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journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/linged](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/linged)

## The effectiveness of intensive and extensive recasts on L2 acquisition for implicit and explicit knowledge

Nobuhiro Kamiya <sup>\*</sup>, <sup>1</sup>

Gunma Prefectural Women's University, 1395-1, Kaminote, Tamamura-machi, Sawa-gun, Gunma 370-1193, Japan

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Available online 15 December 2014

## Keywords:

Planned FonF

Corrective feedback

Intensive/extensive recasts

Implicit/explicit knowledge

## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to compare the effectiveness of intensive and extensive recasts on the acquisition of a planned target structure. The study consisted of a control group and two treatment groups, one of which received intensive recasts on errors only for English unreal conditionals; the other received extensive recasts on any kind of error during 2-h activity sessions. A total of 44 ESL learners participated in the experiment. Results showed that (a) the groups receiving recasts demonstrated higher accuracy on tests of both implicit and explicit knowledge when compared to the control group; (b) the intensive recast group showed a trend toward greater accuracy than the extensive recast group on the implicit knowledge tests; (c) both intensive and extensive recast groups demonstrated similar accuracy on the explicit knowledge test, and (d) the effectiveness of recasts was evident even for a structure that the learners were still unfamiliar with.

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### Introduction

The reactive type of *Focus on form* (FonF; Long, 1991, 1996), defined as an attention to form in response to an error by learners, which is also known as corrective feedback (CF), has been widely researched in second language acquisition (SLA) and is commonly being applied by language teachers. One type of CF technique, the *recast*, reformulates a learner's incorrect utterance while maintaining its original meaning (Long, 1996). Recasts (often together with other kinds of CF) have been investigated thoroughly, ranging from descriptive studies (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997) to meta analyses (e.g., Lyster & Saito, 2010), ultimately yielding a few expansive literature reviews (e.g., Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). Nevertheless, there are still some aspects of recast use that have been largely ignored to date. The present study examines three of them: (a) the difference between intensive and extensive recasts, (b) the effectiveness of each type of recast on implicit and explicit knowledge, and (c) the effectiveness of recasts on a structure with which the learners are not familiar.

<sup>\*</sup> Tel.: +81 270 65 8511.

E-mail address: [kamiya@fic.gpwu.ac.jp](mailto:kamiya@fic.gpwu.ac.jp)

<sup>1</sup> Note: When the research was conducted, the author belonged to the PhD program in Second Language Studies at Michigan State University, East Lansing, USA.

## Review of literature

### *Intensive and extensive recasts*

There are a number of ways to categorize recasts; one divides them as *intensive* and *extensive* (Ellis, 2001; Loewen, 2011; Williams, 2005). According to Ellis (2001), intensive recasts occur when the target structure is planned in the lesson, and learners are likely to receive feedback multiple times on the single, pre-selected structure. In contrast, extensive recasts occur when no target structure is selected by the teacher or researcher; Nevertheless, learners receive feedback on many structures that occur incidentally during instruction.

The findings from past studies indicate that these two types of CF are both effective. Intensive recasts have generally produced significantly better test scores in posttests compared to pretests (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002; Ishida, 2004; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Lyster, 2004). Although the number of experimental studies examining the effectiveness of extensive recasts is more limited, their effectiveness is documented as well. For instance, Loewen and Philp (2006) demonstrated that the participants were able to correctly answer at least 50% of test items on a tailor-made test based upon the features targeted by extensive recasts.

However, when it comes down to a question of which is actually more effective, there have been only a handful empirical studies that directly compared the two types. For example, Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, and Takashima (2008) compared *focused* recasts (i.e., intensive), *unfocused* recasts (i.e., extensive), and a control group (i.e., no recasts) in writing with the English article being the target structure. The results showed that both types of recasts were statistically equally effective compared to the control group although a tendency was shown that intensive recasts may be more effective than extensive recasts. Clearer evidence of the superiority of focused written CF over unfocused written CF was manifested in Sheen, Wright, and Moldawa (2009). This study showed that the former was effective not only for the target structure (the English articles), but also for four other grammatical features despite the fact that CF was not provided for these features. In contrast, the unfocused written CF virtually made no contribution to improving the accuracy of any of the five target structures in comparison to a group that practiced writing without any CF.

Furthermore, there is some indirect evidence showing the ineffectiveness of extensive recasts in light of weak *uptake*, here defined as a learners' immediate response to CF (Lyster, 1998; Sheen, 2006), and a learner's interpretation of CF (Carpenter, Jeon, MacGregor, & Mackey, 2006; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000). Supporting such a hypothesis, Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001) reviewed previous studies, and make claims that intensive recasts are more effective than extensive recasts. Furthermore, in their meta-analysis, Mackey and Goo (2007) showed that intensive recasts were more effective, but the difference emerged later rather than immediately after the treatment, leading Sheen (2008) to nominate intensiveness as one of the properties to ensure effectiveness.

Nonetheless, counterevidence was also expressed by way of another meta-analysis conducted by Russell and Spada (2006), which showed that there was no difference between intensive and extensive CF. Even so, a closer look at the fifteen studies employed for the meta-analysis revealed that among the five studies of extensive CF, four of them examined written CF and among the ten studies of intensive CF, eight of them examined oral CF. For the evanescent nature of oral CF, it perhaps comes as no surprise that extensive written CF was found to be equally effective to intensive oral CF.

Accumulated evidence cogently points to the preponderance of intensive recasts over extensive recasts, a claim that even L2 teachers intuitively may make. Hence, simply comparing the effectiveness of these two types of CF may not be so enlightening. In light of this, for the present study, a decision was made to employ the concept of two types of knowledge (i.e., implicit and explicit) and examine whether or not the superiority of intensive recasts is realized for both types of knowledge, and if not, for which type will it be realized.

Before discussing these two types of knowledge in more depth, it should be noted that the difference between intensive and extensive recasts can be analyzed from two perspectives: the presence of feedback on unplanned linguistic structures and the number of recasts provided for the target structure. With regard to the former, when intensive recasts are provided, errors related to the target structure are the only ones addressed. When extensive recasts are provided, there may be a specific targeted linguistic form, but there are also additional structures that receive feedback sometimes with greater frequency than the targeted structure. In general, however, when intensive recasts are provided, the number of recasts provided for the target structure is likely to be higher than when extensive recasts are provided. This is so because a certain number of recasts will be used for structures other than the target structure. However, the relationship between the number of recasts and their effectiveness is still unknown. It would be natural to assume that the more recasts provided for a structure, the more salient they become to learners, and the more effective they are. In fact, Ellis et al. (2008) speculated that the number of written recasts provided might be the reason why there was a tendency to show that the focused recasts were more effective than the unfocused recasts in the long run (but this difference was not statistically significant in their study); In any case, there is a general paucity of such studies.

Regarding differences in effectiveness, if intensive and extensive recasts are employed that are different in terms of both the presence of feedback on other structures and frequency, it presents difficulties assigning which feature contributed to the difference in effectiveness. Hence, it is imperative to control one of these variables to properly compare intensive and extensive recasts, which is at the heart of the present study.

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