8 Correction and feedback

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Key words

Formative and summative feedback

Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF) methods

Written Corrective Feedback (WCF) methods

Feedback in process writing

Mediating factors

In this chapter, we ask the following questions:

What is the difference between formative and summative feedback?

What types of oral corrective feedback (OCF) and written corrective feedback (WCF) are there?

What is the role of feedback in a process writing approach?

What should teachers consider when choosing a feedback method?

What are some important mediating factors that affect the feedback process?

Theoretical perspectives and the Austrian context

Undeniably, giving feedback – whether on oral performance or written assignments – is one of the main tasks of English teachers and a considerable part of their workload. When learners produce language, the teacher's response can be a rich source of information and an important contributor to the learning process. However, when taking a look at the various points of view of researchers, it can be difficult for a teacher to determine which feedback method to choose for oral corrective feedback (OCF) and written corrective feedback (WCF), respectively. This is not surprising as researchers' views on feedback range from it being seen as effective (Bitchener & Knoch, 2009; Ellis, 2012) to it being ineffective (Truscott, 1999).

One case in point is the differing views on grammar correction. Many researchers stress its effectiveness, claiming that learners need it to be able to acquire the grammatical structures of the target language. Truscott (1999), on the other hand, believes in its ineffectiveness as it does not support the acquisition process. Truscott's opinion that teachers should not correct learners' grammar even when they request it certainly started a heated debated among researchers (as well as teachers) about

the value of correction and feedback. Many researchers have since argued in favour of grammar correction and conducted many studies valuable for teachers today.

In order for teachers to establish their personal idea of feedback, they should stay up-to-date on current research on feedback, be willing to adapt their method(s) regularly and take their learners into account. Ultimately, the decision about which feedback method to use will depend on the teacher's notion of self and their core beliefs about providing feedback for learners.

When thinking about how to incorporate feedback into classroom instruction, a teacher must make a number of decisions such as when feedback should be given, which type of feedback would work best in a particular situation, and whether in a given moment feedback should be provided at all. This chapter will outline various considerations for OCF and WCF and specific strategies that could be used, paying particular attention to the Austrian context. We also discuss mediating factors that may impact how successfully feedback is carried out. Finally, we offer practical recommendations for feedback on writing and speaking.

Formative and summative feedback

In any discussion of feedback, a fundamental distinction needs to be made between summative and formative feedback. These terms are tied to Scriven (1967) who distinguishes between feedback which focuses on the learning process and on how teachers can support learners to achieve their goals (= formative) and assessing learners' performance (= summative). Summative feedback is usually associated with formal, structured assessments that are designed to evaluate what has been learned by the end of an instructional unit and are often connected to a grade (see chapter 9 in this volume). Formative feedback gauges learners' knowledge and skills throughout instruction and provides both the teacher and the learner opportunities to identify strengths and areas for improvement. This kind of feedback takes place in the form of frequent, low-stakes assessments such as homework tasks, questionnaires, self-reflection tools, and activities that allow learners to practice and make mistakes without negative repercussions. In the Austrian school context, summative feedback used to be much more common than formative feedback, but recent years have seen a shift in this respect, and formative feedback is being adopted by more and more teachers. It is also recognized in the latest version of the Austrian curriculum for English (see RIS, 2022).

As stated above, unlike summative feedback, formative feedback focuses on the learning process and provides learners with tools to improve their performance. This entails not only stating the purpose of the chosen feedback method, but also

strategies to work with it effectively. Ideally, formative and summative feedback work together: information about learners' progress that is gathered from brief, formative assessments is then used to guide further instruction, paving the way for learners to meet the goals that summative assessments are intended to measure.

Oral corrective feedback

Generally, learners depend on the teacher for useful feedback on their spoken language and expect to receive feedback on their errors. In the case of advanced and adult learners, it is often welcomed and sometimes even requested. For example, in schools, when speaking tasks are used to prepare for formal assessments such as the oral part of the *Matura*, learners feel they need to receive feedback on the relevant skills and competences.

At all levels, learners will be more open to receiving feedback when they are confident and see that making mistakes – as highlighted in the Austrian curriculum – is part of the learning process. Well before designing speaking tasks, the teacher should therefore be mindful of the learning environment that they establish in their own classroom. This is because learner confidence increases in an atmosphere that invites learners to support each other during spoken interaction and encourages risk-taking when trying out unfamiliar language. Such an atmosphere offers many opportunities for the teacher to provide feedback.

An important consideration for oral feedback is **when** in the course of a lesson it should be given. This question is not usually relevant with writing, as WCF is generally provided after a written text is produced. When it comes to speaking, however, it is useful to think about the objective of the task at hand. For tasks where the main objective is accuracy, providing immediate feedback during the task helps speakers focus on form. In contrast, in fluency-based activities and communicative tasks that focus on conveying meaning, a teacher may choose to delay the feedback until after the task has been completed. In this case, the teacher avoids disrupting the flow of communication and instead notes down errors to bring to the class's attention in a post-task phase. Feedback could begin with the teacher's general comments on content, followed by a discussion of the most frequent problems that the teacher and the learners noticed. When doing so, it is important that individual learners who made the errors are not identified. Conducting delayed feedback with the whole class in an anonymous manner prevents learners from feeling fearful about being singled out for making mistakes in front of their peers. Rather than

being concerned about who made the mistake, all learners can benefit from examining the error and are encouraged to consider their own use of that particular language item, thus improving their own understanding.

Another decision that teachers must make is **which** errors to correct. First, the teacher should try to decide whether the incorrect form was a slip that a learner may be able to correct if prompted, or if it was an error that resulted from a lack of knowledge. Differentiating between the two can sometimes be difficult, especially if there are many errors to correct. Attempting to correct every error is not only unrealistic within the time constraints of a typical lesson but also demotivating for learners. Therefore, a reasonable approach is to focus on errors that pertain to the relevant language point of the lesson and those errors that cause problems in communication (Harmer, 2015).

Types of Oral Corrective Feedback (OCF)

Once it is determined that a particular error needs to be corrected, the teacher has an array of options for which method to use. Research on OCF has offered a variety of classifications of feedback methods (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Lyster & Saito, 2010), but they can generally be understood in terms of either direct or indirect feedback, which can be given explicitly or implicitly.

Direct feedback involves the teacher providing learners with the correct version of the utterance. This can be done in the form of recasts or reformulations, where the teacher repeats back the correct form of the utterance (e.g., L: She no eat meat, T: Ah, she doesn't eat meat). The correction can also be recast in an implicit manner, usually accompanied by a question, which allows the student to acknowledge their mistake (e.g., T: She doesn't eat meat, is that what you mean?). Direct feedback can also be given as explicit correction that points out the corrected form (e.g., T: You need to say 'she doesn't' eat meat), or the teacher may choose to provide a metalinguistic explanation by highlighting an aspect of the language using specialist terminology (e.g., T: When we use the third person 'she' we use 'does not').

When indirect feedback takes place, the teacher prompts and guides learner to produce the correct form rather than producing it for them. When done implicitly, the teacher can repeat the incorrect form, forcing the speaker to rethink their utterance (e.g., T: She no eat meat?), or they can ask for clarification, signalling that something is wrong (e.g., T: Could you say that again? I didn't understand). Alternatively, the teacher can elicit the correct response from the learner with a prompting question, sometimes done by providing a metalinguistic clue (e.g., T: Could you correct the verb?).

The difference between these types of strategies is that direct, input-providing feedback does not encourage learner uptake – in other words, a corrected response from the learner. In contrast, indirect feedback in the form of prompting allows for self-correction and is usually followed by uptake. Lyster and Ranta (1997) found recasts to be the most common type of feedback among teachers but the least effective in generating uptake, whereas learners were more likely to repair their utterances when prompted through elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, and requests for clarification.

Later studies have gone beyond the question of whether uptake occurs, investigating whether certain types of OCF results in learners' acquisition of the form being taught. McDonough and Mackey (2006) found that "primed production" was associated with learning (p. 693). This means that when learners were provided with recasts that included the target syntactic structure, they were able to produce the correct structure on their own several turns later, rather than merely repeating the recast immediately after hearing it. Research by Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006) showed that, compared to feedback in the form of recasts, providing metalinguistic feedback was more effective in contributing to learners' implicit and explicit language knowledge. Other research findings on the relationship between uptake and acquisition have been mixed, as acquisition may depend on individual differences and contextual factors such as emphasis on form in instruction. Nevertheless, there indeed seems to be evidence that "oral CF – in one form or another – can benefit acquisition" (Sheen and Ellis, 2011, pp. 604).

Drawing on our own experience, we argue that learners who are accustomed to being corrected while speaking usually repeat the corrected version and, in an effort to maintain their flow, continue speaking without stopping to think about the error. Thus, prompting is recommended because it instigates immediate awareness of their utterance. It openly encourages interaction and can be motivating for learners. Moreover, too much direct feedback can be overwhelming and can thus have a negative impact. Of course, for self-correction to work successfully, learners need to have the appropriate metalinguistic knowledge. If a teacher's attempts to elicit self-correction do not work, it is recommended that they follow up with explicit correction. Ultimately, we emphasize that there is no one strategy that is considered superior over another and that each of them can be appropriate depending on how the teacher judges the error in the context that it was made.

Thus far, we have only addressed oral feedback in terms of error correction, but the importance of providing positive feedback cannot be overstated. If students perceive that the teacher is only concerned about highlighting errors and problematic

language use, they are likely to withdraw from participating, thus undermining the goals of communication, especially in fluency-based tasks. Being mindful of giving positive feedback and praising good use of language lowers their anxiety levels and reinforces good language use. However, the teacher should be mindful not to praise in a vague manner (e.g., 'OK') or to overly praise, otherwise they risk appearing insincere. Instead, thoughtfully worded praise that makes clear what is being commended can be a powerful form of feedback. For example, 'good!' and 'nice job!' may be well intentioned but are not as informative for learners as specific comments such as 'your pronunciation has really improved', 'clever use of that idiom', and 'great, you figured out a different way to say it!' Specific praise that addresses good language use makes learners aware of behaviours that can be repeated and gives them the confidence to move forward.

While in most cases learner self-correction is the aim of oral feedback, it is important to remember that other learners can be a valuable source of feedback in the classroom, too. Peer feedback in speaking tasks is becoming more commonplace in Austrian classrooms, which is not surprising because involving learners is beneficial in the process of "clarification, rephrasing, and confirmation" (Kerr, 2017, p.7). Some learners may feel reluctant to give feedback directly to their peers, or they may be unreceptive to receiving feedback from anyone besides the teacher. For this reason, ensuring a smooth exchange of peer feedback requires the teacher to supply learners with the appropriate language and feedback mechanisms. With plenty of modelling and practice, peer feedback can be quite stimulating and even fun. In pair work, for example, other students can act as 'spies', observing specific pre-determined criteria and noting them down for a post-task discussion as a group. Learners should also be encouraged to share what others in the group have done well.

Written corrective feedback (WCF)

The focus of written corrective feedback (WCF) can be on either form or content, and it is the learning goal that determines the type of feedback. If language accuracy is the main goal of a task, then a focus on form in the teacher's feedback is essential, but if well-structured arguments are needed, focus on content is more important. As learners are graded on form as well as on content in many standard assessments such *Schularbeiten* (in-class tests) and the written *Matura / schriftliche Reife- und Diplomprüfung* (secondary school leaving exam), it is essential to consistently provide feedback on form as well as content throughout.

When providing feedback, a teacher further has to decide if their feedback should be focused (only one type of error is addressed) or unfocused (all errors are addressed). For beginners focused feedback might be more beneficial as they can concentrate on improving one particular area. Intermediate and advanced learners, however, often prefer all their errors indicated. In the correction process they then might decide to work on only a couple of errors or seek help from their peers or their teacher.

As with OCF, WCF can also be direct, where the correct form is provided, or indirect. Indirect feedback, i.e., indicating the error without providing the correct form, can take many forms. It can be accomplished by circling, highlighting or underlining the errors, as well as a simple indication in the margin of the number of errors in a line or paragraph. Indirect feedback should always include a second step where students then need to correct these errors and get the teachers' (or their peers') feedback.

Another type of feedback is metalinguistic, where errors are explained to learners. This can take two forms: either error codes in the text or in the margin, where usually rather broad categories are used (e.g., article, tense), or metalinguistic explanations. The latter is more time-consuming for the teacher as learners' errors need to be explained in detail, but it is beneficial for them because it helps them to better understand the nature of their errors.

Types of written corrective feedback (WCF)

Which kind of feedback a teacher uses often depends on their overall approach to teaching writing. One of the most common types of error correction is direct feedback, when the correct form is given by the teacher. The rationale behind it is simple: it is not as time-consuming as other types of correction. In addition, certain types of errors, such as idiomatic expressions, are a challenge for learners and reformulation is often seen as the most efficient way of showing learners how to express their thoughts in a more idiomatic way. The difficulty for teachers, however, is not to change learners' utterances or their style of writing too much as this can be seen as imposing their own style onto their learners.

Many teachers acknowledge that a drawback of this form of correction is that learners only file their work in a folder, very likely never looking at their corrected piece of writing again. Teachers would naturally prefer them to re-write their assignments, however, to ensure that they actively think about and work on their errors instead of passively accepting their teachers' corrections.

This active engagement with corrections can be more effectively encouraged when a process approach to teaching writing is taken. In process writing, learners produce a text in a series of stages, beginning with planning and prewriting, then composing, followed by revising and editing before a final draft is published. Learners are expected to use the information they receive from their teacher to revisit their text and rewrite it, sometimes in multiple drafts.

Error indication, a type of indirect feedback where the teacher does not provide the correct form of the error, is very common in process writing approaches. For example, using error codes is a popular type of error indication, where abbreviations (e.g., 'art' for article) or colours (e.g., green for spelling) are used to indicate the type of error. Learners then have to figure out how to self-correct these code-marked errors.

Self-correction definitely requires learners to engage with the errors they made on a cognitive level. However, self-correction needs to be embedded in the teacher's overall approach to teaching writing and learners need to be provided with strategies to be able to self-correct their errors. In addition, as this method demands commitment on the learners' part, the teacher has to explain its value explicitly to the learners to ensure their acceptance. Learners have to realise that writing is a process where several drafts are needed and trying to correct errors themselves will help them in the long run to avoid making them in the future.

Peer feedback (also known as peer response or peer correction) can be another valuable addition to a process writing approach. It was originally developed for L1 process writing but has become popular in L2 writing as well. It should be stressed, however, that learners need to be trained in giving their peers feedback for it to be effective for them, and they need to be guided by the teacher. For example, the teacher has to decide according to the level of the learners which area of a peer's work learners should comment on. Focus on form might be less valuable for beginners, whereas focus on a specific area of content might be easier to tackle.

Which feedback method?

There are many ways teachers can give feedback to their learners. It is essential to keep the needs of a specific group of learners in mind when choosing a feedback method, and learners should always be told why a specific feedback method is used in a particular situation so that they understand how it can aid their learning process. Teachers also need to explain to learners how they should work with the feedback they receive to ensure that they get the most out of it.

No matter which type of error correction a teacher chooses, however, a personal statement should always be provided. Personal statements are especially popular among learners because they are addressed to them individually. Tailoring the statement to the individual learner is imperative as general or vague comments such as 'Well done!' are not appreciated by them (see Moser, 2020), and it is always a good idea to start with a positive note on their assignment before telling them what they can improve. Similarly, when written feedback is given on long-form oral production, such as presentations or speeches, a personal statement can be valuable for commenting on distinct, individual aspects of a learner's spoken performance.

Another aspect that always needs to be taken into account when talking about giving feedback is undeniably the mediating factors which are at play with both OCF and WCF. The feedback method itself, learners' own laziness, their personal interests, self-confidence as well as anxiety have a considerable impact on their engagement with corrective feedback (Moser, 2020). In addition to the important role teachers and peers play in this respect, other factors come into play, too. These factors very often go unrecognised by teachers because they are rooted in learners' personal lives. For example, as a teacher you might suspect that the reason for learners not doing their homework is simple laziness. More often than not that is true, but sometimes there are other reasons for this behaviour. For example, learners might be so preoccupied with a problem in their personal life that they do not complete their assignments (Moser, 2020).

It should be stressed, therefore, that taking learners' individual needs into account and reflecting on feedback methods on a regular basis are definitely necessary if teachers want to provide effective feedback.

Practical Applications

Example 1

Goal: learners will provide oral feedback to each other after performing a fluency-based task, in addition to teacher feedback

Activity: an interactive speaking task (e.g., storytelling or roleplay)

Rationale: to engage learners in a constructive exchange of feedback that prioritises communicating during the task while allowing for reflection and error treatment afterwards

Pre-knowledge: learners need to know metalanguage and phrases for giving feedback, what their role is in the task, and which criteria to give feedback on

Level: CEFR B1+ and above

Procedure

1. The teacher divides learners into groups of four and distributes a picture sequence.

2. The teacher instructs two learners to observe the other two learners in that group.

3. The first pair is asked to work together to tell a story based on the picture, roleplaying as the characters in the picture.

4. As the speaking pair speaks, the observers take notes. One observer focuses on one aspect of language, such as vocabulary, while the other observer focuses on another, such as agreement. Notes are recorded in a + column for good use of language and --> column for areas to improve.

5. The teacher observes each group without interrupting and makes their own notes.

6. Afterwards, speakers share what they noticed about their own performance. Observers share what they have recorded.

7. The pairs switch roles; the speaking pair now becomes the observers and vice versa as they roleplay a different picture sequence.

8. Afterwards, the new speakers share what they noticed about their own performance. The new observers share what they have recorded.

9. In a whole class discussion, the teacher encourages groups to share their observations and the class comes up with a list of common errors, perhaps putting them on the board. The teacher elicits suggestions for how they can be corrected.

10. The teacher provides any additional feedback, including their own observations of how the peer feedback exchange went.

Example 2

Goal: learners will work on errors in their written work themselves before getting final feedback from their teacher

Activity: writing assignment (e.g., a report)

Rationale: to guide learners from seeing feedback as a product to seeing it as a process

Pre-knowledge: learners need to know how the feedback method works

Level: CEFR A2+ and above

Procedure

1. The teacher provides learners with a written assignment.

2. Learners are asked to write the assignment and upload their document on a learning platform.

3. The teacher downloads learners' documents and colour codes learners' errors (e.g., blue for grammar, green for spelling etc.).

4. Hints are given in brackets for certain errors (e.g., expressions, grammar, and content).

5. The teacher posts the colour coded document on the learning platform.

6. The teacher adds a personal written statement for each learner, telling them what they did well and which areas they need to improve.

7. Learners correct the colour coded errors themselves, mark everything they have added in bold, and then upload the document to the learning platform.

8. The teacher checks learners' changes to the colour coded parts and underlines any new corrections so that learners can immediately see what has been changed.

9. Short explanations are provided in brackets for certain errors (e.g., grammar) to support learners in correcting their written assignments.

10. The teacher uploads the document on the learning platform and writes a second short personal statement.

Activities and questions for reflection

1. Critically reflect on your preferred WCF method. Does it take learners' individual needs into account?

2. Thinking back to the types of oral feedback outlined in this chapter, observe a class and try to understand why the teacher chose to correct an error (or ignore it) and why that type of correction was made. Would you have handled it differently?

If you do not have the opportunity to observe a class, you can find some sample lessons on YouTube.

3. What are some reasons for implementing self-correction in WCF?

4. Come up with a list of your own personal guidelines for giving oral feedback.

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Suggestions for further reading

Brookhart, S. M. (2017). *How to give effective feedback to your students* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

This book, while theoretically grounded, provides practical guidelines for implementing feedback for both writing and speaking. In addition to detailed examples, it also offers a 'snapshot view' of feedback as an episode of learning, a 'long view' that considers its impact on learning, as well as content-specific suggestions.

Ferris, D. R. (2011). *Treatment of error in second language student writing* (2nd ed.). The University of Michigan Press.

This book provides a theoretical and practical guide for dealing with errors. It addresses the fundamental issues of which errors to attend to, how to respond to them and some of the most effective ways to provide feedback on errors.

Reitbauer, M., Campbell, N., Mercer, S., Schumm Fauster J., & Vaupetitsch, R. (Eds.). (2013). *Feedback Matters. Current Feedback Practices in the EFL Classroom*. Peter Lang.

This book shows a variety of feedback methods, ranging from peer feedback, online feedback to feedback on specific skills areas. It is especially valuable for obtaining an insight into different ways of giving feedback and also provides examples from classroom practice.

Ur, P. (2012). *A course in English language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Chapter 7 of this book, 'Error correction', is particularly useful as it presents practical self-reflection tools for teachers, encouraging them to think about their own views and attitudes about giving feedback. It also includes questionnaires about oral and written correction that can be used to understand both student and teacher preferences for giving and receiving feedback.

Commentary on reflection questions

1. and 2. Your answers to these reflection questions will depend on your personal teaching experience and context. The point of these questions is to encourage reflection on your preferred methods for feedback and error correction.

3. Research shows that self-correction is not a feedback method favoured by learners – mainly because it involves a lot of work. When it is only one element of a teacher's overall approach to feedback, however, learners are usually not that opposed to the idea of doing it. The value of self-correction is clear. Learners need to go through their written assignment once more and become aware that they make errors in certain areas. In addition, learners are cognitively challenged as they need to figure out what is wrong by themselves. In this way, they are engaged in the correction process and are encouraged to see writing as a process, not a product.

4. Answers to this question may vary as a teacher's preferred feedback methods may be informed by many factors such as their views on authority, learner autonomy, student interaction, and whether correction should be done privately or in front of the whole class.