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Teachers’ Intentions and Learners’ Perceptions about Recasts, Prompts and Models

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Abstract

The present study is based on Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1996) focusing on facilitating role of feedback in accordance with the linguistic and communicative success or failure of learners’ utterance, aims at materializing teachers’ intentions with prosodic features on diminishing the linguistic ambiguity of recasts, prompts and models. Thus 45 learners of English with intermediate level assigned to three groups as the participants while employing Chi-square as statistical means of analysis. The results proved the presumption in recasts and prompts, but not in models. The study carries significant implications for SLA researchers and language teachers.

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Key words: Focus on Form; recasts; prompts; models; feedback

1. Introduction

According to Han (2001, P.591) “corrective feedback is a two-way interdependent process, involving the giver and the receiver, with both being information providers”. On the basis of this definition the importance of both teachers as the givers and learners as the receivers during negotiation as well as investigating the effect of teachers’ intentions in learners’ noticing of feedback can help learners to diminish the ambiguity of feedback moves because according to Robert (1995) on the basis of Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 2001) the effectiveness of interactional feedback is related to the recognition of what is corrected and understanding the nature of the correction (cited in Mackey, 2007). This study provides the opportunity for a better understanding of the role of interactional feedback from learners’ view to give a better insight to the question of which component of interactional feedback can be more salient and less ambiguous to the learner. Thus reported study in this article is congruent with Borg’s (2003) call for investigations addressing specific trend of language teaching in relation to teacher cognition (cited in

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Basturkmen; Loewen; Ellis, 2004). So teachers’ intentions as a particular aspect of cognition should be examined as well as learners’ perceptions when they obtained focus on form techniques as a specific aspect of teaching called Focus on Form (F on F ) instruction that its foundation is Interaction Hypothesis proposed by Long (1996). We briefly examine these below.

2. Conceptual Framework For The Study

2.1. Focus On Form Instruction

Focus on Form is believed to be a feature of CLT, a teaching method with focus on meaning (Basturkmen, et al., 2004). It is an integration of form-focused instruction and meaning-focused instruction. Form-focused instruction is a pre-selection of specific forms with an intensive treatment of those forms. An example for this case of instruction is managed by means of “PPP” (i.e. presentation, practice and production) (Long, 1991). Some researchers have questioned the adequacy of this kind of instruction (e.g. Long, 1991; Long, Robinson, 1995). Also another group of researchers such as (Swain, Lapkin, 1998; Long, Robinson, 1998; Swain, 1995, 1998) have proved purely communicative approaches were insufficient. So both of these trends were not successful at promoting language acquisition (cited in Davies, 2006). Thus Long (1991) proposed the term “Focus on Form” instruction. In an update view, it is an incidental attention to form in the case of experiencing problems by learners during communication that occurs through negotiation of meaning (Basturkmen, et al., 2004). It refers to some kind of communication breakdown in the talk arising from communicative tasks ( i.e reactive focus on form) besides to cases that there is no communication breakdown but the teacher or other learners prefer to attend to a specific form (i.e. pre-empetive focus on form) or negotiation of form (Ellis; Loewen; Basturkmen, 2006). While reactive focus on form deals with performance problems whether addressing a competence problem or not, preemptive refers to a real gap in knowledge (Ellis, Bsturkmen, Loewen, 2001b). Yet according to Doughty and Williams (1998c) proactive or teachers’ advance plan to introduce focus on form, which is another distinctive division of focus on form, does not define the incidental feature of Long’s (1991) original definition and refers to intensive instruction with preselected language form, whereas incidental is a kind of extensive instruction that learners’ attentions are drawn with a range of grammatical, lexical, phonological, pragmatic forms (cited in Nsaji and Fotos, 2007). According to Ellis (2001), two kinds of focus on form includes planned and incidental. The former supplying treatment of preselected forms with the chief focus on meaning; however, in the latter, the attention of learners are drawn to a form completely incidentally and by chance without any predetermined plan. In our study, the type of focus on form is reactive and incidental referring to performance problems just being addressed by teachers. It is worth noting that Long’s focus on form takes place in a negotiation of meaning sequence. Consequently it is an extension of Interaction Hypothesis proposed by Long (1996) (cited in Ellis, et al., 2006), though it should not be considered as an innovation as a distinction of that hypothesis according to Sheen & O’Neill’s belief (2005).

On the other hand focus on form facilitates noticing and encourages pushed output like Interaction Hypothesis. Interaction Hypothesis suggests in its new version that negotiation of meaning, particularly interactional adjustments made by native speakers or capable interlocutors, has a crucial role in promoting acquisition because of its ability in connection of input, internal learner capacities, specifically selective attention, and output (Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003). As a result of Interaction Hypothesis learners receive feedback during interaction. The obtained feedback include explicit correction and implicit moves (Mackey, et al., 2003). The feedback moves not only provide a source of comprehensible input, but also they have a salient role in making problematic aspects of the learner’s interlanguage (Schmidt; Frota, 1986) (cited in Mackey, 2006). In addition, the proposed “Output Hypothesis” by Swain (1995, 2005) argues that interaction provides chance of producing modified output. For this purpose, learners may pay attention to form with the chance of “noticing the gap” between their original utterances and target like utterances (Mackey, et al., 2006). The last impact of interaction on development of L2 is learner “internal variables” including learners perceptions about interaction and its effect on linguistic performance on a specific task. Furthermore Schultz (2001) claimed that if learners’ expectations are not satisfied, language learning process may be adjourned. Therefore learners’ perceptions about interactional process justify interaction a part of the interaction-learning research (Mackey, et al., 2003). It is reasonable for researchers to find a link between L2
learners’ internal variables and interaction-driven learning (Mackey, 2000; Mackey et al., 2002). So attentional capacity not only influence on the extent of noticing but also directly affecting Second Language acquisition. This has been the result from the assumption that interactional feedback may provide learners with the chance of noticing their own target like forms (Mackey, 2002). In order to know the positive outcome of interactional moves, it is appropriate to review briefly the effectiveness of feedback and its role in second language acquisition in previous researches.

2.2. Focus on Form Techniques:

Incidental focus on form supplies learners with two kinds of feedback including explicit evidence and implicit evidence, which according to Lyster and Ranta (1997) have six various types. The term interactional feedback is called “focus on form techniques” in Focus on Form approach proposed by Long (1991). This study focuses on three types of focus on form techniques including recasts, prompts and models (as positive evidence). They are outlined below with an example. All examples presented in this article come from the current study.

**Implicit:**

*Recast:* According to N. Ellis recasts are “reformulation of learners’ immediately preceding erroneous utterance, replacing non-target-like (lexical, grammatical, etc.) items by the corresponding target-language forms” (cited in Nassaji et al., 2007).

St.: A boy is pick a flower.
T.: Oh, a boy is picking a flower.

*Model:* Simple repetition of correct form to agree or appreciate (i.e. positive evidence).

St.: The man is plowing the field.
T.: Oh, yes. The man is plowing the field.

**Explicit:**

*Prompt:* repetition of a learner’s erroneous utterance while highlighting the error with changes in intonation and extra stress that leads to a learner’s self-repair (Ellis, 2003).

St.: There are some tree in that park.
T.: some tree, not tree, there are …
St.: Oh, yes. There are some trees in that park.
St.: student / T.: Teacher

In explicit feedback, the teacher tries to lead the learner to self-repair by a meta-linguistic explanation; however, in implicit one learners are informed of their non-target-like utterance indirectly and incidentally so as not to interrupt the flow of communication (Kim et al., 2005). There are some opponents to facilitative role of feedback as nativists such as Krashen based on their belief on prolonged exposure to positive evidence. Krashen believed feedback was harmful and useless because of the possibility of interruption in the flow of interaction. On the contrary, Swain (1985, 1995) showed, on the basis of her experience in French Immersion Classrooms, that only comprehensible input is insufficient and there is a need to focus on meaning as well as to focus on form.

It is needed to propose that in the context of communicative and content-based approaches to language teaching there is an overwhelming interest for providing corrective feedback on the basis of L2 learning and L1 acquisition sharing certain similarities such as error patterns, developmental paths in L1 and L2 acquisition (Long, 1991; Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Different studies tried to show various effects of interactional feedback on L2 development and short-term memory. Rabie (1996) studied the effect of negative and positive evidence in learners’ ability to learn new vocabulary while he ignored learners’ responses to the feedback and the development of the target structure in his study (cited in Iwashita et al., 2003). Philp and Mackey (1985) studied the effect of recasts on short-term development of question form (cited in Lyster 1998b). They showed the provision of recasts had more beneficial effect and facilitative role for learners than models. But didn’t observe any relationship in learners response to the recast (as uptake vs. topic continuation) and short-term development. Lyster et al. observed the preference of learners to self-repair or prompts rather than recasts. Lyster et al. believed that this finding was due to its ambiguity and implicitness. Doughty and Varela (1998) studied the provision of recasts with an explicit component because of providing recasts with a rising intonation. The researchers concluded that saliency and
immediacy of recasts caused learners to have enhanced target-like use of the past tense that was the goal of the study. Related to the current article is considering the researches that examined learners’ noticing of negative feedback. Mackey, Gass & McDonough (2000) explored learners’ perception of implicit negative feedback got in task-based dyadic interaction. After reviewing the video tapes interactions and asking an introspection of learners’ thoughts at the time of interaction, Mackey, et al. suggested the accuracy of learners’ perceptions of lexical, semantic, and phonological feedback, whereas morephosyntactic feedback was restricted to the level of learners’ length of utterance and number of changes in recasts. Lyster (2004a) proved prompts to be more instrumental and effective than recasts. Long and Robinson (1998) tried to marked recast by pronouncing the incorrect features with stress or getting students to repeat those features. Also they believed that recasts do not interrupt flow of the interaction. Chaudron (1977) suggested that recasts are better perceived by repetition with a change and emphasis as feedback on form rather than on meaning (cited in Lyster, 2006). Furthermore, Nicholas, Lightbown & Spada, (2001) believed in ambiguity of recasts, concluding that recast appear to be most effective in contexts where it is clear to the learner that it is a reaction to the accuracy of the form, not the content of the original utterance. Thus the less salient the gap, the more aware of it. Davies, et al. (2006), in another study, suggests that teachers by using paralinguistic focus on form techniques at the time of providing recasts can make them more salient so that they will result in uptake and this can lead learners to perceive their teachers’ intentions.

In sum, all these researches showed the availability of interactional feedback and some suggested solutions (e.g. Doughty, et al., 1998; Philp, 2003; Chaudron, 1977; Mackey, 2000, 2007) have been investigated to fade the ambiguity of implicit feedback as recasts. Therefore in order to draw learners’ conscious attention to various interactional feedback, teachers’ intentions should be matched with learners’ perceptions. So understanding teachers’ beliefs or intentions seems crucial.

2.3. Teachers’ Intentions

In recent years teachers are considered as those who try to employ their own personal theory and teaching as a thinking activity (Brog, et al., 2003). So the research in teachers’ intent seems important. The term intention or belief (cited in Basturkmen, et al., 2004) denotes to various definitions such as teachers’ idea, thought, and knowledge that are shown in their activity and methods in the classroom. Burns (1992) argues that belief motivates instructional practices in the classroom. Also Johnson (1992) discusses that beliefs form teachers instructional practices in the classroom. Finally Borg (2001) proposes beliefs can act as a guidance in teachers’ thought and behavior. Teachers should be encouraged to think about their lessons and try to construct their own theories (Burns, et al., 1992). Also Borg (1999) encouraged teachers to examine their own instructional decision-making. According to previous findings there are some inconsistencies between teachers’ stated belief and practices (e.g. Basturkmen at al., 2004; Farrokhy, 2004) because teachers may refer to a variety of sources at the time of planning for teaching or on-line decision-making during teaching (Basturkmen, et al., 2004). These sources according to Ellis (2001) include technical knowledge coming from deep reflection on their profession or empirical investigation and procedural knowledge or planned practices referring to teacher’s activities in their lessons adopted from experiences of teaching and learning languages. Thus in this study, teachers are made to refer to their procedural knowledge at the time of teaching and the effect of a specific intention on learners’ perceptions are examined. To put it in another way, this article examined specific aspect of teachers’ intentions, which is communicative in models and corrective in recasts and prompts while incorporating with prosodic features.

3. Method

3.1. Objectives And Research Question

In this study, we examine teachers’ intentions as planned practices while providing three types interactional feedback on the basis of incidental focus on form instruction and investigating its effect on learners cognitive reaction as their recognition of various feedback moves. This empirical study tries to add an explicit component (i.e.
prosodic features) in teachers’ intentions at the time of providing recasts, prompts and models and comparing the effectiveness of this variable in increasing learners’ perceptions in making distinction between three types of focus on form techniques (recasts, prompts and models). Adding this explicit component can help learners to perceive the intention of teachers better and as a result they may develop their L2 knowledge. This study does not measure the uptake or topic continuation resulted of each feedback, but it just measures the learners’ ability in perceiving the ambiguous focus on form techniques from each other.

For this purpose the following research question is stated as follow: Can teachers’ intentions and learners’ perceptions diminish the ambiguity of recasts, prompts and models?

From the research question the following hypothesis is stated as below:

Teachers’ intentions and learners’ perceptions can diminish the ambiguity of recasts, prompts and models.

3.2. Research Participants

Forty-five learners of English as a foreign language participated in three classes (each includes fifteen student). These learners were from three various L1 backgrounds (i.e. Turkish, Kurdish and Farsi). All are classified as being at intermediate level. In incidental focus on form each group of fifteen learners in each class interacted with non-native-speaker teacher while receiving recasts, prompts and models as three types of focus on form techniques. Three teachers participated in this study, they had between 5,8 and 15 years of experience in teaching EFL with a degree BA. and MA. in TEFL. All participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn more about the interaction and ambiguity related to error correction.

3.3. Procedures And Materials

The research process had two main parts. The researchers observed communicatively oriented classroom and recorded it. At the second stage stimulated recall was used with participating teachers and learners to elicit their intentions and perceptions at the time giving or receiving focus on form technique.

3.3.1. Classroom Data

The data consisted of 600 minutes equally divided among three teachers were recorded both visually and audibly. After the data had been collected, it was analyzed, and all focus on form episodes were identified, transcribed, categorized by using the diagram in figure 1. According to Ellis (et al., 2006) every time-out from the flaw of communication can be identified as focus on form episodes.

![Figure 1: How Classroom Data Identified, transcribed, Categorized](image)

3.3.2. Stimulated Recall

This study used an introspective method or stimulated method. Researchers showed learners videotapes of their classroom interactions and were asked to introspect about their thoughts at the original interactions. This method was proposed and used by Gass and Mackey (2000). According to Mackey et al. introspective data aims to reveal learners’ perceptions about the focus on form techniques provided by teachers. By introspective method researchers can gain a deeper insight of interaction from learners’ perceptions. A short time after classroom interaction, the videotape played back by one of the researchers and all Focus on Form Episodes (FFEs) was distinguished by
interactional feedback that was provided by teachers. While watching the videotape, the researcher paused the tape whenever FFEs took place and asked the learners to recall what was going on in their thoughts at the time of original interaction and to report to the researcher, while the researcher took notes for each episode. The recall session was conducted in Farsi (learners common L1) to make learners recall and explain better. The goal of recall procedure was to induce the learners’ original perceptions about feedback moves and understanding their nature as corrective or non-corrective or self-repair. Each recall session took about 50 minutes.

4. Coding And Analysis

The data consisted of two kinds: a) The interaction data coming from observation: transcription of the original interactions (12 sessions of 50 minutes) and b) the introspective recall data: transcripts of the stimulated recall sessions for each learner. Two researchers coded all the data whether interaction or introspective data in accordance with Gass and Mackey et al. (2000) suggestion. In total, 240 FFEs were identified in the data, nearly 1 every 2.5 minutes, a lower rate than Ellis, et al. (2001a) who reported 1 every 3.23 minutes. The total distribution of all focus on form techniques used by the teachers is shown in Figure 2. The result suggests the domination of recasts like the result in Ellis et al. (2001a) study.

![Figure 2: Proportion of focus on form techniques used by each teacher](image1)

Figure 2: Proportion of focus on form techniques used by each teacher

Figure 3 shows the percentage of each type of episodes that occurred with the intention of prosodic features and without prosodic features used by teachers.

![Figure 3: Distribution of focus on form techniques with and without prosodic features](image2)

Figure 3: Distribution of focus on form techniques with and without prosodic features
Figure 4 shows the percentage of each type of episode that resulted in learners’ perceptions. As expected, implicit focus on form technique (i.e. recast) resulted in highest perception. According to Chaudron et al. (1977) recasts are better perceived by repetition with a change and emphasis as feedback on form rather than on meaning (Lyster, et al., 2006). However, in this study the difference in learners’ perceptions between feedback on form and meaning was not examined. Teachers used prosodic features without considering feedback type or their implicitness or explicitness but just their own intentions. Also as it can be seen, episodes resulted in perception in prompts is more than episodes containing models. In fact teachers’ intentions in providing prosodic features is not so effective in increasing models’ saliency as in recasts or prompts.

In order to show a strong relationship between these variables, it depends to Chi-square to establish significance since the data shows frequency. To reject the null hypothesis, Chi-square needed to be greater than 3.84 at an $\alpha$ level of 5% ($\alpha < 0.05$) with df = 1 for a two-tailed test. The analysis was carried in accordance with Yates’ correction for a 2×2 table using SPSS 10. For recasts with prosodic features the Chi-square value turned out to be 16.09, large enough to indicate that there was a significant relationship between the use of prosodic features and diminishing the ambiguity in recasts while resulting in high perception as shown in Table 1.

| Value   | df  | Significance |
|---------|-----|--------------|
| Chi-square | 16.09 | .000         |

For prompts with prosodic features the Chi-square value was 6.80, large enough to indicate that there was a significant relationship between the use of prosodic features and learners’ perceptions of prompts as shown in Table 2.

| Value   | df  | Significance |
|---------|-----|--------------|
| Chi-square | 6.80 | .009         |

But for models with prosodic features the Chi-square value was 0.618 which shows there was not a significant relationship between use of prosodic features and learners’ perceptions as shown in Table 3.
Figure 5 compares the number of teachers’ provision of interactional feedback with the intention of using prosodic features versus the intention of not using prosodic features and much greater effectiveness of teachers’ use of prosodic features in perception of recasts and prompts rather than in models.

![Figure 5: Frequency of use of prosodic features in learners’ perceptions versus not use of prosodic features](image)

### Table 3: Chi-square results for comparing use of prosodic features versus not use of prosodic features

|                  | Value | df | Significance |
|------------------|-------|----|--------------|
| Chi-square       | 0.618 | 1  | 0.432        |

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In Sum, the result reported above suggested that: There was a considerable overlap between the teachers’ intentions with learners’ perceptions absolutely for recasts and to some extent for prompts when teachers use prosodic features (81.96 for recasts and 59.37 for prompts). Carpenter, Jeon, McGregor, & Mackey (2006) focused on the problem of the possibility of ambiguity in recasts. The problem of perceiving recasts as literal or semantic repetitions or models without any corrective element. With their empirical investigation they showed that hearing learners’ original utterance can have an effect on perceiving the recasts as corrective. Also Mackey (et al., 2000) showed morphosyntactic recasts were less perceived than phonological and lexical recasts. However, in our study the rate of learners’ perceptions in accordance with linguistic features were not measured that can be considered as a limitation of the study.

It is worthy of note, the present study indicates multiple linguistic features, whereas Philp study (et al., 2003) concerned with one linguistic feature. Some previous researches believed that with focus on one linguistic feature, learners may attend to the linguistic content of the recast, because a narrow focus creates saliency, which as a result promotes the learner’s noticing of it. Thus the high accurate rate of perception in Philp study is not unexpected, what is surprising is the high rate of perception in the present study where multiple linguistic features are concerned here. That may have been because the teachers use recasts more than other feedback types (68% recasts, 22% prompts & 10% models). This is in consistency with Han (et al., 2001) study. In other words, when teachers use a variety of corrective strategies it may indicate to low rate of accurate perception (Robert, 1995). This was accurate in this study, when teachers were particularly provided models, learners perceived them as recasts. The second main result for this study indicates that models as positive evidence do not have a critical role in providing information for the learners that is in accordance with both Farrar (1992) indicating that children use recast rather than simple repetitions or models and Baker & Nelson (1984) (cited in Kim, et al., 2005) report showed the more effectiveness of recast for learning than model. Models cause learners to feel frustration and dubious because by receiving models learners feel what they have uttered is incorrect. Yet because of low occurrence of models, learners can not recognize them and teachers’ intentions in providing prosodic features can not help to their perception (rate of perception: 41.17% with prosodic features, 25% without prosodic features). Also on the basis of Ellis (et al., 2001) L2 learners rely on inductive learning mechanisms that use negative evidence. The indication of third result in the
present study suggests the accurate perception of prompts, but with a lower rate than recasts. Since teachers do not provide the correct form, an interruption in the flow of communication takes place, on the other hand, it is difficult for learners to focus at the same time to meaning on one hand and dealing with form on the other hand. This is in consistency with information-processing models, indicating that learners have limited processing capacity (Lyster, et al., 2004).

In conclusion, this empirical study suggests that teachers’ intentions in use of prosodic features in providing recasts and prompts can be substantial and help learners to perceive the goal of feedback better and diminish the ambiguity among them, whereas it is not effective in models. Yet the effect of each linguistic features in diminishing the ambiguity among them and the effect of teachers’ intentions in various proficiency levels and contexts can be taken into account. Also teachers as decision-makers can examine their own beliefs in the classroom, besides by identical behavior in giving feedback, teachers can help learners to better perceive the goal for the provision of feedback, hence increase the efficacy of the role of feedback.

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