

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 does indeed affect the provision of recasts: NESTs' recasts tend to be segmented and stressed. These characteristics help learners to attend to the positive and/or negative evidence in recasts in order to identify and/or notice the gap. On the other hand, implicit negative feedback did not seem to be as user-friendly for non-NESTs: they left some errors uncorrected or were unable to correct the errors successfully. While the usability of recasts from students' perspective has received abundant attention, it is also essential to examine recasts' usability from the teachers' standpoint. Although further research would be necessary to arrive at a more generalizable conclusion, the present study sheds light on the importance of considering teachers' background as a factor that affects CF.

Keywords

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

1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, EFL lessons have become more communicative-oriented. More than ever before, teachers are expected to seek teaching methods and techniques that can advance learners' L2 production during teacher-learner/learner-learner interaction. One critical issue to consider is the kind of feedback learners should receive in oral activities. Generally speaking, different types of corrective feedback (CF) have been known to lie on an implicit/explicit continuum (see Figure 1). While explicit CF is provided overtly, implicit CF is generally provided non-overtly. Implicit CF allows for the interaction to be uninterrupted, learner-centered and meaning-focused, and for these reasons recasts in particular have become one of many teachers' most preferred types of CF in many communicative language lessons.



Figure 1: Explicit/implicit corrective feedback types

Despite the beneficial factors of recasts, studies that focus on learners' noticing have pointed out some of the unbeneficial factors of this form of feedback. Recasts are defined as "the teacher's implicit provision of a correct reformulation of all or part of a student's ill-formed utterance" (Lyster and Ranta, 1997, p. 46-47). Unlike more explicit types of feedback (e.g., metalinguistic clues and explicit correction), recasts are less noticeable and thus are ineffective in triggering successful learner-generated repair. As can be seen in Example 1, learners may perceive recasts as non-corrective conversation continuations rather than as negative feedback.

Example 1 (Mackey and Philp, 1998, p. 344)

NNS: *What what they doing?*

NS: *What are they doing?*

NNS: *Yeah*

NS: *They're signing a contract*

Given that triggering learners' attention is crucial for corrective feedback to be effective, previous studies have focused on examining recasts that take perceptual saliency into consideration. From these descriptive studies, the findings revealed that some language instructors control their provision of recasting in such a way that recasts may be delivered more explicitly. Ways to draw learners' attention explicitly to the positive/negative evidence include: the number of reformulation (e.g., Philp, 2003), adding cues to recasts (e.g., Asari, 2012), and segmenting (e.g., Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Such enhanced saliency helps to sensitize learners to corrective aspects of the recasts and hence heighten the noticeability and effectiveness of recasts.

These studies provide evidence that the degree to which students benefit from recasts seems to depend on how it is provided; thus, an additional variable that needs further investigation is the interlocutor. To date, there has been minimal attention on how different teachers with different L1 backgrounds vary in their usage of recasts. While a growing body of research has been done on recasts, it is conducted on dyads between a native speaker (NS) researcher and a non-native speaker (NNS) learner or on classroom interaction between a NS teacher and NNS learners. However, given the deficiency of native English speaking teachers (NESTs), non-native English speaking teachers (non-NESTs) are still the dominant group among those involved in Japan's EFL education. The present study hopes to fill this critical gap by investigating whether teachers with different L1 backgrounds differ in their usage of recasts.

2 Research Question

Consequently the research question addressed in the present study is:

Do non-NESTs and NESTs differ in the type and amount of recasts they provide to NNS learners?

3 Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 10 NESTs teaching in a private language school in Tokyo and 9 Non-NESTs teaching in public/private middle/high schools in different areas of Tokyo and Kanagawa, Japan. In this study, a NEST refers to someone who speaks English as his or her first language or has a near-native command of it as a result of learning it as a second (as opposed to 'foreign') language. On the other hand, a non-NEST refers to a user of English who does not belong to that category. These teachers were paired with a Japanese collaborator who played the role of the student.

3.2 Procedure

The research design was such that during the interaction (picture description task), the collaborator uttered the same set of errors (including phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic errors) to elicit teachers' implicit CF. A picture book *Snow White* was used for the picture description task (see Appendix A). The collaborator produced a total of 34 sentences, of which 28 contained errors and six were well-formed sentences used as distracters. The sentences are presented in Appendix B. The teachers were instructed to make any correction that they found necessary but not in the form of explicit corrections or metalinguistic clues. When the teachers provided different CF other than recasts (i.e., elicitation and clarification requests), the collaborator repeated the original utterance until the teacher had to provide recasts (see Example 2). By doing so, the teachers were guided to provide the kind of recasts that provided the researcher with ample representations of the recast tendencies of NESTs and non-NESTs. All the interactions were recorded on an IC recorder and transcribed for analysis.

Example 2: Other CF with recast (from this study)

Collaborator: *The prince is sitting in the wall.*

Teacher: *The prince is sitting...* (Elicitation)

Collaborator: *Sitting...*

Teacher: *On the wall.* (Recast)

Collaborator: *On the wall. The prince is sitting on the wall.*

3.3 Coding

3.3.1 Recast characteristics (Quality)

Error treatment sequences were categorized by a set of criteria formulated specifically for this study but based partly on those presented in previous studies (Asari, 2012). The categories for different types of recasts are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Recast characteristics

Segmentation		
Segmented	The recast provides a partial recast of the learner's utterance	S: They surprise to see a girl. T: They are surprised
Whole	The recast is an entire recast of the whole trigger utterance	S: The birds is flying. T: The birds are flying.
Emphasis		
Unstressed	Linguistic item that is recast is not given atypical stress	S: She is scary. T: She is scared.
Stressed	Linguistic item that is recast is given atypical stress, through pitch, additional pausing and emphasis	S: The man held a knife. T: The man IS HOLDING a knife.
Intonation		
Declarative	The recast is provided with falling intonation as a declarative statement	S: Glasses dwarf is the leader. T: The dwarf wearing glasses is the leader.
Interrogative	The recast is provided with a rising intonation as an interrogative statement	S: They looking at a house nearby. T: They are looking?
Combination		
Cue plus recast	The recast is provided with an additional verbal signal	S: Snow White animal loves T: Ah! Show White loves animals.
Approval plus recast	The recast is provided with a sign of acknowledgment or approval	S: There is seven birds. T: Yes. There are seven birds.
Other CF plus recast	The recast is provided in combination with other corrective feedback such as elicitation, clarification requests, and repetition.	S: The prince is sitting in the wall. T: The prince is... S: Sitting... T: Sitting on the wall.
Recast only	The recast is provided without an additional signal	S: He is playing piano. T: He is playing the piano.

3.3.2 Recast frequency (Quantity)

The teachers participating in this study were not obliged to correct the collaborator's errors. If they chose not to correct or if they were not able to detect the error produced by the collaborator, the collaborator continued onto the next utterance. Cases labeled in this study as ones without correction in fact include not only cases without any reaction from the teacher (Example 4) but also cases in which a sign of approval (i.e., 'uh huh' and 'yes') without correction is provided by the teacher (Example 3).

Example 3: Approval without correction (from this study)

Collaborator: *It dangerous.*

Teacher: *Yes.* (Approval without correction)

Collaborator: *Snow White die and there is a funeral for her.*

Example 4: No reaction (from this study)

Collaborator: *Snow White is dancing happy with the dwarfs.*

Teacher: ... (No reaction)

Collaborator: *He is playing piano.*

4 Results

Table 2, 3, 4, and 5 display the frequency and the percentage of NESTs' and Non-NESTs' responses to the collaborator's utterances. Tables 2 and 3 each show a breakdown of cases of feedback. As can be seen from the tables, NESTs provided CF more frequently than non-NESTs (81.79% and 43.25% respectively). As indicated in Table 3, the results of non-NESTs' interaction show that approximately 33% of the errors were either completely ignored (15.48%) or approved without correction (17.46%). Of the 67.06% of the errors that were corrected, 35.50% of the recasts were provided incorrectly. That is to say, there were several occasions where non-NESTs either did not properly correct the collaborator's errors or gave utterances that contained some kind of error. These instances were not subjected to further analysis.

The subcategorizations of the correct recasts are tabulated in Tables 4 and 5. As indicated in the tables, NESTs used techniques that enhance explicitness such as stress (50.21%) and segmentation (49.34%) more than non-NESTs (22.94% and 35.78% respectively). On the other hand, while NESTs rarely used recasts with a combination of other CF types (6.99%), 31.19% of the non-NESTs' recasts were provided with other implicit CF such as elicitation and clarification techniques. The results are discussed in the following section.

Table 2: [Quantity] Breakdown of cases of feedback: NESTs

	Collaborator's Utterances			
	Erroneous		Well-formed	
No reaction	36	(12.86%)	38	(63.33%)
Approval without correction	9	(3.21%)	8	(13.33%)
Correction	235	(83.93%)	3	(5.00%)
Incorrect recasts	6	(2.55%)*	3	(5.00%)*
Correct recasts	229	(97.45%)*	0	(0.00%)*
Others	0	(0.00%)	11	(18.33%)
Total	280		60	

Note: The percentages of these subcategories indicate the breakdown of cases included under the 'Correction' category, not their proportion to the total number of responses.

Table 3: [Quantity] Breakdown of cases of feedback: Non-NESTs

	Collaborator's Utterances			
	Erroneous		Well-formed	
No reaction	39	(15.48%)	20	(37.04%)
Approval without correction	44	(17.46%)	17	(31.48%)
Correction	169	(67.06%)	3	(5.56%)
Incorrect recasts	60	(35.50%)*	3	(5.56%)*
Correct recasts	109	(64.50%)*	0	(0.00%)*
Others	0	(0.00%)	14	(25.93%)
Total	252		54	

*Note: The percentages of these subcategories indicate the breakdown of cases included under the 'Correction' category, not their proportion to the total number of responses.

Table 4: [Quality] Breakdown of cases of feedback: NESTs

	Collaborator's Utterances			
	Erroneous		Well-formed	
Segmentation				
Segmented	113	(49.34%)	0	(0.00%)
Whole	116	(50.66%)	3	(100.00%)
Total	229	(100%)	3	(100.00%)
Emphasis				
Stressed	115	(50.21%)	0	(0.00%)
Unstressed	114	(49.79%)	3	(100.00%)
Total	229	(100%)	3	(100.00%)
Intonation				
Interrogative	9	(3.93%)	0	(0.00%)
Declarative	220	(96.07%)	3	(100.00%)
Total	229	(100%)	3	(100.00%)

Combination				
Approval plus recast	5	(2.18%)	0	(0.00%)
Cue plus recast	4	(1.75%)	0	(0.00%)
Other CF plus recast	16	(6.99%)	0	(0.00%)
Recast only	204	(89.08%)	3	(100.00%)
Total	229	(100%)	3	(100.00%)

Table 5: [Quality] Breakdown of cases of feedback: Non-NESTs

	Collaborator's Utterances			
	Erroneous		Well-formed	
Segmentation				
Segmented	39	(35.78%)	1	(33.33%)
Whole	70	(64.22%)	2	(66.67%)
Total	109	(100.00%)	3	(100.00%)
Emphasis				
Stressed	25	(22.94%)	0	(0.00%)
Unstressed	84	(77.06%)	3	(100.00%)
Total	109	(100.00%)	3	(100.00%)
Intonation				
Interrogative	12	(11.01%)	0	(0.00%)
Declarative	97	(88.99%)	3	(100.00%)
Total	109	(100.00%)	3	(100.00%)
Combination				
Approval plus recast	16	(14.68%)	0	(0.00%)
Cue plus recast	4	(3.67%)	0	(0.00%)
Other CF plus recast	34	(31.19%)	2	(33.33%)
Recast only	55	(50.46%)	1	(66.67%)
Total	109	(100.00%)	3	(100.00%)

5 Discussion

In terms of differences in the quality of recasts, the results revealed that NESTs used techniques to enhance the degree of explicitness and salience of recasts more frequently than the non-NESTs. Specifically, NESTs recasts tended to be stressed and segmented (see Example 5). Studies that examine the noticeability and effectiveness of recasts (i.e., uptake and stimulated recall) have reported that high noticeability acts as a strong stimulus for language development. While recasts are sometimes difficult for learners to understand as corrective, stressed recasts help them attend to the positive and/or negative evidence in recasts in order to identify and/or notice the gap (e.g., Loewen and Philp, 2006). Furthermore, segmented recasts are onerous for learners as positive evidence is more likely to be retained in learners' working memory (WM) for comparison between their interlanguage form (IL) and the target form (TL) than in the case of whole recasts (e.g., Asari, 2012). On the other hand, a technique the non-NESTs used more frequently than NESTs was the provision of recasting with a combination of other CF types. While drawing on different CF prior to the provision of recasts may give learners extra time to identify the error, this result must be interpreted with caution as many of these cases were requests for repetition (see Example 6). This could be because the proficiency level of the non-NESTs may not be adequate for registering these errors. This is the point which I turn to next.

Example 5

Collaborator: *She have a bucket of water.*
 NEST: *She HAS* (Segmented and stressed)

Example 6

Collaborator: *She gives Snow White apple.*
 Non-NEST: *She... She gives* [whispering to herself]...
Could you say once again? (Request for repetition)
 Collaborator: *She gives Snow White apple*

Non-NEST: *She gives Snow White an apple.*
 Collaborator: *She gives Snow White an apple.*

The results showed interesting differences in the quantity of recasts between Non-NESTs and NESTs – overall non-NESTs provided fewer recasts than NESTs. As compared to NESTs, Non-NESTs frequently gave a sign of approval to an ill-formed utterance as if it were a well-formed utterance. Cross-cultural conversational studies have reported that Japanese speakers use back channel responses, or “aizuchi”, more frequently than people from other linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Yang, 2001). “Aizuchi” is used to show listenership in conversation. According to Maynard (1993), there are six functional properties of back channeling: 1) continuer; 2) display of understanding of content; 3) support and empathy towards the speaker; 4) agreement; 5) strong emotional response; and 6) minor additions, corrections, or requests for information. With an exception of the sixth point, aizuchi signals the current speaker to continue his/her talk without particularly pointing out that a mistake has been made. 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). Moreover, the mixture of three kinds of approval, viz. (a) that which follows an error but does not correct it (Example 7), (b) that which follows an error and corrects it in the form of a recast, and (c) that which follows a correct utterance (Example 7), can be a problem from an SLA perspective. 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.

Example 7:

Collaborator: *Snow White and the prince meets for the first time.*
 Non-NEST: *Alright.* (Approval without correction subsequent an error)
 Collaborator: *The birds is flying.*
 Non-NEST: *Uh huh.* (Approval without correction subsequent an error)
 Collaborator: *Snow White is in the forest.*
 Non-NEST: *Right.* (Approval subsequent a correct utterance)

Example 8:

Collaborator: *They sad.*
 Non-NEST: *Yes, they look sad.* (Approval with recast)

Finally, an especially striking attribute was the number of incorrect corrections, i.e. comments intended to be corrections but are in fact wrong, given by the non-NESTs. Approximately one third of non-NESTs’ corrections contained some kind of error (Example 9). Learners benefit from recasts provided by the teacher during an interaction as learners can notice the gap between their IL and TL. Needless to say, this would only work if the target language included in the recasts by the teacher is correct. The non-NESTs’ performance seems to indicate that, in situations where teachers’ recasts are potentially problematic, CF types other than recasting should be chosen for learners’ language development.

Example 9

Collaborator: *She poison apple make.*
 Non-NEST: *Poisoned. Or poisons.*
 Collaborator: *She poison apple make.*
 Non-NEST: *Poisons.*
 Collaborator: *She poisons apple make.*
 Non-NEST: *Yes.*

The debate concerning the usability of recasts has focused on learners. When provided a recast, learners must shift attention away from meaning and toward the particular linguistic structure that needs reformulation (see Figure 2). Learners are expected to scan what he or she said prior to the recast and 1) identify the mismatch between what he or she said and what he or she knows to be correct, 2) locate the likely error and 3) reformulate it in the subsequent turn (Mackey et al., 2010). In fact, teachers providing recasts pass through similar processes: When an error occurs, they must 1) identify the error, 2) search his/or her databases to understand the reason for the error and 3) provide recasts, all while attending to the ongoing conversation (see Figure 3). An automatized operation is required, and for non-NESTs this real-time process

is as demanding as it is for learners. Given that recasts arguably could be dependent on teachers' language proficiency, it will be helpful for teachers' professional development to focus on them as stakeholders in the classroom, as well as on learners, when considering the usability of recasts.

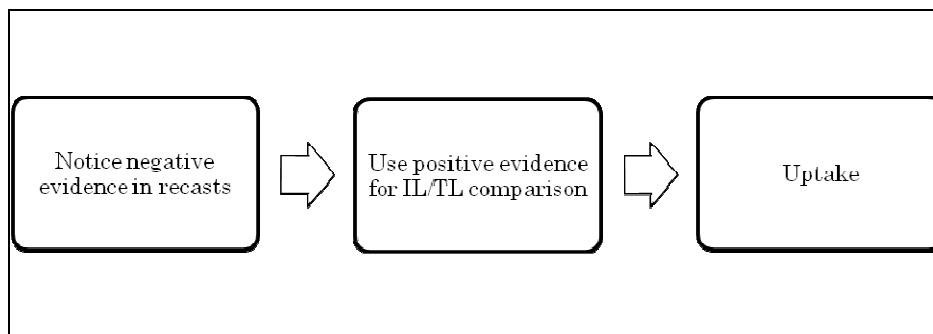


Figure 2: Learners' processes when receiving recasts

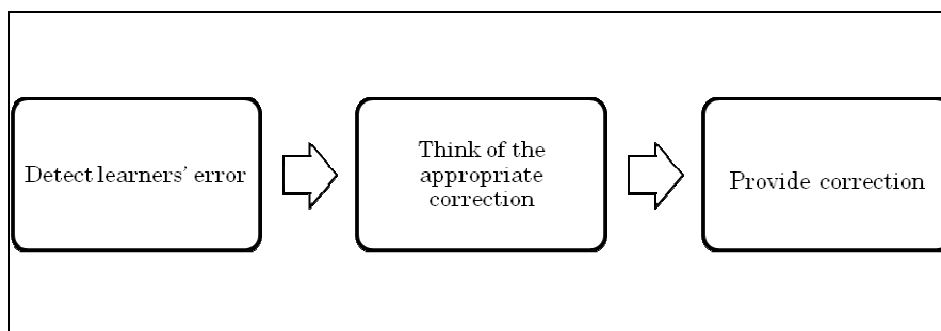


Figure 3: Teachers' processes when providing recasts

6 Conclusions

This descriptive study was designed to investigate the differences in ways in which recasts are provided between NESTs and Non-NESTs. The findings reveal that Non-NESTs were not as well equipped to provide recasts to learners as NESTs. Although it is difficult to generalize the findings from this small-scale study, it provides some evidence as to how teachers differ in their usage of recasts depending on their L1 backgrounds. Future research can look into teachers' language proficiency level and how this can affect their beliefs and provision of recasts through a more qualitative approach (i.e., surveys and interviews) aimed at discovering the reasons for the low frequency of recasting. Finally, degrees of difficulty in 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 possibility of the existence of a hierarchy of error types in terms of the extent to which they tax teachers' ability to provide CF.

In Japan, traditional foreign language instruction has valued a more traditional pedagogy such as the audiolingual method and the translation method. Unlike focus on form lessons, such lessons employ a more explicit type of feedback. With the rise in demand for more communicative language instruction, this type of research would help teachers to be more aware of their own limitations and of the importance of improving their techniques for error treating.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Picture description task



Appendix B: Collaborator’s utterances

1	There is seven birds	Erroneous
2	She have a bucket of water	Erroneous
3	She is cleaning the garden.	Well-formed
4	The prince is sitting in the wall.	Erroneous
5	Snow White and the prince meets for the first time.	Erroneous
6	The birds is flying	Erroneous
7	Snow White is in the forest.	Well-formed
8	The man held a knife.	Erroneous
9	He wore a hat with a feather.	Erroneous
10	Snow White is lost in the forest.	Well-formed
11	She is scary.	Erroneous
12	There are much animals around her.	Erroneous
13	They looking at a house nearby	Erroneous
14	Snow White animal loves	Erroneous
15	There are birds are blue flying in the sky.	Erroneous
16	She is cleaning.	Well-formed
17	The dwarf who is in front of him is tiring.	Erroneous
18	The dwarf which is in front of him is happy	Erroneous
19	Glasses dwarf is the leader.	Erroneous
20	They enter house.	Erroneous
21	They surprised to see a girl	Erroneous

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22	Snow White sleeping bed.	Erroneous
23	Snow White is dancing happy with the dwarfs	Erroneous
24	He is playing piano.	Erroneous
25	They are playing musical equipment	Erroneous
26	She poison apple make.	Erroneous
27	She has basket apple	Erroneous
28	She gives Snow White apple	Erroneous
29	It's raining.	Well-formed
30	It dangerous	Erroneous
31	Snow White die and there is a funeral for her.	Erroneous
32	They sad.	Erroneous
33	The prince kissed Snow White.	Erroneous
34	They lived happily ever after.	Well-formed