

# Negative Feedback as a Facilitative Device for the Acquisition of English Questions by Chinese College Students: An Interactional Perspective

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**Abstract**—This research, based on Pienemann’s “Developmental Stage of English Question”, immerses English questions learning in negative feedback interaction and focuses on the effect of English questions development with different types of negative feedback. We conduct two experiments and attempt to re-evaluate the effectiveness of negative feedback and observe their different impacts. Our research concerns (1) Do learners who receive negative feedback in a communicative context prompt their performance to higher stages of question development than learners who do not receive? (2) Do learners who receive negative feedback progress to a higher level of question development than learners who do not?(3) Is it more effective to provide explicit negative feedback, recast, and modified output during English questions learning? After analyzing longitudinal data, we find that (1) feedback in interaction can assist students to move from lower stage to higher stage but cannot help them construct complicated questions; (2) explicit negative feedback proves to be more effective than other feedback types and we also analyze theoretically their underlying reasons. Our research supports, with empirical study, that “Focus on Form-Function” is effective in English questions learning.

**Index Terms**—English questions learning, negative feedback interaction, effective, focus on Form-Function

## I. INTRODUCTION

A large number of researches investigating the significant relations between conversational interaction and second language (L2) admit that interaction in language teaching plays a facilitative role in second language acquisition (SLA) (Long, 1991; Ellis, 2006, Gass, 2003). On the one hand, based on the theoretical support of Hymes’ communicative competence and Hallidayan Functional Grammar, task-based language teaching becomes a pretty popular method at Universities in China today. On the other hand, the notion of “focus on form” (Long, 1998), which widely prevailed but soon was criticized in period of formal grammar, revives with modification, i.e. teaching form in an interactive context. Interaction encompasses Input process and the Output process. But for quite a long time, input was regarded as the motive to acquisition of language (Krashen, 1985) but Long(1981, 1983, 1996), in his researches, renewed the concept by putting forwards “Interactional Hypothesis” in which he views the engine for acquisition development lies in utterance interaction. For him, “input” only means supply of “form and structure” to L2 learners, but ideal acquisition process needs “interaction” which means input and output are both crucial for learners’ acquisition of “function of form and structure” in context. His theory attempts to emphasize that information and feedback given by teachers in communicative interaction makes learner selectively concentrate on particular language forms. Such noticing leads learners to focus on their formal errors and reformulate the modified output which is considered relevant to effective language acquisition. As a result, scholars are now attempting to re-evaluate teaching focusing on form with a different perspective, i.e. teaching language form with the help of feedback in contextual interaction between teacher and students.

The purpose of this study is to investigate feedback effects in a typical EFL class at a University in China. Our investigation chooses English Question Sentences as the research object and observe the effect of formal teaching in a communicative context with provision of interactional negative feedback. By collecting empirical data of college students’ formal construction performance of English Questions, we evaluate in detail how effective English Questions could be acquired in a communicative context.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Studies on Interaction Hypothesis

Krashen’s (1985) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis suggests that for language acquisition, input must be comprehensible to learners in order to be understood and processed. According to Krashen, the input available to learners must be beyond their existing level of proficiency so that it provides new L2 skills by surpassing learners’ current interlanguage and thus he formulates “i+1” theory, in which he attaches more importance to input. However, Swain (1995) observed that input immersion failed to make L2 learners achieve native-like proficiency despite of

considerable exposure to comprehensible input. This observation led her to formulate “output hypothesis”. She (1993) later argued that a crucial component of the output hypothesis is “pushed output”, and she wrote learners “need to be pushed to make use of their resources; they need to have their linguistic abilities stretched to their fullest; they need to reflect on their output and consider ways of modifying it to enhance comprehensibility, appropriateness, and accuracy” (Swain, 1993, p158). She regarded that “focus on meaning” alone may be insufficient to facilitate L2 formal learning because students are still possible to successfully convey meaning despite of ungrammatical or pragmatically inappropriate forms. Then a large number of scholars support her view from different perspectives. VanPatten (2010) put forwards Interaction Hypothesis which claims that through interaction, learners may be required to notice things they wouldn’t notice otherwise. Students are able to notice their language form while interacting and noticing will affect L2 acquisition. It is quite evident that Output and Input are both considered important in Interaction Hypothesis.

#### **Studies on Attention and Noticing**

Noticing is defined as the detection and registration of stimuli in short-term memory. In some models of SLA researches, noticing is the condition under which input becomes intake (Gass, 2003). In other researches, noticing is a synonym to attention as VanPatten (2010) holds that attention is a cognitive process involving the ability to select and focus on particular stimuli from the environment while ignoring others. Attention, since it was put forwards, has been attracting the interest of EFL researchers, and they agree that attention plays a major role in some SLA hypotheses. The general principles of attention is that (1) learners must actively attend to linguistic stimuli in order to learn; and (2) attention may affect what learners can detect in the input at any given time. And what Swain empathized about “focus on form” is based on learners’ ability to “selectively attend” to stimuli while interacting. So if learners are encouraged to notice what they have produced while interacting, they will acquire more.

#### **Studies on Negative Feedback**

There is no denying that feedback could trigger learners’ more attention on language output and of course becomes an integral part of Interaction. Feedback is defined as the information in view to improving, modifying students’ language output. Feedback can be implicit and thus less intrusive in communicative process, but feedback can also be explicit with a conspicuous response to an error. Provision of implicit negative feedback within conversational interaction or rather interactional feedback may draw learners’ attention to language forms by making certain parts of language more salient during a communicative task. Long (1981) clarified the feedback as (a) clarification requests (*What? What did you say?*), (b) comprehension checks (*Did you understand?*), (c) confirmation checks (*Is this what you mean?*), and (d) *or*-choice questions in which a native speaker asks of a question, and immediately provides the non-natives with a range of possible alternatives (*What time is your class? At 3:00 or 4:00?*). Lyster (2002) classified the negative feedback into six types: recasts, explicit correctness, elicitation, clarification requests and metalinguage clues. These conversational devices are assumed to make it easier for L2 learners to comprehend the content of the conversation. Our research and experiment was carried out basing on Lyster’s classification.

Feedback can be positive and encouraging, but in more circumstances, it is negative and discomforting. Long (1996), Schachter (1984) proved that negative feedback contributes to L2 development by virtue of providing information for learners about the comprehensibility of their utterances and attracting their attention to language form. McDonough (2005) discovered negative feedback may draw learners’ focus on language forms they have produced and help them to re-detect what they have not acquired in their L2 knowledge system or to take notice of specific linguistic forms in the subsequent input.

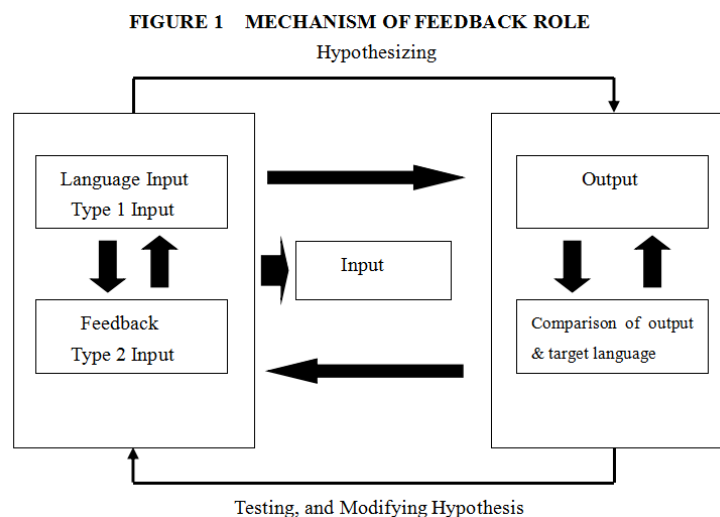
Negative feedback is used to trigger modified output in progress of interaction. A wealth of scholars devoting to the potential contribution of modified output to L2 development makes their findings insightful. Levelt’s (1989) model of speech production accounts for the generation of fluent speech by virtue of processing speech production in terms of three components: the message component, the grammatical component, and the phonological component. Izumi (2003) discovered when learners modify their output, they either generate a new message or reprocess their original message, both of which trigger additional grammatical encoding. Negative feedback is able to push learners to focus on form and improve learners’ speaking performance.

#### **Studies on Interactional Feedback**

With the fruitful studies and findings on Interaction and Feedback in SLA, studies on interactional feedback investigate the negotiated interaction between native and nonnative speakers or between two non-native speakers in the development of L2. Long & Robinson (1998) found that negotiation elicits feedback that may increase learners’ awareness of some linguistic forms. Leeman (2003) claimed interactional feedback offers the learner positive or negative evidence; positive evidence provides correct information about the original utterance, while negative feedback provides evidence to the learner that something in the utterance is ungrammatical or unacceptable. To push students to focus on form without diverting attention from the communicative content, teachers often provide implicit corrective feedback or interactional feedback during conversation. Lyster (2006) held that instructional activities and interactional feedback acting as a counterbalance to a classroom’s predominant communicative orientation are proved to be more effective than instructional activities. Long et al. (2006) in their research used coding as a way of categorizing the output produced by EFL learners between locutors in interaction of a discourse. Interactional feedback offers researchers a new horizon to study SLA.

#### **Basic Principle of Feedback’s Facilitative Role in SLA**

Annett (1969) regarded that feedback is equipped with three functions in terms of task-based language learning. (1) Stimulation: to stimulate learners' efforts of learning. (2) Enhancement: to enhance and reinforce learners' performance. (3) Information/Knowledge: facilitative to correct learners' mistakes. Carroll (1995) elaborated the role of feedback in SLA. He distinguished language input as TYPE 1 input and TYPE 2. The former means learners acquire input from their environment, and the latter refers to the negative input including both implicit and explicit ones. Explicit feedback will show errors in L2 and inform speakers of them. While implicit feedback refuses to provide obvious corrections and instead it elicits elaboration and clarification. Carroll's mechanism of feedback role is illustrated as FIGURE1.



### Reviews on English Questions

A myriad of researches indicate that with the help of interaction in context learners are able to be motivated to modify their output of English question sentence, such as Long (1999), Long & Philip (1998), and McDonough, (2005). Pienemann et al, (1988) put forwards that English questions develop in 6 stages for learners. On the basis of Pienemann's (1988) classification of developmental stages, a great deal of scholars and researchers throw their light into English questions construction acquisition. To name only a few, in China, they are Gu Shanshan(2008), Ma Zhigang (2012).

### Limitation of Previous Researches

Having studied the relevant researches on English questions, we found that most researches concerning feedback and interaction are more likely to choose one type of feedback and they lack a comprehensive consideration of all kinds of feedback and their respective effect, so they lack an overall picture of English questions acquisition. Therefore, more investigations need to be done.

Our research will also be based on Pienemann's classification and focus on the effect studies of English Questions in different developmental stages and different degrees of difficulty. And our experiment attempts to investigate three research questions:(1) Do learners who receive negative feedback in a communicative context prompt their performance to higher stages of question development than learners who do not receive ? (2) Do learners who receive negative feedback progress to a higher level of question development than learners who do not?(3) Is it more effective to provide explicit negative feedback, recast, and modified output during English questions learning?

## III. METHODOLOGY

### Hypothesis

Our empirical research on English Questions Acquisition is based on three hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Learners who receive interactional feedback would produce questions at a higher stage (Pienemann's Question Stage Classification) than learners who do not receive any feedback.

Hypothesis 2: Students with negative feedback perform better than students without any feedback.

Hypothesis 3: Learners who receive recast would not progress to a higher score of English question than learners who received explicit correction.

### Participants

Eighty English learners, who were college students in northwestern China, participated in this study. They were intermediate level of English questions proficiency, defined by their College Entrance Examination grade. They were first-year college students, ranging from 19 to 22, with an average age of 20.3. All of them, except a girl, have never been abroad; there were 30 males and 50 females. They were subdivided into two groups, each of which was the subject for two different experiments.

### Context

The research contained a comprehensive survey on students' English questions proficiency before we conducted the research. With a constant observation and careful record in Speaking and Listening class, we found students in general did not use and made English questions in a correct manner and with less knowledge of what their right forms should be. Participants would produce ill-formed English questions such as "Who Jason like?", "What you think?", "Why you think so?", "What you do?", "Why you say so?" Students failed to use complex English questions and used fewer correct English questions. Of 80 students, a preliminary English Question Elicitation Speaking Test indicated 30.5% of students constructed correct simple questions whereas only less than 9.5% of them were able to construct relatively complex English questions. More than half of the total students were unable to form either complex or simple English questions in spoken English.

Two experiments for different purposes are involved in the research. Experiment One is for figuring out "whether or not negative feedback develops English questions in an interactional context?" Experiment Two is designed for further clarification by answering "If negative feedback does make a difference in facilitating English question acquisition, what type of negative feedback makes the bigger contribution? And is negative feedback a panacea for the acquisition development for all types of English Questions?"

### Materials

Material tasks and tests used in the research are based on Fujii (2009) and McDonough's (2005) tasks for reference but with modification and adjustment. Tasks in the present research are intended to give learners opportunities to practice their communicative skills. Two tasks as follows are for two experiments.

(1) **Elicitation Speaking Task. (Placement Test)**<sup>1</sup> Learners were given 10 optional tourist cities on speaking topic "Touring the World". Students were asked to start a casual conversation and discussed which the best place they should go to was. The task also provided the learners with several "survival expressions" for making suggestions ("Why don't we..."), expressing disagreement ("I see your point, but..."), coming to a consensus ("So, do we all agree?") and so on.

(2) **Treating Materials and Jotting down Learning Journal.**<sup>2</sup> The treatment materials were intended to elicit a variety of question types. Three sessions of treatment materials were created; each session consisted of two communicative activities for eliciting questions. During each treatment session, the learners were given a learning journal, a blank form with spaces for them to write any comments about what they were learning during the interaction. The learning journals were used as an indicator of reporting whether the learners attach their attention on question forms during treatment sessions.

(3) **Testing.** The testing materials were communicative tasks that the learners have to conduct individually in a language laboratory. Each test contained a warm-up activity question about the learners' recent travel and two other activities which elicited questions by such tasks as story completion, brainstorming and interviewing. The oral production tests were different from the treatment tasks.

### Design

Participants were divided into two groups: Group A (n=40) and Group B (n=40). To make each of the two groups equal in their mean score and thus be more reliable, we referred to their final exams grades in a recent semester as a benchmark to group them.

### On Experiment One

Group A (n=40) firstly was arranged to undertake Elicitation Task (Placement Test) without any disturbance, or modification and feedback from the teacher so as to have an overall knowledge of which stage each of the students was. Then we rearranged members of Group A by dividing them into Group 1 (n=10) where students made most of correct English questions in Stage 3<sup>3</sup>, Group 2 (n=10) in Stage 4, Group 3 (n=10) in Stage 5 and a control group (n=10) where most students were in Stage 3 and 4.

We conducted the Treatment Material and Jotting down Learning Journals when we had placed students in the subgroups of English Questions. And then we used all types of feedback in an interactional environment by keeping students talking and communicating with the teacher.

The Treatment Test organized in language laboratory took approximately 10 minutes. During the treatment process, the teacher provided implicit and explicit negative feedback of all kinds to learners when non-target-like questions errors occurred. Given that excessive feedback may lead to irritation, the teacher interlocutor did not provide feedback in response to every non-target question form. In addition, teacher interlocutor remained offering negative feedback if the learner who failed to or refused to modify their question forms. Finally, all learners completed the Learning Journals while carrying out the activities.

### On Experiment Two

Group B (n=40) was arranged to take another relevant experiment which also took place in language laboratory. 40 students were divided into four groups: one control group and four experimental groups. In this experiment, members on four groups were given Testing Materials, but control group did not obtain any assistance and spoke by their own. The other three groups got help and feedback from the teacher. Group 1 (n=10) was given only implicit feedback, group

<sup>1</sup> Experiment One in this research needs a Placement Test. We used Placement Test for placing Ss, and only results of Elicitation Test were considered significant and were recognized by our research data analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Treating Material was based on Kim (2005), but we adapted it to Chinese EFL class with modifications.

<sup>3</sup> English question developing stage in this research was based on Pienemann's Question Stage Classification (1988).

2 (n=10) only explicit and recast, and group 3(n=10) both explicit, implicit feedback, recast and asked of uttering modified output. During the 3-week experiments, we employed language laboratory and tape-recorded the utterances and interaction between teacher and students.

### Procedure

#### On Experiment One

The audiotapes involved in the interaction during the Treatment Tasks were transcribed. What we care in interaction were the evidences of modified output, any simple repetition was not included, because they did not get reformulation involved. Each instance of modified output was classified according to Developmental Stage. What we counted as valid progress in Developmental Stages was modified output in the Treatment Task. Only in such circumstance did we admit speakers' proficiency had made progress from lower stage to higher stage. A record sample of interaction is illustrated as:

Theme: Picture different (information exchange)  
 Time: 10.15  
 Learner: *Why the rabbit run?* ----- Stage 3 question  
 Teacher: (NS) *Why the rabbit? Why the...? Sure?*  
 Learner: *why do rabbit run?*  
 Teacher: *do?*  
 Learner: *Why does the rabbit run?* ----- Stage 5 question

However, according to Kim's framework (2005), English questions outputs as follows were removed. Such as: (1) incomplete questions, such as *how about Phuket?* and *what time?* (2) echo questions; (3) multiple exemplars of the same question on the same task; and (4) formulaic chunks, such as *where do you come from?* and *do you like + object?*

TABLE 1 shows experimental schedule for the four groups.

TABLE 1 RESEARCH SCHEDULE & DESIGN

Week	Day	Group 2 (most Ss in Stage4)
1	1	Placement Test Elicitation Test
1	2	pretest What are they talking about? Picture difference.
2	1	Treatment What are they talking about? Picture difference.
2	5	Midtest What are they talking about? Picture difference.
3	1	Post-Test What are they talking about? Picture difference.

Note: "most Ss in Stage4" means most (more than 80%) of subject students (n=10) who had been distinguished into groups by Placement Test.

Before pretest was carried out, we placed each of the 40 students to his/her proper position by Placement Test. We used Elicitation Task next and then Treatment Tasks were carried out, because we attempted to avoid any distraction or any impression left in subject's mind and affect the reliability of the result of pretest. Usage of Placement Test was only for judging and calculating a student's developmental stage of English questions. We made the total number of English questions in 30 minutes (in sequence as they appear in tape recording) counted as we needed. We did not care about how individuals performed but care how groups did.

#### On Experiment Two

The experiment lasted for 3 weeks, and pretest was taken in week 1, midtest in week 2 after the treatment, post-test in the last week. All subgroups in Group B were exposed to the same materials but with different treatments. Each group only obtained one cluster of feedback: (1) implicit negative feedback, (2) explicit negative feedback and (3) recast. Similar to Experiment One, only modified output could be counted as the materials that we concerned. We collected the frequencies of their correct performance before, during and after the Treatment Tasks were conducted. Then we conducted a Pearson correlation coefficient analysis to test their mutual relation. We guaranteed the total number of question production for each group was almost the same.

## IV. RESULTS

### Result of Experiment One

The first research question was to investigate whether learners who received interactional feedback progressed to

higher stages of Question Development than students who did not receive interactional feedback. The research result is shown in TABLE 2.

**TABLE 2**  
OVERALL STAGES OF CONTROL & TREATMENT GROUPS ON 3-TIME TEST

		Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6	Total	Mean Stage
Group 1	Pre-test	34 94%	2 6%	0 0%	0 0%	36	3.050
Group 1	Mid-test	1 3%	33 94%	1 3%	0 0%	35	4.000
Group 1	Post-test	1 3%	28 93%	1 3%	0 0%	30	4.000
Group 2	Pre-test	4 10%	35 90%	0 0%	0 0%	39	3.897
Group 2	Mid-test	4 11%	1 3%	30 86%	0 0%	35	4.743
Group 2	Post-test	0 0%	1 4%	27 96%	0 0%	28	4.964
Group 3	Pre-test	0 0%	2 5%	38 95%	0 0%	40	4.950
Group 3	Mid-test	0 0%	3 9%	29 88%	1 3%	33	4.939
Group 3	Post-test	0 0%	2 6%	34 94%	0 0%	36	4.944
Group 4	Pre-test	33 90%	5 8%	2 2%	0 0%	40	3.075
Group 4	Mid-test	33 94%	0 0%	2 6%	0 0%	35	3.343
Group 4	Post-test	29 85%	4 12%	1 3%	0 0%	34	3.271

Descriptive data analysis indicates that students' English questions output of higher stage differs from one group to another, but there are no substantial improvement in group 4 (no feedback) which proves that, to some extent, feedback does not work in facilitating English question development. Before the treatment was taken, students in Group 1 in pre-test constructed as many as 94% of the total output of English questions in stage 3 ; but after the teacher gave them implicit and explicit feedback, the number decreased to 3%, with an estimated 87% students reaching to stage 4 in the post-test. The same situation also happened to Group 2 with large numbers of students making their English question correct as the standard of stage 5, and the number of correct forms of stage 5 jumped from 0 to 27. Test of significance ( $P < .05$ ) shows that feedback and modified output are the significant factor of EFL question development. In other words, increasing the production of modified output and providing negative feedback improve the development. All of these observations are consistent with what Kim McDonough conducted in 2005. However, there are still some differences: Even if feedback is offered, fewer students whose initial attainments are in Stage 5 could successfully reach to Stage 6.

### Result of Experiment Two

The second research question was to investigate whether learners who received negative feedback performed better than those who only receive recast.

The first step of the data analysis is to compare the overall performance of the control group (Group 4,  $n=10$ ) to the performances of the other three treatment groups ( $n=30$ ). TABLE 3 displays the overall scores of questions produced by the control group (Group 4) and the treatment groups on the pre-test, mid-test and post-test tasks.

**TABLE 3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

Group	Pre-test		Mid-test		Post-test	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	3.6000	1.71270	12.2000	2.19976	8.3000	1.41814
2	3.1000	2.02485	14.3000	2.05751	11.2000	1.81353
3	3.3000	1.76698	10.1000	2.92309	6.5000	1.66333
4	2.6000	1.50555	4.7000	1.63639	3.9000	3.11314

TABLE 3 shows that the control group produces a lower score (3.9000) on the post-test than the three treatment groups. Students in Group 2 (explicit feedback) perform the best in all the experimental groups with mean 14.3000 in mid-test, 11.2000 in post-test. Group 1 (implicit feedback) come next. Students in Group 1 has mean of mid-test 12.2000 and mean of post-test 8.3000. Both students in Group 1 and Group 2 improve a lot compared what they did in pretest with mean scores 3.6000, 3.1000, 3.3000, respectively. But as for control group (Group 4), mean score in pretest is 2.6000, 4.7000 in mid-test and 3.9000 in post-test. And a Chi-square test finds this differences in performance are significant ( $P < .005$ ). This indicates that the students in the treatment groups perform significantly better than those in the

control groups in the mid-test and post-test.

We also conducted Paired Sample T-Test and found significant differences between pre-test and post-test for Pair 1, Pair 2 and Pair 3. Mean improvement between pre-test and post-test of Group 2 keeps the highest ( $P=.000$ ) and Group 3 keeps a lower Mean ( $P=.002$ ). ANOVA test between groups shows that these score differences are significant. ( $F=35.694$ ,  $P=0.000$ ), which means negative feedback facilitates the construction of well-formed English questions. In addition, Mean of Pair 3 is much lower than that of Pair 2 and Pair 1 ( $P<.05$ ), which means recast exerts a less strong power than other explicit feedback in terms of English questions improvement. Group 2 has the highest Mean ( $P <.05$ ) in the post-test. But Mean of Group 3 ( $P<.05$ ) keeps much lower than that of Group 1 and 2. It indicates that recast has a weak influence on improving students' scores than other groups. And explicit negative feedback performs the best.

## V. DISCUSSION

### Negative Feedback and Developmental Stages of English Question

Experiment one was designed to support the hypothesis that learners who received interactional feedback would produce questions at a higher stage than learners who did not receive any feedback. Experiment one and its data justified and confirmed the hypothesis. Result of the data shows that learners in Group 1, 2, 3 (treatment groups) produced higher overall stages of questions than those in the Control Group on mid-test (mid-test) and post-test. More students with progress in stage of English questions are more found in treatment group than in the control group. Such findings are consistent with the research conducted by Long & Robinson (1998), and Bell (2005). However, our research discovers a special fact, that is, not all the students in treatment groups do the same good job on their stage improvement of English questions as expect. We find students whose initial stage of English questions at stage 3, and at stage 4, can make a substantial improvement in their post-test which have a development from stage 3 to 4, and stage 4 to 5. However, for those whose initial stage are at stage 5, fewer of them are pushed and helped to reach stage 6, the highest level of English question development. As a result, we might claim that negative feedback do not facilitate as well as what they do to stage 5 students at stage 5 to help them to move to stage 6.

This research provides supporting evidence that negative interactional feedback has positive effects on ESL question development but not for improving to all stages. The provision of negative feedback has a positive effect on participants' question development for reaching Stage 3, Stage 4 and Stage 5. But interactive feedback might have difficulties for students who receive regular negative feedback to improve themselves to stage 6. The result also indicates that students in interaction will be more likely to take a notice of the differences between their own output and that of the other speaker. This is supported and illustrated by the performance of the students because they produced more grammatically correct questions on the mid-test than they had on the pre-test. As Swain (1995, p371) noted, "If learners were not testing hypotheses, then changes in their output would not be expected following feedback". On the contrary, students in the Control Group who receive no feedback of any types have no opportunity and ability to motivate their current stage of English questions to a further higher stage. Research conducted by Ma Zhigang (2012) with insights from generative grammar might be helpful to explain why it is hard for the students who received negative feedback to reach the 6<sup>th</sup> stage. According to Ma's Long Distance Question<sup>4</sup>, we observe that question markers in 6<sup>th</sup> stage moves more than three positions in one sentence.

*May I ask how you < may > use it?*

"MAY" moved from its original position in declarative sentence by four positions.

*Why didn't you tell me < why >?*

"WHY" moved from its original position in declarative sentence by five positions.

*He wants to divorce, did he?*

There is no movement in this question, but tag question requires a subject and an auxiliary verb.

Compared to other simpler structures, all of these structural differences might make the 6<sup>th</sup> stage English question more difficult and complicated for students to reach. Data analyses shows that negative feedback is unable to facilitate students to reach the 6<sup>th</sup> stage English questions, and with reference to TG grammar, it might because that an interactional context with feedback will not enable students to realize the movement boundary between main clauses and subordinate clauses. Students, who have no idea of noticing inner grammatical differences movement process, will not distinguish when a complex clause requires adjustment for both main clause and subordinate clause or when it does not require any movement in the subordinate clause. As a result, interaction with feedback makes students notice the error they made, but it may not let students notice the structures which they are not familiar with and understand very well. Traditional language teaching methods in such circumstances may work well for solving such a tricky problem if it could be assisted with interaction and the complex structure had been taught to students.

Whatever feedback students are exposed to during the interaction, they are more likely to improve significantly in English questions. It seems that the more diversified types of feedback students get, the more likely the students will produce more correct modified output. Feedback such as clarification, attracting students' attention, confirmation, and

<sup>4</sup> Ma's research (2012) put forwards two kinds of English Questions, foregrounding questions, and backgrounding questions, which treat subordinate clause as salient or background. Each of them has further three versions of variants such as long distance movement (LDM), short distance movement (SDM) and null distance movement (NDM).

requirement of modified output would affect students' performances after the treatment have been taken. Data analyses in Experiment Two displays an overall description of the different effects on modified output of English questions. The results are consistent with former researches conducted by Kim (2005) and Bell (2005), but students whose output is only reformulated as recast have lower scores than either explicit group or implicit group, which quite differs from Bell's (2005), Loewen's (2006) and Lochtman's (2002) findings in which recast was proved the most effective. Although we admit that feedback may exert larger influence on the students' improvement of English questions, we still need to accept the fact that offering feedback is only one dimension of expecting a pleasant English question, another dimension is modified output, which has been justified by Swain (1995) and McDonough (2005).

We have recorded some interaction clips between Student NO.9 (S.09) of Group 2 in Experiment Two and a teacher who offers explicit negative feedback:

Clip 1.

S.09: *What you see?*

T: *No, incorrect, what DID you see?* → Explicit negative feedback

*Please say it again.* → Ask for Modified Output

S. 09: *What did you see?* → Improvement obtained

Clip 2.

S.09: *Why do they so nice?* → Explicit negative feedback

T: *It is not right. Why are they so nice?* → Ask for Modified Output

*See it? Are not do. Ok, say it again.*

S.09: *Why are they so nice?* → Improvement obtained

Clip 3.

S. 09: *Why not happy?* → Explicit negative feedback

T: *Not exactly, why is he not happy?*

*Pardon.* → Ask for Modified Output

S.09: *Why is he not happy?* → Improvement obtained

Students exposed to negative feedback only have an awareness of their incorrectness, but it was not sufficient to help them come to the next stage, because there was no guarantee for students to take INPUT as INTAKE if no modified output is required. If teachers offers feedback and continues their conversation, students may superficially cater to teacher's instruction and fail to construct it by their own.

#### **Recast and English Question Development**

Researchers (Gu, 2008, Han, 2002 Bell, 2005) regard recast as implicit feedback. However, researchers find it very difficult to confirm that whether or not a sample of recast belongs to category of implicit feedback only with reference to its definition. Traditional definition for recast emphasizes correctness and implicitness, but we find in this research that it is time-consuming and too much subjective to judge implicit feedback as recast. As a result, we singled out recast and tested it in Group 3 where students were only provided with reformulations when they failed to express themselves, and gave implicit negative feedback to another group (Group 1) where students were offered implicit feedback, such as clarification request and elicitation. The following clips excerpted from interaction between students of recast group and students of implicit feedback group.

Student in Group 3 (Recast)

S.03: *What your name please?*

T: *What IS your name please?* → Reformulation

S.03: *Yes. What is your name please.*

S.03: *You like what picture?*

T: *Which picture do I like?* → Reformulation

S.03: *Yes, yes.*

Student in Group 1 (implicit feedback)

S. 06: *What your name please?*

T: *Is that right? Correct? What plus Be.* → Elicitation (implicit feedback)

S. 06: *What is your name please?*

T: *Great.*

Student in Group 1

S. 07: *You like what picture?*

T: *Say again. Remember structure tips!* → Repetition Elicitation (implicit feedback)

S.07: *Yes, you like which picture?*

T: *You like... Which... picture? Or which picture...* → Request of Clarification (implicit feedback)

S.07: *Yes, which picture do you like?*

Data analysis in Experiment Two shows a relative lower score in their post-test of English question acquisition but a higher score in explicit negative feedback. The possible explanation of such a situation happens in our research might be that recast, mainly in form of reformulation, is less able to attract our students' noticing to language form, and thus fails to cause modified output. Students provided with recast might rely on teachers' reformulation and are unable to



transform the input to part of their language competence.

### “Focus on Form” in a Meaning-Constructing Context

Our research was organized in an interactional context. Learning of English Questions requires students “focus on form”, but in our research we put formal learning in a communicative context focusing meaning and meaning negotiation between speakers. The finding that students with no feedback acquire least English Questions and have no substantial improvement on their language developmental stage proves that “Focus on Form-Function” is effective in English questions. A form-function connection means the acquisition of language form can be facilitated by its meaning context. The correspondence between the formal properties of language and the meaning they encode is important for L2 learners. In an interactional context, English questions are acquired in context and thus learners are able to link formal learning to a context where a topic is shared and meaning is negotiated. This is because meaning negotiation provides such indirect negative evidence and clues to the learners as they did something wrong. Thus, interaction potentially provides useful feedback about vocabulary, syntax, and so on. Susan Gass (2003) claimed that negotiation of meaning is important for maximizing comprehension on the part of the learner, and negotiation helps to ensure comprehension. With better comprehension between speakers, there are increased chances for acquisition, because acquisition is a “by-product” of comprehension to a certain degree.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This research answers two questions in relation to English questions acquisition. Firstly, feedback in interaction can assist students to move from lower stage to higher stage. However, feedback is very effective only in improvement of English question from stage 3 to 4, 4 to 5, but less effective in moving from stage 5 to stage 6, i.e. the highest stage. Feedback has some limitations in improving learners’ acquisition stage when complicated question structures are considered, such as questions in Stage 6.

Secondly, explicit negative feedback proves to be more effective than others to elicit correct English questions and implicit negative feedback (excluding recast) also performs well in making students construct more grammatical sentences. Modified output is a very crucial factor, because modified output could, to some extent, represent students’ real improvement and is a reflection of their language competence. Data analyses reveals that recast has no powerful effect, compared to other types of feedback in improving students’ performances of English Questions acquisition. In other words, not all types of feedback have the same effect in improving English Questions in interaction. Feedback could not help students to reach higher stage of English questions because inner structure of English questions has a determinable role in limiting the effect of negative feedback in interactional context.

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