Oral Corrective Feedback and L2 Vocabulary Development:

Prompts and Recasts in the Teens ESL Classroom

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Abstract

This research examines how teens learn L2 vocabulary when affected by different types of oral corrective feedback during a controlled classroom interaction. The study employed post-test design. Pre-Intermediate teens ESL learners (N 30) in an institute were categorized into three groups: prompts, recasts, and control. In the treatment stage, a four step vocabulary activity was provided to prompt, recast or no feedback group, respective. The findings appear to indicate that using prompts and recasts as two kinds of oral corrective feedback were of benefit to students in terms of their ability to detect and correct errors in their own speech when they are learning new vocabularies. However the prompts group was the only one that demonstrated significant increases of vocabulary development as they were operationalized for this study.

Keywords: Corrective feedback, L2 vocabulary development, Prompts versus recasts

Introduction

According to vocabulary acquisition theorists (Henriksen, 2008; Read, 2000, as cited in Dilans, 2010), words serve as the primary building blocks for language development and use. Gass and Selinker (2008, as cited in Dilans, 2010) argue that lexical errors impede the learner's ability to understand another speaker and to negotiate in a second language (L2). Dilans (2010) ,argues that Knowledge of words can definitely reinforce language use and link it to further learning, and one facilitator of that link is conversation, which triggers an interactive type of language learning through a diversity of tasks, responses, and cues. Often such interaction manifests itself through oral corrective feedback (CF) that varies both in form and in input/output orientations.

Han (2008,as cited in Hernández Méndez & Rosario Reyes Cruz**,**2012**)**suggests that error correction implies an evident and direct correction, whereas corrective feedback is a more general way of providing some clues, or eliciting some correction, besides the direct correction made by the teacher.

Hernández Méndez & Rosario Reyes Cruz & Murrieta Loyo. (2010) point out that although the provision of corrective feedback in the foreign language classroom seems natural in the process of learning a language, the role that corrective feedback plays in the classroom and the attitudes language teachers have towards it have been not same through the years, or even from one teacher to another. On the other hand, in the theoretical ground, corrective feedback has also been an area of research and discussion in language acquisition and learning over the last decades, which has contributed to the debate about this issue.

Dilans(2010) in his article claims that, one such approach would be to compare differential outcomes produced by the feedback types, such as prompts and recasts, that are most commonly found in L2 pedagogical contexts by employing more finely grained research methodologies .Comparative studies of feedback effectiveness have usually chosen a morphosyntactic target, and consequently few studies look at CF effects on vocabulary development.

Hernández Méndez et al. (2010) offers that, while some language acquisition theories and second language methodologies encourage the use of corrective feedback, others disfavor its use. Some problems that have arisen with regard to the use of corrective feedback or its absence in the language classroom are a) the inconsistency, ambiguity, and ineffectiveness of teachers' corrections (Allwright, 1975; Chaudron, 1977; Long, 1977) ; b) ambiguous, random and unsystematic feedback on errors by teachers (Lyster and Mori, 2006 *)* ; c) acceptance of errors for fear of interrupting the communication; d) wide range of learner error types addressed as corrective feedback, (Lyster and Ranta, 1997*).*

This empirical study examines, whether teens learn L2 vocabulary, when

exposed to different types of oral CF during controlled classroom interaction. In addition, it presents examination of CF effects on L2 development. There follows a brief discussion of the issues relevant to the study, namely, CF, prompts versus recasts, and L2 vocabulary development.

Oral CF and L2 development

Over the last decades, there has been an increasing interest in researching corrective feedback in second language acquisition, and several definitions have been offered since then. Hernández Méndez et al.,(2010) in their article, have defined several definition of CF. One of the first definitions of corrective feedback is that of Chaudron (1977*)* who considers it as "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance". (p: 31). Other synonyms of corrective feedback more commonly used are "error correction", "negative evidence" "negative feedback". However, Han (2008) suggests that error correction implies an evident and direct correction, whereas corrective feedback is a more general way of providing some clues, or eliciting some correction, besides the direct correction made by the teacher. Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006) describe corrective feedback as follows:

"Corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain error. The responses can consist of (a) an indication that an error has been committed, (b) provision of the correct target language form, or (c) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these". (p. 340).

Prompts versus recasts

According to Lyster (2004,as cited in Dilans,2010), the four elements constituting prompts –clarification requests, repetitions, metalinguistic clues, and elicitation– have the following commonality: 'They withhold correct forms(and other signs of approval) and instead offer learners an opportunity to self-repair by generating their own modified response' (p. 405).Recasts, as Lyster observes, do not generate such outcomes because they provide the correct form, which often implies the need for an admission response from learners. (Thus, it can be inferred that to a certain extent recasts impede modified output.) In other words, a key distinction between prompts and recasts is that while prompts facilitate self- or peer correction through pushed or modified output, recasts do not and, instead, mostly provide implicit correction in the form of modified input. However, in comparison to recasts that provide

modified input, not all prompts seem to be equal in terms of generating reformulation or direct self-correction through modified output.

Another compare has been made by Lyster (2002,as cited in Ding.(n.d)),Noticing that it is the self-correcting force of certain feedback strategies (such as "elicitation" and "metalinguistic feedback") rather than their explicitness that contribute to L2 development, questioned the reliability of comparing the effects of different feedback techniques according to their implicitness/explicitness. Instead, he differentiated two categories of feedback—those that withhold correct forms and encourage learners to self-correct (including clarification requests, metalinguistic clues, repetition and elicitation of the correct form, generally referred to as prompts) and the one that provides learners with correct reformulation and therefore obviates the necessity to self-correct (referred to as recasts).

Because recasts provide language learners with target-like reformulations and exemplars, they account for a significant part of language input in L2 classrooms, while prompts encourage learners to produce their own target-like output. This classification of feedback has aroused great research interest in those who are concerned about theoretical issues such as the role of input and output in L2 learning, as well as the cognitive roles that recasts and prompts play.

Recast: The teacher repeats what the learner has said replacing the error. Some teacher's recasts can be of one word, a grammatical or lexical modification or translations in response to a student's use of the L1

Example: Students complete an exercise after that the teacher calls on students to check the sentences.

S: *Were you **surprising** by anything in the article?* (error-grammatical)

T: *Were you **surprised** by anything in the article?* (feedback-recast)

Repetition of error: The teacher repeats the learner's error in isolation, in most cases, teachers adjust their intonation so as to highlight the error. (Lyster and Randa, 1997)

Example: Students work in pairs discussing about their future plans.

S: *I going to visit my parents next week.*

T: *I going to…*(**emphasis** feedback-prompt,)

S: *I'm going to…*

Elicitation: According to Lyster(19997) in this type of feedback teachers provide a sentence and strategically pause to allow students to "fill in the blank", then if the students give an incorrect answer he/she makes a comment such as "No, not that. It's a…" or just repeats the error.

Example: S: *Androcles and the lion become good friends.*

T: *become?* (**emphasis**, feedback-prompt)

S: *became*

The samples were retrieved from Hernández Méndez et al., 2010.

Vocabulary learning

Many researchers and linguists make great effort to find out the most effective vocabulary instruction and learning strategies that can help students improve word power. Mollakhan , Rasouli , Karbalaei (2013), maintain that, In language learning, vocabulary acquisition definitely plays an important role as Wilkins (1972) pointed out that 'without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed' (p.111). According to Mollakhan et al**. (**2013) learners need to have a bank of lexical items in order to express themselves as part of and throughout the learning process. They also have to know how to master the essential lexical items. Nevertheless, vocabulary learning is often seen as the greatest source of problems experienced by second language learners. Given such a critical role that vocabulary learning plays in second language acquisition, further investigation into learners' approaches and perception towards learning vocabulary is worthwhile.

This leads us to reflect on the current syllabus carried out in classroom context and some possible factors that account for the disappointing vocabulary learning outcomes. Therefore, instructors and course designers for English courses need to be better equipped with instructional tools and techniques that can be easily implemented in the classroom, such as using recast and prompt during classroom interactions while teaching new words.

Consequently, I hypothesized that such a research approach could show that the effects of conversational interaction, in the form of CF, on L2 vocabulary development (consisting of three dimensions or variables) were truly differential. This means that three

different treatments (prompts, recasts, and no feedback) were tested on selective vocabulary knowledge.

Method

Participants

One of the objectives of the study was to develop students' vocabulary knowledge. The subjects were recruited directly by the researcher at the beginning of their classes. They were 30 male and female students learning English at pre-intermediate level in an English institute in Gilan. The students' ages ranged from 15 to 18 and were grouped into three classes: prompts, recasts, and control. Three teachers who were studied EFL were provided enough instruction on how to engage in corrective feedback in both prompt and recast groups. For instruction, some sample examples of providing recast and prompt were given to the teachers to practice them for the class.

Materials and Procedure

The study employed a post-test design. One group of students was treated with recasts, and another was exposed to prompts (elicitation and repetition).The control group received no feedback. At the beginning, the participating teachers were informed about the study and the types of feedback to be used in it in response to grammatical, pronunciation and lexical errors directly or partially related to the production of the vocabulary. The vocabularies were selected out of the one unit of the book. From the whole vocabularies, 10 unknown concrete ones at the same level of difficulty were taught through prompts and recast. Subsequently, the treatment activity included the following four steps: reading word definitions, provision of contextual questions or statements for the studied words, producing hypothetical sentences involving one word of choice, and completing a picture-labeling task .After two weeks treatment a test based on the global selected vocabularies was employed.

After all participants answered the abovementioned test, their performances were compared to see whether there is any significant difference between the three groups or not.

Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed and the following tables were elicited.

Table 1. Paired sample test for vocabulary knowledge in prompt, recast and control

Group	N	Mean	SD
Recast	10	11.5	2.944
Prompt	10	13.5	1.673
Control	10	8.1	1.211

As we can see from the above mentioned table, with respect to using prompt and recast as kinds of corrective feedback, it is clear that students had a better performance in vocabulary knowledge when they were exposed to different kinds of corrective feedback than the time they were not exposed to (means 13.5 and 11.5 respectively)

In other words, techniques of oral corrective feedback can play a significant role on increasing EFL learners' L2 vocabulary knowledge.

According to outcomes of this study, providing EFL learners with modified input and output during interaction between them and their teachers in the classroom could enhance students' awareness and performance with regard to enhancing the level of vocabulary knowledge. The results of this study show that modified input (in the form of recasts) and pushed output (in the form of prompts) were likely to be responsible for an enhanced ability to produce L2 vocabulary through various associative effects that were generated through interaction as far as an EFL context is concerned. Overall, pushed output seemed to be a more efficient factor in facilitating L2 vocabulary acquisition than (modified) input. In addition, the benefit of both recasts and prompts demonstrated in the present study provides motivation for the inclusion of instruction on using these two techniques in teacher training programs. Specifically, teachers-in-training should

be made aware of what recasts and prompts are, their benefits to students, and how they can be incorporated into meaning-based student-teacher interaction in order to achieve focus-on-form goals within the classroom.

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