



Effects of Recast and Explicit Corrective Feedback on Iranian Test-takers' Anxiety in Speaking across Proficiency Levels

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of recast and explicit corrective feedback on Iranian IELTS test-takers anxiety in speaking across different levels of proficiency. Ninety male and female learners, aged 21 to 45, who were preparing themselves to take the IELTS Mock test, were divided into upper-intermediate and advanced levels. Then, they were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups (recast and explicit correction). There were 10 treatment sessions for each group. In the recast group, the students' mistakes were corrected using reformulation. In the explicit correction group, mistakes were not tolerated, and they were corrected on the spot. In order to measure the anxiety in speaking performance, Chowdhury's (2014) questionnaire was given to the participants once before the treatment and once after the treatment. Then, the score of each learner was calculated and recorded for the data analysis. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the control and explicit corrective group and the control and recast groups at the upper-intermediate level. However, there was a statistically significant difference between the control and recast groups and the control and explicit group at the advanced levels.

Keywords: anxiety in speaking, corrective feedback, explicit correction, IELTS, recast

Introduction

Anxiety is one of the effective factors that have been found to affect second language acquisition. Different types of anxiety have been identified: (1) trait anxiety (a characteristic of a learner's personality), (2) state anxiety (apprehension that is experienced at a particular moment in response to a definite situation), and (3) situation-specific anxiety aroused by a particular type of situation). Anxiety may be both facilitating if it has a positive effect on second language acquisition, and debilitating if it has a negative effect (Ellis, 2008).

Improving the speaking ability of test-takers has always been a challenging issue among ELT scholars and practitioners. One way to have better oral performance is to reduce the anxiety on the part of the learner (Chen, 2015). It is often heard that teachers' friendly manner with students in teaching can be of some help. However, psychological factors are not always the determining factors; instead, some techniques in teaching special skills should be used as alternatives. One major problem with IELTS candidates is the existence of anxiety in their oral test performance. This has continued to play a crucial role in their reaching the required band score for the speaking skill. Therefore, finding a suitable way to tackle this issue could be highly promising. Reducing the anxiety would lead to better speaking performance (Irzeqat, 2010). On the other hand, appropriate use of corrective feedback would result in both accuracy and fluency in speaking (Zohrabi, Farrokhi, & Chehrazad, 2017).

Corrective feedback is the transmission or conveyance of evaluative or corrective information on some sort of action, event, or process (London & Sessa, 2009). Two common types of corrective feedback are recast and explicit correction. While explicit correction is the explicit provision of the correct form by a clear indication of an error (Sheen, 2004), a recast is a reformulation of the learner's erroneous utterance or part of the learners' utterance and is embedded in the continuing discourse (Jang, 2011).

Although numerous studies have investigated the effect of feedback types on the speaking ability, and English teachers' corrective feedback on English as a foreign language speaking task complexity (e.g., Zhai & Gao, 2018), it seems, however, that no study has yet been conducted to find the

difference between effects of the recast and explicit corrective feedback on the speaking anxiety in an Iranian context. Furthermore, there is this intuition that explicit feedback in a society like Iran, whose people seem to be more reserved in expressing ideas and emotions would negatively affect learners' speaking ability in the target language. This was an incentive to the initiation of the research study. Therefore, it seems beneficial to explore the speaking anxiety of the IELTS learners in their oral production and find have a comparison on the two effects of the recast and explicit corrective feedback types.

Lyster and Ranta (as cited in Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013) identified six types of corrective feedback which are classified into two categories of reformulation and prompt. Reformulations comprise explicit correction and recast, as these moves provide language learners with "target reformulations of their non-target output" (p. 3). Prompts, on the other hand, include such signals as elicitation, metalinguistic clues, repetition, and clarification request, pushing language learners towards self-repair. Corrective feedback is also classified as implicit and explicit, regarding the directness of the correction made by the teacher.

According to Ellis (2005), the corrective feedback which is provided by the teacher or, to a lower degree, by students is research-worthy inasmuch as there is the claim that learning a second language entails negative as well as positive evidence. Corrective feedback may help language learners' linguistic forms that might be ignored and identify the deviant linguistic productions (Ellis, 2005) As Ellis (2005) adds, corrective feedback ten hypothesized to have a significant contribution in developing accuracy in the second language.

Corrective feedback is claimed by Yilmaz (2016) to have recently received a great deal of attention in second language acquisition. Previous research, as argued, had its focus on the effects of corrective feedback on noticing and second language acquisition, while more recent studies have initiated the surge towards probing the role of a wide range of factors in moderating the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Studies that have a contribution to this line of research have concentrated on cognitive, affective, and task-related Factors (Yilmaz, 2016). Another factor that can moderate feedback effectiveness is purported to be exposure conditions.

Previous research studies concentrated on investigating corrective feedback by directly receiving the feedback on producing inaccurate sentences, while this is not the sole condition under which language learners face corrective feedback (Yilmaz, 2016). It is maintained that in the classroom setting, language learners hear feedback provided for other learners more often than directly being provided with corrective feedback individually. Yilmaz (2016) contends that in spite of this variety in exposure conditions, no studies have, to date, investigated whether language learners who directly receive corrective feedback on uttering inaccurate sentences benefit more than those learners allowed to hear the corrective feedback provided for other language learners.

From a more practical perspective, according to Kozlova (2010), in providing learners with written feedback the teacher can either underline the ill-formed utterance or underline the line and set the learners free to identify the error themselves. Besides, the teacher should take the proficiency level of the EFL learners into serious account to provide them with well-suited feedback in writing. Learners at a higher level of proficiency had better be given fewer instances of feedback and helped solely through being shown the location of errors. The learners who are a lower level of proficiency, on the other hand, should be given more feedback. Giving ready-made answers to learners cannot be accounted for as the appropriate way of giving feedback. They should be required to do more processing. Providing direct corrective feedback often turns out as the solution for the teacher who wants learners to correct their mistakes but takes into account the fact that in this case, the students would need scaffolding (Kozlova, 2010).

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry (Kazdin, 2000). Three main categories of anxiety include trait anxiety, situational anxiety, and state anxiety, which may vary from stability to transient incidences of anxiety arousal. Elements that trigger anxiety, as proven by research, differ across language processes and language skills. According to Gregersen et al.

(2014), anxiety can disrupt complex learning, test-taking, and effective reasoning.

Foreign language classroom anxiety is inferable from an assortment of causes.

Learners' individual personality traits, such as introversion or extraversion, are claimed to be related to arousal of anxiety (Gregersen & Horwitz 2002). Language anxiety, as mentioned by Young (1991) can be caused by instructor-learner interactions, learners' personal and interpersonal anxiety, instructors' beliefs about language teaching, and learners' beliefs about language learning.

Speaking anxiety refers to the worries and problems one has when he/she wants to speak. Students who have speaking anxiety are often very calm and passive and can, therefore, receive less attention from teachers in comparison with noisy and aggressive children. These students usually give up very early and continue to be quiet throughout their years in school (Basic, 2011).

Corrective feedback has been proved to be affected by language proficiency level. Pienemann (1984) proposed that when languages are learned through instruction, a certain form is acquired only when the learner is developmentally ready for it, otherwise, instruction has little effect. Based on this assumption, some studies have attempted to test if feedback (i.e., a strategy of focus-on-form) is effective among developmentally ready learners or among more advanced learners, as presented in the following paragraphs.

Dekeyser (1993) developed a laboratory study for factors influencing feedback effectiveness and found that participants with higher pretest scores improved more compared with lower scorers after receiving feedback. Lin and Hedgcock (1996) also found that more proficient participants incorporated more feedback. Mackey and Philp (1998) found that developmentally ready learners who received recasts significantly improved over time, while developmentally ready learners who received no feedback and the developmentally ready learners who received feedback did not. Iwashita (2003) investigated feedback effectiveness among above-average scorers and below-average scorers and found that positive evidence worked only for learners with higher scores, and recasts worked independently of

the participants' language level. Ammar and Spada (2006) divided their participants in the same way (i.e., high achievers versus low achievers) and found that high-proficiency learners benefited from all types of corrective feedback and from instruction alone, while low-proficiency learners benefited more from prompts. Ammar (2008) used a scale of developmental stage and found that prompts were more effective in helping learners move to the next stages. In a study of computer-delivered recasts, Trofimovich et al. (2007) also found that higher proficiency participants benefited more from feedback. In addition, Philp (2003) found that learners with higher proficiency noticed feedback more frequently.

In sum, some studies have provided evidence that proficiency level affects the usefulness of feedback, overall indicating that the higher the participant's language level, the more they benefit from being corrected (e.g., Ammar & Spada, 2006; Dekeyser, 1993), while studies using measures of developmental readiness support those learners also benefit more from feedback if they are at a higher developmental stage (e.g., Ammar, 2008; Mackey & Philp, 1998). From the studies reviewed above, only two were performed in dyadic interaction (Lin & Hedgcock, 1996; Mackey & Philp, 1998); therefore, the current study aimed at contributing to this discussion by investigating proficiency and feedback effectiveness at separate levels. Hence, this research is an attempt to find answers to the following questions.

RQ1. Does feedback type (recasts vs explicit correction) have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking test anxiety?

RQ2. Does language proficiency level (advanced vs upper-intermediate) have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' speaking test anxiety?

RQ3. Is there a significant interaction effect of feedback type and language proficiency level on Iranian EFL learners' speaking test anxiety?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 90 upper-intermediate and advanced Iranian EFL learners who were homogenized in terms of language proficiency based on OPT. They were selected through convenience

sampling, from among the learners who were taking IELTS preparation courses. The selected participants were both male and female with the age range between 21 and 45, all native speakers of Persian. There were 30 members in the control, 30 in the recast, and 30 in the explicit correction groups. Then, the selected participants were assigned to six groups: two control groups (15 each), two recast groups (15 each), and two explicit correction groups (15 each), forming different classes.

Instruments

The instruments of the study included an Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and a questionnaire on anxiety in speaking performance.

The Oxford Placement Test was used to measure and determine the participants' level of general English language proficiency and ensure their homogeneity. The OPT is generally used by ELT researchers as a language proficiency test where participants' level is a measure based on the guideline of the test and the scores obtained by students. The reliability of the OPT has been reported by Hamidi (2015) to be .82 using the KR-21 formula, having seventy students. This test consists of 60 multiple-choice-item questions, and students are required to choose the correct answer from among the alternatives. The time required to complete the test is 30 minutes. Those who scored 37 to 47 (upper-intermediate level) and 48 to 55 (advanced level) were considered to be homogenous members and were then included in the study.

The second instrument which was utilized in this study was a speaking anxiety questionnaire developed by Chowdhury (2014). This questionnaire is a 25-item Likert-scale instrument in which each item is scored on a 5-point scale where 1=Entirely disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure, 4=Agree and 5=Entirely agree. The participants ought to choose a suitable number based on their opinion for each item. The reliability index of the questionnaire was found to be .78, using Chronbach's Alpha.

Procedure

First of all, the researcher administered the OPT to the IELTS learners at a language institute in Tehran, Iran. The level of the IELTS test takers was determined through the guideline of the OPT, focusing on upper-intermediate and advanced learners. Then, the selected participants were

assigned to six groups: two control groups (N=15 each), two recast groups (N=15 each), and two explicit correction groups (N=15 each).

This was done through simple random sampling. In order to measure the anxiety in speaking performance, Chowdhury's (2014) questionnaire was given to the participants to be filled out: once as the pre-treatment and once as the post-treatment. Then, the score of each learner was calculated and recorded for the data analysis.

There were 10 treatment sessions for the recast and explicit correction groups; however, the participants in the control group did not get any common kind of feedback for their errors during the instruction. The researcher, in the control group, did not correct the mistakes of the participants at whatever point she confronted any. In addition, she did not request that the participants contemplate their errors or modify them utilizing any hints.

In the recast group, the researcher corrected the mistakes of the students using reformulation whenever she faced any problems on the part of students; for example, when someone said "I agree with you", she continued and said, "oh, you agree with me." She did not ask the students to think back on what they had just said, nor did she tell them they had made a mistake.

In the explicit correction group, mistakes were not tolerated and they were corrected on the spot. The researcher provided the correct form for the students whenever they made any mistakes. For instance, when someone said "I play yoga", she replied "play yoga is incorrect. You should say I do yoga." She did not ask the students to correct themselves, rather she herself corrected the erroneous forms.

Results

Before presenting the results of the research questions, the result of the language placement test is shown.

Table 1
The Result of the OPT for the Upper-Intermediate and Advanced Groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Upper	45	37.00	47.00	42.75	2.99
Advanced	45	48.00	55.00	50.77	2.14
Valid N (listwise)	45				

Table 1 shows the result of the OPT scores. The mean and standard deviation scores for the upper and advanced groups are 42.75, 2.99, and 50.77, 2.14 respectively. In the next steps, the research questions are answered.

Answering the First Research Question

The first research question of this study investigated whether explicit corrective feedback had any statistically significant effect on anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the upper-intermediate level.

In order to answer the research question, the researcher ran the ANCOVA test. The following table shows the descriptive statistics for the anxiety in speaking scores of the control and explicit corrective groups.

Table 2
The Descriptive Statistics for the Anxiety in Speaking Scores of the Control and Explicit Corrective Groups at the Upper-intermediate level

Group3	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
control	68.8667	.74322	15
Explicit Correction	68.4000	.82808	15
Total	68.6333	.80872	30

As it can be seen in Table 2 above, the mean for the control and explicit corrective groups related to their anxiety in speaking scores are 68.86 and 68.40 respectively. Table 3 below shows the result of the ANCOVA test.

Table 3

The Result of the ANCOVA for the Comparison of the Control and Explicit Corrective Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	7.838 ^a	2	3.919	9.509	.001	.413
Intercept	10.822	1	10.822	26.258	.000	.493
Prescores_3	6.205	1	6.205	15.055	.001	.358
Group3	1.440	1	1.440	3.495	.072	.115
Error	11.128	27	.412			
Total	141335.000	30				
Corrected Total	18.967	29				

As Table 3 shows, there was no statistically significant difference between the control and explicit corrective groups regarding their anxiety in speaking scores, $F(1,27) = 3.49$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, meaning explicit correction did not have any statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the upper-intermediate level.

Answering the Second Research Question

The second research question of this study investigated whether explicit corrective feedback had any statistically significant effect on anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the advanced level.

In order to answer the research question, the researcher ran the ANCOVA test. The following table shows the descriptive statistics for the anxiety in speaking scores of the control and explicit corrective groups.

Table 4
The Descriptive Statistics for the Anxiety in Speaking Scores of the Control and Explicit Corrective Groups at the Advanced Level

Group3	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
control	67.1333	.99043	15
Explicit Correction	65.8000	.94112	15
Total	66.4667	1.16658	30

As it can be seen in Table 4.4 above, the mean for the control and explicit corrective groups related to their anxiety in speaking scores are 67.13 and 65.80 respectively. Table 5 below shows the result of the ANCOVA test.

Table 5
The Result of the ANCOVA for the Comparison of the Control and Explicit Corrective Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	19.878 ^a	2	9.939	13.699	.000	.504
Intercept	.980	1	.980	1.351	.255	.048
Prescores_3	6.544	1	6.544	9.020	.006	.250
Group3	12.370	1	12.370	17.050	.000	.387
Error	19.589	27	.726			
Total	132574.000	30				
Corrected Total	39.467	29				

As Table 5 shows, there was no statistically significant difference between the control and explicit corrective groups regarding their anxiety in speaking scores, $F(1,27) = 17.05$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .38$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning that explicit correction had a statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in the speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the advanced level.

Answering the Third Research Question

The third research question of this study investigated whether recast had any statistically significant effect on anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the upper-intermediate level.

In order to answer the research question, the researcher ran the ANCOVA test. The following table shows the descriptive statistics for the anxiety in speaking scores of the control and recast groups.

Table 6

The Descriptive Statistics for the Anxiety in Speaking Scores of the Control and Recast Groups at the Upper-intermediate level

Group4	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	68.8667	.74322	15
Recast	68.0667	.70373	15
Total	68.4667	.81931	30

As it can be seen in Table 6 above, the mean for the control and recast groups related to their anxiety in speaking scores are 68.86 and 68.06, respectively. Table 7 below shows the result of the ANCOVA test.

Table 7

The Result of the ANCOVA for the Comparison of the Control and Recast Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	12.039 ^a	2	6.020	21.882	.000	.618
Intercept	6.098	1	6.098	22.169	.000	.451
Prescores4	7.239	1	7.239	26.316	.000	.494
Group4	.261	1	.261	.947	.339	.034
Error	7.427	27	.275			
Total	140650.000	30				
Corrected Total	19.467	29				

As Table 7 shows, there was a statistically significant difference between the control and recast groups regarding their anxiety in speaking scores, $F(1,27) = .94$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, meaning that recast did not have any statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the upper-intermediate level.

Table 9
The Result of the ANCOVA for the Comparison of the Control and Recast Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	153.046 ^a	2	76.523	166.351	.000	.925
Intercept	2.846	1	2.846	6.187	.019	.186
Prescores4	33.046	1	33.046	71.839	.000	.727
Group4	22.431	1	22.431	48.762	.000	.644
Error	12.420	27	.460			
Total	127436.000	30				
Corrected Total	165.467	29				

As Table 9 shows, there was a statistically significant difference between the control and recast groups regarding their anxiety in speaking scores, $F(1,27) = 48.76$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .64$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, meaning recast had a statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the advanced level.

Discussion

The present study was an attempt to probe into the efficient ways addressing the needs of EFL language learners as to their speaking anxiety through finding the comparative effects of recast and explicit correction on the anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS across levels of proficiency in a foreign language context.

The result of the first question showed explicit correction did not have any statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the upper-intermediate level. However, the result of the second question proved that explicit correction had a statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in the speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the advanced level. Findings of the third research question indicated that recast did not have any statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at the upper-intermediate level. On the contrary, concerning question four, there was a statistically significant

difference between the control and recast groups at the advanced level; recast had a statistically significant effect on reducing anxiety in speaking performance of Iranian participants of IELTS at this level.

In contrast to the advanced level students who experienced a significant reduction in their speaking anxiety level, the upper-intermediate students did not happen to benefit from the corrective feedback types, neither in recast nor in the explicit type. The findings of this study are thus in line with Iwashita (2003) who found that positive evidence and feedback works better for learners with higher scores. The findings of Ammar and Spada (2006) also support the result of this study. They found that high-proficiency learners benefited from all types of corrective feedback and from instruction alone, while low-proficiency learners benefited more from prompts. In a similar vein, Philp (2003) and Trofimovich et al. (2007) found that learners with higher proficiency noticed feedback more frequently and benefited more from the corrective feedback on the part of the teacher. The findings of Ammar (2008) also support the results of the present study in that he found learners benefit more from feedback if they are at a higher developmental stage. A justification for the discrepancy between the results of the two levels is that the higher-level students are academically more motivated or mentally more matured in terms of receiving and accepting feedback; they believe that the corrections on the part of their teachers are conducive to better learning. The findings of the study are in contrast to what Mufidah (2017) found in that students from various levels of language groups in his study claimed oral corrective feedback assisted them to locate their mistakes with ease and motivate them to study more efficiently, but it did not help them to significantly increase their speaking performance. Thus, it might be concluded that not every oral feedback is necessarily conducive to better speaking performance since the way students are corrected is as important as the context in which they receive the correction. The findings of the present research, however, may not be extendable to all those who are learning English in courses other than IELTS. The purpose or motivation that learners of IELTS pursue may substantially differ from those learning English in the long run-in institutes whose linguistic focus may differ in that they can focus on daily, non-academic communication in a second language.

Hence, it can be argued that IELTS learners' speaking performance is to some extent associated with the type of feedback they receive and how they are corrected on the part of their teachers.

From the evidence of the present study, some implications can be drawn. First, because it was found that, contrary to the advanced levels, in upper-intermediate classes, there was no statistically significant difference as to the speaking anxiety, it is deemed essential for language teachers to separate the speaking classes based on their proficiency level. This may lead to the better performance of the learners in the long run. Secondly, since both explicit and recast corrective feedbacks were beneficial in reducing the speaking anxiety level, students are encouraged to pay heed to the corrections made by the teacher, either directly or indirectly. Thirdly, teachers are advised to constantly implement different types of corrective feedback in their classes in order to help students with their speaking inhibition problems. However, care should be taken not to overuse the feedback since it might have adverse effects.

Although it was the purpose of the study to compare or investigate the effect of the two types of feedback with each other or simultaneously, the recast group at the advanced level showed less speaking anxiety in comparison to the explicit group. Therefore, it is suggested that future research studies investigate the interactive effect of the mentioned feedback on speaking anxiety as well. In addition to that, we suggest conducting studies that take into consideration the other types of feedback as the independent variables, including metalinguistic and clarification requests. Aside from that, it seems worthwhile to include new dependent variables such as speaking accuracy, speaking fluency, and pronunciation in order to find whether they could be impacted by oral corrective feedback.

In general, this study proved that explicit correction and recast were beneficial for students preparing themselves for the IELTS exam. However, it does not mean that these two types of oral feedback are the only ways that can be applied in language classrooms. We need to observe the fact that the way they are utilized by teachers plays an undeniable role in reaching the required effect. Different feedbacks can be manipulated in terms of frequency, direction, whether given by teacher or peer, and timing and support as stated by Zarrinabadi (2014).

Declaration of interest: none

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Biodata

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