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Exploring non-native English-speaking teachers' cognitions about corrective feedback in teaching English oral communication



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ABSTRACT

Exploring teachers' cognitions is a significant endeavour, as teachers' cognitions inform their classroom practice, and, in turn, their cognitions are influenced by their teaching experiences. This study explored the differences between novice and experienced non-native English-speaking teachers' cognitions about corrective feedback (CF) in teaching English oral communication. Data were collected from 20 novice and 20 experienced teachers through a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. Results show statistically significant differences between the two groups. Teachers' personal experiences influenced their cognitions about the necessity of CF and the effectiveness of different CF types and timing. Interview data show teachers' teaching experiences raise their awareness of the role of mediating factors, namely learner factors, error frequency, types, and severity, target form difficulty, instructional focus, and task types in their cognitions about the necessity, timing, and types of CF. In contrast, novice teachers, partially due to their insufficient teaching experiences, had rigid cognitions about CF. Novice teachers attributed their cognitions to their personal language learning experiences. As a pedagogical implication, we recommend that student teachers be provided with opportunities for acquiring theoretical understanding about CF and translating it into classroom practice.

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1. Introduction

Teaching is a dynamic, complex, and situated activity which requires teachers' online decision-making (Kumaravadivelu, 2014). One such online decision making is providing corrective feedback (CF), which is an incidental rather than designed aspect of language teaching in most cases. When learners make errors, teachers usually decide spontaneously whether to provide or withhold CF, about CF strategies, and also about the timing of providing CF. Evidently, these decisions are influenced by teachers' cognitions, an amalgam of "what they know, believe, and think" about teaching (Borg, 2003, p. 81; see also Borg, 2011).

However, research on teacher cognition about CF and specifically how teachers CF cognition is (trans)formed is scant. In her recent review, Basturkmen (2012) has proposed that research on teacher cognition should move beyond designed aspects of teaching to incidental aspects (e.g., CF) and from case studies to comparative studies (e.g., novice and experienced teachers). She has argued that most research has employed case studies, which have yielded contradictory findings, and that

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there is not enough research on teachers' cognitions about the incidental aspects of teaching (e.g., CF). More importantly, in the general teacher education and language teacher education literature, it has been documented that experienced and novice teachers are different in classroom decision-making (see e.g., Akbari & Tajik, 2010; Pajares, 1992). Nevertheless, it is unclear whether such a pattern would be typically embodied in teachers' cognition about CF. This disciplinary knowledge gap and also the need for a new methodological approach motivated this research project. This study endeavours to fill this lacuna by exploring the differences between experienced and novice teachers' cognitions about three fundamental aspects of CF, namely necessity, types, and timing of CF (Ellis, 2009) to contribute to our understanding of subtleties of teacher cognition trans(formation) about CF in order to provide potential insights into language teacher education.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research findings on the effectiveness of CF and teachers' CF beliefs

Studies have been undertaken on ESL/EFL teachers' cognitions about the diverse aspects of their practice (Goh, Zhang, Koh, & Ng, 2005), including teaching grammar (Borg & Burns, 2008), reading (Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014), writing (Ferris, 2014), listening (Graham, Santos, & Francis-Brophy, 2014), speaking (Baleghizadeh & Nasrollahi Shahri, 2014), and pronunciation (e.g., Baker, 2014). However, a few studies have explored teachers' cognitions about CF and how such cognitions are (trans)formed (e.g., Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Kamiya, 2014; Roothoof, 2014).

Earlier research (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997) have developed taxonomies of CF types that teachers used in their practice and explored: 1) Teachers' rationale for CF (Fanselow, 1977), 2) attitude towards CF (Nystrom, 1983), 3) awareness, 4) beliefs, and 5) perception about CF (Long, 1977), and 6) their reasoning for providing different types of CF (Chaudron, 1986; Nystrom, 1983). This line of inquiry into CF has been extended by experimental studies that examined the differential impact of various CF types on learners' CF uptake, production, and learning (e.g., Rahimi & Zhang, 2013; Nassaji, 2013; Shegar, Zhang, & Low, 2013; Rassaei, 2013).

Taken together, meta-analytic reviews of research on the effectiveness of CF (e.g. Li, 2010) show that CF is effective and the effectiveness of CF is mediated by instructional setting variables, student variables, target form variables, and teacher variables, among others. Additionally, classroom CF research (see Brown, 2014, for a meta-analytic review) demonstrates that recasts comprise 57% of all CF, whereas prompts account for 30% (Brown, 2014). Brown also identified moderators (e.g., student variables, teacher variables, classroom setting variables) that may affect teachers' CF provision. Echoing prior research results (e.g., Mackey, Polio, & McDonough, 2004), Brown's synthesis revealed that target forms (i.e., phonological, grammatical, lexical, or pragmatic errors that teachers' correct) influenced teachers' provision of CF, and that syntactic errors obtained the highest percentage of CF (43%).

Moreover, Basturkmen's (2012) review of research on the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices yielded contradictory findings. The review reveals the mediating role of context in, and constraints on, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices; correspondences were found mainly between experienced teachers' stated beliefs and practices and also between teachers' beliefs about and practices of planned aspects of teaching. There was not enough research to reach conclusions on the correspondence or lack of correspondence between teachers' beliefs and practices of unplanned aspects of teaching (e.g., CF). Basturkmen (2012) argued that this contradictory finding can be partially attributed to case study methodology used in research to date. She proposed that research move beyond case studies. For instance, she recommended further research on the beliefs of experienced versus inexperienced teachers and on the teachers' beliefs in relation to planned (e.g., task design) vs. incidental (e.g., CF) aspects of their teaching (see Rahimi & Zhang, 2013).

2.2. Research on novice and experienced language teachers' cognitions about language teaching

Research into teacher cognitions is significant, as what teachers believe and practice are key to their success in teaching and student success in learning (Barnard & Burns, 2012). In fact, research into teachers' cognitions and especially about factors that influence (trans)forming such cognitions is imperative for informing teacher education, as student teachers' cognitions are unlikely to be influenced by reading research articles and assigned reading materials alone (Junqueira & Kim, 2013; Kagan, 1992; Va'squez & Harvey, 2010). One factor that is shown to influence teachers' cognitions is experience, particularly their previous teaching experience (Mok, 1994) and language learning experience (Borg, 2009; Farrell, 2009, 2014). Although studies exploring novice and experienced teachers' cognitions in the general teacher education field abound (e.g., Doganay & Ozturk, 2011; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Peterson & Comeaux, 1987; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), and there are a growing number of studies on language teachers' cognitions (e.g., Akbari & Tajik, 2012; Akyel, 1997; Gao & Ma, 2011; Gatbonton, 2008; Mok, 1994; Rahmani Doqaruni, 2015), studies comparing novice and experienced teachers' cognitions about CF are scant in the literature.

In the field of language teacher education, studies comparing experienced and novice teachers have shown differences in teachers' pedagogical practices. For example, Akyel's (1997) comparative study of experienced and novice ESL teachers revealed that while novice teachers were concerned about sustaining the smooth flow of their instructional activities and appropriateness of their instructional strategies and considered learners' incomplete responses and initiations as barriers, experienced teachers showed flexibility in their instructional strategies and considered a wider range of instructional options in their practices. Richards, Li, and Tang' (1998) study of L2 reading teachers showed that novice teachers had a limited

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