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Recast Enrichment Episodes for Improving EFL Learners' Written Accuracy and Complexity: Reaching out to Learner Negotiation

David M. Russell[1] *& Massoud Yaghoubi-Notash*[2*]

Abstract

Findings on recast as feedback on learners' erroneous forms tend to be less than conclusive or confirmatory. Also, the conventional formulations in literature give partial accounts of recasting as an effective methodological practice. The present study proposes recast enriched by negotiation (REN) on the learners' part as an alternative. For investigating the hypothetical effect, three all-female groups were concentrated on, namely explicit feedback, recast and REN. Summary writing task as post-test concentrated on the learners' accuracy in terms of error-free T units, and complexity regarding word per sentence ratio as well as lexical density. One-way ANOVA for three independent samples and post hoc analyses revealed that accuracy and word per sentence ratio did not vary significantly; however, lexical density improved as a result of REN. Findings and implications of the study are discussed in the light of methodological potentials and literature.

Keywords: accuracy, complexity, negotiation, recast, recast enriched by negotiation (REN)

[1] Associate Professor, ELT Teacher Education Department, National Taitung Junior College, Taitung City, Taitung Country, Taiwan; *Email: dmruss1988@gmail.com,*
ORCID ID: https:orcid.org/0000-0001-9399-3168
[2] Corresponding Author: Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Faculty of Persian Literature & Foreign Languages, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran;
Email: masoud.yaghoubi@gmail.com, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4330-1415

1. Introduction

To meet accuracy and content demands is often equated with a level of writing adequacy which would be an achievement on the learners' part and a long-cherished dream for EFL teaching practitioners. The so-called achievement will come true only in light of a laborious process with a substantial effort to provide effective comments and editing by the teacher. All these can be seen as instances of what was formerly termed error correction and later came to be known as corrective feedback. However, an explicit concern with form in the former way is what the language education theory and practice have lately been deemphasizing more than ever before (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020). In fact, towards the end of the twentieth century, the attention in ELT shifted away from form to meaning (and correspondingly from accuracy to fluency) which occurred against a wider backdrop of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching). By virtue of this very change, correction has lost the ground to the term feedback which implies more learner-friendly and less intrusive ways of dealing with the erroneous forms emerging in the learners' language production. It is no wonder that the delicate job of providing feedback has turned into a proliferating area of investigation over the last decades.

Concern with feedback is, in effect, neither too new nor very context-specific; however, it continues to stimulate arguments and debates. For one thing, treatment of the erroneous forms produced by the learners seems just too much of a necessity. For another, providing feedback can be associated with a number of issues in SLA that are already appealing including focus on form (FonF), noticing the gap and pushed output, for instance. As for the FonF, providing feedback is one of the primary ways in which the teachers can raise the learners' awareness of the form. Noticing the gap suggests that the learners will have to be made aware of an incongruity between their actual and required productions on the one hand and between their own production and that of the native language speakers on the other (Schmidt, 2001). This, again, requires feedback provision among other things. Moreover, when raising the issue of pushed output as a valuable source of L2 acquisition, Swain (1991) argues that output per se cannot suffice and acknowledges the crucial role of CF. She delineates that inadequate or no feedback on the learners' utterances in terms of accuracy, appropriacy and coherence may mean that the output will not possibly push the learners to process more deeply and with a higher level of mental effort. Detailed elaboration on the various themes

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associated with CF is beyond the scope of the present introduction; nevertheless, one can argue that strong ties can be identified between the essence of feedback and fundamental issues in SLA which makes a hot as well as challenging topic out of this stimulating notion.

Despite strong associations and implications, researchers dealing with CF have not been able to come up with a convenient formulation of the nature and aspects of this notion (see Wiboolyasarin, 2021 for instance). Now, a growing awareness in SLA is that ". . . . there is no easily operationalizable framework for CF that could be offered as a panacea for all instructional settings" (Eslami & Derakhshan, 2020, p. 49). CF provision and outcomes are expected to be governed by individual differences, cognitive and metacognitive factors, learning experience, and a host of other variables (see Murray & Lamb, 2018 for instance). On the other hand, CF cannot be underestimated or marginalized simply by referring to the absence of unanimity. Rather, different positions may suggest that there are still influential variables yet to be explored. Rashidi and Babaie (2013) state that "[w]hat characterizes corrective feedback is that it offers great potentials to draw learners' attention to mismatches between their production and the target-like realization of these hard-to-learn forms" (p. 26).

As a complex and at the same time rich source of L2 acquisition, "CF involves cognitive, social, and psycholinguistic dimensions. . . .[and] taking a sociocultural perspective, L2 learning happens when learners participate in social interactions and engage in collaborative learning activities" (Eslami & Derakhshan, 2020, p. 50). Negotiation, by virtue of accommodating interactional and sociocultural factors, can be a source of investigation as far as CF is concerned. With this background in mind, the research questions addressed in this study are:

R.Q1. Does REN influence the EFL learners' writing accuracy?

R.Q 2. Does REN influence the EFL learners' writing complexity?

2. Review of Literature

Any instructional attempt on EFL teachers' part necessitates their reaction to the learners' performance and treatment of the erroneous forms emerging in L2 production (Shakki, 2022; Shakki et al., 2021; 2023). As a matter of fact, these reactions "to L2 learners' non-targetlike production have been commonly referred

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to as instances of corrective feedback (CF) (Van Beuningen, 2010, p 2).

While the essence of error occurrence is universally acknowledged, the nature, necessity, and extent of treatment continue to be debated. Since the last four decades, concern with treatment of ill-formed L2 productions has traced a long path from Corder's *interlanguage* in the 1960s to Krashen's *Input Hypothesis* and *Monitor Model*, and eventually culminating in *cognitive* and *sociocultural* approaches. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) defined feedback as the "information regarding some aspect(s) of one's task performance" (p. 255). In another definition, CF is argued to be a way of signaling to the learner about his or her incorrect use of target language (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

Askew (2000) describes feedback as judging another individual's performance so as to minimize "a gap in knowledge and skill" (p. 6). Russell and Spada (2006) believe that CF refers "to any feedback provided to a learner from any source" (p. 134) which may include clues as to the learner's use of erroneous form. According to Hattie (2009) the information conveyed by feedback can be provided by agents like teachers, peers, parents, and other external and internal sources (e.g., book and self). Following Lyster et al. (2013), CF embodies reacting to the utterances made by the learners in which errors have occurred. Corrective Feedback (CF) "occurs when the learner is corrected in some way in their use of language." (Neilson, 2017, p. 82). More precisely, Noor et al. (2010) state that the common and recurring theme of all the accounts and definitions for CF is providing the learners with information on their ongoing learning experience. Esmaeeli and Sadeghi (2020) duly state that corrective feedback "is a complex set of planned processes, including planning, brainstorming, writing, revising and editing" (p. 90).

2.1. Recast as CF (Corrective Feedback)

The present study focuses on recast as an intriguing area of research which was first characterized as an L1 acquisition phenomenon. Recast is one of the six types of CF namely, a) explicit correction, b) recast, c) clarification request, d) metalinguistic clues, e) elicitation, and f) repetition (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) which involves the teacher's restatement or reformulation of the learner's erroneous utterance without directly or explicitly indicating that the utterance was wrong. Bohannon, Padgett, Nelson, and Mark (1996) define recast as a correction technique "that expands, deletes, permutes, or otherwise changes the platform while maintaining overlap in

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meaning" (p. 434). As Braidi (2002) puts it, "response was coded as a recast if it incorporated the content words of the immediately preceding incorrect Nonnative Speaker (NNS) utterance and also changed and corrected the utterance …." (p.20). To Ellis (2003), the term suggests "rephrasing an utterance" (p. 168) by modifying its formal elements but preserving the meaning. Long (2007) maintains that it may be defined as "a reformulation of all or part of a learner's immediately preceding utterance" (p.77) where a few non-native-like words, grammatical structures, and so forth are substituted by authentic forms while never having the learners lose focus on meaning. Similarly, Sheen (2006) believes that it occurs when the teacher reformulates a learner's entire utterance containing a minimum of erroneous form.

2.2. The Effects of Recast

Due to different conceptualizations, recast has been "a controversial issue among second language acquisition (SLA) researchers" (Baleghizadeh & Abdi, 2010, p. 57). Oliver and Grote (2010) delineate that context is very influential in recast efficiency as leading to uptake. Recasts were found to be very effective in NNS-NNS interactions but not in the classroom context. Maftoon et al. (2010) reported no significant difference between self-correction and recast for writing. Moreover, they found that the self-correction group did better than the recast group and the latter group failed to improve accuracy on post-test. Sakai (2011) employed stimulated recall to compare recast and no-feedback groups. Regarding the influence of the Japanese learners' noticing the gap, recast did help learners to develop an awareness of their L2 gap. Sato (2012) showed that in the Japanese context recast as CF could improve the learners' accuracy, fluency, and complexity of writing. Zabihi (2013) examining Iranian learners' performance showed that recasts significantly improved writing achievement. Golshan (2013) comparing different types of feedback claimed that with elementary levels of proficiency, explicit corrective feedback worked better than recast. Rassaie (2014) compared recast with scaffolded feedback from a socio-cultural perspective implying that recast can have social dimensions and that it contributes to higher levels of development. Naderi (2014) examining the learners' listening comprehension failed to prove any significant difference between recast and explicit feedback. Sharifi and Mal Miri (2014) reported that recast did not have any effect on autonomy (see Eslami & Derakhsan, 2020).

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In another study, Nurhartanto (2016) reported that recasts may be useful with students who might be employing some strategies. Sato (2016) found that recast as measured by stimulated recall tended to enhance noticing when recast was phonological in nature, but it failed to improve grammatical accuracy (see also Kalanzadeh et al., 2018). In another study, Bing-jie (2016) contended that recast was supported as an effective practice by interaction hypothesis but whether it was supported by input or output hypotheses was doubted.

According to Hawks and Nassaji (2016), recasts were beneficial to the learners on the grounds that they enabled the learners to distinguish and rectify inaccurate forms in their utterance. They went on to contend that when the learners encountered their erroneous forms in the form of a video or through written medium, they found out about their errors successfully or almost successfully as compared to the situation in which they received recast in the oral interaction. Other findings of this study included recast utility even in small-group interactions, as both incidental and extensive practice. Recast was deemed more fruitful "when provided in response to a wide range of linguistic errors, even if some linguistic forms receive only one recast" (Hawk & Nassaji, 2016, p. 35). Noori Khaneghah (2016) could not identify any advantage for recast over explicit correction in treating the learners' errors but claimed that in the case of giving corrective feedback to the learners' lexical errors, negotiation worked better than any other corrective feedback type. Banarouee et al. (2018) reported a positive recast effect compared to the explicit correction group. Alizadeh Vandchalli and Pourmohammadi (2019) confirmed that recast improved the students' performance more than the explicit elicitation group, and both outdid the no-feedback group in their study.

2.3. Issues and Gaps

Despite the fact that CF sounds quite well-defined in the literature, the accounts appear to be far too simplistic. Recast, among other CF types, looks more compliant with interaction since it is expected to occur in the natural real-time communicative situations even in L1. From a pragmatic perspective, recasting may be more tactful because it doesn't threaten the interlocutor's face. However, recast as formulated by Lyster and Ranta (1997) appears inadequate on the grounds that:

a. *Recast* essentially operates indirectly, that is the learner's erroneous form or

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use is treated or manipulated without any explicit reference. Indirectness will be beneficial provided that the context is rich enough for the learners to make the right inferences concerning their own utterance.

b. *Recast* outcome is idealized! It is assumed that the teachers' corrective reformulation will *necessarily* trigger the accurate production of language on the learners' part. But what if it failed to do so due to ambiguity? (Balighizadeh & Abdi, 2010). Since reformulation is indirect in nature, it may fail to raise the learners' awareness for noticing the gap unlike what some researchers claim (Long, 1996).

As far as recast is concerned, although the context of study (i.e., EFL) as well as teachers' partial reformulation of learners' errors made them explicit, it is not clear if all the learners will notice the corrective nature of the recasts. Besides, even those who might have noticed the location of the error may not benefit from the deep level of awareness and understanding that can take place through explicit correction with metalinguistic information. More specifically, as Golshan (2013) puts it

> Partial reformulation of learners' errors did not lead to long time-outs from interaction to afford learners the opportunity to think about the rule and reanalyze their hypotheses as much as it occurred in explicit correction with metalinguistic information group. (Golshan, 2013. 568)

c. *Recast* barely leaves much room for the learners' deeper and longer processing of/reflection upon the erroneous form.

d. *Recast* invariably occurs as a unilateral (teacher-to learner) process. This may minimize the learners' involvement as a group.

e. *Recast* may falsely legitimize the teacher's reformulation at the cost of dismissing other possible correct forms. There may be more than one way to reformulate the erroneous form correctly, but the students in this case are likely to disregard other possibilities and adhere to the form suggested by the teacher! This runs counter to authentic language use which entails that the interlocutors make choices from among possible utterances.

To address these gaps and inadequacies, one may think of negotiation of form as a potential for recast enrichment. Negotiation of form refers to "an interactional sequence in which learners attempt to resolve a linguistic problem in their output" (Koizumi, 2017, iii). It can be argued that interaction promoted by negotiated recast

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will probably lea to a better learning experience for several reasons. Firstly, REN can raise the learners' awareness of the form and their use within the communicative context (therefore FonF). Secondly, negotiated recast more than the one that is unilaterally provided by the teacher can lead to learners' involvement in the interaction process, and is more likely to happen in the authentic context of language use. Additionally, such a recast can prompt learners to reflect upon their language use. Also, negotiation would facilitate a simultaneous employment of communication, cognitive and metacognitive strategies on the learners' part. And finally, more classroom-based authenticity could be ensured as the latter necessitates the possibility of choice on the part of the interlocutors.

It may be argued that the very negotiation of recast could boil the whole classroom interaction down into focus on forms. However, it must not be forgotten that REN differs from negotiation of forms for the sake of forms; negotiation of language forms for meaning is an inherently meaning-focused performance by and in itself that takes place within the process of communication where consciousness-raising can occur about aspects of accuracy, language use, etc. (see Gholami & Narimani, 2012). Thus, the REN must not be mistaken for traditional forms-focused EFL instructional activity.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants in the study comprised 43 female participants who were taking upper-intermediate Spoken English Language courses in three all-female, segregated classes at a private institute in Tabriz, Eastern Azarbaijan Province, Iran. They had already taken a local placement test, and due to the typically rigorous and inflexible streaming of the classes and courses, it was not possible to randomize or divide the students into groups. Their proficiency level was intermediate as they had done at least 10 semesters in the institute. Accidental sampling was used as the only option. All of the participants came from Azerbaijani-speaking context and their ages ranged between 18 and 27 (*Mean* = 20.65, *SD* = 2.45).

3.2. Procedures & Instrumentation

The three groups (classes) were comprised of 16, 12, and 15 female students were

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given A, B and C labels corresponding with explicit feedback, recast, and REN, respectively. To ensure homogeneity of the groups (classes) an Oxford Placement Test was administered. The results of a repeated measure ANOVA with three independent samples of Oxford Placement Test revealed no significant (F = 1.31) difference at $p < 0.05$. The means for the groups were 58.75, 66.16, and 70.01 which following the test interpretation schemes are rounded up to be 60, 65 and 70 which means that the three groups' proficiency fell somewhere in the middle of 0-120 range and the groups. This suggested that the institute had placed the learners at roughly the right level of instruction; therefore, the intact classes following the local course streaming did not harm the basis for comparison (i.e. homogeneity).

Each teacher had already received the instructions to provide the corresponding type of feedback, namely explicit written feedback, recast, and REN for her group (class) that is A, B, and C, respectively. The written feedback on summary writing tasks were assigned for each class. The texts that were summarized were in fact the reading comprehension texts contained in their textbook. For group A, the teacher provided explicit written feedback by marking the incorrect structures and providing the correct form, whereas group B received written recast. However, for group C., the teacher took photos of the summary and arranged them into anonymous PowerPoint files which were shown to the students using the video-projection system. The students were instructed to give comments and negotiate not the form but the possible ways in which the writings could be improved. Utmost care was taken to prevent the learners from being involved in merely form-based explanations. For better involvement and lower inhibition, the students in class C were allowed to do code-switching and use their L1 (i.e. Azarbaijani) whenever they desired. This latter type of recast (i.e. REN) took around 30 minutes of each class time. In the remaining time, the teacher refrained from any other types of feedback even an oral one.

For the purpose of the post-test, a total of ten intermediate-level passages were initially selected at the first stage. Then consulting with the classroom teachers, the researcher narrowed them down into five, and in the end, one text was selected randomly. The text was entitled, 'The Causes of Flood' accessible through the following link:

https://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/courses/elc/studyzone/490/reading/floods2-reading.htm.

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The readability data of the text obtained through online readability calculator is as follows (See Table 1). They indices in Table 1all demonstrate that the text is of average-level difficulty. An average of the values falls somewhere between 9 and 10, and indicates that the text requires a competence comparable to mid-secondary school learners' proficiency in L1.

Table 1
*Readability Statistics*of Post-Test Task*

Index	value	interpretation
Flesch Reading Ease score	67.6	standard / average
Gunning Fog	10.4	fairly easy to read
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	8.4	8th grade
The Coleman-Liau Index	9	9th grade
The SMOG Index	7	7th grade
Automated Readability Index	9.5	14-15 yrs. old (9th 10th graders)
Linsear Write Formula	10.6	11th grade

* https://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php

Their final test for the end of the semester included a separate section on summarizing for which a five-minute reading time and a thirty-minute summary writing time was allotted. They had access to the text 'The Causes of Flood' during the summary writing and were allowed to take notes. After the allotted time was over, the texts along with the summaries, drafts and notes were collected.

3.3. Results

To calculate accuracy (as for research question 1), the ratio of error-free T-units were obtained. Inter-rater reliability was calculated by two independent raters (kappa coefficient = 0.89). For the purpose of obtaining complexity (as for research question 2) number of words per sentence (W/S), and lexical density (the ratio of content words to the total word count) were calculated.

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Table 2
ANOVA for Accuracy

Source	SS*	f	MS*	Significance
Between-treatments	842.38	2	421.19	F = 2.13***
Within-treatments	8319.64	42	198.09	
Total	9162.02	44		

* Sum of squares; ** mean square; *** not significant at p <0.05

As shown in Table 2, the one-way ANOVA comparing three independent groups demonstrates that the differences among the three groups in terms of error-free T-units were not significant. In other words, the students in the three groups (A, B, and C), did not differ in their accuracy of their written summaries.

Table 3
ANOVA for Complexity (Word per Sentence)

Source	SS*	f	MS*	Significance
Between-treatments	14.50	2	7.2497	F = 0.94***
Within-treatments	324.79	42	7.7332	
Total	339.30	44		

* Sum of squares; ** mean square; *** not significant at p <0.05

According to the Table 3, difference among the three groups in terms of the number of words per sentence was not significant. To put it differently the F ratio which is not significant at $p < 0.05$ indicates that none of the groups on average produced a considerably higher ratio of words per sentence.

Table 4
ANOVA for Complexity (Lexical Density)

Source	SS*	f	MS*	Significance
Between-treatments	9091.27	2	4545.63	F =

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Source	SS*	f	MS*	Significance
				26.18***
Within-treatments	7291.48	42	173.61	
Total	16382.77	44	16382.75	

* Sum of squares; ** mean square; *** significant at p <0.05

Table 4 clearly illustrates the ANOVA results comparing the means of the three groups (A, B, and C). F-ratio (26.18) is significant at p <0.05, which means that the learners in the three groups produced a remarkably different rate of lexical density in their summaries. Post hoc analyses were required to pinpoint the exact significant differences. In this case, the post hoc analyses would be independent samples T-test comparing groups A & B, A & C, and B& C.

Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test Comparing Groups A &B (Lexical Density)

	N	Mean	SD*	df	t-observed
A	18	44.02	14.38	28	0.16**
B	12	43.16	14.06		

* Standard Deviation; ** not significant at p < 0.05.

Table 5 indicates that the t-observed is not significantly large enough; therefore, the two groups did not produce very much different written summaries regarding lexical density.

Table 6

Independent Samples T-test Comparing A & C (Lexical Density)

	N	Mean	SD*	df	t-observed
A	18	44.02	14.38	31	6.63**
C	15	73.82	10.71		

* Standard Deviation; ** significant at p < 0.05.

It is understood from Table 6 that the t-observed is significant which indicates that the two groups wrote with significantly different levels of lexical density in their summaries. Looking at the means of the groups A and B (44.02 and 73.82),

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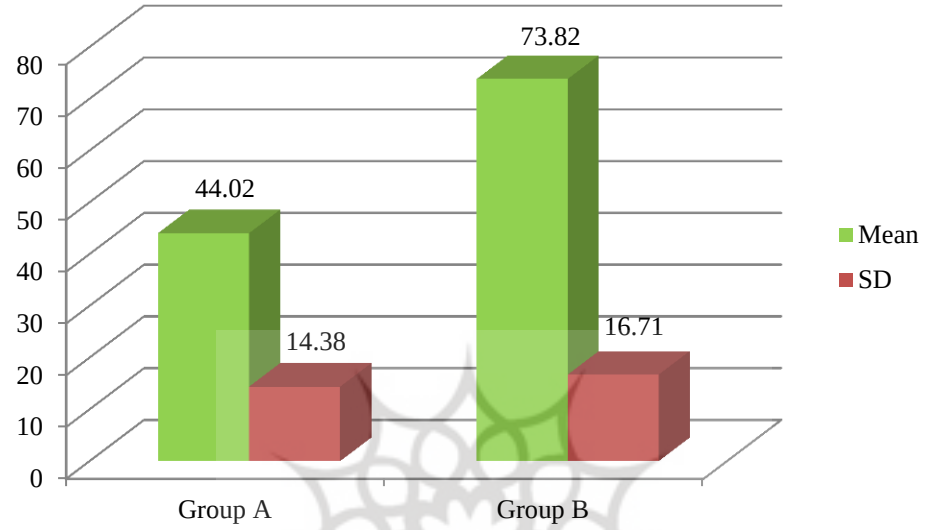
one can infer that groups C wrote more lexically dense summaries on average.

Figure 1
Mean and Standard Deviation of Groups A & C



SD: Standard deviation

The figure above shows that groups C, that is the group receiving REN, on average, produced a higher mean (73.82) of lexical density compared to the group that received explicit feedback (44.02). On the other hand, group C had a lower level of standard deviation (10.71) than group (A), which implies that the learners that received REN had on average a more homogeneous performance since their average score was relatively closer to the mean.

Table 7
Independent Samples T-test Comparing B and C (Lexical Density)

	N	Mean	SD*	df	t-observed
B	12	43.16	14.06		
C	15	73.82	10.71	25	0.643**

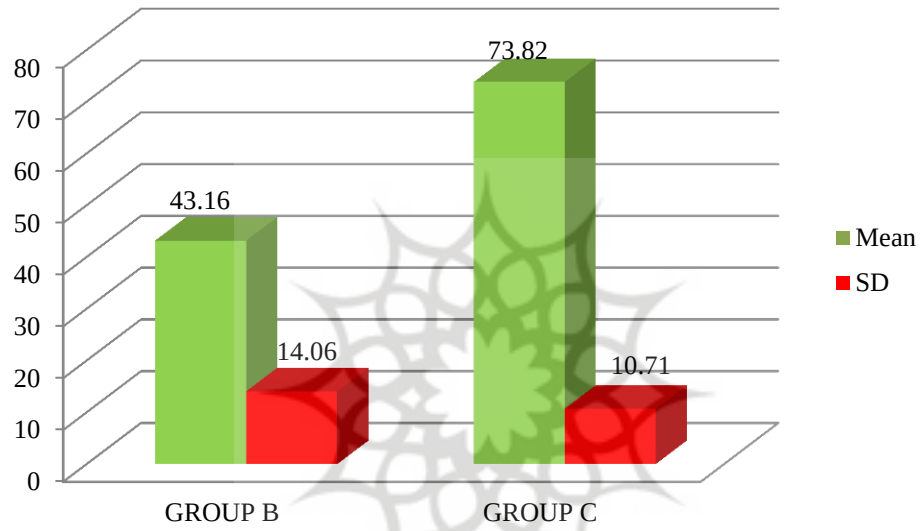
* Standard Deviation; ** significant at p < 0.05.

As the Table 4.6. shows, the difference between the means of groups B and C is

significant at p value smaller than 0.05. Consequently, it can be concluded that the two groups had a significantly different performance in terms of lexical density. Comparing the means, one can strongly claim that the group receiving the REN, on average, outperformed the group whose erroneous forms were treated with recast only (73.16 vs. 43.16).

Figure 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Groups B and C



SD: Standard Deviation

The mean values for groups B and C (43.16 and 73.28, respectively) point out that the latter group did significantly better than the former since their average is remarkably higher. Thus, the group that received REN produced more lexically dense summaries than the recast group. On the other hand, the standard deviation comparison shows that the REN group performance in terms of lexical density tended to be closer (i.e. 14.06 and 10.71) which suggests that the two groups' dispersion of scores from the mean were more comparable than their means (i.e. 43.16 vs. 73.82).

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4. Conclusion

The present study showed that the REN did not bring about any significant improvements regarding accuracy as well as average sentence length (word per sentence ratio) as an indicator of complexity since the difference between explicit feedback, recast, and REN was not significant. This finding is confirmed by Maftoon et al. (2010), Naderi (2014), and Sharifi and Malmiri (2014). Nevertheless, this finding is not supported by other studies including Banarouee et al. (2018), Hawks and Nassaji (2016), Sakai (2016), Sato (2010; 2016), Nurhartanto (2016), Rassaei (2014), and Alizadeh Vandchali and Pourmohammadi (2019). The findings, so far, suggest that the classroom interaction to negotiate feedback did not improve accuracy and length. Speculatively, it may be argued that in the negotiation process, the participants focused more on meaning rather than on form. In other words, the negotiated interaction to enrich recast may have drifted away from form-focused to purely meaning-focused interaction. Additionally, the context of research in Iran where learners traditionally tend to idolize the teacher at the cost of ignoring other sources of knowledge may have been responsible for the absence of influence.

On the other hand, the REN was shown to be influential in improving writing complexity regarding lexical complexity. Contrary to the previous finding on accuracy, the earlier studies by Banarouee et al. (2018), Hawks & Nassaji (2016), Sakai (2016), Sato (2010; 2016), Nurhartanto (2016), Rassaei (2014), and Alizadeh Vandchali and Pourmohammadi (2019) lend support. Conversely, the findings are not in line with Maftoon et al. (2010), Naderi (2014), and Sharifi and Mal Miri (2014) which reported no positive effect for recast. It can be argued that the meaning-focused nature of negotiated interaction in REN may have been the reason why the participants have prioritized lexical dimensions of interaction.

REN can bear implications for language teaching practice in the classroom especially for the teachers who may be looking for less intrusive ways of treating the learners' erroneous forms. An implication of the present study can be that the writing instruction informed by REN can be particularly beneficial with high proficiency learners whose primary concern is complexity rather than accuracy in writing. Syllabus designers and material developers may also enhance input, processing and output by REN-friendly task since the latter type of tasks can ensure more authentic language use, FonF, and can facilitate pushed output (see Schmidt, 2001; Swain, 1991 for instance).

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Further research may address other skill areas such as speaking or other dimensions of language production such as lexical diversity, style, pragmatic appropriateness and so forth. Also, variables such as teachers' or learners' attitude, gender, motivation, learners' age and proficiency level, classroom discourse patterns, etc. can be examined with regard to their hypothetical effect or co-variation with REN. Negotiation as an indispensable component of REN constitutes a dynamic pragmatic and socio-cultural source for boosting intersubjectivity, learner agency, participants' shared voices, and promotion of intercultural competence in new-millennium language learning experience.

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About the Authors

David M. Russell is an Associate Professor of English Language Teaching (ELT). He received his MA in education from Brandon University in Manitoba, Canada in 2012. He completed his doctoral studies in English Language Teaching (ELT) at Georgia State University, USA in 2016. He is currently a staff member of ELT Teacher Education Department at the National Taitung Junior College in Taiwan. His fields of interest include discourse and EFL, CLT methodology, and Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

Massoud Yaghoubi-Notash is an Assistant Professor of English Language Teaching. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Tabriz in 2007 in ELT, and is currently a staff member of the English Department, University of Tabriz. His areas of interest include negotiation, gender and language, interlanguage discourse, CDA, and critical pedagogy in EFL.

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