

Learners' Perceptions toward the Effect of Recast on the Quality of Their Oral Output

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Abstract

Corrective feedback plays an important role in language learning process. Corrective feedback can help EFL learners to ensure that they have internalized the learnt materials in its correct form. Feedback can be categorized to two main types of negative and positive, each of which can be applied either explicitly or implicitly. This paper has focused on the learners' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of recast as one type of implicit negative feedback strategy on the quality of their oral output.

Key Words: Corrective feedback, recast, oral output.

Introduction

Providing corrective feedback is one important part of any EFL education because it exceedingly helps learners to ensure that they are learning and internalizing the correct version of target language forms. Many scholars and researchers have highlighted the importance of using negative feedback in ELT education (Ashby & Brien, 2007), because it is widely accepted that when negative feedback is not provided after a wrong response by a learner, the learner will think that the response he or she has provided is correct. Therefore, the learner will apply the same erroneous form repeatedly. When errors are corrected, it gives the second language learner a chance to change his or her conscious mental rule about the linguistic form he or she has learnt. It informs the learner that his or her version of understanding is wrong and that he or she needs to change to the correct version. As a result, an effective use of negative feedback seems to be essential if the learning process is to be enhanced effectively.

Negative feedback should be provided in its correct way and in the right setting in order to enhance the learning process. While it is important to provide negative error to second language learners, it is important to identify which error should be corrected. Carroll and Swain (1993) have present results of studies that indicate that negative feedback may work effectively in some aspects of language acquisition and while in other aspects it may not be very effective. One aspect of language learning that would be enhanced by provision of negative feedback is grammatical competence. When grammatical errors are corrected the learner can easily change the existing cognitive and reach the target like competence. Carroll and Swain (1993) specifically noted that negative feedback would be more effective in enhancing use of spelling, punctuation, word use, paragraph structure and grammar in written language

Types of Negative Feedback

Carroll and Swain (1993) have classified negative feedback into two major classes: explicit negative feedback and implicit negative feedback. Negative feedback in second language acquisition can be provided by the teacher or by the environment in which the learner applies his or her new skills. The feedback may also be presented directly to the learner or may be left for the learner to identify it as feedback. These are some of the fundamental differences between explicit and implicit feedback. Explicit negative feedback refers to feedback that gives a clear indication that the response given by the student is incorrect (Carroll and Swain, 1993). For example, the teacher may instruct the student to correct the spelling of a word because the word he had written was miss-spelled. In this case, the learners get direct acknowledgement that the communication he is receiving constitutes negative feedback. Thus, explicit negative feedback is more of direct correction mechanism that is used in learning. Explicit negative feedback should go hand in hand with explicit positive feedback in order to enhance language learning. Cases whereby the teacher blatantly points out existence of errors but does not blatantly acknowledge correct responses may result in negative learning outcomes.

Implicit negative feedback, on the other hand, includes corrections, confirmation checks, failure to understand and request for clarification (Carroll and Swain, 1993). These feedback process are not directly perceived but work by forcing the learner to make his own inferences. When corrections are made the learner is forced to make inference on his interaction with the correcting party in order to understand that his response was incorrect (Carroll and Swain, 1993). Confirmation checks is when the instructor or the other party asks for confirmation from the learner during communications. For example, the teacher may ask the student if he is sure that that was the correct pronunciation of a word. In this case, the learner is forced to make his own inferences concerning whether the response provided is correct or not. The recipient of communication from the learner may also provide negative feedback by failing to understand and request for clarification. In this case the learner is forced to reevaluate his communication and make inferences on whether he or she was correct or not. Thus implicit negative feedback is more of an indirect correction mechanism that is used in learning.

Explicit negative feedback takes place almost exclusively in a classroom or formal learning setting (Carroll and Swain, 1993). This is because it is mainly in such settings that you can find instructors or fellow learners issuing correctional statements blatantly to learner. Implicit negative feedback is normally expected to take place in the natural environment where the learner attempts to exercise the acquired learning skills. However, implicit negative feedback may also be simulated in classroom or in formal learning setting.

Recast as one type of Implicit Negative Feedback Strategies

Recast is one of the most commonly used implicit negative feedback strategies. This strategy involves restating the correct version of the learner's incorrect statement by the instructors (Nicholas, Lightbrown and Spada, 2001). This method is considered an implicit feedback despite that fact that teacher corrects the error by providing the correct form of the utterance. This is because the learner has to learn of the existence of the error and how it is corrected through interaction.

Recast must be implemented effectively in order for this strategy to be effective in enhancing language learning. Just like in any other feedback mechanism, the learner must recognize that the responses being given constitute a corrective feedback (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). Without this recognition, the uptake of the corrective measure may not be realized leading to minimal changes in behavior. This implies that the recast must be implemented in such a way that the learner is able to recognize the corrective aspect. According to Nicholas, Lightbrown and Spada (2001) recasts are more effective when conducted in a regular and continuous basis. In that way they become effective in correcting pattern errors and the learner's way of thinking rather specific errors. Researchers also suggest that higher frequencies of recast will also enable children to recognize the contrast between their wrong utterances and the correct utterances thereby leading to rejection of the wrong utterance and acceptance of the correct utterance.

One argument that has been made in favor of recast is that the strategy is more effective in language acquisition because it helps the learner to recognize that the divergence between his current inter-language and the target inter-language. Most other implicit negative feedback strategies leaves the students with a lot of room for thinking and the student may keep making errors. However, in recast the instructor restates the correct version of the learner's utterance. Language theorist suggests that this may play a positive role in promoting language acquisition. Supporting researchers have argued that the learner's perception of contrast between his or her original utterance and the correct utterance is the first step towards the rejection of the incorrect utterance. In this case the learner is able to obtain a new linguistic form that communicates similar meaning as what he or she had attempted to convey his or her original utterance.

Background

Learning and teaching process is significantly linked to the way teachers and learners react toward the errors and how they try to correct them. There are different reasons that lead the learners to produce errors. Some errors occur because learners are not aware of the rules. In this case, error correction can be effective if the teacher can make the error, its source and the way of correcting it, clear to the students. Some errors are produced due to temporary overload on the student's cognitive processes. Error correction in this case may fail to prevent the learners from making future errors because they have not resulted from inadequate knowledge. The overload of the cognitive processes probably indicates that the student needs to have more communication practice than correction. Correcting oral errors of EFL students has been a concern in the literature (Shaffer, 2008). Different researchers express different viewpoints in this regard.

Language learners also have their own preferences about error correction. The implication of recast strategy is considered to be an effective way through which learners' spoken errors can be corrected. The available literature on students' perceptions regarding error correction in foreign language research highlights the importance of the topic at hand (Bang, 1999; Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Chenoweth, Day, Chun & Luppescu, 1983; Katayama, 1996; Oladejo, 1993). The purpose of the present study was to examine student attitudes and perceptions toward error correction in Iranian EFL classes.

Research question

This study addressed the following research question:

What are the Iranian EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions with regard to the effect of recast on the quality of their oral output?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were comprised of 50 Iranian junior students majoring in English Language Teaching at Hafez Institute of Higher Education in Shiraz. The sample who took part in this study was selected among 200 junior students studying at this institute, based on cluster random sampling technique. These students were both males and females, ranging from 21 to 30 years of age. They had registered in the course of Oral Production of Stories, in which they had to extensively produce spoken language via short lectures, summaries and oral communication.

Instrument

The instrument used to elicit information on students' attitudes regarding error correction was a questionnaire developed by Katayama (1996). The questionnaire consisted of two main sections, each of which encompassed certain related questions. The first section contained eight demographic questions/statements about the participants of the study. The second section addressed the research question of the study to examine the students' general views on classroom oral error correction. This section contained four open-ended questions and 28 items, illustrating certain views that have been controversial among language researchers and scholars. These views included: whether or not learner errors should be corrected; whether or not the teacher should correct all errors of speaking even if they interrupt communication; whether or not the teacher's restatements of the learners' erroneous productions lead to improvement of their speaking and whether or not they think that their speaking would be less accurate if the teacher had not corrected them.

The students were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with four different statements. Response options were coded on 5-point scales, starting from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The reliability of this questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha which indicated Alpha level of 0.873 that shows that the questionnaire is reliable to use for the purpose of this study. Table 1 presents the results of reliability statistics.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.873	40

Procedure

The students who took part in this study attended 16 instructional sessions in the Oral Production class for a whole semester. At the beginning of the term, the teacher explained the benefits of error correction and instructed the students indirectly on the way their erroneous oral language productions will be corrected by the teacher using restatements of their erroneous oral output. During other instructional sessions, the students had to give lectures on pre-specified topics, present summaries of previous stories covered in the class and participate in class communicative discussions on various topics. During all these activities, the teacher extensively corrected the students' errors using recast strategy. The questionnaires were completed by the sample at the end of the semester. The purpose was to elicit their viewpoints about error correction in the form of recast after they had experienced this type of error correction and compared and contrasted it to other strategies.

Results and discussion

The participants of this study answered four main categories of question with regard to their perceptions about the effectiveness of error correction using recast strategy on their oral output. The first question category elicited information from the participants to see whether or not they agreed that the teachers should correct their speaking errors. As illustrated in table 2, 93.34% of the students stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that teachers should correct the students' errors when they are speaking in English. The potential reason that the participants of this study may have had for their tendency toward error correction can be their willingness to be accurate users of the English language. It was observed during the semester that when they were involved in speaking, they were much concerned about producing accurate sentences or other linguistic forms. This desire on the part of the students for accuracy in their oral output encouraged and motivated their positive attitude about error correction in their speaking activities. The findings here conform with the results of studies conducted among ESL students by Cathcart and Olsen (1976), Chenoweth, Day, Chun, and Lupescu (1983) and McCargar (1993) as well as studies conducted among EFL students conducted by Oladejo (1993), Katayama (1996) and Bang (1999).

Referring back to table 2, it was observed that 62.45% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that all errors in speaking should be corrected even if the corrections interrupt their flow of communication. The logical interpretation for this standpoint can be the students preference for accuracy over fluency, or at least parallel attention to accuracy and fluency at the same time. This incorporates that these EFL students have awareness toward their learning process and ,in contrast to many generally accepted viewpoints, do not sacrifice accuracy for fluency.

The third question category elicited information from the participants to see whether or not they think that their teachers' restatements of their erroneous linguistic forms can improve their speaking ability. As shown in table 2 below, 93.63% of the participants reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed that when their teacher corrects their errors with restatements, their speaking ability improves. The justification for this finding is that when the language learners are stopped by a restatement of their production, the chance for self monitoring escalates. As a result, they will face an opportunity to reformulate or modify an erroneous form during the learning process in their speaking. This can help the learners to notice their errors and further, to correct them. This will lead to a general improvement in learners' oral output.

The last question category asked whether or not the students oral output could be less accurate if they were not corrected by the teacher. In this regard, 72.02% of the participants reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed that if they were not corrected by the teacher their oral output would be less accurate. This finding conform with the idea that error correction in general and recast in particular, are effective means through which accuracy can be enhanced and oral output can be improved. The result confirmed the findings of some previous studies (Chaudron 1986; Courchêne, 1980; Fanselow, 1977; Lucas, 1975; Lyster, 2001; Salica, 1981).

Table 2. The students' attitudes and perceptions toward recast

Items	N	SD+D (%)	NI (%)	A+SA (%)	Mean	Std.
I want my teacher to correct my errors when I speak in English.	50	3.26	3.02	93.34	5.32	.87
The teacher should correct all errors of speaking even if they interrupt communication.	50	13.24	25.86	62.45	3.56	.54
My teacher's restatements of my erroneous productions lead to improvement of my speaking.	50	4.35	2.09	93.63	4.21	.79
I think my speaking would be less accurate if my teacher had not corrected me.	50	14.18	13.42	72.02	3.87	.58

SD+D= Strongly disagree and Disagree

NI= No idea

A+SA= Agree and Strongly agree

Conclusions

This study was designed to figure out the Iranian EFL learners' general attitudes and preferences toward the effect of recast on the quality of their oral output. The results indicated a positive attitude toward recast as one strategy of error correction in speaking. Most of the students reported that they want their teacher to correct all the oral errors they make. In addition, the findings suggested that the students insist on the quality of their oral output by weighting accuracy more than fluency. The results indicated that they prefer to be corrected even if the correction interrupts their flow of communication. Besides, they maintained that extensive error correction in the form of recast by the teacher, had improved the quality of their speaking. Furthermore, they believed that if their errors were not corrected in the form of restatements, their oral output quality would have decreased because their productions would have been less accurate. To sum up, the results of this study suggested a positive and favorable attitude toward error correction in the form of recast and illustrated that recast can have positive effects on the quality of EFL students' oral output. The findings of this study provide can contribute to developing a clearer understanding of students' perceptions toward recast strategy as one type of error correction. Further studies on the topic at hand are needed to verify the results of this study.

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