



Effects of Oral Corrective Feedback on L2 Development: An Educational Perspective

Bernice Afriyie Bediako*

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University, PR China

Su Jianhong

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangsu University, PR China

Abstract

This paper reviews the effects of oral corrective feedback (CF) in second language (L2) development with focus on Chinese EFL learning. It reports research studies on the theoretical issues related to CF including the implications of recast and prompts. It also discusses the efficacy of feedback in relation to grammatical structures reported in literature in the past two decades. It was observed that there is paucity of studies that investigated the effect of feedback on different grammatical structures. Many studies did not also show the feedback type suitable for a specific grammatical structure in L2 acquisition. This paper therefore proposes further research to explore the effect of the two CF type thus recast and prompt on Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of English past tense (rules-based verses exemplar-based). And this will contribute to providing empirical evidences for SLA theories and enriching the studies of SLA domain.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Oral Corrective Feedback, English as Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, the question of what specific corrective feedback best suit in the communicative classroom context has raised many theoretical arguments and empirical discussions in the domain of second language acquisition (SLA). Numerous studies tailored their research through cognitive approach by means of employing information-processing theories such as Interaction Hypothesis and Noticing Hypothesis to examine the facilitative role oral corrective feedback (OCF) play in improving L2 development. According to the sociocultural perspective, other few studies also seek to explore the effects of various feedback types through teachers or peers interactional moves on knowledge internalization. Considering the studies conducted on OCF, recast has gained a lot research attention because of its frequent utilization as well as its implicit nature of correcting learners' errors. To dichotomize the efficacy of the implicitness and explicitness of feedback, usually there exist comparative studies between metalinguistic

feedback and that of recast. Even though many studies have been conducted on the beneficial roles different corrective feedback types play in improving second language teaching and learning, yet there has not been a decisive and substantial conclusion on a specific feedback type suitable for L2 acquisition in L2 communicative classroom. A potentiating reason could be that most of the research designs could not factor-in the impact of individual learners' differences in the processes including other linguistic factors that may affect OCF (such as prior experience, aptitude, cognitive and learning styles, motivation, willingness to communicate and also learners' reactions towards oral feedback).

Even though previous studies have presented the co-relationship between contextual variables, feedback types, error types and uptake, however there is a paucity study which explores the extent to which feedback types may mediate different types of grammatical structures. Reference to Mackey and Goo (2007), it was stated that, as a result of insufficient substantial studies that compared recasts and metalinguistic feedback, any arguments based on superiority of one type of feedback over another remain premature. They therefore suggested that, in order to make a judgment on the superiority of one type of feedback over another there must be the need for greater theoretical specificity.

Observational studies conducted in classroom settings reveal that recasts may equally be useful in elicitation of uptake and repair in form-focused foreign language contexts (e.g. Sheen, 2004). Numerous comparative studies of recasts and prompts in both laboratory and classroom settings have yielded mixed results. The prospect behind these studies have showed the potentiating and differential role recasts and prompts play in drawing learners' attention to different aspects of grammar (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Ellis, 2007) and also engage learners in different levels of processing (Lyster, 2004b).

In the domain of cognitive psychology and second language acquisition, Skehan's (1998) dual-mode hypothesis posits an alternative approach to which different feedback types may have influence on different grammatical features. From this hypothesis, it is assumed that learners possess two kinds of learning mechanism, thus item-based and system-based. Based on this line of argument, it implies that recasts and prompts may have unique impact on learning different grammatical structures in different ways. In order to test this hypothesis, this current study employ better research design to further explore the differential effects of recasts and prompts on Chinese EFL learners' development of irregular past tense forms (item-based structure) and regular past tense forms (rule-based structure).

This paper attempts to present an overview of the theoretical exploration and empirical studies on the topic. The section begins with the concepts of OCF types. It is then followed by the discussions of relevant research of theoretical issues related to CF. It again presents a review of the efficacy of CF in relation to grammatical structures. Finally, some brief comments are made on the existing studies.

THE CONCEPT OF OCF TYPES

To clearly gain a comprehensive understanding of this topic, there is the need to explain some key terms concerning OCF applications. The studies conducted on CF were not

chosen haphazardly. Generally, before L2 teachers attempt to implement CF activities in a communicative context, there is a need for the teachers to know and understand what comes into play to attain successful task outcomes. Reference to previous empirical studies' findings, all the selected CF types was well organized that led to successful research outcomes. To implement CF in L2 teaching and learning context, teachers and language practitioners must be equipped with enough knowledge in employing CF type. Basically, six different types of corrective feedback were emerged through a descriptive study done to investigate the teacher-student interaction in French immersion classrooms, (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). These six classifications were then further classified into two main categories: reformulations and prompts (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). According to their study, they viewed recast and explicit correction as subcategories of reformulation due to the core functions both moves supply in providing learners with the reformulation of non-target output production. Prompts is also regarded as any alerting moves or signals that enable learners to self-realize their errors and make adjustments in correcting their erroneous utterance by themselves without any reformulation assistance by the teachers or external source. For L2 teachers and researcher to employ any of the CF type, for instance, prompts, they must be aware of the four main key elements embedded in self-repair thus elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests, and repetition. Similarly, recasts have diversified perspectives. For example (Sheen & Ellis, 2011) recast study made contribution by dichotomizing the differences that exist between conversational and didactic recasts. Many studies viewed recasts as an implicit element (M. Long, 1996; M. H. Long, 2007; Williams, 1998). Perhaps research has shown that, recasts cannot be solely implicit, it can also be treated as explicit element depending on the context and linguistic features such as linguistic targets, length, and how adjustments are made to the original utterance (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Lyster & Mori, 2006; Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001; Sato, 2011). This is so because, in some foreign language instructional settings, recasts are employed to explicitly correct learners' incorrect utterances in most situational contexts (Lochtman, 2002; Lyster & Mori, 2006). Reference to "perceptual salience" and "linguistic marking" (Ortega, 2009), explicitness is quite a difficult variable that may be frequently applied across classroom studies. This is because learners' perceptions of salience and linguistic marking are affected not only by learner variables such as age and metalinguistic knowledge but also by contextual variables including the instructional context and also how information is given in communicative orientation (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Lyster & Mori, 2006; Nicholas et al., 2001; Sato, 2011).

The ever-increasing theoretical interest in CF research is mostly done through comparative studies of different CF types. This is because different CF types provide different types of linguistic evidence thus either positive or negative. Positive evidence is an input consisting of a set of well-formed sentences, speech samples that are recognized and accepted in the spoken language and/or the written language. These speech samples are basically the most direct means that learners possess to enable them to build or form linguistic hypotheses. Positive evidence is noted to be the most suitable and preferable necessity for the acquisition of both L1 and L2 (Gass, 2003). Whiles negative evidence is a type of input that is provided to learners based on the incorrectness of an utterance

either in a form of explicit or implicit information. A study came up with a taxonomy which categorized negative evidence to be composed of explicit or implicit (Williams, 1998). Explicit negative evidence is an overt correction but implicit negative evidence can be done by means of communication breakdown or a recast. On account of Long and Robinson's taxonomy of negative evidence, recasts are considered as implicit negative evidence but other scholars argued that this may not be necessarily applicable to all instructional contexts (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Lyster & Mori, 2006). In language acquisition domain, the distinction among types of evidence has theoretical implications. It is stated that positive evidence is the most necessary requirement for language learning because it enables learners to be exposed to a set of grammatical segments. However, over the past three decades, the role of negative evidence in second language acquisition has been a debatable issue for L2 researchers to deal with. In reference to CF types, explicit correction is characterized by both negative and positive evidence; prompts are based solely on negative evidence, but recasts provide both positive and negative evidence if the learner perceives the feedback as an erroneous utterance indication.

Additionally, examining the implicitness and the explicitness of CF, (M. Long, 1996) interactional hypothesis is of particular relevance by attributing a crucial role in noticing target features in the input during interactional communication. Even though some previous studies proposed that learners have high potential in noticing explicit CF than implicit CF (Mackey et al., 2007; Nassaji, 2009) and also notice prompts more than recasts (Ammar, 2008), yet other researchers have suggested that implicit CF might be more effective and durable than explicit CF. Studies have shown that, the effect of explicit CF only last in the short term (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Li, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007).

THEORETICAL ISSUES RELATED TO CF

Although studies on learner preferences are considered to be one of the facilitative elements that support the use of CF in L2 classrooms, however there exist various accounts of L2 development. Theoretically, there has been a variety of views ranging from cognitive perspectives to social-oriented views on beneficial implications of CF in L2 development.

Conceptual views towards interactional moves

Considering the acquisition and development of L2, many theories and interventions come into play in L2 development and most of such theories are interactional context-based. Currently, most SLA theories do not place value on the traditional classroom intervention such as grammatical teaching approach in L2 learning. Some of such theories advocate for communicative interactions as a pivotal element that helps in facilitating L2 development. From the prospect of cognitive-interactionist theory, both positive and negative evidence in the form of CF play the role of triggering noticing of non-target output (M. Long, 1996). Similarly, Skill acquisition theory proposes that the frequency in practicing the target language helps to improve spontaneous use of L2 (Ranta & Lyster, 2007). From Sociocultural theory perspective, the basic role of CF is to employ dialogical negotiations to assist learners to withhold teachers or other-regulation to self-regulation e.g. (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Sato & Ballinger, 2012).

Additionally, theoretical relevance is the concept of transfer-appropriate processing. The human cognitive mechanism is of relevance in processing especially when CF is provided in a context. This implies that during learning tasks, the cognitive processing must ideally correspond to the actual target language use (Lightbown, 2008; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2012; Segalowitz, 1997). In other words, when CF is employed in context, learners have a high likelihood of transferring similar context in spontaneous oral production rather than providing CF in isolation or non-contextualized language form (Lyster & Saito, 2010). Consequently, some studies have argued that the effectiveness of CF is exhibited “within the context of meaningful and sustained communicative interaction” (Spada & Lightbown 1993: 218; see also Lightbown & Spada 1990; Lightbown 1991, 1998; Long 1991, 1996; Doughty 2001). According to cognitive-interactionist perspective, suggestions made by the interaction hypothesis (Pica 1994; Long 1996; Gass 1997) stated that L2 development is successfully attained through meaningful interaction. When learners have the opportunity to interact with their interlocutors, ask for a modification of speech so as to make input more accessible thereby developing interlanguage system. Interaction exposes learners to make modification and adjustment to their non-target output because crucial information that will lead to communicative success will be provided by their interlocutors.

Implications of recasts

Recasts in interactional activities play an imperative role in facilitating L2 development. Considering (Farrar, 1990) acquisition studies, the interaction hypothesis focused on the significant role recasts play in language learning. It was hypothesized that, recasts enable learners to notice the dichotomy between their interlanguage forms and target-like structures without changing the intended meanings of their segments. Recasts are regarded as a prime source of negative evidence which facilitate semantic processing. According to (M. H. Long, 2007), recasts are considered to be more effective due to its implicit nature of corrections. He proposed that recasts are the best intervention in communicative classroom. This is because prompts (explicit corrections) have a high tendency of interrupting communication flow leading to communication breakdowns which may impede L2 acquisition.

Recasts may be viewed as “pedagogically expeditious” (Loewen & Philp, 2006) and also favorable for achieving essential discourse functions. Recasts do not only enhance lesson progress (Lyster, 1998) but also promote various moves towards a more academic register in content-based instructional contexts (Gibbons, 2003; Mohan & Beckett, 2001). Generally, recasts are most suitable for interactional communicative classroom because there is smooth flow of communication and less or no interruption. They help to draw learners’ attention on meaning which enhances active and full participation of interaction that requires development of linguistic abilities. Prediction made by interaction hypothesis states that classroom learners can infer negative evidence from recasts if the discourse context in which recasts are presented allow learners to perceive them as didactic recasts rather than conversational recasts which facilitate meaning approval. It is mostly applicable in form-oriented classroom where accuracy is focused on learners’ ability to notice the corrective function of recasts (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Lyster & Mori,

2006; Nicholas et al., 2001; Ranta & Lyster, 2007; Sato, 2011). Theoretically, interactional hypothesis adopts recasts as the prime element in conversational interaction due to their imperative role of drawing learners' attention to notice the gap between their non-target output and target forms in the input.

Implications of prompts

Prompts which elicit self-repair regardless of providing learners with exemplars of the target forms derive theoretical support from both skill acquisition theory (Anderson 1980) and output hypothesis (Swain, 1985). Skill acquisition theory proposed that successful L2 learning is dependent on thorough practices and feedback in meaningful contexts (DeKeyser 1998, 2001, 2007). This requires a gradual and systematic transition from consistent practicing to the more spontaneous or automatic use of the L2. Generally speaking, the overall CF in the context of communicative interaction specifically prompts employ systematic guided practice and feedback. Considering the various types of practices prompts by means of guiding learners through pushed output as hypothesized by (Swain 1985, 1988) in developing interlanguage seek to improve the already internalized forms. Swain's output hypothesis opposes that of Krashen input hypothesis which claim that input is the sole necessity for L2 acquisition. Even though rich and comprehensible input accounts for learning and acquisition, learners need to be pushed into making their output perfect especially when there are communication breakdowns in their utterance. Generally, prompts by means of pushed output have a beneficial implication on cognitive processes. Prompts exhibit a metalinguistic role in the sense that, "as learners reflect upon their own target language use, their output serves a metalinguistic function, enabling them to control and internalize linguistic knowledge" (Swain 1995, p.126). In other words, learners rely on their cognitive mechanism to retrieve and produce already learned linguistic structure which cooperatively strengthens the memory. When learners are given the chance to reflect on their erroneous segment, it draws their attention to the target forms and rules which guide in producing segments in a meaningful communicative context. Similarly, when prompts are employed to force learners to repair their own output, there will be a potentiating effect that guides learners to notice the gap between their interlanguage forms. For instance, according to (Swain, 1995, pp.125-126) "learners may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or know only partially".

In reference to Swain's output hypothesis, another similar study (De Bot, 1996) proposed that it is more beneficial to offer learners the opportunities to being pushed to remember and retrieve already learned target language structure rather than providing the correct form in the input (recasts). For the reason being that memorization, retrieval and production can cooperatively strengthen memory. The findings from experimental psychology on the "generation effect" (Clark, 1995) made a similar prediction in favor of prompts than recasts. Results from the study stated that, allowing learners to reflect and produce already learned target form strengthen their memory capacity than the effortless provision by external sources (DeWinstanley & Bjork, 2004). From the sociocultural theory perspective, unlike recasts, various CF types that seek to engage

learners to self-repair their erroneous segment enhance language learning rather than eliciting feedback from external sources (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). Prompts are noted to be suitable for instructional discourse. According to (McHoul, 1990)'s study which focused on feedback in subject matter classroom, prompts served as "clueing" procedure or "withholding phenomenon" which enabled learners to be self-dependent rather than relying on an external source for feedback.

THE EFFICACY OF FEEDBACK IN RELATION TO GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

Reference to previous literature on the differential effect of feedback techniques on second language acquisition, Ellis (2006, 2007) argued that the inconclusive nature of the efficacy of different types of feedback is due to a number of factors. These factors include different operationalizations of different types of feedback, the measurement of acquisition, and the choice of target grammatical structure. Regard to the choice of target structure, some studies investigated morphological features (such as French gender in Lyster, 2004b; and possessive determiners in Ammar & Spada, 2006), others examined syntactical features (such as dative alternation in Carroll & Swain, 1993). As argued by Ellis (2007), the efficacy of feedback may be influenced by the developmental readiness accompanied by the complexity of the grammatical structure.

Confirming the prospect that the techniques employed in feedback application may exhibit different effects on the various grammatical structures, Ellis (2007) simultaneously employed two different grammatical structures in his study (i.e regular past tense "-ed" and comparative "-er"). Considering some vital criteria such as grammatical domain, input frequency, learnability, explicit knowledge, scope, reliability and formal semantic redundancy, it was hypothesized that these two structures may exhibit different grammatical difficulty. The study was focused on three main research questions: (a) Do recasts have a differential effect on the acquisition of the English past tense "-ed" and comparative "-er"? (b) Does metalinguistic feedback have a differential effect on the acquisition of English past tense and comparative? (c) To what extent does the effect of corrective feedback on the different grammatical structures differ according to type of feedback? The participants from a private language school were put into three groups (n = 34). During the communicative task, the researcher provided the respective corrective feedback (recasts or metalinguistics) to the two treatment groups whenever error is made in the target structure. In response to the first research question, the results showed that recast has no statistical difference on the acquisition of the two structures. This result deviates from other previous studies (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002). Ellis attributed the discrepancy of the results to lack of saliency of recasts and insufficient time of the treatment task.

Based on the second research question, generally the metalinguistic feedback exhibited a greater effect on the comparative "-er". This implies that the tests that were designed to measure explicit knowledge exhibited the greater effect of metalinguistic feedback on the comparative. In response to the third research question, the results did not show any significant differences between the two feedback types. Perhaps during the oral imitation test, there were differential effects on the ungrammatical sentences. Even though the

recast group showed no significant difference on the two structures, in the oral imitation test the metalinguistic feedback group outperformed the control group on the ungrammatical sentences.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper presents a review of previous studies on the effect of feedback. It again dealt with the implications and the relative efficacy of one type of feedback over another types of feedback. Most of the previous studies have employed different research design such as single-factor causal chain to investigate recasts effectiveness and also the relative efficacy between explicit feedback and implicit feedback in L2 development. Yet there is paucity of studies that investigate the effect of feedback on different grammatical structures. The studies reviewed did not also show the feedback type suitable for a specific grammatical structure in L2 acquisition. Hence, this paper proposes further research on the effect of the two CF type on Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of exemplar-based verse rule-based past tense. And this will contribute to providing empirical evidences for SLA theories and enriching the studies of SLA domain.

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