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Research Final Report

Research Topic:

An investigation on the teachers' ways of providing feedback to correct students' spoken errors in English in Primary ESL classrooms in Hong Kong

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Table of contents

Abstract	3
Part 1: Introduction	4
Part 2: Review of Literature	5
Part 3: Research Design	10
Part 4: Results and Findings	14
Part 5: Discussions	20
Part 6: Recommendations	25
Part 7: Limitations	26
Part 8: Conclusion	26
References and Bibliography	27
Appendices	29
I. A sample observation scheme used during classroom observations	29
II. An interview guide for teachers	31

Abstract

The present research investigated the ways primary school teachers in Hong Kong correct pupils' errors in English spoken utterances with corrective feedback. Ten local English teachers participated in the study. Through the use of two qualitative methods, i.e. classroom observations and interviews, the study addressed three major questions: (i) the types of errors which deserved more attention from teachers; (ii) the types of corrective feedback given with respect to each type of students' errors; and (iii) the rationales behind teachers' selection of corrective feedback strategies. The results revealed that teachers put more emphasis on semantic and lexical errors than phonological or syntactical errors, unless they adversely affected the interpretation of meaning. While recasts were favoured by most teachers to promote a supportive learning environment, it was recommended that prompts should be encouraged in order to provide capacities for students' uptake which could benefit their language acquisition as a result of knowledge internalisation. A variety of corrective feedback strategies should be adopted, though different types of feedback would be helpful in different circumstances.

Part 1: Introduction

An error is generally known as the deviated form as a consequence of the learner's insufficient knowledge of a language (Tomczyk, 2013). A mistake, which is a synonym of 'error', on the other hand, refers to the learner's temporary fallacy in using a language due to his/her unstable psychological state. In this paper, such distinction between the two terms is negligible since the reasons behind the learners' inaccurate forms are not examined, and hence the two words are used interchangeably.

The existence of errors during the language acquisition process of learners is unavoidable (Bagheridoust & Kotlar, 2015). In spite of this, learners often lack the ability to realise and correct the errors by themselves, which leads to the increasing importance of feedback that aims to provide learners with guidance to notice and locate the errors to avoid reinforcement of the incorrect forms. This kind of teachers' responses to learners' language errors is known as corrective feedback (CF) (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006). While there are claims about the undesirable impact of CF on learners' confidence in their language development, CF remains its essentiality in students' language learning (Tomczyk, 2013). Firstly, learners' implicit knowledge of language cannot be adjusted without proper CF. Secondly, evidence from previous research studies proves that learners do expect CF from teachers. Thirdly, students' linguistic awareness can be developed with CF effectively.

In Hong Kong, students are very much encouraged to speak English in English lessons. Their attempt to produce language output is seen as part of their language development process, where errors should be considered as "a normal part of their learning" (CDC, 2004, p.114). Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to provide students with timely CF during the lessons.

This research study aims to explore the ways teachers in Hong Kong provide oral CF to respond to pupils' language errors in their spoken utterances of English in primary ESL classrooms. After a comprehensive literature review through which a research gap is identified, the thesis will address the research design and the results obtained, and provide a discussion on the issue of providing CF. In particular, this investigation focuses on the types of errors which are usually corrected by teachers, the types of CF strategies adopted by teachers to correct these errors, and the reasons which account for their choices of CF strategies provided to students. Implications on English teaching and feedback provision shall be made after the analysis.

Part 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Typical kinds of errors identified in pupils' oral language production

Different ways have been suggested by previous scholars to categorise the errors typically identified in learners' spoken utterances. Errors can be divided generally into content errors and form errors (or language errors) (Milla & Mayo, 2014). Content errors are normally dealt with by implicit corrective feedback, while language errors may require both implicit and explicit feedback. Language errors are further divided into two types: covert errors and overt errors (Tomczyk, 2013). The former type of errors refers to the undoubtedly inaccurate or ungrammatical forms identified in the utterances; while the latter type refers to grammatically acceptable expressions which nevertheless make no sense or can hardly be understood when we examine the context in which they occur. Based on such division, Lyster, Saito & Sato (2013) and Bagheridoust & Kotlar (2015) further classify errors into six kinds, namely phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactical, semantic and pragmatic errors. The first four types belong to covert errors, while semantic and pragmatic errors are overt errors. Table 1 summarises the definition of each type of errors.

1. Phonological errors	They refer to errors as a result of the inappropriate choice of phoneme at the incorrect point in time or articulatory distortion. They may also refer to errors at the syllabic level, in stress and intonation (Romani, Olson, Semenza & Granà, 2002; Chan & Li, 2010). Example: <i>Last night I was bored so I *watched [wɒtʃɪd] TV.</i>
2. Morphological errors	They are known as errors related to faulty derivational forms used to alter the grammatical class of words (McCutchen & Stull, 2015). Example: <i>Last night I *amed bored so I watched TV.</i>
3. Lexical errors	They refer to errors at the word level, i.e. inappropriate word choice or mistakes which concern collocation (Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006). Example: <i>Last night I amed bored so I *looked TV.</i>
4. Syntactic errors	They refer to the deviated forms which violate the grammatical rules, principles and processes which control the way in which sentences are constructed. Broadly speaking, grammatical errors which do not belong to morphological or lexical errors are all put into this category. Example: <i>Last night I was bored so I *watch TV.</i>
5. Semantic errors	They are errors which do not concern the violation of syntactic rules, but arise from the oddness or nonsense in meaning (Yule, 2006). Example: <i>The television talked to me.</i>
6. Pragmatic errors	They refer to utterances that violate the sociocultural rules governing the appropriate language use in particular contexts. The violation of Cooperative Principle proposed by Grice (1989) is also considered as a pragmatic error (Bardovi-Harlig, Félix-Brasdefer & Omar, 2006). Example: <i>Teacher: Where do you live?</i> <i>Student: I live in Hong Kong. (Compare: In Yuen Long.)</i>

Table 1: Six types of errors commonly made by students in their spoken utterances

2.2 Strategies used by teachers to correct students' language errors

Teachers use a variety of strategies to provide CF to students. For instance, when one has made an error in the verb form in the utterance *She has *went to the police station*, a teacher may adopt one of the six types of CF strategies (as shown in table 2) proposed by Milla & Mayo (2014) and Bagheridoust & Kotlar (2015). The six types of strategies are presented in ascending order of the degree of explicitness. Clarification request, repetition, elicitation and metalinguistic clues (or metalinguistic explanations) allow capacities for student's uptake, and are thus known as prompts (Llinares & Lyster, 2014).

<i>CF strategy</i>	<i>Explanation and examples</i>
1. Recast	<p>The teacher repeats the pupil's utterance without pointing out the error explicitly; instead s/he simply replaces it with the correct form.</p> <p>The teacher may draw student's attention to the correction by using emphatic stress, or only saying the part that requires correction.</p> <p>Example 1: <i>She has gone[^] to the police station.</i> (^ stressed)</p> <p>Example 2: <i>(She has) gone</i></p>
2. Clarification request	<p>The teacher raises a question to prompt the student to say again using the correct form or word.</p> <p>Example 1: <i>Excuse me? / Pardon me?</i></p> <p>Example 2: <i>What do you mean?</i></p>
3. Repetition	<p>The teacher repeats the utterance the student produces; typically just repeats the part which requires student's attention. A rising tone or emphatic stress is probably used to locate the error.</p> <p>Example 1: <i>She has went[^] to the police station?</i> (^ stressed)</p> <p>Example 2: <i>She has went?</i> (with a rising intonation)</p>

4. Elicitation	The teacher first locates the error by repeating the student’s utterance and then prompts him/her to replace the error with the correct form. Sometimes the teacher can ask a question to prompt the student. Example: <i>She has went? She has... (How should you say this?)</i>
5. Metalinguistic clues or explanations	The teacher explicitly explains the grammatical rules or conventions using metalanguage to guide the student correct his/her error. Example: <i>The past participle of ‘go’ is ‘gone’.</i>
6. Explicit correction	The teacher explicitly locates the student’s mistake. Example: <i>No, it is not ‘went’. (This is wrong.)</i>

Table 2: Six types of CF strategies typically used by teachers in the classroom

Previous researchers have already found that recast is the most implicit and the most popular CF strategy adopted by teachers (Milla & Mayo, 2014; Llinares & Lyster, 2014). It is a kind of implicit CF since it provides positive evidence of language learning; in other words, learners are presented with the correct language form or structure (Li, 2010). Its dominance can be accounted for by reasons such as reinforcing the supportive classroom learning environment and improving the time efficiency in the classroom (Lyster, Saito & Sato, 2013). Implicit CF is also favoured by students who are more proficient. On the other hand, potential issues of heavy reliance on recasts have also been raised. Some teachers believe that learners may not notice the corrections made by teachers’ recasts and even get puzzled as a result of teachers’ reformulation of their entire utterance (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Haghghi-Shirazi & Sadighi, 2012). Students may realise their errors only if teachers use recasts with emphatic stress.

CF strategies employed by teachers are not limited to recasts only. It is not uncommon to see teachers who use more than one strategy to correct the same error. A range of strategies including prompts and explicit corrections will also be adopted, especially the former type which provides opportunities for learners’ uptake (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Explicit CF strategies, which

include explicit corrections, metalinguistic clues and elicitations, offer negative evidence of language learning since learners are exposed to the inappropriate language forms as a model of what is unacceptable in the language. Therefore, sufficient feedback from teachers is essential for learners to recognise the mistakes and concentrate on them (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Haghghi-Shirazi & Sadighi, 2012; Li, 2010).

2.3 Considerations taken into account by teachers when providing corrective feedback

Not every single error is corrected by teachers in classrooms. Only 50% to 70% of students' errors are corrected with teachers' CF (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Though attempts were made to explore the types of errors which are commonly identified in learners' spoken utterances, rarely do researchers study about the types of errors responded by teachers with CF. Therefore, the question of which types of errors made by students are most frequently corrected by teachers is a gap to be bridged in this study.

Teachers not only have to determine what kinds of errors to correct, they also make decision on how to correct them. This depends on several factors, which include students' language proficiency level, age or grade level, their motivation, the target language forms, the context, etc. (Bagheridoust & Kotlar, 2015; Haghghi-Shirazi, Sadighi, 2012). Contextual factors may refer to the lesson objective, whether it focusses on language forms or communicative functions (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Recast favours students whose language proficiency is relatively lower, or whose age is higher. It is more effective for a communicative-focussed class. On the contrary, prompts are more appropriate for students with higher language proficiency which enables them to do self-repair. They are also more preferable for younger learners in a language-focussed lesson (Lyster, Saito & Sato, 2013). Prompts are also emphasised by many teachers as they encourage learners' self-repairing and provide opportunities for students' uptake (Spada, 2011).

2.4 Arguments for and against teachers' act of providing corrective feedback to pupils

CF is believed to be essential to learners' language development especially when they have not reached the proficiency such that they can self-correct their errors. One of the functions performed by CF is that it prevents fossilisation of students' errors (Sippel & Jackson, 2015). Other purposes include drawing students' attention to the target language forms and facilitating learners' acquisition of second language (Milla & Mayo, 2014; Spada, 2011). These arguments support that CF is beneficial to students' language performance.

However, there are some possible problems arisen from the use of CF. Some teachers comment that excessive CF may result in interruption to the flow of communication or learners' linguistic anxiety (Lyster, Saito & Sato, 2013). Effective CF may also be interfered by limitations such as time restrictions, inadequate control over students' oral language production and inconsistency in providing feedback. The nature of spoken language also constitutes a challenge to the provision of CF since an utterance will go quickly once it is said. Despite the problems and constraints mentioned, CF is still regarded as an important practice in a language classroom where students acquire a language through the process of error making and correction.

Part 3: Research Design

3.1 Research objectives and research questions

After a critical review on the studies conducted by previous researchers on the topic about teachers' use of CF, several research gaps have been identified and are to be bridged in this study. Firstly, most of the previous researches focussed on the secondary and tertiary educational settings, but not in primary schools. Secondly, many researchers did not examine the frequency of teachers

providing CF relative to the number of mistakes made by students in their oral language production. Thirdly, while it has been known that teachers do not correct every mistake made by learners, seldom did the previous studies look into the issue of which types of errors are more likely to be corrected by CF. Fourthly, none of the researches studies the issue of the provision of CF in the educational context of Hong Kong. Hence, this research study aims to bridge these gaps by addressing the three research questions below:

- (i) What kinds of errors made by students do teachers normally correct?
- (ii) What corrective feedback strategies do teachers use to correct each type of error?
- (iii) Why do teachers provide feedback to their students in the way they do so?

3.2 Research methods

Two qualitative research methods were adopted to achieve the above-mentioned objectives. Classroom observations are a kind of classroom-centred research which targets at what is happening in the classroom when teachers and students come together. In this study, the researcher's attention was mainly on the errors produced by pupils when they spoke English and the way teachers provided CF to them. The data collected from classroom observations gave answers to research questions (i) and (ii). Post-observation interviews with teacher participants were then conducted to address research question (iii), which concerns teachers' opinions towards offering CF and their reasons of the selection of CF strategies.

3.3 Setting

The research study was carried out in a local primary school in Hong Kong. To avoid disclosure of the identity of the school, it is referred to as Q Primary School (QPS) in the following. QPS is an aided school located in Tin Shui Wai. The medium of instruction is English in the English lessons, while teachers may sometimes use Chinese to provide explanations when students

have difficulties understanding teachers' instructions. The first language of most students in QPS is either Cantonese or Mandarin. There are a few pupils who belong to ethnic minorities but whose first languages are not English either.

3.4 Participants

Ten local English Language teachers in QPS participated in the research. All participants were female teachers. One 35-minute lesson delivered by each of the participants was observed. The ten classes observed ranged from Primary 1 to Primary 6. Two classes were selected from each of the levels P.1, P.2, P.3 and P.6, while one class was selected from each of P.4 and P.5. Though pupils' errors were recorded and counted during and after the observations, the target group of participants was the teachers who were observed. They then participated in a post-observation individual interview.

3.5 Data collection and instruments

The data collection process began after the ethical review process has successfully been completed and an official approval was obtained from Human Research Ethics Committee of EdUHK in October 2016. Data was collected through two means: classroom observations and individual interviews.

3.5.1 Classroom observations

Ten English Language lessons delivered by ten different local English Language teachers were observed. Taking into account that in Hong Kong educational context it is not often for teachers to devote an entire lesson to only developing learners' speaking skills, the researcher would consider the data taken from a lesson valid if there were adequate teacher-student interactions.

Based on the observation scheme (attached in Appendix I), the researcher recorded and tallied relevant details including the kinds of errors made by learners, the mistakes corrected by teachers with CF, the types of CF adopted by teachers, who did the repair, and the learners' uptake of CF. The observation scheme was adapted from the one developed by Milla and Mayo (2014) who conducted a research on a similar topic. The lessons were videotaped to facilitate the post-observation data processing. The nature of each lesson was also recorded.

3.5.2 Interviews with school teachers

The teacher participants were individually interviewed. They expressed their views about pupils' language errors and discussed their considerations for the selection of various CF strategies in the classroom. They responded to open-ended questions (attached in Appendix IV) concerning their understanding of pupils' common errors, what errors they typically correct, their strategies of providing CF, the reasons behind their selection of certain CF strategies, and the problems encountered during the provision of CF. The interviews gathered more in-depth information from the participants about their practice of using CF strategies (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

3.6 Data processing and analysis

Data collected in classroom observations, i.e. the utterances said by teachers and students were transcribed and annotated, as shown in Appendix III. All the errors of any kind identified in students' utterances were labelled and categorised, and all the CF strategies were also indicated. The researcher then analysed the disparity between the common types of errors produced by learners and those corrected by teachers with CF, and examined the types of CF strategies most frequently used by teachers and their correlations with the students' uptake of feedback in class. The distribution of the use of different CF strategies to correct each kind of error was also analysed.

The data gathered from the individual interviews gave answers to the question of how and why teachers provided CF to students in the way they did so, and the factors taken into account when determining whether or not to correct a particular error. The interview data was first transcribed in Chinese (attached in Appendix VI) and then translated in English (attached in Appendix VII). The participants' responses were then summarised and organised via tabulation (Appendix V). The interview data would then be compared with the classroom observation data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of teachers' provision of CF to students.

Part 4: Results and Findings

4.1 Types of errors produced by students which teachers corrected with CF in class

<i>Categories of errors</i>	<i>Frequency of errors</i>	<i>No. of errors corrected by Ts</i>
Phonological errors	129	58 (45.0%)
Morphological errors	2	2 (100.0%)
Lexical errors	11	9 (81.8%)
Syntactical errors	88	41 (46.6%)
Semantic errors	13	12 (92.3%)
Pragmatic errors	1	1 (100.0%)
Total	244	123 (50.4%)

Table 3: Types of errors identified by the researcher and those corrected by teachers

A total of 244 instances of errors were recorded in the ten observed lessons, 123 (50.4%) of which were corrected by teachers with different CF strategies. Every morphological and pragmatic error was given CF, and over 80% of the lexical and semantic errors were corrected. Though phonological and syntactical errors were the most common among students, taking up

respectively 52.9% and 36.1% of the total number of errors, slightly less than half of these errors were given CF. Table 3 summarises the statistics on types of errors identified by the researcher and those corrected by teachers.

During the interview, participants were asked to identify the typical errors made by students. They mainly divided them into only two kinds – pronunciation and grammar. 70% of teachers pointed out consonant sounds, in particular the final plosives, are the most problematic for students. They regarded collocation, agreement and tenses as the most common grammatical errors. 40% of participants also considered failing to form complete sentences as an error. This point shall be further discussed in Part 5.2.

T1: They [students] often drop the ending sounds [of the words].

T3: They [students] omit many ending sounds such as “p”, “t”, “k”, “b”, “d” and “g”.

T5: Some students are not able to pronounce the “r” sound. Some of them cannot pronounce the “n” sound.

T9: They [students] have trouble pronouncing the ending sounds of different words and the consonant blendings such as “pr”, “pl” and “bl”.

About half of the participants said they generally pay more attention to errors related to pronunciation of target vocabulary words, sentence structures, agreement and tenses. They often neglect the errors not impeding communication or are less relevant to the target language items. 80% of participants mentioned that they do take the lesson objectives into account when they decide which kinds of errors to correct. 40% of participants highlighted that an utterance is considered acceptable to them if the comprehension of meaning is not affected.

T4: As long as I understand what they mean, that’s okay.

T6: The most important in speaking is that a person is able to communicate the ideas.

T7: *If the errors they make do not impede the communication seriously, I will not correct too explicitly their minor mistakes.*

4.2 CF strategies used by teachers to correct each kind of error

There were 165 instances of CF with different strategies used recorded. Recast (58.8%) was the most commonly used CF strategy, followed by metalinguistic explanation (12.7%), clarification request (9.7%) and repetition (9.7%). 80% of the participants in the interview expressed that recast is believed to be the most effective strategy of providing CF. Table 4 summarises the CF strategies used by teachers to correct each kind of error. Details are attached in Appendix II.

	<i>Implicit strategies</i>			<i>Explicit strategies</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>RC</i>	<i>Prompts</i>				<i>EC</i>	
		<i>CR</i>	<i>RP</i>	<i>EL</i>	<i>ME</i>		
<i>Phonological errors</i>	52 (69.3%)	8 (10.7%)	1 (1.3%)	5 (6.7%)	7 (9.3%)	2 (2.7%)	75 (100%)
<i>Morphological errors</i>	0 (0.0%)	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (100%)
<i>Lexical errors</i>	4 (28.6%)	1 (7.1%)	4 (28.6%)	1 (7.1%)	3 (21.5%)	1 (7.1%)	14 (100%)
<i>Syntactical errors</i>	32 (68.1%)	3 (6.4%)	4 (8.5%)	1 (2.1%)	7 (14.9%)	0 (0.0%)	47 (100%)
<i>Semantic errors</i>	9 (47.3%)	1 (5.3%)	2 (10.5%)	3 (15.8%)	3 (15.8%)	1 (5.3%)	19 (100%)
<i>Pragmatic errors</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (33.4%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (100%)
<i>Total</i>	97 (58.8%)	16 (9.7%)	16 (9.7%)	11 (6.7%)	21 (12.7%)	4 (2.4%)	165 (100%)

Table 4: Types of CF strategies used to correct each type of error

Nearly 70% of the phonological and syntactic errors were corrected by recast. 80% of participants expressed in the interview that written recasts are more useful than oral recasts when correcting phonological errors. Students were often expected to repeat after teachers' recasts. Pragmatic and semantic errors were corrected by both implicit and explicit strategies. Other types of errors were generally corrected by implicit strategies.

From the interview, metalinguistic explanation and clarification request were favoured by over half of the participants. The former one is employed to correct both phonological and syntactic errors while the latter one to correct mainly phonological errors. 30% of participants said they would correct grammatical errors only in students' writing tasks.

T1: Sometimes I will count the syllables of words with my students, for instance, with the aid of clapping hands.

T3: I may write down the letter "k", point at it and say "So what is missing?" Or perhaps I will show my lips.

T6: For some general errors, however, I would normally not correct grammatical errors because this is not the focus of speaking. Grammar concerns more in writing.

T9: I will say "What does this word mean? I don't get it." [...] I may realise what s/he means to say, "Oh, you are actually talking about this." Then I'll tell him/her what the correct words/phrases should be.

There were 142 instances of error repair. In two-thirds (67.6%) of the instances, it was teachers who repaired the errors. In about one-fourth (26.1%) of the instances, students who made the error did the repair. In only 3 instances teachers invited other students to repair the mistakes. There were also 6 instances where pupils did either self-repair or peer-repair without teachers' CF.

Since recast was the dominating CF strategy used by teachers, in nearly half (45.8%) of the CF instances, there was no evidence of students' uptake of feedback unless the students were asked to repeat the correct answers. In two fifths (41.5%) of the occasions, students were able to incorporate the CF into the following utterances, unless they had difficulty noticing the errors or knowing how to correct the mistakes.

4.3 Rationales behind teachers' selection of CF strategies in the classroom

All the participants believe that giving CF to students is essential. 70% of them agreed that such feedback will have a long-term impact to students' language learning, and that learners could realise their errors only when teachers provide CF. 30% of participants revealed that they are willing to devote extra time to provide individualised CF and support to students in need.

T7: If you don't do so [provide CF], they don't know whether the answer or the sentence they have said is correct or not.

T8: When teachers are able to explain students' errors and help them correct the errors, their confidence and sense of success will be increased.

T10: Continuous and frequent reminders in various ways help increase students' awareness of certain language items. [...] To some extents, this will enhance my understanding of the students regarding their learning difficulties.

Participants suggested several factors they would consider when they select the CF strategy in the classroom, which include students' ability level and response to CF (90%), time availability in class (60%), lesson objectives and whether the error concerns the target language form(s) (50%), the types of errors made by students (30%) and the extent to which students are familiar with the topic(s) concerned (20%).

- T1: Since oral corrective feedback or response is more instant, I think that for speaking, the major concern will be the use of the quickest way to help the students.*
- T2: If it is speaking I may spend less time on giving corrective feedback.*
- T3: When I first introduce a new item I will give more explicit instructions and reminders to the students. When they have adequate practices and enter into the consolidation stage, I may give fewer hints.*
- T4: If the student is able enough, I just repeat their sentence by using a rising tone and then they may self-correct by themselves. If they cannot; they are weaker, maybe I just focus on the error... the word... the error word... the single word.*

Most participants believe that self-repair without teachers' CF is possible only when students are more advanced and there is sufficient teachers' guidance. Despite the fact that students can do the corrections/repair with teachers' CF, 30% of participants highlighted that their concern is about whether the feedback given can help students internalise their knowledge, rather than their ability to do the immediate repair.

- T1: When some more able students have made an error in, say, pronunciation, you ask him/her a question like 'is it correct?' Then s/he may be able to think carefully and do the correction by himself/herself.*
- T6: Certainly, students are generally able to repeat what I have just said. Yet, I also have to see whether they are able to recall it in the future.*
- T7: When [students are] asked to form a new sentence, they will make errors again.*

40% of participants indicated that it is normal for pupils to make errors. In spite of the necessity of providing CF, 40% of the interviewees added that they would be worried about whether students feel psychologically hurt when their errors are corrected.

T3: *Some children have a very high self-esteem and they may not want the teacher to correct their errors explicitly or give them the correct answer directly.*

T5: *[A student says “I can see two boy”.] I first praise him/her. Then I say “I can see two boys”. My student will know that s/he has made an error and learn it, but will not feel embarrassed. If you say “No, you should say ‘two boys’”, the student will probably not put up his/her hand next time.*

T7: *I may see whether they [students] may feel hurt when I provide corrective feedback.*

Part 5: Discussions

5.1 Essentiality of the provision of CF by teachers

It has been supported by scholars of previous researches on similar topics that CF is believed to be necessary to students' language acquisition. Similar results were also found in this study. CF has a long-term impact on students' learning of English, because it serves as an encouragement to learners which will develop their confidence. CF also raises students' awareness of the target language forms so as to prevent them from repeating the mistakes. The findings are compatible to the literatures on the necessity of teachers' CF by Sippel & Jackson (2015), Milla & Mayo (2014) and Spada (2011). To avoid reinforcement of incorrect forms, errors should be dealt with as soon as possible before the students' interlanguage is habitualised (Tomczyk, 2013). From the results obtained in the observations, only 2 out of 244 instances of errors were self-repaired without any teachers' CF. This reveals that especially for primary students, it is too difficult for them to notice and correct the errors by themselves. Instant feedback is also favoured because of the nature of spoken language. Teachers' CF is therefore essential for learners to understand their mistakes and how to repair them.

5.2 Disparity between teachers' perception and the researcher's interpretation of errors

In this research study, all the students' errors were classified into six types, namely phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactical, semantic and pragmatic. Participants however divided the common errors made by students into only two kinds: pronunciational and grammatical. The gap between the understanding of the kinds of errors of participants and that of the researcher may imply that participants may lack professional knowledge to categorise different errors in order to understand students' potential problems in language acquisition and to use appropriate strategies to give students CF.

Whether or not an incomplete sentence should be treated as an error depends on the context in which the utterance exists. Consider the following cases:

(a) *Teacher: Where do you live?*

Student: I live Tin Shui Wai. (Compare: I live in Tin Shui Wai.)

(b) *Teacher: Why do you think the children like teddy bears?*

Student: Boring. (Compare: Staying in the hospital is boring.)

(c) *Teacher: How do you come to school?*

Student: By bus.

In all the above situations, the student did not give a complete sentence. In (a), the error belongs to syntactical error, because the preposition 'in' is omitted. In (b), the utterance constitutes a semantic error because the meaning is incomplete. The listener would probably raise the question of what is boring without the contextual clues. Though (c) is not a complete sentence, it is grammatical and the meaning is complete without ambiguity. Literally, (c) should not be regarded as an error. Participants however did not make distinctions among these. In fact, different kinds of errors deserve different forms of CF, which will be further discussed in Part 5.4.

5.3 Teachers' responses to students' errors

As discussed in the above, the provision of CF is essential to students' language learning, and errors can be categorised into many kinds. Do teachers have to correct every single error? The answer to this question is certainly no. In this study, it was found that only 50.4% of the identifiable errors were corrected by teachers, which is aligned with the results in the research by Lyster & Ranta (1997). There are several reasons which account for the practice of not correcting every mistake. First, there is time constraint which does not allow teachers to correct all errors. Teachers have to strike a balance between students' in-class practice and participation opportunities and the time devoted to providing CF. Second, when the teacher has to stop a student whenever s/he makes an error, the natural flow of communication will be interrupted. Such interruption is harmful to the language acquisition of a child and may lead to a decrease in the student's confidence to use the language (Llinares & Lyster, 2014). Third, correcting every mistake may result in the loss of lesson focus. Some participants commented that they would only focus on errors which were directly relevant to the learning objectives. Hattie & Timperley (2007) also suggested that CF should adequately describe the discrepancy between students' current ability and the intended learning outcomes. Effective CF provides learners with information about what and how the learning objectives should be achieved.

It was discovered in the observations that semantic errors and lexical errors were corrected more frequently than phonological and syntactical errors. One possible reason to account for this is that semantic and lexical errors more likely affect the comprehension of meaning by the listener. Consider the following cases in which errors have seriously interfered with understanding:

- (d) *Teacher: What does a fireman do?*
Student: He puts on fire. (Compare: He puts out fire.)
- (e) *Student: We look the TV. (Compare: We watch TV.)*

In both (d) and (e), the meaning has changed as a result of the students' unintended errors, which has also impeded communication of ideas, so immediate CF is necessary to correct the errors. Inaccurate pronunciation or grammar may also lead to confusion of meaning, but this is not always the case. Errors should deserve more attention if they interfere with understanding. The error in (f) below obviously has a greater possibility of leading to misunderstanding than that in (g) does, and hence should require more explicit CF from the teacher:

(f) Student: *It is Po Lin [pəʊ læn] Monastery. (Compare: Po Lin [pəʊ lɪn])*

(g) Student: *He catches [kætʃs] bad people. (Compare: catches [kætʃɪz])*

5.4 The adoption of CF strategies in relation to the nature of errors

5.4.1 Comparisons between recasts and prompts

The findings in the present research are quite similar to those in a similar study conducted by Llinares & Lyster (2014). Recasts were the most popular strategy, comprising of nearly 60% of the total number of CF instances, followed by prompts (nearly 40%) and explicit corrections (2.4%). Though recasts are believed to be the most implicit CF strategy, most participants attempted to make them more explicit than they are supposed to be by using emphatic stress or recasting only the incorrect word. Recasts solve the problem of insufficient lesson time because it prevents communication from being interrupted and pupils' attention on content is retained (Tomczyk, 2013).

The dominance of recasts, however, also resulted in a percentage as low as 26.1% of errors which were repaired by students. In the instances of recasts, students were merely asked to repeat the correct utterances, so basically no students' uptake of CF was demonstrated. One of the shortcomings of recasts is that they may be interpreted as confirmation instead of reformulation of the utterance when students do not understand what is corrected (Haghighi-Shirazi, Sadighi, 2012).

Prompts are often used to correct students' semantic and lexical errors, because they allow students to repair their errors and facilitate negotiation of pupils' intended meaning. Teachers tend to use metalinguistic explanations when they are able to predict what students want to say; otherwise they will use clarification requests. Metalinguistic explanations are also favoured when teachers explain grammatical errors, as this may deepen learners' awareness of the difference between the correct forms and the incorrect ones, which may internalise their implicit knowledge (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006). Similar comments were made by participants that effective CF not only prompts students' immediate uptake, but helps them internalise their implicit knowledge.

5.4.2 Use of multiple CF strategies when responding to students' errors

In many instances, teachers have to use more than one CF strategy to correct a single error. From the observations, 123 identifiable errors which were corrected by teachers and 165 instances of CF were recorded. In other words, each error required approximately 1.34 instances of CF. There are not any feedback strategies which suit everyone. In more occasions, the CF given for the first time may not be effective enough, so teachers may have to adjust the CF. A combination of different types of CF, alternatively, will draw the learners' attention to the errors and corrections (Milla & Mayo, 2014). The following is an example illustrating the multiple CF moves:

(T shows a picture in which there is a child playing badminton.)

*Student: Can you play *basketball (lexical error)?*

Teacher: Ah... Please, number 1. (clarification request) Can you play... (elicitation)

*Student: Can you play *basketball?*

Teacher: Is it basketball? (repetition)

Student: Can you play badminton?

Teacher: Yes, very good. Once again, badminton.

5.4.3 Avoidance of the use of explicit corrections in the classroom

The use of explicit corrections was kept minimal in all the observed lessons in QPS. Participants showed their preference towards implicit correction strategies and were eager to promote an encouraging learning environment. In fact, this is not only the case in QPS, but also the results discovered by previous researchers such as Lyster, Saito & Sato (2013). Overemphasis on students' language errors may result in language anxiety, which is definitely harmful to their language development. Overtly pointing out students' errors may sometimes lead to their unpleasant feeling and lower their self-esteem. In fact, explicit correction should not be solely used to provide CF, because students are neither presented with the positive evidence of learning nor encouraged to do the repair by themselves.

Part 6: Recommendations

Teachers are expected to make professional judgements on what types of errors to correct, how much attention should be put on each kind, and in what ways CF should be given to learners. While feedback is necessary to students' language development, it is not always necessary for each and every error to be corrected. The purpose of the lesson is one of the important factors which teachers should consider. In case of a content-focussed lesson where fluency is prioritised, CF should be kept minimal unless errors which impede communication are prevalent. On the contrary, when accuracy is emphasised, teachers should provide adequate and multiple forms of CF (Tomczyk, 2013).

It is recommended that teachers should use prompts to encourage students' uptake of CF in language-focussed lessons because they allow capacities for students to internalise their knowledge. Teachers should always bear in mind that a variety of CF strategies should be used to cater for the

needs of different students, and to deal with different types of errors, with respect to the objectives of the lesson. Teachers are advised to understand the nature of different errors so as to determine the most effective CF strategy to be given.

Part 7: Limitations

There are some limitations in this research which deserve readers' attention. First, teachers from only one school participated in this research. The small sample size can hardly represent the situation of the same issue in other school contexts. Second, the number of morphological and pragmatic errors was extremely small and insignificant from the data, which prevents the researcher from drawing conclusions about the CF strategies to be used in correcting these errors. Third, during the interviews, participants were not explicitly asked about the exact types of CF to correct each type of errors, so part of the discussion has to be supported by previous literatures. Fourth, the rather controlled patterns of students' responses in junior primary classrooms may lead to bias in part of the findings. Fifth, only the immediate students' uptake of CF was evaluated, so the long-term impact of CF towards students' language acquisition is yet to be explored.

Part 8: Conclusion

The present study has explored the issues of the provision of CF by teachers in Hong Kong primary educational context and addressed several major questions. Further to our understanding that teachers do not correct every error, this research reveals that semantic and lexical errors attract more teachers' attention due to their possibility of causing communication breakdown. In addition to learning the distribution of CF strategies used by teachers, the research has answered the question of what forms of CF are typically used for responding to each kind of error. Errors which involve negotiation of meaning normally require prompts, while predictable errors are corrected by either

recasts or explicit strategies. Reasons which account for the combination of CF strategies used are also unfolded. CF is undoubtedly valuable to students' language development, and therefore the discussions and implications generated in this research will hopefully bring teachers insights into more effective use of CF in the future.

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Appendices

I. A sample observation scheme used during classroom observations

Date:	
Lesson / Time:	
Name of the teacher:	
Subject:	English Language
Class level:	
Class size:	
Topic / Unit:	
Learning objective(s):	
Learning activity/-ies:	

Categories of feedback	Tallies	Frequency	Other types under the same category
Types of errors which are identified in students' utterances			
Phonological errors			
Morphological errors			
Lexical errors			
Syntactical errors			
Semantic errors			
Pragmatic errors			
Others (specify on the rightmost column)			
Types of errors which are corrected by the teacher			
Phonological errors			
Morphological errors			
Lexical errors			
Syntactical errors			
Semantic errors			
Pragmatic errors			
Others (specify on the rightmost column)			

Types of feedback (CF) provided by the teacher			
Recast			
Clarification request			
Repetition			
Elicitation			
Metalinguistic clues or explanation			
Explicit correction			
Others (specify on the rightmost column)			
Who do/does the correction			
The student who makes the error			
The teacher who gives feedback			
Other student(s) in the same class			
No correction is done			
Others (specify on the rightmost column)			
Students' uptake of feedback			
Feedback incorporated into next utterance			
Feedback incorporated into later utterance			
Feedback is not incorporated because students do not notice the error			
Feedback is not incorporated because students do not know how to correct it			
No opportunity for feedback due to the time constraint in class			
Feedback ignored due to students inability to understand the feedback			
No feedback is expected from the teacher			
Others (specify on the rightmost column)			

II. An interview guide for teachers

1. How many years have you worked as an English teacher in local primary school(s)?
2. What are the typical errors made by students when they speak English?
3. What do you notice about the common errors made by students when they speak English?
4. Which are the errors you will correct? Which are those you will not correct?
5. What are some strategies you will use to correct students' errors in speaking?
6. From your experience, which strategies do you find more effective? Which are less effective?
7. To what extent do students usually do corrections by themselves?
8. How do students normally respond (do corrections) after you give them feedback?
9. What factors will you take into account when choosing the strategy of giving feedback?
10. To what extent do you think giving feedback to students is essential?
11. What are some difficulties you have come across when attempting to give students feedback?
12. What feelings do you have when you have to correct a student's error when they speak?

*** The End ***