A Review and Prospect of the Research on English Teacher Feedback in China from 2011 to 2021

Shanshan Liu¹, Yujie Su²
(¹²School of Foreign Studies, Wenzhou University, 325035)

Abstract: This study uses the literature research method to search the domestic literature on English teacher feedback from 2011 to 2021, and reviews the research on the three main functions of English teacher feedback, namely language function, cognitive function, and emotional function, so as to explore the current situation of domestic research on teacher feedback. The results show that: First, in terms of research methods, the study of teacher feedback mainly adopts the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, and reveals the characteristics of the use of teacher feedback in Chinese English classrooms. Secondly, in terms of research objects, the research on teacher feedback in China is biased towards the research in universities and high school classrooms. Finally, in terms of research perspectives, the study of teacher feedback is mainly conducted from the perspective of classification, characteristics and functions of feedback. This paper also finds existing problems in the current research and prospects for future trends in development for future research.

Keywords: teacher feedback; literary review; research trends; English teachers

DOI: https://doi.org/10.61414/jeti.v5i4.119

1 Introduction

Foreign language classroom discourse is not only the main medium for teachers and students to complete their teaching and learning plans, but also an important form of expression of students’ foreign language input and output. Therefore, classroom discourse plays an irreplaceable role in classroom teaching and students’ language acquisition (Liu

¹Liu Shanshan, Yichun, Jiangxi Province, graduate student, Wenzhou University
²Su Yujie, Pingyang, Zhejiang Province. lecturer, Ph. D. candidate, Wenzhou University
As a part of classroom discourse, feedback language is often studied separately. In order to understand the research status of feedback language of Chinese teachers, the author retrieved all the literature related to teacher feedback language research from 2011 to 2021. Through reading, it was found that domestic scholars analyzed the types and characteristics of teacher feedback language in English classrooms mainly through empirical research, and further explored the main functions of these feedback phrases in the classroom. Generally speaking, the research on the function of feedback mainly focuses on three aspects, namely, the study on the linguistic, cognitive, and emotional functions of feedback. Therefore, the author summarizes and evaluates the three main directions of the research, and finally gives some suggestions for future research according to the current research status.

2 Overview of teacher feedback

Since the 1970s, teachers’ discourse in classroom interaction has become the focus of scholars’ attention. In 1975, the Birmingham School led by Sinclair studied the dialogue between teachers and students in classroom teaching and came up with a classic dialogue model, namely Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) three-stage communication model. Including the teacher’s Initiation, student’s Response, and teacher’s Feedback (Wang, 2014). In this structure, the teacher feedback speech stage has attracted the attention of domestic and foreign scholars. Therefore, researchers have carried out much research on teacher feedback and made some achievements in this field. In order to better understand the content of teacher feedback, the author will comb and analyze teacher feedback from three aspects: definition, classification, and function.

2.1 Definition of teacher feedback language

Teacher feedback refers to teachers’ responses to students’ verbal performance (McCarthy, 2002). Wiseman and Hunt (2001) define teacher feedback as information provided by teachers to students orally or in writing so that they can understand their learning status. Berlo (1960) proposed that a teacher’s body language, such as nodding, smiling, clapping, or any other physical movement, might send a message to the students. In general, teacher feedback can be defined as the teacher’s response to students’ verbal performance, both verbal and non-verbal response.

2.2 Classification of teacher feedback

If teacher feedback is classified according to different classification criteria, the classification results will be different. According to the function of feedback, feedback can be divided into positive feedback and negative feedback. According to the object of feedback, it can be divided into evaluative feedback and discourse feedback. According to the number of feedback ways contained in the feedback, it can be divided into single feedback and mixed feedback.

As shown in Table 1, the simplest classification is Nunan’s (1991) classification of feedback into

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification Criteria</th>
<th>Representative figure</th>
<th>type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role of feedback</td>
<td>Nunan (1991)</td>
<td>Positive Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Formal feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Content feedback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of feedback ways</td>
<td>Lin Zhengjun and Zhou Sha (2011)</td>
<td>Single feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
positive feedback and negative feedback according to its function. Negative feedback is also called error-correcting feedback. Cullen (2002) divides teacher feedback into evaluative feedback and discourse feedback according to the object of feedback. Richards (1994) divided feedback into formal feedback and content feedback. The essence of feedback was consistent with Cullen’s classification, but the expression was different. Lyster and Ranta (1997) proposed six kinds of error-correcting feedback, namely, explicit error correction, statement, request for clarification, metalinguistic feedback, induction, and repetition. Based on the classification of error-correcting feedback by Lyster and Ranta, Lin and Zhou (2011) divided the feedback into 9 types of unitary feedback and 7 types of mixed feedback according to the number of feedback ways contained in the feedback. Single feedback refers to teacher feedback that contains only one type of feedback, including positive feedback, repetition, restatement, explicit error correction, request for clarification, induction, metalinguistic feedback, extension, and evaluation. Mixed teacher feedback refers to feedback of two or more types, including positive feedback plus restatement, positive feedback plus repetition, positive feedback plus metalinguistic feedback, positive feedback plus evaluation, repetition plus evaluation, and repetition plus extended. According to the classification of different scholars in different periods, it can be found that the classification of feedback has a wide range, and it has realized the combination of qualitative and quantitative research. At the same time, this also shows that the classification criteria of feedback language are not uniform.

2.3 Function of teacher feedback

Different scholars have obtained different functions based on different research objects. According to Allwright (1991), feedback has nine functions: Affirmation and recognition; Criticism and blame; Pointing out mistakes; Naming the type of error; Narrative area; Making demonstrate and illustrate; Indicating corrections and fixes; Taking remedial measures; Increasing opportunities. Tsui (2000) makes an analysis from the perspective of pragmatics and believes that teacher feedback has four important functions: Expressing praise and praise; A response or an opinion to the other person; Leave room for the other person; Ask for the other person’s point of view and perception. Based on Vygotsky’s (1978) scaffolding theory, Xu (2006) analyzed and studied the function of feedback language and concluded that teacher feedback language has two functions, namely cognitive function and emotional function. On the basis of Yan’s (2011) classification of the functions of classroom feedback of excellent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Feedback language function</th>
<th>Function classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criticism and blame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make demonstrations and instructions</td>
<td>Cognitive function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indicate corrections and fixes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take remedial measures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English teachers, the functions of teachers’ feedback of different scholars can be summarized (see Table 2):

According to the classification of functional studies by several scholars, the functions of teacher feedback can be summarized into the following three categories: 1. Language function; 2. Cognitive function; 3. Emotional function. Match the types of feedback with the functions. Different types of feedback have their own preferences in terms of functions. The language function of feedback tends to use positive feedback, discursive feedback and mixed feedback. The cognitive function tends to use evaluative feedback and mixed feedback; positive or negative feedback, discourse feedback and mixed feedback tend to be used in emotional function.

### 3 A study of teachers’ feedback language

Using “Teacher feedback Language” and “Classroom feedback language” as the main topics, the author searched all the literature related to classroom feedback language of English teachers published from 2011 to 2021 in China Journal Full-text Database (CNKI), including 156 journals and master’s degree theses, of which 48 were journals, accounting for 31%. 108 master’s degree papers, accounting for 69% of the total. The distribution time of their publication is shown in Figure 1:

As can be seen from Figure 1, the research on teachers’ feedback in China shows a steady upward trend on the whole, which is reflected in the number and field of research respectively. In the early stage of the research, the definition and classification of the feedback language were studied, and then the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Feedback language function</th>
<th>Function classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allwright (1991)</td>
<td>Pointing out mistakes</td>
<td>Language function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name the type of error</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsui (2000)</td>
<td>Expressing praise and praise</td>
<td>Emotional function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A response or an opinion to the other person</td>
<td>Cognitive function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leave room for the other person</td>
<td>Language function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask for the other person’s views and perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional function</td>
<td>Emotional function</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: The publication trend of feedback language research literature in the past ten years
function of the feedback language was studied. Through literature retrieval and reading, it is found that domestic scholars’ research on teacher feedback language from 2011 to 2021 basically focuses on the three aspects to explore the functional role of teacher feedback language in the classroom.

3.1 Research on language function

Chinese scholars’ research on the language function of teacher feedback mainly focuses on two aspects. The first is to study the relationship between the quantity and quality of feedback; The second is to study the relationship between the variety of feedback language and students’ intelligibility input and output.

In exploring the relationship between quantity and quality of feedback, Yan (2011), Zeng (2013), Zhang (2020) and other scholars analyzed the relationship between quantity and quality of classroom feedback of middle school teachers. The research shows that the quality of teachers’ feedback is an important factor influencing students’ oral language output. As to which type of feedback has the highest quality, Wu Jingtian (2020), through his research on the classroom feedback of excellent teachers in junior middle school, found that not all classroom feedback of teachers can promote students' oral output, but the inductive feedback of unitary feedback can best help students to think positively. Luo (2018) believes that discursive feedback can best promote students’ discourse output and classroom interaction. Meng (2015) pointed out that in positive feedback, questioning is most conducive to students' classroom discourse output, while restatement in negative feedback is more conducive to students' classroom discourse output.

In the study of the relationship between the diversity of feedback language and the input and output of students’ intelligibility, He (2013), Mei and Long (2017) argued that the types of teacher’s feedback language had different effects on students’ discourse output. Kang (2011) and Qiao (2014) found that feedback diversity can greatly increase students' intelligibility input and promote students’ discourse output.

Of course, in their research, scholars have also found some problems. For example, Han(2014) investigated and studied the classroom feedback of junior high school English teachers and found that the current classroom feedback of junior high school English did not fully meet the requirements for teachers' professional ability development set out in the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education. Cao (2016) made a systematic study on the feedback language of junior middle school English classrooms, and pointed out that the teacher feedback language lacks diversity and intelligibility; Students have too few opportunities for language output.

Although the above studies all involve the relationship between teacher feedback and student language input and output, the analysis basically stays on the quantity of teacher feedback, and also shows that the diversity of feedback types or the use of mixed feedback has a positive effect on language output. The research on the quality of feedback should also pay attention to the feedback itself, such as the syntax, vocabulary, and grammar.

3.2 Research on cognitive function

In the study of cognitive function, domestic scholars mainly focus on the strategic and guiding role of feedback language in class.

In terms of strategic research, Jiang (2016) studied the feedback language in the reading class of excellent English teachers in high school and found that excellent English teachers attach importance to the role of feedback language in improving and promoting students' language ability, and can flexibly use various feedback strategies. Qin (2020) found that teachers demonstrated the cognitive scaffolding function of teacher feedback mainly by reducing the difficulty of learning tasks, labeling key features and demonstrating these strategies. Many scholars
have also conducted comparative studies to explore the differences in teacher feedback use strategies at different stages. For example, Zhao (2019), and Wu Xiaodan (2017), through a comparative study of novice teachers and expert teachers, found that expert teachers used mixed feedback more often, while novice teachers used unitary feedback more often in the use of feedback strategies.

In terms of guidance, Chen and Zhou (2012) investigated the attitude of high school students towards the feedback of English teachers with a questionnaire, and the survey results showed that students prefer teachers to guide and inspire in a friendly way, which inspired teachers to use the feedback strategy in class as necessary, and at the same time pay attention to the way of guidance.

Through the analysis of the research on cognitive function, it can be found that teachers should flexibly use the cognitive function of feedback when choosing feedback, pay attention to the strategy and guidance of feedback, and increase the use of content feedback and mixed feedback, so as to diversify the feedback. At the same time, specific feedback language can be used to increase the targeted guidance for students' learning and improve the learning quality. This provides a strong basis for teachers to strengthen the study of the theoretical knowledge of feedback language.

3.3 Research on emotional function

Teacher feedback not only affects students’ behavior but also affects students’ learning psychology. These effects are mainly reflected in the impact on students’ learning motivation and learning emotions. Domestic scholars have made some relevant studies on the influence of different types of feedback on students’ emotions.

Li Kejia (2016) found that positive classroom feedback can promote students’ interest in English learning and improve their enthusiasm and initiative in English learning. Li Rui (2020) explored the relationship between English major teachers’ feedback and freshmen’s sense of self-efficacy through empirical research. The research finds that positive or negative feedback will affect students' sense of self-efficacy. The more times the teacher used negative feedback, the lower the students' self-efficacy in English learning.

Some scholars have also explored the emotional function of feedback language based on different theoretical bases, such as the politeness principle (Wang, 2011), and Long's interaction theory (Wang, 2018). Wan (2014) found that teachers’ nonverbal feedback behavior can also help students to have a positive attitude toward teachers, learning and themselves.

From the research on the emotional function of feedback language, it can be found that students’ learning motivation, interest and self-confidence are closely related to teachers’ feedback language. Students tend to expect teachers to give positive feedback to reduce the sense of learning anxiety. However, the current research does not take into account the differences in students’ learning levels. In addition, nonverbal feedback is also an important factor affecting students' emotions, which Chinese scholars seldom pay attention to in their research. The current domestic research on teacher feedback mainly focuses on the cognitive development of college students and high school students. Middle school students are in a critical period of emotional development. A large number of practices have proved that middle school is an important period of great physical and mental changes for students, and students in this period pay more attention to teacher feedback.

4 Research trends and problems of teacher feedback language

Based on this, by reading and analyzing the retrieved articles, the author will analyze the research trends and problems from three aspects: research methods, research objects and research perspectives.

4.1 Research methods
In the above research on teacher feedback, the author finds that in the past ten years, there have been a lot of empirical studies on teacher feedback, most of which are a combination of quantitative research and qualitative research. These researches reveal some characteristics of teacher feedback in Chinese English classrooms to some extent, and provide some valuable experience for teachers’ professional development in the future. It is beyond doubt that understanding teachers’ classroom practices is vital to establishing a connection between research and practice, which is why related studies typically recruit front-line teachers as subjects (Hong, 2021). However, the author also found the following problems through the research.

First of all, most of the studies are sporadic case studies without systematic large-scale studies, so the data obtained are one-sided. Secondly, when conducting qualitative research on teacher feedback, the collected classroom corpus is less than one or two lessons, and more than ten lessons, which lacks the standardization of qualitative research. Finally, researches on feedback mainly focus on the quantity of feedback and explore its function, and seldom pay attention to the characteristics of feedback discourse itself, such as the lexical, syntactic and grammatical features of the discourse. Teachers’ feedback is random in the classroom. According to the different classroom environment, teachers’ discourse will change to some extent. In addition, if the natural survey method is not adopted when the researcher enters the classroom for observation, the subjective factors of the teacher will also affect the data of the study.

4.2 Research objects

At present, the research on teacher feedback mainly focuses on university teachers and high school teachers, but rarely studies junior high schools and primary schools. Researchers ignore the primary and junior middle schools probably because the teachers in this stage of the English teaching classroom cannot fully use English teaching. However, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, more than 100 million primary school students and 50 million junior middle school students will be enrolled in schools in 2021, much more than the number of high schools and universities. That is, at present, English teaching in primary and middle schools involves the largest number of teachers and students. Therefore, scholars should pay more attention to the study of classroom feedback language in primary and junior high schools. In addition, primary and junior high school is a critical period for students’ language development and emotional development, so it is extremely important for both teachers and students to study the influence of feedback language on them.

4.3 Research Perspectives

In terms of research, Chinese classroom feedback is mainly studied from the perspective of classification and function of feedback. Some scholars conduct research from the perspective of comparative study. For example, they compare the differences in feedback language between novice teachers and expert teachers. There are also very few scholars who study from the perspective of a specific type of lesson, such as reading and speaking lessons. The research content mainly focuses on the effect of teacher feedback and its influence on students’ language, cognition, and emotion. There are a few aspects about the commonality of teacher feedback language in the same lesson type and the difference of teacher feedback language in different lesson type. In addition, the main research point of view is from the teacher’s perspective. It was suggested that the current literature research on feedback should shift from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered model, with particular emphasis on the development of student feedback literacy (Xu et al., 2021). Therefore, the author believes that from the perspective of students, we can establish the teacher feedback expected by students through investigation and interview, apply it to the classroom, and judge the importance of teacher
feedback through the classroom effect before and after.

5 Conclusion
Throughout the research on English teacher feedback in China from 2011 to 2021, scholars have made gratifying achievements in terms of research quantity, research perspective and research object. In the past ten years, Chinese scholars have made some useful explorations in the research of feedback language. The analysis of these researches is helpful for further research based on the shortcomings of the researches, and also helps to guide the classroom teaching practice and improve the teaching quality of teachers. Due to the limited research ability of the author, this review only collected and analyzed the research results of journals and master’s academic papers in the past ten years, which can only represent the research status in this field in the past ten years. In order to fully understand the development process of teacher feedback language in China, it is necessary to start from the 1990s. To address the shortcomings of the past 10 years of research, future research can focus on the following three areas:(1) Explore the characteristics of feedback discourse itself, such as the lexical, syntactic and grammatical features of the discourse. (2) Pay more attention to the study of classroom feedback language in primary and junior high schools. (3) Try to find the commonality of teacher feedback language in the same lesson type and the difference of teacher feedback language in different lesson type.

References
Han, S.S. (2014). A survey and research on Teachers’ Feedback Language in Junior Middle School English Classroom under the New Curriculum Standards (Master Dissertation, Hebei University)
Li, K. J. (2016). The influence of Classroom Discourse feedback of senior high school English teachers on students' English Learning Motivation (Master Dissertation, Yan ’an University).
Li, R. (2020). A study on the correlation between teacher feedback in college English classroom and freshmen’s self-efficacy
in English learning. *University Education* (06),133-135.


Qiao, D. F. (2014). A study on teacher feedback in junior Middle School English Classroom (Master Dissertation, Inner Mongolia Normal University)


Wu, J. T. (2020). A study on the influence of Teacher feedback on Students' Spoken English Output in Junior High School English Excellent Course (Master Dissertation, Changchun Normal University)


