THE ROLE OF RECAST FEEDBACK VS. METALINGUISTIC FEEDBACK ON SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

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Abstract: This study was set out within the process-oriented framework to identify the extent to which the metalinguistic corrective feedback contributed to speaking performance of the Iranian EFL learners better, and also to compare the effectiveness of two types of metalinguistic feedback, error codes feedback and description feedback on students’ grammar empowerment. Great many studies have been conducted to investigate the efficacy of the corrective feedback and its types in the process of language learning and teaching. The purpose of this paper is to study the efficacy of recast and metalinguistic clues as two types of feedback. By selecting these two types, the study also aimed at comparing the implicit and explicit types of feedback. To this end, 55 intermediate EFL learners, aged 17 - 19, of a language institute in Tabriz, Iran were selected as the participants of this study. After administering Nelson Test to 50 students, 38 homogeneous subjects were chosen and assigned to two experimental groups. Participants in experimental groups received treatments, that is, one experimental group (N=19) received recast feedback and the other experimental group (N=19) received metalinguistic feedback during the course of teaching EFL grammar. Finally, at the end of the course participants in these groups sat for the posttest. Results of test analysis indicated that participants in metalinguistic feedback significantly outperformed those in second experimental group in speaking learning. The results of the present study can also provide pedagogical implications in employing corrective feedback in grammar learning classes.

Keywords: metalinguistic feedback, recast feedback, EFL learners, grammar

I. Introduction

Error correction of both oral and written mistakes has a noticeable place in English Language Teaching (ELT) literature and continues to be a troublesome issue due to the conflicting views that exist towards it. Whereas it is regarded as disadvantageous in the past methodologies such as Audio- Lingual method and great attempts were made to prevent it, a group of researchers gradually started to consider it as an indicator of learning or, more precisely, the learner’ experience with language, or a method of testing out a new language hypothesis or progressing. Concepts of metalinguistic feedback and recast feedback and reviews of evidence associated with types of feedback as well as their positive and negative impacts are discussed in this paper. Furthermore, the reviews of supporting research evidence address how different types of feedback yield different levels of effectiveness in language learning. Feedback is a vital concept in most theories of learning and is closely related to motivation. Behavioral theories tend to focus on extrinsic motivation such as rewards (Weiner, 1990). In language learning and teaching, varying types of feedback can be provided to students. Feedback can be defined from various perspectives.

II. Error Correction

In the realm of language teaching, error correction has a long and contentious history. Some schools of thought like nativism refute error correction while others firmly adhere to error correction and regard error as a sin that should be avoided. This dilemma bewilders TEFL practitioners and teachers how to treat errors. One of the most frustrating tasks for foreign-language teachers is that of correcting the same errors time and again. One possible explanation could be the different perceptions that teachers and students have of the most adequate correction of errors. Every teacher has different criteria regarding the type of errors to be corrected. The subjective nature of this point has crucial consequences for error correction and learning a language. Few issues in second language teaching have generated as much controversy as that of error correction. In fact, one of the most discouraging experiences of L2 teachers is correcting errors especially those that recur in their students’ production. A possible explanation may be the mismatch between what teachers and students consider to be effective feedback on error correction.
III. Recasts Feedback

It has long been assumed within traditional pedagogical practice that error feedback is necessary for learners to progress in their acquisition and use of second language (L2) in more target-like ways. Research findings have suggested theoretical explanations as to how recasts in particular may be efficient for language learning. Long (1996) defined recasts as an implicit CF that reformulates/builds an incorrect/incomplete speech clearly, parallel to the type of recasts used by caregivers in a child’s first language acquisition (Lyster and Panova, 2002, p. 582). Recasts also include translations in response to a student’s use of the L1 (Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p. 47). In other words, Loewen and Philp (2006) believe that based on previous research (e.g., Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Long, 1996) recasts may be differentially effective depending on the targeted form under study. Nelson, Denninger, Bonvillian, Kaplan, and Baker (1983) also propose two further classifications of recasts, i.e. simple and complex recasts; the former deals with minimal changes to the child’s utterance while the latter is concerned with providing the child with substantial additions. It is also mentioned that in terms of their linguistic development, children benefit from simple recasts more than complex ones (Nelson et al., 1983).

IV. Metalinguistic Feedback

For Ellis (2009), “Metalinguistic CF involves providing learners with some form of explicit comment about the nature of the errors they have made” (p. 100). As proposed by Ellis (2009), the most common form of explicit comment is the use of error codes which consist of abbreviated labels for different kinds of errors placed over the location of the error in the text or in the margin. Lyster and Ranta (1997) categorize metalinguistic feedback as “comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form”. By encoding direct reference to the existence of an error or to the nature of the error, metalinguistic feedback supplies the language learner with negative evidence regarding the target form. Metalinguistic comments, the most minimally informative of the three, simply indicate the occurrence of an error. The next subcategory of metalinguistic feedback- metalinguistic information- goes beyond simply indicating the occurrence or location of the error and “generally provides some metalanguage that refers to the nature of the error” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 47). Thus, metalinguistic information can provide the learners with a range of hints concerning the possible reformulation of the non-target-like form. This can range from the most general information which labels the type of error made to information regarding a more target-like alternative, particularly when there are more than two potential options.

V. Statement of the Problem

Effective error correction has not received the much deserved attention in many EFL contexts despite its usefulness in language learning. In the Iranian context, Faith (2012) found that error correction during English L2 learners’ oral communication in Iran was beneficial. Educators and students do not have the same attitudes toward error correction. Teachers are more worried about addressing errors than causes behind them. Some educators share a view expressed by Corder (1967), “if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method the errors would never be committed in the first place, and that therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques.” Thus, educators try much technique to prevent the learners from making mistakes by corrections which they consider to be helpful in making students aware of their errors in order not to repeat them again. In the history of language teaching, there have been several approaches to the speaking instruction. Traditionally, most speaking teachers influenced by structural linguistics and behaviorists usually treated speaking as a product and often put strong focus on “linguistic knowledge, vocabulary choices, and syntactic patterns that are essential for the formation of written texts as a product” (Hyland, 2003, p. 3). However, instructors following the process approach have this possibility to intervene in the students' speaking process at any stage they are involved in. Students will pay more attention to their topic, maintain more information, and their insights become more when they are asked to spend more time on their speaking. Then the effective intervention results in better products (Trupe, 2001). Feedback has particular characteristics which makes it worthy of application. As Ryan (1997) believes, feedback provided is effective and can alert students about their current speaking skills and how the feedback can further develop their speaking. Also, self confidence in speaking and motivation is an important feature of feedback in the concept of active learning (Butler, 1988). A lot is being done in these two areas and this is a good reason for the vitality and fertility of these two lines of research. However, a big question mark on the top of language researchers’ heads which is constantly bewildering both our language researchers and practitioners is the way error correction occurs through various CF techniques especially in grammar instruction. Questions like how to treat errors, when to treat errors, which type of errors to treat and the like are the main questions directing this line of research. Researchers in this area have investigated CF and its effect on different aspects of language including grammar, pronunciation, and speaking accuracy (e.g. Bitchener and Knoch, 2008; Ellis, Loewe, & Erlam, 2006; Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005). Studies on CF and grammar instruction approaches have yielded different results, some confirming the previous research and some others casting doubt on what the predecessors have tackled. These differing results leave us in a quandary.
Shall I correct? Does my correction affect the learners’ feelings? Should I terminate the flow of speech or…? All the above-mentioned questions and so many others lead us to make a final decision and put an end to all our irresolution and uncertainty. This was the primary reason for conducting the present study. Corrective feedback is an extremely relevant, but controversial issue in SLA today. I wanted to provide data for EFL teachers and learners to gain better understanding of corrective feedbacks and which type is more effective for learner speaking proficiency and performance. Focusing on two types of corrective feedback strategies in second language classrooms, the current research claims that the differential effectiveness of recast and metalinguistic feedback is an area of great research value, for the following reasons, (1) theoretically, studies in this area can inform the issues such as the roles of input and output in second language and the cognitive roles of metalinguistic and recast in language learning, (2) pedagogically, research findings in this area may provide second language teachers with useful advice concerning theirs classroom error correction.

VI. Significance of the Study

Corrective feedback can act as a remedy to make up for the lost identity of grammar and structure. Based on Hattie and Timperley’s (2007) work, feedback can be defined as “information provided by an agent with respect to one’s performance or understanding” (p. 81). The role of corrective feedback (CF) in second language (L2) learning has received much attention in the literature, but it is still unclear whether CF is effective. However, some theories claim that CF may help only for language skills that call upon offline processing like reading and speaking; marking errors and references to grammatical rules may not be directly useful in on-line processing like oral L2 learning (Sorace, 1985; Hulstijn, 2007). Talking of the importance of feedback, Krashen and Seliger (1975, cited in Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001, p. 720) observed that “the two characteristics common to all L2 teaching methods they had examined were discrete point presentation and feedback on error”. This study’s sought to investigate the functions of two types of corrective feedback, recast and metalinguistic. These two types are selected since they are the implicit and explicit feedback respectively. A comparative study on the efficacy of them is the next purpose of the present study.

VII. Questions of the Study

The questions which the present observational study addresses are:
1. Is speaking instruction more effective with feedback (i.e. recast vs. metalinguistic feedback) than without any feedback?
2. Which type of feedback is more effective in speaking instruction, recast or metalinguistic feedback?

VIII. Methodology

This study utilized a repeated-measures design to examine the effects of recast vs. metalinguistic feedback on learners’ on second language empowerment. This experimental design was selected because it has been observed that related samples allow the researcher to avoid problems that can result from subject-to-subject variability, (Howell 1999).

IX. Research design

This study tests the effectiveness of two different feedbacks, namely, recast and metalinguistic. The researcher wanted to find out which type is more effective in advancing learner language. Treatment (I) used feedback in the form of Metalinguistic. Treatment (II) used another type, namely, recast. The researcher wanted to examine the effect of recast and metalinguistic feedback (independent variables) on the acquisition of grammar (dependent variable). To carry out this study a pretest or homogeneity test has been administered beforehand, then students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups. Treatments were interactional feedback which was put on experimental groups individually. At the end of the eight sessions, a post-test was administered to all groups. So the current study enjoyed an experimental design.

X. Participants

The main subjects of the study were 38 Iranian female learners who were selected randomly from among 55 intermediate learners of Kish Language Institute in Tonekabon, with the age range of 17-19. The participants were divided into two main groups, each group consisting of 38 learners. (Experimental group 1=19) (Experimental group 2= 19). They were in the same proficiency level as measured by Nelson Proficiency Test (NPT) with the criteria of at least 1 standard deviation below or 1 standard deviation over the mean.

XI. Materials and Instrumentation

Nelson English Language Test: To assure the homogeneity of the participants, a Nelson proficiency test series 200A (developed by Fowler and Coe, 1976) containing 50 items in MC vocabulary and cloze-test forms was given to a population including 90 participants. The time allotted was 25 minutes. Sixty participants whose scores were one SD above and below the mean were selected as the participants of this study. Therefore, they were randomly
assigned into two experimental and one control groups. While Nelson is reliable, in order to test the reliability of the test in this study for these participants in Iran a Kuder-Richardson was estimated to determine the degree of internal consistency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nelson Proficiency Test</th>
<th>Kuder-Richardson</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instruments utilized were a pretest, a post test, and a scoring scale.

**Pretest:** The test which was used was a sample IELTS speaking test from the book ‘prepare for IELTS’ written by Cameron and Todd (2005).

**Post test:** Another sample of speaking test from the book ‘prepare for IELTS’ was given to the control and experimental groups. Scoring scale: IELTS speaking band descriptor was used as a checklist for two experienced English teachers, holding M.A in TEFL to determine learners’ level of oral proficiency. In order to ensure the homogeneity of learners, an inter-rater reliability of the two the raters was gained.

**XII. Procedure**

An experimental methodological approach was utilized for this research incorporating a pre-test, eight treatment sessions, one immediate and one delayed post-test. In this study, the data collection procedure took place as follows:

a) At the beginning of the course, students were randomly assigned to two experimental groups, one receiving recast feedback and one receiving metalinguistic feedback. Each group contained 13 students. Then, NEPT was administered to all groups to ascertain all groups were at the same proficiency level.

b) In this English course which took 8 sessions, the students were presented with the skill of speaking as a part of the general English book they studied. On the first session of the course, the experimental groups were introduced different CF; specifically the metalinguistic and recast CF types. The experimental explanation group were presented with the explanation of each CF, and the experimental error code group were clarified what each code refers to. Each session, a topic was introduced and students were required to write a paragraph on it and submit it to the teacher the following session. The teacher did not simply score the speaking as the final product. She, rather, provided different forms of corrective feedback (explanation, error code, no feedback) on students’ speaking depending on the group the students were attending and returned them to the students the following session. To elaborate, the error code group was provided with correction codes in the margin so that they could understand their mistakes easily and corrected them properly. Every session consisted of some discussion questions extracted from the afore-mentioned books. During the class the learners were all motivated to speak about the topic broached in the class and they were taught some rules related to the four criteria of oral proficiency, although they had already been taught in their classes. A great deal of attempt was exerted to indirectly engage all learners in the discussion. The sequence of corrective feedback was ignited by an ill-formed utterance of a learner. A certain kind of corrective feedback was sequel to the learner’s utterance. The feedback was mostly followed by uptake from the learner’s side. When uptake occurred, the flow of discussion was either interrupted or continued. Needless to say, the teacher provided the corrective feedback again to raise the learner’s consciousness about the abnormality of his utterance.

**XIII. Results of Nelson Proficiency Test**

To select homogeneous participants with the same level of language proficiency Nelson test was administered to 90 intermediate EFL learners. Table 2 shows the data obtained from SPSS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34.76</td>
<td>4.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on data in table 1 ninety participants sat for the test; its mean is 35.88; standard deviation (SD) is 5.94; as previously mentioned those participants whose scores were one SD above and below the mean (between 29.94 and 41.82) were selected as the participants of this study. In order to ensure the differences of groups at the beginning of the research, one-way ANOVA (or equivalent tests such as Welch if needed) was used. Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference among the experimental and control groups, regarding their language proficiency at the outset of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Df1</th>
<th>Df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leven Statistic</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table 3 displays P-value is .005 which is less than α = .05, so the null hypothesis of Levene test which is the equality of variances, is rejected. The results of prompt, recast and control groups on the pretest and posttest are presented in Table 2 below.
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Recast, Prompt and Control groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Pre-Test</th>
<th>Post-Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalinguistic Recast</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 2, mean scores improve from pretest to the posttests for both recast and prompt groups. For the recast, there was a considerable increase from pretest to posttest, while the mean score for prompt group improved slightly. As for control group, the mean scores show a slight drop.

Table 3. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leven Statistic</th>
<th>Df1</th>
<th>Df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.565</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the assumptions of the one-way ANOVA is that the variances of the groups you are comparing are similar. The test of homogeneity of variances (see above) shows the result of Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance, which tests for similar variances. If the significance value is greater than 0.05 (found in the Sig. column) then you have homogeneity of variances. We can see from this table that Levene's F Statistic has a significance value of 0.89 and, therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of variance is met. Since homogeneity of variances for prompt, recast and control group was met, one-way ANOVA was used to test the question if these groups would have different effects on the grammatical achievement of Iranian English learners. Summaries of the results of ANOVA are presented in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between group</td>
<td>177.224</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>94.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td>146.058</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>323.282</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p≤.05

What can be concluded by comparing the mean of group’s oral achievement at the levels of fluency and grammatical range and accuracy in the pre test and post test stages is that corrective feedback will conducive to a better performance in post treatment stage. This finding confirms there being the need to include corrective feedback in classes aimed at improving the oral achievement of EFL learners. What this study did was to exert a greater degree of concentration on the type of corrective feedback which EFL learners were availed of. Needless to say, expunging other types of corrective feedback thoroughly was not feasible i.e. every group received a special type of corrective feedback dominantly. Another important variable heeded in this study was the level of EFL learners’ level of oral proficiency. It was that for learners at the lower intermediate level of oral proficiency, 5.5 in IELTS speaking test, ‘metalinguistic’ feedback is a highly appropriate type of corrective feedback. It is clear that the finding of this study may not be extendable to studies in which the levels of oral proficiency of EFL learners are at such levels as advanced, upper-advanced, upper-intermediate, etc.

XIV. Discussion

Error correction and its importance in the foreign language classroom have received considerable attention during the past decades. According to Corder (1967), correcting learners’ errors is substantial in three different ways: First, they tell the teacher about the progress of the learner, and therefore what remains to be learnt. Second, they supply evidence of how a language is acquired and what strategies the learner employs in learning a language. It is inevitable that learners make mistakes and commit errors in the process of learning a second (L2) or a foreign language (any additional language learned besides the mother tongue). However, what is questioned by language teachers is why students go on making the same mistakes even when the concerned rules have been repeatedly taught to them through formal classroom instruction. Yet not all mistakes are the same; sometimes they seem to be deeply ingrained which are called errors, but at other times students correct their problems with ease which are termed as mistakes. Thus it is realized that the mistakes a person makes in the process of constructing a new system of language needs to be analyzed carefully as they may help understand second language acquisition.

The aspect of interaction in classrooms with the widest scope is probably that generally referred to as feedback, which includes the notion of error correction. Feedback has been widely investigated in information theory and general communication research outside classroom or language learning contexts (Annett 1969). Participants in natural communication actively, and usually equally, exchange and negotiate this sort of information in many ways. From the language teacher’s point of view, the provision of feedback is a major means by which to inform learners of the accuracy of both their formal target language (TL) production and their other classroom behavior and knowledge. From learners’ point of view, the effectiveness of externally provided feedback depends on the degree to which it helps them repair their utterances. The information available in feedback allows learners to confirm, disconfirm, and possibly modify the hypothetical, “transitional” rules of their developing grammars, but these effects are dependent on the learner’s readiness for and attention to the information available in feedback. That is, learners must still make a comparison between their internal state of a rule and the information about the rule in whatever input they encounter. All the teacher guides I have inspected address the importance of providing
both positive feedback as well as negative feedback (i.e. corrective feedback). Nunan (1991), in fact, devotes more attention to positive feedback than corrective feedback (CF). He noted that it serves two functions – ‘to let students know they have performed correctly’ and ‘to increase motivation through praise’ (p. 195). Due to the dominance of product-oriented approaches in the Iranian speaking classes that encourage students to mimic a model text than reflecting their own work gives value to a finished product, finding the provision of feedback frustrating, time-consuming and ineffective. Concerning the effects and quality of teacher corrective feedback (TCF) including their legibility and their attendance by the students, this study was set out to implement a process-oriented approach to speaking and to provide the metalinguistic teacher corrective feedback, firstly, to see the overall effect of the metalinguistic feedback and secondly, to see which form of metalinguistic feedback, error codes or description, result in more speaking progress. In general, because providing metalinguistic feedback was found as an effective form of feedback provision resulting in significant speaking improvement. Of the two metalinguistic modes, the description one lead to more significant improvement compared to the error code one, suggesting that Iranian EFL students particularly at high school level which is rather a low language proficiency level, benefit more from more direct and detailed forms of feedback rather that more indirect and brief ones. There has also been a shift from the most popular way of feedback provision, that is, producing written comments on the student’s final draft, to making comments on students’ initial drafts, offering suggestions for the future development of the final or the subsequent drafts (Naidu, 2007) as practiced in this study.

To summarize, the researcher in this study used recasts that were mainly short, unstressed, more likely to be declarative in mode, and aimed at a single change. Furthermore, short, declarative and single change recasts were related to learner repair. Recasts are known to be less capable of eliciting uptake than other metalinguistic feedback. But, in fact, according to the previous research that has detected different features of recasts, some recasts may enhance salience of positive and negative evidence depending on how they are provided (Loewen and Philp, 2006; Sheen 2006). Indeed, as a result of the present study, some recasts turned out to be successful in triggering uptake, which provides opportunities for production practice. During the time of speaking, EFL students should ponder on their products and speak about several topics in the short blocks of times. Editing again and again increases students’ attention and if simultaneously they are indirectly warned over their errors they may self-correct them; this kind of error correction may put positive effects on EFL learners’ long-term memory.

**References**


