

A Study on Negative Feedback in English Extensive Reading Course

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Negative feedback serves as a means of correcting and rectifying students' utterances. While content feedback is commonly used in extensive reading course, indirect feedback dominates in written assignments, providing students with opportunities for second thoughts and self-correction. For oral limited-response and open-ended questions, recasts are predominantly used to give students more time to reflect and reduce teacher talk, thereby mitigating anxiety and enhancing learning motivation.

Keywords: negative feedback, indirect feedback, recasts

Introduction

Feedback bridges the gap between assessment and teaching, playing a vital role in regulating and enhancing teaching effectiveness. Research on feedback has a long history both domestically and internationally. Annett (1969) highlighted three functions of feedback: stimulation, reinforcement, and information provision. Feedback stimulates learners' intrinsic motivation, reinforces correct learning behaviors, and corrects incorrect learning methods or problem-solving approaches. In second language learning, feedback, particularly negative feedback, plays a pivotal role in teaching (Zhang, 2009). Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis states that negative feedback (i.e., corrective information given to learners about inappropriate language forms) informs learners whether their language is comprehensible or not and draws their attention to language form to increase their language alertness. Generally speaking, negative feedback encompasses explicit correction, implicit correction, recasts, and negotiation of forms. This study focuses on teachers' feedback discourse pattern used in English extensive reading classes, which refers to the language that teachers use during classroom activities. According to Zhao Xiaohong (1998), teachers of College English Reading Course mainly employ two discourse patterns: directly related or unrelated to teaching content if relativity is taken as a judging criterion. Common discourse in extensive reading classes includes textbook knowledge explanation and presentation, homework answers, and clarification of related content. Additionally, feedback on students' classroom performance, encompassing positive and negative feedback, is also prevalent. Organizing and facilitating classroom activities falls under instructional language, such as grouping students, maintaining order, stimulating atmosphere, encouraging, or terminating responses. This discourse constitutes a significant portion of teachers' talk, with knowledge delivery and feedback being the most relevant to teaching content.

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Common Types of Feedback in Extensive Reading Courses

Reading comprehension competence entails readers' ability to construct meaning from written materials by using various knowledge (linguistic and non-linguistic) and strategies. It includes abilities such as identifying and extracting written information, summarizing and analyzing it, and critically evaluating it. The China's Standards of English Language Ability (2018) outlines six dimensions of reading comprehension: understanding written descriptions, narratives, instructions, explanations, arguments, and interactions. According to this authoritative standard instruction and regulation of English teaching in Chinese schools, the teaching of extensive reading course emphasizes the students' ability of application of knowledge rather than meticulous examination of vocabulary and grammar. Extensive reading is different from intensive reading. Hence, pronunciation, phonetics, and grammatical errors are less prioritized than the depth of thought, analytical angles, and critical thinking demonstrated in open-ended responses. Standardized tests of reading comprehension rarely reflect pronunciation, voice, or grammar errors, thus making meaning-focused feedback prevalent in extensive reading classes.

Classroom questions in College English Reading Course are mainly categorized as limited-response and open-ended. Limited-response questions often have fixed answers based on the text, effectively testing students' understanding of content and details. This can also be taken as the testing of the reading basic skill of scanning. Open-ended questions promote deeper comprehension and encourage creative self-expression, fostering English expression and communication skills. These open-ended questions have no standard answer and some teachers do not practice in class, because subjective answers are hard to control and may cause misunderstanding. Additionally, they cost much class time. So, they are often designed and organized by teachers themselves, posing challenges due to the lack of a fixed model and the potential for subjective answers. Sometimes, conflicts may arise due to different answers from students with different backgrounds and understanding gaps. To sum up, teachers' feedback in extensive reading classes can be divided into knowledge-based or comprehension-based questions, with the former targeting explicitly stated content and the latter requiring logical judgments based on information analysis and inference.

Negative Feedback in Written Assignments of Extensive Reading Course

Lyster and Ranta (1997) proposed six types of corrective feedback: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. Feedback on written assignments falls into direct and indirect categories. Direct feedback involves teachers pointing out explicitly and correcting errors, while indirect feedback merely hints at errors, e.g., marking error lines, annotating error types in margins, underlining errors, or indicating the total number of errors per line. Indirect feedback of written homework in extensive reading course requires much more time and energy both from the learners and the teachers as indirect feedback only vaguely indicates there is a mistake at someplace without pointing out specifically what the problem is. Thus, the learners need more time to figure out the problem and even more time to correct the mistakes. Some learners may lose their patience as time goes on and their passions decrease. Although both are negative feedback, direct feedback deprives students of the opportunity to identify and correct errors themselves, potentially fostering laziness and inhibiting long-term learning. Indirect negative feedback, though time-consuming, fosters independent problem-solving and linguistic analysis skills. Purely academically speaking, indirect feedback is way better than direct feedback from the aspect of language learning.

Negative Feedback for Limited-Response and Open-Ended Verbal Questions

In the context of extensive reading class, oral assignments often elicit the use of singular feedback types, including positive feedback, explicit correction, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification request, repetition, reformulation (recast), expansion, and evaluation (Lin & Zhou, 2011). Among these, recast will be emphasized in this paper. Recast involves the rephrasing of the learner's utterance while preserving its meaning and correcting linguistic errors. To make it easier to understand, students will be given another chance to reorganize their language to present a better answer not only in language structure but also in words selection with no help from the teacher, just a second chance by themselves. Ellis's experiments demonstrate that recast is a vital feedback form in classroom settings, effectively prompting learners to self-correct their language forms, ultimately outperforming other feedback types (Ellis, 2001). By providing accurate linguistic input without disrupting the conversation, recast enhances the salience of the target language form, thus making it a preferred method for negative feedback in extensive reading oral assignments. For limited-response questions, instead of directly pointing out errors, teachers encourage students to recheck their answers, thereby strengthening their skimming abilities. Although this requires students to think and self-correct, the preserved sentence structure and most content, along with the indication of the specific issue, allow for swift reactions and smooth teacher-student dialogue, preventing disruptions due to excessive tension. The effect of self-alertness and self-correction outweighs direct feedback or correction from the teachers and this is generally accepted and agreed from either the viewpoint of students or teachers. If the class conversation pauses due to over-anxiety caused by direct feedback, the learning effect will be harmed as all students need encouragement instead of criticism and direct feedback or telling them the mistake directly will be naturally taken as undervaluation or lack of necessary ability, and this is very harmful to a healthy classroom teaching relationship.

Open-ended questions, with no fixed answers, necessitate constructive feedback rather than simple negation. These types of questions pose the greatest challenge for negative feedback as they require both negation and suggestions for new directions, ideas, and approaches. Recast becomes the optimal choice as it embeds new thoughts and methods within the negation, encouraging students to broaden their perspectives and accept new explanations more readily than direct disapproval. The essence of negative feedback lies in negation and correction, inherently eliminating emotional resistance from students. However, recast feedback demonstrates that negative feedback can be non-threatening, enabling students to correct themselves in an acceptable manner and gain recognition. Language acquisition will happen when the learner feels comfortable and deserving, and this feeling can only be fulfilled through encouragement. One key point is that negative feedback can also be performed in an acceptable way and this is contrary to general understanding that only positive feedback can encourage students to produce favorable reaction in leaning. The nature of recast is not telling the learner that you make a mistake, but telling them you can find your problem by yourself and overcome it on your own. This is true encouragement.

Apart from feedback methods, teachers' waiting time after posing a question correlates with students' acceptance of feedback. If intervention occurs within two or three seconds, answers tend to be shorter and less accurate. Conversely, extending the waiting time to five seconds or more increases answer length and fosters deeper thinking and questioning (Rowe, 1974). The longer the teacher waits, the better answer the students will give. This is not indicating the longer the better. If the student has no single idea about the answer, too much

waiting time will be taken as embarrassment instead of patience and kindness. So, it is indeed practical if a teacher knows how to control his or her classroom time management.

Balancing classroom progress and student proficiency, waiting time varies. Too short waiting can induce pressure and anxiety, limiting thinking and hindering subsequent learning and confidence building. Repeated anxiety can diminish students' interest in the subject and create negative feelings towards teachers, impeding further instruction. Conversely, excessive wait time can disrupt teaching progress and test the patience of high-achieving students. Students' tolerance and receptiveness vary based on peer relationships and question difficulty, requiring teachers to be mindful of student personalities, class culture, question difficulty, and participant selection.

Conclusion

In summary, short wait times dissatisfy low-achieving students, while long wait times dissatisfy high-achieving ones, necessitating a multi-faceted approach. For example, if the question is difficult, the teacher should choose those higher than the average level to have a try instead of calling one randomly. If the class has been kept in repeatedly normal and nothing special answers and the teacher hopes to hear something new and spectacular, then the teacher should ask someone who has wider horizon and rich knowledge background to answer it. This kind of students may not do well in exams but they read more, think more, and dream a lot. For example, for questions like "Will AI replace human beings in the future?", "What does AlphaGo's defeat human beings mean?", "What are the first three careers that will be replaced by AI in the future?" apart from these factors, class culture is also a deciding factor in feedback modes choices. Some classes are active and positive, while some may be negative and silent. To avoid waiting too much time in class after proposing a question, the teachers should know clearly what class culture the students commonly accept. To answer questions one by one is always the last and worst choice.

The proportion of teacher and student talk directly reflects teaching effectiveness. A teacher-dominated classroom leads to low student initiative and participation, fostering a serious and oppressive atmosphere. In contrast, a student-centered classroom fosters active participation and a relaxed atmosphere (Zhao, 1998). The proportion of teacher talk varies significantly across courses, with extensive reading classes having less teacher talk than intensive reading, and oral classes featuring far less teacher talk than student talk. Considering discourse allocation, negative feedback in extensive reading classes should prioritize recast and clarification requests, encouraging student reflection, output, and refinement, thereby enhancing their language proficiency. Effective evaluative feedback necessitates cognitive guidance to assist students in generating, analyzing, and applying standards, coupled with emotional support to gain trust and motivate students (Pan, 2022). Transforming negative feedback into positive feedback, avoiding negative reactions, is the greatest challenge. While negative feedback may initially evoke resistance, its proper application can mitigate psychological pressure, a pressing research direction in English language teaching.

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