

When Do Recasts Contribute to the Learners' Acquisition of L2 Grammar?

—A Short Review of Four Empirical Studies on Recasts and Uptake—

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本研究では、言語学習者の発話上の誤りを教師が口頭で即座に訂正するリキャストという手法が、学習者の文法習得に及ぼす効果を、学習者が口頭で即座に行う言い直し（アップテイク）の成功率の比較結果から考察した。教授コンテキストが異なる先行研究を比較した結果、学習者の年齢、学習者の文法学習に対する積極的態度、学習者がリキャストに向ける注意が、リキャストの効果に影響を及ぼすことが示唆された。

Key words: リキャスト, 訂正フィードバック, アップテイク, 文法指導

1. Introduction

One of the main concerns about current L2 grammar teaching is how grammar forms should be taught with a lesson's main focus being on the content of the lesson (DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2017; Gascoigne, 2006; Nunan, 2003; Swain, 1995). Providing corrective feedback is one option for a language teacher to take as a way of teaching grammar forms in the classroom interaction. In fact, some researchers have emphasized the importance of corrective feedback in the interaction, which they claim will help students notice or raise consciousness of their own errors (Carroll, 2001; Corder, 1973; Long, 1996; Mackey, 2006; Rutherford, 1987; Schmidt, 1994). However, the idea of giving too much feedback seems incompatible with input-rich and meaning-oriented language teaching (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) since it seems quite difficult for language teachers to provide students with feedback without impeding the flow of communication in meaning-oriented lessons. It is true, nevertheless, that many students, especially adults, feel they need feedback or some kinds of explicit teaching from teachers (Ellis, 2002; Gass & Selinker, 2001). Then, what can language teachers do if they want to help students notice their errors without interrupting the flow of the communication? In those cases, many L2 teachers seem to be using the technique for error

correction called recasts.

According to McDonough and Mackey (2006, p. 694), "recasts are more target-like ways of saying what a learner has already said". Since different linguists define recasts differently, it is quite difficult to comprehensively define recasts because of their numerous forms and functions (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). However, many researchers seem to be in overall agreement with three points below. Firstly, the recast is an implicit or indirect form of corrective feedback (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Gass, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ohta, 2000; Uddin, 2022). Secondly, it is a corrective response to a learners' grammatically wrong response which keeps the original message (Gass, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Long, 1996, 2006; Mackey, 2006). Lastly, it is used in a spontaneous interaction between a teacher and a student (Braidi, 2002; Gass, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Sheen, 2006; Williams & Lavott, 2005). These characteristics make the recast a popular way for teachers to provide corrective feedback; that is to say, it is not so offensive, but corrective, spontaneous and relatively easy to use in a classroom interaction without impeding the flow of communication.

In fact, many researchers maintain that the recast is one of the most popular corrective feedback types among

L2 teachers (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Fu & Nassaji, 2016; Loewen & Philp, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ohta, 2000; Sheen, 2004; Uddin, 2022; Wang & Li, 2021), despite the fact that a recast is just one option among several corrective strategies for teachers to deal with errors by students (Loewen & Philp, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). According to Sheen (2004), for example, 55 to 83 % of all the feedback in four communicative language classrooms he observed involved recasts. In spite of its popularity, however, some researchers claim that the recast is not an effective way for providing corrective feedback (Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler, 1989). One of the cogent reasons for this view of recasts being ineffective is that the recast is less likely to elicit corrected responses from learners (Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler, 1989). They argue that this is because recasts do not modify learners' previous utterances effectively, and they surmise that recasts might not contribute to the acquisition of L2 grammar. Then, is this claim rational or not? Now that the recast has been found to be used by relatively many teachers despite the view that it is ineffective as mentioned above, this question is worth examining.

First, this paper will pick up four empirical studies on recasts to show what these studies tell us about the relationship between L2 teachers' recasts and L2 learners' uptake. The four studies, Lyster and Ranta (1997), Loewen and Philp (2006), Fu and Nassaji (2016) and Ohta (2000), were chosen because each of them has its unique teaching context. Then, this paper will compare the three studies except Ohta (2000) in terms of their recast and uptake. Lastly, this paper will discuss whether and when recasts contribute to the acquisition of L2 grammar or not, referring to their teaching contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The study by Lyster & Ranta (1997)

Lyster and Ranta (1997) conducted a research study on the relationship between corrective feedback and learner's uptake. According to them, uptake is "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspects of the student's

initial utterance (p. 49)". One of the aims of their study was to search out what the distribution of uptake following different types of corrective feedback was, and thereby to examine whether recasts could contribute to the acquisition effectively. In this study, they distinguished six different types of feedback; (1) explicit correction, which is the explicit revision of the correct form, (2) a recast, which is the teacher's reformulation of the student's utterance, minus error, (3) a clarification request, which refers to the teacher's request to repeat or reform the student's utterance for some reasons, (4) metalinguistic feedback, which refers to the feedback on the student's error by providing some grammatical metalanguage, (5) elicitation, which elicits the correct form from the student by pausing, questioning, asking the student to reformulate his utterance, and (6) repetition, which refers to the teacher's repetition of the student's erroneous utterance. This study involved 104 young French immersion program students who were at Grade 4 and Grade 5, and 4 teachers. In French immersion education, French is used as a medium of instruction for students whose home language is English. In this study, 7.8 hours of French language arts lessons and 10.5 hours of subject-matter lessons from science, social studies and math were analyzed.

This study shows that the recast is a feedback type used most frequently by the four teachers, which accounts for 55% of the total number of teacher turns. Despite its popularity, however, the recast resulted in student uptake less frequently (31%) than did elicitation (100%), clarification request (88%), metalinguistic feedback (86%), explicit correction (50%) and repetition (78%). This figure of the recast is conspicuously lower than those of the other feedback types. In addition, this study shows that the recast led to much less repairs (18%) than did elicitation (46%), clarification request (27%), metalinguistic feedback (45%), explicit correction (36%) and repetition (31%). Furthermore, the recast resulted in no student-generated repairs (0%), while elicitation (46%), clarification request (27%), metalinguistic feedback (45%) and repetition (31%) resulted in much more student-generated repairs. This implies that none of the repairs that recasts elicited might have been the results of the students' noticing of their own errors. Rather, the repairs might have been just a parroting of the teachers' feedback without

understanding anything. Judging from these results, it seems quite natural that they questioned whether the recast was regarded as a good choice of corrective feedback and whether they would contribute to the L2 grammar acquisition.

2.2 The study by Loewen & Philp (2006)

The next study is Loewen and Philp (2006). They were interested in the incidence and effectiveness of recasts in the young adult ESL context. The study involved 118 learners and 12 teachers at a private language school in Auckland. The majority of the learners (more than 75%) were from Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan. Their proficiency levels of English were either intermediate or upper-intermediate. The types of activities observed were information gap tasks, story narration tasks, and discussion relating to topics such as travel, smoking, and so on. Any activities that focused mainly on form were excluded from the analysis. A total of 32 hours of classroom interaction was observed and 17 hours was examined in detail for this study. They categorize corrective feedback into three types in their study; namely, elicit, inform and recast. According to their definition, elicit is an attempt to get the learner to provide the correct linguistic form. Inform is the provision of explicit information about the problematic linguistic form. Recast refers to reformulation of all or part of the erroneous utterance.

First of all, as Lyster and Ranra (1997) showed, they found that the most frequently used type of feedback was the recast (49.03%). This figure is a little lower than that of Lyster and Ranta, but it corresponds to them in that the recast is the most popular feedback technique. Concerning the posttest accuracy scores, the recast made the lowest score (53%) of the three categories at the immediate posttest which took place after 1 to 3 days after the focus on form episode (FFE), but the recast achieved about the same level of score (50%) at the delayed posttest which took place 13 to 15 days after the FFE. This made the score of the recast the second best of the three and it showed that the recast has long-lasting effects. Concerning the percentage of the successful uptake, the recast gained 59.6%, with Inform 45.9% and Elicit 83.1 %. The recast was the second best, not the worst. Concerning the percentage of the unsuccessful uptake, the recast gained

19.3 %, with Inform 30.8 % and Elicit 10.8 %. Concerning the percentage of no uptake, the recast gained 11.4 %, with Inform 16.3 % and Elicit 6.2 %. Concerning the percentage of no chance, where the learners did not have the opportunity to respond to the feedback, the recast gained 9.6 %, with Inform 7.0% and Elicit 0%. When both no uptake and no chance are combined, the recast gained 21.0%, Inform gained 23.3% and Elicit gained 6.2%.

2.3 The study by Fu & Nassaji (2016)

The next study is Fu and Nassaji (2016). The goal of their study was to extend research on recasts by examining teacher feedback and learner uptake in an adult Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) context. One of their research questions was what type of feedback the teacher use and what their relationship with learner uptake is in a CFL context. Their study was conducted in an intermediate level CFL context. This study involved 13 university students (10 females and 3 males) with varying first language backgrounds including English, Japanese, Thai and so forth, and one female teacher (a native speaker of Mandarin). The average age of the students was 20. Their classes were held three times a week. They were 50-minute long each. The data was collected through both videotaping and surveys. Altogether, thirteen 50-minute sessions (10 hours) of classroom interaction were recorded for this study.

As the studies above showed, they found that the recast was the most frequent of the 12 types of corrective feedbacks they identified in their study. The recast accounted for 56.7 % of all feedback moves, followed by metalinguistic feedback (10.6 %) and translation (7.3 %). This clearly shows that recasts are by far the most popular corrective feedback in this CFL context, too.

On the other hand, the recast led to the least uptake of the 12 feedback moves identified in their study. More specifically, only 49.6 percent of all recasts in their study led to learner uptake and 45.3 % out of 49.6 % was successful uptake. Once recasts led to uptake, most of the uptakes were successful, which should be noted, though the percentage of “no uptake” resulting from recasts reached as much as 50.4 %. This figure is extremely high compared with those resulting from all the other feedback moves in their study.

2.4 The study by Ohta (2000)

Lastly, Ohta (2000), a unique study on the recasts and the uptake, is picked up here. After Lyster and Ranta (1997), she conducted a unique study concerning how learners respond to teachers' recasts. Interestingly, she focused on language learners' private speech instead of their uptake, and thereby examined the relationship between learners' private speech and a teacher's recasts.

This study involved 7 learners of Japanese as a foreign language at a university in Japan. Four of them enrolled in first-year Japanese and three enrolled in second-year Japanese. In both of them, the language of instruction was Japanese, with rare use of English. In the first-year Japanese, the textbook incorporated grammatical syllabus, and in the second-year Japanese, the grammatical syllabus was utilized broadly. In both classes, individual microphones were clipped to each learner's collar or the front of his or her shirt so that individual microphones could catch their private talk after recasts. The observation lasted for an academic year during which the students took part in an eclectic, communication-based Japanese classes taught by some different teachers.

The most interesting finding must be that "learners produced private speech most often when they were not individual addressees, but when they were auditors" (p. 56). When we think about the corrective feedback, we usually think that it is one-to-one feedback between a teacher and a student (an addressee) and we seldom care much about what other students are doing during that time. However, she found that auditors, those who were not individual addressees, were privately and actively involved in a classroom interaction between a teacher and an addressee, and that they use responses by the addressee and feedback including recasts by the teacher in order to check and improve their own sentences. She claims that this was often done in a private speech, which means they speak too silently for anyone to recognize their utterances as the uptake. She also claims that while students are privately formulating their own responses to the teacher's questions, their own responses can be compared with those of the teacher and other classmates, and that those utterances should function as incidental recasts in choral contexts and in acting as auditors in case the learner's own response is grammatically incorrect.

What makes Ohta (2000) valuable is that she pointed out that it is important to broaden the notion of the recast beyond utterances that are addressed to the individual learner who made a grammatical error, to all utterances that potentially provide corrective information to an L2 learner. More specifically, she claims that, even if there are no uptakes or visible repairs immediately after recasts, L2 learners, including auditors as well as the student who was corrected by the teacher, might privately make use of recasts to improve their L2 grammar.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) argue that the recast is least likely to lead to uptake of the other types of corrective feedback, and that even if the recast leads to repairs, those repairs might be mere repetition (or parroting) of a teacher's recast. This is exactly why they claim the recast cannot be an effective feedback type and that it might not contribute to the L2 grammar acquisition very effectively. Ohta's counterargument is that even if recasts do not elicit uptake from learners effectively, it does not necessarily mean that the recast is an ineffective feedback type.

3. Discussion

The three studies except Ohta (2000) will be discussed here in more detail. **Table 1** below shows the percentage of successful uptake, unsuccessful uptake and no uptake (including "no chance" in Loewen and Philp) in the three studies. This study will focus only on the percentage of successful uptake in each study here.

Table 1 Uptakes from the three studies

Study	Successful uptake (%)	Unsuccessful uptake (%)	No uptake (%)
Lyster & Ranta (1997)	18	13	69
Loewen & Philp (2006)	59.6	19.3	21
Fu & Nassaji (2016)	45.3	4.3	50.4

There is a surprisingly big difference between the studies in the percentage of successful uptake. What makes such a big difference? Fu and Nassaji (2016), referring to some previous studies, stated that it is suggested that "context plays an important mediating role in the effect of feedback" (p.162). In my view, the more specific and

rational assumption might be that the L2 learners' ages, their positive attitude toward L2 grammar learning and their attention play an important mediating role in the effect of the recast (see **Table 2**).

Table 2 Context, students and successful uptake

Study	Context	Student	Successful uptake (%)
Lyster & Ranta (1997)	French immersion (French language arts & subject-matter)	104 students in Grade 4 & 5	18
Loewen & Philp (2006)	ESL	118 young adults	59.6
Fu & Nassaji (2016)	CFL	13 young adults	45.3

The study by Lyster and Ranta (1997), which shows by far the least successful uptake, was conducted in the context of French immersion. Lyster (2004) claims that the focus of the French immersion lessons is predominantly on meaning, and that French immersion lessons offers conditions for sustained exposure and authentic communication. In Lyster and Ranta (1997), the data not only from French language arts lessons but also from subject-matter lessons such as science and social studies were analyzed. If so, it seems natural that the very young L2 learners, who were in Grade 4 and Grade 5, focused mostly on meaning, rather than on their grammar, trying to understand the contents of each lesson and express their ideas in their lessons. In other words, it seems natural that such young learners' attention was not directed to the recast, or in other words, to accuracy.

In contrast, the study by Loewen and Philp (2006) was conducted at a private language school in Auckland, where young adult learners aged around 20 came all the way from Asian countries to learn English. In contrast to Lyster and Ranta (1997), the goal of the learners must have been improving L2 itself, including L2 grammar. Also, Morrison and On No (2007, p.356) point out that, in contexts where the influence of Confucian heritage culture is strong, students generally have "little tolerance of ambiguity" and tend to search for the single right answer. It seems possible that the mature Asian L2 learners in Loewen and Philp, searching for the single correct form, were more likely to pay attention to the recast and try to correct their

ill-formed statements more often than the young French immersion learners in Lyster and Ranta. Loewen and Philp referred to the intentional exclusion of the form-focused instruction from the data analyzed, but this does not necessarily exclude the possibility of the learners having focused on their grammatical improvement even while doing communicative tasks.

Similarly, the study by Fu and Nassaji (2016) was conducted at a university in China. In this study, the goal of the students was improving L2 itself, too. The young adult learners, like the learners in Loewen and Philp (2006), came all the way from their countries to China to improve their Chinese. If so, they must have had more positive attitude toward learning L2 grammar as well as speaking, listening, writing and reading skills than the elementary school students in Lyster and Ranta. The researchers stated in the study that the teaching method was "a combination of task-based learning and form-focused instruction" (p.164), and that when the teacher explained sentence structure to the students, "she used English to make the explanation more accessible to the students" (p.164). This implies that the learners' attention had been directed to grammar. Considering these, it seems no wonder that the mature L2 learners' attention was, as least from time to time, directed more to the recast, and as a result, they were more motivated to uptake than did the young French immersion learners in Lyster and Ranta (1997).

4. Conclusion

In light of the fact that there is a big gap in the percentage of successful uptake mentioned above, whether the recast contributes to the acquisition of L2 grammar remains controversial. However, judging from the discussion above, it is suggested that the recast could contribute more to the L2 acquisition when L2 learners are mature enough, when they have positive attitudes toward learning grammar, and when their attention is directed to the recast. In other words, if a teacher can focus his or her learners' attention on a target form, and if a learner is developmentally ready for learning it, recasts could probably be more effective. Otherwise, recasts might be less effective than some other explicit types of feedback.

Lastly, it must be noted here that Loewen and Philp (2006) claim that the use of uptake as a measure of

effectiveness of the recast is problematic because uptake does not indicate the status of L2 learners' knowledge. Also, it must be noted that Ohta (2000) claims that even if the recast does not elicit uptake from L2 learners effectively, it does not necessarily mean that the recast is not effective because L2 learners privately make use of it even when they are auditors. Considering these two views, discussing the effectiveness of the recast in terms of successful uptake seems more complicated than it looks. However, Loewen and Philp (2006) also claim that the "production of successful uptake provides an indication that the learner has noticed the recast" (p.542), referring to some other researchers. How we should examine whether the recast contributes to the learners' acquisition of L2 grammar must be considered carefully.

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