



# Learners' oral corrective feedback preferences in relation to their cultural background, proficiency level and types of error



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 16 October 2015

Received in revised form 3 August 2016

Accepted 5 August 2016

Available online 13 August 2016

### Keywords:

Oral corrective feedback

Metalinguistic feedback

Recasts

Preferences

Error type

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the preference of adult learners of Chinese as a second language (CSL) for six types of oral corrective feedback (OCF) on phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic errors in relation to their cultural background and proficiency levels. A sample of 159 university students completed a Likert scale questionnaire and shared their views on how they prefer OCF in a follow-up interview. The results showed learners generally preferred metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction, and recasts on nearly all types of errors. Recasts were viewed as OCF more useful for phonological errors than for lexical and grammatical errors. Intermediate level learners tended to believe that clarification requests on pronunciation errors were effective, whereas beginning level learners did not have the same confidence. Explicit correction on pragmatic errors was viewed as effective by learners from Confucian cultural background; however, learners from non-Confucian background did not agree with this view. A follow-up interview revealed that the linguistic features of learners' first language, cognitive processing, affect, instruction, and cultural perception were five main factors influencing learners' OCF preferences. Implications are suggested for the use of OCF to help understand learners' expectations of CF in second language instruction.

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## 1. Introduction

The effectiveness of corrective feedback (CF) on second language development has been discussed intensively by researchers in the last two decades. CF refers to “responses to a learner's non-target-like L2 production” (Li, 2010, p.309). Teachers provide CF in either oral or written form to raise learners' awareness of various types of errors they make in the language classroom. In this study, only oral corrective feedback (OCF) is focused upon. OCF was generally demonstrated to facilitate learners' language learning in empirical and observational studies (Lyster & Ranta, 2012; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Mackey & Philip, 1998; Russell & Spada, 2006). Studies have identified different OCF types that teachers provided in classrooms on learners' types of errors (Lyster, 1998; Saito & Lyster, 2012). The most frequently used OCF in the classroom was recasts; however, these were not preferred as explicit correction and metalinguistic explanations of morphological errors by learners (Lee, 2013; Lyster, 1998; Moroishi, 2002; Schulz, 1996, 2001). Teachers' phonological recasts were considered lexical modifications by their students (Moroishi, 2002). Similarly, corrections of inappropriate use of language in a particular social cultural context without following native speakers' habits of speaking (i.e., pragmatic errors) were perceived as OCF for grammatical errors (Yoshida, 2010). Learners' confusion of OCF with respect to error types indicates a necessity to consider

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error types when exploring the effectiveness of OCF in learning and teaching. Furthermore, the key issue lies in learners' perceptions of OCF, because those perceptions can affect their responses to OCF and strategies for L2 learning (Kartchava & Ammar, 2014; Loewen, 2004; Lyster, 1998). Discrepancies between learners' expectations of OCF and teachers' intentions when correcting errors can also lead to ineffective instruction (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). Therefore, it is important to explore learners' views of OCF, particularly their preferences for OCF types for different errors. In addition, studies have shown that learners' proficiency level (Kaivanpanah, Alavi, & Sepehrinia, 2015; Mackey & Philip, 1998; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Philip, 2003) and L1 cultural background (Schulz, 1996, 2001) are significant factors influencing their preferences for OCF. However, some studies (Brown, 2009; Loewen et al., 2009; Schulz, 1996, 2001) merely focused on learners' preferences for OCF in general, or receiving OCF particularly for grammatical errors. Thus, it is necessary to investigate further learners' preferences for OCF types in terms of different types of errors and the types' relationship with learners' L1 cultural background and proficiency level. This study aimed to investigate these preferences by asking the following research questions:

- 1) What types of OCF do adult learners prefer on different types of errors when learning Chinese as a second language (CSL)?
- 2) Do CSL adult learners' cultural background and proficiency level affect their preferences for OCF types?
- 3) What are the possible reasons for learners' preferences for certain OCF types with respect to specific errors?

The following section reviews background literature about OCF and learners' preferences for OCF to address the research questions. Section 3 and 4 present the methods and findings of the present study, followed by Section 5 and 6 with discussions and implications.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. OCF types and L2 learning

A growing body of studies have been conducted to identify and compare the effectiveness of different types of OCF. The classification of OCF types developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) has been widely used in many studies (Lee, 2013; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Sheen, 2004; Yoshida, 2008). According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), OCF consists of six types – explicit correction, recasts, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification requests and repetition – in terms of different features of OCF strategy (See Table 1).

The efficacy of OCF types on learners' L2 development has been discussed by researchers from theoretical perspectives. The interaction hypothesis indicates that OCF in interaction helps L2 learners to notice their non-target output (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996). The extent to which learners notice the gaps between positive input and the errors they have made is a crucial process in their L2 learning (Schmidt, 1995). According to the distinction by Sheen and Ellis (2011) of explicit and implicit OCF on a continuum scale, explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback are more likely to be explicit than are clarification requests and recasts. Thus, OCF types such as explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback, which most likely draw more attention from learners because of their explicitness, are perhaps more effective than clarification requests and recasts for L2 development. However, the explicitness of OCF is not a constant variable and is easily affected by learners' differences and contextual factors (Lyster et al., 2013; Sheen, 2004). Skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2007; Lyster et al., 2013), conversely, emphasizes the role of practice “from effortful to automatic use of the target language” through OCF in meaningful contexts (Lyster et al., 2013, p.10). Thus, regardless of explicit or implicit OCF, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification request, and repetition might be more useful than other OCF types because learners are given opportunities to self-adjust their errors that, as Swain suggests, “pushed output” (Swain, 2005). Therefore, the effectiveness of OCF types on L2 learning is closely related to how learners perceive the OCF due to its explicitness of error correction and to how they respond to the learning after OCF.

### 2.2. Effect of error types on OCF

Previous studies have recognized the error type as an important variable affecting learners' perceptions of and responses to OCF (Lyster, 1998; Mackey et al., 2007; Nabei & Swain, 2002; Yoshida, 2010). Mackey et al. (2007) revealed that learners of Arabic were likely to notice teachers' corrections triggered by morphosyntactic or lexical errors but not those triggered by

**Table 1**  
Classification of oral CF.

Classification of Oral CF	
Explicit correction	An utterance that explicitly indicates the errors learners made along with target reformulations.
Recasts	An utterance that provides L2 reformulations of learners' non-target utterances.
Elicitation	An utterance that uses pausing to guide learners to their errors.
Metalinguistic feedback	An utterance that emphasizes on explicit explanation of forms.
Clarification requests	Clarification requests means asking learners to reformulate their utterances which are hard to understand.
Repetition	An utterance indicates repeating errors with emphasizing stress or intonation.

phonological errors. In contrast, [Gass and Lewis \(2007\)](#) showed that learners of Italian could perceive lexical and phonological CF but not morphological errors. [Moroishi \(2002\)](#) found that learners of Japanese had difficulty in recognizing recasts for morphological errors. Moreover, they interpreted teachers' intentions of correcting phonological errors as lexical recasts. In [Yoshida's \(2010\)](#) study with learners of Japanese as a foreign language (FL), Irene was confused by the teacher's recasts of Japanese humble forms because the polite expression she used was not grammatically mistaken but rather inappropriate according to the specific social and cultural context. Such errors were called pragmatic errors. [Tyler \(2012\)](#) noted that the pragmatic aspect of language use, "such as the forms politeness phenomena actually take", is an indispensable component in the language system because language use represents people's general interpretations of the world (p.13). Thus, it should be considered together with other aspects of the language, "phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon and semantics" ([Tyler, 2012](#), p.13). Learners' misunderstanding of teachers' OCF on different error types might be due to the characteristics of linguist aspects. Input, including OCF, with a higher communicative value is likely to be decoded ([VanPatten, 1996](#)). For instance, "short pronunciation-focused recasts" were found effective in pronunciation acquisition ([Lyster et al., 2013](#), p. 24). Therefore, the present study examined OCF with respect to four aspects of language errors: grammatical, phonological, lexical, and pragmatic.

### 2.3. Learners' OCF preferences and individual differences

Studies reviewed above showed the effects of OCF are related to learners' understanding of and reaction to OCF types on different errors. Learners' expectations of teachers' OCF reflect their "readiness" for learning ([Cotterall, 1995](#), p.196; [Havranek & Cesnik, 2001](#); [Horwitz, 1988](#); [Sheen, 2007](#)), and mismatches of interpretations of OCF between teachers and learners would lead to negative effects on language instruction ([Brown, 2009](#); [Kartchava & Ammar, 2014](#); [Lyster et al., 2013](#); [Yoshida, 2010](#)). Moreover, [Kartchava and Ammar \(2014\)](#) showed that learners' preferences for a certain OCF type (i.e., recasts in this study) were related to their awareness of teachers' intention concerning error correction. Thus, teachers should listen to their students' voices, particularly their preferences for OCF types on errors.

Previous studies generally reported that learners had a strong preference for CF ([Elwood & Bode, 2014](#); [Incecay & Dollar, 2011](#); [Loewen et al., 2009](#); [Schulz, 1996, 2001](#); [Zhang & Rahimi, 2014](#)). In terms of learners' favourite OCF types, most of studies largely focused on OCF provided for grammatical errors or errors in general; however, a few studies addressed learners' errors in other language aspects in relation to their preferred OCF types. In my opinion, only [Katayama \(2006, 2007\)](#) and [Papangkorn \(2015\)](#) examined learners' OCF preferences on phonological and grammatical errors. Concerning phonological errors, metalinguistic feedback and elicitation were the most preferred OCF in all three studies. In terms of grammatical feedback, learners in [Katayama \(2006\)](#) viewed recasts as effective OCF, whereas elicitation and metalinguistic feedback were supported by learners in the other two studies ([Katayama, 2007](#); [Papangkorn, 2015](#)).

Another important factor in these different beliefs concerning OCF is the proficiency levels of learners. [Kaivanpanah et al. \(2015\)](#) found that Iranian learners of English with different language levels tended to hold different beliefs about OCF. Elementary learners preferred metalinguistic feedback, whereas advanced learners preferred prompts such as elicitation. Researchers indicated that due to the limited knowledge of the target language, low-level learners most likely had a strong demand to learn more about the structures and rules, which could guide them to use the language for communication ([Kaivanpanah et al., 2015](#); [Lin & Hedgcock, 1996](#); [Mackey & Philip, 1998](#); [Philip, 2003](#)). High-level learners might be able to notice and correct their own mistakes with clues through elicitation and other prompts ([Lyster & Ranta, 2012](#); [Panova & Lyster, 2002](#)). Therefore, it is necessary to consider learners' proficiency levels when examining their preferred OCF types on specific errors.

In addition, L1 learners' cultural backgrounds, in terms of educational experiences, are crucial aspects to consider in their perceptions of OCF and preferred OCF types ([Schulz, 1996, 2001](#); [Sheen, 2004](#)). [Gass and Lewis \(2007\)](#) found that, compared with non-heritage learners of Italian, Italian heritage learners were more likely to notice the OCF on lexical and semantic errors but not on grammatical errors. This difference indicates an effect of cultural heritage on learners' perceptions of OCF with respect to different error types. Because the present study addresses learners of Chinese as a second language, it is important to note that learners from neighbouring countries of China such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam were to some extent affected by the Confucian tradition ([Chang, 2010](#)). Confucius was one of the greatest mentors in ancient China, and his principles of learning and teaching were widely spread in the surrounding Asian countries, and thus these Asian countries were in the "Confucian cultural sphere"(CCS) ([Li, 2003, 2005](#)). Therefore, learners' language background was specifically categorized into two groups, CCS (learners from Asian countries) and Non-CCS groups (learners from European and Northern American countries) to ascertain whether there were differences in their preferred OCF in this study.

### 3. Method

A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used. The first two questions of the study aimed to obtain students' preferences on OCF and enabled the researcher to make a comparison between L1 language background and proficiency-level groups; a cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to achieve the goal. This approach was intended to enable the researcher to understand the wider picture. However, to investigate the reasons learners prefer some OCF over others, the limited resources of a lone researcher suggest that an in-depth treatment of a small number of cases would offer important insights. Therefore, I chose to administrate a Likert scale questionnaire, with interviews to investigate

some key issues in depth. The survey was collected from 159 university students in Beijing; 7 students who completed the questionnaire participated in the interviews.

### 3.1. Participants

Due to the accessibility of the sample, a non-probabilistic convenience sample with 159 CSL learners at a Chinese university in Beijing was selected to complete the survey. All of the participants took part in the study voluntarily, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30. In terms of language background, 53% of the students (84) were from countries in the Confucian cultural sphere such as Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Singapore, and 47% of the students (75) came from non-CCS countries such as the UK, the US, Australia, and Canada. All of the participants in this study were taking an intensive Chinese program in the university at the time of the study. According to students' enrollment exams, six levels of modules (A–E) with two subcategories (e.g., B and B+) were developed to meet students' individual proficiency. Level A refers to total beginners with no prior knowledge of Chinese, and Level E refers to advanced level students. Students participating in this study were from module B to D+. Therefore, based on students' module levels and their teachers' suggestions about students' CSL learning experience, two level groups were defined:

- (1) Level 1, experienced beginners, with 1–2 years of Chinese learning experience (79, including modules B, B+ and C)
- (2) Level 2, intermediate level learners, with 3–4 years of Chinese learning experience (80, including modules C+, D, and D+) (See Table 2)

Interview participants were largely volunteers who had already completed the questionnaire survey. Seven interviewees came from a wide range of countries: 2 Koreans, 1 Thai, 1 Japanese, 1 Spanish, 1 American, and 1 Italian. In terms of level groups, 4 learners were at level 1 (i.e., from modules B and B+), and the remaining 3 were from modules C+, D, and D+, which were at level 2 (see Table 3). Note that approaching the interview participants was a challenge in this study; because the survey was conducted at the end of the term, many students who had previously responded to the questionnaire were no longer at school. Thus, only 7 students participated in the interview voluntarily. However, learners with both language backgrounds (CCS and non-CCS groups) and proficiency levels (level 1 and level 2) were involved. It might be possible to obtain an overview of students' OCF preferences from each group.

### 3.2. Setting

The detailed instructional setting in this study is also illustrated because the setting is an essential aspect affecting perceptions of OCF efficacy from learners' perspectives. All of the participants in this study are learning Chinese as a second language in an intensive program at a university in Beijing. The intensive Chinese program was established in this university thirty years ago, aimed at developing learners' language knowledge and skills in a short time. Four courses were included in the program: intensive reading, speaking, listening and a Chinese character course. The classes I observed were intensive reading courses; they were core courses that aimed to introduce new linguistic items to students. The module B+ and D classes were observed. Pronunciations and words were the main focus in the module B class. The first quarter hour of each class was primarily spent on recognizing new words and practicing pronunciation. The teacher then spent the next 15 min introducing new structures by doing replacement exercises. The last 15 min were focused on dialogues in the textbook. Teachers organized various activities such as role-play and storytelling (i.e., changing the dialogues to a story) to develop students' communicative skills and ability to understand. In the module D class, in which students were at an intermediate level, the main focus of the class was on the comprehension of long texts and cultural understanding. Thus, although teachers in the module D class followed a similar pattern to that employed by teachers in module B+, introducing new words,

**Table 2**  
Students' language background and proficiency level.

CCS group	Proficiency		Non-CCS group	Proficiency	
	Level 1	Level 2		Level 1	Level 2
Korea	15	21	Australia	15	11
Japanese	11	3	US	6	4
Thailand	4	4	Russia	2	5
Malaysia	2	2	UK	3	3
Singapore	1	0	Italy	3	4
Laos	1	1	Netherlands	2	3
Cambodia	1	1	Canada	2	2
Burma	0	1	Germany	2	2
Vietnam	0	1	France	1	2
Philippines	2	2	Spain	1	2
Indonesia	5	6			
Total	42	42	Total	37	38

**Table 3**  
Interviewees' backgrounds.

No.	Age	Gender	L1 Background	Module	Level group	Years of learning Chinese
1	22	Female	Korean	B	1	1.5
2	21	Female	Japanese	B	1	1
3	24	Female	Italy	B	1	1.5
4	28	Male	American	B+	1	2
5	27	Male	Spanish	C+	2	3
6	26	Female	Korean	D	2	4
7	25	Male	Thai	D+	2	5

practising grammar, and understanding texts, they spent more time (approximately 25–30 min) on long-text comprehension. Teachers asked many questions to check whether students understood details of the paragraphs. They also shared some Chinese cultural knowledge with students based on the topics of the texts. Teachers in both modules had at least 6 years of teaching experience. They provided OCF on diverse errors when they found it necessary. Given that there was a Chinese character course specifically aimed at developing students' character recognition and writing skills, writing took approximately 5 min in both classes of modules B+ and D.

### 3.3. Instruments

#### 3.3.1. Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire design process was to develop an OCF preference inventory. Because the OCF types reviewed previously are technical terms that are too difficult for students to understand, it is important to generate questionnaire items appropriate for exploring students' OCF preferences. Because both beginners and intermediate-level students were involved in this study, developing a questionnaire suitable for both levels of students was another concern. Cathcart and Olsen (1976) initially used examples of OCF types on specific errors as questionnaire items; the present study adopted the same method of displaying specific OCF type on errors. Thus, instead of using technical terms to refer to OCF types in the questionnaire statements, specific instances of error correction were provided in the questionnaire (See Appendix, Part 2).

In the questionnaire, students were asked to rate the effectiveness of six OCF types from their point of view. A 4-point Likert scale was used, with 1 being very poor and 4 being very good. As reviewed in the literature, students' perceptions of input, including OCF, can be underpinned by the degree of forms-meaning connections and communicative value of the linguistic elements (VanPatten, 1996). Bearing these two criteria in mind, the error examples for the questionnaire were carefully chosen from the researcher's classroom observation notes on four linguistic aspects (i.e., phonology, lexicon, grammar, and pragmatics), with two specific error examples in each language aspect (See Table 4 for details). Thus, a total of 48 Likert scale items of examples of OCF types on eight errors were generated. Student background information was also included in the questionnaire, with six questions about L1 language background, age, gender, education, time spent learning Chinese, and the modules they were studying. Thus, a 54-item inventory of students' OCF preferences was developed (See Appendix). All OCF types in each example and error types were displayed randomly. To ensure that students understand all examples of errors and OCF, English, Korean, and Japanese translation versions were provided for them to choose. Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire is 0.778, indicating a satisfactory reliability of the instrument.

#### 3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews

The interview questions in this study are primarily designed based on two sources. One is follow-up questions based on participants' answers to the questionnaire items; the other is general inquiry directly from the focused aspects discussed previously in the review. Furthermore, the two sources of interview questions are not asked in a specific order but brought up naturally, according to the interaction between the researcher and interviewees. The reason that learners preferred specific OCF for a particular error is the focus in the interview. Thus, the interview guidelines are as follows:

- Learners' preferred OCF type on the error examples given in the questionnaire, and why they preferred that type to others;
- Aspects that they liked or disliked about OCF on error types in actual classrooms, and why they liked or disliked those aspects;
- Type(s) of OCF they believed effective for learners from their home countries, and why they thought so;
- Opinions about language proficiency level and preferred OCF types, and why they did or did not consider them related.

### 3.4. Procedure and data analysis

A cover letter about the research was sent in advance to teachers and students to provide a brief introduction of the aims and conduct of the research and an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Consent forms were obtained from program directors, teachers and students.



**Table 4**

Error examples used in the questionnaire.

Linguistic aspect	Error aspect	Example
Phonology	1 Chinese tones 2 initial pronunciation	*hèn (很)冷 *这sì (是) 我们的学校。
Lexicon	1 clutch word 2 fixed expression	*见面朋友 *他去家了。
Grammar	1 sentence order 2 ‘是—的’ structure	*以前常常我去图书馆。 *我坐飞机来了。
Pragmatics	1 politeness 2 implication of rhetorical questions	*老师, 你为什么 not 请我帮助你? *我不是预习了吗?

The final 200 questionnaires were distributed in the university and 159 valid copies were collected, a return rate of 79.5%. A follow-up interview was conducted to seek students' further insights about their preferred OCF types. Seven students were interviewed individually during the break in a quiet place, and each interview lasted 5–7 min. Interviews were recorded with the permission of participants. Given that the interview was conducted at the end of the term, as mentioned above, only seven students, who were already known by the researchers, voluntarily participated in the interview. Due to the time constraints of the break, the duration of the interviews might seem too short to explore in-depth views. However, when the researcher observed their classes during the term, she had already communicated with the seven students as their friend about their views on OCF. The researcher kept notes of daily conversations about their OCF preferences, together with classroom observations. Thus, the researcher's role in this study is that of an insider; as [Lichtman \(2013\)](#) indicated, “the researcher shapes the research and, in fact, is shaped by the research” (p. 164).

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analysed via SPSS. MANOVA was used to examine the effects of learners' cultural background and proficiency levels on their preferences for OCF on specific errors. The qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes via Nvivo. Triangulation of data in qualitative findings from interviews and researcher's notes was accomplished by exporting the original transcription data and notes via Nvivo report.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Research question 1: learners' preferred OCF on specific errors

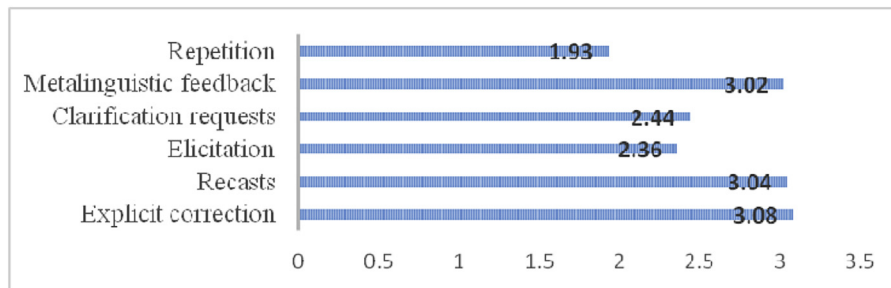
Mean scores of learners' ratings on the effects of OCF type were calculated and presented in [Fig. 1](#), in terms of four subsequent figures about phonological, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic errors. As participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of OCF types on a 4-point Likert scale, with 1 being very poor and 4 being very good, items with mean scores less than 2.5 indicate a less preferred OCF pattern, and those greater than 2.5 indicate a preferred OCF type from the learners' perspectives.

As shown in [Fig. 1](#), CSL learners in this study tended to favour metalinguistic feedback on all types of errors, with means above 2.90, respectively. Moreover, metalinguistic feedback was most preferred for grammatical (3.18) and pragmatic errors (2.96) by CSL learners. Learners also most preferred explicit correction on pronunciation (3.08) and grammatical errors (3.08), followed by lexical (3.04) errors, but they were ambivalent about its role on pragmatic errors (the mean is 2.47, which is around the baseline 2.5). Concerning recasts, interestingly, their positive effect was rated highest on phonological errors (3.04), followed by grammatical (2.70) and lexical errors (2.61). This indicates that recasts were viewed as OCF more useful for phonological errors than for grammatical and lexical errors. However, recasts were viewed as ineffective OCF on pragmatic errors (2.16, which is much less than the baseline 2.5). That is to say, with respect to pragmatic errors, only metalinguistic feedback (2.96) was favoured by CSL learners in this study. Other OCF types such as repetition and elicitation were consistently believed to have varying degrees of negative effects on all error types.

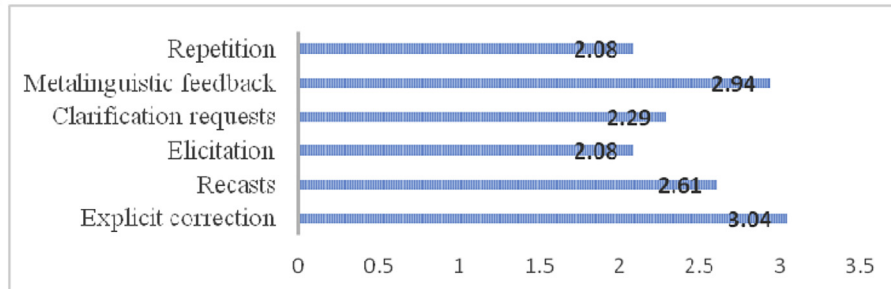
### 4.2. Research question 2: proficiency level, cultural background and OCF preferences

MANOVA was used to examine the effects of learners' cultural background and proficiency level on their preferred OCF type on specific errors. In terms of phonological errors, the main effects of cultural background ( $F(1,155) = 6.865$ ,  $p = 0.010 < 0.05$ ) and proficiency level ( $F(1,155) = 4.872$ ,  $p = 0.029 < 0.05$ ) were only found significant on the effectiveness of clarification requests. Subgroups were used to show that learners from non-CCS group tended to view clarification requests as effective (2.63) to some extent, whereas CCS learners did not agree (2.27). Similarly, clarification requests were considered relatively positive OCF by learners at the intermediate level (2.59) but not by the beginning level group (2.29).

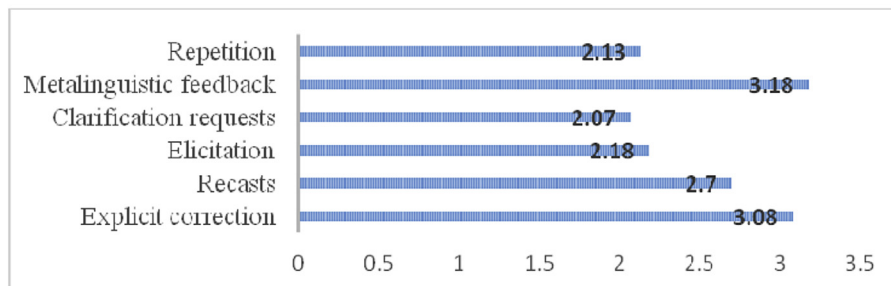
In terms of OCF effects on lexical errors, significance was only found on repetition between two cultural groups ( $F(1,155) = 5.896$ ,  $p = 0.016 < 0.05$ ). Interaction effects of cultural background and proficiency level were also revealed ( $F(1,155) = 5.485$ ,  $p = 0.020 < 0.05$ ). These results indicate that both CCS and non-CCS groups hold negative views on the role of repetition; however, CCS learners (1.95) rated its efficacy even lower than did non-CCS learners (2.22). The interactive effects



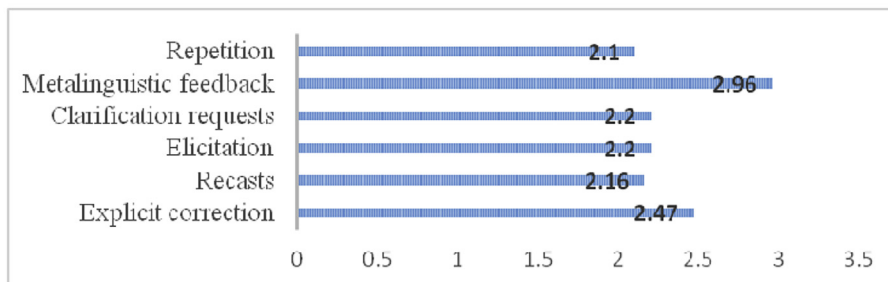
Beliefs about the Effectiveness of CF on Phonological Errors



Beliefs about the Effectiveness of CF on Lexical Errors



Beliefs about the Effectiveness of CF on Grammatical Errors



Beliefs about the Effectiveness of CF on Pragmatic Errors

**Fig. 1.** Beliefs about the effectiveness of CF type on error patterns. Beliefs about the effectiveness of CF on phonological errors. Beliefs about the effectiveness of CF on lexical errors. Beliefs about the effectiveness of CF on grammatical errors. Beliefs about the effectiveness of CF on pragmatic errors.

of the two factors suggest that among all subgroups, CCS learners at an intermediate level had the lowest estimate of the effectiveness of repetition (1.82, much less than the baseline 2.5)

Concerning grammatical errors, no significant difference between groups was revealed on the six OCF types. This result indicates that learners tended to share similar preferences about specific OCF types on grammatical errors, regardless of their language background and level group.

With respect to OCF effects on pragmatic errors, the main effects of cultural background were revealed as significant on explicit correction ( $F(1,155) = 17.484, p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ); elicitation ( $F(1,155) = 4.706, p = 0.032 < 0.05$ ), and clarification requests ( $F(1,155) = 5.175, p = 0.024 < 0.05$ ). Interactive effects of two factors were only found on recasts ( $F(1,155) = 5.489, p = 0.020 < 0.05$ ). CCS learners (2.69) were more likely to prefer explicit correction than were non-CCS learners (2.23). Conversely, CCS learners tended to view elicitation and clarification requests as less effective than did learners from non-CCS group. In addition, recasts were rated lowest by non-CCS learners at an intermediate level.

Overall, discrepancies between preferences of learners with different proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds were only found on specific OCF types for phonological and pragmatic errors. In terms of phonological errors, clarification requests were only preferred by non-CCS learners and intermediate level learners, respectively. Explicit correction on pragmatic errors was only viewed as effective by learners from CCS group.

#### 4.3. Research question 3: possible reasons for learners' preferences on OCF efficacy

The qualitative data were coded and categorized via Nvivo 10, and five themes were generated – linguistic features, cognitive processing, affect, instructional limitation, and cultural perception.

Linguistic features were mentioned most by learners when considering the effects of OCF types. Learners reported that some similar sounds, words and grammar rules are easily confused. For instance, two Korean students mentioned “表现” (to perform) vs. “表达” (to express) and “合适” (suitable) vs. “适合” (suit/suitable) and said that metalinguistic feedback was useful because:

“in my mother tongue, these words are nearly used in the same way with similar meanings, yet it is not the case in Chinese. It would be good to understand their differences, if teachers could explain the rules to us.”

The Spanish students simply stated, “If you do not know their differences, you probably would make the same mistakes again.” In addition, four out of seven learners mentioned that they preferred to work out some errors that they had learned before on their own. However, with respect to pronunciation errors, as the student from Thailand said:

“I prefer teachers to shout out the right pronunciation, or simply to point out ‘you are wrong, it should be said like this’, because when they do that, it is just a good chance to listen to their correct pronunciation again.”

In terms of cognitive processing, three learners talked about their memory capacity and awareness of OCF. The Japanese student said, “Linguistic explanations give me the reason why I make mistakes, and thus [they] help me understand and memorize it.” Similarly, the Spanish student noted, “Further explanations of Chinese culture can stick in my mind and remind me not to make the same errors again.”

OCF awareness refers to whether learners notice the purpose of their teachers' OCF. The Italian student mentioned that occasional recasts on lexical errors were unlikely to be perceived as teachers' corrections to their mistakes but rather as confirmations of meanings.

In terms of affect as a reason, the Japanese learner mentioned clarification requests were the least preferred OCF for her simply because they were likely to make her nervous and embarrassed in front of peers. She stated, “It can be worse if I say it again and the teacher seems still not to get it.”

Instructional reason refers to limited learning time in the classroom. As an intermediate level Italian student noted:

“The teacher correct[ing] my mistakes straightaway by saying the right one is efficient in classroom teaching because class time is always limited, and it is not feasible for us to work out every single error on our own.”

Cultural perspectives are specifically related to learners' preferences for OCF type on pragmatic errors. As the Spanish and US students noted:

“I don't have the cultural understanding of China,” and “I need to know why it is not appropriate to say it like that, and teachers' explanations of why it should be said in that way give me some clues, [but] simply telling me that I am wrong and showing me the correct forms does not work every time on pragmatic errors, particularly some intonations, sort of thing, in conversations.”

Indeed, similar comments were shown in a learner's interview in the current study, which indicated, “class time is always limited, and it is not feasible for us to work out every single error on our own.”

## 5. Discussions

In general, this study found metalinguistic feedback was preferred for all error types by learners. Explicit correction and recasts were endorsed for phonological, lexical and grammatical errors. Only learners from Confucian cultural sphere tended to prefer explicit correction for pragmatic errors, and intermediate level learners preferred clarification requests for phonological errors.

Learners' preference for metalinguistic feedback for grammatical and phonological errors is partly consistent with findings in the previous studies (Katayama, 2007; Papangkorn, 2015). As mentioned in the literature, teachers' OCF could not be facilitative if they did not understand the real nature of the learner's problem (Yoshida, 2010). Metalinguistic feedback's



emphasis on explicit explanation of forms can provide detailed information about why the form should be used in this way (Kaivanpanah et al., 2015).

With respect to pragmatic errors, metalinguistic feedback was favoured by all learners, and explicit correction was preferred by CCS group. The discrepancy is most likely to be attributed to CCS learners' prior knowledge of Chinese culture. Historically, Confucianism significantly influenced these countries such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Chang, 2010; Li, 2005). Thus, when teachers indicated CCS learners' mistakes in pragmatics, the students were more likely to work out the cultural rules themselves rather than expecting further explanation from the teachers. Nevertheless, as pragmatics is "concerned with the appropriateness of utterances given specific situations, speakers and content", learners' awareness of pragmatic errors, even for the advanced learners, is not as strong as that of grammatical mistakes (Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei, 1998, p.233). Thus, learners might not be able to notice that they are wrong if teachers do not identify their errors explicitly (Yoshida, 2010). Similar reasons are also reported in learners' interviews, such as that of a US learner who admitted he did not have a "cultural understandings of China" and preferred some metalinguistic feedback on errors.

Phonological, lexical and grammatical recasts were preferred by learners in this study. This result partly echoes the studies of Katayama (2006); however, it contradicts many other previous studies (Moroishi, 2002; Papangkorn, 2015). Sheen (2007) attributed the problem to the length of recasts, the number of changes, and the focused linguistic targets (Lyster et al., 2013; Sheen, 2007). In the present study, I would argue that recasts can be effective in the specific instructional setting in which "the focus of the recasts is more salient" and "learners are oriented to attending to linguistic forms rather than meaning" (Sheen, 2004, p.253). Based on my classroom observation, the instructional setting tended to be forms-focused. Teachers spent two-thirds of the class hours on teaching and practising linguistic forms rather than on real communicative activities to develop learners' oral skills. Moreover, learners in this study were asked to rate the effectiveness of OCF from groups of OCF instances developed from classroom observation. The questionnaire itself most likely enhanced the salience of language forms for learners. The instances of phonological recasts in the questionnaire were short, primarily focusing on reformulating students' inaccurate pronunciation of a Chinese tone and the initial "sh". Moreover, responses from learners' interviews provide a similar plausible explanation, that is, that the reformulations of errors that recasts offer are a good opportunity to be exposed again to language input. This preference is particularly important for Chinese pronunciation, because both Chinese tones (i.e., a supra-segmental marker used to distinguish the meaning of the same syllable) and syllables must be spoken correctly to communicate (Liu et al., 2011). Therefore, recasts were viewed as OCF more useful for phonological errors than for grammatical and lexical errors in this study.

Clarification requests, elicitation and repetition are generally viewed as ineffective for all error types. This finding contradicts previous studies (Katayama, 2006, 2007; Papangkorn, 2015). According to Lee (2013) and Katayama (2006), the key reason for learners' low preferences for clarification requests and repetition was that they were generally vague; therefore, students did not understand teachers' OCF purpose and did not know how to respond. Some learners thought that the requests indicated their low proficiency level or that the teacher did not give them much attention when they were speaking, which made them uncomfortable or embarrassed (Lee, 2013). In the present study, an interviewed Japanese girl talked about her anxiety and frustration when teachers used clarification requests to prompt her errors. This point suggests that affect might be a factor influencing learners' preferences for OCF. Zhang and Rahimi (2014) concluded that if learners were aware of the purpose and types of OCF, their anxiety did not negatively affect their CF beliefs. However, even when learners are aware of their teachers' reason for using OCF, prompts do not provide sufficient useful information for students to correct their errors (Katayama, 2006; Lee, 2013). This issue might be related to learners' proficiency levels, which are further discussed below.

Unlike the previous studies, which generally found that advanced learners tended to favour repetition and elicitation (Kaivanpanah et al., 2015; Katayama, 2006; Papangkorn, 2015), only clarification requests were only preferred for phonological errors by intermediate level learners in this study. Learners' perceptions of OCF and other input depend upon the communicative value that input conveys (VanPatten, 1996). Accurate pronunciation matters most in communication, particularly in Chinese (Liu et al., 2011). Compared with beginning learners, intermediate level learners might be able to recognize teachers' intentions to correct their inaccurate pronunciation and correct it themselves (Lyster & Ranta, 2012; Panova & Lyster, 2002). It would be interesting to know why intermediate level learners in this study did not favour repetition and elicitation for their errors. One possible reason might be that as Katayama (2006) noted, repetition and elicitation with nonverbal hints are "potentially unclear to learners" and did not facilitate their self-correction (p. 1257). Moreover, some researchers were concerned about the negative effect of teachers repeating incorrect forms (pronunciation in this case), particularly when learners are unaware of teachers' correction purpose (Gooch, Saito, & Lyster, 2016).

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, this study provides an understanding of CSL learners' preferred OCF types on specific errors. Metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction, and recasts were preferred for most error types by learners. In addition, learners' preferences for an OCF type for pragmatic errors provide some new insights for L2 learners' intercultural knowledge development. Different from previous studies about OCF, the questionnaire items used in this study developed from actual classroom observations attempt to seek learners' preferences on a large scale. However, the results have to be interpreted with caution due to some limitations and constraints. The questionnaire approach might raise concerns in terms of validity due to its isolation from an actual instruction environment. Besides, limited qualitative data with only 7 students were collected from interviews. More

participants should be involved in the further study to obtain in-depth insights about learners' OCF preferences. Nevertheless, this study has some implications for L2 language teaching. To use OCF effectively, it is important for teachers to know their students' expectations for the efficacy of OCF and their preferences concerning it. In addition, different types of OCF were suggested for different errors. For instance, both explicit correction and recasts might be good techniques for correcting pronunciation errors, and metalinguistic feedback works well for pragmatic errors. As [Lyster and Ranta \(2012\)](#) noted, the variety of CF types adds to the effectiveness of corrective feedback in L2 development.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the cooperation from teachers and students in Beijing Language and Culture University. Thanks for Xin Jiang, Dingfang Shu and anonymous reviewers' comments and suggestions on the draft.

## Appendix. Oral Feedback Preferences in Chinese Classrooms

The purpose of this survey is to help us discover more-effective ways of providing corrective feedback on learning Chinese. Your voices are important to us. Please answer the questions below. This survey will take approximately 20 min to complete. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

### Part 1 About You

1. Your first language is...?
2. Your age is...?
3. Are you...?  
A. Male B. Female
4. How long have you been studying Chinese?
5. Which class are you in?

### Part 2 Preferences on oral feedback in the classroom

Please tell me to what extent you like or dislike the following oral feedback that teachers provide in the classroom.

	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
学生说：“以前常常我去图书馆。” Student: "Previously used to I go to the library." 老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF:				
1. “以前什么？” Previously what?	1	2	3	4
“嗯——” Mmm (disapproval)	1	2	3	4
2. “以前常常你去？” Previously used to I go ?	1	2	3	4
3. “哦，以前你常常去图书馆？” Oh, previously you used to go to the library?	1	2	3	4
4. “常常”应该放在动词前面。 'Used to' should be used before the verb.	1	2	3	4
5. “语序不对，应该是‘以前我常常去图书馆。’” Wrong sentence order. It should be 'Previously I used to go to the library.'	1	2	3	4
老师说：“你下午做什么？” Teacher: What are you going to do this afternoon?	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
学生说：“去五道口见面朋友。” Student: "I am going to Wudaokou to meet meet friends." 老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF:				
6. “不对，应该说‘见朋友’或‘跟朋友见面’。” It is wrong. You should say 'meet friends' or see friends'	1	2	3	4
7. “去五道口见朋友啊。” You are going to Wudaokou to meet friends.	1	2	3	4
8. “‘见面’后边不能加宾语，‘朋友’是宾语。 No objects were allowed behind 'meet' in Chinese; 'friends' is an object.	1	2	3	4
9. 请再说一遍。 Please say it again.	1	2	3	4
10. “去五道口……” To go to Wudaokou to...	1	2	3	4
11. “见面朋友？” Meet meet friends?	1	2	3	4
老师说：“今天冷不冷？” Teacher: Is it cold today?	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
学生说：“hèn (很)冷。” Student: "It is very (wrong pronunciation with Chinese tones) cold." 老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF:				
12. “嗯。hèn (很)冷。” Yes, it is very (tone correction) cold.	1	2	3	4
13. “hèn?” (incorrect tone repetition)	1	2	3	4
14. “不是'hèn'，是'hèn'，第三声。” it is not 'hèn'; it should be 'hèn', the third tone.	1	2	3	4
15. “今天……？” Today...?	1	2	3	4
16. “注意，‘很’是第三声。” Note the tone. 'very' should be the third tone in Chinese.	1	2	3	4
17. “请再说一遍。” Please say it again.	1	2	3	4

学生A看见老师搬东西，说：“老师，你为什么不请我帮助你？” Student A saw a teacher was carrying something heavy and said, “Teacher, why don't you please ask me for help?	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF: 18. “不要用‘请’，应该用‘叫’，‘叫我来帮你’。” Do not use ‘please’ but just use ‘ask’. Ask me to help you.	1	2	3	4
19. “‘请’是对别人客气，不是对自己客气。‘请’后面不能加‘自己’。” ‘Please’ is a humble word used for others, not for yourself. ‘Please’ cannot be used before ‘me’.	1	2	3	4
20. “不重，所以不让（重读强调）你帮啊。” It is not heavy; that is why I did not ask (emphasis) you for help.	1	2	3	4
21. “什么？再说一遍。” Pardon? Please say it again.	1	2	3	4
22. “请（重读）你帮助我？” Please (emphasis) ask you to help?	1	2	3	4
23. “称自己的时候，用‘请’合适吗？” Is it suitable to use ‘please’ when referring to yourself?	1	2	3	4
老师说：“你怎么来北京的？” Teacher: How did you come to Beijing?	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
学生说：“我坐飞机来了。” Student: “I have come here by plane.				
老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF:老师的纠错： 24. “请再说一遍。” Please say it again.	1	2	3	4
25. “不对，应该说‘我坐飞机来的。’” It is not quite right. You should say I came here by plane.	1	2	3	4
26. “坐飞机来了？” Have come here by plane?	1	2	3	4
27. “你坐飞机来的啊。” You came here by plane.	1	2	3	4
28. “‘了’表变化，这里只表示过去的情况，要用‘的’。” “le” means changes, but here you should use past tense by using ‘de’ in Chinese.	1	2	3	4
29. “坐飞机来……” Came here by plane...	1	2	3	4
学生说：“这sì (是) 我们的xuéxiào (学校)。” Student: This is (wrong pronunciation) our school (wrong tone).	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF: 30. “注意发音和声调。” Please note the pronunciation and tones.	1	2	3	4
31. “这shì (是，重读)我们的(xuéxiào)学校。” This is (pronunciation correction, emphasis) our school (tone correction).	1	2	3	4
32. “请再说一遍。” Please say it again.	1	2	3	4
33. “这sì (是)?” This is (wrong pronunciation)?	1	2	3	4
34. “发音不对，shì (是)不是sì, xué (学) 不是xué”。	1	2	3	4
35. “shì (是) 声母sh要卷舌。 When pronouncing the initial ‘sh’ in ‘shì’, your tongue should be rolled up.	1	2	3	4
老师说：“为什么听写不出来？” Teacher: How could you do not know the words when taking the dictation?	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
学生说：“我不是预习了吗？” Student: “I did review the words, didn't I?				
老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF: 36. “不可以跟老师这样说。”	1	2	3	4
You cannot speak to your teacher in this way. 37. 什么？请再说一遍。 What? Please say it again.	1	2	3	4
38. 不是……吗？‘是’反问句，有不满、埋怨的意思。‘didn't I?’ is a rhetorical question. It means unsatisfied and complaining.	1	2	3	4
39. 这样说不礼貌。” It is not polite to say in this way.	1	2	3	4
40. “哦，你预习了啊。” Oh, you did review the words.	1	2	3	4
41. “你觉得你这样跟老师说话合适吗？” Do you think it is ok to talk with your teacher in this way?	1	2	3	4
42. 什么？不是预习了吗？” Pardon? “I did review the words, didn't I?”	1	2	3	4
老师说：“你的同桌去哪儿了？” Teacher: Where is your classmate who sits next to you?	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very Good
学生说：“他去家了。” Student: “He went home.				
老师的纠错：The teacher's oral CF: 43. “去家了？” Went home?	1	2	3	4
44. 哦，他回家了啊。” Oh, he came home.	1	2	3	4
45. “不对，应该说‘他回家了。’” It is wrong. You should say ‘he came home’ in Chinese.	1	2	3	4
46. “我们说过，‘家’前面的动词是……。” We mentioned before, the verb before ‘home’ should be ...	1	2	3	4
47. “他……” He...	1	2	3	4
48. “再说一遍。” Please say it again.	1	2	3	4

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