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Declarative Knowledge: Does It Mediate the Effect of Recasts and Prompts in an EFL Classroom Setting?

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The effect of recasts and prompts on L2 accuracy has already been explored intimately in classroom settings. This study, however, investigates the moderating effect of declarative knowledge on recasts and prompts. To this purpose, 48 Iranian learners of English were assigned to four conditions: +declarative knowledge (DK) recasts, -DK recasts, +DK prompts, and -DK prompts. This assignment was made based on the performance of participants on an untimed grammaticality judgment and a metalinguistic knowledge test which were focused on simple present yes/no and wh- question forms. Learners who appeared to be familiar with the forms in focus were assigned to +recasts and +prompts while those who were unfamiliar with the forms were assigned to -recasts and -prompts groups. A story-completion task and a spot-the-difference task were performed by the participating groups to serve as the pre- and post-test of the study. During communicative interaction, the 4 groups involved received corrective feedback (CF) in accordance with the conditions they had already been assigned to. Results revealed that +DK recasts and +DK prompts groups benefited from feedback sessions more than -DK recasts and -DK prompts groups did and the presence of declarative knowledge made recasts more effective than prompts. Also the recasts group outperformed the

prompts group in the absence of declarative knowledge.

Key words: recasts, prompts, declarative knowledge, L2 accuracy

INTRODUCTION

The relative effects of recasts and prompts have been explored by second language acquisition (SLA) researchers (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Leeman, 2003; Long & Robinson, 1998; Lyster, 2004; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001) and various arguments have been made for the value of such feedback techniques. It is argued that prompts enjoy the potentiality to force learners to modify their own utterance or to produces "pushed output" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) and have superiority over recasts. But these arguments cannot be taken as solid evidence since declarative knowledge is likely to function effectively with respect to recasts or prompts. For any prompt to induce modified output, the learner should have declarative knowledge of the form prompted to be modified. Unless the leaner has some explicit knowledge of the rule at issue, prompts cannot elicit the correct form and they can just serve the purpose of making the learner savvy that there is a gap between his/her interlanguage and the target language (TL). Due to the fact that recasts never urge the learner to react to the reformulations rendered, any speculation about the role of declarative knowledge with respect to recasts seems to warrant more caution. This study is an attempt to see if declarative knowledge of learners mediates the effect of prompts and recasts on L2 accuracy in an EFL classroom setting.

INTERACTIONAL FEEDBACK

Although communicative approaches to L2 teaching, which put primary emphasis on meaning-oriented activities, have received enough attention over the last 30 years, studies have shown the limitations of such noninterventionist

approaches to language teaching in accuracy development. In search of optimal instructional mediation, Long (1991, as cited in Ishida, 2004) proposed focus on form as an alternative to purely meaning-first approaches to L2 instruction. Focus on form "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements when they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, p. 46, as cited in Ishida, 2004, p. 327). Many focus on form techniques including input processing, input enhancement, input flooding, and CF, which are nowadays employed in L2 classrooms. In recent years, advances in both the theoretical camp and empirical research, and integration of research in the field of cognitive psychology have led to a greater interest among SLA researchers in various types of feedback (Ayoun, 2001; Doughty & Valera, 1998; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000; Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003; Oliver, 2000; Panova & Lyster, 2002).

Recasts vs. Prompts

Recasts (or reformulations) and prompts (or elicitations) that occur in the course of interaction to deal with communication problems have been explored as two important feedback techniques. The effect of recasts as a way of providing feedback to learners' errors has been investigated since the mid-1990s (e.g., Nicholas et al., 2001). Recasts, as implicit negative feedback, "retain the focus on meaning by implying the existence of an error in students' utterances instead of explicitly stating the problem" (Loewen & Philp, 2006, p. 537). Long and Robinson (1998) argued that "such feedback draws learners' attention to mismatches between input and output, that is, causes them to focus on form, and can induce noticing of the kinds of forms for which a pure diet of comprehensible input will not suffice" (p. 23). In example 1 below (taken from the data in the present study), the teacher responds to the learner's ill-formed utterance with a reformulation, modifying the learner's utterance by supplying the auxiliary verb, and deleting the singular third person marker from the end of the main verb. The central

meaning of the learner's original utterance is retained.

(1) Learner: *Why fox wants cheese?*
Teacher: *Why does the fox want cheese?*
Learner: *Ah yes, why does ...*

Recasts have their own merits and demerits. A recast can be time-saving, and might make less of a threat to the learner's confidence, and would not interrupt the flow of interaction as much as, for example, elicitation for self-repair would, for example. That is why recasts are taken as the most frequent kind of feedback in many language classrooms (Long, 2006). In addition, recasts provide negative evidence (information about what is not correct in the TL) and positive evidence (examples of what are possible in the TL) rather than providing overt correction (Long & Robinson, 1998; Nicholas et al., 2001). Leeman (2003) suggested one more role for recasts. She argued that in addition to providing negative and positive evidence, recasts enhance the salience of the target form. This is likely to happen when a non-target-like and a target-like utterance are juxtaposed during recasting. This juxtaposition is likely to enhance the salience of different elements of the reformulated utterance and to indicate to the learner what is missing from his or her original non-target production. This enhanced salience might facilitate L2 development. Recasts also gain importance when L2 learners' limited attentional capacity is taken into account; studies conducted to date have shown that learners' attention is limited, selective, and partially subject to voluntary control. VanPatten (1990) argued that learners cannot attend to and process both meaning and form at the same time. He is of the view that L2 learners can consciously focus on form if the input is easily comprehended. Given that recasts juxtapose the correct and incorrect utterances while keeping the meaning constant, they are thought to free up processing resources by allowing the learner to attend to the form of the utterance.

Some researchers (e.g., Philp, 2003; Sheen, 2004) view recasts as facilitative for noticing of linguistic items in productive ways and believe that

they are likely to lead to higher degrees of immediate uptake and repair of erroneous utterances. Still some other researchers (e.g., Lyster, 1998a, 2004; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002) take a more pessimistic view of their effectiveness in classroom settings. The opportunity to notice the recast might disappear due to the simple fact that the peers or the teacher might take the subsequent turn. Also repeating correct utterances by the teacher can be confused as a recast (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Egi, 2007; Long, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Morris & Tarone, 2003; Nicholas et al., 2001).

According to Lyster and associates (Lyster, 1998b, 2004; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002), recasts–in comparison with prompts–are less effective because, with recasts, the teacher provides just the correct form for learners while learners are not urged to modify their own utterance or to produce "pushed output" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). On the other hand, learners who are less proficient have been reported to benefit more from prompts than recasts thanks to metalinguistic clues (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Rouhi, 2006), suggesting that they experience more difficulty recognizing the corrective intent of recasts. Regarding this point, prompts are argued to have superiority over recasts. They are likely to push learners implicitly or explicitly to reformulate an erroneous utterance into a correct form so that opportunities are provided for self-repair. An example of a learner being pushed to produce more comprehensible output can be seen in example 2 (taken from the data in the present study) where the student rephrases the original sentence in an effort to meet the norm.

(2) Student: *Does she girl lives with family?*
Teacher: *We don't say she girl lives. Ask again!*
Student: *Does small girl live with family?*

Although elicitation provides greater opportunity for either self-repair or other-repair, this opportunity is not likely to be realized all the time because self-repair requires at least latent knowledge of the targeted form (Long, 2006).

Declarative Knowledge

SLA literature is full of terms such as language awareness, metalinguistic awareness, analyzed knowledge, conscious knowledge, declarative knowledge, learned knowledge, and explicit knowledge. The overlap among these terms is quite unclear and we do not intend to explore the subtle defining features which may distinguish them.

Explicit (declarative) knowledge cannot be defined without making reference to implicit knowledge. Implicit knowledge is "knowledge of language and is typically manifested in some form of naturally occurring language behavior (e.g., conversation) and cannot be easily accessed separately from this behavior. It is 'unanalyzed' in the sense that language users are not aware of the knowledge they hold" (Han & Ellis, 1998, p. 5). Ellis defines explicit knowledge as follows:

> Explicit L2 knowledge is the declarative and often anomalous knowledge of the phonological, pragmatic, and sociocritical features of an L2 together with the metalanguage for labeling this knowledge. It is held consciously and is learnable and verbalizable. It is typically accessed through controlled processing when L2 learners experience some kind of linguistic difficulty in the use of the L2. Learners vary in the breadth and depth of their L2 explicit knowledge. (Ellis, 2004, p. 244)

From both practical and theoretical point of view it is important to understand the difference between implicit and explicit knowledge and the role they play in second language learning. Accessibility and awareness are taken to be two principal criteria which can be used for making a distinction between implicit and explicit knowledge. As Han and Ellis (1998) assert, implicit knowledge accounts for fluent language performance because it can be accessed easily. Explicit knowledge, on the contrary, cannot be accessed without control and can be used in language production if there is some time for planning and monitoring. Implicit knowledge is held to be unanalyzed whereas explicit knowledge is viewed as analyzed and "model-based".

Implicit knowledge is believed to exist without awareness while explicit knowledge is believed to account for conscious "insights about language". Explicit knowledge may or may not involve metalinguistic knowledge (Han & Ellis, 1998). Traditionally, the relationship between the two types of knowledge has been discussed in terms of the interface between them, as shown in the following discussion of three distinct cognitive perspectives.

The noninterface position holds that implicit and explicit L2 knowledge undergo different acquisitional mechanisms (Hulstijn, 2002), and are accessed for language performance by varying processes, either automatic or controlled (Ellis, 1993). According to this position, explicit knowledge cannot transform directly into implicit knowledge as implicit knowledge cannot become explicit. According to a weaker version of such a position, "the possibility of implicit knowledge transforming into explicit is recognized through the process of conscious reflection on and analysis of output generated by means of implicit knowledge" (Ellis, 2005, p. 144). Roehr (2007) confirms this position and argues that, contrary to learners' and teachers' expectations, metalinguistic knowledge may be constructed on the basis of increased L2 competence, rather than, or in addition to, being instrumental in building up L2 proficiency.

In contrast, the strong interface position claims that not only can explicit knowledge be derived from implicit knowledge but also that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge through practice; that is, learners can first learn a rule as a declarative fact and then, by practice, can convert it into an implicit representation, although this need not entail the loss of the original explicit representation. This interface position has been promoted by DeKeyser (1998, 2003, 2007). Differences exist, however, regarding the nature of practice that is required to affect the transformation from explicit to implicit knowledge; in particular, researchers disagree on whether this practice can be mechanical or needs to be communicative in nature.

The weak interface position exists in three versions, all of which acknowledge the possibility of explicit knowledge becoming implicit but

posit some limitation on when and how this can take place. The first version assumes that explicit knowledge can convert into implicit knowledge through practice only if the learner is developmentally ready to acquire the linguistic form (Ellis, 1993). The second version holds that explicit knowledge contributes indirectly to the acquisition of implicit knowledge by promoting some of the processes which are believed to be responsible. Explicit knowledge facilitates attention to form in the input. It can be done in two major ways. First, it aids the process of noticing. That is, if learners are equipped with explicit knowledge of a linguistic feature, they are more likely to notice its occurrence in the communicative input they receive and thus to learn it implicitly. In other words, explicit knowledge helps make a feature salient. Second, explicit knowledge may assist "noticing-the-gap". If learners know about a particular feature, they are better prepared to detect the difference between what they themselves are saying and how the feature is used in the input they are exposed to (Ellis, 1993). Finally, according to the third version, learners can use their explicit knowledge to produce output that then serves as "auto-input" to their implicit learning mechanisms (Schmidt & Frota, 1986, as cited in Ellis, 2005).

According to Braidi (2002) and Leeman (2003), recasts occurring in appropriate discourse contexts can facilitate the encoding of new declarative knowledge. Prompts, on the other hand, given their aim to elicit modified output, can enhance control over already-internalized forms–that is, prompts serve to assist learners in the transition of declarative to procedural knowledge. Ellis et al. (2006) concluded that explicit feedback in the form of metalinguistic explanation can be more effective than implicit feedback (in the form of recasts) and might contribute to implicit as well as explicit knowledge. Lyster (2004) indicated that when combined with prompts rather than with recasts, focus on form instruction would be more effective as a means of enabling L2 learners to acquire rule-based representations of the target form and to proceduralize their knowledge of these emerging forms. The goal of the present study is to see to what extent the existence of declarative knowledge of the target form is likely to influence "feedback

appreciation" (Skehan, 1998).

The Study

The goal of the present study is to see to what extent the existence of declarative knowledge of the target forms is likely to influence "feedback appreciation" (Skehan,1998), operationalized as prompts and recasts. The effect of these two commonly practiced and researched feedback techniques are to be examined in the presence and absence of declarative knowledge of the forms selected to be focused on in the present study, i.e., single present yes/no and wh- questions. Our research questions were formulated as follows:

1. Will declarative knowledge increase students' chance of benefiting from recasts and prompts?
2. Is declarative knowledge more necessary for prompts to be effective than it is for recasts?
3. Which type of feedback is more effective in form focused instruction–recasts or prompts– if learners enjoy declarative knowledge?

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted at Setaregan English Language Institute and Jihad Center, Ardabil, Iran. Sixty two female learners of English who had already been placed in five elementary classes according to their placement test scores participated in this study. They ranged in age from 15 to 25 and were bilingual (in Azari-Turkish and Persian). The selection of participants was motivated by the fact that learners at this level have relatively low proficiency but have generally acquired enough English to participate in meaning-oriented interaction. Based on the scores made on a test which

assessed their declarative knowledge of the target forms, the participating learners were assigned to four groups as follows: following Ammar and Spada (2006), learners who obtained an accuracy rate of greater than 50% were randomly divided into two groups labeled as recasts +declarative knowledge (DK) (n = 15) and prompts +DK (n = 15). Likewise, learners who obtained an accuracy rate of 50% or less were randomly divided into two groups and were labeled as recasts -DK (n = 16) and prompts -DK (n = 16). After taking a pre-test, three learners in +DK group who scored more than 70% were excluded as outliers. Eleven learners did not take the post-test.

Materials

Following Ellis (2004, 2005; Ellis et al., 2006; Ellis & Loewen, 2007), an untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and a metalinguistic knowledge test (MKT) were developed to reflect an index of learners' declarative knowledge and were used to assign learners to +DK and -DK groups. Sets of pictures which were used to elicit questions from the participants through story-completion and spot-the-difference tasks in testing sessions and story-completion and picture drawing tasks in treatment sessions inspired by Philp (2003).

Task-based interaction has been used frequently in interaction research and has appeared to provide opportunities for learners to practice forms and to receive feedback on their errors under real operating conditions. The testing instruments used in this study were operationalized according to Ellis's (2003) definition of tasks; that is, they included some information gap, requiring learners to focus primarily on meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, and had a clearly defined non-linguistic outcome. They constituted what Ellis has called focused tasks as they served to provoke using pre-determined linguistic features.

In the spot-the-difference task, every participating individual asked questions to pinpoint the difference between the two identical pictures, one held by the learner and the other held by the teacher.

The picture drawing task required learners to ask questions to discover the content of a picture held by the teacher. Every single learner had to ask questions about the picture and draw a picture to resemble the objects described as closely as possible and their position in the picture as closely as possible. In the story completion task, participants were presented with a pictorial story. Some pictures, which could lead to narrating a short story, were shown in sequence one by one. As each picture was presented, every single participating learner was instructed to ask any questions to discover the story behind the pictures.

Procedures

To gain an index of the declarative knowledge of the participating individuals regarding the target forms, an untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT) and a metalinguistic knowledge test (MKT) were developed. According to Ellis (2004, 2005), tests of explicit knowledge need to elicit a test performance in which learners are encouraged to apply rules, are under no time pressure, are consciously focused on form, and have a need to apply metalinguistic knowledge. As Ellis (2004) argues to be the case, a GJT involves three principal processing operations: "a. semantic processing (i.e., understanding the meaning of a sentence), b. noticing (i.e., searching to establish whether something is formally incorrect in the sentence), and c. reflecting (i.e., considering what is incorrect about the sentence and, possibly, why it is incorrect" (p. 256).

An untimed test provides an opportunity for all the three processing operations to take place. The untimed GJT was a paper-and-pencil test consisting of 15 sentences. Eight sentences targeted simple present yes/no and wh- questions and the remainder targeted 7 other structures, evenly divided as grammatical and ungrammatical. Participants were required to indicate whether each sentence was grammatical or ungrammatical, show the degree of certainty of their judgment on a scale marked from 0% to 100%, and self-report whether they used *a rule* or *feel* for each of their judgments.

Each item was presented on a new page, and participants were informed that they were not supposed to go back to look at any part of the test they had already completed. This test provided three measures: percentage a percentage of accuracy judgment scores based on the participants' dichotomous responses, percentage of certainty scores, and percentage of scores based on participants' reported use of *the rule* in judging about each item. Each item was scored dichotomously as correct/incorrect, scoring items left unanswered as incorrect. A percentage of accuracy scores was calculated.

In taking the metalinguistic knowledge test, learners were presented with seven sentences and were told that they were ungrammatical. Four of the sentences contained incorrect target forms. The part of the sentence containing the error in each example was underlined. Learners were asked to correct the error and explain what was wrong with the sentence (using their own words in English). As in the previous test, each item was presented on a new page. Learners scored one point for correcting the error and one point for a correct explanation of the error. A total percentage of accuracy scores was calculated. Tests (consisting of a story-completion task and a spot-the-difference task) were given to participants and a time pressure of ten minutes was imposed on participants. Students were provided with vocabulary items that they had no knowledge of or they had forgotten.

The treatment lasted for 5 sessions, 25 minutes each, spread out over a period of 3 weeks (totaling 2 hours), with simple present yes/no and wh-question forms included as the forms in focus. Several studies (e.g., Mackey, 1999; Mackey & Oliver, 2002; Mackey & Philp, 1998) have investigated the effect of interaction on English question development because questions are complex structures that are readily elicited by tasks and therefore can be appropriately addressed by recasts and prompts in EFL classroom setting. Participants in the four groups were involved in these 5 sessions that covered two tasks: a story-completion task and a picture-drawing task designed to maximize the chances of producing the target forms. Learners were not told what forms they were required to practice to avoid tasks turning into situational grammar exercises and end up with practicing “structures” rather

than “behaviors” (Ellis, 2003). Along with these activities, either recasts or prompts were provided in response to students' errors depending on the experimental conditions. A teacher was asked to be the researchers' assistant and was given a booklet to assist her in running treatment sessions. The booklet contained a description of the objectives of the study and detailed explanation of the CF techniques to be used during the experimental intervention. The treatment sessions were audio-recorded to ensure that the instructional treatment was implemented as intended. The errors of participants in the recasts group were reacted upon by reformulating them and all the time full recast was provided (as in example 3, taken from the data of this study) unless the learner's utterance was just lexically incorrect which received partial recast.

(3) Student: *Is she doll in the hand?*
Teacher: *Does she have a doll in her hand? ..... Hmm. Yes, she does.*

Participants in the prompts groups were always pushed to self-correct (as in example 4, taken from the data of this study) through one or a hybrid of the three techniques of negotiation of form, i.e., elicitation, repetition, or metalinguistic feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

(4) Student: *Why he go to house?*
Teacher: *Why he?! You need an auxiliary verb.*
Student: *Why does he ...*

This quasi-experimental study followed a pre-test, two different treatments, and a post-test design. The groups were not equivalent at the beginning of the study, thus obligating the use of ANCOVA to analyze post-test scores. CF served as the independent variable and declarative knowledge did as the moderator variable. Oral performance on grammar was the dependent variable.

Measures and Results

Following Han and Ellis (1998), the untimed grammaticality judgments and metalingual comments were used to assess declarative knowledge. Learners' developing knowledge of simple present yes/no and wh- questions were tested immediately before the instructional intervention (pre-test) and immediately after it (post-test). All interviews took place in a separate classroom and were tape-recorded and analyzed. Accuracy ratio was used for the story-completion and spot-the-difference tasks. By dividing the number of correct use of target forms by total use of target forms an accuracy ratio was calculated for each individual participant. In calculating the accuracy ratio yes/no and wh- questions with the verb *be* were excluded because a pilot testing demonstrated that learners had already mastered this form. Appropriate statistical analyses were run and results were explored intimately which are to be explained in the following section.

Since the participating groups were not homogeneous in terms of the forms in focus, due to the nature of the study, three ANCOVAs were run on the data obtained from the tasks and their total. Results pertaining to the participants' performance in the story-completion task indicated that, overall, learners possessing declarative knowledge of the target forms obtained a superior mean score (M = 76.33, M = 64.70). The -DK prompts group recorded higher mean (M = 41.94) in the post-test in comparison with the -DK recasts group (M = 37.84). Also, the +DK recasts group's mean (M = 76.33) was higher than that of the +DK prompts group (M = 64.70). Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for all the participating groups.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Story-completion Task

Group	N	M	SD
-DK recasts	12	37.84	33.16
-DK prompts	12	41.94	34.88
+DK recasts	12	76.33	21.26
+DK prompts	12	64.70	23.18

Results of ANCOVA, provided in Table 2, revealed that the difference among the four groups was significant on the post-test, $F(3, 43) = 3.85$, $p < .01$.

TABLE 2
ANCOVA for the Story-completion Task

Source	df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	3	9772.060	3257.353	3.85	.01**
Within groups	43	36356.368	845.497		
Total	48	194841.041			

Note: DK = declarative knowledge, $p < .05$

Results pertaining to the participants' use of the target form in the spot-the-difference task showed that, overall, the +DK groups outperformed the -DK groups. The learners' knowledge of the target structure in the -DK recasts group had improved more (M = 59.49) than the -DK prompts group (M = 35.24). The mean score of the +DK recasts group was higher (M = 76.68) than that of the +DK prompts group (M = 65.53). However, ANCOVA analyses revealed that the difference among the groups was not statistically significant on the post-test, $F(3, 43) = 1.49$, $p = .22$. Results from the spot-the-difference task are summarized in Table 3 and Table 4.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics for the Spot-the-difference Task

Groups	N	M	SD
- DK recasts	12	59.49	38. 62
- DK prompts	12	35.24	33.68
+DK recasts	12	76.68	21.09
+DK prompts	12	65.53	31.77

Note: DK = declarative knowledge

TABLE 4
ANCOVA for the Spot-the-difference Task

Source	df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	3	3998.138	1332.713	1.49	.22
Within groups	43	38265.325	889.891		
Total	48	224370.386			

$p < .05$

In total, the results related to mean scores indicated that learners who enjoyed declarative knowledge showed higher means (M = 77.49, M = 67.01). In comparison with the effectiveness of elicitation technique in -DK prompts (M = 38.81), -DK recasts (M = 49.15) benefited more from reformulations. +DK recasts group (M = 77.49) recorded greater improvement in comparison with +DK prompts group (M = 67.01). The ANCOVA test run showed that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant on the post-test when the scores of the two tasks were added up, $F(3, 43) = 2.17$, $p = .10$.

TABLE 5
Descriptive Statistics for the Total Results of the Two Tasks

Group	N	M	SD
- DK recasts	12	49.15	32.56
- DK prompts	12	38.81	30.08
+DK recasts	12	77.49	15.74
+DK prompts	12	67.01	24.23

Note: DK = declarative knowledge

TABLE 6
ANCOVA for the Total Results of the Two Tasks

Sources	df	SS	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	3	4405.212	1468.404	2.17	.10
Within groups	43	29016.378	674.799		
Total	48	203854.575			

$p < .05$

DISCUSSION

This study was motivated by a polarized debate about the role of recasts in L2 learning. Some researchers advocate recasts as an effective CF technique because they are implicit, unobtrusive, and contingent on the learner's intended meaning (Doughty & Valera, 1998; Leeman, 2003). Others, however, argue that recasts are ambiguous and, therefore, might be less effective, particularly in classroom settings where primarily meaning-based

instruction is provided (Lyster, 1998a; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Advocates of the latter position argue that prompts are a more effective technique. In light of this debate, the following goals were pursued in this study.

One of the goals of the present study was to investigate the effect of providing learners with recasts or prompts during communicative interaction while they possessed declarative knowledge of the target form (research question 1). The fact that the +DK groups performed significantly better than the contrast groups suggests that declarative knowledge helps learners attend to linguistic features in the input. In accordance with skill acquisition theory, the +DK learners move from exclusively declarative knowledge to at least partially procedural knowledge through conveying a message in the TL while thinking of the rules. Repeated behaviors of this kind can provide a better opportunity for restructuring declarative knowledge. Restructuring, as it is argued to be the case, results in ready-made larger chunks which can reduce the working memory load during L2 production. Declarative knowledge, if available during actual practice of the form to be proceduralized, is taken to be essential to skill acquisition (DeKeyser, 1998). Lightbown (1998) sees a role for formal linguistic features. She points out that if teachers are to have brief "time-out", as Long (1991, as cited in Ishida, 2004) advises, learners must have explicit knowledge, and vocabulary to draw upon.

Prompts, however, provide opportunities for learners to proceduralize the TL knowledge already internalized in declarative form (Lyster, 2004). Also prompted learners can re-analyze and modify their non-target output as they test new hypotheses about the TL. In +DK prompts group, learners enjoyed the repetition or elicitation as an opportunity to think more and rephrase the structure. It must be noted that some learners, who had explicit knowledge of the structure, made errors in its use, especially when they came to perform an oral task.

A second goal of the current study was to explore the necessity of declarative knowledge for the efficacy of prompts in comparison with recasts (research question 2). In this study, results of the spot-the-difference task and ultimately the total of the results of the two tasks showed that the -DK recasts

group was better than the -DK prompts group. However, the difference was not statistically significant. It might be argued that this was the result of task effect, that is, students benefited from the story-completion task which served to increase students' ability to draw on declarative rule-based representations and they had sufficient time to monitor their performance. On the other hand, opportunities to interact with the teacher provided them with valuable oral practice.

The results obtained from the story-completion task seem to be different the -DK recasts group did not outperform the -DK prompts group. Thus, the results of the first task did not find a statistically significant advantage for reformulating the students' errors in comparison with pushing students to correct their own errors. These findings echo those of Lyster (2004), Ammar and Spada (2006), and Ammar (2008). Learners in the -DK prompts group might have benefited from this technique because of two central factors: the explicitness and clarity of this CF technique and the multiple opportunities to produce the target form in reaction to the teacher's corrective moves provided through this technique. In the following subsections, these factors are discussed in relation to the theoretical and experimental studies on CF in SLA.

Explicitness of CF and L2 Accuracy

As described in the methodology subsection, the teacher in the prompts groups reacted immediately to students' errors and provided students with metalinguistic clues whenever an error occurred in order to help them reformulate their utterances. These different moves made the prompts treatment explicit and salient for two reasons. First, they unambiguously indicated the presence of an error and, therefore, encouraged and directed students to think about alternative forms. Second, once the learners were aware of the fact that there was a problem in the form that they had used to express their meaning, they were given metalinguistic clues–as a last solution–to help them identify the nature and locus of the error and limit the

processing effort required to notice the gap between their interlanguage system and the TL norm, so their entire attention was devoted to thinking about the rule and producing the grammatical form.

Metalinguistic feedback–in comparison with recasts–seems to lead to greater degrees of awareness of the gap between what was said and the target forms, thereby facilitating the acquisition of implicit knowledge. It is also important to recognize that metalinguistic feedback does not intrude unduly in the communicative flow of the activity. It constitutes a brief time-out from communicating, which allows the learner to focus explicitly but briefly on the form. The effectiveness of the metalinguistic feedback, therefore, might derive in part from high level of awareness it generates and in part from the fact that it is embedded in a communicative context (Ellis et al., 2006). It must be noted in passing that if the teacher withholds metalinguistic feedback from students, the effects of prompts might be paralyzed to a significant extent.

Although the teacher in the recasts group provided reformulations immediately after errors occurred, it was unlikely that the participants would perceive or treat them as CF moves in these communicative classes. Furthermore, the fact that learners in the recasts groups received no clues and had to identify the nature of the errors as well as their locus adds to their implicitness. Overall, the explicitness and saliency of prompts, on the one hand, and the implicitness of recasts, on the other, might be one of the major explanations for the significant differences observed between the two groups.

CF and Proceduralization

Uptake with repair is another factor that might have contributed to the superior effects of prompts. Learners in the prompts group were pushed by their teacher to correct their ungrammatical utterances and all of the repairs were student-generated. As Van den Branden (1997) pointed out, even if repair is classmate-generated, the learner acknowledges the suggested solution and notices it. It stands the reason to logic to argue that participants

in prompts groups tried to produce the form correctly through testing hypotheses suggested by the student who initially produced the error or by his or her peers (problem solving). Uptake is hardly generated as a result of recasts (Braidi, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002) and if there is any opportunity for uptake, it is not necessarily some evidence of noticing and it might also be mere repetition. According to learners' stimulated recall reports in relation to their responses to the recasts, learners only produce uptake when they perceive recasts as CF and notice the interlanguage-L2 mismatch (Egi, 2010).

Learners' bias may also account for the relationship between the interlanguage level of the learner and noticing. Learners are usually biased to some degree for the input they are exposed to by their current interlanguage system (Harley, 1994). This bias modulates the learner's apperception of recasts. This is illustrated in example 5 (taken from the data of the present study), in which the -DK learner benefited from the recast partially.

(5) Student: *Is man bag take?*
Teacher: *Does the man take the bag?*
Student: *Yeah. Does man the bag take?*

In terms of acquisition of question forms, recasts may be of more or less potential benefit to learners according to how well the recasts match learners' readiness to acquire the form (Mackey & Philp, 1998). Given the implicitness of recasts and the corresponding load that this might have imposed on the -DK learners' attention capacity, learners in the -DK recasts group were unable to benefit from their teacher's reformulations.

The third goal of this study was to investigate which type of feedback would be more effective in form focused instruction (i.e., recasts or prompts) if learners enjoyed declarative knowledge (research question 3). Superior performance of the recasts group on the post-test in comparison with prompts group suggests that despite implicit nature of recasts, the +DK learners whose errors were reformulated, were able to benefit from feedback more than those

who were pushed to self-correct.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper demonstrated that learners who possessed declarative knowledge were more successful in benefiting from both recasts and prompts in comparison with learners who did not possess such knowledge. Hence, the results remain a little ambiguous in the case of learners who did not have declarative knowledge of the target form. Total results indicated that recasts were a more preferred technique but results related to the first task, together with the findings of some previous studies (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Lyster, 2004) seem to provide support for the idea that prompts would work better. Therefore, this issue remains to be explored through future studies. In addition, the present study examined the effectiveness of prompts and recasts in the presence and absence of declarative knowledge of the target form. It was concluded that recasts are a better choice if students are equipped with declarative knowledge of the target form.

This study implies that explicit grammar teaching can result in declarative knowledge which might facilitate uptaking recasts and prompts, and the teacher, before providing any feedback, should make sure that students are already equipped with declarative knowledge of the target form. On the other hand, language teachers themselves need sufficient explicit knowledge about language to be able to plan form-focused instruction and respond appropriately to the needs of learners especially in the case of prompts.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A big limitation of this study relates to the small sample size. The results may not be generalizable to a larger population of learners. Another issue that

will need to be addressed in future studies is that of time. Findings were based on just immediate post-test results while the possibility that long-term rather than short-term effects are the outcome of interactional feedback has been suggested by SLA researchers (e.g., Lightbown, 1998; Mackey, 1999; Mackey & Philp, 1998). Similarly, this study targeted just simple present yes/no and wh- question forms and the results may not hold true for other forms and further research might explore learners' noticing of other forms. Participants were beginners and the study could have been done with pre-intermediate level learners who could have more interaction leading to different results.

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