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Learners' noticing of recasts of morpho-syntactic errors: Recast types and delayed recognition

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Abstract

Recasts are the most commonly studied type of corrective feedback in interaction research and lately the investigation has extended to what makes recasts beneficial or unbeneficial. Expanding the investigation to the effect of different types of recasts (i.e., declarative or interrogative) on learners' noticing, the present study reports the findings of an empirical study that examined whether learners' noticing of morpho-syntactic recasts is influenced by recast type, and whether learners subsequently recognize their morpho-syntactic errors and the target-like reformulations they received during task-based interaction. Results show that learners noticed 10% of morpho-syntactic recasts and there was no significant difference by recast type. In subsequent recognition tasks, learners tended to recognize recasted forms (i.e., target-like forms) more than their errors (i.e., non-target forms).
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1. Introduction

1.1. Recasts and noticing

Recasts are the most commonly studied type of corrective feedback in interaction research (Ellis and Sheen, 2006). The emphasis on studying recasts is motivated by the fact that recasts have been shown to be the most common feedback given to learners in classroom settings (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Moreover, studies have also shown that recasts, and other forms of feedback, have a beneficial effect on second language acquisition (Mackey, 2007). However, the issues of how recasts actually contribute to second language development and what processes are required to make recasts beneficial are still under debate. Some researchers argue that for recasts, or corrective feedback in general, to be effective, learners have to recognize the corrective nature of the recasts and have to attend to the linguistic problems in their utterances (Gass, 1997; Schmidt, 1990). This view rests on Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990, 1995, 2001), which suggests that when learners notice the gap between what they produced and the

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corrective input they receive, learning occurs, and that detection, processing, and storage of input in the long memory is restricted by learners' awareness at the time of learning.

As a result of those assumptions, questions have arisen as to whether learners actually notice this gap or notice that they were corrected in the first place. Studies have indicated more or less that learners tend to notice recasts less than other types of feedback and that recasts are relatively beneficial for L2 development (e.g., Egi, 2007; Gass and Lewis, 2007; Lyster, 1998; Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Mackey, 2006; Mackey et al., 2000; Nabei and Swain, 2002; Philp, 2003). Lyster and Ranta (1997) analyzed 18.3 h of classroom interaction and found that recasts were the most common type of feedback, but the least to be followed by uptake (operationalized as learners' utterances that immediately follow the teacher feedback and that indicate a reaction to the teacher's intention to draw the learners' attention to their first utterance). Lyster and Ranta indicated that recasts are more ambiguous than other types of feedback.

What makes recasts ambiguous was the focus of some studies that investigated the relationship between feedback types and error types. Mackey et al. (2000), for example, found that learners tend to attend least to feedback on morpho-syntactic errors and that linguistic content of errors could be a factor that plays a role in noticing recasts as corrective feedback.

Other factors that were investigated include learner's developmental level, recast length, the degree of difference between the recast and the learners' non-target utterance, and the learners' background. Philp (2003), for example, found that recast length, learners' proficiency level, and the extent to which the recast was different from the learner's utterance had an effect on immediate recall of recasts. On the other hand, Gass and Lewis (2007) did not find an effect of learners' background on noticing recasts. They also indicated that learners perceive lexical and phonological feedback more accurately than morpho-syntactic feedback. This study provides further evidence that morpho-syntactic recasts are less noticed and strengthens the claim that learners' perception of recasts as corrective feedback is a complex issue. As such, the present study, in part, investigates whether learners interpret recasts of grammatical errors as corrective feedback and focuses on the effect of one other major factor: recast type.

1.2. Recast types

Recasts have been extensively investigated in the interaction literature, and as a result, they have been classified in different terms and from different perspectives. Roberts (1995), for example, distinguished between partial and full recasts, where partial recasts refer to the reformulation of the erroneous segment. In terms of their structure, recasts have been classified into simple and complex (see Philp, 2003) based on whether recasts involve deletion, addition, reordering, or simply substituting the problematic form. These distinctions were captured in a more wide-ranging model presented by Lyster (1998). Lyster distinguished between four different types based on the discourse context they occur in: isolated declarative, isolated interrogative, incorporated declarative, and incorporated interrogative. For all these classifications, Sheen (2006) presented a comprehensive taxonomy of the characteristics of recasts that have been shown in the literature. The most salient features were the explicitness and the mode of recasts. Recasts could be explicit or implicit and they could be declarative or interrogative. The effect of the latter distinction on recast noticing is investigated in the present study as it is one of the most salient characteristics that might have an effect on learners' noticing of recasts.

1.3. Recasts and L2 development

While the factors that might have an effect on learner's noticing of feedback were the concern of one group of researchers, the issue of how noticing leads to L2 development was the concern of another. Nabei and Swain (2002), for example, studied an adult Japanese learner's awareness of and development from the recasts provided by her teacher in a theme-based EFL classroom in Japan. Results showed that the learner attended to feedback differently according to the context of interaction (i.e., teacher-fronted or group-related). She attended more to recasts in group interaction than in teacher-fronted interaction, and showed overall improvement in the grammaticality judgment tests. Even though the learner in this study indicated her awareness of feedback, the amount of noticing was relatively low. Moreover, the learner's slight improvement could result from being in the instructional setting for a long time.

Mackey (2006), unlike Nabei and Swain, was not satisfied with one measure (i.e., stimulated recall) to assess learner's awareness of corrective feedback. Mackey, on the contrary, employed three different measures in her