In the Name of God

University of Isfahan
Faculty of Foreign Languages
Department of English Language

PhD Thesis

The Effects of Negotiated Feedback and Recasts on the Acquisition of Implicit and Explicit Knowledge of Wh Question Forms by Iranian EFL Learners

Supervisor:
Dr. Ahmad Moinzadeh

Advisor:
Dr. Manijeh Youhannaee

By:
Ehsan Rassaei

Feb. 2012

کلیه حقوق مادی مترتب بر نتایج مطالعات، ابتکارات و نوآوری‌های ناشی از تحقیق موضوع این پایان‌نامه متعلق به دانشگاه اصفهان است.

دانشگاه اصفهان

دانشکده زبان‌های خارجی

گروه زبان انگلیسی

پایان نامه ی دکتری رشته ی آموزش زبان انگلیسی احسان رسائی تحت

عنوان

تاثیر بازخوردهای تصحیح کننده یکسویه و دوسویه بر فراگیری دانش تلویحی وصریح جملات پرسشی در زبان انگلیسی توسط فراگیران فارسی زبان

در تاریخ ۱۳۹۰/۱۱/۱۷ توسط هیأت داوران زیر بررسی و با درجه عالی به تصویب نهایی رسید.

۱- استاد راهنمای پایان نامه: دکتر احمد معین زاده با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار امضا

۲- استاد مشاور پایان نامه: دکتر منیژه یوحنائی با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار امضا

۳- استاد داور داخل گروه: دکتر حسین براتی با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار امضا

۴- استاد داور داخل گروه: دکتر داریوش نژاد انصاری با مرتبه علمی استاد یار امضا

۵- استاد داور خارج از گروه: دکتر محمد رضا طالبی نژاد با مرتبه علمی دانشیار امضا

امضای مدیر گروه

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks and appreciations to all those who helped me in the preparation of this study.

First and foremost, I should extend my appreciation to Dr. Moinzadeh, My supervisor, whose comments and suggestions have been my guide throughout the process of doing the research and whose meticulous examination of the manuscript has truly enhanced the quality of the work.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Youhannaei, my thesis advisor, for all her constructive advice and deep concern.

I am also thankful to Dr. Barati, Dr. Nejad Ansari, and also Dr. Talebinejad for their professional comments, insightful suggestions and constructive criticism without which the completion of this work would not have been possible.

Finally, I feel deeply indebted to my wife for her patience and tolerance of inconveniences throughout my PhD program.

Dedicated to:

My Wife

Abstract

The current study investigated the relative effectiveness of recasts and negotiated feedback on the acquisition of implicit and explicit knowledge of English in a pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test design. Motivated by socioculturally-based concepts of scaffolding and assisted performance, negotiated feedback in the present study was operationalized as a feedback sequence that first requires learners to draw on their interlanguage knowledge to produce modified output and if unsuccessful increases the level of scaffolding by providing metalinguistic information or models. Furthermore, learners' perceptions of recasts and negotiated feedback as well as learners' responses to recasts were investigated in order to explore the underlying cognitive mechanisms which are associated with the efficacy of corrective feedback. The participants included 107 Persian EFL learners who formed two experimental groups and one control group. The learners in the experimental groups received either recasts or negotiated feedback for their errors during task-based interactions with their interlocutors while the learners in the control group performed the same task but received no feedback for their errors. Immediately after task-based interactions, the learners watched the videotape of their incorrect utterances followed by interlocutors' feedback during stimulated recall interviews and were asked to provide their comments regarding negotiated feedback and recasts they received. Learners' responses in stimulated recall interviews were classified as noticing, corrective and non-corrective. Furthermore, learners' responses to recasts during task-based interactions were also considered to investigate the link between learners' modified output and recasts' efficacy. The results of repeated - measures ANOVA and also Pearson's chi-square analysis indicated that negotiated feedback is more associated with learners' ability to notice target forms and L2 development. The results also indicated that the effectiveness of recasts is contingent on learners' modified output following recasts.

Key words: Corrective feedback; Explicit knowledge; Implicit knowledge; Negotiated feedback; Recasts; Sociocultural theory.

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List of Abbreviations

ECT: Error correction test
EOIT: Elicited oral imitation test
EFL: English as a foreign language
ESL: English as a second language
GJT: Grammaticality judgment test
MKT: Metalinguistic knowledge test
IGT: Information gap test
RFFE: Reactive focus on form episode
SLA: Second language acquisition
TGJT: Timed grammaticality judgment test
TL: Target language
UG: Universal grammar
UGJT: Untimed grammaticality judgment test
ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

Research on classroom interaction has established itself as an indispensible aspect of second language acquisition research. According to Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Long,1996), classroom interaction promotes language learning by (1) providing second language (L2) learners with comprehensible input, (2) pushing them to produce modified output, and, (3) providing learners with opportunities to notice the gap between their output and the feedback which they receive. It is widely accepted that through interaction in L2 classrooms, learners notice the gap between their non-target forms and target forms and are pushed to make modifications to their non target-like forms (Gass & Lewis, 2007). Meanwhile, one important aspect of L2 classrooms interaction is corrective feedback which is directed at learners' incorrect utterances by teachers. Corrective feedback is defined as a teacher's reactive move that invites a learner to attend to the grammatical accuracy of the utterance which is produced by the learner (Sheen, 2007).

According to Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam (2006), corrective feedback takes the form of one or a combination of the following responses by a teacher when a learner commits an error: (1) an indication that the learner committed an error, (2) The provision of correct form of the error, and (3) The provision of some metalingual explanation regarding the error. Different types of corrective feedback have been identified and classified by different researchers. The most comprehensive taxonomy of corrective feedback has been provided by Lyster and Ranta (1997) who classified corrective feedback into six categories. They include: explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and clarification request. Among these categories, recasts will be considered in the current study. Lyster & Ranta (1997) defined recasts as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error" (p.46). An example of a recast adapted from Sheen (2007) is given below.

Student: There was fox.
Teacher: There was a fox. (p. 307)

Research has shown that recasts are the most frequently used type of corrective feedback in L2 classrooms especially in content-based and communicative classrooms (Braidi, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Oliver, 1995; Sheen, 2004). Beside recasts, the current study will investigate the efficacy of another kind of corrective feedback which we called negotiated feedback. What makes the current study significantly different from previous studies of corrective feedback is the operationalization and investigation of a new corrective feedback type, called negotiated corrective feedback. The concept of negotiated feedback was introduced in the current study based on the Vygotskian concepts' of scaffolding and assisted performance. In other words, the concept of negotiated feedback can be described in terms of a collaborative process called scaffolding (Cazden, 2001Lantolf & Thorn, 2006) through which a learner or an interlocutor is enabled to do something ,which s/he cannot otherwise perform, with the help of a more capable peer. The following negotiated feedback episode retrieved from the

current study's data base indicates how negotiated feedback was operatinalized in the study:

Learner: What the man is doing?

Teacher: Pardon?

Learner: What the man is doing?

Teacher: Is your sentence OK?

Learner: um…

Teacher: We say: what is he doing? what is she doing?

Learner: What is…*pause*..the man doing, yes what is the man doing?

As the above example indicates, a negotiated feedback episode begins with some implicit hints such as clarification request and become increasingly more explicit as the learner fail to produce a repair.

A number of empirical studies investigated the efficacy of different types of corrective feedback (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Han, 2002; Lyster, 2004; Lister & Ranta, 1997; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Sheen, 2007; Mackey & Philp, 1998). There is a controversy over what type of corrective feedback among others is more effective for L2 development. In order to answer this question, a more fundamental question should be answered: Why are certain types of corrective feedback more effective than others? In order to shed some light on the above questions, the current study will also tap on learners' perceptions of corrective feedback and also their responses to corrective feedback to provide an in depth and psycholinguistic account of the mechanisms by which corrective feedback works to promote L2 acquisition.

1.1 Statement of the problem

In an attempt to reach a consensus regarding the most effective types of corrective feedback, the dominant trend of corrective feedback research to date has mainly focused either on the comparative investigation of different types of correct feedback (e.g., Ellis, 2007; Ellis, Erlam, & Loewen, 2006; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Lyster, 2004; Sheen, 2007) or the influence of learners' internal and external factors such as proficiency level, first language (L1), perceptions of corrective feedback, etc. on the effectiveness of corrective feedback (e.g., Egi, 2010; Mackey et al. 2000; Mackey et al., 2002; Philp, 2003; Sheen, 2004, 2007; 2008; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007). Such an approach to corrective feedback research stems from a cognitive-acquisition perspective on language learning which is based on a clear triadic distinction between learner, teacher, and instruction.

From a sociocultural perspective, however, learning is a collaborative achievement and the utterances of teachers and learners are more than linguistic evidence to trigger acquisition. Instead, they are essentially social practices of assistance which help interlocutors reach beyond their individual capabilities. In this approach, sharp distinctions between who provides and who receives corrective feedback is blurred and teacher/learners provide jointly owned affordances which can be used by the interlocutors to do something which might not have been otherwise performed. The sociocultural approach to corrective feedback is mainly concerned with when and how corrective feedback in an L2 classroom is appropriate and timely and thus doesn't make rigid distinctions between different types of corrective feedback (Nassaji, 2007). In this way, many questions and issues regarding the effects of learners' internal and external factors on the effectiveness of corrective feedback which are the main concerns of a cognitive acquisition approach to language learning can be relieved.

The main objective of the current study was, thus, to investigate and compare the effects of two types of corrective feedback, namely recasts and negotiated corrective feedback on L2 development. While recasts represent the currently popular cognitive – acquisition view of corrective feedback in L2 acquisition research, negotiated feedback was operationally defined in the current study based on the principles of sociocultural theory. To this end, the concept of negotiated feedback was introduced and operationalized in the current study, based on the Vygotskian concepts' of scaffolding and assisted performance. Furthermore, as a number of empirical studies compared the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback on L2 development, there is no firm answer to the debate over what type of feedback is more effective than the other. One line of research which contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness of corrective feedback types is the investigation of underlying cognitive mechanisms which correspond to different types of corrective feedback. As an important cognitive mechanism associated with the efficacy of corrective feedback, learners' perception or interpretation of corrective feedback has been investigated in several studies. This line of research is motivated by Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990, 2001) which claims that for input to be processed for acquisition by learners, it must first be noticed. According to Schmidt "intake is that part of the input that the learner notices" (1990, p. 139).

Schmidt (2001) also states that "people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to" (p. 30). Recognizing the mismatch between one's incorrect utterance and the correct form delivered through a corrective feedback implies that the learner correctly noticed the recast, an observation which can be regarded as an evidence for the effectiveness of the corrective feedback. Furthermore, learners' uptake or modified output following corrective feedback (i.e., learners' responses to corrective feedback) has also been regarded as evidence of the efficacy of the

corrective feedback by some researchers (e.g., Egi, 2010; Lyster, 1998a, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Sheen, 2004).

In order to shed more light on the mechanisms by which corrective feedback works to promote L2 acquisition, the relationship between the efficacy of corrective feedback with learners' perceptions of corrective feedback and also their responses to corrective feedback should be demonstrated. To this end, besides investigating and comparing the effectiveness of recasts and negotiated feedback, the current study explores: (a) learners' perceptions of recasts and negotiated feedback as indicated by their verbal reports following corrective feedback they received (b) the relationship between learners' ability to produce modified output and their perceptions of corrective feedback, (c) the relationship between learners' perceptions of corrective feedback and subsequent development.

1.2 Significance of the study

Previous studies of corrective feedback made sharp distinctions between different types of corrective feedback and either investigated the effects of corrective feedback on L2 development irrespective of learners' internal and external factors, or included learners' individual factors as a moderator factor in their studies. Such an approach to corrective feedback studies make it difficult to make generalizations regarding the effectiveness of corrective feedback due to diverse individual learner differences which may confound the effects of corrective feedback. In this regard, , Panova & Lyster (2002) observed that while recasts were the most frequent type of corrective feedback among seven categories of corrective feedback they investigated in an adult ESL classroom, they gave rise to the lowest amount of learners' uptake and repairs. Panova & Lyster concluded that L2 learners' proficiency determines the extent to which learners can benefit from feedback. They noted that more advanced learners can benefit more from recasts because they are able to notice the corrective focus of recasts.

Negotiated feedback as operationalized in the current study may ameliorate the confounding effects of individual learner factors especially with regards to learners' proficiency level and their perception of corrective feedback by gradually increasing the level of scaffolding and moving from more implicit to more explicit feedback and thus catering to learners' internal syllabus and also by engaging learners in the collaborative process of error correction. The current study thus aimed at contributing to current literature by investigating corrective feedback from a sociocultural perspective. Furthermore, previous studies of corrective feedback have either explored the effectiveness of corrective feedback in experimental designs and provided only some speculative discussions for the efficacy of certain types of corrective feedback or explored the effects of corrective feedback indirectly through examining learners' certain behaviors following corrective feedback such as their perceptions of feedback, modified output, etc. In fact, one of the strengths of the current research is that it combined both research traditions in an attempt to ground corrective feedback in a firm theoretical framework. Finally, while previous studies of corrective feedback investigated learning achieved through corrective feedback via different measurement instruments, they didn't straightforwardly address learning gains in terms of implicit and explicit L2 knowledge. Thus, the current study also aimed to investigate the effects of recasts and negotiated feedback in terms of implicit and explicit knowledge.