Oral Corrective Feedback in the Chinese EFL Classroom

Methods employed by teachers to give feedback to their students

Muntlig korrigerande feedback i kinesisk undervisning i engelska som främmande språk
Metoder som används av lärare för att ge elever feedback

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Pages: 28

Abstract

This is an empirical study based on English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' experiences. The study is on Chinese EFL teachers' usage of different oral corrective feedback (OCF) types as well as their own beliefs as to what strategies they make use of most frequently and what they do to improve their own OCF. Semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations were employed as instruments for the data collecting process. Four Chinese EFL teachers were interviewed, one male and three female, with varied amounts of professional experience and of different ages. Four observations were made in the classrooms of the same teachers as a supplement to the interviews. The interviews were analyzed by means of content analysis. The results indicate that Recast is the most commonly used feedback method and that the teachers had different thoughts on which feedback method was the most effective or the one they most frequently used. Furthermore, the results indicate that there are differences between teachers’ beliefs about their feedback strategies and the observation results.

Keywords: Feedback, error correction, Chinese EFL teachers

Sammanfattning på svenska


Nyckelord: Feedback, rättning av fel, kinesiska lärare i engelska som främmande språk
1. Introduction

Corrective feedback (CF) has been defined simply as ‘responses to learner utterances containing an error’ (...) but also as a ‘complex phenomenon with several functions’ (...). Knowledge about this seemingly simple yet complex phenomenon continues to grow, as research accumulates on its role in L2 classrooms and its effects on L2 development. (Lyster, Saito & Sato 2013: 2)

The quotation above is from Lyster et al (2013), a recent study that reviews research on oral corrective feedback (OCF) in second language (L2) classrooms. Lyster et al (2013) identify various types of corrective feedback (CF) types and their function. This study, however, will mainly focus on different types of OCF in a Chinese EFL classroom and teachers' use of them as well as the same teachers' thoughts on OCF.

Throughout their schooling students receive a large amount of OCF in the language classroom. It is probably the case that they do not stop and reflect on the significance of the teacher's provision of OCF until the day when they themselves are the ones to give feedback during teacher training, for instance. Since an oral corrective is an immediate signal to students that there is an error somewhere in their utterance, teachers may feel as if they are exposing or embarrassing students when giving feedback. The feedback-giving anxiety which teachers may experience is one of the things that add to the complexity of giving feedback in classroom contexts. Something that makes OCF important is that without teachers' immediate correction of errors, students would keep making the same mistakes over and over again. In that sense, OCF plays an important role for the development of students' speaking accuracy.

Chinese and English are languages which differ a great deal from one another, which makes learning English a serious challenge for Chinese native speakers. Differences are found in areas such as sentence word order, phonology and intonation patterns and also in the writing system: the alphabet is nonexistent in the Chinese language and instead a logographic system is used for its written language. The big language differences entail a greater risk of error making by Chinese students in the English classroom, maybe more so than in the English classroom by students who are native speakers of a Germanic language. This study will investigate spoken errors made by Chinese students in the English classroom, and, more importantly, focus on teachers' OCF that may or may not follow the erroneous utterance.
1.1 Aims and research questions

This study aims to examine the ways in which Chinese EFL teachers give feedback to their students as well as their attitudes towards OCF. The study will be quantitative in that it will present the frequency with which various feedback types were used by the teachers and also qualitative in that it attempts to highlight what strategies the teachers employed to improve their feedback. The aims can be operationalised into the following research questions:

- What are the teachers’ attitudes towards OCF?
- What feedback types do the teachers believe to be the most effective?
- What feedback types do the teachers believe to be the least effective?
- What are the teachers’ beliefs as to what feedback types they use most frequently?

- What do Chinese EFL teachers do in an attempt to improve the quality of their OCF?

- What types of errors do the teachers choose not to correct?

- What types of OCF are actually most frequently used?

2. Background

In section 2.1 are definitions of a number of recurring terms that are central to this study. There has been a great amount of research done on OCF, which makes it difficult to find clear definitions of the terms within the research field. This is partly because researchers within different disciplines tend to use different definitions. An example of that is the term negative evidence, which is used by researchers in the field of language acquisition, whereas corrective feedback is mainly being used by researchers in the field of language teaching (Sheen, 2011:19). For the sake of convenience, the terms used in this study will therefore be defined in the way that they are intended to be understood in this study. Noteworthy is, however, that feedback is the key term and corrective feedback (like oral corrective feedback) are lower-level types of feedback. The feedback definition section (2.1) will be followed by a presentation of previous studies (2.2) including the theoretical model for studying feedback (2.2.1) and a review of different feedback types (2.2.2). Lastly, section 2.2.3 will present some previous research on oral corrective feedback.
2.1 Definition of feedback

It is generally accepted that feedback is an important classroom activity. It works as a motivation tool by letting learners know how they are doing in class. Sheen (2011:32) argues that feedback should be provided regardless of whether the learner’s response is correct or incorrect. An example of positive feedback is a teacher writing “well done” on a learner’s paper. Corrective feedback, on the other hand, is the teachers’ cues to the learners to indicate that there is an error that should be corrected. Sheen (2011:133-132) stresses that the difference between feedback and corrective feedback is that corrective feedback entails the presence of an error, whereas feedback as such could be encouragement. Corrective feedback can be given in writing on learners’ written work, or it can be given orally after an erroneous utterance. An example of corrective feedback is a teacher making a written remark on a learner’s grammar asking them to rephrase. Oral corrective feedback, by contrast, is described by Lyster et al (2013:1) as the teachers’ responses to learners’ erroneous utterances.

In summary, feedback is the general term, corrective feedback is feedback which focuses on correction and oral corrective feedback is corrective feedback focusing on students’ speech. Oral corrective feedback is also is usually given immediately after the erroneous utterance. In the context of this study, feedback, corrective feedback and oral corrective feedback should be understood as the feedback that is immediately given orally by the teacher.

2.2 Previous studies

This section will present the theoretical model which this study employs in the classification of the different feedback types. Furthermore, this section aims to account for previous research in the same area and also to depict various researchers’ thoughts on the subject in the light of the aims and the research questions of the present study.

2.2.1 A theoretical model for studying feedback

Many observation schemes have been used in classroom research on L2 teaching and learning. Some of them, like COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching), cover a wide range of instructional practices and procedures (Lighbown & Spada, 1999:102). Others focus on a more specific feature of classroom interaction. An example of the latter is the instrument developed by Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta, which focuses exclusively on describing the immediate feedback on learner errors provided by the teacher. Lyster and Ranta’s (1997:46-48) instrument, or classification of OCF types, will be used as the theoretical model. Another function which their instrument fills, besides describing the
different feedback types, is to describe learners’ immediate response (or uptake, as they call it) to teachers’ OCF. This study will not, however, investigate learners’ uptake.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) developed their OCF classification model while observing the different types of OCF provided in approximately 20 hours of classroom interaction in four classrooms. They started their observations by using a combination of categories taken from a COLT scheme and also from other models which had examined feedback in both first and second language (L2) learning. As time passed, they adjusted some of the categories in order to better fit their data and also developed some categories of their own. The final result of their research was the identification of six different feedback types, which will be described in the next section.

2.2.2 Different types of feedback

The categories below are all from Lyster and Ranta’s model (Lyster & Ranta, 1997:46-48). The examples, on the other hand, are all from Lightbown and Spada (1999:104-105). This is because Lyster and Ranta (1997) wrote their study in French while Lightbown and Spada (1999) use English examples.

1. **Explicit correction** refers to the explicit provision of the correct form. As the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect (e.g., “Oh, you mean,” “You should say”).

   S The dog run *fastly*.
   T ‘Fastly’ doesn’t exist. *Fast* does not take -ly. That’s why I picked ‘quickly’.

2. **Recasts** involve the teacher’s reformulation of all or part of a student’s utterance, minus the error.

   S1 When *you’re* phone partners, did you talk long time?
   T When *you were* phone partners, did you talk for a long time?
   S2 Yes my first one I talked for 25 minutes

   S1 Why *you don’t* like Marc?
   T Why *don’t you* like Marc?
   S2 I don’t know, I don’t like him.

3. **Clarification requests** indicate to students either that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way and that a repetition or a reformulation is required. This is a feedback type that can refer to problems in either comprehensibility or accuracy, or both. Lyster and Ranta (1997) coded feedback as **Clarification requests** only when it followed a student error. A **Clarification request** includes
phrases such as “Pardon me”. It may also include a repetition of the error as in “What do you mean by X?”

T  How often do you wash the dishes?
S  Fourteen.
T  Excuse me? (Clarification request)
S  Fourteen.
T  Fourteen what? (Clarification request)
S  Fourteen for a week.
T  Fourteen times a week? (Recast)
S  Yes. Dinner and supper.

4. **Metalinguistic feedback** contains either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student’s utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form. Metalinguistic comments generally indicate that there is an error somewhere (e.g., “Can you find your error?,” “No, not X,” or even just “No.”). Metalinguistic information generally provides either some grammatical metalanguage that refers to the nature of the error (e.g., “It’s plural”) or a word definition in the case of lexical errors. Metalinguistic questions also point to the nature of the error but attempt to elicit the information from the student (e.g., “Is it the past tense?”).

S  We look at the people yesterday.
T  What’s the ending we put on verbs when we talk about the past?

5. **Elicitation** refers to at least three techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the student. First, teachers elicit completion of their own utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to “fill in the blank” (e.g., “It’s a . . . ”). Such “elicit completion” moves may be preceded by some metalinguistic comment such as “No, not that. It’s a . . . ” or by a repetition of the error as in the following example: S: “The big dog runs fastly” T: “The big dog runs fastly? The big dog runs...”.

Second, teachers use questions to elicit correct forms (e.g., “How do we say X in English?”). Such questions exclude yes/no answers: A question such as “Do we say that in English?” is metalinguistic feedback, not elicitation.

Third, teachers occasionally ask students to reformulate their utterance.

S  My father cleans the plate.
T  Excuse me, he cleans the???
S  Plates?
6. *Repetition* refers to the teacher’s repetition, in isolation, of the student’s erroneous utterance. In most cases, teachers adjust their intonation so as to highlight the error.

\[
\begin{align*}
S & \quad \text{We is...} \\
T & \quad \text{We is? But it's two people, right? You see your mistake? You see the error?} \\
& \quad \text{When it’s plural it’s we are.}
\end{align*}
\]

### 2.2.3 Empirical studies on OCF

Büyükbay and Dabaghi (2010) investigated the effectiveness of *Repetition* as corrective feedback in terms of its contribution to student uptake and acquisition. The participants in the study were 30 students in two classes, one control and one experimental group. In order to determine the effectiveness of *Repetition* as corrective feedback, the researchers observed and videotaped the two classes. The results revealed that the experimental class, which was exposed to *Repetition* as corrective feedback, showed a higher level of improvement during the duration of the study. The conclusion drawn by the researchers is that repetition, as a correction technique, is effective in terms of its contribution to uptake and acquisition. According to Büyükbay and Dabaghi (2010), “it is highly likely that this difference in the two classes was due to the difference in feedback types that were used in the two classes” (Büyükbay and Dabaghi, 2010:187). *Repetition* was, in fact, the most effective feedback type in terms of student uptake. These results are similar to the results of other studies by researchers who have investigated what feedback type is the most effective.

Corrective feedback is a research field that is gaining increasing prominence in the world, but according to Shanshan (2012), it has not drawn enough attention in China. “The few issues addressed in studies in China are teachers’ CF and learners’ uptake in EFL classrooms in primary and middle schools” (Zhao, 2005, referenced in Shanshan, 2012:483). An *Investigation into teachers’ corrective feedback in Chinese EFL classrooms* is a study conducted by Shanshan (2012). The study investigated what OCF types were being used by the teachers, and examined the effect of error types on strategy choice as well as OCF strategies’ effect on learners’ responses. The subjects in the study were four EFL teachers and 89 English major students. Data were collected through a total of 40 hours of classroom observation and interviews carried out with the four teachers. A distinctive feature of the study is that it identified so-called nonverbal signals as a feedback type. “With nonverbal signals, teachers use gestures or facial expressions to indicate the existence of errors in students’ utterances. Teachers provided seven types of CF in senior middle school and university EFL classrooms: *Explicit correction, Recast, Clarification request, Metalinguistic...*
feedback, Elicitation, Repetition and Nonverbal signals” (Shanshan, 2012:502). This sets the study apart in that OCF research generally focuses on the verbal classroom communication. The relevant findings in the study were that the Chinese EFL teachers’ treatment of oral errors was related to error types. Although implicit input-providing feedback was popular in the treatment of all errors, teachers still altered their feedback strategies in an attempt to improve their feedback provision.

3. Methods

This section will present the methodological approach of this study. The issues that will be addressed here are choice of methods, sampling, the analytical procedure, reliability, validity and research ethics.

3.1 Choice of methods and selection of informants

The instruments used for data collection in this study are semi-structured interviews and nonparticipant observations. The decision to use interviews and observations came naturally as this study aims to examine the ways in which Chinese EFL teachers give feedback to their students and teachers’ attitudes towards OCF. Furthermore, this study aims to highlight what feedback types the teachers make use of most frequently, which requires the addition of quantitative analysis methods as a supplement to the qualitative methods used.

In quantitative research, statistics or some other form of mathematical operations are utilized in analyzing data. In qualitative research, mathematical techniques are eschewed or are of minimal use, although assuredly rudimentary or implicit and measuring are usually involved (How many? How often? To what degree?). (...) Qualitative researchers tend to lay considerable emphasis on situational and often structural contexts, in contrast to many quantitative researchers, whose work is multivariate but often weak on context. (Strauss 1993:2-3)

This study describes teachers’ attitudes and highlights the frequency of feedback types during the observed classes, hence the use of both qualitative and quantitative analytic methods in this study.

For this study, four teachers participated in the interviews and observations. The aim was to have as much diversity among the informants as possible in order to get a broad base of professional experiences. In order to do so, a few aspects were taken into consideration. The
first was the informants’ occupation. They were all EFL teachers with a university teaching degree and worked full time. If they were teaching any other subjects besides EFL or not was not relevant for this study. The informants’ profession was important to take into account since this study is based on Chinese EFL teachers’ experiences and ways of giving feedback in a classroom context.

The second aspect was the informants’ gender. One male and three female teachers participated as informants. The great majority of the teachers available for this study were female, and therefore, great effort was put into finding at least one male informant for the interviews and observations. This was to control that the interview and observation results were not gender-biased.

The third aspect was the length of the informants’ experience in terms of number of years they had worked as EFL teachers. Little working experience was defined as newly graduated teachers to teachers who had taught for up to eight years. Long experience was defined as teachers who had taught for nine years or more. Controlling for the length of informants’ professional experience involved controlling for the informants’ ages as well to some extent. The length of the informants’ professional experience spanned between 6 and 17 years and their ages between 30 and 44 years. The two teachers who had the most working experience had taught for 13 and 17 years respectively. The two who had the least working experience had taught for 6 and 7 years respectively. The length of the informants’ experience was kept in mind to insure that the results were not of a certain character because of age differences. The aim was to have two more informants to secure a broader range and variety between the teachers. Due to time constraints however, four informants was the maximum number of informants manageable.

In summary, this study is qualitative, with supplementary quantitative methods to address the frequency of the different feedback types. Four teachers (one male and two female), of different ages and professional experience participated during the data collection procedure. The teachers were all Chinese EFL teachers at university level. The sampling was done randomly among teachers who were appropriate in terms of the aims of this study. Noteworthy is, however, that the informants were also chosen according to availability and what the time-limit allowed. “Regardless of what type of sample is being constructed, there can be practical problems in putting together a sample, and at times, these problems force researchers to rethink other aspects of research design,” says Loseke (2013:111). This study has not been an exception to Loseke’s (2013) statement. Some rethinking has been inevitable along the way.
In table 1, the informants have been coded as T1, T2, T3 and T4. The second row of the table shows the teachers’ gender, the third row shows their age and the fourth row shows the number of years they have been teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Interview guide and observation schedule

Think of interviewing as the process of getting words to fly. To be sure, they do not fly with the regularity and predictability of balls emerging from batting-practice machines that baseball teams use. Interviewing is a human interaction with all of its attendant uncertainties. As an interviewer, you are not a research machine, but you do “pitch” questions at your respondents with the intent of making words fly. Unlike a human baseball pitcher whose joy derives from throwing balls that batters never touch, you toss questions that you want your respondent to “hit” and hit well in every corner of your data park, if not clear out of it - a swatted home run of words. As a researcher, you want your “pitches” -your questions- to stimulate verbal flights from the important respondents who know what you do not. From these flights comes the information that you transmute into data - the stuff of dissertations, articles and books. (Corrine 1999:67).

The vivid metaphor in the quote above is something that was borne in mind when designing the interview guide. The aim was to elicit as much information from the informants as possible. The interview guide was made in two versions: one version that was given to the informants before the interview and one that was kept by the interviewer. The informants’ version began with a part where they were thanked for their willingness to participate in the study and they were introduced to what the interview would be about. Furthermore, the first page of the informants’ guide included information about the purpose of the study and a guarantee that all data would be kept confidential. On the same page, the Ranta and Lyster (1997) feedback classification list was submitted to facilitate the informants’ comprehension of the terminology used. The second part of the interview guide is where the actual interview questions started. The informants were asked to describe their understanding of OCF. Questions which might be of a sensitive nature were saved for later in the interview. The
interviewer’s interview guide differed from the informants’ in that most of the questions were written down with supplementary questions.

Below is the observational schedule that was used during the observations. It is a simple schedule where the researcher makes a tick whenever there is a verbal correction of a student utterance given by the teacher. Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) classification of the feedback types was used. The observations cover a total of 12 class hours.

Table 2. Example of an observation schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCF given on:</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
<th>Recast</th>
<th>Clarifi.</th>
<th>Metaling.</th>
<th>Elicitation</th>
<th>Repetition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>IIII</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td></td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>IIIIIIIII</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Approach and analysis process

Upon completion of the interview guide and the observation schedule the informants were contacted through e-mail and dates and times for the interviews and observations were set. The e-mail sent to the informants consisted of a description of what the study was going to be about and explained that all data would be dealt with confidentially. A pilot interview was conducted with a teacher trainee student. This was to test the quality of the interview guide. The results were considered good since the answers were both detailed and rich. Since this study examined graduate teachers, the data collected from the pilot interview were not used. Before the pilot interview, the digital audio recorder that was to be used during the interviews was tested with success. For practical reasons, it was nevertheless a cell phone that was used for the interview recordings because it had equally good sound quality and it was also easier to transfer files to the computer with it. This would also facilitate the transcription process since that could be done from the cell phone as well.

Before the interviews took place, a decision had to be made as to where they were to be conducted. “Where will you conduct your interviews? Convenient, available, appropriate locations need to be found. Select quiet, physically comfortable, and private locations when you can; they are generally most appropriate” (Glesne 1999: 75). All interviews were held in locations suggested by the informants. This was to create a safe environment for them so they
could feel comfortable enough to speak as freely as possible. In addition, no informant who voluntarily agrees to participate should need to adapt to the interviewer’s needs in terms of convenience. The interviews were all between 25-40 minutes and were carried out smoothly without interference or technical problems. The informants were reminded that they could at any time choose to stop the interview or refuse to answer questions that they did not want to answer. They were also offered to take part of the study’s final results upon completion.

All data from the interviews have been processed using content analysis: “More than just a single technique, content analysis is really a set of methods for analyzing the symbolic content of any communication” (Singleton & Straits 2004:371). As described in Graneheim & Lundman (2004) and in Singleton & Straits (2004), the interviews were first transcribed by hand on the computer after which the transcript was read repeatedly to give a full picture. The next step was to analyze the text and mark meaning-bearing units. The meaning-bearing units could consist of a phrase that was relevant to the aims of the study. The meaning-bearing units were then compared to each other and were classified into groups which together made a code. A code is a group of related meaning-bearing units which have been interpreted latently or manifestly. The same analytical work was done with the codes which were compared and later categorized. "Creating categories is the core feature of qualitative content analysis. A category is a group of content that shares a commonality" (Graneheim & Lundman 2004:107). The analytical work meant that both the manifest and latent interpretations were done in order to elicit the created categories. The words manifest and latent content analysis refer to the level of abstraction in the interpretation. The researcher can either look into the manifest content, that is what is explicitly expressed in the text, or he can analyze the latent content, which means that the researcher makes an interpretation of what the text says. The interpretations may be done with varying levels of abstraction (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

The observations were recorded in an excel spreadsheet to demonstrate the actual use of the different feedback types. The numbers from the observation schedules were transferred to the spreadsheet and tables were made to provide an overview from the observations.

### 3.3.1 Reliability and validity

According to Singleton & Straits (2004:90), the concept of reliability deals with the reliability of the research results. If a study has high reliability, the results should be able to be replicated by another researcher at another time. In this study it could be about whether respondents will change their responses with different interviewers or be consistent or if another researcher would get different results with the same observation schedule. Singleton
& Straits (2004:90) argue that higher reliability could be achieved by the interviewer being consistent in the way he or she asks the questions. Efforts were made to ask the questions as objectively as possible so that subjective factors would have as little impact as possible on the answers. During transcription, everything was written down as it was said. Fillers such as "uh" and "um" were also written down because they could reveal the mood of the interviewee. Nevertheless, Singleton & Straits (2004:90) caution that although it may be desirable to increase the reliability of the results to avoid any subjectivity, too strong an emphasis on reliability discourages creativity and variability. Supplementary questions were therefore spontaneously used during the interviews. These follow-up questions were added whenever they were needed and could therefore differ from interview to interview depending on the answers that were given.

Validity “deals with “goodness of fit” between an operational definition and the concept it is purposed to measure” (Singleton & Straits 2004:91). In a broader perspective, validity relates to the degree that a method investigates what it is intended to measure. As a measure to increase the validity, sub-questions, which could seem similar to the main question, were asked in order to elicit answers to the actual questions instead of to something else. Throughout an attempt was made to be objective as well as to keep the aims of this study in mind.

3.3.2 Research ethics

Ethics is a branch of philosophy and theology. Both theological ethicists, who define the field in terms of religious and sacred texts, and philosophical ethicists, who define it strictly on the basis of reasoning independent of religious faith, are concerned with the same fundamental question: What ought to be done? Ethics is the study of “right behavior”. For the social scientists, ethics poses questions concerning how to proceed in moral and responsible ways. (Singleton & Straits 2004:515)

To have a morally responsible approach is important when doing research. Singleton and Straits (2004) identify four issues to bear in mind when conducting research: harm, informed consent, deception, privacy.

The issue of harm is, according to Singleton and Straits (2004:521), not so simple and straightforward as it may appear. This is because harm is something difficult to define and predict. In social science, physical harm is unlikely, but not all harm is of a physical nature. Singleton and Straits (2004:521) state that informants may experience harm of embarrassment or humiliation. To avoid any kind of harm to the informants, they were
always treated respectfully. This was of great importance since face threatening acts are rather serious in China. All the informants were native Chinese which made face saving acts a key ingredient for successful interviews.

The second issue is informed consent, which means that the subjects must understand that their participation is voluntary and they should be given enough information about the research to make an informed decision about whether to participate (Singleton and Straits 2004:521). The informants in this study were all thoroughly informed about the study before making the free decision to participate.

Deception is the third area of concern presented by Singleton and Straits (2004:522) and it deals with truthfulness. A researcher should not purposely deceive the subjects. As part of showing respect, the informants were always addressed truthfully as to how the data was intended to be used.

The fourth issue is privacy and deals with an individual’s decision when, where, to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behavior will be revealed. The informants’ privacy was respected and no names are mentioned in the results.

4. Analysis and results

This section presents a results of the present study. Section 4.1 introduces the results of the teacher interviews which will be presented in sections 4.1.1-5. Section 4.2 presents the results of the observations and a summary of the results will be presented in section 4.3.

4.1 Results of teacher interviews

This section will include a presentation of the results of the content analysis of the interviews. The results were coded to form categories as explained in the methods section. Examples from the transcripts will be quoted to demonstrate the teachers’ thoughts on the subject matter. During the content analysis, five categories were identified, and each of these categories will be presented in separate subsections below.

4.1.1 OCF as an error modification tool

OCF as an error modification tool refers to the teachers’ thoughts on OCF in general. During the interviews, the teachers were asked to discuss their own understanding of OCF. They all
described OCF, in one way or another, as a tool which teachers use to help learners improve their speaking skills of the target language. T3’s description of her understanding of OCF differed from the others in that she pointed out Chinese teachers’ discretion when giving feedback:

Eh... oral corrective feedback in China is eh... kinda fact that the teacher's supposed to provide to the students after they answer their questions to help them improve. If they answer the question not so correctly, I will not, you know, uh... according to Chinese custom we seldom directly correct them in the face but we will offer some kind of feedback after the students are done talking (...). (T3)

T1, T2 and T4 focused more on describing what OCF is and why it is given to learners:

I think it’s part of the communication between a teacher and a student. For one thing, you want to make the students’ speech effective and for another thing, you want it to be accurate (...). (T1)

I think OCF is uh... for the students, it’s a chance to get some eh... mh... guidance from their instructors in order to modify the mistakes they have been making (...). (T2)

For example, the students eh... have said something that you think could be better, you-you find there’s room for improvement, then you would do it – I would do it right now, immediately. (T4)

The teachers’ descriptions of OCF are similar to what was said in the literature (see section 2.1). Lyster et al (2011:1) describe oral corrective feedback to be the teachers’ responses to learners’ erroneous utterances. In short, it is teachers’ oral correction of learners’ erroneous spoken utterances. The difference between the literature and the teachers’ thoughts on OCF is that the teachers more than the literature, described how OCF works. While the literature focused on describing what OCF is, the teachers gave specific examples of how they give feedback. By doing so, the teachers addressed the how and not only the what.

4.1.2 The ways in which OCF should be given

The ways in which OCF should be given refers to the teachers’ thoughts on how a teacher should give feedback to learners. T1 states that students who make errors when they speak can expect correction and she also said that teachers should be constructive rather than destructive when giving feedback. T2 thought that OCF should be an immediate response or comment on student speech while T3 thought teachers should be flexible and able to change
their feedback strategies if one strategy should have an undesired effect on learners. Like T1, T4 also thought feedback should be provided in a constructive manner when there is room for improvement:

If they [/learners/] don’t find the correct form of a word from for example a dictionary, they can choose to speak up in the class, and what awaits them is of course correction from the teacher (...). (...) I think you need to be constructive, not destructive when correcting them. (T1)

(...) oral... uh corrective feedback is an immediate response or comments on answers or in-class activities. (T2)

(...) when you face... are facing the students you feel that they feel embarrassing or uh... some other feeling showed on their faces. I think that is not a good way [/of giving feedback/]. Next time I will change it in another way. (T3)

Eh... not to save their face, but I would still correct them but in a more gentle way with my voice and face expressions. A more pleasant manner to do so is that I would sometimes tell the class that this piece of suggestion could apply to all of you, not just one. (T4)

In summary, the teachers thought it is important to be able to switch between feedback strategies if one strategy should have an undesired effect on the learners. Furthermore, the teachers observed that a teacher should be constructive and not destructive when giving feedback. The biggest difference between the teachers and the literature in this matter is that the teachers were more specific when explaining how learners might react when receiving feedback and why they would react in that way.

4.1.3 The most effective/frequently used OCF

In contrast to the previous category, the most effective/frequently used OCF includes instances of teachers’ opinions about how OCF should not be given. This category refers to the teachers’ beliefs as to which feedback types are the most and the least effective and also their beliefs as to which feedback type they make use of most frequently. T1 believed Metalinguistic feedback to be the most frequently used feedback type as well as the most effective one, whereas Explicit correction was believed to be the least effective one. Unlike T1, T2 believed Recast and Clarification request to be the most frequently used feedback types, Recast to be the most effective one and, unlike T1, T2 believed Metalinguistic feedback to be the least effective one. T3’s opinion was that the implicit corrective feedback types are the most effective, as well as the most frequently used, while Explicit correction was believed to
be the least effective. T4 was unable to say which feedback types she believed to be the most frequently used. On the other hand, she found Clarification request and Recast to be the most effective types of OCF. When asked to name the least effective feedback types she replied as follows:

> It depends on the students, what kind of level, what kind of competence in regard of the language that they have. When I have this course with these students, I’m so familiar with them. I know their background and also what feedback strategies to use. For a class that I’m totally unfamiliar with, I don’t know”. (T4)

In summary, only one of four teachers believed Recast to be the most effective feedback type while two of the teachers believed Explicit correction to be the least effective. They all had completely different beliefs as to which feedback type was most frequently used. In short they were, to a large extent, in agreement when naming the most effective feedback type. When naming the least effective and the most frequently used feedback types, however, they were to a large extent, in disagreement.

The one teacher's belief about Recast being the most frequently used feedback type is in agreement with the results from previous research. Lyster and Ranta (1997) listed Recast as, by far, the most frequently used feedback type. In terms of learner uptake, Lyster and Ranta (1997) found Recast to be the least effective and Elicitation to be the most effective feedback type.

### 4.1.4 Teachers’ ways of refining their feedback techniques

*Teachers’ ways of refining their feedback techniques* refers to what the teachers do or do not do to improve their feedback. All the teachers stressed the importance of always striving to improve one’s feedback. T1 did not learn how to give feedback during her teacher training, but developed feedback strategies by herself while teaching: “I didn’t have any professional training on teachers’ feedback strategies, but I can observe and learn some effective ways of giving feedbacks on my own”. (T1)

T2 said that he took some time to reflect on his feedback and that this was done unconsciously:
(...) actually after every session, after every period of class I uh... unconsciously think about it. Especially when something special has happened during that session – for example when a certain student felt frustrated when he or she got my correction, then I would stop and reflect that probably I can improve my corrective feedback next time. Maybe I feel more at home. In that way not only will they feel comfortable, they will also understand my perspective. (T2)

T3 learnt feedback strategies during her post-graduate studies and like T2, she reflects on her feedback strategies after every class. She also said that she would use another feedback strategy if the one she is using should have an undesired effect on learners.

T4 also reflected on her feedback giving strategies after every class: “after each lesson you would stop and reflect about how you give feedback and how you can do it in the future”. (T4)

The teachers were in total agreement that reflection about feedback strategies is a key ingredient in improving one’s feedback. They also agreed that it is important for a teacher to be able to change between feedback strategies if one feedback strategy should have an undesired effect on the learners.

4.1.5 Times when teachers choose not to correct students

*Times when teachers choose not to correct students* refers to the paradoxical task which the teachers face daily. The analysis of the interviews revealed that the teachers thought it was very important to give OCF, yet there were times, even with the presence of errors, when teachers felt no correction should be given. Although the teachers agreed that there are times when errors should not be corrected, they disagreed on when errors should not be corrected.

T1 found it unnecessary to always correct less severe grammar or vocabulary errors. Furthermore, T1 chose, at times, not to correct errors when students communicate ideas and sometimes errors were ignored in order not to break students’ “flow of mind”. Examples of that from the transcription are as follow:

> Sometimes in order not to interrupt their mind flow, I will not correct their less severe grammar mistakes and vocabulary mistakes. Even though they are incorrect I won’t interrupt to give them freedom to express themselves. (T1)

T2 said that he tends to let errors slip by in order to save students embarrassment: “sometimes they will feel embarrassed when I correct them, especially when they were freshmen”. (T2)
T3 referred to her not correcting students at times as a face-saving act:

Ehm... As I said before, I sometimes don’t correct them to save face. Sometimes I choose not to correct them because I think that is the mistake that they can... it can easily be identified by the students themselves. It’s a kind of uh... slip of the tongue, they immediately realize that (short laughter), so there’s no need to correct that. (T3)

T4 had similar opinions in this matter to T1 but added that correction was unnecessary if the students’ erroneous utterances could still be understood: “If you can understand, I don’t care about that sometimes when they make mistakes”. (T4)

In summary, something that all the teachers had in common was that they all felt there are times when OCF should not be given. When OCF should not be given is something the teachers could not agree on.

4.2 Results of the classroom observation

This section will include a presentation of the results of the analysis of the observations in the form of two tables. Figure 1 illustrates the total number of the different feedback types given by the four teachers and table 4 illustrates the percentage distribution of the feedback types. The numbers from the observation schedules were transferred into Excel and tables were made to provide an overview of the observation results. The teachers who participated in the interviews are the same teachers whose classes were observed and the observations cover 12 class hours. While the interviews show the teachers’ beliefs about and experiences of OCF, the observations show the actual use of the different feedback types.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the total number of feedback types used by the four teachers. Recast was, by far, the most frequently given feedback type with a total of 103 times whereas Explicit correction was the least frequently given feedback type with an occurrence of 24 times. This could be due to Chinese teachers not wanting to be too direct when correcting their students as T3 expressed during the interviews. T1 used Explicit correction somewhat more frequently than the other teachers with a total of ten times and T3 used Explicit feedback the least (only three times). T3 was the one who, overall, used the least amount of feedback types of the four teachers (there was a total of 51 during the observations in this teacher’s classroom). This is not surprising given her comments made during the interview.
about being discreet when giving feedback. Consistent with this study, Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) study also reveals Recast to be the most frequently used feedback type. Another similarity between this study’s results and Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) is that the other feedback types did not differ too much from each other in terms of the number of the times they occurred during the observations. The biggest difference is that they listed Elicitation as the second most frequently used feedback type while the present study lists Elicitation as the second least frequently used feedback type.

**Figure 1. Distribution of feedback types**

Table 3 (see below) shows that Elicitation which, according to Lyster and Ranta (1997), was the most effective feedback type in terms of learner uptake, occurred for a total of 25 times, small compared to Recast and making it almost as infrequent as Explicit correction.
4.3 Summary of results

In summary, the teachers considered OCF to be a tool which teachers use to help learners improve their target language speaking skills. They believed that a teacher should be flexible and ready to switch between different feedback strategies to best meet their classes’ needs. This feedback should be an immediate response or comment on student speech and they should be given in a constructive manner. The teachers had varied thoughts as to which feedback they most frequently used, as well as which one was the most effective and the least effective. The feedback type that one teacher believed to be the most effective one was, according to another teacher, the least effective one. Furthermore, the results showed that not all the teachers had learned how to give feedback during their teacher training, but developed feedback giving strategies on their own as they gained more teaching experience. Self-introspection appeared to be the teachers’ key strategy in their striving to improve their feedback methods. The teachers found it to be of great importance that oral corrective feedback was given when students made errors; however, they disagreed on when errors should not be corrected. The teachers’ examples of when errors should not be corrected were when the errors were less severe, when learners’ utterances could still be understood despite the error, and there were also times when teachers let mistakes slip in order not to break the learners’ flow of mind. Lastly, the results show that *Recast* was the, by far, most frequently used feedback type and *Explicit correction* was the least frequently used feedback type.
5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the ways in which Chinese EFL teachers give feedback to their students and teachers’ attitudes towards OCF. The study is quantitative in that it presents the frequency with which the various feedback types were used during twelve a total of hours of classroom observations, as well as qualitative in that it attempts to highlight what strategies the teachers employed to improve in giving feedback. This section will discuss the findings as well as the methods and limitations of the present study.

5.1 Discussion of the findings

The data from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis and the results were presented in the form of five categories. The analysis included both manifest and latent interpretations and the categories that were identified are: OCF as an error modification tool, the ways in which OCF should be given, the most effective/frequently used OCF, teachers’ ways of refining their feedback techniques and times when teachers choose not to correct students. The observations were analyzed with a quantitative approach. In the light of the research questions, the results were as follows:

What types of errors do the teachers choose not to correct? The teachers found it to be of great importance that oral corrective feedback was given to students who made errors; however, they disagreed on when errors should not be corrected. The teachers’ examples of situations when errors should not be corrected were when the errors were less severe, when learners’ utterances could still be understood despite the presence of an error, and there were also times when teachers let mistakes slip in order not to break learners’ flow of mind.

What are the teachers’ attitudes towards OCF? The teachers considered OCF to be a tool which teachers use to help learners improve their speaking skills of the target language. They believed that a teacher should be flexible and ready to switch between different feedback strategies to best meet the needs of their classes. Furthermore, the results showed that the teachers differed as to which feedback type was the most frequently used, the most effective and the least effective. Only one teacher believed Recasts to be the most frequently used feedback type. The reason for this could be that teachers do not think about feedback in the terms used in the theoretical model for studying feedback. With this in mind, it could be that they may have taken a guess when referring to the different oral corrective feedback types. The feedback type that one teacher believed to be the most effective one was, according to another teacher, the least effective one. One reason why their attitudes were so diverse could be because teachers have different teaching styles, feedback type preferences and previous
experience of feedback giving. With the teachers’ different personalities, it could be the case that one feedback type could differ in effectiveness when being given by different teachers.

What types of OCF are actually most frequently used? Like the vast majority of other OCF studies, the results of this study show that Recast was the most frequently used feedback type. Out of a total of 258 instances of feedback registered, 103 were Recasts. The reason why teachers use Recasts the most out of the six feedback types could be because Recasts come naturally for most teachers. Another reason could be that Recast is not very time consuming and not too direct of a correction. T3 spoke about face saving strategies for Chinese teachers and with that in mind, it is not surprising that Chinese teachers prefer Recasts.

What do Chinese ELF teachers do in attempt to improve the quality of their OCF giving? In order to improve their feedback giving, the teachers strive to stay flexible in their use of feedback to best meet the needs of their classes. Moreover, the teachers stressed that feedback should be given in a constructive, rather than a destructive, manner. Self-introspection was a key feature in the teachers’ strive to improve their feedback giving. They would, at times and sometimes unconsciously, take some time to reflect on their ways of giving feedback.

5.2 Discussion of methods and limitations
The present study is primarily qualitative, with supplementary quantitative methods to address the frequency of the different feedback types’ appearance. The study was at first intended to be purely qualitative but dealing with numbers in order to analyze the observations was inevitable, hence the addition of a quantitative method. Noteworthy is however, that the informants were also chosen after availability and after the time constraints. In an attempt to increase the reliability and validity, the number of participants could have been larger and the observations could have covered more class hours than they did. To be critical, four informants are too few to offer results that are applicable to the larger context. However, the results can hopefully give some indication of what the case is on a small scale.

6. Conclusion
This study set out to examine the ways in which Chinese EFL teachers give feedback to their students and teachers’ attitudes towards OCF. The results are quantitative in that they present the frequency with which the various feedback types were used in the study, and also
qualitative in that it attempts to highlight what strategies the teachers employed to improve their feedback giving.

The findings were similar to previous studies in that *Recast* was the most frequently used feedback type but not believed to be the most effective one. Another similarity to previous studies was that there were no big differences in the number of times the other feedback types occurred during the observations.

The findings suggest that the teachers in this study chose not to correct their students when the errors were less severe, when learners’ utterances could still be understood despite the presence of an error, and there were also times when teachers let mistakes slip in order not to break learners’ flow of mind. All the teachers considered OCF to be an important tool which a teacher uses to guide learners in their language learning. They stressed the importance of a teacher being able to change between different feedback types when needed.

### 6.1 Suggestions for further research

One suggestion for further research is to build on this study, but on a larger scale if time and resources allow. This is because four informants can only give an idea about the reality on a very small scale. With many more informants the results might have been different. One way of doing that could be to do a comparison between teachers from different countries and investigate if there is a correlation between teachers’ cultural inheritance and feedback type preference.

A type of corrective feedback which is given immediately to learners’ erroneous utterances, in a nonverbal way, is the nonverbal signal which is identified as a CF by Shanshan (2012). Even though Shanshan’s (2012) results found the nonverbal signals to be the least frequently used CF type (only 1% of the CF types were nonverbal) it would be interesting to see more research done on nonverbal CF in an EFL teaching context. After all, it is generally accepted that a great part of human communication is done nonverbally.

Another way of building on this study is to make slight changes to the aims and research questions and allow the quantitative part to take up more space.

This study should be of relevance for future as well as qualified teachers. It could serve as support for teachers or teacher trainees since the study is based on established research.
Additionally, this study deals with an area of teaching that teachers, as it seems, do not reflect too deeply about.


Appendix A

Information given to teachers before the interview

Thank you for participating in this study. This interview is carried out to provide qualitative data about teachers’ ideas and understanding of oral corrective feedback (OCF), as well as their beliefs about what strategies they make use of most frequently.

The study aims to examine the ways in which Chinese EFL teachers give feedback to their students as well as their attitudes towards OCF. The study will be quantitative in that they will present the frequency with which various feedback types were used by the teachers and also qualitative in that it attempts to highlight what strategies the teachers employed to improve their feedback. Below is a feedback type classification scheme done by Lyster and Ranta (1997). Please take the time you need to read it. You can always go back and have a look at it during the interview. Everything you say will be confidential and the data will not be used for anything other than this study. As part of the confidentiality, no names of informants will be mentioned. When the paper is finished, all recordings will be deleted. If you would like, a copy of the study will be sent to you when it is done.

Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta’s observational scheme for OCF

1. **Explicit correction** – the explicit provision of the correct form (“Oh, you mean…” “You should say…”
   - S “The dog runs fastly”
   - T “Fastly does not exist. Fast does not take –ly”

2. **Recast** – reformulation by the teacher of all or part of the student’s utterance, minus the error.
   - S1 “Why you don’t like Mike”
   - T “Why don’t you like Mike?”
   - S2 “I don’t know, I just don’t like him”

3. **Clarification Request** – indicates that the student’s utterance was misunderstood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way (can refer to either problems in accuracy or comprehensibility, or both)
“How often do you wash the dishes?”

S “Fourteen”

T “Excuse me” (Clarification request)

S “Fourteen”

T “Fourteen what?” (Clarification request)

4. **Metalinguistic Feedback** – contains either comments, information or questions related to the well-formedness of the student’s utterance without explicitly providing the correct form (“Can you find your error?”) Points to the nature of the error but attempts to elicit the information from the student

S “We look at the people yesterday”

T “What’s the ending we put on verbs when we talk about the past?”

S “e-d”

5. **Elicitation** – strategic pauses to allow students to fill in the blanks, questions to elicit correct forms (not yes/no), or asking students to reformulate utterances

S “My father cleans all the plate”

T “Excuse me, he cleans all the???”

S “Plates?”

**Repetition** – repetition to isolate student’s utterance, with changes in tone or inflection to highlight the error

S “We is…”

T “we is…”
Appendix B

Interview questions

1. What is your understanding of OCF, please describe OCF with your own words?

2. How often do you reflect about the different ways in which you give feedback?

3. What feedback strategies do you think you make use of most frequently?

4. What feedback strategies do you think are most effective and why?

5. What feedback strategies do you think are least effective?

6. During your own teacher training, how much did your teacher’s teach you about feedback strategies?

7. Do you give OCF more when it comes to grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary?

8. Are there times when you choose not to correct students’ errors? When is that and why?

The is the end of the interview. Thank you very much for participating in the study. You have my address, phone number and e-mail address. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Once again, thank you.