Corrective Feedback in Second Language Pragmatics: A Review of Research

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Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on the role of corrective feedback and instruction in L2 pragmatics. Pragmatics "focuses on how people perform, interpret, and respond to language functions in a social context" (Taguchi, 2011, p.289), and therefore its development is key to the development of language competence. Pragmatics entails both linguistic knowledge to perform language functions (pragmalinguistics) and knowledge about the appropriateness of linguistic forms in a given social context (sociopragmatics) (Thomas, 1983). The acquisition of this skill has been shown to be one of the most difficult and latest acquired aspects of L2 learning (Bardovi-Harlig & Vellenga, 2012), and in this context, corrective feedback (information about the accuracy of learners' output), has been considered to be essential to the mastery of this knowledge. This paper reviews studies investigating the effects of corrective feedback on learning L2 pragmatics and their implications for L2 teaching. The review will include studies on corrective feedback and those that have used corrective feedback as a component of classroom instruction.

Keywords: *corrective feedback, L2 pragmatics, instruction, meta-analysis*

L2 Pragmatic Instruction

Second language pragmatic (L2 pragmatic) development is an interdisciplinary field, which covers two areas: pragmatics and second language acquisition (SLA). Research in SLA often does not match pragmatic practice in the classroom. Ishihara (2007) writes:

Although *pragmatic ability* (the ability to use language effectively to achieve a specific purpose and understand language in context) has been recognized as an essential component of communicative competence…, pragmatics has not been fully incorporated into today's second/foreign language (L2) teaching and teacher education [emphasis in original]. (p. 21)

Given the complexities of pragmatics, one would naturally wonder whether pragmatic competence is indeed teachable (Taguchi, 2013). Many studies have examined the role of instruction in L2 pragmatics, the findings of which have been summarized in a burgeoning number of meta-analyses and review papers. In the first survey, Rose (2005) reviewed 25 studies (from 1986 to before 2005) that he called a "small, but growing body of research" (p. 386). In 2006, Jeon and Kaya conducted the first meta-analysis on L2 pragmatics instruction and identified 34 studies. By 2010, Takahashi was able to review 49 studies, double the number reviewed by Rose in 2005. Then, the number of studies grew to 58 when Taguchi (2015) reviewed instructed pragmatics studies. Badjadi (2016) located 24 experimental studies and investigated the effects of different instructional designs on L2 pragmatics comprehension and production. The current authors performed a meta-analysis investigating 40 published studies from 2006 to 2016 in terms of the effectiveness of instruction in L2 pragmatic development and several moderator variables (Yousefi & Nassaji, 2019). Subsequently, Plonsky and Zhuang (2019) reviewed 50 primary studies in L2 pragmatics. In the Iranian context, Shakki et al. (2020) reviewed the instruction of the L2 speech acts in English pragmatics from 2000 to 2020. The results of their synthesis from 54 studies showed that teaching speech acts brings about significant outcomes for the learners. The results of the above-mentioned reviews and meta-analyses strongly suggest that most aspects of L2 pragmatics are indeed amenable to instruction. In other words, instructional intervention is more beneficial than no instruction targeted to pragmatic learning, and that for the most part, explicit instruction combined with ample practice opportunities results in sizable gains. In the most recent meta-analysis on L2 pragmatics, Derakhshan and Shakki (2021) investigated the effects of explicit and implicit instruction on learning the speech act of request among Iranian EFL learners. Their initial corpus included 37 studies, out of which 17 studies were selected based on their inclusion /exclusion criteria. Their results demonstrated an overall large effect size for the effectiveness of the instruction ($g = 1.48$). They also showed that some variables such as gender and treatment type mediated this effectiveness. The male group produced a larger effect size ($g = 3.09$) than the female group ($g = 1.10$) and the explicit group yielded a larger effect size ($g = 1.53$) than the implicit one ($g = 1.20$).

While the effects of instruction have by now been investigated rather extensively in instructed pragmatics studies, the effects of corrective feedback (CF) on learning pragmatics have not received comparable attention. A large number of studies have investigated the effects of feedback on other areas of L2 teaching and learning (e.g., Eslami & Derakhshan, 2020; Li, 2012; Lyster & Saito, 2010a; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Russell & Spada, 2006). However, there are still relatively few studies about how feedback affects the development of L2 pragmatics.

Corrective Feedback

Feedback is an interactional strategy that makes learners aware of their incorrect use of language and provides the model for more appropriate L2 use (Nassaji, 2016). CF is very complex, and

advantageous ways of providing it can be recommended only after one has fully reviewed various aspects of CF and its effectiveness (Cohen, 2018). According to Li and Vuono (2019), "whether CF facilitates learning is a primary concern of theorists, researchers, and teachers, because the ultimate goal of all discussions and research about CF is to see whether CF can enhance L2 learning" (p. 97). As Lyster et al. (2013) note, CF may consist of an indication of the existence of an error, provision of the correct target form, or metalinguistic information about the rules of the target language. CF can vary in degree of explicitness, so it is best viewed on a continuum between explicit and implicit. In addition, researchers differ in their opinions as to which types of CF are most effective. Figure 1 illustrates different types of CF along this continuum. CF can be written or oral, as well as immediate or delayed.
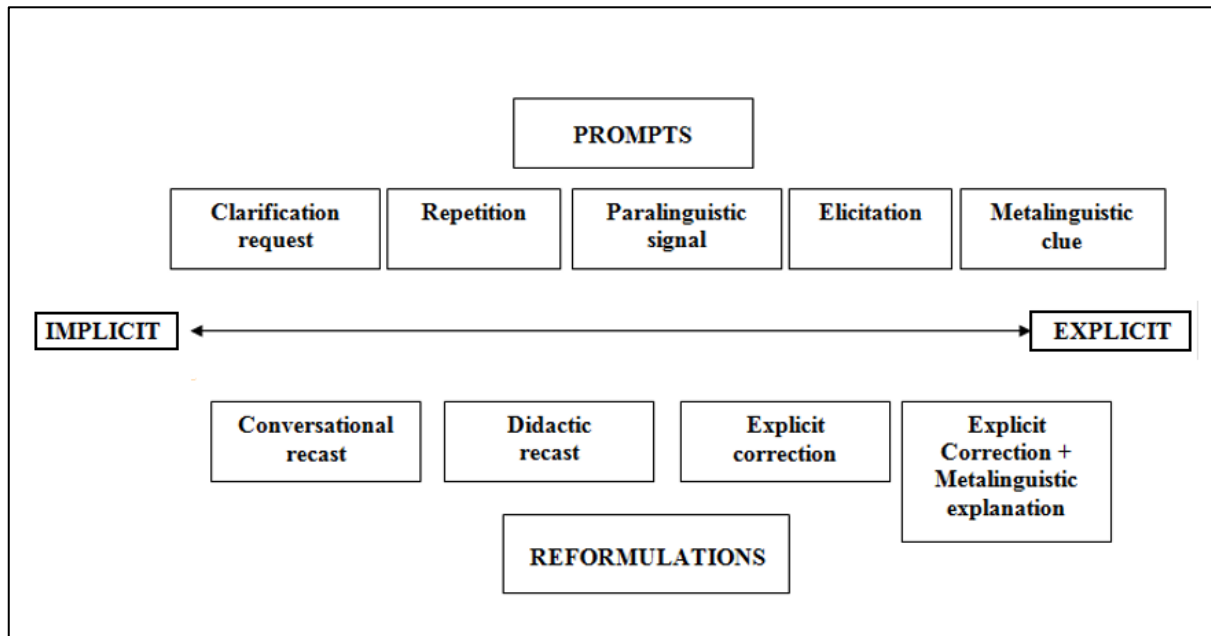

Figure 1. Corrective Feedback Types (Lyster et al., 2013, p. 5).

There has been a growing interest in the role of CF and its mechanism in the field of SLA in recent decades. As Brown (2016) mentions:

This line of research stems, pedagogically, from the shift towards communicative language teaching with a focus on form (e.g., Norris & Ortega, 2000) and, theoretically, from the long-standing interactionist tradition of SLA (e.g., Gass et al., 1998; Plonsky & Gass, 2011). (p. 437)

Indicative of the growing interest in CF is the number of meta-analyses of CF research (e.g., Brown, 2016; Kang & Han, 2015; Li, 2012; Lyster & Saito, 2010b; Mackey & Goo, 2007). The findings together provide strong support for the overall effectiveness of CF, which leads to the conclusion that CF facilitates the development of L2 grammatical knowledge. For instance, Li (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of corrective feedback in SLA. He found that there was a medium overall effect for corrective feedback ($d = 0.64$), and the effect was maintained over time. Explicit feedback was more effective than implicit feedback on both immediate and short-delayed posttests. Another major finding of the meta-analysis was that the effect of implicit feedback was better maintained than that of explicit feedback, as shown through larger effect sizes on long-delayed posttests. There are also a number of studies that have examined the provision and effects of computer-assisted feedback (e.g., Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011; Lee, 2011; Rouhshad et al., 2016; Sauro, 2011; Yilmaz, 2012). The results of these studies also show that feedback can be

beneficial for L2 learners, especially when it draws learners' attention to form, and that feedback occurs in computer-mediated settings. (Nassaji, 2015)

Corrective Feedback in L2 Pragmatics

Despite much research on CF in other areas of language learning, feedback research on L2 pragmatics has been relatively limited. Bardovi-Harlig (2017) argued that the reason might be that in pragmatics and in any given context, multiple utterances can be appropriate. For instance, multiple request strategies can be made in a given context (*would you* versus *I was wondering if you would* ; Takahashi, 2005). Based on Bardovi-Harlig's argument, feedback on pragmatics can also be challenging because "pragmatics is defined by choice: speakers make choices among available linguistic forms to convey social meanings" (p. 230). Based on Thomas's (1983) distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics, correcting pragmalinguistic failure is less challenging than correcting pragmatic failure. Sociopragmatic errors are more delicate to correct because they stem from decisions that are social in nature rather than linguistic, and learners might consider feedback as a judgment on their social behavior.

In other words, there is hardly one right or one wrong answer in pragmatics, and the speaker has a range of felicitous alternatives to choose based on contextual, social, and personal preferences. This is in sharp contrast with grammaticality. Collecting a standard set of appropriate L2 pragmatic behaviors to teach or to test may not be not realistic or practical. This is due to "the immense variety in what constitutes appropriate pragmatic behavior, varying individual interlocutor perceptions and responses, and the innumerable contextual possibilities" (Holden & Sykes, 2013, p. 155). According to Bardovi-Harlig (2017),

Because pragmatic value is derived from the *choice* of available linguistic devices to signal relationships among speakers, the study of acquisition of form in pragmatics—including grammar, lexicon, and formulaic language—is the study of the development of alternatives. The study of use in pragmatics must be understood in light of the forms available to the learner at any given stage of interlanguage development. (p. 230)

To avoid discomfort in correcting pragmatic behavior (rather than language) for both students and teachers, Holden and Sykes (2013) suggested providing feedback through games. They developed Mentira (http://www.mentira.org), a mobile game for learners of Spanish in which students had to collaboratively interact with each other to solve a crime mystery in the virtual neighborhood. They had to investigate the neighborhood and talk with members of their own and other families to find out who might have committed the crime. Learners' interaction with the game required the use of pragmatically appropriate information. Students were corrected by an online character when they selected speech that was inappropriate for the context (such as informal direct speech to a high-status character who was part of the game).

Holden and Sykes's (2013) research showed that the game was an effective tool to engage learners with sociopragmatic features of the language. According to Sykes and Dubreil (2019), CF during digital games can be individualized and immediate, which can fulfill the needs of learners throughout the game experience. However, programming and developing online pragmatics games for individual groups of learners may not be feasible and affordable for all educators, and CF remains a challenge in L2 pragmatics.

In L2 pragmatics, like in other areas of SLA, feedback is "postevent or reactive (in contrast to models that are pre-event), occurring after learners have engaged in a production or interpretation activity, and may assume a variety of formats" (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017, p. 230). Corrective feedback can be immediate or delayed, addressed to an individual or to a group, delivered face-to-face or

computer-mediated. Out of 81 studies, Bardovi-Harlig (2015) reviewed, she counted 34 with feedback. Of those, only three studies investigated feedback as a variable (Barekat, 2013, who used Takimoto's 2006 feedback script; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Takimoto, 2006a), whereas the others simply reported it as a feature of the instruction (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017).

Studies of Corrective Feedback in L2 Pragmatics

In the next sections, studies of CF on L2 pragmatics are reviewed. We organize these studies into two groups: those that have focused on corrective feedback as the main variable and those that have included corrective feedback as a part of the instructional methods.

Corrective Feedback as the Main Variable

The literature search for this study led to only a few studies on pragmatic development with a focus on corrective feedback as the main variable (Fukuya & Hill, 2006; Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Guo, 2013; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Takimoto, 2006b; Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2020; Nipaspong & Chinokul, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2015).

Fukuya and Zhang (2002) investigated the effects of implicit feedback on Chinese learners of English in learning eight pragmalinguistic conventions associated with requests. Participants role played a scenario that featured request making and received a recast from their instructor when they produced nontarget-like request forms. Both pragmatic recast and control groups performed role-plays; the experiment group received recasts on their request Head Acts, while the control group did not. In this treatment, learners were not only made aware that their request forms were inappropriate but also had an opportunity to compare their forms with more target-like request forms. Because the recasts occurred through meaningful communication, learners were able to establish a connection among the target pragmalinguistic form, the function it expressed, and the context of its occurrence. Instructional gains in the accuracy and appropriateness of the request forms were measured in a DCT task. The results yielded large (d = 0.83) effect sizes for the pragmatic recast group, proving that pragmalinguistic recasts were effective for teaching both pragmatically and grammatically appropriate requests.

Again, targeting requests, Koike and Pearson (2005) provided feedback after learners completed a series of exercises and activities. They examined the effectiveness of teaching pragmatic information through the use of explicit or implicit pre-instruction, and explicit or implicit feedback, to English-speaking learners of third-semester Spanish. They operationalized explicit CF as a correct response along with metalinguistic information and implicit CF as a request from the teacher that the learners clarify what they had just said. Results showed that the explicit group performed significantly better than the other experimental group and the control group on all measures.

Takimoto (2006b) provided feedback to learners after they had made an incorrect selection from two possibilities in a written dual-choice task. He compared the effects of structured input tasks with and without explicit CF on the ability of adult Japanese learners of English to make polite requests. All participants engaged in structured input tasks requiring them to rate the appropriateness of dialogues in different situations; participants in the CF group also received explicit CF that involved "either a metalinguistic question to elicit a correct response or provision of a metalinguistic rule" (p. 411). Both groups made significant progress in the receptive and production tasks, although the CF group had slightly higher scores than the no-CF group on all measures.

Later in 2010, Nipaspong and Chinokul examined the effectiveness of explicit feedback and prompts on learners' pragmatic awareness of the use of appropriate refusals. There were three groups in the study; explicit feedback, prompt, and control group. The data were derived from the

parallel pretest and posttest and interview protocols. After a 10-week treatment, results from a pragmatic awareness multiple-choice test and qualitative data revealed a significant increase in pragmatic awareness, especially with regard to unconventional refusal expressions, for the prompts group over the explicit feedback and the control groups. The researchers explained that the "advantages of prompts may result from its demand for learners to generate repairs and its provision of more opportunities for learners' uptake" (p. 101).

In a more recent study, Nguyen et al. (2015) examined whether giving written corrective feedback on students' performance during pragmatics-focused activities led to their subsequent improvement in producing and recognizing pragmatically appropriate email requests. The study involved two experimental groups, one receiving direct-feedback (provision of the correct/ suggested answer without explaining the correction) and the other receiving metapragmatic feedback (provision of comments/ questions relating to the nature of the error without providing the correct/suggested answer). There was also a control group. Students' pragmatic performance was measured by means of a pretest, an immediate and a delayed posttest, which consisted of a production and a recognition task. The results indicated that the treatment groups performed significantly better than the control group in the production task, but there was no significant difference between the two treatment groups. On the other hand, students who received metapragmatic feedback significantly outperformed those receiving direct feedback and the control group in the recognition task. Examples of metapragmatic feedback include provision of comments or questions relating to the nature of the error without providing the correct or suggested answer. For instance, when giving feedback on a student's pragmatically incorrect request 'Please give me more time to complete my work', the teacher can explain that 'The teacher has a higher social status than you. She is also not obliged to give you the extension'.

Corrective Feedback as Part of Instruction

In addition to the above studies, there are other studies that employed feedback as part of instruction, but did not compare it to a non-feedback or other-feedback condition. For example, Nguyen et al. (2012) evaluated the relative effectiveness of two types of form-focused instruction, i.e., explicit and implicit instruction on the acquisition of the speech act set of constructive criticisms by 69 Vietnamese learners of English. The explicit group ($N = 28$) participated in consciousness-raising activities, received explicit metapragmatic explanation and correction of errors of forms and meanings. The implicit group ($N = 19$), on the other hand, participated in pragmalinguistic input enhancement and recast activities. The two treatment groups were compared with a control group ($N = 22$) on pretest and posttest performance, consisting of a discourse completion task, a role play and an oral peer- feedback task. The results revealed that both experimental groups outperformed the control group, with the explicit group performing significantly better than the implicit group on all measures.

Another example of a study which included feedback as one of components of instruction is that by Fukuya et al. (1998). They investigated the effects of focus on form (FonF) versus focus on formS (FonFS) instruction and feedback on ESL learners' ability to request. They employed four role-play scenarios for teaching appropriate requests for the given situation. The treatment consisted of three stages: rehearsal, performance, and debriefing. The type of treatment in the rehearsal and performance phases was the same for both experimental groups. However, in the FonFS debriefing, the teacher explicitly addressed pragmatic strategies, providing the students with appropriate utterances for each scenario. The control group participated in the same rehearsal stage but did not receive feedback during the performance phase. The instructors in the experimental groups provided brief, explicit focus on form when the performing student said something inappropriate given the social distance, social power, or degree of imposition inherent in the

scenario. More specifically, they raised a sign and repeated the student's inappropriate utterance with a rising intonation. According to Fukuya et al., "this procedure was designed to focus the students' attention on the pragmatic failure without completely interrupting the interaction" (p. 10). Results from the written DCT pre-and posttest showed no statistically significant differences among the three groups. The researchers explain that the reason for the inconclusive findings could be "that exposure to a total of four role-play scenarios may have been insufficient input to achieve generalization of sociopragmatic competence to the wide range of scenarios represented on the DCTs" (p. 16).

Summary

In summary, the results of the reviewed literature (e.g., Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Koike & Pearson, 2005; Nipaspong & Chinokul, 2010) show that corrective feedback can positively influence learners' pragmatic development. The presence of feedback in instructional designs for L2 pragmatics suggests that lesson designers view it as an integral part of instruction, even in the absence of studies that isolate feedback as a variable for investigation in instructed pragmatics (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017; Derakhshan, 2019). Furthermore, these findings confirm that focused instructional tasks benefit learners' L2 pragmatic development (Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Derakhshan & Eslami, 2015; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020) and suggest that different types of CF contribute differentially to this development. On the other hand, the problem with these kinds of studies is that since multiple instructional techniques were applied, the obtained effect cannot directly be attributed to a particular component/task of instruction like feedback. Therefore, more research is necessary to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between CF and L2 pragmatic knowledge.

Limitations

Overall, the literature on the effect of CF on L2 pragmatics reveals some problems. First is that the number of studies is very few, and findings are still very inconclusive. Although a topic of both theoretical and practical interest, the role of CF is under-researched in the field of L2 pragmatics. More research is recommended to better understand the role of a range of CF in L2 pragmatic acquisition.

The second problem with the reviewed literature is that findings are relatively mixed. The results lead to a conflict as to whether CF is necessary for fostering L2 pragmatic knowledge, and, if yes, which type works more effectively. For example, whereas Fukuya et al. (1998) found no effects for recasts in teaching sociopragmatic aspects of L2 requests, Fukuya and Zhang (2002) reported relatively large impact of recasts on improving learners' performance of requests in terms of both sociopragmatic appropriateness and pragmalinguistic accuracy. Therefore, more research on the relationship between CF and L2 pragmatics is needed.

Finally, the durability of feedback effects in the delayed posttest remains rather unexplored. The reason that very few studies reported using a delayed posttest might be the difficulties in finding and keeping participants or other institutional constraints. Moreover, the few studies in L2 pragmatics that used delayed posttest reported mixed findings. While some L2 pragmatic scholars (e.g., Koike & Pearson, 2005; Nguyen et al., 2015) argued that instructional effects could be retained and even improved by the time of a delayed posttest, other researchers (e.g., Salemi et al., 2012) reported that there was no long-term retention of pragmatic knowledge in learners' performances. However, study designs with delayed posttests are more advantageous in that they reveal whether the gains that students made through instruction are durable (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996).

Implications for Future Research

As the findings of the previous body of research examining technology and interaction suggest, CF has positive benefits within technology-supported environments (e.g., Eslami et al., 2015; Holden & Sykes, 2012; 2013; Lai & Li, 2011; Sauro, 2011; Sauro & Smith, 2010; Martín-Laguna, 2020). As Rassaei (2017) pointed out, "CMC tools such as Skype foster learning opportunities such as negotiation of meaning during online interactions as well as learners' motivation, and autonomy for L2 learning" (p. 134). Therefore, teachers are encouraged to become familiar and comfortable with performing different interactive tasks and providing corrective feedback via various forms of popular technological tools. Nassaji (2015) also highlighted the need for further research to directly examine and compare face-to-face classroom interaction with computer-mediated interaction. Although studies of computer-mediated feedback seem to suggest that computer-assisted interactions may provide useful opportunities for feedback, this area is rather unexplored in L2 pragmatics.

Another fruitful research area that still requires attention is corrective feedback in cross-cultural pragmatics (monolingual, bilingual, multilingual contexts). With the accelerating globalization, communication is becoming more and more intercultural because it involves participants who have different first languages and represent different cultures. The language and cultural backgrounds of learners influence the choices they make. Moreover, the CF choices the teachers make in a multilingual classroom are in turn influenced by the teachers' socio-cultural backgrounds. More research into such issues can equip learners and teachers with language and intercultural communication skills to thrive in today's diverse society.

An additional area that is considered crucial to the endeavor of understanding the role of CF in L2 pragmatics is expanding the number of target languages and the number and variety of speech acts investigated. So far in CF pragmatics studies, English has been the dominant target language and requests are the most frequently instructed and examined speech act. Examining different target languages and features can further develop empirical inventories of pragmatic research and contribute to L2 pragmatics instruction.

Another avenue for research requiring more attention is educating language teachers to strengthen both their knowledge about L2 pragmatics and CF types as well as teaching pragmatics. Besides challenges in providing CF in L2 pragmatics, there are other challenges that deserve further attention. Some of these areas include limited theoretical support for curricular development, lack of authentic input in teaching materials, individual student differences and learning subjectivity, and the lack of reference books and resources (Bardovi-Harlig, 2017).

Implications for Classroom Teaching

Since feedback is pedagogically valuable, its application in L2 pragmatics classes must be addressed. The positive effects of CF can extend beyond L2 grammar and vocabulary and include L2 pragmatic competence as well. Therefore, CF can be a good practice for L2 teachers who want to help learners with the development of L2 pragmatics as the influential role of corrective feedback has been evident in previous research. Based on the studies reviewed here, we would encourage L2 teachers to design activities and implement pragmatic instruction that is explicit (for instance metapragmatic explanations) and includes opportunities for the practice and production of L2 pragmatic forms.

Moreover, as Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2010) suggest, CF should address both form and meaning. In other words, one concern of teachers in L2 pragmatics should be correcting form as well as learners' pragmalinguistic failure. This type of failure arises when learners have the same

understanding of a given context as that of the NSs but do not have enough knowledge of linguistic means to enable them to communicate appropriately in that particular context" (Shirkhani & Tajeddin, 2017, p. 27). In this case, learners are aware of the social demands of a situation, but they do not know which linguistic forms would express the appropriate level of politeness. For example, learners may realize that they need to use more polite forms when making a request of a professor, but they may not know which modal (e.g., can or could) reflects the stance they wish to take. Another concern of corrective feedback in L2 pragmatics should be learners' sociopragmatic failure where they interpret a situation differently from a native speaker (NS). Thus, L2 teachers are advised to pay attention to both types of errors in L2 pragmatics classes. When designing teaching materials, teachers should carefully monitor the type and level of target linguistic resources. This means that teachers can utilize materials at two levels: linguistics and pragmatics. Linguistic input (e.g., grammar and vocabulary) needs to be fully accessible to learners so the focus of instruction can remain on the pragmatic implications of the input (Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019).

Another important practical tip for teaching pragmatics is to provide learners with authentic models. Teachers can collect authentic examples and gradually build up a teaching resource. Such authentic examples can include both appropriate and inappropriate utterances. Some examples include thank-you notes, invitation letters, emails, Facebook posts, and voice mails. These can be taken from face-to-face conversations, phone conversations, or video calls which can be recorded for use in the classroom. As Derakhshan and Eslami (2020) suggested, when developing input and production practice in pragmatics instruction, it is desirable to include oral input and practice. This would match the oral nature of conversational language. Other useful tips for teachers include becoming familiar with free online corpora, engaging in discovery activities with students, and using different forms of technology both in instruction and feedback stages.

Conclusion

This paper provided a brief review of the studies that used CF in instructed pragmatics. While in L2 pragmatics, the majority of previous work has focused on the effect of instruction on the acquisition of pragmatic competence (see the meta-analyses mentioned above for a review of these studies), there has been relatively little attempt to link corrective feedback to interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Fukuya & Zhang, 2002; Nguyen et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2015; Takimoto, 2006b). However, the findings of current studies suggest the applicability of CF in pragmatic instruction. Corrective feedback in teaching pragmatics is important both in directing learners' attention to areas that may cause potential communication breakdown and in providing modified output. As the importance of corrective feedback is recognized in L2 pragmatics, its use in pragmatic instruction will become more common in classroom instruction.

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