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## **INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF EXPLICIT VS. IMPLICIT RECAST AS CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON VOCABULARY LEARNING OF IRANIAN SEMINARY STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**



Teaching vocabulary learning skills is time consuming, the problem cannot be solved easily though. As a result, students are mostly dependent on their teachers and the methodology the teachers use among which recast as corrective feedback seem to be a fruitful technique. The goal of this study, accordingly, was to see if there were any significant differences among the effect of explicit vs. implicit recast as corrective feedback on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL learners. The participants under study were 45 Iranian seminary intermediate level EFL students studying English at Islamic Propagation Office, Isfahan, Iran chosen non-randomly among over 100 seminary EFL learners. Besides the general English placement test (QPT), the vocabulary pre-test was run to check the students' vocabulary knowledge (designed and validated by Nation, (1983)). After the completion of five teaching sessions for the 3 groups of participants, the same Vocabulary size test (VS) used as the pre-test was used as the post-test to check students' vocabulary achievement in the three groups. Finally the Motivational Questionnaire was run to see if there was any significant difference in motivation for vocabulary learning of the control group and the experimental groups. The data were analyzed by ANOVA and paired sample t-tests in order to accept or reject the formulated hypotheses using SPSS software version 16. It was found that the formulated hypotheses for the study in hand could be safely rejected.

**Keywords:** Feedback, Recast, Implicit knowledge, Explicit knowledge

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Corrective feedback is one of the hot topics in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) (Brown, 2007). It is also "of perennial concern to L2 teachers" (Kepner, 1991, p. 305). Feedback in language teaching takes the form of positive reinforcement or correction (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami,

& Takashima, 2008). Over the past two decades, corrective feedback and learner uptake have been targets of investigation for researchers working in the field of classroom foreign language acquisition (FLA). Also, learner uptake is defined as 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 aspect of the student's initial utterance (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Implicit and explicit knowledge of the second language (L2) are two central constructs in the field of foreign language acquisition (FLA). Implicit knowledge of the L2 is often defined as the intuitive and procedural knowledge that is normally accessed automatically in fluent performance and that cannot be verbalized. In contrast, explicit knowledge is understood as the conscious and declarative knowledge of the L2 that is accessed during controlled processing and that is potentially verbalizable (Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005).

The role of corrective feedback in second language (L2) learning has received much attention in the literature, but it is still unclear whether CF is effective. There are indications that exposure to the target language alone might not be sufficient for high-quality L2 learning (e.g. Swain, 1985), suggesting a need for CF. However, some theories claim that CF may help only for language skills that call upon off-line processing like reading and writing; marking errors and references to grammatical rules may not be directly useful in on-line processing like oral L2 learning (Sorace, 1985; Hulstijn, 2007).

It is worth to explain that seminary students are those religious students studying theology in theology schools. Because of personal interest or being interested to learn English to propagate Islam, the students included in the research study English in Islamic propagation office which is the center for extra school studies of seminary students.

Recast as an important type of corrective feedback has attracted little attention in the literature; except for Loewen and Philp (2006) and Sheen (2006). In addition, it seems that not too many studies (to the researcher's best knowledge) have investigated the relative effectiveness of implicit recasts combined with explicit features. This study made an effort to do so by examining the relative effects of explicit and implicit recasts on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL learners. However, there has been little research that testifies this claim empirically. So this study attempted to fill this gap by examining the relative effectiveness of

implicit and explicit recasts on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL learners. The following research questions were foci in the present research:

#### **Research Questions**

1. Does explicit recast as corrective feedback have any significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL seminary students?
2. Does implicit recast as corrective feedback have any significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL seminary students?
3. Are there any significant differences in motivation for vocabulary learning of the control group and experimental groups?

#### **Research hypotheses**

Accordingly based on the above questions the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. Explicit feedback as corrective feedback has no significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL seminary students.
2. Implicit recast as corrective feedback has no significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL seminary students.
3. There are no significant differences in motivation for vocabulary learning among the control group and the two experimental groups.

This section takes a look at the existing literature on the topic. Panova and Lyster (2002) examined the patterns of corrective feedback during teacher-learner interactions in an adult ESL classroom based on the categories of corrective feedback identified by Lyster and Ranta (1997). Most of the findings of their study were the same as those of Lyster and Ranta (1997) recasts were found to be the most frequent corrective tool utilized by the teacher, learners' uptake and repair following recasts, on the other hand, were lowest among categories of corrective feedback.

Braidi (2002) examined the distribution and occurrence of recasts in native speaker and non-native speaker interactions of Japanese learners of English. The results indicated that learners received corrective feedback for 25% of their errors

Sheen (2006) concluded that recasts should not be considered by nature implicit; rather they can

function as either implicit or explicit depending on the way they are manipulated.

Trofimovich et al. (2007) investigated the effects of several cognitive factors, namely attention, memory, and analytical ability, on the efficacy of recasts in a computerized study. Results indicated that learners were more accurately able to notice lexical errors than grammar errors. The analysis of learners' production scores, also revealed that learners were significantly more accurate in the post- and delayed post-test than in the pre-test.

Bitchener (2008) argues that Corrective feedback can improve learners' skills. He believes that feedback from teacher is an important part of learning process and it can help learners to remove learning gaps and ambiguities.

Rassaei and Tavakoli (2010) investigated if learners' gender during classroom interactions modifies the efficacy of corrective feedback. The results, indicated that both recasts and metalinguistic feedback were more effective when provided in matched – gender dyads that is from same – gender interlocutors.

Rouhi and Samiei (2010), in their research found that there was not a differential effect on accuracy (in using the simple past tense) for different CF options.

Vaezi et al (2011) studied patterns of corrective feedback in relation to error types in Iranian EFL learners, this study synthesizes findings from observational classroom research on corrective feedback and then presents an observational study of patterns of error treatment in an adult ESL classroom at two intermediate and advance levels.

Ahangari and Amirzadeh (2011) explored the teachers' use of spoken corrective feedback in teaching Iranian EFL learners. Findings show that recast was the most frequently used type of corrective feedback that teachers provided to their learners at various levels of proficiency.

In another study, Razaei and Derakhshan (2011) concluded that metalinguistic feedback was more effective than recasts in the Iranian teaching environment because learners often expect more explicit CF.

Afras and Ghaemi (2012) researched on the effects of the corrective feedback (with no control

group) on the acquisition of verb tenses (the perfect tenses, including past, present and future). They reported the performance of the participants was highly positive and "the learners gained high language analytic ability and they somehow became alert about the differences in the two languages" (p. 48).

Previous studies of recast as corrective feedback made sharp distinctions between different types of recasts and either investigated the effects of corrective feedback on L2 development irrespective of learners' internal and external factors, or included learners' individual factors as a moderator variable in their studies. Such an approach to corrective feedback studies makes it difficult to make generalizations regarding the effectiveness of corrective feedback due to diverse individual learner differences which may confound the effects of corrective feedback. In this regard, Panova & Lyster (2002) observed that while the recasts were the most frequent type of corrective feedback among seven categories of corrective feedback they investigated in an adult ESL classroom, they gave rise to the lowest amount of learners' proficiency determining the extent to which learners can benefit from feedback. They noted that more advanced learners can benefit more from recasts because they are able to notice the corrective focus recasts.

As Lee, (2014) mentions Feedback that provides [a] meaningful learning experience, is able to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses (p. 204). So the results of this study might be useful for Iranian seminary EFL students in the way that it provides an effective way of using explicit and implicit recast that may influence the improvement of vocabulary learning of L2 learners. This study has compared the explicit and implicit recast with each other and noticed their advantages and disadvantages among Iranian seminary EFL learners. This study might help EFL learners improve their speaking skill, and also helps EFL teachers and managers in charge of Isfahan propagation office promote their students' language learning and find the most important points that help students enhance their performance in speaking and conversations.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants of the study were 45 Iranian seminary intermediate level EFL students studying English at Islamic Propagation Office, Isfahan, Iran, aged 20-30, chosen non-randomly by administering a general English placement test, namely, Quick Placement Test, hereafter called QPT to over 100 EFL students who were supposed to be at intermediate level. The selected learners were randomly assigned to three groups: control group ( $n = 15$ ), implicit group ( $n = 15$ ) and explicit group ( $n = 15$ ).

### **2.2 Materials**

Different materials were employed in this study to carry out the intended research. In the following subsections, they are described in detail.

#### **2.2.1 The QPT**

To identify the proficiency level of the participants Quick Placement Test (QPT, version 1) was used. The test as shown in attachment consists of two parts; part one has 40 questions testing situations (five questions), cloze passages— testing prepositions, grammar, pronouns, and vocabulary— (15 questions), and completion questions (20 questions). The second part contains 20 questions; 10 questions on cloze passages and 10 questions of completion type questions. All questions are multiple-choice items.

#### **2.2.2 Vocabulary test**

The Vocabulary size test (Nation, 1983, complete test) called the Vocabulary Levels Test which was originally developed by Nation (1990, 2004) and Laufer and Nation (1995) was used to do the treatment and measure the size of the test-takers vocabulary. This test was used because it is commonly used by other studies and it is easy to administer and score. The test has been accepted by a number of L2 researchers as an appropriate measure of vocabulary size (cf. Laufer, 1992a, 1996; Yu, 1996). The same vocabulary size test (VS) was used as the pre-test and as the post-test to check students' vocabulary achievement in the three groups

#### **2.2.3 Motivational Questionnaire**

In order to understand about the students' motivation toward learning English after this study,

a questionnaire containing 41 items were used. It was adapted from the Motivational Questionnaire (MQ) outlined by Celce-Murcia (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996.). The questionnaire was a likert-type scale coded on a 5-point scale.

### **2.3 Procedure**

After clarifying the homogeneity of the participants through running Quick Placement Test and selecting the participants, the treatment was run. The selected learners were non-randomly assigned to three groups: control group, implicit group and explicit group. Then the vocabulary pre-test was run to check the students' vocabulary knowledge designed and validated by Nation, (1983). Then a 5-session vocabulary teaching was run for the 3 groups of participants, which was designed based on Nation (1983) complete test. The students of control group received no corrective feedback, and the implicit group received corrective feedback implicitly while the explicit group received corrective feedback explicitly. Learners' perception of corrective feedback during learner-interlocutor interactions was analyzed in order to improve their vocabulary learning ability. The control group and experimental groups participated in pretest and posttests, but only the experimental group received the treatment. Afterwards the same vocabulary size test (VS) used as the pre-test was used as the post-test to check students' vocabulary achievement in the three groups. Finally the Motivational Questionnaire was run to see if there is any significant difference in motivation for vocabulary learning of the control group and the experimental groups.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 Answering the first research question**

In order to test the validity of the first null hypothesis, the results of the posttest of the explicit group had to be compared with that of the control group. Table 1 indicates the descriptive statistics for this comparison.

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Hypothesis One**

Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Explicit	15	72.13	5.502	1.421
Control	15	60.92	6.627	1.838

As it can be seen in the above table, there exist some differences between the two means, but

it is not clear whether or not this difference is significant. In order to find this out, an independent-

sample t-test was employed. Table 2 depicts the results of this t-test.

**Table 2 The Results of the t-test for Hypothesis One**

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means			
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
.034	.855	4.892	26	.000	11.21	2.291	6.500	15.920
		4.826	23.447	.000	11.21	2.323	6.410	16.010

According to Table 2, the amount of t-observed (5.404) is statistically significant ( $p= .000 < .05$ ); in other words, with regard to the mean difference, the explicit group outperformed the control group. Therefore, the first null hypothesis which states that "explicit feedback as corrective feedback has no significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL intermediate learners" is safely rejected, and it can be claimed that explicit feedback affects positively the vocabulary learning of intermediate EFL learners.

### 3.2 Answering the second research question

The second null hypothesis was meant to find out if the implicit feedback had any effect of vocabulary learning of intermediate learners; therefore, it was necessary to compare the posttest performances of the implicit group and the control group. Table 3 gives the descriptive statistics of this comparison.

**Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Hypothesis Two**

Groups	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Implicit	15	66.00	4.551	1.175
Control	15	60.92	6.627	1.838

It can be seen in Table 3 that the implicit group has a greater mean score than the control group. Another independent-sample t-test was applied to the means to find out if this difference is statistically significant. Table 4 shows the results of this t-test.

**Table 4 The Results of the t-test for Hypothesis Two**

T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
2.744	28	.010	5.47

One can clearly see in table 2 that the amount of t-observed (2.744) is statistically significant ( $p= .010 < .05$ ); in other words, here again, regarding the mean difference, it can be understood that the implicit group showed a better performance than the control group. Therefore, the second null hypothesis which stating that "implicit feedback as corrective feedback has no significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL intermediate learners" can also be safely rejected, and it can be claimed that implicit feedback has a positive effect on the vocabulary learning of intermediate EFL learners.

### 3.3 Answering the third research question

The reason for the third null hypothesis was to find out if the responses given to the motivation questionnaire by the three groups involved in this study were the same or not; in other words, if the participants in the groups had different motivations for learning vocabulary. Table 5 reports the descriptive statistics for the questionnaire responses.

**Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for the Motivation Questionnaire**

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Implicit	15	3.67	.171	3.41	3.97
Explicit	15	3.70	.174	3.47	3.99
Control	15	3.56	.179	3.37	3.97
Total	45	3.65	.181	3.37	3.99

By checking the information in Table 5, one can understand that the three means are different from each other. To find out if these differences are statistically significant or not, a one-way ANOVA was run. Table 6 presents the results of this ANOVA.

**Table 6 The Results of the One-way ANOVA for the Motivation Questionnaire**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.167	2	.084	2.742	.076
Within Groups	1.280	42	.030		
Total	1.447	44			

The figures in the above table, that is, Table 6, reveal that the amount of F-observed ( $F_{(2, 42)}= 2.742$ ) is significant at the probability level of  $p=.076$  which is higher than .05; therefore, it is not statistically significant. Therefore, the third null hypothesis which claims that "there are no significant differences in motivation for vocabulary learning among the control group and the two experimental groups" can safely be rejected, and it can be said that the motivation is the same for all three groups of the participants in this study.

#### **4. Discussion**

In this study an attempt was made to answer the following research null hypotheses appropriately:

##### **4.1 Investigating the First Null Hypotheses**

The first Null Hypotheses of the current study wanted to see if Explicit feedback as corrective feedback has any significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL intermediate learners or not. As it was seen in Table 2, the amount of t-observed (5.404) is statistically significant ( $p= .000< =05$ ); in other words, with regard to the mean difference, the explicit group outperformed the control group. Therefore, the first null hypothesis which states that "explicit feedback as corrective feedback has no significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL intermediate learners" is safely rejected, and it can be claimed that explicit feedback affects positively the vocabulary learning of intermediate EFL learners. This conclusion is in line with some previous research including de Graaff (1997) Ellis (1994) Ellis (2005) Norris & Ortega, (2000) and Ullman, (2001) results which showed that Adult learners of a second language generally benefit more from explicit instruction than implicit instruction.

##### **4.2 Investigating the Second Null Hypotheses**

The second Null Hypotheses of the current study intended to see out if the implicit feedback had any effect of vocabulary learning of intermediate learners or not.

As it was seen in Table 2 the amount of t-observed (2.744) is statistically significant ( $p= .010< =05$ ); in other words, here again, regarding the mean difference, it can be understood that the implicit group showed a better performance than the control group. Therefore, the second null hypothesis which stating that "implicit feedback as corrective feedback has no significant effect on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary EFL intermediate learners" can also be safely rejected, and it can be claimed that implicit feedback has a positive effect on the vocabulary learning of intermediate seminary EFL learners. This result is parallel with Evans, Saffran et al.'s (2009) ancillary finding using a traditional implicit learning paradigm (e.g., speech stream to identify word boundaries) demonstrated a positive correlation between the implicit learning and vocabulary knowledge. Saxton (1997) posits that implicit corrective feedback (i.e., recasts) promotes children's language acquisition

##### **4.3 Investigating the Third Null Hypothesis**

The reason for the third null hypothesis was to find out if the responses given to the motivation questionnaire by the three groups involved in this study were the same or not; in other words, if the participants in the groups had different motivations for learning vocabulary. As it was seen in Table 6, reveal that the amount of F-observed ( $F_{(2, 42)}= 2.742$ ) is significant at the probability level of  $p=.076$  which is higher than .05; therefore, it is not statistically significant. Therefore, the third null hypothesis which claims that "there are no significant differences in motivation for vocabulary learning among the control group and the two experimental groups" can safely be rejected, and it can be said that the motivation is the same for all three groups of the participants in this study.

This conclusion is in line with some previous research including (e.g., Schmidt and Watanabe, 2001; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Bernaus & Gardner, 2008) studies which have been done on the role of

motivation and foreign language learning and most of them indicated that there is a positive relationship between motivation and foreign language learning among learners of different age, sex and levels of language proficiency.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The study was in fact an attempt to determine whether Implicit/Explicit feedback as corrective feedback have any significant effects on vocabulary learning of Iranian seminary students EFL learning or not. Furthermore it was tried to see if the responses given to the motivation questionnaire by the three groups involved in this study were the same or not. As it was illuminated in the preceding section of the study, the findings of the study revealed that explicit and implicit feedback both affect positively the vocabulary learning of intermediate seminary EFL learners. Furthermore motivation for vocabulary learning was the same for all three groups of the participants in this study

In nowadays EFL teaching curriculums, corrective feedback and motivation are influential, frequent and common phenomena in L2 learning. After the literature review, it should be realized that the previous studies only revealed the complexity of this issue, further indicating the due responsibility of teachers and curriculum planners. The results of previous studies have not only discovered some aspects of the true nature of corrective feedback and motivation in vocabulary learning but also pointed out some effective strategies of improving EFL knowledge and proficiency especially vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian seminary EFL learners.

What we can glean from all the above is that the application of corrective feedback and motivation are salient phenomena in vocabulary learning competence of Iranian seminary EFL learners that should concern every classroom practitioner. It goes without saying that it is a complex issue and the present analysis just focused on some of its specific aspects. There are many factors that may affect vocabulary learning, not the least of which is the role of the teacher.

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