Effects of Recasts on Child EFL Learners’ Development of Regular and Irregular Past Tense Forms

Ji Hyun Kim
(Keimyung University)


Recasts have been at the center of much discussion in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and a great deal of research has explored the effects of recasts on second language (L2) learning. However, there are still many issues and questions left to be answered. As a means of responding to these needs, the current study investigated the effectiveness of recasts in the accuracy development of child EFL learners in their use of past verb forms in English. The effectiveness of recasts was examined in relation to the type of past verbs (i.e., regular vs. irregular verbs) and the degree of explicitness of recasts (i.e., implicit recasts vs. explicit recasts). Six elementary school students participated in the study and data were collected through a time-series design for 6 weeks. The analyses of the data showed that recasts were effective in enhancing the learners’ accuracy in the use of both regular and irregular verbs. The learners benefited more from explicit recasts than implicit recasts in developing the accuracy of past verbs. However, improving the accuracy of regular verbs was more susceptible to explicit recasts than implicit recasts, while there was no significant difference in the gains of accuracy of irregular verbs in relation to the type of recasts.

I. INTRODUCTION

Recasts, a type of interactional corrective feedback, have been at the center of much discussion in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Recasts have been defined differently across studies, and this has often been pointed out as a problem that makes it challenging, sometimes even impossible, to compare the effects of recasts across studies (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). Despite of different operationalizations of recasts, three common properties can be recapitulated as follows: a recast is adjacent to an ill-formed utterance, reformulates it and retains its essential meanings (Han, 2007).
Indeed, these features of recasts account for the ways recasts are beneficial from a psycholinguistic perspective. First, recasts immediately follow the learner’s erroneous utterance and, by reformulating the utterance, provide a correct form of the utterance. In other words, the incorrect form (i.e., the learner’s initial erroneous utterance) is juxtaposed with the correct form (i.e., recasts), which allegedly leads the learner to compare the two forms and to find the contrast - noticing the gap (Long, 2007). Noticing the gap has been considered vital for L2 development (Schmidt, 1990, 2001, elsewhere). In addition, recasts retain the essential meanings of the learner’s initial utterance. This means that the learner already has prior comprehension of at least part, if not all, of the message and will understand all or part of the interlocutor’s recast. The fact that the learner has prior understanding of the message (i.e., meaning) may allow him/her to have “additional freed-up attentional resources which can be allocated to the form of the response” (Long, 2007, p. 78). In short, it has been argued that the learner’s attention may be easily drawn to the forms in the interlocutor’s recasts under the assumption that s/he has already processed the message for meaning (VanPatten, 1996, 2004).

Along with these psycholinguistic benefits, recasts are found pedagogically useful. Compared to other types of corrective feedback (e.g., explicit correction), recasts are non-obtrusive and are less likely to interrupt the flow of communication. Thus, recasts maintain the focus of meaning, which makes recasts well-suited to meaning-oriented interaction. In addition, recasts are pedagogically expeditious in that “A recast is time-saving, less threatening to student confidence” (Loewen & Philp, 2006, p. 537). This may give a good reason why teachers prefer recasts over other types of corrective feedback in many meaning-based classrooms (Long, 2007).

Such theoretical and pedagogical benefits of recasts have been tested out in many experimental studies. Many studies have compared recasts with other types of input (i.e., models) or interactional corrective feedback (i.e., prompts). They have resulted in considerable evidence that supports the facilitative role of recasts in L2 development over models (Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998). However, its effectiveness is largely constrained by factors such as learner developmental readiness (Mackey & Philp, 1998; Philp, 2003), working memory capacity (Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007), and target linguistic features (Ishida, 2004; Long et al., 1998). The studies that compared recasts to other types of feedback showed a mixed conclusion: some studies have found that recasts and prompts are equally beneficial, while others suggest learners take more benefits from prompts than recasts (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Lyster, 2004; Lyster & Izquierdo, 2009).

Reflecting a continuing interest in recasts, many studies have been conducted to date. However, we are still left with questions that need to be answered (Long, 2007). Due to space constraints, among many other issues, the issues directly related to the current
research will be listed here. One of these concerns the differential effects of recasts on linguistic features targeted by recasts. Although target linguistic feature has consistently been pointed out as a key factor that may decide the effectiveness of recasts (Long, 2007), this has not been tested out substantially through experiments. Second, a recent conception of recasts is that all recasts are not the same in their degree of explicitness (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Kim, 2011). In other words, recasts can become more explicit through external enhancement (i.e., the manner of provision of recasts). Thus, it is questionable that recasts will be more/less effective depending on their degree of explicitness. Third, as pointed out in SLA literature as a limitation, most recast studies employed a cross-sectional approach. This approach does not allow us to see how recasts would affect an individual learner’s interlanguage development over time (Long, 2007). Finally, while many studies focused on adult L2 learners, not much research has included child L2 learners.

Considering these existing gaps, the current study examined how recasts affect the development of regular and irregular past verb forms in English of six elementary school students for 6 weeks, employing a time-series design. The study also examines whether the effects of past tense learning will be different depending on the degree of explicitness of recasts. To this end, the current study will first review and discuss previous studies concerning the two main elements it aims to examine: target linguistic features and the degree of explicitness of recasts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Effects of Recasts in Relation to Target Linguistic Features

There has been a consensus that all grammar rules are not equal (Han, 2007). Researchers have classified grammar rules using several categorizations. One of the commonly employed categorizations is the degree of complexity (Pienemann, 1998). However, the foundation that has been used to distinguish complex and simple rules varies. Hulstijn and de Graaff (1994), for example, defined complexity as “the number of (and/or the type) of criteria to be applied in order to arrive in a correct form” (p. 103). For Dekeyser (1995), whether grammar rules were categorical (simple) or fuzzy and prototypical (complex) was a basis that distinguished the grammar rules. Robinson (1996) relied on the judgments of a number of “experts”. Another feature that has been considered is the level of perceptual salience of grammar rules in input. Perceptual salience of forms can be decided by their physical attributes such as their position in a word or sentence (e.g., sentence-medial position vs. sentence-initial or final) and their
syllabicity (e.g., syllabic vs. non-syllabic) (Han, 2007). Perceptual salience is also determined by whether the form is stressed or unstressed, contracted or un-contracted, or regular or irregular. Besides such physical attributes, semantic value of forms decided salience of a form (i.e., whether it is meaning-bearing or communicatively redundant, and semantically transparent or opaque) (Skehan, 1998).

Proving the different natures of each grammar rule, target linguistic features have constantly been reported as a crucial factor that constrains the effectiveness of recasts. However, the research on the differential effects of recasts in relation to different linguistic forms is as yet scarce, and in fact, began only quite recently. Here four studies are reviewed: Ellis (2007), Yang and Lyster (2010), Ishida (2004), and Song (2009).

Ellis (2007) compared the different effects of corrective feedback (i.e., recasts vs. metalinguistic feedback) on two grammatical targets: regular past tense –ed and comparative –er. Ellis selected these features based on the hypothesis that they were different in terms of learning difficulty. Considering grammatical domain, input frequency, learnability, explicit knowledge, scope, reliability, formal semantic redundancy, and experts’ opinion, Ellis hypothesized that past regular past tense would be easier to acquire than comparative. Two experimental groups received either recasts or metalinguistic feedback to their errors related to the target feature while they were involved in one hour communicative tasks. One control group took part in the tasks without receiving any corrective feedback on their errors. The results revealed that students who received metalinguistic feedback showed improvement in both features, but they showed more improvement on comparative than regular past tense forms. In contrast, the recast group did not show any significant improvement over the control group in both target features. Although this outcome is surprising when we consider a great deal of research that shows that intensive recasts are facilitative in L2 development (Han, 2002), it is, to some extent, expected. As Ellis attributed this difference to the salience of recasts (i.e., while recasts were given over several weeks in other studies, recasts were provided only for an hour in Ellis’ study), recasts were relatively more implicit than metalinguistic feedback. It has been known that explicit instruction is better in showing improvement in a short time although the duration of its effects is questionable (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Ellis’ study was not able to provide supportive evidence that shows the different effects of recasts in relation to different linguistic features, since recasts did not work for the both features. However, evidently, the study showed that corrective feedback did not work in the same manner across target linguistic features.

A similar, though not quite identical, finding is reported in Yang and Lyster (2010). They looked into differential effects of different corrective feedback (recasts vs. prompts) in relation to two grammar forms: regular and irregular past tense forms. Seventy-two
students enrolled in three intact EFL classrooms at the university level participated in the study. Students in the recast group and the prompt group received either recasts or prompts in responses to errors in past tense while they were engaged in form-focused production activities, whereas students in the control group only received reaction to content. The treatment sessions were given for approximately two hours over a period of two weeks. The analyses of pretests, posttests, and delayed posttests revealed that both recasts and prompts were overall beneficial although the effects of prompts were larger than those of recasts. When differential effects of feedback in relation to regular and irregular past forms were examined, it was found that prompts were more effective in increasing accuracy in the use of regular past tense forms, whereas prompts and recasts were equally effective in improving accuracy in the use of irregular past tense form.

Yang and Lyster (2010) attributed this result to the different level of salience of the target forms: “recasts of irregular past tense forms were likely more noticeable than recasts of regular forms, due to the greater saliency of the irregular forms” (p. 258). In contrast, since prompts employed in the study were provided in a more explicit way than recasts, the students were able to notice prompts in response to regular past forms as much as they did in response to irregular past forms.

While the aforementioned studies compared the relative effects of two different types of corrective feedback in relation to different target features, Ishida (2004) focused on the relative effects of recasts on the Japanese aspectual form -te i-(ru) which conveys four different meanings: progressive, resultative, habitual, and perfect, using a time-series design. Four adult learners of Japanese participated in 8 conversational sessions. Recasts were not provided during the first two sessions, and the learners’ performances during this period served as pretest data. During the middle four sessions, recasts were provided for learners’ errors including ones on -te i-(ru). During the last two sessions, recasts were again withdrawn. The learners’ performances during this period were considered immediate posttest. Seven weeks later, two learners out of four participated in a delayed-posttest session. Overall, recasts were found effective in developing the learners’ accurate use of the aspectual form -te i-(ru). However, when a detail analysis was conducted to compare the learners’ acquisition of different aspects of -te i-(ru), the progressive use of -te i-(ru) was less accurate than the resultative use although frequent input of the progressive use was provided during the conversational sessions. Ishida explained such finding: “Difficulty in developing the progressive use of -te i-(ru) despite a relatively large number of recasts could be attributed to the difficulty in applying the -te i-(ru) form of a verb to various meanings of the progressive aspect” (p. 374).

Song (2009), employing the same research design as Ishida (2004), examined the effects of recasts on L2 development on four grammatical morphemes: past tense regular,
past tense irregular, third person singular -s, and plural -s. Two adult Korean learners of English participated in thirty one-on-one conversation sessions with a researcher over a period of one year. Intensive recasts were provided during the intervention period (i.e., sessions 9 through 22). Recasts were provided to the errors in response to the target features and other forms. The comparisons were made among the learners’ accurate use of the target forms during pre- and post intervention periods. Overall, Song provided evidence that recasts were effective in the development of four grammatical morphemes. However, the effects of recasts on the learners’ development of plural -s were smaller than ones on the other three features. Both Ishida’s and Song’s studies revealed recasts worked for some linguistic targets better than others (Long, 2007).

2. The Degree of Explicitness of Recasts

Recasts have been considered a type of implicit corrective feedback. It is true that compared to other types of explicit error correction recasts are implicit since recasts do not directly indicate that errors have occurred. However, researchers argue that all recasts are not the same in their degree of implicitness/explicitness, and they can lie at various points on a continuum of implicitness/explicitness depending on “discourse context, instructional setting, and learner orientation as well as formal characteristics such as linguistic targets, length, and number of changes” (Lyster & Saito, 2010, p. 268). The degree of explicitness of recasts is discussed based on learners’ noticing of recasts. Learner noticing of recasts has mainly been measured via two different ways. The most common way to measure is to examine learner immediate responses (i.e., uptake) to recasts on the premise that learner response is an indication of learner noticing (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). The other way takes a more direct approach by documenting how learners recognize or perceive recasts via verbal reports such as stimulated recall (Egi, 2007; Kim & Han, 2007).

The studies that investigated learner noticing of recasts resulted in the following outcomes. First, recasts provided in a dyadic interaction are more noticeable than ones in the classroom since more individualized attention is given in the former context than in the latter. In addition, learners are more likely to notice recasts as correction in language classrooms than in content-based classrooms since the primary instructional focus in the former setting is on the language; on the other hand, the main focus of the latter setting is on the content such as history and mathematics (Lyster & Mori, 2006). Learners who are oriented to language forms are more sensitive to feedback than those who are not, so they are more likely to perceive recasts. Besides these factors, researchers investigated the formal characteristics which seem to enhance learner noticing of recasts. Studies reveal that a shorter recast (e.g., partial recasts or isolated form) or one that involves
fewer changes may be more explicit than a longer one or one that has multiple changes. Recasts with prosodic stress on the corrected form may be more explicit than one without the stress (Kim, 2009; Loewen & Philp, 2006; Sheen, 2006).

The understanding that recasts differ in their degree of explicitness is crucial in deciding the effectiveness of recasts as a means of L2 instruction since the extent of explicitness is closely related to the notion of explicit and implicit instruction. The issue surrounding the explicit and implicit instruction of L2 has been a thorny topic discussed in the field of SLA (Ellis et al., 2006). Researchers have compared the effectiveness of implicit and explicit instruction on simple and complex grammar rules. The different operationalizations of ‘implicit/explicit instruction’ and ‘simple/complex rules’ and measures across studies make it difficult to compare the outcomes from the studies (Norris & Ortega, 2000). Nevertheless, acknowledging the needs for a cautious synthesis of the results, Ellis (2007) suggests a tentative list of conclusions: a) Simple rules are more amenable to explicit instruction. But, it may be due to the fact that “testing instruments only provided measures of explicit knowledge” (p. 341); b) Complex rules have a mixed picture. Some studies found explicit instruction to be more effective and others found the opposite result; c) When implicit knowledge was measured through oral task, no difference was found (Scott, 1989). Ellis’ list provides us a brief summary of the previous research findings regarding explicit/implicit instruction and, at the same time, it also tells us that the issue surrounding explicit/implicit instruction still remains unsolved. Of particular interest to the current study is whether or not the degree of explicitness of recasts influences L2 learning. A dispute over the effectiveness of implicit and explicit corrective feedback has been made (Ellis et al., 2006). However, research into the relative effects of recasts in relation to degree of explicitness is as yet scarce, although its necessity has been pointed out.

Taken all together, the relative effects of recasts in relation to a) the nature of targeted features and b) the degree of explicitness have recently received great attention in the field of SLA. However, the amount of research that actually seeks out these matters is very limited. Acknowledging the gap in the field, the current study aims to examine the relative effects of recasts in relation to their degree of explicitness and the nature of targeted features. In addition, knowing that most L2 studies on recasts targeted adult learners, the study investigates the effects of recasts on young EFL learners’ accuracy development over time by employing a time-series design. The research questions are below.

1) Are recasts effective in improving learners’ accurate use of English past tense form?
2) If so, is the effectiveness different depending on the forms – regular vs. irregular past tense forms?
3) Is the degree of explicitness of recasts related to the improvement of learners’ accurate use of past tense forms? If so, is the effectiveness different depending on the forms?

III. METHOD

The current study employed a time-series design (Mellow, Reeder, & Forster, 1996), which is frequently used with small groups of participants. A time-series design involves repeated observation throughout three periods – pre-treatment, treatment, and post-treatment periods. Before the treatment period, a set of observations is made to establish a baseline. Then, the repeated treatments are provided. Following the treatment period, further observations are made to ascertain the effects of the treatment. In addition, since a time-series design not only includes multiple treatment sessions but also consists of several pre- and post-treatment sessions, it allows us to document how the treatments affect a learner’s progress over time. Furthermore, in the experiment with a time-series design, an individual learner’s performance is a focus rather than comparing two or more groups, having a control group is not a necessary condition (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Mackey and Gass (2005) summarize the merits of a time-series design: “a time-series design can overcome some of the problems typical in second language research, in which there can be both small numbers and noncomparability of individuals at the outset. It also reduces some of the problems inherent in research that does not utilize a control group” (p. 155). In the current study, data from the first two sessions out of eight sessions served as pretests, and then they were compared to those from four subsequent treatment sessions and those from two final sessions that served as posttests.

1. Target Features

Past tense forms were selected as the target features of the current study for the following reasons. First, although the past tense is introduced early on in most English textbooks, it has been found that many learners of English have difficulties achieving complete command of the features (Ellis et al., 2006). Especially, in a communicative context, the past tense morpheme -ed has been known to be problematic for learners even when they have knowledge of this form (e.g., Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2002). In addition, past tense forms are comprised of regular and irregular forms. Regular verbs require rule-based learning while irregular verbs require item-based learning (Skehan, 1998). In other words, although the forms deliver the same meaning (i.e., past events), they are different in their acquisitional processes (Ellis, 2005). For this reason, the
investigation of the effectiveness of recasts on the improvement of past tense forms allows us to examine how recasts affect two different linguistic features in nature.

2. Participants

Six 4th grade students (4 girls and 2 boys) participated in the study. At the time of data collection, they all attended the same level of English class in a private English institute in Korea. They were selected after two observations of the class considering the following two main reasons: since the current study included conversational tasks, a certain degree of speaking ability was required. In addition, it was important to include participants who demonstrated their ability to use past tense forms although they did not fully acquire the control over the forms. The six children all met these conditions. When they were asked to participate in the study, all of them were willing to participate and their parents also gave consent for their participation.

The class they were attending in the private English Institute was taught by one female native speaking English teacher from Canada. The class consisted of 12 children. It met three times a week for 90 minutes. The class primarily focused on improving speaking and listening skills. Many different types of classroom activities were employed (e.g., reading short stories, games, and working on a group project).

Two native English speaking teachers participated in the study. One was the teacher who taught the class, and the other was a teacher in the same private institute. Both teachers were familiar with recasts, but specific instruction was given, especially, about the difference between implicit and more explicit types of recasts. After that, they practiced recasts with the researcher and with each other.

3. Feedback Treatment

Recasts were provided in two different ways: implicit and explicit recasts. The operationalizations of each recast and the examples taken from the data of the current study are as follows.

1) Implicit recasts

Implicit recasts were operationalized as recasts which reformulated the error within its larger context with no additional intonational or verbal signals to highlight the error.

Example 1
S: The bird want water.
T: The bird wanted some water?
S: Yes, the bird… hmm… thirsty?

2) Explicit recasts

Explicit recasts were operationalized as recasts which isolated the error and reformulated it outside the context. In order to prevent learners from interpreting recasts as a confirmation, a raising intonation was not used.

Example 2
S: John look around.
T: Looked around.
S: Looked… around.

4. Procedures

The learners were divided into two groups – 3 learners in the Explicit Group (EG) and 3 learners in the Implicit Group (IG). Each learner participated two times a week in a 45 minute one-on-one conversation with an English speaking interlocutor. While a total of eight sessions were offered for one month, recasts were not provided during the first two sessions (a pre-treatment period). Recasts were provided for erroneous utterances including past tense forms during the next four sessions (a treatment period) in an either implicit or explicit way. Other types of interactional feedback such as clarification requests were also provided when it was necessary to confirm the meaning of the message the learners were trying to convey. However, errors on grammatical items were only treated by recasts. Recasts were again withdrawn during the last two sessions (a post-treatment period). The first two sessions served as equivalent to pretests, and the last two sessions served as equivalent to posttests. In addition, two weeks after the eight sessions, the six learners participated in another conversation session that served as a delayed posttest.

In each conversation session, the learners were engaged in two tasks. First, the learners received a short story of a past event (e.g., Asian folktales). They were given five minutes to read silently and were allowed to ask about unknown vocabularies. Then, they were told to report what they had read to the teacher. To assist the learners in retelling the story, they were given a series of word cues that included all content words as well as verbs in their base form and adverbial phrases that indicated past time referent (e.g., once upon a time). In order to minimize the effects input frequency possibly played on the learning of regular and irregular past tense forms, the number of types of
regular and irregular forms included in each story was controlled by modifying the original stories. With this effort, the difference in the number of regular and irregular past forms used in each story was minimized.

The second task was to make a story of a series of pictures. The learners received two sets of pictures. Each set consisted of 8 strips that depicted past events, which were arranged in order. The teachers had the same pictures but they were not in order. The learners were told to explain the pictures to the teacher to help her rearrange the pictures in a correct sequence. All content words and verbs (base forms) were given to help learners describe the pictures. The number of regular and irregular forms used in Task 1 and Task 2 are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>The Number of Past Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two weeks after the last session, each learner participated in the delayed posttest. In the test, the 20 verbs (10 regular and 10 irregular verbs) that most received recasts were chosen. Two sets of thirty cards were prepared - one for the learner and the other for the teacher. The cards which were given to the teacher included 30 questions. Twenty cards out of thirty included the questions about an action in the past, using the selected 20 verbs (e.g., Did John use a red pencil to draw a picture last night?). On the learners’ cards, the direction about whether or not the learner was expected to answer affirmatively (“Yes”) or negatively (“No”) was provided. Some extra information was provided if necessary (i.e., In the case of ‘No’, further information was included). After listening to the teacher’s question, the students were expected to answer, using the information (Yes, or No and other information) on their card. For instance, on the corresponding cards to the teacher’s question “Did John use a red pencil to draw a picture last night?”, “No” and “a blue pencil” were given. The learners were asked to make complete sentence to answer the question using the information (e.g., “No, he used a blue pencil”). The other ten questions were not about the past event and they were employed as distractors (i.e., What does John like?). The learners’ answers to the past event were used for data analyses.
5. Measures

In measuring the learners’ improvement in the use of past tense, target-like use (TLU) analysis (Pica, 1983) was employed. TLU has widely been used to measure the overall accuracy level in many previous studies (e.g., Ishida, 2004; Jang & Kim, 2011; Pica, 1983; Song, 2009). TLU is formulated as follows:

$$\text{TLU} = \frac{n \text{ of correct use} \times 100}{n \text{ of obligatory contexts} + n \text{ of overuse}}$$

In addition to TLU, a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVR) was utilized to compare the mean TLU in the pretest, treatment, posttest, and delayed posttest periods. ANOVR was chosen because the same participants were measured more than one time (Larson-Hall, 2010).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Effects of Recasts on Improving Learners’ Accurate Use of English Past Tense Form

The first research question asked whether or not recasting treatment triggered accuracy in the learners’ overall use of English past tense. First, individual learners’ TLU were counted and are presented in Table 2. As the Table shows, all of the six learners improved in the accuracy of the use of past tense verbs over the eight sessions. The TLU of students B, C, D, E in the delayed posttest were a bit lower than one observed in the last session, but the scores were much higher than those observed in the pretests.

In order to see an overall picture of the progress, the mean of TLU in each period was calculated as shown in Table 3. It showed that all of the learners improved their accuracy in the use of past tense verbs. Particularly, even after the recasts were withdrawn on sessions 7 and 8, TLU still improved, which indicated that the students were still able to control their use of the past verb forms even when recasts were not provided. Moreover, except student B, all learners’ TLU in the delayed posttest were higher than the mean of TLU in the post-intervention period. This suggests the effects of recasts were sustained even two weeks after the last session of the treatment. The results of ANOVR confirmed the significant improvement: the F value for this analysis was 75.94 (df = 3), the main effects were found to be significant at the p < .05 level. Eta-squared was .95, and the
Effects of Recasts on Child EFL Learners’ Development of Regular and Irregular Past Tense Forms

power was 1.00.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Delayed posttest</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I &amp; 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(12/34)</td>
<td>(16/32)</td>
<td>(15/34)</td>
<td>(14/30)</td>
<td>(15/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>44.12</td>
<td>46.67</td>
<td>46.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(13/34)</td>
<td>(14/32)</td>
<td>(16/34)</td>
<td>(15/30)</td>
<td>(16/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>38.24</td>
<td>43.75</td>
<td>47.06</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(12/34)</td>
<td>(11/32)</td>
<td>(13/34)</td>
<td>(13/30)</td>
<td>(12/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>34.38</td>
<td>38.24</td>
<td>43.33</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(12/34)</td>
<td>(13/32)</td>
<td>(13/34)</td>
<td>(16/34)</td>
<td>(17/30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>43.75</td>
<td>47.06</td>
<td>56.67</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(12/34)</td>
<td>(13/32)</td>
<td>(13/34)</td>
<td>(16/30)</td>
<td>(18/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>43.75</td>
<td>38.24</td>
<td>53.33</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(12/34)</td>
<td>(13/32)</td>
<td>(15/34)</td>
<td>(17/30)</td>
<td>(15/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>40.63</td>
<td>44.12</td>
<td>56.67</td>
<td>46.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>(12/34)</td>
<td>(13/32)</td>
<td>(15/34)</td>
<td>(17/30)</td>
<td>(15/32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>35.78</td>
<td>42.71</td>
<td>43.14</td>
<td>51.11</td>
<td>47.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: numbers in parentheses are raw scores)

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest Sessions 1 and 2</th>
<th>Treatment Sessions 3-6</th>
<th>Posttest Sessions 7 and 8</th>
<th>Delayed posttest Session 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>42.65</td>
<td>47.30</td>
<td>48.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>40.99</td>
<td>51.92</td>
<td>59.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>41.13</td>
<td>45.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>39.52</td>
<td>53.58</td>
<td>63.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>39.52</td>
<td>52.08</td>
<td>62.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>37.96</td>
<td>52.07</td>
<td>54.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>39.25</td>
<td>49.68</td>
<td>56.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The improvement exhibited in the current study corroborated the results from the research that showed a positive role of recasts in the development of past tense. For
example, Doughty and Varela (1998) examined whether recast treatments in a theme-based ESL class were effective in the development of past time reference. They reported that the learners who received recasts showed large and statistically significant improvement compared to those who did not receive recasts. Han (2002) also reported a similar result in her research into the positive role of recasts in triggering the accuracy in tense consistency. Although Han did not particularly focus on the past tense, many errors which elicited recasts were related to past verb forms. Jang and Kim’s (2011) research also reported a positive effect of recasts on past tense verbs in their study with two Korean middle school students learning English.

2. The Different Effectiveness of Recasts on the Development of Regular and Irregular Verbs

For the purpose of examining whether the effects of recasts on improving accuracy differed in the use of regular and irregular verbs, TLU of regular and irregular verbs were separately counted as in Table 4 and Table 5. Figure 1 also showed the changes of the mean of TLU of regular and irregular past tense verbs in each period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
<th>The Mean of TLU in Each Period: Regular Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest Sessions 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>42.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>32.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>39.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>40.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 5
The Mean of TLU in Each Period: Irregular Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest Sessions 1 and 2</th>
<th>Treatment Sessions 3-6</th>
<th>Posttest Sessions 7 and 8</th>
<th>Delayed posttest Session 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>42.50</td>
<td>50.75</td>
<td>52.78</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>49.53</td>
<td>61.11</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>36.95</td>
<td>45.33</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>39.72</td>
<td>52.47</td>
<td>63.89</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>39.72</td>
<td>50.84</td>
<td>58.34</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>36.95</td>
<td>53.94</td>
<td>52.78</td>
<td>60.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>38.38</td>
<td>50.47</td>
<td>56.48</td>
<td>56.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 1
Mean of TLU in Each Period

As in Table 4, Table 5, and Figure 1, the learners showed improvement in both types. In order to investigate whether the degree of effectiveness differed depending on the verb types over the periods, ANOVA was employed. The F value for the analysis was .662 (df = 3) and the main effects were not found to be significant at the p < .05 level. Eta-squared was .14, and the power was .15, which indicated that the verb types – regular vs. irregular – did not differently have an impact on the effectiveness of recasts. In other words, regardless of the very type, recasts had a positive impact on improving learners’ accuracy.

The result of the current study was not consistent with Yang and Lyster (2010). They
found that recasts resulted in significant gains in the use of irregular past tense but no significant gains in the use of regular past tense. However, Yang and Lyster’s study is not comparable with the present study in three main aspects. First, while a teacher provided recasts during student-student interaction during pair and group works in Yang and Lyster, the teachers provided recasts while they were interacting with the learners on a one-on-one basis in the current research. For this reason, the learners in the current study might have attended more to recasts than those who were in Yang and Lyster (Han, 2002), perhaps bringing about the different result. In addition, it was not clearly noted what types of recasts were provided in Yang and Lyster. As mentioned earlier, since the way recasts are provided can affect the effectiveness of recasts (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Kim, 2009), it seems difficult to compare the results from Yang and Lyster and the current study. More importantly, Yang and Lyster’s participants were university students while the learners in this study were elementary school students. The different results might be attributed to this age difference (Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003).

With regard to the age of participants, Jang and Kim’s (2011) research seems more comparable with the current study. They also looked into whether recasts affected the improvement of regular and irregular verbs differently and two middle school English learners participated in the study. Since no inferential statistical analysis was performed in Jang and Kim, it was difficult to claim a statistically significant difference on the improvement. However, calculating the difference between the mean of pretests and posttests revealed that the both participants showed greater increase in use of regular verbs than in irregular verbs. However, as Jang and Kim (2011) cautioned, the results need to be carefully interpreted considering that the learners’ uses of both past tense forms were quite different even before the intervention occurred. This made their initial developmental stages asymmetrical for regular and irregular past tense forms: one student’s mean TLU for regular verb was 43.78 and irregular verb was 72.01; the other student’s mean was 14.55 and 52.62 respectively. As the mean scores showed, in the case of irregular verbs, since the learners already achieved a high accuracy level, there seemed to be less room for improvement compared to regular verbs. Considering this condition, Jang and Kim were reluctant to claim that recasts worked better for regular past verbs. Instead, they focused on the consistency of accuracy based on the scores of standard deviation (SD). They found that the learners showed more consistent use of irregular verbs. A similar result was found in the current study as Table 4 and 5 present.

3. Differential Effects of Explicit vs. Implicit Recasts

In order to investigate the effects on the degree of explicitness of recasts, the TLU in each period was calculated according to the type of recasts as presented in Table 6. Table
6 and Figure 2 show that overall the learners who received explicit recasts showed
greater improvement than those who received implicit recasts. This difference was
confirmed by ANOVA: The F value for the analysis was 11.21 (df = 3) and the main
effects were found to be significant at the p < .05 level. Eta-squared was .73, and the
power was .99. This result is congruent with previous research which showed the
effectiveness of explicit instruction/corrective feedback over implicit one (Ellis et al.,
2006; Norris & Ortega, 2000). However, it is still challenging to determine whether or
not explicit instruction fares better than implicit instruction in L2 learning since the
effectiveness of instruction is constrained by many factors including the nature of
linguistic features (Han, 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Delayed posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sessions 1 and 2</td>
<td>Sessions 3-6</td>
<td>Sessions 7 and 8</td>
<td>Session 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>42.65</td>
<td>47.30</td>
<td>48.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recasts</td>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>40.99</td>
<td>51.92</td>
<td>59.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>41.13</td>
<td>45.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.49</td>
<td>46.78</td>
<td>51.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>7.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>39.52</td>
<td>53.58</td>
<td>63.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recasts</td>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>39.52</td>
<td>52.08</td>
<td>62.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>37.96</td>
<td>52.07</td>
<td>54.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.00</td>
<td>52.58</td>
<td>60.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus, for the purpose of investigating the different effects of recasts on improving accuracy in the use of regular and irregular verbs in relation to the degree of explicitness of recasts, the accuracy level of the two verb types was considered separately. As Figure 3 shows, in the case of regular verbs, explicit recasts triggered the increase of accuracy level far more than implicit recasts. This was confirmed by ANOVA: the F value for the analysis was 15.562 (df = 3) and the main effects were found to be significant at the p < .05 level. Eta-squared was .80, and the power was .99. In the case of irregular verb, Figure 4 shows that explicit recasts resulted in more improvement than implicit recasts. However, the difference was not statistically significant: the F value for the analysis was .602 (df = 3) and the main effects were not found to be significant at the p < .05 level. Eta-squared was .13, and the power was .14. In other words, the degree of explicitness of recasts was a significant factor in the improvement for regular past verbs while it was not for irregular past verbs.
Effects of Recasts on Child EFL Learners' Development of Regular and Irregular Past Tense Forms 21

FIGURE 3
TLU of Regular Verbs in Relation to Explicit vs. Implicit Recasts

FIGURE 4
TLU of Irregular Verbs in Relation to Explicit vs. Implicit Recasts

This result can be explained by two main aspects. First, as noted earlier, regular verbs require rules-based learning while irregular verbs entail item-based learning (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Skehan, 1998). Rule-based learning interprets development as the restructuring of interlanguage, which often takes place as a result of the perceived gap between current knowledge and L2 knowledge (Schmidt, 2001; Skehan, 1998). The recasts provided in the same ways where the explicit recasts were employed in the current study have been found to be effective in triggering learner recognition of the gap (Kim & Han, 2007; Loewen & Philp, 2006). As a result, it seems that the accuracy of the use of regular verbs was enhanced further through the explicit recasts than the implicit
recasts in the present study. As opposed to regular verbs, irregular verbs require item-based learning which is more concerned with the accumulation of items or exemplars. Thus, the acquisition of the irregular verb is more significantly affected by its frequency in input (Salaberry, 2000). In the current study, regardless of the degree of explicitness of recasts, the frequent encounter of the correct form in the form of recasts during the interaction might boost the learners’ accurate use of irregular verbs.

In addition to the different acquisition mechanism required for regular and irregular verbs, the different level of phonological salience inherent in both forms might have affected the result. In the case of regular verbs, the grammatical morpheme ‘-ed’ added to the end of base verb is allophone pronounced as /-d/, /v/, or /id/, which are unlikely to be salient in the input. In contrast, the change in irregular verbs is more perceptible. For this reason, explicit recasts seem more appropriate than implicit recasts to help learners recognize regular past verb forms in the input (Dekeyser, 2005).

V. CONCLUSION

The present study has the goal of filling a gap in recast research by investigating how child EFL learners developed their L2 through recasts, and how the effectiveness of recasts differed depending on the target linguistic features and the degree of explicitness of recasts. The data collected using a time-series design showed that the learners benefited from recasts in enhancing the accuracy of their use of both regular and irregular past verb forms over time. With regard to the extent of explicitness of recasts, explicit recasts fared better than implicit recasts. It was also found that learners benefited more from explicit recasts for the improvement of regular verbs than from implicit recasts. However, in terms of the development of irregular verbs, there was no significant difference in the learners’ gains from explicit and implicit recasts.

That recasts could contribute to children’s L2 development in past verbs seems encouraging for educators teaching children because recasts, unlike other corrective feedback, are frequently used in child L2 learning (Mackey et al., 2003; Oliver, 2000). Furthermore, considering that target features are known to be notoriously problematic for L2 learners, employing recasts as instructional tools seems promising. It can also be suggested that, given the fact that regular verbs benefited more from explicit recasts, rule-based linguistic features may be more susceptible to explicit instruction.

Consequently, the current research contributes to the field of SLA by examining the issues that have been pointed out in previous recast research. However, the study also suffers significant limitations. For instance, like other laboratory research, the results of the current study may not be as successfully applied in the classroom context where
recasts are less likely to be given on a teacher-student one-on-one basis and where recasts target multiple types of errors. Such different contextual factors may affect the effectiveness of recasts (Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001). In addition, it is difficult to conclude that recasts work as well for the development of other grammatical forms as they do for the past verb forms. It would be worth conducting further research to explore the role of recasts in developing many different linguistic forms in relation to their complexity and L1-L2 contrast (Dekeyser, 2005).

REFERENCES


Effects of Recasts on Child EFL Learners’ Development of Regular and Irregular Past Tense Forms


Modern Language Journal, 73, 14-22.

Applicable levels: Child EFL
Key words: Recasts, improvement of accurate use of past tense in English, the degree of explicitness of recasts

Ji Hyun Kim
Dept. of English Education
Keimyung University
2800, Dalgubeodaero, Dalseo-Gu,
Daegu, 704-701, Korea
Tel: (053) 580-5136
Fax: (053) 580-5315
Email: jhk2024@kmu.ac.kr

Received in March, 2012
Reviewed in April, 2012
Revised version received in May, 2012