The Differential Effects of Corrective Feedback

Before and After Explicit Instruction

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of prompts and recasts, according to two learning stages: One before explicit instruction, and the other after explicit instruction. Participants were 4 students enrolled in 200 level courses at Hawai’i English Language Program. On two occasions, individual students participated in communicative tasks during dyadic interaction with the researcher, and were provided with feedback in the form of either prompts or recasts. The tasks were designed to provide contexts where use of the targeted English prepositions was obligatory. Between the tasks, explicit instruction was offered to each participant, and soon after the tasks, the knowledge of the prepositions was tested through post-test (1) and post-test (2). Results showed that recasts benefited participants more than prompts in the early stage, and prompts benefited participants more than recasts in the later stage. The careful examination of the results, however, is necessary to understand the study.
Introduction

This study addresses the effect of two types of corrective feedback, prompts and recasts, according to two learning stages: One before explicit instruction, and the other after explicit instruction. There are many theoretical and empirical studies which examined the effect of prompts and recasts, none of which pays attention to the extent to which they are mediated by learning stages: An early stage or a later stage. This variable, however, is significant for language teachers to design an actual instruction. In order to make their instruction more effective, teachers need to consider how much knowledge of a target structure their students have acquired. According to the stage, they have to choose appropriate teaching methods and materials. If a lesson is offered through interactional feedback, this information should exercise a decisive influence on the type of feedback, because each type of feedback varies in effect according to variables. Therefore, the researcher decided to investigate the extent to which the effect of two different types of feedback was mediated by learning stages. For this purpose, the researcher provided participants with feedback in the form of either prompts or recasts, and measured the scores which they got on the tests before and after the explicit instruction.

In the following sub-sections, a review of the literature will firstly be made on the overview of corrective feedback. The focus will then be directed to the empirical studies of prompts and recasts, and finally to the theoretical perspectives on prompts and recasts.

The Overview of Corrective Feedback

In Long’s (1996) Interaction Hypothesis, he claimed “interaction facilitates
acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective
attention, and output in productive ways” (pp. 451-452). Mackey (2007) states that
researchers’ interest is no longer whether interaction impacts learning, but how interactional
processes drive L2 learning. Interactional process can supply corrective feedback to let
learners know that their utterances were problematic (Mackey, 2006). Mackey (2007)
suggests that it is important to ascertain what it is about different types of feedback that
makes them effective.

As for corrective feedback, I would say who initiates and who performs the repair,
and then mention all four types. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977, p. 363) use “repair”
rather than “correction” in order to capture the more general domain of occurrences. I
follow them and use “repair” in making explanation. One distinction in repair is drawn
between self-initiation of repair and other-initiation of repair, that is, repair initiated by the
speaker of the trouble source vs. repair initiated by anybody other than speaker of the trouble
source (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977). The other distinction is made between
self-repair and other-repair, that is, repair by the speaker of that which is being corrected vs,
repair by some other (Schegloff, et al. 1977). According to the researchers (1977), the
initiation of reparative segments and their completion can be quite different, and the one who
performs a repair is not necessarily the one who initiated the repair operation. Both
self-repair and other-repair can be arrived at from either of the exclusive types of repair
initiation. Accordingly, four types of repair can be supposed: (a) self-initiated self-repair,
(b) other-initiated self-repair, (c) self-initiated other-repair, and (d) other-initiated
other-repair.

In the previous studies of corrective feedback, a considerable amount of recent research has concerned recasts and prompts, which resulted in different outcomes across different settings (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Lyster & Izquierdo, 2009; Mackey, 2006; Sheen, 2007). Recasts, which are one type of other-initiated other-repair, are reformulation of learners’ nontarget utterances. Prompts, which are a type of other-initiated self-repair, provide signals that prompt learners to self-repair. They include clarification requests, repetition, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback. The followings are an example of each type of feedback.

1. Recasts:

Recasts involve the teacher’s reformulation of all or part of a student’s utterance, minus the error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Student: Why does the aliens attacked earth?
Teacher: Right. Why did the aliens attack earth

(Mackey, 2006, p. 413)

2. Clarification requests:

Clarification requests indicate to students that their utterance has been misunderstood or ill-formed, and that a repetition or a reformulation is required (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995). They include phrases such as “Pardon me” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Learner: Non è certo.
Is not certain.
Interlocutor: Certo?
Certain?
Learner: Um, oh, é abierto.
Um, oh is ‘abierto.’ (Spanish)
Interlocutor: *Abierto?*  *Aperto?*  
‘Abierto?’  Open?  
Learner: *Aperto, si.*  
Open, yes.  

(Mackey, 2007, pp. 13-14)

3. Repetition:  

Repetition means to repeat the student’s ill-formed utterance.  

Student: *Laguimauve, la chocolat.* [gender error]  
Marshmallow, chocolate (fem.).  
Teacher: *La chocolat?*  
Chocolat (fem.)?  

(Lyster & Mori, 2006, p. 272)

4. Elicitation:  

Elicitation refers to the techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the student (e.g., “Fill in the blank”, and “How do we say X in French?”).  

(Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 48).

Student: *Ben y a un jet de parfum qui sent pas très bon…*[lexical error]  
Well there’s a stream of perfume that doesn’t smell very nice…  
Teacher: *Alors un jet de parfum, on va appeler ça un…?*  
So a stream of perfume, we’ll call that a …?  

(Lyster & Mori, 2006, p. 272)

5. Metalinguistic feedback:  

Metalinguistic feedback contains either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student’s utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form.  
This type of feedback generally provides either some grammatical metalanguage that refers to the nature of the error or a word definition in the case of lexical errors.  
Metalinguistic questions also point to the nature of the error but attempt to elicit the information from the students (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).
Student: *Kuruma.* [lexical error]
A car.
Teacher: *Kuruma janai yo.*
(It’s not a car.

(Lyster & Mori, 2006, p. 272)

**Empirical Studies of Prompts and Recasts**

Among the studies which investigated recasts and prompts, the following three are noteworthy to compare the relative effectiveness of these two types of corrective feedback. Firstly, I report the study by Lyster and Izquierdo (2009). They (2009) researched the differential effects of prompts and recasts on the acquisition of grammatical gender by 25 undergraduate students who enrolled in an intermediate-level French course at an English-speaking university. The participants were exposed in class to a three-hour form-focused instructional treatment distributed over two weeks, and were then randomly placed in either the recast or prompt group. On two occasions outside of class, individual students participated in three different oral tasks during dyadic interaction with an instructor, and were provided with feedback in the form of either prompts or recasts. The researchers hypothesized that students receiving prompts would outperform those receiving recasts, because they were given the opportunities that prompts provide for a deeper level of processing that entails both retrieval and production mechanisms. Contrary to their hypothesis, the results showed both groups significantly improved accuracy, irrespective of feedback type. Lyster and Izquierdo (2009) concluded that learners receiving recasts had benefited from the repeated exposure to positive exemplars as well as from opportunities to infer negative evidence, while learners receiving prompts had benefited from the repeated
exposure to negative evidence as well as from opportunities to produce modified output.

A second considerable classroom study was conducted in classes in the English language program of a community college in the United States by Sheen (2007). The participants were intermediate level students. She compared the effects of recasts and a type of feedback which included correct forms and the explanation (e.g., “You should use the definite article ‘the’ because you’ve already mentioned ‘fox’”) on English articles. Participants who received the latter type of feedback significantly outperformed the recast and control groups, whereas the recast group did not perform significantly better than the control group. Sheen (2007) concluded “the more informative type of correction resulted in the acquisition of articles whereas simply providing learners with the correct form through recasts did not” (p. 318).

What is the most interesting is the research conducted by Ammar and Spada (2006). They compared prompts with recasts in form-focused instruction in three sixth-grade intensive ESL classrooms over a 4-week period. Participants received form-focused instruction which targeted third person possessive determiners in English, including controlled and communicative practice activities. During the practice activities, one class received feedback in the form of recasts, another received prompts, and the third received no feedback. Results showed that all three groups benefited from the form-focused instruction, and that the two feedback groups benefited the most, outperforming the control group on posttests. The group receiving prompts significantly outperformed the recasts group. What is more interesting in the study is that the effectiveness of recasts depended on the
learners’ proficiency. High-proficiency learners benefited equally from both prompts and recasts, while low-proficiency learners benefited significantly more from prompts than recasts. Ammar and Spada (2006) concluded that the effectiveness of any corrective feedback technique needed to be evaluated in relation to learners’ proficiency levels. This result agrees with a study in which Trofimovich, Ammar, and Gatbonton (2007) examined whether learners’ ability to notice and benefit from recasts depended on individual differences in learners’ working memory, phonological memory, analytical ability, and attention control. Trofimovich, et al. (2007) suggest “learners’ existing knowledge of a particular form or the state of their ‘readiness’ to acquire it (or perhaps both) enhance the usefulness of recasts for them” (p. 191). Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001) claim “recasts can be effective if the learner has already begun to use a particular linguistic feature and is in a position to choose between linguistic alternatives” (p. 752).

The Theoretical Perspectives on Prompts and Recasts

The theoretical perspectives on prompts. Lyster and Izquierdo (2009) state that the effectiveness of prompts has been related to the modified output they elicit. In the Output Hypothesis, Swain (1995) claims that one function of output is to promote noticing. Swain and Lapkin (1995) state the following: In the production of the target language, learners may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or know only partially; this may trigger cognitive processes which might develop linguistic knowledge that is new for learners, or consolidate their existing
knowledge. According to the Noticing Hypothesis by Schmidt (2001, p. 2), “SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be.” Schmidt (1990, p.144) also states “those who notice most learn most.” In sum, output through prompts is related to noticing, which leads to language acquisition.

There is a study which explored the relationships between prompts, noticing, and L2 acquisition. Mackey (2006) investigated the relationships between feedback (negotiation by a teacher and recasts), learners’ noticing of L2 form (questions, plurals, and past tense) during classroom interactions, and their subsequent L2 development. When interactional feedback was provided on L2 forms, participants reported noticing those forms more than when feedback was not provided. There was also a positive relationship between reports about noticing and L2 development for one of the forms on which learners received feedback: For questions, 83% of those who noticed learned; for plural forms, 50% of those who noticed learned; for past tense forms, the numbers were very low (20%). What is more interesting in this research is that participants’ reporting of noticing may be affected by interactional feedback type. Some grammatical forms (questions) were more often negotiated (e.g., clarification request, elicitation), while others (plurals and past tense) were more often recast. The learners reported noticing questions more than noticing plurals and past tense. This indicates that negotiation made by a teacher triggers noticing more than recasts.

*The theoretical perspectives on recasts.* By offering learners positive input about
their problematic production, recasts are hypothesized to create ideal opportunities for learners to notice the difference between their interlanguage forms and target like reformulations (Long 1996; Lyster & Izquierdo 2009; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007). Ellis and Sheen (2006), however, claim that it is true only in form-oriented classrooms. According to them (2006, p. 596), “it is impossible to say with any certainty whether recasts constitute a source of negative evidence (as is often assumed) or afford only positive evidence, as this will depend on the learner’s orientation to the interaction.” Even if recasts are provided for learners in form-focused instruction, where learners treat language as an object to be studied, the story is not so easy. From the research conducted by Mackey (2006), it can be predicted that recasts will require learners to pay more attention to the target structure than prompts so that they can notice the gap between the targetlike reformulations and the negative evidence. Moreover, whether students can benefit from recasts depends on individual differences (Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007). According to Ammar and Spada (2006), it is only learners whose proficiency is high that can benefit enough from recasts. In sum, the ability of learners to infer negative evidence from recasts by comparing them with their nontarget output may be related to the extent of learners’ knowledge of the targeted structure as well as the type of instruction.

Considering the evidence to show that various factors influence the function of recasts, it may be safer for teachers to choose prompts rather than recasts, irrespective of learners’ condition. However, teachers instruction can be more effective, if they
comprehend their student’ level or learning stage and make an appropriate choice between recasts and prompts, because recasts have an advantage, too. Recasts keep flow of an interaction segue, which can lead to a more efficient and effective lesson. This may be one reason why teachers prefer recasts to other types of feedback. A study that compared the frequency of recasts in communicative English shows that 55 % of all the feedback moves involved recasts (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). The other feedback types are distributed in decreasing frequency as follows: elicitation (14%), clarification request (11%), metalinguistic feedback (8%), explicit correction (7%), and repetition (5%). Lyster and Izquierdo (2009) suggest that teachers should not use only one type of feedback over another. Lyster (2007) claims teachers need “to orchestrate, in accordance with their students’ language abilities and content familiarity, a wide range of feedback types befitting of the instructional context” (p. 124). This suggestion motivates researchers to investigate the factors which produce different effects of recasts and prompts.

Research Questions

In order to investigate the relative effectiveness of prompts and recasts, according to learning stages, the present study investigates the following research questions:

1. Do prompts and recasts have a differential effect on the acquisition of English prepositions in the early stage?

2. Do prompts and recasts have a differential effect on the acquisition of English prepositions in the later stage?
Hypothesis

1. Prompts benefit learners more than recasts in the early stage.

2. Recasts benefit learners more than prompts in the later stage.

Methods

Participants

Students studying at Hawai’i English Language Program (HELP) of the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa (UHM) were asked to participate in the study. The mission of HELP is to provide English instruction for the students who have not enrolled in UHM yet, and to empower them to succeed at UHM and other higher educational institutions. It puts a heavily emphasis on English for Academic Purposes and TOEFL preparation. The four levels of study at HELP range from the lowest course which labels level 100 to the highest course which is level 400.

As this study needed participants who had a little knowledge of English prepositions, at first the students attending 100 level courses were solicited to participate in the research project, but there were no applicants. The 100 level students may have hesitated about participating in the project, firstly because they didn’t have confidence in grammatical structures, and secondly because they didn’t want to take the tests offered in this study. Next, the researcher asked the students attending 200 level courses to participate in the study, which resulted in four applicants. Table 1 provides a profile of the participants. Three participants were male and one was female, their average age was 21.3 years old, the average
length of their residence in the U.S. was about 3.8 months. They had been learning English for an average of almost 10.3 years, and had been learning English at HELP for an average of 7.3 weeks. Their L1s were Japanese and Korean. One of them had never taken TOEFL before the researcher offered the treatments, but the others had taken it at least once. Their score ranged from 460 to 537 on the Paper Based TOEFL Test, and their average score was 495. The participants’ scores were much higher than the researcher had expected. All of them reported that they had not been taught English prepositions very much before. They were much motivated to learn English prepositions.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Students (N = 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback type</th>
<th>Recasts</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in learning English</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in U.S</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in learning at HELP</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>12 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL score</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Participant 1 had never taken TOEFL before the feedback treatment sessions.

Materials

The targeted form was English prepositions. The reason why this grammatical structure was chosen was that (a) generally, explicit instruction is more effective with simple rules (Lowen & Navei, 2007), (b) it is possible for learners to acquire English prepositions in a relatively short time, and (c) this grammatical structure is easier to elicit in form-focused
tasks. Treatment time was so short that only twenty-two prepositions to express location were targeted in this study: *Above, across, among, against, along, around, at, between, behind, beside, down, for, from, in, into, on, opposite, over, through, to, under, up.*

The knowledge of English prepositions before the treatment was analyzed through a pre-test, and the effect of the communicative tasks was analyzed through post-test (1) and post-test (2). The questions were designed on the basis of actual task performance so that the researcher could measure the learning which occurs as a result of task involvement. Each test consisted of 40 questions. Out of forty, 30 questions were a cloze-test, and the remaining 10 were multiple-choice (Appendix A). To establish the validity of the tests, the researcher consulted the assistant director of HELP and modified the drafts. Learners’ responses were scored as either correct (1 point) or incorrect (0 point). To examine the consistency of the tests, Cronbach’s alpha was used. The reliability for the pre-test was 0.95, the reliability for the post-test (1) was 0.44, and the reliability for the post-test (2) was 0.50. A possible cause of the low reliabilities of the post-tests may be that the difference in score among the participants in each test was small. Actually, the standard deviations for the mean of each post-test was small (See Results section).

Interaction during the feedback treatment was administered through a one-way picture description task. Thirty pictures were offered to the participants, and they described every picture using English prepositions. During the treatment, the communicative tasks were audio-recorded with the consent of the participant.
Procedure

As there were no applicants to the project at the first elicitation, the original plan was modified from four sessions to two sessions, which forced the researcher to administer the pre-test and the communicative task (1) on the same day. As she could not divide the participants into prompts and recasts groups on the basis of the pre-test, the students were paired in two groups according to the information from the assistant director of HELP. In spite of this unexpected situation, the accurate information from the HELP assistant director made English proficiency level of each group equal at the beginning of the treatment.

On two occasions, individual students participated in communicative tasks during dyadic interaction with the researcher, and were provided with feedback in the form of either prompts or recasts. The tasks were designed to simultaneously expose the participants to all the target prepositions and to provide contexts where use of the prepositions was obligatory. In the tasks, participants received feedback from the researcher (teacher), whenever it was necessary. Soon after communicative task (1) and (2), the knowledge of the prepositions was tested through post-test (1) and post-test (2) respectively.

Between these two tasks, explicit instruction was offered to each participant by the researcher. She used a handout and explained the concept of each English preposition. During the instruction, the students freely asked her questions about preposition usage.

The schedule of the data collection was the following:

*Day 1*

1. Consent form, background information questionnaire [15 minutes]
2. Pre-test [15 minutes]

3. Communicative Task (1) [15 minutes]

4. Post-test (1) [15 minutes]

Day 2

1. Explicit explanation of the prepositions [30 minutes]

2. Communicative Task (2) [15 minutes]

3. Post-test (2) [15 minutes]

Analysis

1. The effect of prompts and recasts before explicit instruction was measured with scores which participants got on the pre-test and the post-test (1).

2. The effect of prompts and recasts after explicit instruction was measured with scores which participants got on the post-test (1) and the post-test (2).

Results

The audio recordings of the two feedback treatment sessions confirmed that the quantity of feedback was similar in prompts and recasts. As displayed in Table 2, participants in the recasts condition each received an average of 10.26 minutes of feedback in communicative task (1) and 4.32 minutes of feedback in communicative task (2), and participants in the prompts condition each received an average of 12.59 minutes of feedback in communicative task (1) and 3.75 minutes of feedback in communicative task (2). In
communicative task (1), the prompts group spent slightly more time on the task than the recasts group, because follow-up prompts were often used when the participants did not succeed in self-repair. On the other hand, in communicative task (2), the recasts group spent slightly more time on the task than the prompts group.

Table 2

*Feedback Treatment-time Means*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Communicative task (1)</th>
<th>Communicative task (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recasts group</td>
<td>Mean 10.26</td>
<td>Mean 4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 6.71</td>
<td>SD 1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompts group</td>
<td>Mean 12.59</td>
<td>Mean 3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 0.16</td>
<td>SD 0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Minutes

As for the pre- and post-tests, Table 3 displays the scores of each participant. On the pre-test, the participants had a mean of 22.5, and a standard deviation of 5.32. At the onset of the study, participant 2 had the most ability in English prepositions, while participant 1 had the poorest skills of the four. Participant 3 and 4 had the similar skills in the prepositions. Participant 1 and 2 were paired, and participant 3 and 4 belonged to the prompts group. On the post-test (1), the mean was 29.8, and a standard deviation was 3.69. The mean of the post-test (2) was 35.0, and a standard deviation was 0.82. All participants demonstrated improvement from the pre-test to the post-tests in their abilities to use appropriate English prepositions.
Table 3

*Individual Test Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test (1)</th>
<th>Post-test (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recasts group</strong></td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Maximum score = 40

The means and standard deviations resulting from the tests for each group across three testing times appear in Table 4 and are displayed graphically in Figure 1. The group means for the pre-test were 22.5, which indicated group equivalence at the onset of the study. Comparing the standard deviations of both groups on the pre-test, however, showed that they had very different characteristics: The recasts group had a standard deviation of 9.19, while the prompts group had a standard deviation of 0.71. As for the post-test (1), the recasts group outperformed the prompts group. On the post-test (2), the means of the two groups became the same again.

Table 4

*Test Means by Feedback Condition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test (1)</th>
<th>Post-test (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recasts group</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompts group</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Maximum score = 40
Next, to examine the effect of the two types of corrective feedback according to two learning stages, two kinds of scores were calculated: Post-test (1) minus pre-test, and post-test (2) minus post-test (1). The results are presented in Table 5 and Figure 2.

Between the pre-test and the post-test (1), the score of the recasts group increased more than the prompts group. The score of the recasts group increased by 9.5 points, while the score of the prompts group increased by 5.0 points. On the other hand, between the post-test (1) and the post-test (2), the prompts group score improved more than the recasts’. The score of the prompts group increased by 7.5 points, while the score of the recasts group increased by 3.0 points.
Table 5

Score Differences between the Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score difference</th>
<th>Recasts group</th>
<th>Prompts group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (1) minus pre-test</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test (2) minus post-test (1)</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2

Score Differences between the Tests

There was a difference in the means for post-test (1) between the recasts group and the prompts groups. Therefore, t-test was used to determine whether the difference was statistically significant. Independent-groups mean comparison was conducted to examine whether the difference of 4.5 points (32.0 points of the recasts group minus 27.5 points of the prompts group) was statistically significant. Table 6 summarizes the result of this analysis. The two group means missed being significant at $p < .05$. Therefore, it was possible that the observed difference of 4.5 points between the two means was due to chance alone.
The first research question investigated whether prompts and recasts had a differential effect on the acquisition of English prepositions in the early stage. The researcher’s hypothesis was that prompts benefit learners more than recasts in the early stage. The result was, however, opposite to the hypothesis. Between the pre-test and the post-test (1), the score of the recasts group increased more than the prompts group. The score of the recasts group increased by 9.5 points, while the score of the prompts group increased by 5.0 points. This result indicates that recasts benefit participants more than prompts in the early stage.

The researcher begins the discussion by asking what makes the recasts group outperform the prompts group in the early stage. Firstly, examination of sampling in the present research is necessary to understand why recasts benefited learners more than prompts in the early stage. Given the constraints the researcher faced in accessing an appropriate level of participants, the sample in the study may not have been eligible. Though the participants reported that they had not learned English prepositions much before, they seemed to have sufficient knowledge of English prepositions at the onset of the research. The students’ average paper-based TOEFL score was 495, which meant that their proficiency
in English was very high. This score is almost equivalent to the score with which international students can apply to undergraduate courses of UHM (a minimum score of 500). One of the participants reported that he had never taken TOEFL, but his learning setting in Japan was exceptional, because his mother was Filipino and had a good command of English. Though he did not say that his mother spoke English in her daily life, her existence seemed to have a significant impact on his English learning. In fact, he began to learn English at the age of five.

The participants’ much knowledge of English including prepositions seems to be one of the possible reasons why recasts benefited the recasts group more than prompts even in the early stage. There are many studies which show that it depends on individual differences whether students can benefit from recasts (Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007). Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001) claimed that recasts can work more effectively when the learner has already begun to use a particular linguistic feature and is in a position to choose between linguistic alternatives. In the present study, the participants’ much knowledge of the targeted form must have provided the recast group with the opportunities to notice the difference between their interlanguage forms and positive evidence. This process seems to have enabled the recasts group to acquire the target form easily.

Another possible reason is related to a form of instruction. As stated in the literature review section, recasts are hypothesized to create ideal opportunities for learners to notice the difference between their interlanguage forms and target like reformulations (Long
1996; Lyster & Izquierdo 2009; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007). It was also said that this was the case only in form-focused classrooms (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). Lyster and Izquierdo (2009) stated in form-oriented instruction, recasts can facilitate the encoding of new target representations by serving as exemplars of positive evidence. In the present study, feedback treatment was offered in the form-focused instruction. In the instruction, communicative tasks exposed the participants to all the target forms and provided them with contexts where the use of these forms was obligatory. Therefore, the recasts group must have greatly benefited from recasts even in the early stage.

The second research question was whether prompts and recasts have a differential effect on the acquisition of English prepositions in the later stage. The hypothesis was that recasts benefit learners more than prompts in the later stage. Again, the result was opposite to the hypothesis. Between the post-test (1) and the post-test (2), the prompts group score improved more than the recasts’. The score of the prompts group increased by 7.5 points, while the score of the recasts group increased by 3.0 points.

It is true that the score of the prompts group increased more than the recasts in the later stage, but the group means for post-test (2) were the same. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret the finding as prompts’ outperforming recasts in the later stage. The researcher discusses the problems related to the result in the later stage. There were two problems. One problem was the validity of the testing instrument. There was a ceiling effect on post-test (2), with the participants scoring around 35 points out of 40: Participant 1 got a score of 34, participant 2 a score of 36, and participant 3 and participant 4 a score of 35
points respectively. This result indicates the possibility that the participants’ knowledge exceeded what the post-test (2) could measure. If the level of the test had been valid enough to measure what recasts and prompts benefited each group in the later stage, the results might have been different.

The other problem is related to the target grammatical structure. Only the explicit instruction may have had effect on the participants’ acquisition in the later stage. The targeted form was the English prepositions to express location. One of the reasons why this grammatical structure was chosen was that explicit instruction was more effective with simple rules (Lowen & Navei, 2007). Another reason was that learners would acquire prepositions in a shorter time than any other grammatical form. As stated above, the participants’ proficiency in English was so high that they may have acquired all the targeted prepositions during the explicit instruction. In fact, in the second communicative task, feedback was hardly necessary for both groups. The sample did not include a control group that received instruction without any feedback treatment. Therefore, it may have been the case that the explicit instruction outweighed any potential impact that the second feedback session might have had and was even sufficient on its own to produce the gains made by all participants.

To sum up, the results indicate one interesting finding: In form-focused instruction, recasts benefit learners who have already had some knowledge of the targeted form, have already begun to use the linguistic feature, or is in a position to choose between linguistic alternatives. This agrees with the results of the studies conducted by Trofimovich, Ammar,
& Gatbonton (2007) and Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada (2001), however, further investigation is necessary to conclude that recasts benefit more than prompts in the later stage. Therefore, the researcher is asked to develop the present study and explore the effect of prompts and recasts according to learning stages again.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present research was to investigate the extent to which the effect of recasts and prompts was mediated by learning stages. For the study, the researcher measured the scores which participants got on the tests before and after the instruction. It was predicted that prompts would benefit learners more than recasts in the early stage, and that recasts would benefit learners more than prompts in the later stage. The results, however, were unexpected findings. As presented in the results section, the score of the recasts group increased more than the prompts group between the pre-test and the post-test (1). Between the post-test (1) and the post-test (2), the prompts group score improved more than the recasts group’s. When considering the characteristics of the participants, the result in the early stage may have been an expected one, because all of them had already been in the later stage at the onset of the study.

It is important to consider some of the limitations of the study. There were some points to improve in the methodology. In spite of the quantitative research, the sample size was too small. Another limitation is the participant characteristics. At the onset of the study, the participants had sufficient knowledge of English prepositions. In addition, the
length of the feedback treatment was so short, and the explicit instruction was offered only once. It would have been more desirable and interesting to have spent more time on the feedback treatment and the instruction of the targeted structure. Another limitation is the validity of the testing instrument. Finally, it should be stated that this research lacked a control group.

The present research was only a preliminary attempt to untangle one of the many factors determining the effectiveness of interactional feedback. It has a potential to contribute to an understanding of the differential effects of corrective feedback. As Mackey (2007) states, it is important to ascertain what it is about different types of feedback that makes them effective. The topic of the present study is one of the most important factors when teachers are planning the lessons. Therefore, the effectiveness of corrective feedback should be evaluated in relation to learning stages, too. There are many teachers who are addressing problems in classrooms or developing materials to motivate students. This topic should help such teachers to offer more effective instruction through interaction.
References


Appendix A

Pre-test

You have 15 minutes to complete this test.

Name: __________________________

1. Please choose one English preposition for each blank. Write your answers in the spaces.

1. The sun has risen ___________ the horizon.
2. The new bridge is ___________ construction. It will be complete next month.
4. The sun rises ___________ the east.
5. She fell ___________ a deep sleep.
6. The temperature dropped ___________ zero. The river froze over.
7. We waved to her in farewell until the ship went ___________ sight.
8. The thief got in ___________ the window.
9. The brass band marched ___________ a street.
10. A lamp hung ___________ the table.

above / along / among / at / below / for / in / into / on / out of / over / through / to / under

2. Please look at the pictures on pp. 3-4, and fill in the blanks with the right or correct English prepositions. Write your answers in the spaces. Each blank has only one word.

1. The dog is ___________ the box.
2. The dog is ___________ the box.
3. The dog is ___________ the boxes.
4. The box is ___________ the dogs.
5. The dog is ___________ the top of the ladder.
6. The dog is ___________ the middle of the room.
7. The teacher is ___________ the blackboard.
8. The dog is ___________ the box.
9. The dog is walking ___________ the street.
10. The dog goes ___________ Madrid.
11. The spider is ___________ the matchbox.
12. The pig is ___________ the tree.
13. The bird is ___________ the table.
14. The flowers are ___________ the vase.
15. The dog leans _________ the road sign.
16. The person goes _________ the tunnel.
17. The bridge is _________ the river.
18. The dog is _________ the second floor.
19. The dog came _________ Madrid.
20. The cat is _________ the chair.
21. The dog is swimming _________ the river.
22. The man is _________ front of the information office.
23. The dog goes _________ the ladder.
24. The dog goes _________ the ladder.
25. The boy jumped _________ the swimming pool.
26. The earth moves _________ the sun.
27. The plain is flying _________ the clouds.
28. The bus left Ala Moana _________ Waikiki.
29. The white dog is _________ the black dog.
30. My tent is next _________ the swimming pool.