

RECASTS AND THEIR USE IN SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

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LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**

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This essay intends to review various research articles in order to describe a general idea about what has been found supporting the use of recasts and what has been found as negative evidence about its use. Recasts are one of the most useful methodological resources to provide feedback in SLA (Gass, et al., 2003, cited by Nassaji, 2009. p.2)

There are some researchers which have found the relative effect of recasts over other models of feedback (Long, et al., 1998), whether recasts promote learner uptake (Lyster and Ranta, 1997), whether recasts exposes learners to positive or negative evidence (Leeman, 2003). The use of recasts has better effects than modeling, any type of input enhancement, and elicitations; nevertheless, teachers should be selective regarding the type of error to which recasts are apply; facilitator, as feedback provider, and learner as receptor, are influenced by the nature of the conversation in which they are involved. As a consequence, output production after the recasts is forced by the apprehension the learner has.

According to Krashen's theory, the input alone was enough for an assertive L2 acquisition. However, Swain (1985 as cited by Gass and Selinker, 2008) realized that there were some other possible components in order for learners to show improvement in their language outcomes. She found that the second component for learning a language was to use it. This means, the exposure to written or spoken language is essential, but the production of output was even more important since the students are required to process language in a more elaborated way, not only for its meaning but also for its construction. (Swain, 1985).

Gass and Selinker (2008) suggest that students can evidence the language they intend to produce in a positive or a negative way. All the accurate language students listen to or read (input) is considered positive evidence. Negative evidence refers to the information given to the learner that interferes in an unusual way to recognize the norms of the target language. As an example of this fact, White (1991, as cited by Gass and Selinker, 2008) offers evidence by studying the acquisition of English adverb placement in English. She was interested in knowing how students get information about something possible in their L1 but not in the L2. She found that negative evidence did improve the adverb placement in the participants of the study. These results introduce the third essential component when learning an L2: feedback. According to Gass and Selinker (2008), feedback gives students 'information about the success or lack of success of their utterances and gives additional opportunities to focus on production or comprehension'. Feedback gives the students the opportunity to realize the problems they have in their output.

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997) explicit feedback refers when it is necessary to show the speaker whether there is a mistake. For example: '*Oh, you mean...*', '*You should say...*' On the other hand, Braidi (2002) states that implicit negative evidence is when the learner is indicated in a more indirect way that there is a problem in production. The researcher presents some techniques used for providing this type of feedback, such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, and recasts.

As was previously discussed, recasts have been central in debates regarding the role of negative evidence in language acquisition. Although recasts are frequently classified as implicit negative evidence (e.g., Bohannon et al., 1990; Long, in press, as cited in Long & Robinson, 1998), they also provide positive evidence, making it difficult to ascertain the source of any benefits they may provide (Grimshaw & Pinker, 1989; Long, 1996; Pinker, 1984, 1989)

Recasts is when a native speaker (Ns), a teacher, or a more proficient speaker reformulate an incorrectly formed sentence keeping the initial meaning but with the deletion of the error (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Long (1996, as cited by Braidı, 2002, p. 434) defined recasts as “utterances that rephrase child’s utterance by changing one or more sentence components (subject, verb, or object) while still referring to its central meanings”. Braidı (2002) gives an example:

*Speaker A:* ‘She walk\_ to school’.

*Speaker B:* ‘She walks to school’.

Some researchers have found improvements in learners’ development using recasts, but other few have found other types of feedback techniques more helpful; while others have taken recasts for granted and have investigated issues about it.

### **In favor of the use of recasts**

Long, Inagaki, and Ortega’s (1998) carried out a research aiming to establish which of the learners exposed modeling recasts were able to produce a set of specific structures easier when receiving one of the types of corrective feedback. The findings were positive for recasts. They found that this implicit negative feedback technique is more effective than modeling (a type of positive feedback) in, at least, showing more improvements in the unknown L2 structures which were first met by students while participating in this research. Lyster’s (2001), in a similar research comparing the effects of recasts, and another types of feedback, realized that there were two main objectives: to determine the type of feedback (negotiation of form, recasts or explicit correction) given by teachers to specific error types: grammatical, phonological, lexical, or L1 non-solicited interventions; the second purpose was to determine which type of feedback leads students to immediate repair. The researcher found that the teachers select feedback types according to the error types. For instance, recasts were majorly given when a grammar error was committed (72%), followed by phonological errors which

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were corrected with recasts with 64%. Also, when a lexical error was made, the teachers tended to use a negotiation-of-form type of feedback. Lyster' study agrees with Leeman's (2003) in its finding but not in the design. This is also a study comparing recasts with other types of correction or what in this case could be interpreted as evidence. She compared the effects of four different types of input on the Spanish noun-adjective concordance. More specifically, she intended to determine if the exposure to input with recasts gave as result more evidence than input with enhanced positive evidence. She argues that recasts can lead to greater L2 development by highlighting specific forms of input. If specific points of input are highlighted it is more likely that students attend to specific forms. Schmidt (1979) maintains that if learners attend to specific forms learning is more probable to take place.

Nassaji (2009) also made his contribution to the field by looking at the effects of recasts and elicitations on the development of linguistic issues that were incidentally mentioned in pair interaction. Besides, the researcher intended to determine if the effects of recasts and elicitations were preserved over time. Nassaji proposed that recasts (as well as elicitations) can occur in implicit or explicit ways. He explains and gives examples:

(1) *Feedback type: recast*                      *Nature: implicit*

*Characteristic: 'the feedback reformulates the error within its larger context with a confirmatory tone and without any additional clue to highlighting the error.'*

**Student:**     *she saw young woman.*

**Teacher:**     *Oh, she saw the young woman.*

**Student:**     *Yeah.*

(2) *Feedback type: recast*                      *Nature: more explicit*

*Characteristics: 'the feedback reformulates the error and highlights it with added stress and rising intonation.'*

**Student:**     *a woman and a man was walking through the sidewalk.*

**Teacher:** *A man and a woman WERE [added stress] walking?*

**Student:** *Yeah, were walking together.*

Nassaji (2009) shows evidence that recasts provide more long-term effects than elicitation, additionally, that the more explicit the nature of the recasts the more the immediate and lasting the effects it gives.

Long et al. (1998), Leeman (2003), Lyster (2001), and Nassaji's (2009) findings are consistent with McDonough and Mackey (2006). However, these last researchers address a key issue that can make a difference when deciding whether recasts should or should not be used in classroom settings. They highlight the value of the learners' responses to recasts by dividing them into two: (1) repetition of the recasts which is given immediately after the recasts occur; this means it is implemented in the third turn; (2) when a new sentence containing the structure provided in the recasts is given shortly after the recasts or in subsequent interventions.

### **Negative evidence about recasts**

Ammar (2008) presents a wide background about recasts and suggests that the possibilities of noticing recasts are low specially when providing it directed to morphosyntactic mistakes or to limited-proficiency learners. However, she recommends that more research must be conducted in order to draw final conclusions about the use of this type of explicit negative feedback.

In order to contribute to this range of research, she proposed to find out if learners who were exposed to recasts will overcome better with difficulties in communicating than students who did not receive any kind of feedback. It also had as an aim, to compare prompts and recasts to see which was more effective. The researcher analyzed three intensive ESL teachers and their 64 students in Montreal who were divided into three treatment groups: recasts, prompts, and control group. The

findings of this study illustrate that prompts and recasts are more effective when providing feedback than was the non-feedback technique. However, prompts are significantly more successful than recasts in assisting students with morphosyntactic development. Lyster (2004, as cited Gass and Selinker, 2008) conducted another study supporting the previous findings, also comparing the effects of recasts and prompts in a French immersion program. Prompts include: clarification requests, repetitions, metalinguistic cues, and elicitations. In written measures it was found that prompts along with form-focused instruction were more successful than recasts.

The similarity in the result between these two studies may be due to their similar design including that both are quasi-experimental, both included participants from primary schools, and both included prompts and no-feedback groups to be compared with recasts.

Basically, the differences among all the previous articles consulted draws on the various objectives they have. For example, the relative effect of recasts over other models (Long, et al., 1998), whether recasts promote learner uptake (Lyster and Ranta, 1997), whether recasts exposes learners to positive or negative evidence (Leeman, 2003), etc. Also, the differences draw on some of the items in the designs. For instance, if the researches were conducted in real settings (Lyster, 2004) or in laboratories (Leeman, 2003). All this issues make each study unique and sometimes incomparable with other studies.

Various issues are identified to which we teachers must pay attention in order to provide the best feedback every mistake deserves in order to promote language learning:

- Recasts have better effects than modeling, any type of input enhancement, and elicitations. A possible reason is that recasts provide learners with the relevant opportunities to be pointed out that there is something wrong with their production and to be given the correction.

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- Teachers should be selective regarding the type of error to which recasts are provided. For instance, when providing feedback to grammatical and phonological errors recasts were more prevalent.
- Feedback providers are influenced by the nature of the conversation in which they and the counterparts are involved.
- Learners' subsequent output production after the recasts is constrained by the anxiety level the learner has, being the lowest the most beneficial. This uptake/repair is also recasts-nature dependent, this is that the more explicit the nature of the recasts the more advantages it brings.
- Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001) state that recasts are more beneficial in contexts where learners know they are receiving corrections about the form of their language, not the content. Thus, when providing recasts, teachers need to specify to students what the intentions are when repeating the utterances previously produced.

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