

International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



The Role of Implicit Negative Feedback in Language Development-Some Reflections

[PP: 01-07]

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of feedback, especially the implicit negative feedback in learning process to enhance language development. The definition of the feedback and the types are elaborated in relation to how the types contribute in improving the comprehension and the acquisition of second language in the process of communication with native and non-native speakers of English by providing comprehensible input and modified output. The theory of implicit negative impact which focuses on three significant areas: (1) type of implicit negative feedback, (2) the critical role of noticing to increase the knowledge and the acquisition by demonstrating research studies to prove, and (3) the key role of interaction to increase the acquisition and the comprehension are detailed with supportive literature. The paper also briefs some limitations encountered while applying such type of feedback in the learning process.

Keywords: Negative Feedback, Interaction, Modified Output, Corrective Feedback, Second Language Acquisition

ARTICLE INFO	The paper received on	Reviewed on	Accepted after revisions on
	03/10/2016	05/11/2016	12/02/2017

Suggested citation:

Mashrah, H. (2017). The Role of Implicit Negative Feedback in Language Development-Some Reflections. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 5(1), 01-07.

1. Introduction

Providing feedback to learners contributes effectively to increase acquisition of second language. During negotiation for the meaning, there are some types of feedback used among native speakers (NS)-nonnative speakers (NNS) or non-native speakers (NNS)-nonnative speakers (NNS). The importance of providing feedback is to give opportunities to learners to correct their utterance during the interaction. Learners in this stage receive the feedback from NS and should pay attention to the feedback to see the gap between input (NSs' utterance) and output (learners' utterance). Consequently, paying attention or noticing leads learners concentrate on particular mistakes because learners, in this case, can produce modified output after receiving comprehensible input (Doughty & Long, 2003). However, the comprehensible input is not everything to simplify the production; learners need to notice the gap and reproduce modified output to have meaningful communication. Thus, the purpose of the paper is to show how implicit negative feedback facilitates language learning through interaction while learners produce comprehensible output and receive modified input that supports

promoting more comprehension and acquisition of a second language. Therefore, it is important to state the exact definition of the corrective feedback and what the feedback types are. The paper also discusses the vital role of two concepts: noticing theory and the interaction method to promote comprehension and acquisition of the second language by providing detailed studies to support these two concepts.

2. Corrective Feedback and the Role of Implicit Feedback

Corrective feedback is defined as native speakers' reactions when they listen to learners' utterance of non-native speakers (Adams, Nuevo & Egi, 2011). Corrective feedback is considered negative evidence for learners and has two different types of feedback: explicit feedback and implicit feedback. Explicit feedback is realized as an overt or direct correction for example (no, it is not eaten. It is ate), metalinguistic feedback, or elicitation. Unlike explicitness, implicit feedback is realized as a covert or indirect correction. Implicit feedback takes many forms such as repeats or reformulation of the utterance of non-native speakers, repetition, or requests for clarification like "pardon?".



Implicit feedback has an influence on modified output through interaction. According to Swain (2005), learners may respond to any feedback by providing output modification. As a result, learners are forced to correct their first output which leads them to pay more attention or notice to syntactic process to focus on meaning level. Many instructors in ESL prefer using implicit feedback, particularly recasts, because it does not make more distraction during the interaction and allows learners to promote noticing their mistakes and the gap between native and non-native speakers. In contrast, other researchers do not mention the benefits of using implicit feedback because some learners cannot notice the gap or the mistake which restrains language learning development. The researchers are more likely to use explicit feedback to lower the confusion and allow learners to recognize their errors and to perform more accurately. In Adams, Nuevo and Egi's (2011) study, their first hypothesis was whether implicit feedback, recasts in learner-learner interaction, promotes language learning. The second hypothesis was whether output modification, following recasts in learner-learner interaction, enhances linguistic forms. The findings showed that that when learners modified their output, following implicit feedback especially recasts, learners reprocessed and produced the output differently and this allowed them through negotiation to gain more explicit knowledge which is a controlled process where learners make efforts to use their memory during their learning a second language. Thus, the modified output is a learning method, also considered as gradual learning process to change previous knowledge but it is not a way to learn a new linguistic knowledge. However, the results of the same study showed that implicit feedback in learner-learner interaction has more limited evidence to promote learning language and linguistic forms than native speaker-learner interaction does. Furthermore, Mackey's (2006) study was to demonstrate whether learners modify their responses when they form question structures by applying implicit negative feedback. The results showed that as learners alter their responses, they enhance their production of question types. Receiving implicit negative feedback in question forms through negotiation may give an opportunity to reprocess the output and produce it accurately and facilitate developing a language. Ellis, Basturkmen

and Loewen (2001) and Mackey (2006) examined the retention of the output in short-term. They observed that pushed output assists learners to produce accurate structures that they already knew about them. However, these changes of modified output through interaction can be retained for short period of time. Thus, implicit negative feedback has a significant role in affecting the production of the output modification.

3. Recasts as an Implicit Negative Feedback

One of the most important types of implicit negative feedback is recasts. There is significant evidence supporting the useful role this kind of feedback "recasts" can offer when we, as teachers, apply it in ESL/EFL classrooms through communications with the learners.

According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics defines recast as "a more competent interlocutor (parent, teacher, native speaker interlocutor) rephrases an incorrect or incomplete learner utterance by changing one or more sentence components (e.g. subject, verb, or object) while still referring to its central meanings" (p. 487). Doughty and Long (2003) state four purposes of doing recasts: (a) to restate the ill-formed utterance, (b) to expand the utterance, (c) to retain the central meaning of the utterance, and (d) to recasts the ill-formed utterance. Implicit negative feedback has a major role through the interaction in the second language acquisition and facilitates the second language development. Moreover, implicit negative feedback induces noticing in some structures and forms, especially recasts which are considered another primary source of reformulating the utterance in target-like saying (McDonough & Mackey, 2000). Doughty and Long (2003) singles out that learners may confuse whether recast is a model of corrective feedback or a different way of pronouncing the same word. There are some experiments below to reveal the impact of recasts to learn the second language through implicit negative feedback.

First, in McDonough and Mackey's (2000) research, the study compared two groups of students: the first group received modified input through interaction and the second group received the same input but with intensive recasts. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of recasts on learners' interlanguage development and

to notice the responses of learners when they receive the recasts via information-gap tasks. The results showed that the interaction, with intensive recasts, was more efficient to enhance production than interaction without intensive recasts for the advanced student. However, having recasts in the interaction had limited progress for students in low-level. In summary, the recasts have had an influence on language development and enhancing the awareness of the gap by noticing.

Second, Long, Inagaki and Ortega (1998) carried out two studies. The aim of these two studies was to prove the best method to maximize second language acquisition by comparing between using models and recasts through interaction via forming questions. The participants were asked to play information-gap communication game and use either recasts or model while they played. The two studies concentrated on applying models before utterance and recast after utterance in Japanese and Spanish as second languages. The results revealed that recasts were more efficient than following models to develop structure and adverb placement in the Spanish study. On the other hand, in the Japanese study, recasts played a role as learners' assistance to learn or resuscitate some background knowledge of structures. In short, implicit negative feedback (recasts) is more efficient than using models to make some developments for short-term.

The last study was conducted by Mackey (1999) and her primary goal was to see whether learners improved their learning question structures by modifying their output, which is learners' responses, via implicit negative feedback in interaction. She divided her participants into two groups: one group had to produce modified responses, and the second one did not alter their responses. The findings showed that learners who implemented modification in the question structures in their responses maximize their productions of the higher level of forming questions. Mackey emphasizes that receiving implicit negative feedback through interaction and then modifying the output through producing responses is considered an excellent opportunity to promote comprehension and to learn more particular question forms. All earlier studies present strong evidence that implicit negative feedback particularly recasts plays a facilitating role in second language acquisition.

4. Noticing in Second Language Acquisition

Noticing or awareness, which has attracted some scholars' attention such as Leung and Williams (2012) and Philip (2012), aids developing the acquisition through negotiation, and it is a part of implicit negative feedback. Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics defines noticing as "the hypothesis that input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, that is, consciously registered" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 401). According to Gass and Mackey (2006), the intake of foreign language does not internalize in learners unless they notice the input to occur the acquisition. Furthermore, Schmidt (2001) and Philip (2012) emphasize that new linguistic forms will be internalized when learners receive comprehensible input through interaction based on Doughty and Long's (2003) interaction hypothesis. If learners are likely to take advantage of negotiation, they must perceive the input and pay more attention to the gap between their interlanguage forms (i.e. linguistic knowledge) and second language alternative. To acquire the target language, noticing may take negotiation as a tool to facilitate language learning. If learners do not perceive the input that they receive during the interaction, they will not learn or acquire much information from the conversation (Gass & Mackey, 2006). Doughty and Long (2003) explain that during a negotiation, learners have difficult times to understand the meaning of the conversation and to communicate with native speakers as well because learners attempt to concentrate more on the language forms and the meaning at the same time. Furthermore, Mackey, Philip, Egi, Fujii and Tatum (2002) showed in their study that there are outstanding outcomes because of the role of noticing during feedback interactions (recasts) and its relationship with working memory of the individual differences to increase the acquisition of learning a language. In short, one way to improve the comprehension and the acquisition of the second language is noticing or attention to the gap through negotiation.

Besides, noticing is an essential part to enhance learning implicit knowledge. According to Ellis (2005), learning language implicitly is to expose to the input incidentally with little awareness to linguistic forms. There are several processes to transfer input to implicit



knowledge: (1) noticing: learners pay more attention to particular linguistic form in the input, (2) comparing: learners examine the noticed forms with their production of the output, and (3) integrating: learners are asked to create new ways to integrate the noticed forms to their interlanguage forms. There are many factors which aid in increasing noticing in the input: (1) task demands: paying attention to learners to ask instructions because these instructions are necessary to accomplish a task, (2) frequency: when input is repeated many times in the classroom, the input become recognized and ready to be acquired by learners, (3) unusual features: sometimes learners encounter incidentally with unfamiliar linguistic forms that are not frequently occurred, (4) salience: some linguistic forms are more overtly than others because of their pronunciations, (5) modified conversation through negotiation of meaning causes noticing of some linguistic forms which might be neglected, and (6) existing linguistic knowledge: there is a particular level that learners become read to acquire this linguistic form via noticing. Besides, noticing assists to obtain comprehensible input because sometimes learners can pay attention to some neglected linguistic forms when the comprehensible input is stated (Schmidt, 2001). To sum up, learning implicit knowledge is an outcome of noticing which promotes second language acquisition.

5. Impact of Interaction in Modified Input

The conversational modification is considered a vital point because it leads to facilitate the meaning of the negotiation. Doughty and Long (2003) point out that modification can be comprehension checks, clarification requests, and confirmation checks. All these changes contribute effectively to increase learners' awareness, to solve their difficulties of understanding the meaning of the communication, and to promote second language acquisition. Thus, ESL classrooms lack in providing comprehensible input that assists learners to acquire a second language through the meaning of negotiation, and it is necessary to give this opportunity to learners because unmodified or incompressible input impedes the acquisition. In respect to this issue, there are many studies to support the interaction hypothesis because it facilitates input modification in second language acquisition and promotes language learning.

A study was done by Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) who claimed that modified negotiation help comprehension. The researchers compare the effects of two things: pre-modified input and modified input. The number of participants was 16, and they were in low-intermediate level. The participants were divided into two groups: one group received directions by choosing and placing items on a small board. These directions were modified to maximize repetition and minimize the complexity. The other group received baseline directions. That is, the direction produced among native speakers of English and not modified. However, the participants had opportunities to ask when they did not understand. The results showed that the group of changed or adjusted input gained higher levels of comprehension 88% vs. 69%. Pica et al. stated that when modification happened in interaction, learners would not meet any difficulties to comprehend the input. In contrast, Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki (1994) wonder if the learners should involve actively in the negotiation or they simply access to adjust input through efforts of others. In Pica's study (1992), the question had been answered when Pica divided three groups: (1) negotiators who took part in negotiation, (2) observers who watched the negotiators, but they did not involve, and (3) listeners who performed the task later, they listened to what teacher would read the modified input of directions but without involving to the negotiation. The results showed that negotiators scored 88%, observers gained 78%, and listeners were 81%. Pica declared that learners who have the higher ability of comprehension did not bank on the interaction to understand the input, while learners who scored low-level of comprehension depended on interaction to understand the input.

Second, in Gass and Mackey's (2006) study, their aim of the experiment was to compare between modified and unmodified input with or without modified negotiation on production and comprehension. Participants were receiving direction on a task. The findings came up with that negotiated, and modified input has influenced efficiently on comprehension. Additionally, when native speakers understood the directions given by learners, the production improved because the native speakers understood and followed the directions given by learners (Gass, 2002). Thus, interaction with

modification affects positively in language learning use.

Loschky (1994) also did a study and his purpose was to prove the impacts of comprehensible input on comprehension through interaction and retention of vocabulary and grammar in Japanese as a second language. The results revealed that comprehensible input contributes positively to promote understanding of vocabulary, yet it does not contribute to retention or acquisition of grammar and vocabulary. In contrast, Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994) conducted an experiment with Japanese students of English in high school. The main aim of their research was to investigate whether modified negotiation or input plays a facilitating role in maximizing comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The findings revealed two things: first, changed or adjusted input through interaction assists better-promoting comprehension than pre-modified input does; second, interactionally adjusted input aims to acquire more new words than pre-modified input does. Thus, the comprehended input is valuable as it facilitates understanding through interaction which leads to acquiring the second language. The above studies have proved a part of interaction hypothesis that the modified input in negotiation leads to the increasing of comprehension.

On the contrary, there are several drawbacks when the input is elaborated through interaction. According to Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994), some studies have shown that elaborated input does not assist learners to understand the negotiation. First, native speakers assume when they include more explanation during the communications, they will aid learners to comprehend the interaction. However, native speakers make their interactions more complicated and cause less achievement of learners' comprehension. Second, native speakers provide an amount of information to learners to do a particular task. Some native speakers implement "skeletonizing strategy" which is giving limited information to learners whereas other native speakers provide "embroidering strategy" which is giving much information and more explanation beyond the requirement. Thus, embroidering strategy causes some problems while learners do a particular task because this approach leads to distracting them more than it assists them. Resulting from this, learners will have hard times due to receiving expanded information more

than they need. To conclude, giving learners greater quantity of input through interaction leads negatively to make low-level of comprehension.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, implicit negative feedback has had an influence on comprehension and acquisition of the second language through interaction where learners receive modified input and produce comprehensible output. Interaction contributes efficiently to raise the understanding of learners by providing input modification to give an opportunity to learners to control over receiving input and solving problems of comprehension which facilitates second language acquisition. As a result, learners start producing more comprehensible output in the communication (Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994).

Therefore, some implications might work effectively in classroom settings suggested by Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987). Mayo and Pica (2000) conducted some studies in EFL classrooms and claimed that the environment of EFL classrooms considers as a vital step to enhance input, output, and feedback in learning the second language. Thus, their findings pointed out that EFL classrooms are considered as a real learning context. Teachers can help their students understand the input by giving sufficient quantity and redundancy without waiting for students to ask for more clarification or confirmation. However, teachers should check students' comprehension by asking them if they need more explanation or clarification and by encouraging them to ask any question, rather than relying on giving quantity and redundancy.

Another suggestion is that teacher-student relationship assists in facilitating input modification by implementing the negotiation in classroom settings, instead of common teachers' and students' roles which are teachers' elicitation and feedback and students' response. Also, if modified input has involved in a classroom, the teachers are not going to take an advantage and ask questions to students. However, all students in that classroom will have an opportunity to interact with their teachers and come up with questions and to clarify and confirm some incomprehensible input to have a better understanding of some concepts. Furthermore, by the interaction that encourages students to speak, teachers and students have more confidence to make a small discussion about things that are



considered ambiguous for students and need more explanation to clarify the meaning of some incomprehensible input. Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) single out some alternative methods rather than spoken interaction in the class. Teachers can ask students to check dictionaries, read their textbooks thoroughly, discuss with other classmates or with teachers in their office hours, or implement scaffolding method. In contrast, the lack of spoken communication in the class, which makes comprehensible input more apparent, narrows the benefit of interaction because pre-modified input provided by teacher and curriculum designers limit negotiation use in the classroom.

The traditional pedagogy concentrated more on teachers' role to make students dependently. On the other hand, the current education shifts to the opposite direction that teachers should assist students to depend on themselves and students have more responsibilities by enhancing spoken interaction in a classroom which increases input comprehension. Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994) and Doughty and Long (2003) point out that there are further researches and studies on interaction and acquisition as they focus in their study on vocabulary acquisition. In contrast, there are other aspects of language such as phonology, syntax, and morphology that may have different ways to acquire acquisition or may not be acquired through interaction. Moreover, Gass and Selinker (2001) emphasize that the communication should not be considered as a key factor to cause the acquisition which is banked on the needs of learners' differences. From this point, there is promising research in the future that will have many contributions to find out the relationship among interaction, input, and second language acquisition.

Acknowledgments

The author gratefully acknowledges Dr. David Hayes, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Linguistics at Brock University for his advice, support, and guidance in the development of this paper.

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