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Oral Corrective Feedback And Learning Of English Modals

Faqeih, Haifaa[a]*, Marsden, Emma[b]

[a]*Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, 21955, Saudi Arabia* [b]*University of York, York, YO10 5DD, United Kingdom*

Abstract

The study examines the effects of interactional corrective feedback (CF) in the form of recasts (i.e. teacher's reformulation) and metalinguistic information (i.e. provision of some grammatical information) in response to any erroneous utterance in English modals. Evidence regarding the relative effectiveness of these types is mixed (reviewed by Li [1]), and only few studies have isolated metalinguistic feedback from recasts. The current classroom study aims to address these issues, and focuses on learning of English modals, a structure which has been neglected in corrective feedback studies and is considered to be difficult for EFL/ESL learners (Celce- Murcia and Freeman [2]). Pre-intermediate L1 Arabic learners (n=36) in an ESL context were randomly assigned into two experimental groups; metalinguistic information (MI) and recast (R), and one task only (TO) group. Three hour oral communicative tasks were held in four consecutive weeks. Learning was measured via pre-, post-, and delayed post- picture description test (PD), gap fill test (GF), and timed grammaticality judgment test (TGJT). An exit questionnaire, (e.g., Sheen [3]) to check awareness of the target feature and an attitudinal questionnaire to measure participants' attitude towards error correction and grammatical accuracy were administered. The results demonstrate that metalinguistic information and recasts were beneficial for learning of English modals and learners' preference for recast was more than that for metalinguistic information feedback.

Keywords: Corrective feedback; recasts; metalinguistic; interactional tasks alone; English modals; attitude;

Introduction

In the early sixties, language errors began to be viewed by language experts in a more positive way; as being

*Corresponding author Faqeih Haifaa . Tel.: +966506509998
E-mail address: hifaqeih@uqu.edu.sa

indicative of progression. Corder [4] pointed out that learner's errors are important for teachers as they indicate the amount of information that the learner has acquired, and teachers can then modify their instruction according to their students' needs. Similarly, Hendrickson [5] stated that language errors are a natural part of learning and

the systematic analysis of errors can help researchers and teachers to understand better the process of language acquisition. Along the same lines, Van Lier [6] noted that in the late sixties and early seventies, teachers began to realize that errors might be more an indication of learners' efforts to form a new linguistic system rather than linguistic failure. Hendrickson [5] emphasized five critical questions concerning the type of errors to be corrected, the people who should do the corrections, and the ways of correction. Educators and researchers have investigated the questions stated by Hendrickson for many years, but Lyster and Ranta [7] pointed out in their review that researchers were far from finding answers to these questions. Accordingly, the types of CF that are most effective in terms of student learning have been debated (e.g. Carroll and Swain [8]; Ellis et al [9]; Sheen [3]; Lyster and Ranta [7].

Given that the ways of correction were of researchers' concerns, there has been some divergence of thought regarding the effectiveness of corrective feedback. For example, Krashen [10] suggested that students do not need any feedback to progress. Contrarily, Lightbown and Spada [11]; Carroll et al [12]; Long [13]; Lyster and Ranta [7]; Sheen [14]; and Ellis [15] suggested that feedback plays a crucial role in language learning as it pushes learners to notice and attempt to say the targeted form, and therefore students may be more likely to repair their erroneous utterances. In addition, the meaning-focused instruction has been questioned with regard to its effectiveness and research suggests its benefits to language learners regardless of context.

The effectiveness of CF and subsequent learning outcomes might be different in laboratory and classroom settings (e.g., Li [1]; Spada & Lightbown [16]). Ellis et al [9], however, argued that ecological validity of the CF can only be achieved through classroom-based research.

To gauge the effectiveness of CF, learners' reactions to feedback have often been used as indicators, such as intake, uptake, and repair(e.g., Lyster & Ranta [7]) or comparing pre and post-test scores (e.g., Carroll & Swain [8]; Ellis et al [9]; Loewen & Nabei [17]; Révész [18]). It is sometimes assumed that these reactions indicate that the learner has noticed the non-target form. However, a learner may not have noticed the error, but simply repeat the teacher's or a learner may not respond even though s/he does understand the error (Lochtman [19]).

1.1. The scope of the study

Three recent meta-analysed data on the effectiveness of the types of CF are considered in this research. For example, Norris and Ortega's [20] meta-analysis found a larger effect size for explicit instructions (0.96) than implicit instructions (0.81).In contrary, Mackey and Goo [21] meta-analysed the effect of different feedback types on immediate post-tests and have found the mean effect size was 0.96 for recasts, 0.47 for metalinguistic feedback, and 0.52 for negotiation. Although Li[1] pointed out, in the meta-analysed data, that recasts have tended to receive considerable attention in SLA research, whilst explicit feedback such as explicit correction and metalinguistic information have had much less interest, Mackey and Goo [21] stated that it was premature to make conclusive arguments for the superior effects of recasts based on their analysed data.

As research findings seem to be mixed of whether metalinguistic is equal to or more effective than recast, more research concerning the effectiveness of CF emphasising on the explicit type, metalinguistic information in particular, is needed.

The provision of outcome measures that may tap into implicit as well explicit knowledge is projected for the purpose of the current study, for Ellis [22] indicated that several studies used tests that favour the use of explicit knowledge to examine the effectiveness of implicit versus explicit feedback.

Testing session is another focus of the study, Li [1], however, stated that few studies did not provide learners'