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# The Impact of the Provider-based Distribution of Corrective Feedback Moves on Learner Uptake in Small-size Classes

### Sabrine Hallem

Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sfax. Published on: 19 February 2025

#### Abstract

corrective Research into oral feedback (henceforth OCF) has widely been studied in SLA and applied linguistics research and it aroused much debate among EFL researchers and scholars in the past three decades (Sheen, 2011). While the attention was shifted towards exploring the nature of this construct (CF) in addition to its role in the language learning process, the interplay between OCF, uptake and size remains class an underinvestigated area to date. In an attempt to fill this gap, the present study explores the effect of the provider-based distribution of CF strategies on learner uptake in smallsize classes in the EFL context. The subjects of this study are 75 language learners and 4 teachers from four



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language centres in Sfax, Tunisia. To collect data, three tools were utilised; questionnaire, А classroom observations and an interview. The findings from the interviews with the teachers showed that learners prefer to use the input-providing CF strategies over the output-pushing CF moves. As regards the effectiveness of CF in generating uptake, the data from the questionnaire and the observations revealed that outputpushing CF moves are more effective in eliciting uptake compared to inputproviding CF moves.

**KeyWords:** Oral Corrective Feedback, Learner preferences, Uptake, Language Centres, EFL learners.

#### \* Introduction

Defined as "any indication to a learner that his/ her use of the target

language is incorrect" (Lightbown and Spada, 2003), Corrective Feedback (henceforth CF) has gained considerable in interest SLA research. Specialists in this area of research, specifically the ones interested in studying CF have widely explored its nature and role in the language learning and teaching processes. One of the main reasons behind this interest in this specific area of research is that it not only helps language learners acquire the language successfully but it also assists teacher upon making the best pedagogical decision for a successful teaching experience. To meet these research ends. in CF both theoretically and practically has focused on the type and amount of feedback, mode of feedback, timing of feedback, learners' proficiency level which proved to have a significant impact on.

Based on research into CF, the roles of agents in the process of feedback have been studied in order to deepen the understanding of CF dynamics. Sheen and Ellis (2011) devised a taxonomy of CF strategies based on the provider of CF. They distinguish between input-providing corrective feedback and outputpushing corrective feedback, the former of which refers to corrective feedback whereby the teacher provides the correct reformulation (e.g., recasts and explicit correction), while the latter withholds the correct reformulation but instead encourages learners to self-repair (e.g., clarification requests, elicitation, repetition and metalinguistic feedback). They argued that the types of CF move that have a significant impact on L2 development in a classroom context are the ones that are explicit and output-prompting rather than implicit and inputproviding. They gave the example of explicit feedback in conjunction with metalinguistic clues which proved to result in learning more than recasts do.

first model that first The introduced CF moves (as can be seen in the figure below) was devised by Lyster and Ranta (1997). It includes explicit correction, recasts. clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. This model marked the beginning of a wave of research on the nature of CF and its role in SLA. These studies took place mostly in ESL contexts and only few of them were in EFL settings with a significant variation in the number of participants in the experiments. Besides, these studies were built upon Lyster and Ranta's (1997) model and sought to explore the distribution of CF techniques

(e.g., Panova and Lyster, 2002; Sheen, 2004).

	Implicit	Explicit
Input-providing	<ul> <li>Conversational recasts (i.e., the correction consists of a reformulation of a student uterance in the attempt to resolve a communication problem; such recasts often take the form confirmation checks where the reformulation is followed by a question tag as in "Oh so you were sick. Were you?")</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Didactic recasts (i.e., the correction takes the form of a reformulation of a student's uterance even though no communication problem has arisen).</li> <li>Explicit correction only (i.e., the correction takes the form of a direct signal that an error has been committed and the correct form is supplied).</li> <li>Explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation (i.e., in addition to signalling an error has been committed and providing the correct form, there is also a metalinguistic comment).</li> </ul>
Output-pushing	Repetition (i.e., the leamer's repeated without any intonational highlighting of the error).     Clarification requests (i.e., attention is drawn to a problem ulterance by the speaker indicating he'she has not understood it).	Metalinguistic clue (i.e., a brief metalinguistic statement aimed at eliciting a correction from the learner).     Elicitation (i.e., an attempt is made to verhally elicit the correct form from the learner, by, for example, a prompting question).     Paralinguistic signal (i.e., an attempt is made to non-verhally elicit the correct form from the learner).

To date, class size has not been considered as an important variable in CF research. Most of the experiments in the aforementioned studies were conducted in а laboratory or a classroom setting. The participants were assigned to considerably large groups ranging between 12 and 207 according to Chen's (2013) review of literature on CF strategies. More specifically, the choice of the number of participants in these experiments depends on the methodological design as well as the size of the effect. To illustrate, some studies on the effectiveness of small size classes confirmed the significant effects of the reduction of class size on learning. Finn et al. (Z1990), Finn (1998), Hoxby (2000), Barbara, et al. (2000) and Chetty et al., (2011) acknowledged the positive effects of small size classes on students' engagement and achievement without referring to CF distribution.

In addition students' to engagement and achievement, class reducing size (mostly in elementary and secondary education settings) was found to have a positive impact on the timeliness of feedback as it allows more time for immediate feedback over delayed feedback (Monks and Schmidt, 2010). It also allows more opportunities for with personalised assessment learners (Laria and Hubbal, 2008). Here, with a few number of students assigned to a class, their chance of getting personalised feedback that is tailored to fit each learner's needs increases. One central argument in support of this view is the fact that small size classes boost teacherlearner-learner learner and interaction time (Orellana and Gutiérrez, 2006).

The above mentioned studies provide supportive evidence for the favourable impact of small size class on feedback. However, whilst there range of studies are а that investigated the correlation between class size and feedback in its general view, there are no studies on the relationship between corrective feedback and class size in the virtually observed literature thus far. Hence, following this argument, studying the possible link between CF as a classroom practice and class

size, namely small size classes, seems to be both rewarding and needed.

## \* Method

# \* Research questions

1- What is the frequency of use of the teacher-prompted CF moves in small size classes?

2- What is the recurrence of use of the learner-generated CF moves in small size classes?

3- What are the effects of the use of the teacher-prompted CF moves in reduced classes?

4- What are the effects of the use of the learner-generated CF moves in these classes?

# \* Research design

The present study has employed a mixed-method design since both quantitative and qualitative approaches are needed in collecting data of the recurrence of use of CF strategies in reduced-size classes and the effect of using inputproviding and output-pushing CF moves on learner uptake in these classes.

## \* Participants

In the process of choosing participants for this inquiry, probability sampling methods were applied for the sake of validating generalizations. Indeed, this study involved 75 students of twelfth graders as the source of data for questionnaire, 68 students from classes (high and low proficiency class) as the source of data for observation and 10 students from the observed classes as the source of data for student interview. \* Instruments

1- Questionnaire: Lyster and Ranta's (1997) Questionnaire for Corrective Feedback Approaches (QCFAs) was adapted for use in the present study after to investigate the frequency of use of CF moves. It not only allows an in-depth investigation of the frequency of use of CF moves which constitutes one of the variables in this study, but it also takes into consideration learners' and teachers' preferences of CF strategies in addition to their attitudes regarding CF. The QCFAs is divided into two parts; the first covers the frequency of use of CF techniques and learners' and teachers' preferences for CF techniques and the second involves demographic the data about respondents.

2- Classroom Observation: The classroom observations were conducted using a schedule following the Communicative Orientation of Teaching Language (COLT) observation scheme. In its original form, this scheme accounts only for the frequency of use of the six types of CF moves following Lyster and Ranta's taxonomy. The provider of CF strategies and learner CF uptake are not taken into consideration. As the present inquiry seeks to explore the frequency of use of the providerbased types of CF moves and its impact on learner uptake, the scheme was adapted following Lyster and Ranta's (1997) model of analysis of error treatment sequences.

3- Teacher Interview: To support the quantitative data collected from the classroom observations and the questionnaire. an interview was conducted with the four teachers. The interview included 14 questions. The first six items were designed to put the subjects in the context of the study by asking them to reflect on their experience, class arrangement practices, and general information about their learners. The remaining questions were devised to ask them about their CF practices in their small-sized EFL classes and their correlation with learners' uptake. The interview was semi-structured in nature granting them the chance to expand over some replies and provide further details on the topic.

#### \* Results and discussion

The three methods of data collection that were utilised in the present survey yielded various results. On the one hand, the observations revealed that the outputpushing moves are the most frequent used type of CF with a great impact on generating learner uptake than did

the input-providing type, which was less frequently used. The two figures below present the finding of quantitative analysis detailing the descriptive statistics from the classroom observations:

Type of CF move	Std. Deviation	Mean	Sum
input-providing	1,884	4,00	128
output-pushing	1,725	4,84	155
Total	1,841	4,42	283

# Figure 1: Frequency of occurrence of CF moves.

ANOVA

Frequency of Repair from CF							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.		
Between Groups	45,563	1	45,563	15,337	,000		
Within Groups	184,188	62	2,971				
Total	229,750	63					

#### Figure 2. Test statistics table of the Oneway ANOVA test

On the other hand, student questionnaires indicated that outputpushing CF is more frequent in use than input-providing CF in their English class as they also concluded that both self-repair and teacher CF are significantly effective in enhancing proficiency as can be seen in the following figure:

CF type	Never		Occasionally		Sometimes		Usually		Always	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Explicit Correction	11	14.7%	24	32%	17	22.7%	10	13.3%	13	10.3%
Recast	14	18.4%	23	30.7%	21	28%	9	12%	8	10.7%
Metalinguistic clue	18	24%	16	21.35	18	24%	17	22.7%	6	8%
Repetition	9	12%	28	37.3%	25	33.3%	3	12%	4	5.3%
Elicitation	4	5.3%	16	21.35	25	33.3%	21	28%	9	12%
Clarification	8	10.7%	23	30.7%	25	33.3%	10	13.3%	9	12%
request										

# Figure 3. The frequency of occurrence of the six types of CF

The above figure indicates that the students received explicit correction from their teacher occasionally or sometimes (54.7%). For recasts, the respondents reported that they are provided occasionally or sometimes (58.7%) as well. This indicates that input-providing CF +strategies (recasts explicit correction) occur occasionally or sometimes. In terms of metalinguistic feedback, students reported that it is used sometimes or usually in class (46.7%). Repetition on the other hand was found to significantly occur occasionally or sometimes (70.6%) while Elicitation is used sometimes or usually (61.3%). For clarification requests, the respondents reported an occasionally to sometimes frequency of occurrence (64%). This actually reveals that output-pushing CF is used sometimes or usually, a little more often than input-providing CF.

The interviews, however, revealed that the input-providing CF is more frequent in use than the output-pushing type. Yet, the latter resulted in more instances of CF than the first. The major themes that emerged from the respondents' answers to the interview questions are as follows:-

1- Input-providing CF strategies are more frequently used that output pushing CF moves.

2- Teacher CF and peer CF are the most commonly-used type of CF in small size classes compared to selfrepair. 3- Output-pushing CF is more effective than input-providing CF in enhancing proficiency.

4- Error correction plays an important role in preventing fossilisations, enhancing proficiency and improving language mastery.

5- Correcting errors boosts classroom interaction and peer discussions.

6- The choice of the type of CF to use in class is one of the teaching practices and it depends on the teacher's experience with CF provision.

The main theme that may be extracted states that error correction should be kept to a minimum when it causes interruptions and hinders fluency.

In summary, the use of a mixed-methods approach allowed the identification of the areas of accordance and discordance in the use of three methods for data collections, which can be viewed in the following figure:



Figure 5: A summary of the findings from the data collections tools

As can been seen in the above figure, the findings from the three

methods share some common points while differing on others. Concerning the areas of accordance, the findings of the three methods regarding the frequency of use of CF varied from one another. While observations showed that output-pushing CF is more frequent in use, the interviews held the opposite as they indicated a preference for the input-providing CF moves. On the one hand, the results from the observations align with some previous studies (Li, 2010; Lyster and Saito, 2010). The results of the interviews in their turn echoed the findings from previous research. For instance, Choi and Li (2012) concluded that the most frequently used type of CF is input-providing. The questionnaires, however, showed obvious differences no in the frequency of occurrence of these CF types. This is consistent with a wide set of studies in the literature (e.g. Ammar and Spada, 2006; Loewen and Nabei, 2007: McDonough, 2007).

As regards the effect of the provider-based types of CF moves on learner uptake, the results yielded from the observations were found to be in accordance with the data from the interviews. On the one hand, the output-pushing CF move are more effective than the input-providing type in generating learmner uptake. This echoes the findings from previous research such as Sato and Loewen (2018) who reported the output-pushing CF type to foster learner uptake more than inputproviding CF. Student questionnaires on the other hand showed different results by granting the inputproviding CF the effectiveness in generating CF uptake.

In the light of what has been argued and discussed so far, it is evident to argue that the results yielded by the three methods share no common preference for using one CF type over the other. Yet, it can be safely deduced from the results of the observations and the interviews that the output-pushing CF moves (the student is the provider of the correct form) are more effective in eliciting CF uptake than the input-providing type in EFL classes of small size. **\* Conclusion** 

The present research claims to have contributed to the understanding of CF practices in relation to learner uptake in reduced size classes. In the light of what has been discussed thus far in the course of this research project, it can be asserted that the results yielded no significant preference for one CF type over the other. While the data from the observations and the questionnaire reported that output-pushing CF moves are more frequently used that input-providing the types, the from findings the follow-up interviews suggested that inputproviding CF is more frequent in use than output-pushing CF. Yet, it can safely be argued based on the findings from the observations and the interviews that the output-pushing CF moves are more effective to generate CF uptake than the inputproviding type since the findings from the questionnaire concluded that both types are effective when it comes to eliciting learner uptake.

## \* Implications of the study

Based on the findings of this research, a set of pedagogical implications may be drawn regarding CF practices. First, it may be suggested that that teachers can resort to the use of output-pushing CF strategies to elicit learner uptake. This is relative to classes with a small number of students since, based on what was observed in this study, there were some reduced size classes in which input-providing CF was more frequently used than the other CF type.

Second, students' responses to the open-ended items from the questionnaire drew the researcher's attention to certain unfavourable attitudes held by EFL learners toward output-pushing CF. For instance, they view output-pushing CF less effective than the input-providing type because of the fact that they lack the experience with this type of treating errors and that they feel anxious and embarrassed as they doubt their answers when they are prompted to self-repair. Perhaps, here, if teachers train their students to this type of CF that proved to better elicit uptake, they get accustomed to it and gain experience. This would reduce their feeling of doubt, anxiety, embarrassment with and error correction.

Furthermore, it be may suggested that teachers may have a discussion with their students at the beginning of their courses to discuss their CF preferences to learn about their attitudes regarding the way and the time they find effective to correct errors. This may be beneficial for both teachers, as this helps them meet their course objectives (language and communication-wise), and learners as they get to receive the error treatment they find beneficial to their learning needs.

Finally, the findings of this research suggest that small size classes suggest that class-size reduction fosters the provision of output-pushing CF with the students having more time to interact in class and the interaction may include error correction. This, in turn, leads to more

instances of learner uptake facilitating English language learning. Therefore, reducing the size of EFL classes in the Tunisian context is recommended.

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