Questioning and Feedback in the Interactive Classroom: Exploring Strategies

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Table of content

Introduction p. 1

Defining trategy p. 2

Understanding questions and questioning p. 3

Understanding feedback p. 4

Effectiveness and SLA p. 5

Comprehensible Input p. 5
Interlanguage p. 6
Interaction hypothesis p. 6

Research context and participants p. 7

Data collection instruments p. 7

Data collection methods p. 8

Questions p. 8
Feedback p. 9
Normative p. 9
Interpretive p. 9

The findings p. 10

Normative findings p. 10

1. *Questions and feedback in relation to teacher turns* p. 10
2. *Question frequency, type and convergent sub-type* p. 11
3. *Feedback frequency, type and sub-type* p. 12

Interpretive findings p. 13

Discussion p. 14

Conclusion p. 16

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with interaction as one of its central tenets is influencing classroom practices the world over. Yet, as Richards and Rodgers (2001:153) point out, the debate over what CLT entails has the "effect on varying interpretations of meaning and practice" because (p. 155) "there is no universally accepted text or authority on it, nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative."

Practices in the interactive classroom may in fact be opposing. Based on Howatt's distinction of a 'weak' and a 'strong' form of CLT as mentioned in Richard and Rodgers (p. 155), a proponent of the strongest form may, when facing a student's deviant utterance for example, decide that corrective feedback has no place in a classroom intent on "using language to learn it", not unlike the Natural Approach or that questions should primarily be divergent in kind.

By contrast, the 'weak' CLT form described by Howatt as "more standard" (p. 155), accommodates a corrective feedback strategy with a focus on accuracy similar to practices in the Audiolingual tradition, and accepts divergent questions as the exception rather than the rule.

Even though most teachers take a less polarized view on CLT, they are faced with a pedagogical menu that may be appetizing for the erudite but overwhelming for teachers, who in their formative years, look for proven practical answers to use in their own interactive classrooms.

Pedagogical solutions are particularly relevant to the use of questioning and feedback strategies alluded too earlier, as the success of a class largely depends on them. One reason, as Mercer (Mercer & Candlin, 2001:245) states, is that they form the most frequent model of teacher-student talk in the classroom, in terms of the model described by Sinclair and Coulthard (p. 245) as Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) exchanges. More fundamentally however, it is because they are arguably a teacher's best instruments to regulate the quantity and quality of language used in the classroom.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how an experienced teacher in Seoul, Korea, chooses to answer the "weak" "strong" dichotomy with regards to

questioning and feedback strategies in his interactive classroom during a 70 minute lesson observed. Questions for which answers will be sought are:

What types of questions does he ask and how do these inform his strategies and their effectiveness?

What techniques can be identified from analyzing feedback events and how effective are they?

Before we explore these questions, however, it is useful to specify the way strategy, questions and questioning, feedback and effectiveness are to be understood in the limited scope of this investigation.

Defining strategy

Different sources define strategy in different terms. The broader meaning in Longman's Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2002, strategy) uses the word "goal" to imply intent and is thus defined as "procedures used in learning, thinking, etc., which serve as a way of reaching a goal". Brown (2001:129) usefully equates strategy with procedures and practice under the heading of techniques as referring to the "pedagogical units or components of a classroom session" and these terms are used synonymously in the present paper.

Furthermore, strategies are defined by the decision making process of which Richards and Lockhart (2001: Ch.4) distinguish three: the planning decision during which techniques are chosen for the class, the interactive decision for strategies adopted during class and evaluative decisions made after class. Of the three, decisions about questioning and feedback strategies fall mostly under the interactive decision category and demand skill. In Richards and Lockhart (p.84) terms:

> "The ability to make appropriate interactive decisions is clearly an essential teaching skill, since interactive decisions enable teachers to assess students' response to teaching and to modify their instruction in order to provide optimal support for learning".

Subordinate to an overall definition is what a strategy says about choices. As Brown (2000:201) states, an overall strategy informs on the "theoretical rationale that underlies everything *a teacher* does in the classroom" and "draws on (...) issues,

findings, conclusions, and *principles* of language learning and teaching". The wisdom of a teacher's strategic choices and their success, then, relate to his/her well-founded knowledge and understanding of the options available before, during and after class.

Understanding questions and questioning

Much that defines questioning lies in the salience of questions and of their purpose in classroom interaction. The importance of "careful framing of questions" according to Brown (2001:169) sets a "learning climate for interactive teaching". He considers a teacher's questioning strategies (p. 173) "as one of the most important teaching behaviours () to master". Ideally, questions should stimulate, interest, encourage, focus, help clarify, elicit, help check understanding, all positive achievements as stated in Richards and Lockhardt (1996:185).

Unfortunately, every positive attribute has its negative equivalent. Brown (2001:172,3) warns of the pitfall of questions that are artificial, too obvious, too vague, too complex, rhetorical or random and, although we all strive for the best outcome, the reality doesn't always match our expectations. The good news is that by virtue of a reasonably clear cause and effect relation between a question and the answer to that question, it is possible for a teacher to redress an interaction that has gone awry.

To discuss questioning strategies, the types of questions a teacher asks need to be examined. Different classifications exist but two main types are generally considered: display and referential (Brown 2001:171). Display refers to questions for which the teacher knows the answer and/ which demand a single or short response of the low-level thinking kind. Referential questions, by contrast, demand more thought and generate longer responses and for which the teacher does not know the answer in advance. Richards and Lockhart (1996:185-187) divide questions into three useful categories: procedural related to classroom procedures such as "Do you know what to do?" and convergent, which request a short answer around a specific theme such as "Do kids help out with the housework?" divergent questions, the last, are like referential questions as in "Sally, what do you think?" Their categories differ from the simple display/referential variety in that convergent questions include those to which a teacher may not know the answer but which

narrow the range of possible responses, most notably closed questions demanding a yes or no answer.

Long and Sato (1983), are often quoted for their comparison of display versus referential questions in natural versus classroom discourse. "They found that in naturalistic discourse referential questions are more frequent than display questions, whereas display questions are much more frequent in whole-class teaching in ESL classrooms" (Richards and Lockhart 1996:187). For the interactive and communicative classroom intent on emulating naturalistic settings, Long and Sato's conclusions mean that teachers need to address the issue of ratio of referential and display questions to use.

Understanding feedback

Feedback techniques in the interactive classroom, as alluded to earlier in the case of deviant utterances, are harder to fathom, broader in scope and, generally, more difficult to master than their questioning sisters. Their cause and effect relation is less clear and influenced by competing theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), as we shall see later. Their success or failure is not always discernable or predictable and, consequently, they are not easy to correct in mid-course.

In general, feedback refers to "the response given by teacher to efforts by the learner to communicate" as defined by Ellis (1985:295) and

> "can involve such functions as correction, acknowledgement, requests for clarification and back channel cues such as 'Mmm'. It has been suggested that feedback plays a major role in helping learners to test hypotheses they have formed about the rule system of the target language."

The tentative tone of Ellis' definition sums up the disagreement feedback generates despite volumes written on the subject but the affective and cognitive distinction made by Vigil and Oller (Brown 2001:67) can safely be made and points at the evaluative nature of feedback. It is best explained in Brown's (2001:67-68) own words:

> "The former (affective) is the extent to which we value or encourage a student's attempt to communicate; the latter (cognitive) is the extent to which we indicate an understanding of the "message" itself. Teachers are engaged in a never-ending process of making sure that we provide sufficient positive affective

> feedback to students and at the same time give appropriate feedback to students about whether or not their actual language is clear and unambiguous."

Richards and Lockhart (1996:189) make a more practical distinction to investigate by isolating cognitive feedback into feedback on form and opposing it to feedback on content which refers to the teacher's response to *what* a student says. The affective dimension applies to both but is thus removed, leaving space to establish useful discrete categories for each.

Feedback on form and error correction in particular lies at the core of the feedback debate and, consequently, presents the greatest challenge in deciding on an appropriate strategy. The most compelling evidence of the difficulty involved is given by Brown (2001:292) as he describes the elaborate sequence of information a teacher needs to process before making a decision which he effectively summarizes in his "model for treatment of classroom speech errors" (293). As he winds down his page long account of the steps a teacher takes, he states (294):

> "After one very quick deviant utterance by a student, you have made an amazing number of observations and evaluations that go into the process of error treatment. New teachers will find such a prospect daunting, perhaps, but with experience, many of these considerations will become automatic."

Effectiveness and SLA

A successful strategy is an effective strategy and, ultimately, effectiveness is measured in terms of language learned. Theories on learning abound but answers are cautious, as more research is needed to tell us what constitutes learning, how learning takes place and what facilitates it in the short and long term. Three issues, however, bear on the present investigation: comprehensible input, interlanguage and interaction hypothesis.

Comprehensible Input

Krashen's comprehensible input theory, in Richards and Rodgers (161), distinguishes between learning that is conscious and acquisition that is unconscious. Acquisition, then, precedes learning or as he states, "Learning can only serve as monitor of output of acquired system". To acquire a system, according to Krashen, it is necessary to expose a learner to language of a level slightly above his/her own, called comprehensible input, and acquisition --in the sense of

Chomsky's "competence" (Lightbown and Spada 1999:17)-- cannot be 'forced'. The specific teaching of these systems, it could then be inferred, is a vain enterprise, which, if coupled with a strong belief in free interaction, gives rise to the argument in favor of a strategy of non-intervention, whereby teachers do not correct learners' errors and just ensure that comprehensible input is in plentiful supply.

Interlanguage

On the road between learning and acquisition comes interlanguage, a useful term coined by Larry Selinker and sometimes called approximative-system (Brown 2000:215) that refers to the unique language produced by a learner in progress before the target language is mastered. It suggests a transition on a continuum that is "open to influence from the outside" and "also influenced from the inside" as Rod Ellis (1997:33) points out. Interlanguage as a continuum proposes that there is a sequence to acquisition not necessarily linear, that could be influenced, possibly sped up through instruction (Brown 2001:67). According to Ellis (p. 34), however, this "variability" is not proven and may be "an aspect of performance rather than competence" but which, in the absence of evidence, appeals to some teachers' intuition and sense of worth.

Interaction hypothesis

Michael Long (Ellis 1997:47; Lightbown and Spada1999:42-44) has hypothesized the influence of interaction on language learning as stemming from the negotiation of meaning that takes place in conversation. If two people conversing do not understand each other, they tend to ask for clarification or change the way they say things (called modified input) until the message is clear. The thinking, correcting and processing taking place as learners struggle to communicate is also believed to provide the kind of comprehensible input for language learning to occur. If this exchange involves a more proficient speaker, Vygotsky (p. 44) believes, the level of performance by the learner can be accrued which he calls the zone of proximal development. If Vygotsky is right, then there is no better interlocutor for a learner in the classroom than his/her teacher and may, in turn, influence a teacher to include as much direct interaction with students as the context permits.

Most communicative approaches are rooted in these theories and have contributed to swing the attention-to-'form' pendulum nearly out of sight in the direction opposite from the early grammar translation days. Feedback is now often seen as the only

means teachers have to pay attention to *how* learners say things with the enormous burden on teachers to figure out how it is to be accomplished. Recent publications (Han 2002; Ellis 2001; Sheen 2003) have emerged that discuss feedback strategies that value attention to 'form' in an attempt to bring the pendulum to a reasonable swing.

It is now to the small research project investigating the questions mentioned in the introduction that we shall turn.

Research context and participants

The Language Institute of Yonsei, one of the leading universities in Seoul, was the host of this investigation and the class observed consisted of seven upper-intermediate adult learners, who shared the same first language and an educational background at university level, but whose personal circumstances differed considerably as twenty years separated the youngest --a student-- from the oldest member --a working mother-- of the group. At the time of observation, the members and their instructor were well acquainted: they had met for two and a half hours, four times a week for nearly four months and the course was due to end a week after the observation. It was agreed with the instructor that half of the regular class (70 minutes) would be observed.

The teacher has been with Yonsei for six years, is highly qualified and is a figure of stature not only in his Institute but also within the local EFL community. He holds the CELTA, the DELTA and is about to complete his Masters in TEFL. In addition to teaching, he holds the position of training and development coordinator at the Institute and that of CELTA and DTEFLA trainer at the British Council since 1998. He is also known for his participation in events organized by the Korean TESOL organization (KOTESOL). The instructor's pedigree is mentioned to illuminate his choices of questioning and feedback strategies as well as my deliberate choice, as nascent teacher and investigator, to glean solutions applicable in my own similar context from someone whose approach to teaching, I trusted, would be an informed one.

Data collection instruments

To collect the quantitative and qualitative data needed for the analysis the observation was audio-recorded and accompanied by field-notes. For the most part,

the method proved adequate, but the intimate nature of classroom interaction, and the low number of students, as well as the teacher's soft and low voice prevented the transcribing of all that was said, despite the use of a good quality microphone and the availability of a back-up recording. Whole-class interaction was transcribed but contained 23 instances of unclear speech, usually single words. Group events or student-student interactions were excluded but interruptions for whole-class input were recorded. In addition, the audiotape didn't do justice to the extensive use of the board for feedback purposes; a video-recorder would have been better suited. Field-notes helped capture some of the extra-auditory events but proved impossible to fully transcribe.

The transcript was keyed and the key adapted from Joan Swann's article in Candlin and Mercer (2001:Ch.20). One useful strategy devised was color-coding and line numbering. Teacher turns were coded in blue for salience and the lines numbered in fives for reference throughout the transcript whilst teacher questions were further set apart in red.

Data collection methods

The significance of questions and feedback in the class observed was first measured by counting the number of turns (times when the teacher would speak) containing feedback or questions and comparing them to the total number of turns.

Questions

Questions were counted using Richards and Lockhart's (1996:185) classification as described earlier and consisted in grouping questions into the following three categories: procedural, convergent and divergent. Convergent questions were further divided into closed (Yes/No answers) and open questions.

The rationale behind the three-tier classification and further division of convergent questions was because early attempts to categorize questions into display and referential proved too polarized for the questions the teacher asked. The teacher did not always know the answer to a particular question yet intended to narrow the answers to a focal theme, a distinction made earlier that bears on the questioning strategy and reflects on a teacher's level of control over the interaction.

Feedback

Data on feedback was collected drawing on McDonough and McDonough's (1997:47-54) "normative" and "interpretive" forms of research.

Normative

The normative form aims at "description by numbers" (p. 48) and to do so, feedback moves have been quantified using two models.

The first model, based on Richards and Lockhart (1996:189), quantified feedback on content and feedback on form and then used their sub-categories for further dividing content as follows:

- Acknowledging an ( ) answer
- Indicating an incorrect answer (content)
- Praising
- Expanding or modifying a student's answer
- Repeating
- Summarizing
- Criticizing

To brake down feedback on form, Lyster and Ranta's model described in Lightbown and Spada (1999:104) which includes the categories below was used:

- Explicit Correction
- Recasts
- Clarification requests
- Metalinguistic feedback
- Elicitation
- Repetition

Interpretive

The interpretive form looked at "qualitative data" (p. 53) and was considered for feedback on form. The transcript and field notes were pruned for information that revealed features of feedback strategy not covered by numbers.

The decision to scaffold feedback in this manner came gradually as experimentation with single forms proved incomplete and unsatisfying in the result they generated. The Lyster and Ranta model, the first one tried, proved inadequate on its own

because, strictly speaking, feedback on error could only be identified a minimal number of times amidst many feedback turns. Richards and Lockhart's model appeared advantageous in highlighting the ratio feedback on content, versus feedback on form but failed to account for other, very important, feedback strategies employed.

As an aside, my first encounter with research proved an agonizing journey encumbered by doubt, hesitations and dead-ends that challenge the wisdom of every assumption along the way. Gathering numbers, seemed a good approach because, low-inference in kind, they appeared trustworthy. The ensuing results proved incomplete and a qualitative approach, albeit more subjective, was added to complement normative findings. The adoption of an eclectic approach to data gathering appeased inner turmoil because it was perceived best suited for the investigation and effected progress, but raised concerns about validity. In the end, the data instructed the way to collect it and not the other way around as it should perhaps have been.

The findings

Normative findings

The normative findings will precede interpretive findings and are shown summarized in table form and treated in three parts, each offering a brief analysis of the results

1. Questions and feedback in relation to teacher turns

Table 1 shows that the teacher took 181 turns, of which questions and feedback are roughly equal and some of which overlap. Together they amount to three quarter of all teacher turns confirming, at least in numbers, Mercer's notion quoted in the introduction that questions and feedback form the bulk of teacher-student interaction in the classroom. At first glance, the nearly equal number of turns containing questions and feedback also suggest that the preponderance of IRF sequences also referred to, is observable here as well.

Table 1: Distribution of questions and feedback in relation to teacher turns

Teacher turns 181	100%
Teacher turns containing questions 82	45.3%
Teacher turns containing feedback 78	43%

Teacher turns containing feedback and questions 23	12.7%
Total turns containing feedback and/or questions 137	75.7%

2. Question frequency, type and convergent sub-type distribution

Table 2: Frequency of questions, type distribution and convergent sub-type

Questions 105	100%
Procedural 6	5.7%
Divergent 7	6.7%
Convergent 92	87.6%
Closed (Y/N answers) 31	*Of convergent questions 33.7%*

The overwhelming frequency of convergent questions shown in Table 2 and the amount of closed questions among them is remarkable considering that the investigation is premised on the type of interaction found in communicative classroom and for which a higher incidence of divergent questions could be expected. In reference to earlier discussions, the numbers suggest that the teacher's questioning strategies draw from a 'weak' interpretation of CLT in his classroom, are less 'natural', demand lower-level thinking and provide less comprehensible input to students than divergent questions would have. It would, however, take a more qualitative investigation to validate this interpretation. It can also be inferred that the teacher exercises a strong control over what and how much is being said, even more so considering that over a third are closed in kind, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Excerpt 1 (Transcript: Lines 17-43)

T: Take a look (...)	
shows picture of a man measuring a girl's height	
What's happening in this picture?	divergent
S1: ( ) I think.	
S2: Father is measuring her daughter's height.	
Ss: Uh-huh / Yeah / Ah	
S: This is height?	
T: Yeah, you can see the chart in	content: acknowledges, expands
the back. Do Koreans do this?	convergent
I know, er, a lot of Americans do this	
with their kids.	
Ss: Yes / yes / yes we do.	

T: So you do that. You write the name, and then the age...	content: acknowledges, expands
S: ...and the date	
T: and the date. So can you guess what the topic of today's class is?	content: repeats convergent
S: measuring?	
Ss: <laughter>	
T: That would be very boring!	content: acknowledges
Ss: <laughter>	
S: Family relationship	
S: Mmmh	
T: Yeah, specifically?	content: aknowledges, convergent
S: Father and daughter.	
T: Fathers and daughters.	form: recast
S: Oh yeah and ( )	
<laughter>	
T: ( ) no I'm talking about kids.	content: expands
S: Aah!	
T: And parents and kids.	content: expands

3. Feedback frequency, type and sub-type distribution

The high ratio of feedback on content versus feedback on form presented in Table 3 signals a strategy of non-intervention with regards to errors, whilst the high incidence of expansion and modification moves indicates that the teacher actively pursues fluency by participating in and adding content to the discussion. Furthermore, the use of acknowledgement further contributes to fluency in creating a positive affective environment that learners feel encouraged participating in, yet, interestingly, making use of neither praise nor criticism. Excerpt 1 above with the categories on the right also serves to illustrate how this is done.

Table 3: Frequency of feedback turns, turn types and move types in decreasing order

Feedback turns 78	100%
1. Feedback on Content turns 65	83.3%
Expanding or modifying a student's answer 47	
Acknowledging answer 19	
Repeating 7	
Indicating an incorrect answer 5	
Praising/Criticizing 0	
2. Feedback on Form turns 13	16.7%
Elicitation 6	
Repetition 4	
Metalinguistic feedback 4	
Recasts 3	
Clarification requests / Explicit Correction 0	

The relative paucity of feedback on form barely warrants a detailed account of how they are divided. Their presence nevertheless suggests that form is not simply ignored as the recast in the previous excerpt illustrates and the following excerpt shows. It also shows how two moves, here a repetition and a metalinguistic comment are elegantly combined in one turn.

Excerpt 2 (Transcript: Lines 581-585)

T: And what is the woman's hope for the future?	
Ss: more people/ substitute/ children/ do not..	
T: more people, children, substitute...	form: repeats
Ss <laughter>	
got a lot of nouns and no verb on this.	metalinguistic

Interpretive findings

Whilst normative data answers questions about feedback strategies for the IRF cycle, interpretive data is needed to reveal the delayed variant of teacher feedback, a technique planned ahead of the class and referring to the issue of timing addressed in the section defining strategy. Feedback on form, thus, becomes a planned feature of the lesson in response to a free practice activity. The content for the feedback on form shown below is derived from the 10 minutes free practice session, but instead of interrupting students, the teacher sits aside and takes notes of problematic utterances heard. He later writes five of them on the board, anonymously, in the form of sentences with blanks as shown (corrections shown in green) and says, "Alright, here's a couple of sentences that I wrote down while you were talking. How do you fix them?" before interactively solving them like a riddle.

1. I think the happiest time is after getting married.
2. They have no ~~any~~ right.
   or don't have any right.
3. They spend a lot of time to make friends.
4. How about you? If you could have a child, what would you do?
5. They need permission from their parents.

When quantified, this feedback on form session turns out to only contain feedback on content as the teacher elicits, often wordlessly, pointing at the board and silently filling the blanks as he hears answers to prompts, or simply revealing corrections in writing without further ado, as shown in Excerpt 3. The same technique is used for the feedback to the two short dictoglosses done during the lesson with a very similar quantified outcome.

Excerpt 3 (Transcript: Lines 396-434**)**

Feedback on form
T: Alright, here is a couple of sentences that
I wrote down while you were talking. How do
you fix them?
S: ( )
<laughter>
*T points to sentence 1 "I think the happiest
time is after get married"*
S1: getting
S: Aah
*Ss <laughter>, T corrects 'get' to 'getting'
using green marker*
T: How about number 2?
... obviously talking about kids.
S: no right
S: no right
T: or you can say... content: expands
writes on board: 'don't have any right'
T: Yeah. So it's spend time? content: acknowledges
S: ( )
*T fills gap in sentence two:"They spend a lot of
time making friends."*
Ss <whispers>
T: We were talking about.. you were talking
about hypothetical meaning-*pointing at sentence
3 on board.*
A latecomer enters the classroom
S: Wow!
Ss: *<clapping>*
T: Hello!
S1: New face!
S2: Long time no see
S1: Why do you here?
Ss <laughter>
T: so we were talking about hypothetical meaning- *pointing again*
S1: Mhm
S2: couldn't do
S3: could have.
S1: couldn't have a child
T fills gaps in sentence 4 on the board
S: ( )
T: PER...
S: permission
T: Okay. content: acknowledges

Discussion

The questions investigated have produced some unusual, seemingly conflicting findings. What is certain is that questioning and feedback form the better part of teacher-student interaction in the class observed. Simply stated, we have, on the one hand, a teacher who mostly asks convergent questions, often just closed ones.

These indicate that he is in "control", "manipulating" classroom interaction in a near "mechanical" way (Brown 2001: 130-133). On the other hand, the same teacher mostly responds to *what* students say and not *how* they say it, hardly ever correcting and if so, then gently, non-intrusively, taking care not to brake the flow of interaction. Errors, we found out, are not just ignored but identified during communicative activities and treated later, quickly, anonymously, almost playfully.

Are these strategies effective? In terms of SLA, it can be argued that the teacher is accessible to the students' "zone of proximal development" in a Vygostkyan sense, and that interaction is central to his teaching for optimizing comprehensible input. Furthermore, his multifaceted feedback strategy indicates that he believes, in part at least, that instruction can effect progress in a student's interlanguage. However, a feedback strategy of non-intervention followed by delayed correction juxtaposed with a questioning strategy that shows as much control appears elegant but does not fully explain what theoretical take informs his feedback disposition. It may, in the end, qualify as efficient more than effective.

In technical terms, the teacher believes in the 'scaffolding' merits of the IRF exchange as described by Leo van Lier (Candlin and Mercer 2001:96) and Mercer (Candlin and Mercer 2001:255) and in spite of their concerns about their legitimacy in terms of giving students more creative opportunities to use language (p. 245) or of a teacher's over-reliance on them (p. 97) or, for that matter, Breen's (Candlin and Mercer 2001:131) concern with at teacher's abuse of power in a classroom culture that is "asymmetrical" from the start.

The combination of control and non-intervention is indeed perplexing but it works and can be justified on two grounds, both contextual in nature. Amy Tsui, mentioned by Nunan (1999: 233-5), investigated the reason why learners in Hong Kong are often reluctant to speak. Among the five she identified, students' "fear of mistakes and derision" (p. 234) stands out, the reason being "cultural factor that functions in a number of Asian cultures inhibiting students from speaking up in front of their peers". In elaborating strategies to overcome this fear, one that proved effective (p. 235) "was to focus on content rather than form. This lowered anxiety ( ) presumably because they were not inhibited about making mistakes."

The other is that the prevailing Confucian culture in Korea, places the teacher center-stage as all-knowing, in charge and unchallenged, despite changes

underway. Without strong direction, lessons falter and silence takes over, paralyzing interaction as many teachers teaching in Korea, myself included, would agree. The all-knowing aspect of a teacher's role in Korea also implies at least treatment if not correction of errors. Criticism by students can be harsh and have consequences for teachers in some institutions if errors are not addressed. Error correction, despite Long's strong objections to treating "language as object" (Candlin and Mercer 2001:181), is arguably expected by students (Nunan 1988) regardless of whether or not they do lead to learning in the end.

My arguments are clearly favorable to the teacher's choice of questioning and feedback strategies as a suitable affective and cognitive mix for a context that demands a teacher with "an iron hand in a velvet glove" but a major concern is applicability. The strategies may be limited to that context, with motivated adult Korean learners, in a small intimate classroom, but more importantly, they demand great skills and a perfect command of English. Most EFL teachers are non-native speakers of English, myself included, and in our struggle to master language and skills would be hard-pressed to reproduce these questioning and feedback strategies in our own classrooms and maintain the level of gentle control thus exercised.

What the teacher undoubtedly practices is what Kathleen Bailey says as quoted by Brown (2001:291):

> "The teacher needs to develop the intuition, through experience and established theoretical foundations, for ascertaining which option or combination of options is appropriate at given moments. Principles of optimal affective and cognitive feedback of reinforcement theory, and of communicative language teaching all combine to form those intuitions."

Conclusion

An experienced teacher's questioning and feedback practice was investigated in the context of a small research project and against a backdrop of conflicting strategic options caused by conflicting but widely accepted theoretical claims. The teacher's approach was found to be appropriately eclectic for the context he teaches in as he controls interaction through asking convergent questions yet choosing not to intervene when errors are produced during interaction but responding to them separately later. Referring to Howatt's 'weak' and 'strong' forms of CLT once more,

the teacher effectively melts elements of both in a way that possibly reflects efficiency more than theoretical concern.

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