EFL Teachers' L1 backgrounds and the characteristics of their feedback

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Abstract

This small-scale study investigated whether English teachers with different L1 backgrounds vary in the *amount* and *nature* of the implicit negative feedback they provide to NNSs during a communicative interaction. Data were collected from 10 native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and 9 non-native English-speaking teachers (non-NESTs). The findings indicated that teachers' L1 did indeed affect the provision of recasts: NESTs' recasts tend to be segmented and consistent – traits that are strongly related to students' repair (e.g., Sheen, 2006). Furthermore, these traits seemed to allow the communication to remain learner-centered, thus carrying out the primary function as a 'focus on form' strategy. On the other hand, implicit negative feedback did not seem to be as user-friendly for non-NESTs: they left some errors uncorrected. This study points to the importance of taking teachers' L1 backgrounds into account as we examine the usability of recasts.

Keywords

corrective feedback, native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), non native English-speaking teachers (Non-NESTs), recasts,

Introduction

One type of feedback that has received abundant attention in the past few decades is recasts, i.e. "the teacher's implicit provision of a correct reformulation of all or part of a student's ill-formed utterance" (Lyster and Ranta, 1997: 46-47). Although recasts have traditionally been acknowledged as an implicit reformulation move, more recent studies (e.g., Loewen and Philp 2006) have reported that teachers actually provide recasts in a more or less explicit manner (e.g., segmented and stressed). However, a majority of these descriptive studies have been conducted with NS-NNS dyads. As the types of recasts impact the noticeability and the usability from learners' standpoint, it is crucial to examine how non-NESTs provide recasts.

1 Present Study Results

1.1 Research Question

The research question addressed in the present study is: Do non-NESTs and NESTs differ in the amount of implicit negative feedback they provide to NNSs?

1.2 Method

1.2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 10 NESTs and 9 Non-NESTs teaching in public/private middle/high/language schools in Japan. These teachers were paired with a collaborator who played the role of the student.

1.2.2 Procedures

The research design was such that during the interaction (picture description task), the collaborator made the same set of errors (including phonological, lexical, and morphoysntactic errors) to elicit teachers' implicit CF. The collaborator produced a total of 34 sentences, of which 28 contained errors (six well-formed sentences were included as distracters). The teachers were instructed to make any correction that he/she found necessary in the form of an implicit reformulation.

2 Results

Table 1 and Table 2 display the frequency and the percentage of how NESTs and Non-NESTs responded to the collaborator's utterances.

Table 1: Breakdown of cases of feedback: NESTs

	Collaborator's Erroneous Utterances	Collaborator's Well-formed Utterances
No Reaction	36 (12.86%)	38 (63.33%)
Approval only	9 (3.21%)	8 (13.33%
Approval with repetition	0 (0%)	3 (5.00%)
Repetition only	0 (0%)	4 (6.67%)

Recasts	235 (83.93%)	7 (11.67%)
Approval with correction	5 (2.13%)	0 (0%)
Incorrect correction	6 (2.55%)	3 (5.00%)
Rephrase	10 (4.26%)	4 (6.67%)
Others	214 (91.06%)	0 (0%)
Total	280 (100%)	60 (100%)
Coverage: Segment	113 (48.09%)	3 (42.86)
Coverage: Full	122 (51.91%)	4 (57.14)
Total	235 (100%)	7 (100%)

Table 2: Breakdown of cases of feedback: Non-NESTs

	Collaborator's Erroneous Utterances	**Collaborator's Well-formed Utterances**
No Reaction	39 (15.48%)	20 (37.04%)
Approval only	44 (17.46%)	17 (31.48%)
Approval with repetition	0 (0%)	7 (11.67%)
Repetition only	0 (0%)	7 (11.67%)
Recasts	169 (67.06%)	3 (5.56%)
Approval with correction	8 (4.73%)	0 (0%)
Incorrect correction	60 (35.50%)	3 (5.56%)
Rephrase	2 (1.20%)	0 (0%)
Others	99 (58.58%)	0 (0%)
Total	252 (100%)	54 (100%)
Coverage: Segment	65 (38.46%)	1 (33.33%)
Coverage: Full	104 (61.45%)	2 (66.67%)
Total	169 (100%)	3 (100%)

3 Discussion

NESTs provided segmented recasts slightly more frequently compared to the Non-NESTs (48.09% and 38.46%). This general trait has been reported to act as a strong stimulus for modified output and language development (e.g., Asari, 2012) -- the positive evidence is more likely to be retained in learners' working memory (WM) for comparison of their interlanguage form (IL) to the target form (TL) than in the case of full recasts.

There were more occasions for non-NESTs compared to NESTs to give a sign of approval to an ill-formed utterance (17.46% and 3.21% respectively) in the same way that they approved a well-formed utterance. As was discussed by Lyster (1998), such inconsistency and ambiguity make it difficult for learners to detect IL/TL mismatches with respect to form, and the corrective reformulations included in recasts may go unnoticed.

The findings also revealed that Non-NESTs did not correct some (15.48%) of the errors. Moreover, the combination of Non-NESTs' chances of not correcting the collaborator's errors ("approval only" and "no reaction") sums up to nearly 33%. Learners may interpret an absence of correction subsequent to an error as an indication that their message was accurately produced, and misjudgment of this sort could lead to fossilization of errors. (Vigil and Oller, 1976).

Finally, particularly striking is the amount of incorrect correction given by the non-NESTs. 35.50% of non-NESTs' correction contained some kind of error. Considering that the biggest advantage of recasts lies in the provision of positive evidence, the non-NESTS' performance seems to indicate that, in situations where teachers' recasts is potentially problemantic, CF types other than recasting should be chosen for learners' language development.

4 Limitation and Future Implication

This descriptive study was designed to investigate the differences in the provision of recasts between NESTs and Non-NESTs. The finding reveals that Non-NESTs were not as well equipped to provide recasts to learners as NESTs. Although it is difficult to generalize the finding from this small-scale study, it provides some evidence as to how teachers differ in their usage of recasts depending on their L1 backgrounds. Degrees of difficulty of recasting for non-NESTs in relation to learners' error types were outside the scope of the present study, but it will be of interest in the future to investigate the existence of a hierarchy of error types in terms of the extent to which they tax teachers' ability to provide CF.

5 References

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