

# The Impact of Explicit and Implicit Recasts on the Grammatical Accuracy of Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Performance

Saeideh Ahangari<sup>1</sup>, Farhad Golpour<sup>\*2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>*Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran*

*\*corresponding author: golpourf@gmail.com*

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## Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the effects of explicit and implicit recasts on Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of English relative clauses. For this purpose, 64 participants were selected out of 94 intermediate level EFL learners at Falagh language Institute, Rasht, Iran. To have homogenized groups, the researcher administered a language proficiency test (TOEFL). Then, the researchers assigned them randomly to the explicit recast group, implicit recast group, and control group. They carried out some information gap tasks within four sessions. One group received explicit recast, the other group received implicit recast and the control one got no corrective feedback, for the target linguistic errors during the task performance. A grammatical judgment test was applied as the pretest and immediate posttest. The results of a paired-samples *t*-test and analyses of variance (ANOVA) showed that the scores of all three groups improved significantly overtime. However, the explicit recast group did significantly better than both the control group and the implicit recast group. The results of the study were elaborated in terms of counterbalance hypothesis and noticing hypothesis. The superiority of explicit recast implied a beneficial role for negative evidence in SLA and that explicit recast was a better choice than implicit recast in the L2 classroom.

**Keywords:** Grammar Enhancement, Implicit Recast, Explicit Recast

### **Introduction**

Interaction hypothesis research has started from twenty five years ago. This hypothesis emphasizes the negotiation of meaning which contributes to acquisition. And a growing body of research has been done in this domain to find the effects of interlocutors' feedback on developing learners' language. In this respect correcting feedback (CF) which facilitate language development gained more attention than other aspects, since it helps learners to attend to some aspects of language that leads to incidental language learning.(Long,1996). Moreover Schmit's (2001) Noticing Hypothesis indicates that paying attention to form of language can enhance language acquisition, so that corrective feedback can be a good trigger for noticing.

Many researchers have investigated corrective feedback and its effectiveness on different language aspects such as pronunciation, writing and grammar (Loewen&Erlam, 2006; Gass& Mackey, 2005), different characteristics of feedback including amount of explicitness (Takahashi, 2007), the positive effects of various kinds of CF (Perdomo, 2008; Nassaji, 2009; Ellis,2006;) number of changes and linguistic differences( Egi, 2007). Results of different researches on grammar teaching and CF vary from different studies; some indicated positive effects of corrective feedback and some confirmed doubts in this aspect. These studies help us to understand the essential role of recast in language learning but the role of recast differs in different studies thus it is better to study the types of recasts in order to gain better understanding of these different types on some aspects of language such as grammar. In some studies recasts considered as explicit such as (nassaji, 2009) and in some studies implicit and some researchers determined that some are more explicit and some are less; however, this study aims at determining the efficacy of both implicit and explicit feedback on grammar enhancement (relative clauses).

Schmidt (1990) proposed the concept of noticing hypothesis in second language acquisition. He intensified that learners cannot learn features of grammar if they don't notice them. He postulated that input cannot be converted into intake for language learning unless learner noticed input, this is his strong version of noticing hypothesis. Further he suggested that nothing will be acquired if it is not attended. In his weak version of noticing hypothesis, noticing does not lead to acquisition but it facilitates it. In this

aspect connectionists considered that acquisition is attained by frequent processing something that is available not by noticing. Venkatagiri and Levis (2009) stated that noticing hypothesis implies that noticing is important and the initial stage of language acquisition and just considering automatic acquisition of second language will face learners with many challenges. Lightbown. And Spada (2006) mentioned that there is debate that whether learning takes place subconsciously or it should be noticed. Based on this hypothesis distinguishing contrast between his own language structure and adult language construction is the first step in recognizing language system. Noticing hypothesis has some relation with corrective feedback studies in that awareness and noticing are essential in understanding different kinds of feedback and enhancing their advantages for language learners.

The theoretical basis of research about recast originated from Long's (1983,1996) interaction hypothesis. He suggested that interaction can help development of inter-language by aiding comprehension in which promotes language development. In 1990s some researchers such as Tanaka and Yazmaki (1994) and Ellis(1994) demonstrated that interaction is helpful in language learning. Following these studies Long proposed that negotiation for meaning particularly negotiation with competent interlocutor or native speakers promotes language acquisition (Long, 1996).This hypothesis prompted researchers to explore some particular interactional characteristics on L2 development like prompts, models and recasts (Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998). This was a starting point of research for studying of the recast. There are definitions of recast by some repudiated specialist such as Sheen (2006)'s who has defined recasts as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance that contains at least one error within the context of a communicative activity in the classroom (p.365)". Lyster and Ranta (1997) defines recasts as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance minus the error (p.46)". According to Long (2007) *corrective* recast is a "reformulation of all or part of a learner's immediately preceding utterance in which one or more non-target like items are replaced by the corresponding target language form(s),while the focus of the interlocutors is on *meaning* not language itself ( p.77)". In spite of different

definitions suggested for recast in investigated literature, there are some essential features that are common in all definitions: 1) a recast comes after an utterance that is erroneous, and 2) rephrasing of an utterance that is ill-formed. 3. Keeping the main meaning and expanding the ill-formed.

For learning a language successfully, most of the ELT specialists agree that error correction is necessary. However, they are discussing on the way of doing this correction. The essential matter is the degree of implicitness or explicitness of the feedback. Explicit correction can be defined as giving students direct forms of correction. Instructors must inform learners about their erroneous utterances. Lyster (2002) exemplified explicit recast:

Teacher: which poem are you going to read?

Student: I do not study it.

Teacher you want to say I didn't study; this poem

Student: sorry! I didn't study this poem.

Whereas in implicit correction learners must be provided with indirect feedback, Learners themselves must infer from the signs that they have created some ill-formed sentences. (Dabaghi&Basturkmen, 2008).

Long (2007 cited in Yousefi&Biria 2011). 'example of implicit recast.

Teacher: what did she become when she grew up?

Student: she be a doctor

Teacher: she became a doctor

Student: no reaction

There have been some investigations that have inspected outcome of corrective feedback in the form of explicit or implicit on language acquisition. First some studies that investigated the effects of corrective feedback on learners' language development are represented. Ammar and Spada (2006) studied the effects of prompts and recasts on oral and written abilities of students with various proficiency levels. They uncovered that prompts were more effective than recasts and also recasts were subtle to proficiency levels of learners. It revealed that high proficient learners profited from both recasts and prompts while low proficient ones used more prompts than recasts. Moreover; Carroll and Swain (1993) found that second language learners that received metalinguistic explanation in

comparing to those that received no feedback recast or prompts, produced more correct utterances.

In a study done by Han (2002) using corrective feedback in one group compared to other group receiving no treatment at all, he discovered that recasts can help in promoting consistency of tense use in oral and written forms. On the pre-test both groups displayed some consistency in using tenses especially present tense but on the posttest, recast group were more consistent in using of present or past tense. Additionally, Doughty and Varela (1998) examined two groups, i.e., one with positive corrective recast and other group receiving no feedback. The result showed significant gain earned by recast group comparing to control group.

However, there are some studies that declared superiority of implicit recast group performance over explicit one. Menti (2003), for example, investigated the effects of elicitation and recast on the EFL learners' performance at intermediate level. The results of the study in immediate and post-test revealed that the elicitation group outperformed recast group. Peredomo (2006) also studied the effects of two kinds of feedback on acquisition of past participle in present perfect tense and auxiliary form of (to have). The subjects of the study were divided randomly into two different groups, one receiving implicit recast and other explicit negative one. The learners who received implicit recast performed better than those who received explicit negative evidence.

Finally, some investigations confirmed that those learners that received explicit recasts outperformed the group receiving implicit ones. Some of the most important studies were represented below. Ellis, Erlam and Loewen (2006) studied the effectiveness of explicit and implicit corrective feedback on the performance of low- intermediate students. An imitation test was used for measuring implicit knowledge and a metalinguistic knowledge test and a grammaticality judgment test used for testing explicit knowledge. The results revealed that explicit feedback was superior to implicit knowledge.

In a study done by Heift (2010), it was found that the metalinguistic description in which specific explanation provided on learners' errors resulted in more uptake than providing a kind of feedback including highlighting the erroneous parts based on these results. Heift (2010)

suggested that when specific feedback provided, it is more probable that our learners involved in error correction procedure.

Nassaji (2009) also discovered that elicitation that is a kind of explicit feedback resulted in higher amounts of delayed and immediate interaction than implicit recasts. Muranoi (2000) in a comparative study compared function of three groups of Japanese college students; first group interact through recast and request for repetition through some tasks and explicit explanations of grammar was provided. Group two did some meaning focused activities and interaction enhancement activities and control group received no treatment. The results of this study showed that both first two groups outperformed the control group on the immediate post-test and delayed post-test. However, the group with explicit description did better than other group that received no explicit explanation.

Lyster (1998) also discovered that corrective effect of recasts that is hidden within them may not be noticed by learners. In another study, Lyster (2004) studied the effects of prompts and recasts for grammatical point of gender acquisition in French. Prompts used in this study were metalinguistic cues, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request. The result showed that prompts along with form-focused instruction were more efficient than recast combined with form-focus instruction. Lyster and Panova (2002) reported the same results in another study. Moreover, Haghani and Sedighi (2012) studied the benefits of using recasts and elicitation feedback and the result of their study on both immediate post-test and delayed post-test showed no significant difference between two treatment groups. Similarly, zhuo (2010) investigated the influences of both explicit and implicit recasts. The result of his study uncovered that explicit recast group outperformed both implicit and control group.

Lyster and Izquierdo (2009) recently examined the influence of two kinds of corrective feedback in grammatical gender acquisition among French students. The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of prompts versus recasts in interaction. The results revealed the effectiveness of both types of feedbacks. Mackey and McDonough (2006) also examined the effect of different types of responses and recasts for expansion of question form among Thai EFL learners. The results uncovered that both learners' output and recasts are prognostic of following development.

By glancing at preceding studies, it was revealed that there is a discrepancy in the results of the studies done before. Therefore, the researchers were motivated to find the effects of explicit and implicit recasts on the improvement of EFL learners' grammatical accuracy. Therefore, the researchers raised the following research question:

Is there a significant difference among the effect of implicit, explicit and no feedback on the learners' grammatical accuracy?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were chosen from among 94 intermediate EFL learners at Falagh Institute, Rasht, Iran. Intermediate level students seem appropriate since they can interact in communicative activities and they can notice when feedback is given. For assigning learners to this study, the researcher used intact groups. To homogenize participants, the researchers administered a proficiency test TOEFL. According to scores those participants with Scores within one SD below and the above the mean ( $M=82.41$ ,  $SD= 8.33$ ) were chosen. At last, 64 learners formed the selected group. The Average age range was 19. The Participants were attending classes twice a week which lasted for two hours. Then, the researchers randomly ascribed learners to three groups of explicit recast, implicit recast and control.

### **Instruments**

#### *TOEFL*

To make sure that learners are homogenous in terms of language proficiency, Longman pencil and Paper test (2004) was utilized. This test included three main parts of listening comprehension, reading comprehension and structure.

#### *Pretest and Posttest*

The test consisted of some relative clauses and it was prepared in counterbalanced design in the forms of pre-test and post-test. The main purpose of pretest was to make sure how much EFL learners knew about this structure. Because of the lack of ready-made test it was prepared by

researchers. At first 90 test items were written and after pilot testing an item analysis was done for omitting inappropriate items. Poor items were deleted or revised and only sixty items remained. Then the reliability index of it was calculated which was 0.80. The same test was used for pretest and post-test.

### **Procedures**

This study was done at Falagh language institute in Rasht. According to the design of the study, three classes that were homogeneous based on TOEFL were assigned to one control group, one experimental group with implicit recast and another experimental group with explicit recast. These three classes 90 minutes were held twice a week and were taught by the researchers. However, before the treatment initiation, the pre-test was administrated. For this purpose, some focused tasks such as picture description tasks (Ellis,2003) were used to prompt participants to utilize targeted structures. Particularly in this study, the tasks were selected in a way that enticed participants to use relative clauses. Whenever the participants made any mistake, they received corrective feedback. For explicit recast, according to Sheen (2006), just one erroneous utterance should be emphasized but in implicit recast, the teacher reformulate the whole erroneous part and there is no stress on erroneous part. After four weeks the posttest was administered by the researchers.

#### *Target Structure*

In this research, feedback concentrated on some forms that were preselected. The structure that was chosen for the study was relative clause, because Iranian EFL learners are familiar with this difficult grammatical structure that is important in communication. Ishida (2004) have proposed that when learners are ready for acquiring some structural points, recast is very useful. Moreover, the research done by Schacheter (1974) discovered that relative clause is the most problematic subject for the Iranian students to acquire.

Here are some common Learners erroneous sentences:

- \*The woman that she is speaking aloud is my mother.
- \*The boy who his hat is white is my friend.
- \*This is the map that I bought it.

### *Treatment task*

The tasks that were used for this study were picture description focused tasks in which the focus is on meaning not tasks themselves. Using tasks is based on

Ellis' (2003) definition of an information-gap task. The learners were asked to look at the pictures and describe them for the class. They had to use relative pronouns (when, where, who, which, whose, whom, , etc.) in their descriptions.

## **Results**

### **Homogeneity Test**

For determining the learners' proficiency level, the researchers utilized Longman (2004) TOEFL test. The specified time for answering the test was 150 minutes and the process of scoring was out of 150. Those participants whose scores were within one standard deviation above (95) and below (75) the mean (82.35) were selected. Then, an ANOVA was run on their proficiency scores. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

*Table 1*

*Descriptive Statistics for the TOEFL scores of three groups*

TEST	Item	N	range	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
TOEFL	150	64	35	30	120	82.35	9.73

*Table 2*

*ANOVA analysis for the comparison of three groups' proficiency scores*

	Sum of squares	df	mean squares	F	sig.
Between groups	70.32	2	24.06	2.37	.43
Within groups	112.14	61	13.26		
Total	182.46	63			

As it is clear from Table 2, there was no significant difference among the groups' proficiency scores. After checking the participants' proficiency scores, the researcher tested the research hypothesis. For this purpose, first the researchers compared each group's pre-test and post-test through some descriptive statistics the results of which are given in Tables 3.

*Table 3*  
*Descriptive statistics for the three groups' pre-test and post-test scores*

Groups	Pretest			Post-test	
	N	M	SD	M	SD
Explicit recast	20	18.86	4.75	29.26	3.91
Implicit recast	20	18.91	4.66	25.36	4.12
Control group	20	19.10	4.7	23.45	4.60

As Table 3 shows, there has been an increase in the mean score of all groups from the pre-test to the post-test. Then, in order to compare three groups' mean scores, the researchers ran two one way ANOVAs on the pre-test and post-test mean scores of three groups. The results of ANOVAs are represented in Table 4.

*Table 4*  
*ANOVA test used to determine the differences between and within the groups*

Groups	Pairs	Sum of square	df	Mean of square	f	p
Pre-test	Between groups	.767	2	.334	.034	.98
	Within groups	765.122	61	14.037		
	Total	765.889	63			
Post-test	Between groups	440.714	2	220.857	16.200*	.00
	Within groups	829.143	61	13.486		
	Total	1269.857	63			

As indicated in Table 4, the results of first ANOVA which was run on the groups' pre-test mean scores showed no differences among pre-test mean scores of three groups,  $F=.034, p=.98$ . However, applying ANOVA on the post-tests mean scores showed a significant difference among the groups' performance  $F= 16.200, p < .05$ . Later, in order to find the source of these significant difference, the researchers ran a Scheffe post hoc analysis, the results of which are given in Table 5.

Table 5  
Scheffe' multiple comparisons of groups' posttest scores

Test	group	group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	<i>p</i>
Post-test	explicit recast	Implicit recast	3.55434*	1.12138	.005
		control group	6.34746*	1.12138	.000
	implicit recast	explicit recast	-3.55434*	1.12138	.005
		control group	2.46234	1.12138	.085
	control group	explicit recast	-6.34746*	1.12138	.000

As it is shown in Table 5, in the post-test, the explicit recast group performed significantly better than the implicit recast group since their mean of difference is 3.55434, with  $p < .05$ . Moreover, the explicit group's performance was significantly better than the control group in the post- test since their mean difference was 6.34746,  $p < .05$ . In the post-test, there were some differences between the implicit recast group and the control group's performance, however, these differences were not significant since their mean difference was 2.46234,  $p = .85$

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of corrective feedback in second language learning. Moreover, it explored the results of explicit and implicit feedback. The answer to the research question which investigated the difference among the impact of different types of feedback, i.e explicit, implicit and no feedback on the writing accuracy of the learners was positive. Explicit recast group outperformed the other two groups. Explicit recast means changing the erroneous utterance, and providing corrected feedback which makes clear for the learners the erroneous part of their utterance and teacher provides one change from the utterance that needs correction. By comparing his utterance with his teacher's, the learner can attend to the erroneous part and correct his utterance himself. This finding is in line with previous findings such as Carroll and Swain (1993) Muranoi (2000); Leeman (2003), Nassaji (2009), Mackey and McDonough (2006), Ammar and Spada (2006) Ellis, Erlam and Loewen (2006) who compared explicit feedback group and the group receiving no feedback and concluded superiority of explicit feedback group than no feedback group.

According to *counterbalance hypothesis* (Lyster & Mori, 2006) which states that providing an interactional feedback in a context is appropriate to the extent that it varies from the normal way of communication, explicit feedback provides this condition.

The second part of research question that compared using implicit recast with no feedback, the answer is not positive it means that differences in using implicit recast and using no feedback is not statistically significant. This finding is in contrast with some studies such as Peredomo (2006) emphasizing the effects of implicit recasts over no feedback and Ellis, Erlam and Loewen (2006) and Doughty and Varela's (1998) proving the effects of implicit and explicit recast on grammar enhancement. In their study the distinction between explicit and implicit is not clear but in this study the explicit and implicit recasts are isolated. However, it is in line with Haghani & Sedighi (2012) and Zhuo (2010) stating that there is no significant difference between implicit feedback and no feedback. This may result from the fact that learners consider this recast as verification of meaning rather than correcting the erroneous forms.

The outperformance of the explicit recast group over the implicit one revealed the superiority of explicit recast over implicit one in the post-test. The results approved the findings of the previous studies such as Heift (2010), Menti (2003), Haghani & Sedighi (2012) and Zhuo (2010). The study supports Schmidt's (2001) noticing hypothesis which stresses that in order to attain linguistic aspects of language, learners' attention must be attracted toward it. Moreover, when learners become aware of the corrective intention of feedback they will notice it and it will lead to acquisition and explicit recast is one way for providing this condition. This process does not happen for implicit recast. VanPatten (1990) stated that both meaning and form cannot be attended at the same time and if meaning is clear for learners they can attend to form of language. In relative clauses, meaning is stable in both erroneous utterances and correct ones so learners might pay attention to forms.

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### **Biodata**

**Saeideh Ahanghari** is an assistant professor in TEFL at Islamic Azad University/Tabriz Branch. Her main interests are Task-based language Teaching, CALL and their interface with the issues in language testing. She has published many articles and participated in many national and international conferences.

**Farhad Golpour** is a Ph.D. candidate in TEFL at Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch. He is teaching at Teachers' University. His research interests include language teaching, writing, and material development. He has published some books and articles on some international journals and has presented some papers in both international and national conferences.