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Language Trajectory through Corrective Feedback

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Abstract

This quasi-experimental study was designed to investigate the effects of corrective feedback on SLA/EFL to determine the potential benefits of two different corrective feedback techniques, namely recasts and elicitation. The research hypotheses were: 1) Learners who are exposed to interactive focused task that requires CR will benefit more than those who are exposed to communicative activities only; 2) Elicitation will be more effective than recasts in leading to L2 development; Three intensive EFL classes in a language center in Songkhla province, Thailand were selected to participate in the study. Based on the study design, two class were assigned to the treatment conditions elicitation group and recasts group and the third was used as a control group. The treatment took place over a period of 9 meetings focusing on teaching third person singular –s morpheme and the provision of CF where it was necessary. The participants' knowledge of the intended syntactic point was tested before treatment and post tested after receiving the treatment. A multiple choice and focused-cloze reading grammar test was used in the pre-test and the post-test to evaluate the effects of the treatments on the learners' acquisition of third person singular morpheme. This classroom-based study showed that the two treatment groups benefited from CF strategies, but according to the study, elicitation group outperformed the recast one.

Keywords: Corrective feedback; recasts; elicitation; comprehensible output; focus on form

Introduction

This study is motivated by an increased interest and need to investigate the contributions of corrective feedback to second language (SLA) acquisition and English as Foreign Language (EFL). With the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the late 1970's, particularly the strong communication version in which the principal focus is on meaning, the role of form-based instruction and corrective feedback became less important and were dominated by teaching strategies based on "comprehensible input", functional language practice and opportunities for spontaneous, creative language use (Alavi, Chow Voon Foo, and Amini, 2015, Brumfit, 1984; Krashen, 1981). The literature has indicated that while students in purely communicative programs attain advanced levels in listening comprehension and reading, they perform considerably less well in speaking and writing. The low grammatical competence that has resulted from such exposure has been interpreted by several second language acquisition (SLA) researchers as evidence against the sufficiency of comprehensible input and exclusively meaning-based instruction (Alavi *et. al.*, 2015; Swan, 2005; Revesz, 2002). In light of

Schmidt's "noticing hypothesis" which advocates the necessity to draw learners¹ attention to the formal properties of language to help them notice the L2 norms (Alavi & Chow Voon Foo, 2012), corrective feedback and form-focused instruction in general have been proposed as solutions to this problem (Alavi *et. al.*, 2015; Vartanian, 2011; Sheen, 2010).

While a consensus has been reached as to the importance of focusing on the formal properties of the L2 through corrective feedback, two positions have emerged from the debate about the differential effectiveness of corrective feedback techniques. Recent research that has investigated the use of recasts in L2 classrooms, however, has led to a different position (Alavi *et. al.*, 2015; Sakai, 2011, Revesz, 2011, Panova & Lyster, 2002;). These findings, along with others (Panova, 1999), shed doubt on the potential effectiveness of recasts as a corrective feedback technique and have led Lyster and Ranta (1997) to advocate the use of what they refer to as "negotiation of form". Negotiation of form refers to CF techniques that withhold the correct form from the students and provide clues to help them correct their ungrammatical utterances. The elevated uptake rates that have resulted from negotiation of form techniques (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), along with the belief that "pushed output" is a strong trigger of syntactic processing and, hence, SLA (Swain, 1984, 1985, 1995) have motivated the second position.

Embarking on the provided review, to contribute to more empirical work and theoretical insights to the role of corrective feedback in classroom L2 learning and teaching, current research is based on the following research questions;

1. Comparing the CR techniques, which techniques the foreign language learners tend to benefit more, elicitation or recast?
2. Does learners' English level assist the FL learners to benefit from CR?

Research context

The current research was conducted in three different classes in Songkhla province, Thailand. To ensure the accuracy of data, the teacher kept a record of the students' oral interview in which he used the corrective feedback techniques. The only corrective feedback strategies which are of particular interest to the study, namely recasts and elicitation. One of the three classes was assigned to recast treatment group and another one to elicitation treatment group and the last group as control/intact group.

Participants

The number of students per class ranged from 12 to 14. Meanwhile only 8 out of each class participated in the study as their preliminary test results were below the general class proficiency level. Most of the participants were university students and non-English major students. The grammatical feature that was addressed within this study is third person singular morpheme –s as it is quite common among Thai English learners to miss it out that can be attributed to their first language transfer. The treatment period took place 3 weeks over 9 meetings 90 minutes namely 3 meetings each week.

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Intervention of the Target Language

The grammatical point under study in this research is third person singular morpheme -s. A meta-analysis of the students writing assignments as well as their oral production, revealed that Thai English language learners tend to miss out the third person singular -s or in some rare cases they find it rather demanding to pronounce as a final sonorant sound (which is beyond the scope of the current research). Therefore, the idea sprang to incorporate CF to see if Thai learners will benefit from the inclusion of CF in their language learning course. The treatment period took place 3 weeks over 9 meetings 90 minutes namely 3 meetings each week. During the treatment period, the teacher tried to follow the course book outline and including CF to deal with any grammatical errors while keeping the main focus on the intended grammar point under study. During the first 3 meetings with the students, the teacher tried to practice the idea giving CF to the students' erroneous utterances so they could differentiate that it is not merely a comment. In addition to the instruction, students were intended to barge on doing interactive focused task in the classroom. Corrective feedback was provided while students were involved in performing these tasks in both treatment groups.

Measurement

Four tests were administered to determine the effects of the different NF techniques on the acquisition of third person possessive. These tests comprised: 1) pre-test, 2) a hybrid cloze- reading test, and multiple choice grammar proficiency test, 3) an oral teacher-student interview, and 4) post-test. Analyses of variance (ANOVA) run on the pre-test data showed that there was a significant difference between the three groups. Consequently, written data obtained from the control group on the pre-test as well as the post-tests, were excluded from any further analyses. Only data from the treatment groups were analyzed and compared against each other.

Results

The results of the data analysis are explained in this section. The pre-test results indicate that the three participating groups showed almost identical proficiency level at the onset of the experimental intervention. Both experimental groups data analysis result revealed a considerable improvement in their performance on the oral and written tests. Consequently, no statistically significant differences were found to exist between them. However, results from the cloze reading test differed in overall pattern. The participants in the intact group showed highly poor performance compared to that of the recast and elicitation groups.

Table 1 Pre-test results

Groups	Mean		Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
	Difference	Std. Error		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	-4.000	1.414	.186	-10.826	2.822
	-4.000	1.414	.186	-10.826	2.816
Recast	4.000	1.414	.186	-2.816	10.818
	-8.000*	1.414	.032	-14.823	14.816
Elicitation	8.000*	1.414	.032	1.172	14.823
	4.000	1.414	.186	-2.816	10.818

Post-Test Results

Results from the immediate post-tests are illustrated in the following table. According to the results presented in the following table, it is shown that the use of both CR strategies are effective compared to the control group in which no CF strategy was used. Meanwhile inter-experimental group data result comparison proved that elicitation as a feedback technique will be more effective than the use of recast.

Table 2 Post-test result Summary

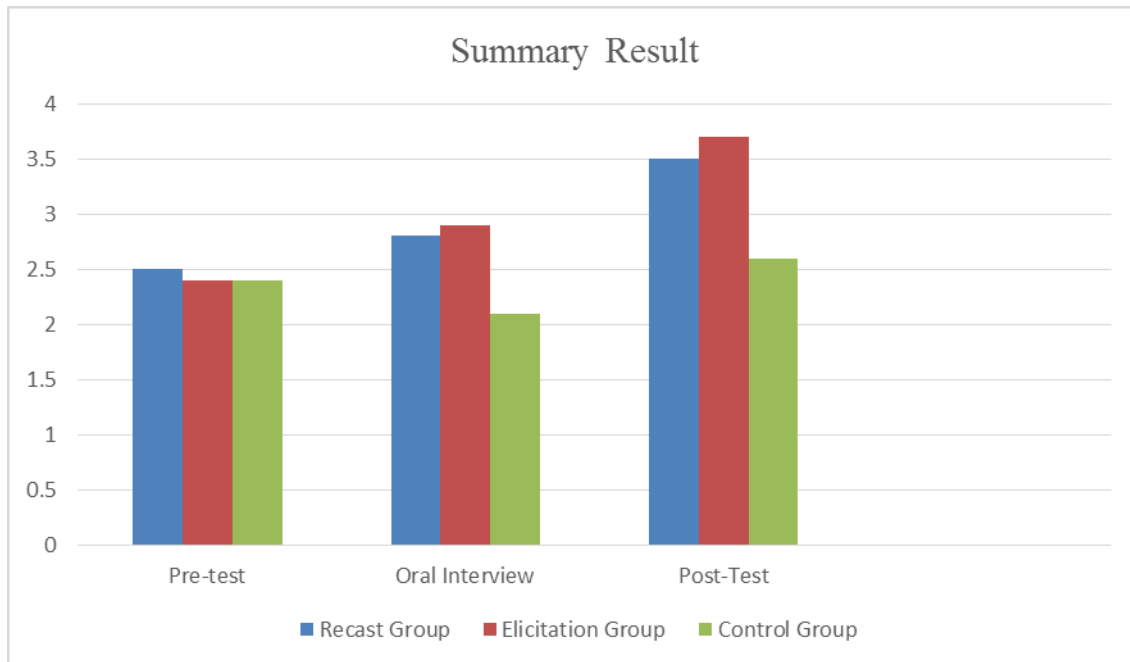
Groups	Mean		Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
	Difference	Std. Error		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	-6.000	1.619	.198	-11.117	2.930
	-5.000	1.521	.191	-11.056	2.894
Recast	6.000	1.644	.198	-2.978	11.213
	-8.000*	1.418	.040	-15.113	15.014
Elicitation	8.000*	1.428	.042	1.172	14.912
	4.000	1.414	.186	-2.901	10.938

Summary

Overall, the results obtained from the written as well as the oral tests indicate that elicitation as a corrective feedback technique appears to be slightly more effective than recasts. On written post-tests, students who were pushed to self-correct significantly outperformed participants. Results from the oral tests compared to those with the written test revealed that students performed better in their written test although the two research questions of the study were addressed and answered robustly. The two experimental groups by far outperformed the control group and the participants from elicitation group outperformed the recast group. However, while the differences between the experimental groups

with the control group proved to be significant, the difference between the two experimental groups did not vary significantly from one another. That is, the results comparison did not reveal any significant superiority of either group over another one.

Fig. 1 Summary of the results



Discussion

Despite the plethora of research addressing the role of “noticing” and application of different strategies to increase it such as task-based language teaching, form-focused instruction, corrective feedback, etc., (Alavi et al, 2015; Doughty, 2001; Long, 1991, 1996; Nicholas et al, 2001, Norris & Ortega, 2000) and output-based practice (Pica, 1994; Swain, 1985, 1995), there is no consensus as to which ones are more effective. This disagreement also applies to the potential benefits of different types of corrective feedback (i.e., reactive FFI). While some researchers advocate recasts because they are implicit, unobtrusive and contingent on the learner's intended meaning (Doughty, 2001, Nassaji & Fotos, 2011), others argue that recasts are ambiguous and, therefore, less effective particularly in classrooms that provide primarily meaning-based instruction (Nassaji, 2009). In light of this debate this study took place in a communicative FL classroom. Overall it can be argued that the findings support the research questions. In all cases, the elicitation group outperformed the recast group. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant on both post-tests. Quantitative analyses of the oral data showed that the elicitation group obtained higher means than the recast group yet these difference between the two experimental groups were not of significant value. Findings also proved that the provision of CF provided the participants from the experimental groups with more opportunities for self/peer correction. that is, they are exposed to a higher rate of language exposure. In the nutshell, the present study supports the claim that incorporating CF along with interactive tasks within communicative classroom is more effective than participation in such activities without CF.

Conclusion

After a scrutiny of the researches in the literature in both second and foreign language acquisition, this study was intended to explore CF strategies role in FL learning and mainly to explore the impacts of two corrective feedback techniques, namely elicitation and recasts. The findings showed that the opportunity to great exposure of input is not as effective as input along with CF. Nonetheless, no straightforward answer can be planned concerning what technique is more successful in improving the learners' language. Despite the fact that an analysis of the literature uncovered that elicitation was more successful than recasts. On the other hand, elicitation was seen to be more effective than recasts.

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