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The Relative Efficacy of Recasts and Prompts on Past Tense Use of ESL Learners

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The objective of the study is twofold: to investigate the effects of corrective feedback (CF) on the accuracy of past tense use, and to compare the relative effectiveness of recasts and prompts on the accuracy of past tense use. The participants of the study consisted of 105 secondary school ESL learners in Malaysia. The target structure of CF was the regular and irregular past forms. CF was provided contingent upon the occurrence of past tense errors according to the type of corrective feedback (i.e., recasts, prompts and no corrective feedback) assigned to participants. By employing a pre-post- and delayed- post-test design, learning outcomes were measured by means of an oral production test (OPT), a written production test (WPT) and an untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT). The results revealed that participants, regardless of type of corrective feedback, showed both short-term and long-term gains in accuracy of past tense use. However, on the delayed effects of CF, the findings suggest that the effects of prompts may be more durable compared to recasts or control. It was found that the effectiveness of corrective feedback was also affected by other mediating factors, including learners' proficiency level, prior knowledge and the morphological structure of the target linguistic feature.

Keywords: oral corrective feedback, recasts, prompts, past tense

Introduction

Corrective feedback refers to any attempts made by the teacher, both verbal and nonverbal with the intention to point out to the learner that there is something wrong with his utterance that needs revision or correction. It has a dual purpose, serving as a remedial function and provides reinforcement to learners' L2 learning. In the event where L2 learners' language behaviour is target-like, corrective feedback motivates learners to continue to perform with the target-like linguistic form (i.e., positive reinforcement); whereas in the case where there is non-target like language behaviour; corrective feedback deters learners from using the non-target like form in their subsequent language production (i.e., negative reinforcement).

Where pedagogical interests are concerned, provision of feedback is of utmost importance to both language teachers and language learners. To teachers, it is a means by which they can inform learners of their problems of inaccuracy in their target language production. To learners, it is a channel through

which they receive feedback for repairing their non-target like utterance, which may constitute the most powerful source of improvement in L2 learning (Chaudron, 1988). Moreover, teachers' correcting behaviour and feedback may be the most influencing factors affecting learning (Chaudron). In the local ESL classrooms, teachers have become the main source of error correction (Salahuddin Muhd, 1998). Learners usually rely on their teachers to judge the correctness or acceptability of their language use. Due to frequent occurrence of linguistic errors in learners' use of the target language, corrective feedback has become an indispensable part of Malaysian ESL classrooms.

In relation to this, teachers' feedback is often in the form of a spontaneous reaction triggered by learner errors (Zhao, 2009). At times, teachers may not be aware of their use of feedback to correct learner errors (Yang, 2010). More importantly, teachers seldom reflect upon and evaluate the effectiveness of corrective feedback by considering learners' perceptions on teacher feedback, learners' receptivity towards the feedback and the effects of feedback on learners' second language development. Another problem that has surfaced in teachers' corrective feedback is that there were discrepancies between teachers' choice of corrective feedback and the CF type preferred by learners (Mackey et al., 2007; Yoshida, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). While teachers tended to choose recasts over other corrective feedback types while dealing with learner errors, learners conversely preferred more explicit types of corrective feedback (i.e., metalinguistic feedback and elicitation) which allow them time and space for self-correction (Gitsaki & Althobaiti, 2010; Yoshida, 2008a).

Literature Review

Effects of Corrective Feedback

Previous studies that examined the effects of CF on L2 development seemed to suggest that the effectiveness of corrective feedback may be differentially mediated by learners' developmental readiness or proficiency level (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Mackey & Philp, 1998), the target linguistic structure (e.g., Ellis, 2007; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Yang & Lyster, 2010) and the type of CF (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, et al., 2006; Lyster, 2004). With regard to the type of CF, we can therefore argue that one type of corrective feedback may not serve all corrective purposes. Farrar (1990, p. 620) comments that recasts "do not appear to be all-purpose facilitators of language acquisition." This perhaps has given rise to a shift to corrective strategies other than recasts in classroom interaction, and comparative CF studies in second language research.

Recasts and prompts are inherently two different types of corrective feedback. The recast, by definition is implicit, designed not to interrupt speakers' focus on message, and is often immediately followed by speech by the party providing the recasts..." (Long 2007, p. 99). In recast, there is no direct indication that there are linguistic errors in learners' L2 production, and the corrective function of recasts is often left to the learner's interpretation (Sato, 2009). In contrast, prompts are classified as explicit feedback as there is an overt indication to the learner that there are errors in learners' output. Some scholars (e.g., Mackey & Goo, 2013) have argued that comparisons between these two forms of CF should not be carried out as these two types of corrective feedback are inherently different. However, we think a comparative study on the relative efficacy between recasts and prompts will lend valuable insights to researchers and teachers on which type of CF works better with which category of a problematic target linguistic feature among what type of learners under what conditions.

Different types of CF would not have much impact on high proficiency learners' attainment of linguistic accuracy as the ability to perform self-repair increases as they become more proficient (Lyster et al., 2013). However, Ammar and Spada (2006) suggested that low proficiency learners seem to find explicit corrective feedback (i.e., prompts) more beneficial than implicit feedback (i.e., recasts). Explicit corrective feedback is said to have advantage over implicit corrective feedback in that it aids learners to recognize the corrective function of prompts, the focus of the error and possible solutions to correct their

errors. Similarly, Van den Branden (1997) noted that low proficiency learners may rely on their interlocutor to provide them with corrective feedback and cooperate with them to incorporate feedback into successful modified output.

To date, the meta-analyses of corrective feedback studies seem to suggest that it is premature to make any firm conclusion regarding the relative efficacy of different corrective feedback types. It is noted that the number of studies on implicit corrective feedback (i.e., recasts) outnumbers those on explicit corrective feedback (i.e., prompts), resulting in insufficient sample size in the explicit type of corrective feedback to be included for comparisons. In particular, there is a lack on extensive research on prompts or negotiation of form. This has served as a basis to carry out the present comparative study on corrective feedback.

The Effects of Corrective Feedback on Past Tense Acquisition

In the last three decades, several corrective feedback studies have selected English past tense (i.e., the regular past and the irregular past) as the target linguistic feature. Though these studies share a common target linguistic feature, they show considerable variations in terms of setting (naturalistic, classroom), education level (primary school, middle school, university), course design (conversational class, intensive ESL class, content-based Science class). Studies of CF have also focused on age, the type of corrective feedback (clarification requests, recasts, metalinguistic explanation and prompts), and the measure of learning (past marking, correct suppliance of past verb forms, use of target-like past forms and interlanguage past forms, tense consistency, and accuracy in past tense use). Despite the differences in many aspects of these studies, what is noteworthy across these studies is that English past tense is amenable to corrective feedback and CF has beneficial effects on past tense development. It is noted that CF studies that have chosen the past tense as the target of CF employed both implicit corrective feedback (e.g., clarification requests, recasts) and explicit corrective feedback (e.g., metalinguistic explanation, prompts). Both types of corrective feedback were found to be facilitative of past tense acquisition. What is also noteworthy is that the effects of metalinguistic feedback tend to be delayed or manifested in the second post-test (Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al., 2006; Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993).

However, on the relative efficacy of different types of feedback on the past tense, there have been only a handful of comparative studies of CF on past tense acquisition to date (e.g., Ellis et al., 2006; McDonough, 2007; Yang & Lyster, 2010); mixed results were obtained in these studies, therefore there is no sufficient evidence to show that one type of corrective feedback has advantage over another. Thus, no conclusive findings can be reaped from studies that examined the effects of different types of CF on past tense acquisition. Therefore, the study seeks to fill in the research gap by looking at the relative efficacy of two types of corrective feedback (i.e., recasts vs. prompts) in the acquisition of English past tense.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed the quasi-experimental approach to compare the relative effectiveness of two types of corrective feedback, recasts and prompts on past tense acquisition. This research framework has recasts, prompts and no feedback as the independent variables and accuracy of past tense use as the dependent variable.

Setting

A district in Sabah, a Malaysian state located on the island of Borneo, was chosen as the research site. According to statistics provided by the Department of Education in this district, there are approximately 20 secondary schools in total. Sample selection was narrowed down to six schools located in the urban or near-urban areas. Of the six schools, SMK A was chosen as the research site for the current study. The name of the school and exact location has been masked to maintain anonymity of the participating school and students. The school was chosen on the basis that they possess an adequate operational proficiency in English based on the Average School Grade (ASG). The ASG grade shows the performance of the school in which the lower the grade, the better the performance.

Participants

The participants of the study comprised 105 students studying at a government secondary school in Malaysia. The 16-year old students were recruited from three intact classes who were studying in the same school. The class size for the three classes was 37, 33 and 35 respectively. To ensure equal numbers of participants across the groups, 35 participants were distributed to each group. The students on overage had spent nine years learning the English language through formal study. The students were selected on the basis of appropriateness. The students who had started to produce the English past tense but had not fully mastered the target feature made perfect participants for the current study. The consent for research project was received from districts' education office, the school administrators, the respective English language teachers and all the students.

Instrument

Treatment tasks

Four 15-minute treatment tasks which allow obligatory use of the past tense were devised for the administration of treatment in the research. The treatment tasks consisted of three narrative tasks (i.e., Cinderella Story-retelling, Johnny's Most Productive Weekend and The Day When I Lost Something I loved) and a role play. The narrative tasks require participants to narrate one part of the stories assigned to them while the role play asks participants to answer questions related to a road accident. The treatment tasks are deemed appropriate because the stories which follow a clear structure are easy to understand. The ease of comprehension would allow the low-intermediate proficiency learners to free up some attentional resources to allocate them to form (Van Patten, 1990). According to Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001), tasks that follow a clear structure facilitate task performance by clarifying the macrostructure of the speech event. In this way, the lack of need to attend to macrostructure planning frees up learners' attentional resources for online planning. Second, it provides a meaningful context to elicit the use of simple past.

Assessment tests

In the study, learning outcomes were measured using three assessment tests which comprised an oral production test (OPT) and a written production test (WPT) and an untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT). Three different versions for each test were devised for the pre-test, post-test and delayed post-test to counter test-retest effects. Multiple varied tests are necessary in order to measure both implicit and explicit knowledge of the past tense (Ellis et al., 2006; Loewen & Nabei, 2007). The first two production tests were assumed to provide a measure of implicit past tense knowledge while the untimed GJT test is predicted to encourage learners to draw on their explicit knowledge to complete the task (Ellis, 2005;

Loewen & Ellis, 2007). For scoring the OPT and WPT, accuracy in the use of simple past in percentage is calculated using Pica's (1991) formula of target-like use (TLU) as follows:

> n correct suppliance in contexts x 100%
> n obligatory contexts + n suppliance in non-obligatory contexts

While for scoring the GJT, accuracy in the use of simple past in percentage form was calculated based on the ratio of correctly judged sentences to the total of sentences which require obligatory use of past tense (N = 24).

Operationalization of recasts and prompts

In the study, recasts were operationalized as teacher's reformulations of learner's part(s) of incorrect utterance which contain(s) at least one instance of incorrect use of the past tense, with emphatic stress on the final /t/ and /d/ sounds on the regular past or the correct irregular past. A provision of recasts is shown in Example 1.

> Example 1
> L: When her father died, her stepmother treat her like a maid.
> T: treated her (recast).
> L: Her stepmother treated her like a maid. Cinderella…

The present study conceptualized prompts as metalinguistic feedback and/ or elicitation. A practical reason is that these two CF types may be complementary to each other in eliciting the correct past tense form in the treatment phase. A provision of prompts is shown in Example 2.

> Example 2
> L: Long time ago, there live a beautiful girl…
> T: Use the past tense. There… (prompt = metalinguistic feedback + elicitation)
> L: There lived a beautiful girl named Cinderella.

Procedure

At the pre-treatment stage, participants were given a formal instruction session on the target structure. The one-hour session was aimed at refreshing and reinforcing learners' knowledge of the form, meaning and use of the past tense (see Appendix for Formal instruction of English Past Tense). After receiving the formal instruction, the pre-tests were administered. At the treatment stage, participants were instructed to perform four communicative tasks, during which they were treated with the type of CF assigned to them (i.e., recasts, prompts and no feedback). Immediately after the treatment sessions, participants were instructed to take the post-tests. Two weeks later, the participants took the delayed post-tests. The procedures used in the study are shown in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Prior to a repeated- measures of analysis of variance (RM ANOVA), one-way ANOVAs were run on the pre-test scores of GJT, OPT and WPT to establish if the different treatment groups were of the same footing at the outset of the experiment. To assess the effects of corrective feedback on the accuracy of past tense use, rates of target-like use of past tense on the OPT/WPT/GJT at the three testing times were submitted to a repeated- measures of analysis of variance (RM ANOVA), with time as the within-subject factor and type of treatment as the between- subject factor. The alpha level was set at .05 ($p \leq .05$). To

determine the effect size with RM ANOVAs, η² (Eta squared) was calculated for between- groups and within- groups differences. Following Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the effect size is considered small if η^2 = .01, medium if η^2 = .06 and large if η^2 = .14.

TABLE 1
Procedures of the Study

Stage	Week	Activity	Duration
Pre-treatment	1	Formal instruction on English past tense	1 hour per session
	2-3	**Pre-tests:** WPT & GJT pre-tests OPT pre-test	2 weeks
Treatment	4-10	**Four treatment tasks:** Task 1: Cinderella Story-retelling	2 weeks
		Task 2: Real-life Experience Recount One (Title: Johnny's most productive weekend)	1 week
		Task 3: Real-life Experience Recount Two (Title: The day when I lost something I loved very much)	2 weeks
		Task 4: Role-play (Title: Police interrogation)	2 weeks
Post-treatment	11-13	**Post-tests:** Oral Production Test (OPT) Written Production Test (WPT) Untimed Grammaticality Test (GJT)	3 weeks
	14-15	**Delayed post-tests:** Oral Production Test (OPT) Written Production Test (WPT) Untimed Grammaticality Test (GJT)	2 weeks

Findings

Overall Results Across the Learning Measures

As this study is concerned with assessing the effects of corrective feedback on target-like use of past tense, we would examine if experimental groups who were provided with corrective feedback, either recasts or prompts showed superior performance than the control group in each learning measure. In statistical terms, we were interested to know if type of treatment had a significant effect on participants' performance in the oral, written and untimed grammaticality judgment tests designed to measure their ability to use correct past tense. The difference in performance between groups was deemed significant when $p \leq .05$.

The results in Table 2 show that the effect of type of treatment on accuracy of past tense use did not prove statistically significant. Thus, we can infer that experimental groups, who were provided with corrective feedback, either recasts or prompts did not show superior performance than the control group across the learning measures.

TABLE 2
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Assessment Tests	Effect	Df	F	Sig. Value	Partial Eta Squared
OPT	Type of Treatment	2	0.322	0.719	.008 (very small)
WPT	Type of Treatment	2	0.666	0.516	.015 (small)
GJT	Type of Treatment	2	0.156	0.855	.003 (very small)

Oral Production Test (OPT). The descriptive statistics of the oral production test at the three testing times are presented in Table 3. It shows that all treatment groups, with or without CF, experienced an approximately twofold increase in their mean scores of target-like use of past tense from the pre-test to the post-test.

TABLE 3
Means of Target-like Use of Past Tense in the Oral Production Test

	Pre-test			Post-test			Delayed Post-test		
Group	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*
Recast	28.20	23.28	29	54.85	28.43	29	50.38	24.10	29
Prompt	25.46	25.26	30	50.74	25.06	30	46.89	23.42	30
Control	25.92	23.28	30	58.58	21.07	30	51.11	19.21	30
Total	26.51	23.72	89	54.73	24.92	89	49.45	22.15	89

In evaluating whether type of treatment had a significant effect on accuracy of past tense use, measured by oral production tests, the RM ANOVA found that type of treatment was not statistically significant, $F(2, 89) = .332$, $p = .719$, partial eta squared = .008 (close to .01, small effect size). This is to say that participants in different treatment groups demonstrated similar performance at the post-test and the delayed post-test.

Although the RM ANOVA showed no statistical difference between the experimental groups and the control group, the effect size of treatment based on the partial eta squared was small but positive. This suggests that at average, experimental groups performed better than the control group in their achievement of accuracy of past tense use. Figure 1 shows graphically the group means of target-like use of past tense in oral production for both the experimental and the control groups at three testing times.
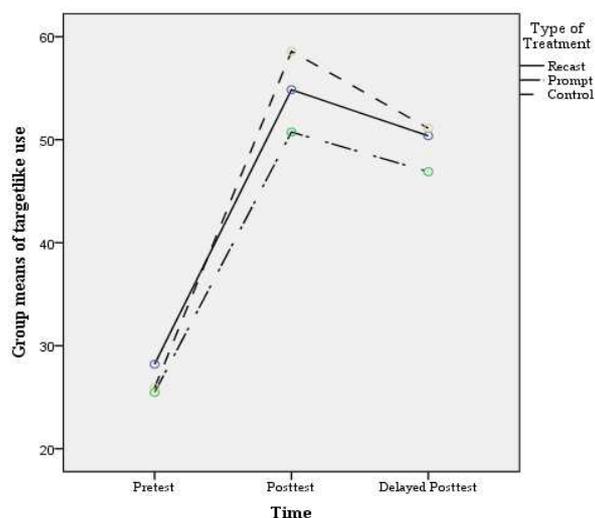

Figure 1. Means of target-like use of past tense in the oral production test.

The mean plots in Figure 1 show that both the experimental and control groups demonstrated gains in accuracy of past tense use between the pre-test and the post-test. However, this positive trend in accuracy of past tense use did not hold when the different treatment groups were tested two weeks after the treatment session. Sharing a similar pattern of change, the three groups attenuated in their achievement in accuracy of past tense use between the post-test and the delayed post-test. Therefore, we can infer that participants from the experimental groups did not outperform the control group in their OPT performance. Instead, the mean plots indicate that both the experimental and control groups experienced both short-term and long-term gains in their OPT test scores. The oral production test performance, therefore, does not provide evidence to support the claim that experimental groups who were provided with corrective feedback, either recasts or prompts showed superior performance than the control group in the oral measure.

Written Production Test (WPT). Compared to the oral production test, participants on the whole demonstrated better performance on the written production test as shown in the higher mean scores across the three testing times. The descriptive statistics of the written production test at the three testing times are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Means of Target-like Use of Past Tense in the Written Production Test

Group	Pre-test			Post-test			Delayed Post-test		
	M	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*
Recast	68.03	20.30	31	81.10	14.54	31	78.84	14.20	31
Prompt	62.93	15.86	29	76.68	15.54	29	77.04	11.11	29
Control	68.02	17.76	28	77.97	14.90	28	76.37	12.70	28
Total	66.35	18.08	88	78.65	14.94	88	77.46	12.67	88

In examining whether type of treatment had a significant effect on accuracy of past tense use, measured by written production tests, the results of the RM ANOVA reveal that the main effect of type of treatment was not statistically significant, $F(2, 88) = .666$, $p = .516$, partial eta squared = .015, which was a small effect size. Thus, we can infer that the effect of treatment was small and positive, though the effect of type of treatment was not statistically significant. Figure 2 shows group means of target-like use of past tense in the written production test for the three groups at the three testing times.
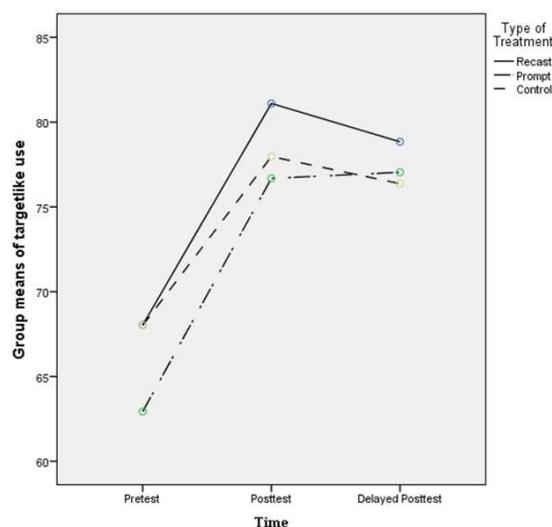

Figure 2. Means of target-like use of past tense in the written production test.

The mean plots in Figure 2 show that the three groups demonstrated gains in accuracy of past tense use on WPT between the pre-test and the post-test. Nonetheless, the new heights in accuracy rates of past tense use for the recast and the control groups were not sustained at the delayed post-test. Similar to the pattern of change in OPT, the two groups showed slight decrease in their achievement in accuracy of past tense use at the written production delayed post-test. As can be seen in the mean plots, the recast and the control groups recorded simultaneous decline from the post-test to the delayed post-test. What is perhaps striking is that out of the three groups (recasts vs. prompts vs. controls), only prompts were able to sustain a continuous increase in rates of accuracy in past tense use at the delayed post-test.

Similar to the findings in the OPT, the written production data did not provide evidence to support the claim that experimental groups who were treated with corrective feedback, either recasts or prompts performed better than the control group who received no corrective feedback in the written measure. Nonetheless, the change in written production test scores between the pre-test and the delayed post-test across three groups was maintained at an upward direction. In another word, there was improvement in the accuracy of past tense use in the written production test, both in the short term and the long term.

Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT). The descriptive statistics of the untimed grammaticality judgment test at the three testing times are presented in Table 5. Comparing the group means of the GJT, the OPT and the WPT at the pre-test, the post-test and the delayed post-test, Table 5 shows that participants' rates of accuracy in past tense use in the GJT were higher than their accuracy rates in the OPT but lower than those in the WPT.

TABLE 5
Means of target-like Use of Past Tense on Untimed Grammaticality Judgment Test

Group	Pre-test			Post-test			Delayed Post-test		
	M	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*
Recast	58.85	11.60	31	64.38	15.43	31	60.62	11.78	31
Prompt	57.42	13.12	32	59.77	14.99	32	62.37	12.36	32
Control	54.82	12.44	32	63.53	13.58	32	63.79	14.04	32
Total	57.01	12.39	95	62.54	14.66	95	62.28	12.7	95

In evaluating whether type of treatment had a significant effect on accuracy of past tense use measured by untimed grammaticality judgment tests, the RM ANOVA found that type of treatment was not statistically significant, $F(2, 95) = .156$, $p = .855$, partial eta squared = .003, a very small effect size. This can be interpreted as treatment having had little effect on participants' performance on the GJT at the post-test and the delayed post-test. Figure 3 shows group means of target-like use of past tense on the untimed grammaticality judgment test for the three groups at the three testing times.

The mean plots in Figure 3 show that there was improvement in accuracy of past tense use for all the groups between the pre-test and the post-test. As shown in Figure 3, the recast and the control groups seemed to have an advantage in that the two groups exhibited higher growth rates compared to the prompt group during this testing period. However, at the delayed post-test, the recast group showed a decline in accuracy rate while the control and the prompt groups sustained their growth in accuracy of past tense use. As shown in the mean plots, prompts displayed gradual increase between the post-test-delayed post-test and recorded higher growth rates than controls at the delayed post-test. What seems noteworthy is that, like the findings in WPT, out of the two experimental groups, only prompts were able to sustain a continuous increase in rates of accuracy in past tense use at the delayed post-test. This finding suggests that prompts may have a more durable effect on accuracy in past tense use.

The untimed grammaticality judgment test data, consistent with the findings in the OPT and the WPT, did not show significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group. Nonetheless, similar to the findings in the OPT and the WPT, the change in scores between the pre-test and the delayed post-test across three groups was maintained in an upward direction. In other words, there was

improvement in accuracy of past tense use in the untimed grammaticality judgment test, in both the short term and the long term.
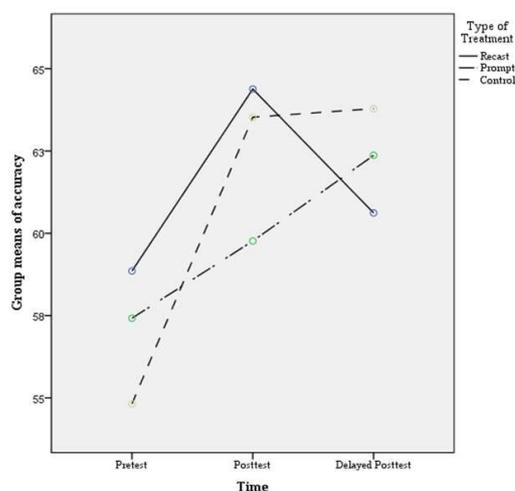

Figure 3. Means of target-like use of past tense on untimed grammaticality judgement test.

Discussion

The effect sizes, measured by partial eta squared that reports the strength of the effects of CF on target-like use of past tense, remained positive, albeit small, across the three measures of learning. This implies that on average, the experimental groups performed better that the control group. This in turn confirms the facilitative effects of CF on past tense acquisition. Besides, both the experimental groups and the control group showed pre and post-test improvements and pre and delayed post-test improvements in their target-like use of past tense. In other words, all treatment groups experienced both short-term and long-term gains in accuracy of past tense use. In addition, the results as shown in the written and untimed grammaticality judgment delayed post-tests seem to suggest that the effects of prompts may be more durable than recasts and no CF treatment in terms of their delayed effects on accuracy of past tense use.

The study has revealed that all treatment groups, regardless of type of treatment (i.e., recasts, prompts or no CF) experienced gains in their use of past tense, both in the short term and in the long term. This finding can be attributed to the procedures and the way the corrective feedback treatment was operationalized in the current study. In the experiment, each participant completed four 20-minute corrective feedback treatments (i.e., recasts, prompts or no CF) over seven weeks' duration. During each of the four treatment sessions, all treatment groups were asked to perform the communicative task given with an equal number of verb items devised for each participant, where the experimental groups received corrective feedback, either recasts or prompts while the control group received no corrective feedback but the answer key to the communicative tasks. The procedures in which the corrective feedback was carried out appeared to be successful in drawing participants' attention to the target language feature (i.e., the past tense).

The study was conducted in a laboratory where every individual learner was given an equal opportunity to be provided with corrective feedback and to respond to it with an equal number of verb items which require the obligatory use of the past tense within a dyadic interactional setting. Moreover, the manner in which corrective feedback was operationalized in the current study has made the target of corrective feedback more perceptually salient. In addition, the fact that the study was focused on a single linguistic feature (i.e., the past tense) consistently in an intensive manner over four treatment tasks is assumed to have increased the perceptual saliency of the target linguistic feature. This heightened saliency of the

linguistic target of CF is assumed to have drawn learners' attention to form, aiding learners to improve in their past tense accuracy immediately after the CF treatment. Some second language researchers have argued that corrective feedback is effective in facilitating L2 restructuring when it is targeted at only one linguistic feature (e.g., Doughty, 2001; Ellis, 2001; Han, 2002; Lyster et al., 2013; Nicholas et al., 2001)

Where L2 classroom instruction is concerned, the present study supports variety in corrective feedback provision (Lyster, 1997). Language instructors need to be aware of the threshold beyond which a particular type of CF cannot function for corrective purpose. It is recommended that ESL teachers use a variety of corrective feedback techniques according to learners' developmental level for a particular linguistic feature. As Ammar and Spada (2006) argued, "one size does not fit all." A single type of CF perhaps does not serve all corrective purposes. Neither recasts nor prompts can work effectively on their own in isolation. These two types of CF serve different but complementary purposes in language teaching and learning. While recasts provide the necessary linguistic form for repair, prompts allow learners to draw on their own linguistic resources to make self-repairs where possible.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the effects of oral corrective feedback on accuracy in the use of the past tense. A series of RM ANOVAs was employed in the analyses of the learning outcomes, measured by the oral production test (OPT), the written production test (WPT) and the untimed grammaticality judgment test (GJT). The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental groups (i.e., recasts and prompts) and the control group. However, the analyses revealed that both experimental groups as well as the control group experienced gains in their target-like use of past tense, both in the short term and also the long term. The effect sizes measured by partial eta square across the learning measures were small but positive. This reiterates that oral corrective feedback has a positive effect on accuracy in the use of the past tense. The study has, thus, provided empirical evidence to the claim that oral corrective feedback has a facilitative effect on acquisition of the English past tense. Alternatively, the study has also lent evidence to the claim that the English past tense is amenable to oral corrective feedback. In addition, the study found that prompts may have a more durable effect compared to recasts as shown in the delayed written production test and the delayed grammaticality judgment test. This finding suggests that second language learners may need time to internalize the linguistic content of prompts for the production of more target-like past tense forms.

Contrary to what was expected, the study indicates that factors such as proficiency level and exemplars of the target linguistic feature, may have an irrefutable influence on the extent to which learners can utilize oral corrective feedback. In other words, the findings suggest that type of CF may not be the sole factor that determines the effectiveness of oral corrective feedback. Instead, it is likely that the efficacy of oral corrective feedback may hinge on a constellation of learner internal factors such as proficiency level and linguistic content of CF (i.e., positive evidence vs. negative evidence) as well as the target linguistic feature which comes into play when learners are exposed to CF.

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Appendix

Formal Instruction of English Past Tense

Prior to the pre-tests, learners were required to attend an instructional session on the target structure where they were taught

> i. the rule of thumb, i.e., When do we use the past tense? Ask yourself this question: "When did the event happen?" or "Did the event happen at a certain time in the past?" If yes, use the past tense.
>
> ii. the three rules on past tense formation, i.e., base form + ed, change the vowel of the base form and no change as in work-worked, play-played; do-did, get-got; and put-put and hit-hit. In addition, learners were taught the phonological aspect of the regular past.
>
> iii. on how to pronounce the allomorphs of the regular past, i.e., /t/ as in worked, /d/ as in played and /id/ as in planted or landed.

In the training, care was taken to expose learners to a limited number of high-frequency past tense verbs (e.g., was/were, had, did, went). This is to ensure that the effect of the formal instruction which is form-focused does not override the effects of CF in the treatment phase. The prior-to- pre-test training is also considered a necessary step to ensure that the participants share a common minimum level of past tense knowledge at the outset of the experiment.