

## Casting Light on Learner Noticing and Interpretation of Teacher Recast

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### Abstract

The role of teacher feedback as a contributor to effective instruction has long been established. However, the types of feedback frequently exploited during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and the efficiency of teacher feedback types, addressed in this study, warranted thorough investigation. Moreover, the recasts noticed by learners and the gaps they conveyed were scrutinized to investigate the correspondence between recast types and their interpretation with an eye to learner English proficiency level. To this end, a recast-sensitive teacher's oral recasts, in four intact communicative English classes, were investigated. To capture the recast episodes, six class sessions were video-recorded, and follow-up stimulated recall interviews on the teachers' and students' thoughts and perceptions of each recast were audio-taped. Then the teacher and 31 learners, who had received recasts, were interviewed. The analysis of the coded qualitative data was guided by Nabei and Swain's (2002) classification of recast types. It revealed that the most frequent recast types were simple, vocabulary-focused, incorporated declarative, direct, and corrective with or without the intention to communicate which also corresponded with the learners' noticing of the recast. Moreover, chi-square tests indicated that only the linguistic targets were significantly related to learners' accurate interpretation while the inaccurate learner interpretations were predominantly meaning-focused. The analysis also indicated a positive

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correspondence between the learners' English proficiency level and their accurate interpretation of the recasts perceived. The findings have implications for teachers as the results can sensitize them to recast multi-dimensional treatment and their efficient manipulation.

**Keywords:** communicative interaction, corrective feedback, noticing, target, type

### **Introduction**

Interaction research has led to an approach with claims about the contributions of conversational interactions and specific interactional processes into second language acquisition (SLA) (Mackey, 2012). Within the now "dominant interactionist paradigm" (Byrnes, cited in Mackey, 2012, p. 3), the construct of corrective feedback, has stood the test of time (Mackey, 2007). Further, the interaction theory seeks to specify how interaction, providing feedback opportunities, creates learning space and explains why the social context of learning, learners' internal processes, and individual differences influence interaction (Mackey, 2012).

Besides, pedagogical rendering of the interaction approach has brought the focus on form (FonF) (Long, 1991) to the fore as an object of investigation. It advocates learners' overt and incidental focus on certain language forms brought about through negotiation during communicative interaction. FonF can be actualized through feedback provision as in recasting. Viewed from a cognitive perspective, recasts preserve the learner's meaning, and hence reduce the processing load, opening cognitive capacity for a focus on form. This, in turn, may increase the chances for learners to notice the gap in their second language knowledge (Oliver & Adams, 2021). Along with the cognitive approach (Oliver & Adams, 2021; Leow & Driver, 2021), the concepts of feedback in general and recast in particular, as fundamental paths to effective teaching and learning, have long been investigated from different perspectives including the behavioristic (Han, 2021), interactionist (Abbuhl, 2021), and sociocultural (Nassaji, 2021) approaches.

Recast has also been the object of wide-ranging theoretical and empirical studies in SLA research for over two decades (Hassanzadeh, et al., 2019). It involves the reformulation of all or part of the learner's erroneous utterance immediately following it while the overall meaning focus of the conversation is maintained

(Mackey, 2012). In this vein, Nassaji (2015) posits recast as a type of reformulation in his taxonomy of oral input providing feedback.

Theoretically, the utility of recasts is supported from a cognitive perspective. Specifically, by maintaining the learner's meaning, recasts lighten the processing load, allowing cognitive space for a focus on form to occur and, in particular, for the learner to notice the "gap" between the language they produce and that of the target language form (Oliver & Adams, 2021, p. 196)

A large body of research to date has been carried out to examine the efficiency of recasts as a vehicle for corrective feedback in contrived and natural contexts (Kim & Han, 2007; Loewen & Philp, 2006; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Sheen, 2006). Collectively, the findings of the studies have attributed the efficacy of recasts to both learner external and internal factors. While context—the physical as well as social—as an external factor is assigned a predictive role in the likelihood of learner attention to recasting (Ellis, 2012; Mackey, 2012), learner internal cognitive facets or individual learner differences have also proven instrumental to noticeability and effectiveness of recasts (Mackey, 2012).

Cognitively, learner perception of recasts is likely to be affected by individuals' second language proficiency (Kennedy, 2010), age, or even willingness to communicate (Mackey, 2012). For example, Ammar and Spada (2006) in line with Mackey and Philp (1998) found that recasts were more beneficial when addressed to learners at higher levels of oral proficiency in their second language. Besides, Lyster and Saito (2010) note that younger learners may be more susceptible to corrective feedback in general since it triggers indirect learning—a characteristic of young learners. Moreover, young learners, compared to adults, generally have a weaker sense of identity and are more open to correction in public.

The aforementioned factors underscore effective recasting. Viewed from the teacher's perspective, recasts have been seriously challenged for their noticeability and effectiveness (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Egi, 2010; Kim & Han, 2007; Mackey & Goo, 2007). Recasts should not be seen as a single monolithic form of feedback (Loewen & Philp, 2006). Teachers, in their recasts, may vary the number of errors corrected or their prosodic adjustments and the degree of explicitness among others; which result in recasts whose salience might not have been proven empirically. Moreover, recasts on different linguistic targets may

involve different learning processes depending on the learners' prior knowledge of the targeted form (Egi, 2010). Further, recasts might be perceived as corrective but optional and as suggested paraphrases or responses to the content rather than the form of learners' utterances. Recast ambiguity resides in its potential for being either corrective, communicative, or a mixture of both, due to the negative and positive evidence it might provide (Ellis & Sheen, 2006).

To investigate teacher recast as a multidimensional phenomenon, the present study aimed to highlight the learners' interpretation of the teacher feedback from a cognitive-interactive perspective. Therefore, the study examined the degree of correspondence between the teacher's recast type and learners' interpretation of the feedback. More specifically, the study focused on *teacher intent* (communicative or corrective), the type of *addressing* (direct or indirect), the type of *linguistic target* (phonology, syntax, or lexis), the *form* of recast (isolated declarative, isolated interrogative, incorporated declarative, incorporated interrogative), and recast *complexity* (simple or complex). Moreover, the relationship between learners' *SL proficiency* and their interpretation of recast targets was studied.

## Literature Review

Myriad studies have been conducted on teacher corrective feedback, recast types, and learners' perception and interpretation of the provided recast (Ellis, 2012; Kim & Han, 2007; Mackey, 2020, Mackey & Goo, 2007; Nassaji, 2015). Interaction-driven studies on L2 learning have emphasized the role of learners' cognitive reactions in conversational interaction to corrective feedback in general and recasts in particular (Ellis, 2012). Learner's cognitive reactions are wide-ranging. They include internal factors such as perception, noticing, awareness, and interpretation and the more external reflection of these factors in the form of learner response. Robert's 1995 study (cited in Kim & Han, 2007) pinpointed a discrepancy between teacher corrective feedback and learners' perception of it in a college-level Japanese as a foreign language class revealing the significant role of the learners' SL proficiency level. That is, the lower-proficiency learners outperformed their higher-proficiency counterparts in identifying instances of corrective feedback. This study raised generic concern about learners' sensitivity to teachers' corrective feedback/recasts.

Similarly, learners' perception of interactional feedback directed at different aspects of language was examined by Mackey et al. (2000). The analysis of the learners' stimulated recall protocols confirmed Roberts' 1995 finding on the mismatch between feedback and its perception. Moreover, Mackey et al. (2000) and Han (2008) found the learners more sensitive to feedback targeted at lexical rather than morphosyntactic errors although the latter were more frequently addressed. Consequently, the learners' morphosyntactic uptake was considerably low. The congruence Mackey et al. (2000) found between the linguistic content mediated through recasts and their uptake resonated later in major studies of corrective feedback by Mackey and Goo (2007) and Li (2010). On the contrary, in Philp's (2003) study, participants showed relatively much higher sensitivity to recasts on the morphosyntactic feature targeted. The learners' accurate noticing was justified with reference to their cognitive resources like SL proficiency, and their attention capacity. The study hence supported the "selective nature of learner noticing of recasts" (Kim & Han, 2007, p. 274).

Referring to the recast target, Mackey (2012) pinpoints the ambiguous nature of recasts arguing that they may convey either teacher's *corrective* or *communicative* intent or even both (Ellis & sheen, 2006). The ambiguity is harder to resolve in meaning-based classrooms where recasts are deployed not only to indicate learners' erroneous utterances but to maintain classroom interaction and coherence serving the sender's communicative intention as well (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Therefore, learners may not perceive recasts as corrective feedback to modify their outputs.

Moreover, different language forms targeted by recasts differ in noticeability and the resulting uptake (Mackey, 2007; Mackey, 2012; Mackey & Goo, 2007). Mackey (2012) reports the incompatible research findings on how learner awareness of recasts is mediated by the type of linguistic target addressed. She states that in the classroom setting, teacher intention and learner perception of the recasts overlapped for the syntactic and lexical targets far more than the phonological ones. However, in the contrived laboratory environment learner perception of the phonological feedback surpassed recasts on morphosyntactic ones.

Recasts could also be classified based on their complexity. Unlike simple recasts, the ones that focus on multiple linguistic items in one discursal move are

complex (Kim & Han, 2007). Reasonably, simple recasts are quite explicit hence more noticeable (Sheen, 2006). The ambiguity surrounding explicitness, therefore, is worthy of attention.

The taxonomy of recast characteristics presented by Lyster (1998) comprises the mode of recasting. Recast modes and forms, according to Lyster (1998) and Kim and Han (2007), demand further verification. To date, myriad studies have investigated teacher feedback and more specifically recasts; however, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, the multiple dimensions of recast types which may lead to their ambiguity and the learners missing the recasts or misinterpreting them have not received due consideration. Therefore, this study focused on the efficiency of recasts types addressing the following questions:

1. What were the most frequent recast types deployed by the participant teacher?
2. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the recast type and the learner's noticing of the recast?
3. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the recast type and the learner's recognition of the recast intention?
4. Is there any statistically significant relationship between the learners' English proficiency level and their recognition of the recast intention?

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Language learners in four EFL classes, comprising 52 females, at a language institute, in Karaj, Iran were selected as the participants of the study. The principled non-probability sampling was conducted at three stages. To control the moderating effect of EFL proficiency, the above-intermediate students were purposefully selected from the 150 classes available. Prior to the main study, 14 of the classes which were taught by three teachers holding TEFL MAs were screened. Further purposive sampling guided the *expert selection* of one recast-sensitive teacher. This sampling maximized the chances of teacher recasting, and so yielded more recast episodes, in the *typical* case sample which included her above-intermediate classes. Due to the accessibility condition, the third stage involved convenience sampling of the teacher's four intact classes.

The classes were held in two 105-minute sessions weekly. Two of the classes, institutionally placed at upper-intermediate levels of English language proficiency, comprised 22 adult learners aged between 17 to 28. The two others at advanced levels consisted of 29 students aged between 17 and 45. The General English classes were intended to develop communicative skills with a focus on spoken interaction. They studied the *Summit* (Saslow & Ascher, 2016) series. They used to learn English mostly in traditional teacher-fronted environments at either school or university. They were all native speakers of Persian. Altogether, the data were collected from six class sessions. Among the 51 students, 31 participated in recast episodes naturally through classroom interaction with the teacher and were invited to a stimulated recall interview individually.

The non-native speaking English teacher, with a Master's degree in TEFL, was familiar with recasting and recast frequently as a feedback strategy. She was sensitized to recasting on a pre-service teacher education course, had a good reputation for her teaching efficacy through her ten years of teaching experience, and concerned herself with student involvement in interaction.

### ***Instruments and Materials***

The main data collection instrument was a six-session video-recorded classroom observation made with a hand-held digital camera. To avoid any unwanted intervention or observer distraction, a non-participant observation was made whereby every instance of the teacher-learner interaction was captured as closely as possible.

Additionally, following Gass and MacKey (2017), delayed stimulated recall interviews were deployed as a means to explain the recast incidents. The use of this technique was legitimized by Gass and MacKey who see it as compensation for inevitable logistic interventions such as participant availability and class schedules. The participants' delayed recall was stimulated using the video recordings and prompting questions.

### ***Procedure***

Among the 14 upper-intermediate and advanced classes, preliminarily observed, four classes were selected. Prior to the recording, the participants' consent

to have the session taped was sought. All of the observations were video-recorded and viewed by the researchers within a week. The selection of the participant teacher, among the three teachers holding TEFL MAs, was based on classroom observations and follow-up teacher interviews distinguishing her as a recast expert who deployed recasts frequently as a typical case among the three (Davis, 2015). She was a high-achiever in pre-service and in-service teacher education courses incorporating discussions on recast among feedback types. The interviews were conducted within a week after the classroom observations and were planned to avoid raising their consciousness of the aims and scope of the study. The interviews were recorded in a quiet staff room where the recast episodes were played for the interviewees as a reminder of each recast.

To arrange the interview timeline, we followed Gass and MacKey (2017) considering time lapse between the event and stimulated recall, i.e., the interview sessions were planned at the earliest convenience after each session within a week. The teacher was interviewed before the learners and to maximize the chances for the participants' self-expression, the interviews were given in their native language. Throughout the interviews, the teacher watched selected parts of the video clips to recall her thoughts during the recast episodes identified by the researcher beforehand. The teacher was interviewed on 78 recast episodes from her six class sessions. The interviews which lasted for 106':10", were audio-recorded, and transcribed afterward.

During Learners' interviews, held eight to 14 days after the recordings, 15 upper-intermediate and 16 advanced level students individually watched the recast episodes and were familiarized with the aims, requirements, and procedure in Persian in a non-technical language. Then each interviewee was presented with the recast episodes based on the notes made on the recast recipient's name and the recast timing. Meanwhile, each learner was supposed to recall what they thought the teacher meant by the recast when she interrupted them. Viewing the videos, learners were free to request a pause or replay. Having identified the corrective and/communicative intention, each student identified the linguistic target and uttered the correct form intended. The recall interviews, totally lasting for 150':57", allowed interactive space for further elaboration of the learner responses and comments on the usefulness of the feedback.



### ***Design and Data Analysis***

This study enjoyed a quantitatively-dominated (Brown, 2015), sequential explanatory mixed methods design (Mackey & Bryfonsky, 2018). The data transcripts underwent three rounds of coding. First, the researchers detected the recast episodes following Nabei and Swain's (2002) classification. Accordingly, each episode began with a student non-target-like utterance—e.g., linguistic errors, use of L1, and incomplete or fragmented utterances—followed by a teacher's response in a sequence of one or more turns. In each episode, at least one error was recast. The episode ended with either the student's response to the recast or ignoring it. Recasts were coded in terms of complexity, linguistic content, form, and meaning from the teacher and students' perspectives and the data were analyzed using SPSS software.

**Complexity-Oriented Recast.** Initially, the recasts were categorized as simple or complex. While simple recasts involved a single change in the learner's utterance, complex ones addressed more than one erroneous aspect. A complex recast, immediately after the learner's response to the initial simple recast, is exemplified below:

**Example 1** A simple recast

Episode 7: UI1: 18/6/2020

S1: Most of the people ...uhhhh.../dʒæzb/?

T: **Attract!**

S1: **Attract** to the outside

**Example 2** A complex recast

Episode 8: UI1: 18/6/2020

S1: **Attract** to the outside

T: Uh-huh, **most** people are **attracted** to **the beauty on** the outside

S1: Yes! Most of Iranian people, I think

**Linguistically-Oriented Recasts.** The second facet of recasts examined was the linguistic content: vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation. The morphological features targeted like plurals, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, gerunds, and problems with word order, or auxiliaries were subsumed under grammar. However, errors related to word choice, collocations, derivations, or prepositions were considered matters of vocabulary. Moreover, non-target-like pronunciations

were categorized as linguistically oriented errors.

**Example 3** *linguistically-oriented recast*

Episode 9: UI1: 18/6/2020

S2: ... / bɜːrɪŋɪŋ /population...

T: Uh-huh ... / bɜːdʒɪnɪŋ /... yes... population

S2: Yes.../ bɜːdʒɪnɪŋ/ population

**Form and Meaning-Oriented Recasts.** Formally, recasts were declarative or interrogative. Meaning-wise, each recast either conveyed additional meaning (i.e., incorporated) or not (i.e., isolated). The form-meaning dichotomy yielded four distinct recasts categories: the isolated statements, the incorporated statements, the isolated questions, and the incorporated questions.

**Example 4** An incorporated interrogative recast

Episode 19: A1: 3/3/2020

T: (asking for meaning clarification of *drowning in debt*) Drowning in debt. Do you know *debt*? D-E-B-T..., b is silent, **debt**...

S3: The money that you give somebody

T: You **give** somebody? Why?

S3: No...you **get** somebody

T: Uh-huh, the money that you have **borrowed**, so you have to pay back...this is **debt**

Following the student's uptake, the teacher extends the interaction to confirm the student's response and implicitly recast *debt* again in the last turn. This could be an incorporated declarative recast.

**Example 5** An incorporated declarative recast

Episode 20: A1: 3/3/2020

S3: No...you **get** somebody

T: Uh-huh, the money that you have **borrowed**, so you have to pay back...this is **debt**

**Coding the Students' Interview Data.** Students' comments were coded into (a) recognition of recast, and (b) no recognition of recast. Recognition of recast represented learner's *noticing* (Schmidt, 1990) and was operationalized as the student's interpretative comments on the teacher's feedback. However, the students' irrelevant comments were considered no recognition of recast. Even if recasts were

recognized, the difference between a recast and its trigger utterance, i.e., the gap (Kim & Han, 2007), might not have been correctly identified by the recipient. Cases of recast recognition were hence subcategorized firstly as partial and complete recognition of the gap. Later, the researchers found that statistically, the two levels needed to be merged. Thus, three levels were available for *recast recognition*: (a) recognition of recast and complete or partial identification of the gap, (b) recognition of recast (without identification of the gap), and (c) no recognition of recast.

**Example 6** No recognition of recast

Episode 4: A4: 3/3/2020

T: Now, **what** are you afraid of? **Not** just animals...**what** else?

S1: I afraid of a **high place**!

T: **High places**...**height**, you mean!

S1: Yes!

T: Uh-huh!

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

To identify the most frequent recast types deployed by the teacher, the patterns of recasting were derived. The recasts varied in complexity, linguistic target, form, teacher intention, and recipient. The major findings were as follows:

As reported in Table 1, among other types of recast, instances of simple recasts (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) (82.5%) were the most frequent. Simple recasts targeting vocabulary and grammar were in majority —i.e., 77.2%. However, complex recasts aiming at both vocabulary and grammar errors were also considerable (15.8%). Generally, recasts targeting vocabulary and grammar amounted to 93% of the whole. Nevertheless, despite their predominance, not all the lexical and syntactic errors received recasts. They were either ignored or treated via a different feedback strategy.

**Table 1***The Frequency of Recasts According to the Linguistic Target*

	Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Vocabulary	26	45.6	45.6	45.6
	Grammar	18	31.6	31.6	77.2
	Pronunciation	3	5.3	5.3	82.5
	Vocabulary and grammar	9	15.8	15.8	98.2
	Vocabulary and pronunciation	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total		57	100.0	100.0	

As presented in Table 2, recasting in the declarative mode abounded (80.7%). Declaratives were consistently exploited without the need to add the prosodic salience of interrogatives.

**Table 2***The Frequency of Recasts According to Form-Meaning Correspondence*

	Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Isolated declarative	9	15.8	15.8	15.8
	Isolated interrogative	2	3.5	3.5	19.3
	Incorporated declarative	44	77.2	77.2	96.5
	Incorporated Interrogative	2	3.5	3.5	100.0
	Total		57	100.0	100.0

Considering recast frequency, the teacher's dominant recast intention was corrective. Regarding the discrepancy between corrective and communicative intention, the corrective intent was almost always present (see Table 3), which was further supported by the teacher's stimulated recall. She assigned equal weight to the recasts as either merely corrective hence didactic or carrying the communicative meaning-focused intent as an added dimension.

**Table 3***The Frequency of Recasts According to the Teacher Intention*

	Variable	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Corrective	28	49.1	49.1	49.1
	Communicative	1	1.8	1.8	50.9
	Mixed	28	49.1	49.1	100.0
Total		57	100.0	100.0	

To investigate the relationship between the recast type and the learners' noticing of the recasts, the interview data were analyzed. The in-depth analysis revealed several categories as not noticing of recast. The students mistakenly viewed the feedback as just a reaction to the content of their utterances or mere confirmation of what they thought they had accurately uttered. In the other cases, the learners assumed that they had not committed any errors prior to the recast asserting that they were misinterpreted. In other cases, they considered the teacher's recast as a supportive reaction where the teacher's strategic scaffolding completed the learner's incomplete utterance, summarized the student's speech, or just offered an alternative to what the student had formulated.

Statistically, the relationship between learner interpretation and teacher intention of the recasts was targeted by the third research question. With an alpha level set as .05, chi-square tests showed whenever the teacher tended to be corrective, with or without communicative intent, the gap was accurately identified provided recasting had already caught the learner's attention. That is, there were cases that the student did not recognize the target correctly, discussed a different point in the turn, or provided very general comments. For example, in one case a student stated, "the teacher helped me with the vocabulary" (e.g., T: "You **lost your voice** somehow and you...", Episode 9: A4: 7/3/2020), or "the teacher helped making the utterance" (e.g., "T: Uh-huh...so girls **gave him calls?** ", Episode 16: UI1: 18/6/2020). Clearly, the learner had not recognized the recast target. In another case, the student did not comment at all. The analysis revealed the students' interpretation of recast intention as predominantly communicative, rather than corrective. When recasts remained unnoticed (25), gap recognition was out of the question and the only purely communicative recast was unnoticed. Aside from

absolutely communicative recasts, corrective recasts and those intended to be corrective and communicative simultaneously received an equal weight (28) (see Table 3). Nevertheless, the mixed recasts were slightly more variably perceived—none of the purely corrective recasts and only one of the mixed recasts were perceived without gap recognition. To examine any overlap between teacher intention and learner interpretation a chi-square test was run. Since over 80% of the cells (55.6%) contained frequencies less than 5, the data underwent Fisher's exact test (Pallant, 2016). The correspondence between teacher intention and learner interpretation was insignificant: Fisher's = 4.41,  $p = .786 > .05$ .

To examine the interpretation of recasts regarding their complexity, a chi-square test indicated that the teacher's preference for simple recasts did not guarantee accurate interpretation (Fisher's = .978,  $p = .773 > .05$ ) (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Recast Complexity\* Learner-Recognition Crosstabulation*

Variable		Recognition			Total
		Recast Complete/partial gap	Recast	No recog.	
Complexity	Simple	28	1	18	47
	Complex	5	0	5	10
Total		33	1	23	57

*Note.* recog. = recognition.

Concerning the recast addressee, direct and indirect recipients of recasts were also studied and the relationship between the recipient type and their interpretation was sought. Subsequently, a chi-square test yielded an insignificant relationship: Fisher's exact test valued 4.587 and  $p = .506 > .05$ . Disregarding the missing data, coded as 4 (see Table 5), 19% of the recasts incorporated direct addressees. Having been recognized, at least partially, the gaps were accurately identified.

**Table 5***Recipient \* Recognition Crosstabulation*

Variable		Recognition			Total
		Recast Complete/ partial gap	No recog.	4.00	
Recipient	Direct	22	1	19	42
	Peer	1	0	1	2
	Both	10	0	3	13
	Total	33	1	23	57

*Note.* recog. = recognition.

From still another dimension, the relationship between the mode and scope of teacher recasting and learner interpretation was checked by a chi-square test. Fisher's test did not indicate a significant relationship (Fisher's = 4.242,  $p = .716 > .05$ ). Further, the crosstabulation of recast form and learner recognition revealed higher chances of learner recognition and gap identification to the isolated declarative and incorporated declarative recasts (Table 6). Chances for no recognition of the same types of recasting were considered as high, but incorporated interrogative recasts were least likely to be correctly interpreted.

**Table 6***Recast Type \* Recognition Crosstabulation*

Variable		Recognition			Total
		Recast Complete/ partial gap	Recog.	No recog.	
Recast type	Isolated declarative	5	0	4	9
	Isolated interrogative	1	0	1	2
	Incorporated declarative	24	4	16	44
	Incorporated interrogative	0	0	2	2
	Total	30	4	23	57

*Note.* recog. = recognition.

The next question concerned the relationship between learner interpretation and the type of language item targeted. The chi-square test indicated a significant relationship (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Chi-Square Tests for the Interdependence of Learner Interpretation of Recasts and Linguistic Target*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	11.097 <sup>a</sup>	8	.196	.128		
Likelihood Ratio	11.832	8	.159	.087		
Fisher's Exact Test	14.761			.047		
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.595 <sup>b</sup>	1	.107	.124	.062	.009
No. of Valid Cases	57					

*Note.*

a. 10 cells (66.7%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

b. The standardized statistic is 1.611.

Checking the cross-tabulated data revealed the highest percentage (77%) of correct recast recognition and the noticing of the gap occurred with vocabulary errors. Recasts on grammatical problems, the second most frequent, were not interpreted accurately to the same degree (33.3%). Nevertheless, the grammar recasts were missed more frequently (61%) than any other simple or complex recast reported. Moreover, recognizing recast without noticing the gap was unavailable in vocabulary or pronunciation errors. Complex recasts aiming at vocabulary and grammar errors, however, seemingly underwent the moderating effects of both types of targets; while the rates of accurate interpretation (55.5%) and failed recognition (44.5%) were both considerably high, lexico-grammatical recasts were more frequently recognized and the gaps were at least partially identified.



**Table 8***Linguistic Target \* Recognition Crosstabulation*

Variable		Recognition		Total	
		Recog.	No recog.		
Target		Recast Complete/ partial gap			
	Vocabulary	20	0	6	26
	Grammar	6	1	11	18
	Pronunciation	2	0	1	3
	Vocabulary and grammar	5	0	4	9
	Vocabulary and pronunciation	0	0	1	1
	Total	33	1	23	57

*Note.* recog. = recognition.

Scarcely addressed, pronunciation recasts were at higher risk of failure (see Table 8). More often (55.5%), simple pronunciation recasts were accurately interpreted. Complex recasts incorporating pronunciation were rare and none were perceived correctly. Interestingly, the incorporation of vocabulary into these complex recasts did not show any moderating effect on the probability of accurate learner interpretation.

To check the relationship between English proficiency level and the recognition of the recast intention, chi-square tests were run and crosstabulation of the data indicated more recast incidents among the advanced students and a higher percentage (62.5%) of accurate interpretation, while the scope of recast interpretation was more limited. They either perceived teacher recasts and recognized the gap, or did not perceive the feedback at all. A wider range of responses was tabulated about the upper-intermediate classes; though minimal, apparently the recast was perceived, but the gap was not accurately identified. The possibility of no recast perception at upper-intermediate levels was not as high as that of advanced levels (37.5%) (see Table 9). However, the relationship between interpretation of recasts and learner English proficiency was not proved significant (Fisher's = 1.639,  $p = .493 > .05$ ).

**Table 9***Learner English Proficiency\* Learner-Recognition Crosstabulation*

Level		Recognition			Total
		Recast Complete/ partial gap	Recog.	No recog.	
Proficiency	A1 and A4	20	0	12	32
	UI1 and UI2	13	1	11	25
Total		33 <sup>a</sup>	1	23	57

*Note.* A = Advanced; UI = Upper-intermediate.

<sup>a</sup>. 2 cells (33.3%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .44.

## Discussion

### *The Teacher's Deployment of Recasts*

The teacher's tendency towards simple recasts is in line with recasting effectiveness reported by Ellis and Sheen (2006) and Sheen (2006) who argued that simple recasts are more salient, hence their targets are more likely to be interpreted, leading to higher uptake and interlanguage development in ESL classrooms (Loewen & Philp, 2006).

Viewed linguistically, the high proportion of vocabulary and grammar-focused recasts might have stemmed from the highly frequent lexico-grammatical errors, though not investigated in this study. Alternatively, the teacher might have been more concerned with lexical and grammatical errors (Hancock, 2009; Myhill, et al., 2012). The predominance of lexico-grammatical recasts, however, did not exactly coincide with Kim and Han's (2007) finding where morphologically-focused recasts occurred more frequently than grammar or vocabulary. Noticeably, the error frequency alone could not have explained the teachers' decision whether to recast or not. Besides, very few pronunciation errors were recast probably because they less often interrupted the flow of communication.

Regarding the recast scope and mode, the teacher's tendency towards incorporated declarative recasting is not well supported in the literature reviewed. This may reside in the potential ambiguity in incorporated declarative recasts, which are context-bound. Presumably, the communicative gravity of errors might determine the most effective corrective feedback type (Kim & Han, 2007).

However, in this study, the communicative nature of the classroom interaction demanded the incorporated recasts more than the isolated ones.

Regarding the recast recipient, the predominance of recasts directly addressing learners is not supported by Li's (2010) argument concerning the marginal utility of individually directed recasts in the classroom context where distractions abound. Therefore, the teacher tended to collectively recast hoping to reduce typical problems.

The teacher's intention behind the provision of corrective versus communicative recasts was investigated through eliciting the teacher's reflection-on-practice (Bailey, 2012). Mostly, recasts were identified as corrective even when the classroom interaction necessitated a communicative recast. This does not support Sheen's (2006) position attributing communicative recasts primarily to meaning-focused classroom interaction and corrective recast to form-focused negotiation.

The teacher's faith in corrective recasting follows Li's (2010) position on the widespread use of the corrective feedback and the positive learner attitude to error correction justifying the effectiveness of corrective recasts in EFL contexts. Moreover, the teacher's claim for combining corrective and communicative intentions is supported by Ellis and Sheen (2006) who approved the recast potential to convey both positive and negative evidence. They recommend investigating ways to combine the two intentions; however, teachers' corrective-communicative intent controversy has not been resolved yet (Mackey, 2012). Further research might probe into the linguistic and discoursal features signaling recast intention.

### ***Learners' Noticing of Recasts***

The fact that the learners' correct interpretation of the majority of recasts was perfect could be partly explained by the recast types. The teacher's frequent recasts may have led to their higher noticeability (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). Two factors were instrumental in the high degree of recast noticing—the number of changes recasts contained, and the learners' developmental level (Philp, 2003). On the one hand, learner perceptions of recasts have been proven to be sensitive to the linguistic content (Kim & Han, 2007; Mackey & Goo, 2007). On the other hand, lexical and grammatical aspects are arguably not constraining factors imposed by learner developmental readiness (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). Therefore, the learners' accurate

perception relied more on variables as teacher's methodological options contributing to the explicitness, and, hence, the salience of recasting which is in line with Mackey (2012). In this study, the teacher's frequent choice of corrective declarative recasts in a predominantly communicative context provided degrees of explicitness leading to the noticing of the recast provided.

Conversely, the frequent failure in recast recognition was justifiable with reference to the context-bound nature of recasting. The teacher's recasting taken as confirmations, non-corrective, or reformulations of error-free utterances supported the widely held view (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) that recasts constitute an exclusively implicit form of corrective feedback (Sheen, 2006). Implicit recasts were subject to misinterpretation while providing linguistic signals and discursal context could have yielded degrees of explicitness to disambiguate them (Carpenter, et al., 2006). Therefore, interrogative recasts would not have been mistaken for confirmation checks.

Further, in certain cases, students misconceived the teacher's communicative recasts or scaffolding. These recasts constituted a unique category because they comprised non-corrective communicative strategies implemented through the negotiation of meaning. For instance, a recast intended to provide the teacher's approval was mistakenly perceived as summarizing. Similarly, completing trigger utterances was not meant to correct the learner's error, but to express the teacher's approval. Therefore, due to their implicit nature, the summaries and completions were not salient enough to be rightly interpreted as recasts. Moreover, the teacher's imprecise gap identification led to impaired learner noticing and imperfect recall.

Learner misconception might have been influenced by factors other than the meaning-focused nature of the feedback, i.e., the linguistic target of recasts (Mackey, 2012), or the students' unawareness of the corrective force of recasts. Traditionally they are accustomed to meta-linguistic feedback or other formS-focused (Long, 1991) feedback types.

### ***The Relationship between Teacher Recasts and Learner Interpretation***

The results of the quantitative data analysis revealed a lower degree of correspondence between teacher intention and learner interpretation of

communicative recasts. However, in the explanatory interview analysis, the students frequently confirmed that meaning-focused negotiation was involved in teacher recasting. Noticeably, the recasts with simultaneously corrective-communicative (mixed) intent, 49.1% were correctly interpreted by the learners, explaining this discrepancy.

Among the characteristics of recasts examined, only the linguistic target was significantly related to the learners' perception. Unlike lexical recasts, which have received ample support (Ellis & Sheen, 2006) for their high noticeability and interpretability, grammatical recasts hold a more variable stance (Kim & Han, 2007; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Sheen, 2006). Since the grammatical recasts were quite large in number, frequency count did not explain this difference. Similarly, grammatical recasts, despite their relatively high frequency, were less noticed in Kim and Han's (2007) study. The contrast between grammar and vocabulary recasting might be due to the fact that lexical recasts involve more meaning negotiation and are better oriented to learners' natural inclination to process input for meaning rather than form.

The simple pronunciation recasts seemingly inquired more learner involvement possibly for the contribution of the phonological memory to their noticeability (Trofimovich, et al., 2007). Neither phonology-bound type of complex recasts nor their grammar counterparts, however, had the noticeability of their lexical components. Viewed from the complexity perspective, simple recasts won no better chance of accurate interpretation while the naturalistic data in Kim and Han's (2007) study did not confirm this blurred distinction. Reasons other than the data collection methods could explain these mixed results. Factors such as limits of the learners' working memory, phonological memory, or analytical ability might have contributed (Trofimovich, et al., 2007) to the findings. This calls for further research in naturalistic classroom environments.

As for the form, the findings only partially supported previous research (Loewen, & Philp, 2006) advocating the efficacy of declarative as opposed to interrogative recasts. Despite the greater opportunities for uptake created by interrogative recasts, they were at times mistaken for confirmation checks (Lyster, as cited in Sheen, 2006) so neither their corrective function nor the gaps addressed were clear. Discoursally, therefore, declaratives had higher chances for accurate

perception. In practice, however, declaratives were either perfectly interpreted or went totally unnoticed quite irrespective of their difference in scope. The results conform to the persisting discrepancy in the literature on the salience and efficacy of isolated declarative recasts and ambiguity of incorporated recasts (Kim & Han, 2007; Sheen, 2006).

Regarding the teacher's intention behind recasting, a degree of correspondence with learner perception could be observed, though not statistically insignificant. These implied higher degrees of explicitness in the teacher's recasts compared with what is viewed in the literature (Mackey, 2012). As a defining characteristic of corrective recasts, explicitness heightened the learners' chances of noticing and the gap targeted. With communicative intents, the teacher's recasts became less explicit hence more difficult to perceive especially when they were complex.

### ***Learner SL Proficiency and Recognition of Recast Intention***

The learners' English language proficiency was a contributing factor to their interpretation which is in line with Kennedy's (2010) position. The variability observed in recast interpretation by the lower proficiency learners provided further support for the claim that advanced EFL learners are the *ideal* recast recipient (Havranek & Cesnik, 2001). Although, even to the advanced learners, the recognition of complex recasts was proved to be challenging (Mackey, 2007).

The contrast in scope between perfect recognition of recast intention and no recognition by the advanced learners—either perceiving teacher recasts and recognizing the gap, or not perceiving the feedback at all—demands justification from the instructional environment. In this study, the frequent lack of recast recognition among the upper-intermediate and advanced learners can be justified by the prevalent socio-cultural context of education in Iran and consequently, the learners' feedback experience and pedagogical schemata. This is in line with Jackson's statement (2021) pinpointing the mediating role of schemata in noticing. A piece of evidence supporting our argument about the Iranian educational context comes from the selection of the recast-sensitive teacher participant. As mentioned, initially, among the 60 available teachers, merely three were eligible for inclusion in the study. Later screening through the classroom observations qualified only one of them as truly recast sensitive.

## Conclusion

This study investigated a teacher's recasting—the frequency of recast types deployed, recast noticeability in terms of the gaps they conveyed, and the correspondence between recast types, the learners' interpretation, and their English proficiency level. The results indicated that the most frequent teacher recasts were simple, focusing on vocabulary. They incorporated declarative, direct recasts, expressing teachers' corrective intent both with and without the intention to communicate. They resulted in the learners' accurate interpretation of the gap conveyed. The least frequent recast types, however, were complex recasts targeting combined vocabulary-pronunciation errors. They were generally interrogative, purely communicative, addressing indirect observers, but remained totally unnoticed. Concerning their noticeability, aside from the perfect learner perceptions of the teacher's recasts, inaccurate learner interpretations were predominantly meaning-focused. With regard to the interpretation of the teacher's recasts, the only characteristic of recasts that was found significantly related to learner interpretation was the linguistic target. Besides, the English language proficiency of the learners was found to have a direct positive correlation with the learners' correct recognition of the recast intention.

The results of the study should be treated with caution due to the limitations in the small sample size, control for individual differences, the inherent limitation of stimulated recall as a research tool, and the possible effects of cam-cording. Finally, the transient nature of noticing was hard to capture and operationalize as a research construct.

To narrow the resulting gaps, further research agendas are to be perused in the future. Specifically, further studies might extend the present research findings to problematize the relationships which were found insignificant between the characteristics of teacher recasting and learner interpretation of the feedback. Such a study might incorporate an in-depth qualitative analysis of the present results against the sources of mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation of recast (Kumaravadivelu, 1991). The finding of such research, in line with Ellis (2012), could help teachers and researchers identify the instructional options that create facilitative conditions for SLA. Future research can also focus on the possible effects of recast sources (the teacher or peer) on recast noticeability (Mackey, 2020).

Besides, in-depth investigations of teacher recasting with concerns for learner individual differences is another area in need of further research. Likewise, as Kim and Han (2007) suggest, future studies could explore factors guiding teachers' corrective and communicative recasts, or those enabling learners to distinguish the teacher intent. Future research can investigate the input features whose frequency might influence the effectiveness of recasts (Mackey, 2012). Moreover, it would be worthwhile to compare the possible effects of recasts across different proficiency levels. Another line of research, following Mackey (2012), might elicit enriched data through stimulated recall and video technology to capture the discourse that might help learners identify the intent and target of corrective recasts in diverse educational contexts.



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