Task-induced Content-familiarity, Task-driven Attention to Form, and Learner Uptake of Recasts: A Preliminary Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

Recent SLA research has found that recasts on morphosyntactic features are more effective in form-focused classrooms than in meaning-based classrooms. Based on this understanding, it is hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between the effectiveness of recasts on morphosyntactic features and the amount of attention learners pay to form. This paper reports on a preliminary study that tests this hypothesis through administering a sequence of communicative tasks, designed to promote different degrees of attention to form and meaning. The tasks differed as to (a) the extent of learners' familiarity with task content and (b) the intrinsic capacity of the task to draw attention to form. The study observed both learners' uptake and perception of recasts through the tasks. The data collected consisted of transcripts of the participants' task-based interactions and stimulated recall sessions. The results show that both the amount of uptake after recasts and the accurate perception of recasts are positively correlated with the amount of attention learners devote to form during task-based interaction. The preliminary study, therefore, suggests that learners' familiarity with task content along with the intrinsic capacity of a task to promote attention to form can increase the effectiveness of form-focused recasts.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research on the role of conversational interaction in second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that interaction can provide both the input and output conditions facilitative of second language development. Long (1996) argues that the linguistic modifications that occur during interactions can provide learners with the comprehensible input they need. In addition, negotiation, which can occur through interaction, elicits negative feedback that can induce learners' noticing of forms for which comprehensible input is not sufficient. Also, interaction gives ample opportunity for production, which, according to Swain (1995), is also necessary for gaining control over linguistic forms.

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The facilitative role played by interaction in SLA has also aroused researchers' interest in communicative tasks. In a classroom environment, research has shown that tasks can engage learners in meaningful interaction, and that through these interactions negotiation can occur (see Long, 1996; Pica, 1994). Moreover, the negotiation work triggered by tasks may elicit negative feedback, which can turn learners' attention to the mismatches between input and output; in other words, such feedback might draw students' attention to form. This paper focuses on one such kind of feedback (McDonough & Mackey, 2000): the recast, which is defined in the literature (e.g., Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001) as "the teacher's correct restatement of a learner's incorrectly formed utterance" (p. 720).

The goal of this preliminary study is to explore whether learners' familiarity with task content and the intrinsic nature of a task can impact the noticing of recasts provided in response to morphosyntactic errors. As background for the present study, I first examine some recent research on recasts, with special emphasis on recasts provided in response to morphosyntactic features. Then I will review some relevant studies on communicative tasks, focusing on how learners' familiarity with task content and the intrinsic nature of the communicative task affect to what extent learners pay attention to form.

Recasts

Recent studies on recasts have demonstrated that recasts can enhance SLA. Doughty (1994), in a classroom-based study of beginner-level university students of French, found that among the three most frequent feedback types, repetition, clarification requests and recast, recast was most likely to result in learner repetition. Richardson's (1993) pilot study of native speaker (NS) – non-native speaker (NNS) dyads produced very similar results: He observed that repetitions given in response to ill-formed NNS utterances were less likely to lead to learner repetition than recasts. Long, Inagaki, and Ortega (1998) also studied the influence of recasts: They compared the effects of recasts with positive speech models in a laboratory study of Spanish and Japanese NS-NNS dyadic interaction. They reported that learners of Spanish receiving recasts performed significantly better on adverb placement than the model group. In another laboratory study by Mackey and Philp (1998), the impact of intensive recasts during negotiated interaction was examined. Their study demonstrated that more advanced learners, who, supposedly, were developmentally ready to acquire English questions, gained more benefit from the interaction with intensive recasts on questions than from interaction not containing recasts. Finally, Braidi (2002) examined the existence and short-term use of recasts among English NS and Japanese NNS dyads. She concluded that recasts do occur, and that they are used in the short term. Considering the findings of all these studies, obviously, recasts are of some use to second language learners.

Some recent studies have also suggested, however, that recasts are relatively ineffective compared with other types of negative feedback provided through conversational interaction. The most striking results regarding the effectiveness of recasts were found in a study of a French immersion classroom carried out by Lyster and Ranta (1997). The study attempted to determine the types and distribution of corrective

feedback moves, and their relationship to learner uptake. *Uptake* is defined in this paper as "a learner's immediate response to a recast either in the form of repetition or modification." (Han, 2002, p. 5). Lyster and Ranta found that although recasts were the most frequently used feedback type (55%), accounting for more than half of the feedback provided by the teachers, they led to the lowest rate of uptake (31%). By contrast, four other interactional moves (clarification requests, metalinguistic clues, elicitation, and repetition), grouped under the rubric of *negotiation of form*, resulted in significantly more uptake. Lyster and Ranta explain the smaller amount of uptake after recasts by the fact that recasts do not trigger negotiation: Recasts encourage learners only to repeat the already corrected forms, while the other four forms of interactional feedback facilitate peer-repair and self-repair.

Another study by Lyster (1998), drawing on the same French immersion database, however, offers an alternative explanation for the low rate of uptake after recasts found in Lyster and Ranta (1997). Lyster (1998), examining the relationship between type of feedback, type of error, and uptake, made two important observations. Firstly, most recasts were provided in response to morphosyntactic errors (55% of the recasts were in response to morphosyntactic problems, 15% to lexical problems, 20% to phonological problems and 10% to L1-related problems). Secondly, recasts on morphosyntactic features were the least likely to result in uptake (10%): Recasts on phonology were reported to be significantly more successful (58%), though much less frequent. Based on these findings, Lyster and Ranta's (1997) conclusion that recasts are a relatively ineffective form of corrective feedback, leading to only a small amount of learner uptake, could be refined as follows: Only recasts that are provided in response to morphosyntactic features seem ineffective.

Mackey, Gass, and McDonough's (2000) study found very similar results regarding recasts. Mackey et al. examined what type of feedback, including recasts, occurred in response to what type of error, and whether or not learners accurately perceived that feedback. The study involved ESL learners and Italian as a foreign language learners, who received substantial feedback while interacting in two-way information exchange activities with a more proficient speaker. These interactions were videotaped. Immediately after the activities had been completed, the video was rewound, and a stimulated recall session followed. The results were similar to Lyster's (1998) study, i.e., most recasts were provided in response to morphosyntactic errors (75%). Furthermore, the study found that, although learners were very likely to perceive feedback on lexis and phonology as feedback, in most cases they were unable to identify feedback on morphosyntactic features as feedback. Mackey et al. concluded that recasts targeting morphosyntactic features are seldom recognized as negative feedback. In other words, both the Lyster and Mackey et al. studies question whether recasts supplied in response to grammatical errors facilitate language development.

Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001), however, reached different conclusions as to the effectiveness of recasts on morphosyntactic features. In a classroom observation study of adult ESL learners, Ellis et al., as did Lyster and Mackey et al., found that the target of most focus on form episodes was grammar and the most dominant feedback move (75%) was the recast. But as to the efficacy of recasts, the findings of this study are quite different: A significantly higher amount of uptake was detected (75%). This contrast is most probably due to the distinct instructional environments of the studies.

Although the classes observed by Ellis et al. were communicative with no predetermined grammatical focus, they were preceded by an hour of form-focused instruction, which, as the authors explain, "may have created a mindset in the subjects to focus on form during the second part." (Ellis et al., 2001, p. 239).

Hence, one plausible explanation for the inconsistency in the results of these studies is their distinct context of data collection. The studies by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Lyster (1998) were undertaken in immersion classes, and the communicative task in Mackey et al. (2000) had clear content-based goals. In these studies the main focus of students' attention was on meaning. In contrast, Ellis et al.'s (2001) study was carried out in a more language-focused instructional environment. Clearly, in this setting, students were more likely to turn their attention to form in addition to meaning. In sum, the findings of these studies suggest that there might be a positive correlation between the effectiveness of recasts on morphosyntactic features and how much attention learners pay to form.

This paper explores this possible correlation from a different perspective. It examines the effectiveness of recasts on morphosyntactic errors as a function of the attention to form induced by the communicative tasks. In particular, the goal of this study is to investigate whether recasts targeting morphosyntactic features are more effective when the need to focus attention on meaning has been minimized through learners' familiarity with task content, thereby freeing learners to devote their attention to form.

The next section briefly summarizes the theoretical assumptions of the study and then reviews recent research on the relation between task characteristics and allocation of attention to form and meaning.

Tasks

Two theoretical assumptions are of central concern to this research, both relating to the role of attention. First, attention and noticing are necessary for second language development (Schmidt, 1990). Second, attentional resources are limited; therefore, there is competition for attentional resources between form and meaning. In other words, attention to one area, e.g., form, can only be allocated at the expense of the other, e.g., meaning (Van Patten, 1990).

There has been ongoing research attempting to establish which task characteristics variables have the most salient effects on the allocation of attention to meaning/form. Bygate (1996) and Ellis (1997) both conclude that tasks whose content is familiar to learners ease the information-processing load, thus releasing attention for form. In a pilot case study, Bygate (1996) found evidence that task repetition has a considerable impact on oral processing. The speaker in the study, on redoing a video narrative task (retelling a Tom and Jerry cartoon) after three weeks, showed a number of changes in her oral performance. In particular, according to Bygate's qualitative analysis, her selection of lexical items, her use of grammar, and, very importantly, her ability to self-correct were substantially improved. This finding can be easily accounted for if we apply Van Patten's (1996) information processing model to speech production. Given that the speaker was familiar with the content of the cartoon at the time of the second

performance, her primary attention no longer had to be focused on meaning. Hence, she could free more processing capacity for form: In other words, she could allocate more attention to form.

Ellis (1987) also found that the recycling of task content results in more accurate oral performance. His study compared performance on an oral picture-strip narrative task under two task conditions. Participants in the control group were required to tell a story without any pre-task preparation, whereas those in the experimental group were asked to do the oral narration after completing a written version of the task. For the experimental group, Ellis reported an improved performance in terms of accuracy: Participants produced more accurate regular past tense forms during the oral narrative task. The familiarity with task content, just as in Bygate (1996), is likely to have at least partly led to more accurate performance. However, there are two very significant differences between the two empirical studies that need to be considered. First, in Ellis's study, the oral task had been preceded by a written task that involved a different mode of processing. Second, while in Bygate's experiment long-term memory processes were involved (the task was repeated three weeks later), learners' performance in Ellis's study was more dependent on the information kept in their short-term memory (since the written task was immediately followed by the oral one). Nevertheless, it seems likely that repetition of tasks from the same content domain leads to more focus on form[2], as less attention needs to be devoted to meaning.

Kowal and Swain (1997) proposed that the dictogloss procedure can also lead learners to pay attention to form in addition to meaning. This procedure involves the use of the same concept across two stages of the same task. First, while listening to a passage read at normal speed, students are required to take notes on the content of the passage. Then, students work together to reconstruct the passage in writing from their shared resources. According to Bygate (2001), during the listening stage, students' attention is more likely to be drawn to meaning, whereas during the reconstruction stage students will, to a greater extent, focus their attention on form. However, unlike Bygate's (1996) study, the familiarity with task content in the dictogloss procedure is not the sole variable in accounting for the more syntactic orientation on the part of the participants. Besides being able to allocate more of their attentional resources to form due to their familiarity with the task, students are likely to focus more on form because of the necessity of producing written language. The need to reconstruct the text in writing leads learners to attempt to express their meaning as accurately as possible, which, in turn, encourages them to direct their attention to form. In other words, during the dictogloss procedure, the combination of two task variables elicits a focus on form from the students: (a) the learners' familiarity with task content, and (b) the intrinsic nature of the task that promotes attention to morphosyntactic features.

Swain and Lapkin (2001) also attest that learners' familiarity with task content paired with the need to produce written output enables learners to pay considerable attention to form in addition to meaning. In this study, two communicative tasks, a jigsaw task and a dictogloss, were compared in order to establish which type of task leads to more negotiation of meaning or focus on form. In the jigsaw task, the participants,

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[2] In this paper, the term *focus on form* refers to the state when learners' primary attention is on morphosyntactic features. Thus, the term is used differently from Long's (1991) notion of *focus on form*, i.e., incidental attention to form, a characteristic of meaning-based or communicatively-oriented teaching.

who were French immersion students, had to reconstruct a story told by eight pictures. Each student held four pictures and was not allowed to show these to his or her partner. After having found the right sequence, students had to write the story. The dictogloss task was similar to that described in Kowal and Swain (1997). It is important to note that to ensure content comparability, the same story was used in both the jigsaw and the dictogloss tasks. The authors' hypotheses that the dictogloss task would provide more opportunities for focus on form and the jigsaw task for focus on meaning at the writing stage proved incorrect. In actual fact, in performing either task, students displayed equal, and, very importantly, ample attention to form while reconstructing their stories in a written form. Thus, it seems that a task requiring learners to produce a written text will, by its very nature, encourage learners to allocate more attention to form. It must be pointed out, however, that during both the dictogloss and the jigsaw task, the co-occurence of two task variables made learners pay attention to form: (a) their familiarity with the task content, and (b) the intrinsic capacity of writing tasks to direct learners' attention to form.

To summarize, it seems that certain tasks may have the capacity to direct learners' attention toward form. Research implies that tasks with familiar content can free up attentional resources, thus allowing learners to focus on form. Also, it seems that some tasks are intrinsically capable of focusing students' attention on morphosyntactic features.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In light of the above, this paper focuses on how the following variables impact the effectiveness of recasts on morphosyntactic errors: (a) the learners' familiarity with task content, and (b) the intrinsic capacity of tasks to promote attention to form. Specifically, the goal of the study is to reveal whether these variables can facilitate the perception and uptake of recasts on form. The specific research questions of the study are as follows:

1. Does learners' familiarity with task content impact the amount of uptake and perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features?

2. Is the amount of uptake and perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features more substantial when the task content is familiar to learners and the nature of the task promotes attention on form?

In this preliminary study, a sequence of three tasks was designed to test the effects of these variables on the perception and uptake of recasts. The three tasks differed as to the extent of task content familiarity and the capacity of the task to direct learners' attention to form. In view of the studies reviewed, it was anticipated that familiarity with the content of the task would lead to learners perceiving more recasts on linguistic form. It was hypothesized that the familiar task content would enable learners to focus their attention on form, which, in turn, would make them more receptive to feedback on form. In addition, it was also hypothesized that tasks whose content was familiar and that, by their intrinsic nature, required learners to pay attention to form, would induce learners to

notice recasts on morphosyntactic features to a greater extent. The specific hypotheses for the study were as follows:

1. Learners' familiarity with task content will be positively correlated with the amount of uptake and accurate perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features.

2. Tasks that contain familiar content and have the intrinsic capacity to draw learners' attention to form will lead to a substantially greater amount of uptake and accurate perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were two female and one male ESL adult learners from the Community English Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. At the time of the experiment, they were all enrolled in the intermediate level course of the program, which they were assigned to based on the program's placement test. They were all highly motivated students since, as they explained, a better knowledge of English would open up a wider range of job opportunities for them. All three students' participation in the study was voluntary. The participants had the same native language, Spanish, and they were 23, 24, and 29 years old. They had been in the United States for 2, 3, and 9 years and had received 10, 6, and 7 years of previous English instruction respectively. They all reported that they predominantly used Spanish in private conversations, but they were required to use English at their workplace.

Before the experiment, the researcher observed the participants in a number of language classes in order to become more familiar with their language proficiency. In addition, she had a 10- to 20-minute general conversation with each participant outside class prior to the experimental sessions.

Procedures

Each participant carried out three tasks with the researcher. The three tasks used were a two-way story sequencing jigsaw task, a one-way story-telling task, and a story-writing task. All three tasks were based on the same story told by eight pictures. In other words, the content of the three tasks was exactly the same. Therefore, the tasks were hypothesized to require different levels of attention to form and meaning, with progressively more familiar information causing a decreasing processing load and, as a result, more attention to form on the part of the participants.

The first task, a story-sequencing jigsaw task, required the learner and the researcher to reconstruct a story based on eight pictures. Both the learner and the researcher held four pictures, which were hidden from the view of the other member of the dyad. The learner and the researcher each described a picture in turn and then tried to

find the right sequence of the story. This task demanded encoding completely new, visual information into linguistic form, i.e., the task content was completely unfamiliar at this point. The intrinsic nature of the task did not facilitate attention to form, as learners were most likely engaged in a semantic processing mode. In light of this, the task required more focus on meaning, leading learners to pay the lesser attention to form. Learners received form-focused recasts throughout the whole task.

For the second task, a story-telling task, the participants were asked to narrate the same story. This time, however, they were allowed to see all the pictures. Since the learners had previously described four of them, this task involved accessing some familiar and already rehearsed information as well as some new visual information. Therefore, due to the learners' familiarity with the task content, this task was seen as demanding less focus on meaning and allowing more attentional resources to be devoted to form. Nevertheless, the second task, by its intrinsic nature, did not *promote* focus on form: Learners were expected to function at a semantic level. As in the first task, learners were provided recasts throughout the task.

For the third task, a story-writing task, participants were told to write the story; more specifically, they were asked to write one or two sentences about each picture. But, more importantly, they had to perform their sentences orally before the writing stage, and during this time they received recasts on their morphosyntactic errors. The learners' uptake and perception of recasts was examined during this oral stage. So, although the ostensible goal of the task was to produce a written text, learners' oral reactions to recasts were observed. It was hypothesized that this task would induce learners to pay the most attention to form due to the co-occurrence of two variables. Firstly, by this stage learners had used the same task content through two tasks; as a result, task content familiarity allowed them to pay less attention to meaning and allocate more attention to form. Secondly, the writing task, by its intrinsic nature, made learners pay more attention to form.

In sum, the three tasks form a continuum as to the amount of attention paid by learners to form and meaning. At the "meaning" end of the continuum is the first task, the jigsaw story-sequencing task. This task places the most attention on meaning, since it does not contain any familiar information, nor does it have the capacity to direct learners' attention to form. The third task, the story-writing task, is at the "form" end of the continuum. This task draws the greatest amount of attention to form due to the co-occurrence of two variables: The learners' familiarity with the task and the intrinsic capacity of the writing task to promote learners' attention to form. The second task, the story-telling task, is placed between the two: The content of this task is more familiar than the first task, and less familiar than the third, and unlike the third task, the intrinsic nature of the task does not enhance the amount of attention students devote to form (see Figure 1.).

FIGURE 1
Attention to Meaning/Form Induced by Tasks

Attention to meaning   Attention to form

⟵————————————————————————————————————⟶

1st task   2nd task   3rd task

8
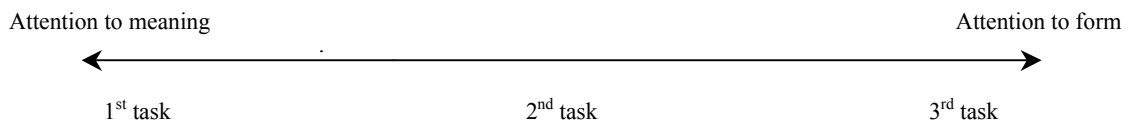
Through the sequence of these three tasks, the impact of the following variables can be observed: (a) the learners' familiarity with task content, and (b) the intrinsic capacity of the task to draw learners' attention to form. Given that the first two tasks only differ as to the learners' familiarity with task content, the impact of task content familiarity can be inferred by comparing the effectiveness of recasts through these two tasks. The effect of the combination of learners' familiarity with task content and the intrinsic capacity of a writing task to promote attention to form can be detected by observing the effectiveness of form-focused recasts during the third task (note Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Characteristics of the Tasks

1st Task (Jigsaw Story-sequencing task)	2nd Task (Story-telling task)	3rd Task (Writing task)
Task content unfamiliar	Task content more familiar	Task content most familiar
Attention to form not promoted by the nature of the task	Attention to form not promoted by the nature of the task	Attention to form promoted by the nature of the task

Each session lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes and was videotaped. During each task, the researcher tried to recast almost all utterances containing a morphosyntactic error. She ignored only some ungrammatical forms that the students obviously were not developmentally ready to acquire. Developmental readiness was defined as suggested by Han (2002): A learner is considered developmentally ready for a particular grammatical feature if he has already started to use that feature, and can choose between alternative linguistic forms. It should be noted that recasts were provided exclusively in response to morphosyntactic errors, and no other type of feedback was given during the tasks.

Immediately after the three tasks had been completed, a stimulated recall session followed. The researcher rewound the videotape and played it for the learner. While watching the tape, the researcher paused it after each recast episode, and asked the learners to recall what they had been thinking at the time the feedback was provided. In addition, the learners were encouraged to pause the tape at any time they wished to explain what they were thinking during the activity. These stimulated recall sessions were carried out in English. The aim of this procedure was to gain insight into how learners perceived the recasts of form during the task: In particular, whether the recasts were perceived at all, and if so, whether the learners' perceptions about the target of the recasts were accurate. These stimulated recall sessions were audiotaped.

This retrospective method, stimulated recall, has been criticized on several grounds in the SLA literature. It has been claimed that the gap between the event and the recall session will result in unreliable data. Another objection is that if subjects are aware that they will be asked to restrospect, this will affect their task performance during the experiment (Nunan, 1991). In this study, the data was collected immediately after the task, and the participants were not informed that they would be required to give a restrospective account until after the tasks. Therefore, the reliability of the data was enhanced as much as possible regarding these two points. However, the most significant

limitation of stimulated recall in this study was the following: Students might not have been able to distinguish between what they perceived at the time of the experiment and what they perceived at the time of the recall sessions. In other words, learners might have given an apparently 'retrospective' account of perceptions that they, in fact, only experienced during the recall video session. In an attempt to circumvent this problem, students were made aware of this danger and were asked to try and report only what they had been thinking while performing the tasks.

Coding

The researcher transcribed the videotapes of the learner-researcher interactions, and the audiotapes of the stimulated recall comments. Then the transcripts were analyzed in order to classify the recast episodes and stimulated recall comments. There were 112 recast episodes in total. About 8 to 13 recast episodes were observed per task, with an average of 12.4, and about 40 to 45 recast episodes occurred per participant. The details of the coding categories for each analysis are described in the following sections.

Recast Episodes

Based on the transcription of the videotapes, the recast episodes were classified into five categories according to the learners' reaction to the recasts. The five categories were: (a) topic continuation, (b) negotiation, (c) agreement, (d) successful incorporation of recasts, and (e) unsuccessful incorporation of recasts (Braidi, 2002). An example for each category, taken from the current data set, is given in (1)–(5).

(1)   Topic continuation
       NNS: *Yes. I have a picture with the ladies. One have a yellow coat.*
       INT: *One has a yellow coat.*
       NNS: *And the other a green.*

In (1), the learner did not correct her utterance in response to the interviewer's recast. She continued to talk about "the clothing of the ladies." In other words, she carried on with the conversation, keeping the semantic theme of the interaction.

(2)   Negotiation
       NNS: *The guys laughing at him.*
       INT: *The guys are laughing at him.*
       NNS: *Are?*
       INT: *Yes, the guys are laughing at him.*
       NNS: *The guys are laughing at him.*

In this recast episode, the learner noticed the corrective recast, and to make sure of its target, he asked for clarification. Here the interviewer's recast led to negotiation.

(3)   Agreement
       NNS: *He drank too much beers.*

        INT: *He drank too much beer.*
        NNS: *Yeah.*

In (3), the interviewer's recast is followed by an agreement signal *yeah*. In cases like this, it is not clear whether the learner agrees with the content or the form of the feedback (Braidi, 2002). Stimulated recall comments revealed that these signals almost always demonstrated the learner's agreement with the content of the recast, but not the perception of its target.

(4)   Successful incorporation of recast
        NNS: *The fat man running ...*
        INT: *The fat man is running ...*
        NNS: *is running into the street ...*

In example (4), the interviewer's recast resulted in successful uptake. The learner responded by repeating the verb *run* in the correct form, so she repaired her ungrammatical utterance as a reaction to the recast.

(5)   Unsuccessful incorporation of recast
        NNS: *And the womans ...*[wɪmɪnz] (referring to two women in the picture)
        INT: *The women ...*[wɪmɪn]
        NNS: *The womens talking with the dog.* [wɪmɪnz]

Although in example (5), the learner noticed the target of the recast, the noun *womans*, he did not seem to realize the grammatical problem. He mistook the recast on the irregular plural form for a recast on pronunciation.

A distinction was made between successful and unsuccessful uptake as well, as it is assumed that successful uptake is more likely to result in acquisition. Successful uptake included the categories of negotiation (but only those cases that lead to repair) and successful incorporation of recast. Unsuccessful uptake consisted of the categories of agreement and unsuccessful incorporation of uptake; in other words, those student reactions that did not give a clear demonstration that the learner understood the target of the recast. Topic continuation was not classified as uptake.

Stimulated Recall Comments

Besides classifying the recast episodes based on the videotapes, the learners' audiotaped stimulated recall comments were also transcribed and coded. Four stimulated recall comments were distinguished: comments on (a) lexis, (b) morphosyntax, (c) phonology, (d) no content, and (e) no recall (Mackey et al., 2000). Examples for each category, collected in this study, appear in (6)-(10).

(6)   Lexis
        I said hungry and not angry. I always mix these words.

The lexical category included comments that were made about a specific vocabulary item; in particular, comments about the use of a word, the meaning of a word, its confusables, etc.

(7)   Morphosyntax
   a.   *If you say the fat man looking into the mirror, the sentence is not complete. We need the word is.*
   b.   *It's has because only one lady.*
   c.   *He's walking in the street. Walking is just now. It's present.*
   d.   *Her, not him, because it's she.*

The morphosyntactic category incorporated comments about closed classes such as prepositions and pronouns, comments about grammatical gender, and comments about tense, verb morphology, and agreement. The majority of stimulated recall comments concerned morphosyntactic features.

(8)   Phonology
   I thought I pronounce woman bad but that was good, yes?

The phonological category contained comments concerning pronunciation.

(9)   No content
   I'm sorry, I don't remember.

The no content category consisted of examples in which, although the learners provided a stimulated recall comment, they could not specify what their thoughts were at the time of the interaction.

(10)   No recall
   You said this because you agreed.

Finally, an additional category, no recall, was created. This category included comments in which learners said that they did not think that they were receiving feedback at the time of the interaction.

RESULTS

Overall, 112 recast episodes were provided during the three tasks, with the most occurring during the story-writing task (44). The average number of recasts was 37.33 across the tasks. The number of recasts per learner ranged from 31 to 45.

First, let us examine how the amount of uptake of form-focused recasts is distributed across the three tasks. To explore this, the total number of recasts resulting in uptake was tabulated across the tasks. As Table 1 shows, the jigsaw story-sequencing task (Task 1) led to the least uptake (57.1%). The story-telling task (Task 2) resulted in slightly more uptake (66.6%). Recasts given in the story-writing task (Task 3) proved to

be the most successful; there was uptake following 88.8% of recasts provided in response to morphosyntactic features.

TABLE 1
Uptake and no uptake of recasts, by task

	Task 1 (35 episodes)		Task 2 (33 episodes)		Task 3 (44 episodes)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Uptake	20	57.1%	22	66.6%	39	88 .6%
No uptake	15	42.8%	11	33.3%	5	11.4%

Table 2 presents the rate of successful and unsuccessful uptake. The frequency of successful uptake draws a more clear-cut distinction between story-sequencing (Task 1) and story-telling (Task 2) than the data on uptake. As illustrated in Table 2, the story-telling task led to almost twice as much successful uptake (45.5%) as the story-sequencing task (25.7%). And, similarly to the amount of uptake, the amount of successful uptake detected in the story-writing task (Task 3) is the most substantial across the tasks.

TABLE 2
Successful and unsuccessful uptake, by task

	Task 1 (35 episodes)		Task 2 (33 episodes)		Task 3 (44 episodes)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Successful	9	25.7%	15	45.5%	30	68.1%
Unsuccessful	11	31.4%	7	21.2%	9	20.45%

Table 3 reveals the distribution of learners' reactions to recasts across the three tasks. Three important observations can be made. First, recasts on morphosyntactic features induced negotiation exclusively for task 3, the story-writing task (and all these negotiation moves resulted in repair). Second, the distribution of agreement is worth noting. Recasts provided during the jigsaw task were followed by agreement in 25.7% of learner reactions, exactly as frequently as successful incorporation occurred. Agreement was found to be slightly less frequent in the story-telling task (18.2%), but compared to the amount of successful incorporation (45.5%), this amount is less striking. Finally, the amount of unsuccessful incorporation (15.9%) during the story-telling task is worth

mentioning. However, given that the percentage of successful incorporation is relatively high for this task, this result is less significant.

TABLE 3
Learners' reactions to recasts, by task

	Task 1 (35 episodes)		Task 2 (33 episodes)		Task 3 (44 episodes)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Successful incorporation	9	25.7%	15	45.5%	22	50%
Negotiation	0	0%	0	0%	8	18.2%
Agreement	9	25.7%	6	18.2%	2	0.05%
Unsuccessful incorporation	2	5.7%	1	0.03%	7	15.9%
Topic continuation	15	42.8%	11	33.3%	5	11.4%

Next, the results concerning learners' perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features will be presented. Table 4, showing learners' stimulated recall comments, indicates that the amount of accurate perception of recasts varies considerably across the three tasks. Learners perceived recasts as being about morphosyntactic features most often (79.5%) during the story-writing task. Learners' perception of recasts was second best in the story-telling task. Here, 42.4% of the recasts were recognized. The least accurate perception occurred during the story-sequencing task: Only 25.7% of recasts were perceived as being about morphosyntactic features.

Table 4 shows that, in many cases, learners' stimulated recall comments did not indicate that they recognized the target of recasts. Learners were most likely to mistake morphosyntactic feedback for lexis, with gradually lower frequency across the three tasks (Task 1, 14.3%; Task 2, 9%; and Task 3, 6.8%). This is in contrast to Mackey et al.'s (2000) study, where learners were most likely to perceive feedback on morphosyntactic features as being about semantic content. Further, unlike Mackey et al. who reported hardly any stimulated recall comments with no recall, learners in this study very frequently said that they did not think that they were receiving feedback at the time of the interaction. The distribution of no recall comments is in negative correlation with the distribution of comments indicating accurate perception: Most no recall comments occurred during the jigsaw task (37.1%), fewer in the story-telling task (24.2%), and hardly any during the writing task (2.3%). The amount of stimulated recall comments reporting the perception of phonological feedback, as Table 4 demonstrates, is negligible.

TABLE 4
Content of stimulated-recall comments, by task

	Task 1 (35 episodes)		Task 2 (33 episodes)		Task 3 (44 episodes)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Lexis	5	14.3%	3	9%	3	6.8%
Morphosyntax	9	25.7%	14	42.4%	35	79.5%
Phonology	1	3%	2	6.1%	0	0%
No content	7	20%	6	18.2%	5	11.4%
No recall	13	37.1%	8	24.2%	1	2.3%

Finally, the relationship between learners' accurate perception of recasts and their uptake was examined. As illustrated in Table 5, some variation among the tasks can be observed with regard to this point too. The most recast episodes with both uptake and accurate perception were found in the story-writing task (69.2%). In the story-telling task, somewhat fewer were found, as 59.1% of recasts with uptake were recognized as being about morphosyntactic features. The story-sequencing task proved the least facilitative for the combination of uptake and accurate perception of recasts (45%).

Perhaps the most remarkable finding of the study is the correlation found between the successful uptake and accurate perception of recasts. As Table 5 illustrates, independent of the task, in the case of successful uptake, learners almost always accurately perceived the target of the feedback. In all three tasks, about 80% of recasts with repair were recognized as feedback on morphosyntactic features.

TABLE 5
Distribution of accurate perception by successful and unsuccessful uptake, by task

	Task 1 (20 episodes)		Task 2 (22 episodes)		Task 3 (39 episodes)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Successful uptake	7/9	77.8%	12/15	80%	25/30	83.3%
Unsuccessful uptake	2/11	18.2%	1/7	14.3%	2/9	22.2%
Total uptake	9/20	45%	13/22	59.1%	27/39	69.2%

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine whether learners' familiarity with task content, together with the intrinsic nature of a task to promote attention to form, can affect the perception and uptake of recasts on morphosyntactic features. Based on VanPatten's (1990) information processing model, it was hypothesized that recasts targeting morphosyntactic features might be more effective when the need to focus attention on meaning has been minimized through task familiarity, thereby allowing learners to devote more attention to form. It has also been proposed that oral tasks with familiar content and with the intrinsic capacity to focus learners' attention on form (for example, requiring learners to produce written output) will induce learners to engage in a more syntactic mode of processing, thus making them more receptive to recasts on morphosyntactic features. The specific hypotheses of the study were the following:

1. Learners' familiarity with task content will be positively correlated with the amount of uptake and accurate perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features.

2. Tasks that contain familiar information and have the intrinsic capacity to draw learners' attention to form will lead to substantially greater amount of uptake and accurate perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features.

The results have confirmed both hypotheses. In terms of the first hypothesis, the story-telling task, containing more familiar information, led to a greater amount of uptake and accurate perception of recasts than the story-sequencing task. It must be noted, however, that the data on learners' perception of recasts give stronger support to the hypothesis than the results regarding uptake. While almost twice as many accurate perceptions were detected in the story-telling task as in the story-sequencing task (42.4% to 25.7%), the story-telling task resulted in only 10% higher uptake (66.6% compared to 57.1%).

If we compare the amount of successful uptake found across the two tasks, however, it becomes obvious that learners' familiarity with task content has a strong impact not only on accurate perception, but also on uptake. Recasts given during the story-telling task resulted in successful uptake in almost twice as many cases (45.5%) as recasts given during the story-sequencing task (25.7%). The question arises as to why there is such inconsistency between the amount of uptake and successful uptake detected in the two tasks. Or the question might be rephrased as "why was there substantially more unsuccessful uptake found in the story-sequencing task than in the story-telling task?" A closer inspection of the distribution of learners' reactions to recasts reveals that one form of learner reaction, agreement, is primarily responsible for the non-uniform results. As Table 6 shows, in the story-sequencing task, out of 11 recasts with unsuccessful uptake, 9 were agreement. In the story-telling task, 7 recasts led to unsuccessful uptake, and learners reacted to recasts with agreement in 6 cases. In sum, during both tasks, most unsuccessful uptake (consisting of two learner reactions, agreement and unsuccessful incorporation of recasts) was realized in the form of agreement. We may conclude, therefore, that this learner reaction accounts for the bulk of difference between the amount of uptake and successful uptake across the two tasks.

In other words, apart from agreement, the results of the study strongly support the hypothesis concerning the relation between uptake and task content familiarity.

TABLE 6
Relation between learners' uptake and agreement

	Task 1 (35 episodes)		Task 2 (33 episodes)	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Uptake	20	57.1%	22	66.6%
Successful uptake	9	25.7%	15	45.5%
Unsuccessful uptake	11	31.4%	7	21.2%
Agreement	9	25.7%	6	18.2%

This is an important observation given that a very small number of recasts followed by agreement were recognized as being about grammar. The stimulated recall comments revealed that, in the case of agreement, learners were usually unaware (90% of the time) that they were receiving feedback. It seems, therefore, that although agreement gives the impression that the learner noticed the recast, most likely, the learner only confirmed the interlocutor's interpretation or repetition of his previous utterance. In sum, agreement does not seem to be a good indicator of learners' noticing of feedback.

Hence, it seems that based on the off-line data, the question raised in Braidi (2002) about the status of recasts preceding agreement can be resolved. Braidi argues that "no distinction could be made between agreement to meaning and agreement to form; therefore, it is impossible to tell what the learners are agreeing to" (p.31). This small-scale study suggests that agreement mostly indicates agreement to meaning rather than agreement to form; that is, recasts prior to agreement seem to provide positive models, rather than "well-timed negative evidence" (p. 31).

By contrast, recasts that are followed by successful uptake seem to serve as negative evidence to the learners. When learners' responses to recasts resulted in successful uptake, the learners generally had an accurate perception about the target of the feedback. During each task, for about 80% of the recast episodes with successful uptake, learners' stimulated recall reports showed that they accurately perceived the feedback as being about grammar (see Table 5). Thus, it seems that in cases where learners successfully modified their output in response to recasts on morphosyntactic features, they also seem to have had accurate perceptions about the target of the recasts. To summarize, according to the present study, successful uptake seems a more accurate measure of the effectiveness of recasts than uptake. Uptake includes the learner response of agreement, which occurs with high frequency in interactions, but rarely serves as negative evidence.

Although Mackey et al. (2000) did not separate uptake and successful uptake in their data analysis, their results regarding the relation between uptake and accurate

perception are in line with those of the present study. Mackey et al. also found that when learners demonstrate uptake of the feedback, they are also likely to perceive the feedback as it was intended. However, they point out that, in their data, the relationship between uptake and accurate perception seemed to be a function of the error type. Simultaneous uptake and accurate perception occurred for lexical (82%) and phonological episodes (69%) with very high frequency, but for morphosyntax, only 33% of feedback led to uptake with accurate perception. They explain the very low number for morphosyntactic episodes by the fact that most morphosyntactic feedback occurred in the form of recasts. They add, however, that the low uptake and accurate perception of feedback on morphosyntactic features might also be due to the specific aspects of language that the morphosyntactic feedback focused on. During the jigsaw picture description task used in their study, learners received most recasts on agreement, plural formation, etc. And, as they remarked, these aspects of language were not crucial for understanding.

Following this line of reasoning, the relatively larger amount of uptake and accurate perception (45%), revealed in the jigsaw task of this study might be explained as follows: Recasts provided during the jigsaw story-sequencing task of this study mostly focused on verb tenses, which, in case of a narrative, might have been more important for understanding.

However, there seem to be some alternative explanations for the varying extent of effectiveness of morphosyntactic feedback across the two studies. First, the saliency of feedback on grammar might have also differed between this study's story-sequencing task and the picture description task in Mackey et al. (2000). Recasts on verb tenses were probably more salient to learners than recasts on agreement, plural formation, etc. Second, the intensity of morphosyntactic feedback in this study might have also increased the impact of recasts. Here, almost all morphosyntactic errors received feedback, and recasts exclusively targeted morphosyntactic features.

Examining the results in terms of the second hypothesis of the study, we might conclude that this hypothesis was strongly confirmed. First, the recasts provided on oral output during the writing task, which contained familiar information and had the intrinsic capacity to direct learners' attention to form, led to a substantially greater amount of uptake of recasts on morphosyntactic features (88.6%). Second, during this task, learners' perceptions of recasts were considerably more accurate (79.5%) than in the story-sequencing (25.7%) or story-telling task (42.4%). Thus, the combination of these two variables seemed to have facilitated both the perception and uptake of recasts.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine which task variable is responsible for the increased effectiveness of recasts. On the one hand, learners' familiarity with task content might have played a role. In view of the results regarding the story-sequencing and story-telling task, it is obvious that task content familiarity was a facilitative factor. On the other hand, the intrinsic capacity of the task to draw learners' attention to form might have also enhanced learners' sensitivity to recasts. The fact that learners had to produce a written text is likely to have encouraged them to function at a more syntactic level, which, in turn, might have made them more receptive to recasts on morphosyntactic features. Further research is needed to determine whether it is the combination of these two characteristics or one particular characteristic that leads to the difference in uptake and perception.

It should be mentioned that an additional variable might also have had a minimal effect on the noticing of recasts among the learners. As learners worked with the same story across all three tasks, not surprisingly, they were committing very similar errors. In fact, sometimes they made exactly the same error in one task after the other. Hence, receiving recasts in response to the same or very similar errors, even in such a short instructive period, probably had a positive impact on the participants' uptake and perception of recasts.

Finally, several limitations of the study must be noted. First, the sample of the study was extremely small. Therefore, the results can only indicate the need for further research. Second, because this study only examined immediate responses to recasts, it does not shed light on the acquisitional value of recasts provided through different tasks. More long-term and in-depth analyses of recasts and sophisticated task design would be necessary to be able to address this question. Third, although the researcher made some classroom observations and briefly talked to the learners before the experiment to explore which structures they were developmentally ready for, and, based on these observations, made an attempt at providing fine-tuned feedback in the interactions, her knowledge about the learners' language ability was still very limited, and mainly based on intuition. Fourth, as already mentioned above, in the third task two different variables were not separately controlled: (a) the learners' familiarity with task content, and (b) the intrinsic capacity of the task to direct learners' attention to form. Future research should therefore investigate the individual effect of each of these variables. Finally, it should be mentioned that the researcher was the interviewer, transcriber, and analyzer of the data, which might have introduced additional bias into the results.

CONCLUSION

This preliminary study has shown that recasts on grammar are not necessarily ineffective; in fact, under certain conditions they can be very beneficial. The results of this study suggest that (a) learners' familiarity with task content, and (b) the intrinsic capacity of the task to draw learners' attention to form may facilitate learners' uptake and perception of recasts on morphosyntactic features. Apparently, the co-occurrence of accurate perception and uptake does not necessarily entail acquisition. It might not be a foregone conclusion, however, that in case of both successful incorporation and accurate perception, noticing occurs. And, according to recent SLA research, noticing is at least a facilitative, if not a necessary and sufficient (Schmidt, 1990) condition for L2 development.

The findings of this study also put Pica's (1994) reservations about the value of tasks into a new perspective. In her review on negotiation, she notes that although tasks give opportunities for learners to engage in authentic conversations in the L2 classroom, these tasks may or may not induce learners "to ask the kinds of questions about form and meaning that will really deliver L2 data to them" (p. 521). She also points out that interaction will most probably facilitate the learning of lexical items and certain L1-L2 contrasts, but might not be so beneficial to some aspects of L2 morphosyntax. Although it may be true that communicative tasks in general are more likely to focus learners' attention on meaning, the findings from this study suggest that by manipulating certain

variables, certain tasks can also promote learners' attention to form. Hence, in addition to confirming the results found here in a larger–scale study, future research should focus on exploring and developing further task variables that may facilitate the noticing of recasts on linguistic forms.

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