

# The Impact of Corrective Feedback on EFL Learners' Acquisition of Regular and Irregular Past Simple Forms: Evidence from a Portuguese Context Using a Picture Description Task

Ana Rita Faustino

Centro de Linguística da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal)

Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração de Lisboa (Portugal)

Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa (Portugal)

anaritafaustino@netcabo.pt

Recebido: 30/05/2024

Aceite: 28/07/2024

Publicado: 23/12/2024

**ABSTRACT:** Corrective Feedback (CF) is a common practice in the foreign language classroom and constitutes a topic of interest for both language teachers - who have to decide whether to correct their students, when and how - and for L2 researchers - who are interested in testing the efficacy of CF techniques in L2 acquisition. Conducted in a state school in Portugal, this quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of three CF strategies - recasts, prompts and explicit correction - and of no feedback on the acquisition of English regular and irregular past tense forms. 166 9<sup>th</sup>-grade Portuguese students (and their five teachers) took part in the study and were tested in a pretest-posttest design. Comparisons of group means using ANOVA revealed a significant effect for test time. Post-hoc analyses revealed that the Prompt group significantly outperformed both the Explicit Correction group and the Recast group in the production of regular past tense items and showed significant improvement between the Pretest and Posttest 2 in the use of irregular past tense.

**KEYWORDS:** English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Corrective Feedback (CF); Recast; Prompt; Explicit Correction.

## Introduction

The present work focuses on the effects of Corrective Feedback (CF), "responses to learner utterances containing an error" (Ellis, 2006, p. 28), on the acquisition of regular and irregular English Past Simple forms. Research has shown strong support for the effectiveness of CF (Lyster, Saito & Sato, 2013; Pawlak, 2014), with its facilitative role being recognized by second language (L2) acquisition theories such as the Interaction Hypothesis (e.g. Long, 1996), the Output Hypothesis (e.g. Swain, 1995), Sociocultural Theory (e.g. Lantolf, 2006), and the Skill-Learning

Theory (e.g. DeKeyser, 1998). It has established itself as a key component in form-focused instruction, whether as a way of drawing the learner's attention to linguistic items in the context of activities whose focus is on communication, referred to by Long (1991) as *Focus on Form* (FoF), or as a means of reacting to the learner's erroneous utterances when developing accuracy in a more discrete-item based approach, which Long (1991) labelled *Focus on Forms*.

This study aims at investigating the effects of three feedback strategies as identified by Lyster & Ranta (1997), outlined below, and of no feedback on the acquisition of English past tense. The study further investigates whether these results persist over time. The CF strategies analyzed were as follows: *explicit correction*, in which the correct form is overtly supplied by the teacher, as illustrated in (1a); *recast*, when the teacher reformulates the learner's utterance incorporating the correction of the error, as shown in (1b); and *prompts*, a number of techniques that stimulate the learner to self-correct, including clarification request (1c), metalinguistic feedback (1d), elicitation (1e) and repetition (1f).

- (1) S: Last weekend I go to the cinema with my friends.
  - a. T: You should say "I went to the cinema with my friends".
  - b. T: Oh, you went to the cinema with your friends.
  - c. T: Pardon? Can you repeat?
  - d. T: What happens to the verb if you're talking about the past?
  - e. T: Last weekend, I...
  - f. T: I go?

These corrective turns may be followed by topic continuation by the same or another student, or by the teacher, or they may be followed by *uptake*, "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 49). Uptake encompasses a wide array of learner responses to CF, from simple acknowledgements of a correction to reformulations of their errors. A type of uptake, *modified output*, consists in the learner's modification of a non-target-like form (Mackey, 2007). Lyster

& Ranta (1997) divided uptake into two categories: *repair*, when the error is correctly reformulated in a single turn; and *needs-repair*, when the uptake results in an utterance that still needs correction. Both categories are classifiable as modified output provided that the learner's turn entails modifications to the original error (Egi, 2010).

The target structure – the English past simple tense – remains a problematic one at intermediate and advanced levels, although it is introduced very early in the curriculum, and the distinction between regular and irregular forms enables us to study the effects of different CF strategies on a linguistic feature that is rule-based (regular forms) and item-based (irregular forms).

Taking part in this study were 166 intermediate level students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) from a state school in Portugal, a context where there is a lack of research about oral CF. Each class received one of four different treatments – explicit correction, recast, prompt or no feedback – and was tested through a picture description task (PDT) in a pretest-posttest design.

The present article is organized as follows: Section 1 presents a brief overview of the research on the effectiveness of CF, focusing on laboratory and classroom studies; Section 2 presents the research questions and hypotheses; Section 3 provides information about the methodology, including the data collection tool, procedures for data collection and demographic information about the participants; and Section 4 presents the results of the statistical analysis for the PDT. The findings that emerged in the course of this study are presented in Section 5. The article ends with a summary of the main findings of the study and a brief discussion of pedagogical implications, limitations and future research directions.

## **1. Research on the effectiveness of CF**

This section aims at providing a brief overview of empirical studies on CF. It starts with a short summary of selected laboratory studies, followed by a discussion of quasi-experimental studies that have contributed to the research on the effectiveness of CF.

### **1.1. Laboratory studies**

There are a large number of laboratory studies which have yielded positive effects for recasts (e.g. Han, 2002; Ishida, 2004; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Long, Inagaki & Ortega, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; McDonough & Mackey, 2006; Révész, 2007; Sagarra, 2007). Han (2002), for example, studied the impact of recasts on tense consistency in L2 output and found that recasts were successful at heightening the learners' (n=8) awareness and helped them in the correct use of past tense. The recast group outperformed the control group, which did not receive CF, following eight instruction sessions with intensive provision of recasts.

Focusing on three laboratory studies that compared recasts to other types of CF, Carroll & Swain (1993) compared the effects of explicit correction, recasts, prompts and no feedback on the acquisition of dative alternation in English (e.g., *John sent a letter to Mary* and *John sent Mary a letter*). All feedback groups outperformed the control group and the explicit correction group outperformed the recast and prompt groups in some measures. The recast and prompt groups had a similar performance. Lyster & Izquierdo (2009) investigated the effects of recasts and prompts on the acquisition of French grammatical gender. The analysis showed that the two types of feedback were equally effective. McDonough (2007) compared the effectiveness of recasts and clarification requests on the acquisition of English simple past verbs. The results demonstrated that both techniques were effective, with no significant difference.

### **1.2. Classroom studies**

Doughty & Varela (1998) investigated the role of CF in the form of recasts as a type of FoF in two intermediate level ESL classes (n=34). The participants were divided into two groups: a FoF group (n=21) and a control group (n=13), which did not receive CF. Participants who received recasts outperformed those who did not receive CF in accuracy and total number of attempts at past time reference, particularly in the immediate posttest. Based on these results, the authors claim that providing CF in a timely manner that does not hinder natural communication

promoted learners' noticing of the target forms, which contributed to their higher performance.

Ellis *et al.* (2006) focused on the acquisition of the English regular past tense by three classes of lower-intermediate adult learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) in New Zealand (n=34). The classes were randomly divided into a recast group; a prompt group; and a control group, which continued with its regular activities. Overall, explicit CF was found to be more effective as it is more likely to be perceived as a correction move, thus generating "awareness of the gap between what was said and the target norm" (Ellis *et al.*, 2006, p. 329).

To investigate this relationship between noticing of CF and learning of past tense and question formation, four groups of high beginner college-level Francophone ESL learners (n=99) were assigned to a recast group, a prompt group, a mixed group (a combination of recasts and prompts) and a control group (no feedback) in a classroom quasi-experimental study by Kartchava (2012). The prompt and the mixed groups noticed more feedback than the recast group. As for the learning outcomes, accuracy levels increased more for past tense than for questions. Accuracy levels in the first posttest in the prompt and mixed groups improved for both features, while those in the recast group decreased both grammatical targets.

In a study involving 72 EFL Chinese learners, Yang & Lyster (2010) compared the effects of recasts and prompts on the acquisition of English regular and irregular past tense, using oral and written production measures. The prompt group, which received feedback in the form of metalinguistic clues, repetition, clarification request or elicitation, showed significant improvement in both the immediate and delayed posttests with respect to regular and irregular forms in both oral and written production. The recast group had significant short-term gains in the use of irregular past tense but no significant gains in the use of regular past tense in oral production. In written production, the recast group had significant short and long-term gains in the use of irregular past tense and short-term gains in the use of regular past tense. Given the low salience of regular past tense, the researchers hypothesize that recasts of irregular forms were more easily noticed by learners.

These studies suggest a positive effect for CF on promoting the noticing of the target feature (TF). Overall, explicit CF in the form of prompts seems to be more effective in generating learning outcomes than implicit feedback, such as recasts.

Additionally, several meta-analyses have revealed a medium to large effect of CF on acquisition, which was maintained over time. The benefits seem to be stronger in the foreign language (FL) than in the second language (SL) context (Li, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007) and more evident in the laboratory than in the classroom context (Li, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007). The results are not clear-cut as far as the differential effects of CF types are concerned: Norris & Ortega (2000) and Li (2010) found greater effects for explicit strategies - those that overtly indicated that the learner's output was not acceptable - than for implicit strategies - those that did not overtly draw the student's attention to his/her erroneous production. However, in Li's meta-analysis, while explicit strategies produced higher gains in immediate and short-delayed posttests, implicit ones had a greater effect on long-delayed posttests.

## **2. Research questions**

To investigate the effects of CF strategies - explicit correction, recasts and prompts - and of no feedback on learners' acquisition of English regular and irregular past tense forms, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1 Do the groups that received CF show higher gains in acquiring English past tense forms over the control group, which did not receive CF on past tense errors?

As described in Section 1, many classroom-based studies (as well as laboratory studies) have contributed to the perspective that CF assists L2 acquisition, as summarized in the meta-analyses on the topic (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Lyster *et al.*, 2013; Mackey & Goo, 2007). Based on the results from previous research, we predicted that the feedback groups would perform better than the control group as far as the target structure is concerned.

RQ2 Do recasts, explicit correction and prompts have different effects on the acquisition of English regular versus irregular past tense forms?

Few studies have aimed at comparing CF effectiveness regarding regular and irregular past tense forms. In Section 1.2., some studies on the English past tense were reviewed. Whereas Ellis (2006) and Ellis *et al.* (2006) focused only on regular past tense, concluding that prompts are overall more effective than recasts, Yang & Lyster (2010) found that recasts promoted short-term gains for irregular forms but no significant gains for regular forms in oral production tasks and considerable short- and long-term gains for irregular forms and short-term gains for regular forms in written production tasks. Participants receiving prompts made significant gains on all measures and with respect to both regular and irregular forms. Considering the results of previous research, we predicted that prompts would have more significant effects than recasts on both regular and irregular forms and that recasts would be more effective with irregular forms than with regular forms.

### **3. Methodology**

The present study, conducted in a state school in Portugal, sought to explore the impact of three CF strategies - explicit correction, recasts and prompts - and of no feedback on the acquisition of regular and irregular past simple forms, and to examine whether these results persist over time.

Seven classes of 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students (n=166) and their teachers (n=5) took part in the study. Student participants included 84 male students (51%) and 82 female students (49%). Their L1 was Portuguese, with most of the students reporting that they had been learning English for more than six years (76%) or from four to six years (24%), which indicates that the participants started learning the FL in primary school. All the classes followed the regular curriculum and, at the time of the study, had 135 minutes of English lessons per week, distributed between one 90-minute lesson and one 45-minute lesson. As a whole, the classes could be said to represent an intermediate level of proficiency in English, or B1, according to the Common

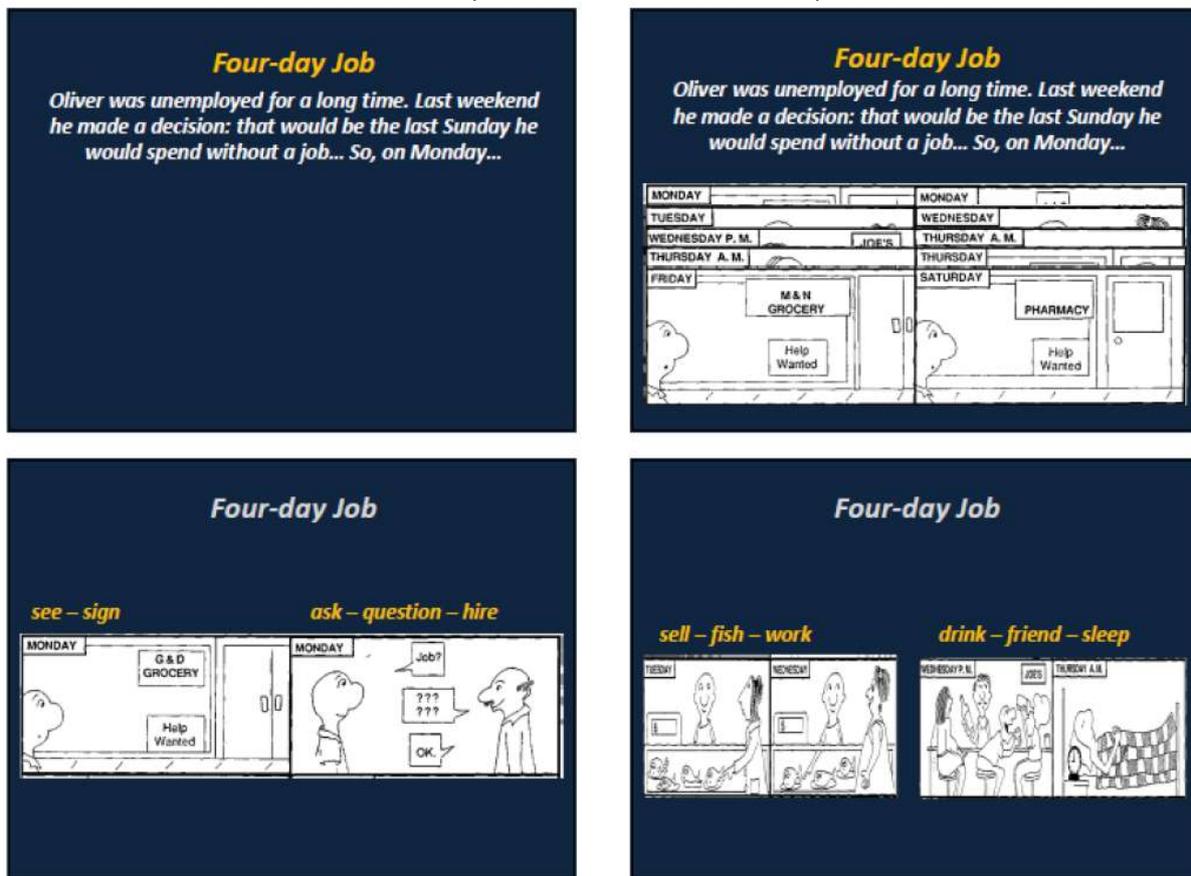
European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), although they also comprised a few students who could be placed either above or below this threshold.

The five participating teachers were experienced EFL professionals who had taught English for eleven to thirty years, mainly in the state school context. To prepare for the implementation of the research study, teachers were assigned the CF strategy that they most naturally provided in class, which was ascertained through lesson observation by the researcher. Although the teachers were receptive to the idea of having the researcher attend their classes, it was not possible to implement video-recording or audio-recording in the present study. Given this restriction, several steps were taken to ensure that the instructional treatment was implemented as planned. The researcher met with each teacher beforehand to provide a more detailed explanation of the objectives of the study, the assigned feedback strategy and the data collection tools. The teachers received a document with a summary of the research aims and methodology and with specific guidelines on the provision of CF as far as their strategy was concerned. Moreover, the researcher was in regular contact with the participating teachers to discuss any questions they might have and to ensure the smooth implementation of the assigned CF strategy, having observed several lessons.

During the instructional period, the classes received the same amount of instruction - a total of nine hours over four weeks (one 90 minute-lesson and one 45-minute lesson per week). The instruction comprised activities included in the coursebook (Gonçalves, Coelho & Gonçalves, 2015) and some communicative activities to encourage the exposure to and the production of the target forms. Whenever a participant made an error in a target structure, the teachers provided CF by way of explicit correction (two intact classes), prompt (two intact classes) or recast (two intact classes). The control group (one intact class) did not receive any CF on past simple errors. It is worth noting that, while the CF was directed at individual learners, preference was given to activities that encouraged the whole class to be focused as much as possible on the speaker at moments of spoken production and interaction.

Students' performance on the accurate use of the past tense was measured in a pretest-posttest design with tests conducted before, immediately after and four months following the instructional intervention. For each testing session, a PDT was designed to elicit the production of sentences in the past tense. Each task included three cartoon stories with eight pictures each, depicting everyday situations, as illustrated in Figure 1. Learners had to tell the stories in the past using word cues: regular and irregular verbs in the infinitive, content words and adverbial phrases. There was no planning time after the pictures and word cues were presented, which potentially limited the learner's ability to draw on explicit knowledge of the TF (Ellis, 2005).

FIGURE 1- Excerpt from the Picture Description Task



(Source: adapted from Ligon & Tannenbaum, 1990)

## 4. Results

To investigate how the groups receiving different CF conditions performed in the PDT in the pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2, their answers were computed and compared. A total of 17,388 occurrences were observed. Learners' responses were scored as either correct (1 point) or incorrect (0 points). In order to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the pretest scores, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)<sup>1</sup> compared the four groups. No significant differences were found among the groups on the PDT,  $F(3, 157) = 1.008, p = .39$ . Descriptive statistics for the participants' performance on the PDT with respect to regular and irregular verbs will be presented in the following subsections.

### 4.1. Regular Verbs

Descriptive statistics for the participants' performance on the PDT are presented in Table 1, which displays the mean, standard deviation and median as well as the lowest (minimum) and highest (maximum) scores of regular past tense accuracy for each group across the three testing times (pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2). In the pretest the lowest mark was achieved by the Recast group ( $n=54$ ), with a mean accuracy percentage score of 68.66% and the highest by the control group ( $n=18$ ), with a mean accuracy percentage score of 80.77%. In posttest 1 the mean scores ranged from 72.28% to 85.73%, with the recast group being the lowest and the prompt group ( $n=55$ ) the highest-scoring CF Type. In posttest 2 the mean scores ranged from 59.28% to 86.57%, with the explicit correction group ( $n=34$ ) achieving the lowest mark and the prompt group the highest.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to the meta-analysis presented by Mackey & Goo (2007), ANOVA was the most frequently used statistical method for main analyses in CF studies.

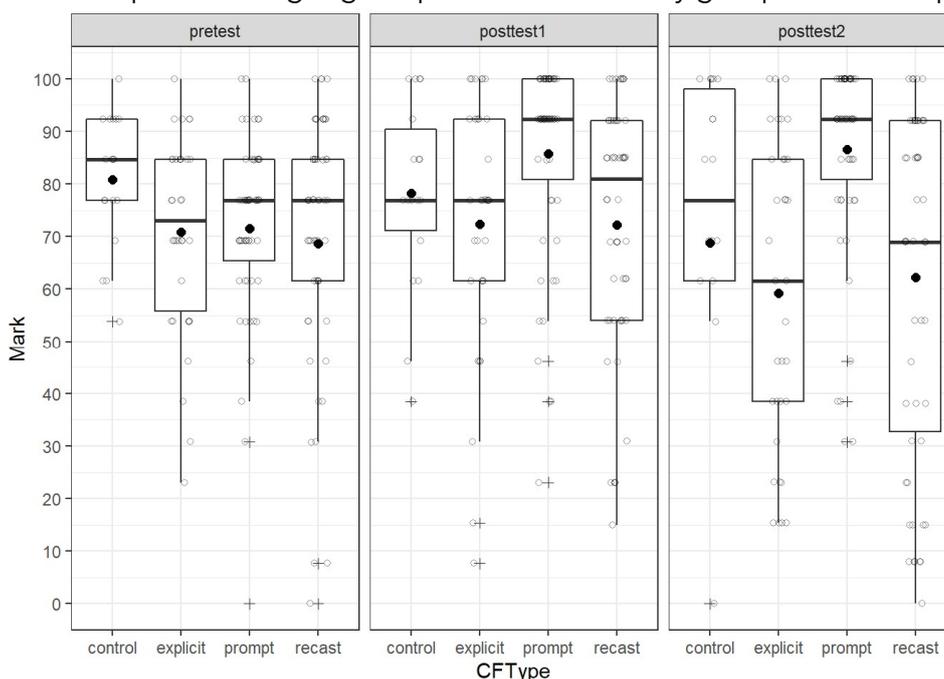
TABLE 1 - Mean percentage scores of regular past tense accuracy by group across test periods

Test	CF Type	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Median	Max.
Pretest	Control	80.77	12.72	53.85	84.62	100
	Explicit	70.81	18.62	30.77	73.07	100
	Prompt	71.61	17.32	0	76.92	100
	Recast	68.66	25.53	0	76.92	100
Posttest 1	Control	78.21	17.94	38.46	76.92	100
	Explicit	72.40	23.96	7.69	76.92	100
	Prompt	85.73	18.87	23.08	92.31	100
	Recast	72.28	23.79	23.00	81.00	100
Posttest 2	Control	68.80	35.15	0	76.92	100
	Explicit	59.28	29.12	15.38	61.54	100
	Prompt	86.57	18.62	31.77	92.31	100
	Recast	62.20	32.76	0	69.00	100

(Source: created by the author)

Figure 2 graphically shows the mean, median, interquartile range, standard deviations and outlier values in the pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2.

FIGURE 2 - Boxplot showing regular past tense scores by group across test periods

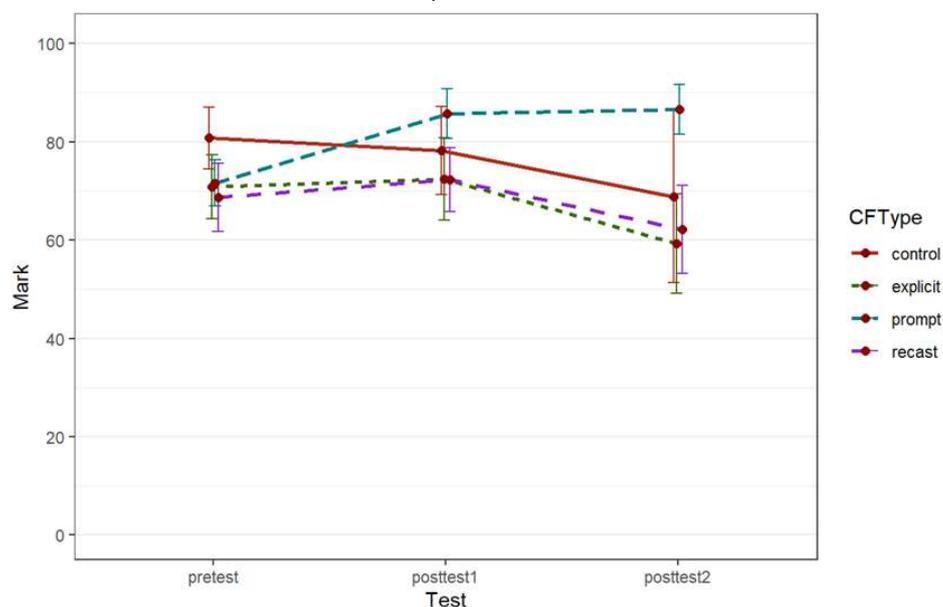


(Source: created by the author)

A two-way ANOVA with unbalanced design was performed, with the scores of the PDT as dependent variables. The statistical analysis was conducted on R. Test Time (pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2) was a within-subjects independent variable, and CF Type (control, explicit correction, prompt, recast) was a between-subjects

independent variable. An alpha level of 0.05 was used. The results revealed a significant Test Time effect,  $F(2, 157) = 4.108, p = .017$ , a significant CF Type effect,  $F(3, 157) = 11.594, p < .001$  and a significant interaction effect between Test Time and CF Type,  $F(6, 157) = 3.256, p < .005$ . Post-hoc analyses revealed that the prompt group significantly outperformed the explicit correction group ( $p = .031$ ) and the recast group ( $p < .005$ ) in the production of sentences containing regular past tense items. Figure 3 graphically displays the group accuracy percentage scores over time.

FIGURE 3 - Mean percentage scores of regular past tense accuracy by group across test periods



(Source: created by the author)

## 4.2. Irregular Verbs

Descriptive statistics for the participants' performance on the PDT are presented in Table 2, which displays means, standard deviations, median and the lowest (minimum) and highest (maximum) accuracy irregular past tense scores for each group across the three testing times (pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2). In the pretest the lowest mark was achieved by the prompt group ( $n=55$ ), with a mean accuracy percentage score of 54.86% and the highest by the control group ( $n=18$ ), with a mean accuracy percentage score of 62.32%. In posttest 1 the mean scores

ranged from 56.04% to 73.04%, with the control group being the lowest and the prompt group the highest-scoring CF Type. In posttest 2 the mean scores ranged from 55.56% to 85.08%, again with the control group achieving the lowest mark and the prompt group the highest.

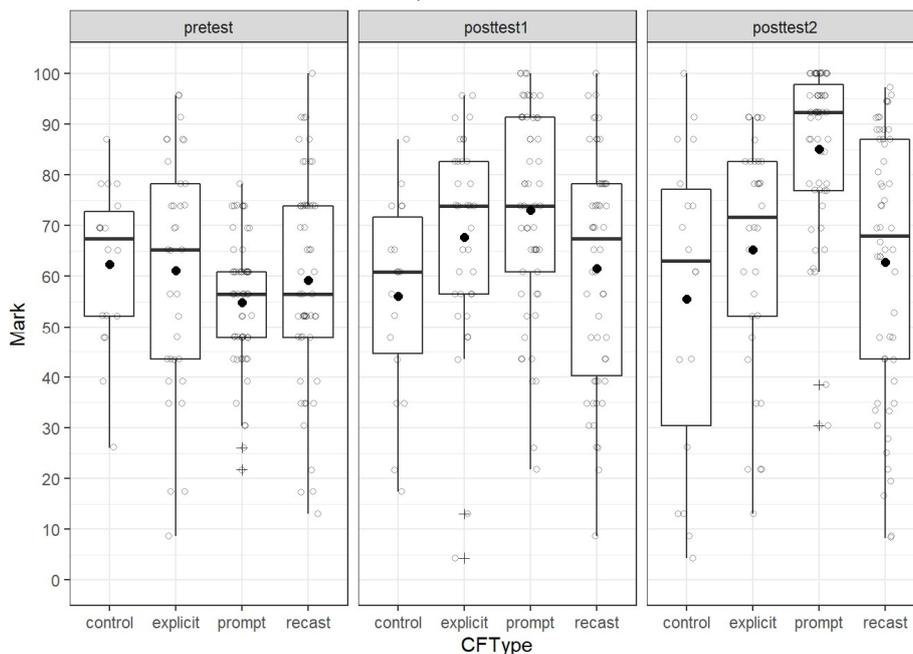
TABLE 2 - Mean percentage scores of irregular past tense accuracy by group across test periods

Test	CF Type	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Median	Max.
Pretest	Control	62.32	15.92	26.09	67.39	86.96
	Explicit	61.13	23.57	8.70	65.22	95.65
	Prompt	54.86	12.95	21.74	56.52	78.26
	Recast	59.26	20.76	13.04	56.52	100
Posttest 1	Control	56.04	19.49	17.39	60.87	86.96
	Explicit	67.65	21.01	4.35	73.91	95.65
	Prompt	73.04	20.18	21.74	73.91	100
	Recast	61.59	22.69	8.70	67.39	100
Posttest 2	Control	55.56	31.02	4.35	63.04	100
	Explicit	65.22	23.25	13.04	71.74	91.30
	Prompt	85.08	17.29	30.43	92.31	100
	Recast	62.80	25.97	8.33	68.06	97.22

(Source: created by the author)

Figure 4 graphically shows the mean, median, interquartile range, standard deviations and outlier values in the pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2.

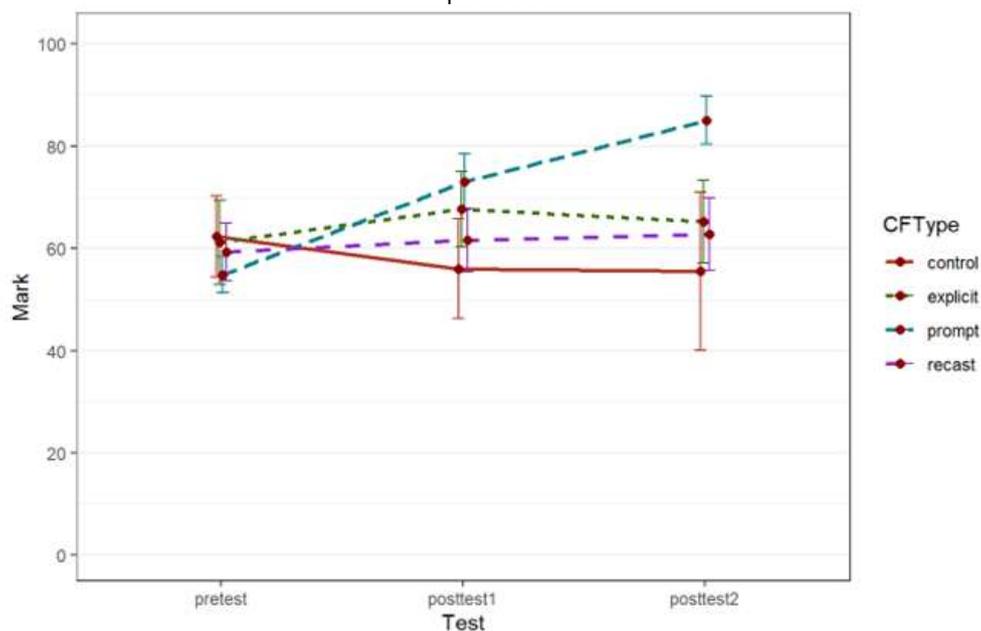
FIGURE 4 - Boxplot showing irregular past tense accuracy scores by group across test periods



(Source: created by the author)

A two-way ANOVA with unbalanced design was performed, with the scores of the PDT as dependent variables. R Studio was used to conduct the statistical analysis. Test Time (pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2) was a within-subjects independent variable and CF Type (control, explicit correction, prompt, recast) was a between-subjects independent variable. An alpha level of 0.05 was used. The results revealed a significant Test Time effect  $F(3, 157) = 12.547, p < .001$ , a significant CF Type effect,  $F(3, 157) = 8.129, p < .001$ , and a significant interaction effect between Test Time and CF Type,  $F(6, 157) = 5.886, p < .001$ . Post-hoc analyses revealed significant gains in the prompt group between the Pretest and Posttest 2 ( $p = .013$ ). Figure 5 graphically displays the accuracy percentage scores by group over time.

FIGURE 5 - Mean percentage scores of irregular past tense accuracy by group across test periods



(Source: created by the author)

## 5. Discussion

The present section is organized as follows: in subsection 5.1., the results of the different CF groups - control, explicit correction, prompt, recast - regarding regular and irregular past tense items are discussed. These results may be

influenced by a number of factors, such as the extent to which learners are familiarized with the TF, discussed in subsection 5.2., the variation in CF salience, analyzed in subsection 5.3., and the opportunities for modified output, discussed in subsection 5.4.

### **5.1. Regular and irregular items**

The prompt group significantly outperformed the explicit correction group and the Recast group in the production of sentences containing regular past tense items in the PDT. Although the prompt group was the only group that managed to both improve its accuracy scores from the Pretest to Posttest 1 and maintain them from Posttest 1 to Posttest 2, it did not outperform the control group, which achieved relatively high scores from the Pretest onwards, maintaining its performance across the test times.

As far as irregular items are concerned, only the prompt group showed short- and long-term gains in the use of irregular past tense forms. These results are in line with those of Kartchava (2012), whose quasi-experimental study also included a picture description activity designed to elicit both regular and irregular past simple forms. In Kartchava's study, the accuracy levels increased in Posttest 1 for the prompt group and the mixed group, which received both prompts and recasts as CF treatment, whereas the scores for the recast group decreased. However, in the Results section the researcher did not differentiate between regular and irregular forms and no statistically significant differences were found between the groups.

Yang & Lyster (2010) also used a picture-cued narrative activity to test the production of regular and irregular past tense items. The researchers found that, regarding regular past tense, only the prompt group made significant gains, whereas all three groups significantly improved their irregular past tense scores over time. This testing instrument differed from the PDT in the present study, since the learners were provided with the complete narrative (including the past simple forms) as preparation and had three minutes to read the text before retelling the story based on word cues, which included all content words, adverbial phrases and verbs in their base form. There was, however, no planning time after the learners received

the word cues. The fact that more significant gains were found by Yang & Lyster (2010) might, to a certain extent, be explained by a memory effect. Although the researchers controlled for test-retest effect by using two versions of the test alternately over the three testing sessions, following the sequence ABA for all participants, each version contained exactly the same 9 regular and 18 irregular verbs. Having read the story three times, it is possible the learners may hypothetically have memorized some of the past simple forms, given that the retelling occurred immediately after the provision of the story. In the present study, learners were not provided with the complete narrative beforehand. The stories were presented to the students in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, with no planning time after the pictures and word cues were presented.

As discussed in Section 1.2., regular past tense forms are associated with low salience, low communicative value and high regularity, whereas irregular past tense forms have high salience, high frequency and low regularity (DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2005). Therefore, we could expect recasts to be more effective in drawing attention to irregular than to regular forms, because irregular forms are more salient and it would potentially be easier to notice the difference between the student's own erroneous form and the correct form provided by the teacher. This was, however, not the case in the PDT administered in the present study. Prompts, on the other hand, were predicted to induce learners to notice both regular and irregular forms. The accuracy scores in the prompt group significantly increased for both regular and irregular forms in the PDT. In the case of explicit correction, the corrective intention is clearly communicated by the teacher and, therefore, these corrections could be expected to lead to more gains in accuracy. However, this was not the case in this task.

## **5.2. Familiarization with the target feature**

Recasts are hypothesized to work better at providing exemplars of TFs that are relatively new to learners. The same would apply to explicit corrections, as they provide learners with positive evidence. Prompts, on the other hand, are predicted to promote a greater control over and faster access to already-acquired forms (Yang

& Lyster, 2010). During their experience as EFL learners, which, as previously established, for most of the participants in the present study began in primary school, the participants were exposed to classroom input containing exemplars of the TF and to the grammar rules involved. Therefore, like the participants in Ellis *et al.* (2006), Kartchava (2012) and Yang & Lyster (2010), the learners in the present study were at a stage in their learning process where they could take advantage of opportunities for TF production guided by CF.

### **5.3. Corrective Feedback salience**

CF salience may also play a role in the results. As observed by Lyster & Ranta (1997), the implicitness of some recasts may contribute to these corrections being interpreted by students as repetitions of their correct answer. Lyster (2004, p. 404) also notes that “recasts of ill-formed utterances and repetitions of well-formed utterances together appear to confirm or disconfirm the meaning of a learner’s message”. The possibility exists that when the focus of the learners’ selective attention is on content, they may not perceive the corrective intention of recasts, leading them to ignore the linguistic evidence contained within them.

The results of this study differ from those of previous studies which found a positive effect for recasts. As discussed in Section 1.1., results that show the effectiveness of recasts stem especially from laboratory studies (e.g. Han, 2002; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Sagarra, 2007). In this research setting, CF is often provided consistently on a one-to-one interaction, which makes the corrective intention more evident to learners (Nicholas *et al.*, 2001). On the other hand, in the classroom setting, the implicitness or explicitness of recasts may be mediated by whether the teacher uses intonation, pauses for the learner to modify his or her output and also the content of the recast itself, i.e., if it is a short or a long recast and the number of changes it includes. For example, after analyzing the provision of recasts in four classroom settings, Sheen (2004) concluded that shorter recasts focusing on a specific word or phrase, recasts with an interrogative intonation and recasts that focused on phonological rather than grammatical or lexical errors were more likely

to lead to repair, with the results being corroborated by Loewen & Philp (2006) and Oliver & Grote (2010).

As illustrated in (2) below, in our observation of the classes in the recast group, we found several examples of relatively long recasts that involved multiple changes. In this interaction, the student's turn contains three errors. In the first utterance, the past simple of the verb *to be* (*was*) is missing and there is an omission error of the past simple form of the verb *want* (*wanted*). Moreover, the plural of the noun *child* is incorrectly formed (*children*). The teacher reacts by recasting the student's utterance, thus correcting the three errors and asking a follow-up question. These corrections occurred in a single turn, which may have hindered the learner's ability to process all the corrections and to notice the gap between his or her utterance and that of the teacher. Additionally, the teacher asks the student a question, for which the learner correctly provides an answer, which suggests that his or her attention was focused to a certain extent on reacting to the teacher's question rather than on acknowledging the difference between his or her turn and that of the teacher. In the student's response, we find no evidence that he or she has noticed a correction as the recast did not lead to uptake.

(2) S: \*When I a kid I want to be a teacher... To help childs learn new things every day.

T: You wanted to be a teacher when you were a kid? To help children learn new things every day... Are you not so sure anymore?

S: No... Teachers work a lot.

The several corrections in one teacher turn and the subsequent topic continuation by the teacher may pose a challenge to the learner in interpreting CF. Also, as argued by Goo (2012, p. 465), it is possible that responding to implicit CF moves such as recasts entails a greater cognitive effort, since "the noticing of recasts (...) necessitates cognitive control of attentional resources because it requires learners to engage in cognitive comparisons". Moreover, since students in the recast group did not receive clues on the nature and location of the error, even if they were

able to establish this cognitive comparison between their utterance and that of the teacher, they had to perform the task of identifying the error.

Furthermore, in other instances, a learner's well-formed utterance was repeated by the teacher not with a corrective intention, but with a communicative one: sustaining classroom interaction and maintaining its coherence. This is shown in (3).

(3) S: We went there together last week.

T: Oh, you went there together last week? Did you have fun?

S: Yes, a lot.

Thus, as far as recasts are concerned, the results of the present study differ from those of Doughty & Varela (1998), a quasi-experimental study described in Section 1.2. which investigated only this CF technique and found that the recast group revealed statistically significant gains in immediate and delayed posttests, whereas the control group showed no significant improvement over the same period. However, the "corrective recasting" in the treatment group consisted of two phases: first, repetitions of learners' imprecise output with rising intonation, and second, recasts to provide the target form. Thus, the recasting treatment provided leaned towards the explicit end of a continuum, since the erroneous form was stressed before another repetition of the learner's utterance incorporating the correction. The results were, nevertheless, interpreted as supporting evidence for the facilitative role of implicit forms of negative evidence. In the present study, recasts were operationalized as the teacher's reformulation, whether partial or full, of the learners' erroneous utterances that contained past tense items. Recasts included no repetition of ill-formed past tense and, thus, the CF provided was essentially implicit.

The corrective intention of prompts is generally easier to notice in the classroom setting (Ammar, 2008; Yang & Lyster, 2010), since they indicate that there is a problem with the learner's utterance but withhold the correct form, promoting noticing and modified output. This explicitness is a potential explanation for the greater effectiveness of prompts. Like the teachers in the recast and explicit

correction groups, the teacher in the prompt group was asked to provide immediate CF to the learners' past simple errors. However, the specific guidelines for the teacher in the prompt group were to provide the learners with clues that assisted them in reformulating their utterance. The teacher was also asked not to provide the correct form, unless the learner visibly struggled in self-correcting. These aspects added salience and explicitness to the prompt CF treatment. Firstly, they unequivocally pointed out the occurrence of an error. Secondly, once the learner was aware that his or her utterance needed repair, the aim of the teacher was to ensure that he or she was able to locate the error and self-correct. For example, the student in (4) incorrectly forms the interrogative by using both the auxiliary verb *did* and the past simple form *used*. The teacher in the prompt group treats the error through a prompt in the form of metalinguistic feedback, by reminding the student that a change in his or her utterance should be made due to the presence of an auxiliary verb in his or her question.

- (4) S: \*What did you used to do at your grandparents'?
- T: Remember there is an auxiliary verb in the sentence, so...
- S: What did you use to do at your grandparents'?

As far as explicit correction is concerned, often there is no ambiguity regarding the teacher's intention of providing CF, as there is a clear indication that an error has occurred, as illustrated in (5). Nevertheless, the explicit correction group did not show any significant gains in accuracy. In (5), the student incorrectly uses the present simple form to refer to a past event. The teacher makes clear that the use of this form is incorrect and provides the student with the correct past simple form of the regular verb *start*.

- (5) S: \*She starts to be an actress in 2008.
- T: It's not starts. It's started.
- S: She started.

#### 5.4. Opportunities for modified output

Regarding the opportunities for modified output, recasts, explicit corrections and prompts differ in the extent to which learners attempt to self-correct. Despite being the most widely used CF type, the recast is the least likely to lead to uptake, followed by explicit correction. Prompts are usually more likely to elicit uptake from the student than the two input-providing strategies<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, self-correction (or modified output) encourages the learner to test hypotheses when trying to reformulate the original utterance. Moreover, when attempting to produce an utterance that is more target-like, the learner may engage in deeper levels of processing than processing for meaning (Swain, 1995). Furthermore, practicing with a correct form after CF may promote automatization. Through reprocessing his or her original utterance, the learner's awareness of the TF is potentially increased.

In the case of recasts and explicit corrections, because the correct form is provided by the teacher, the repair that follows may consist mainly in an imitation of the teacher's utterance, without any deeper processing involved. In the interaction shown in (6), a student in the recast group incorrectly forms the past simple of the verb *take*, producing an error of regularization (*\*taked*). The teacher reacts with a full recast by repeating the student's utterance and incorporating the correct form *took*. Then, the student repeats the teacher's utterance in its entirety.

- (6) S: \*I taked the bus to school yesterday at half past seven.  
T: I took the bus to school yesterday at half past seven.  
S: I took the bus to school yesterday at half past seven.

In this context, the students can have a different reaction if they repeat only the forms that were targeted in the CF episode, as shown in (7). In this case, the student in the recast group made a double marking error (*\*lefted*). The teacher

---

<sup>2</sup> In Lyster & Ranta's (1997) study, for example, only 31% of the recast episodes led to uptake; explicit corrections elicited uptake 50% of the time and prompts were similarly effective in leading to uptake: elicitation (100%), clarification request (88%), metalinguistic feedback (86%) and repetition (78%). These results are corroborated by Lyster (1998) and Sheen (2004).

reformulates the student's utterance to include the correct form *left*. Finally, the student reacts by repeating only the TF on which the teacher provided CF.

(7) S: \*I lefted home at eight o'clock.

T: I left home at eight o'clock.

S: I left.

This type of modified output, which Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt (2015) operationalize as partial modified output, i.e. when the learner repeats only the TFs that were targeted in the CF, may indicate that the learner has focused their attention on the error.

## Conclusion

The present study was undertaken to contribute to the growing body of research on CF by investigating the effects of three CF types - Explicit Correction, Prompt and Recast - compared to no correction on the acquisition of English regular and irregular Past Simple forms. The findings suggest that prompts as a CF strategy can be effective in the FL classroom. These strategies can potentially be more effective than recasts when dealing with errors related to the past simple regular and irregular forms because the corrective intention of the teacher is more salient and because they provide opportunities for modified output. As previously discussed, several studies have shown recasts to be effective in the laboratory setting (e.g. Ishida, 2004; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Mackey & Philp, 1998; McDonough & Mackey, 2006) but less effective in the classroom context (e.g. Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Ellis *et al.*, 2006; Kartchava, 2012; Yang & Lyster, 2010). An implication that may be drawn is that recasts should be salient in terms of length and number of errors corrected. Additionally, teachers should be aware that a repetition of the recast by the learner does not necessarily mean that he or she has noticed the gap between their utterance and that of the teacher. Confirmation and/ or further explanation may be needed.

Furthermore, CF research is an area that may promote the dialogue between teachers and researchers. It is a relevant phenomenon for both, since instances of CF take place every day in most FL lessons and are an important tool used by language teachers in their interaction with students in an effort to maintain the flow of communication while also helping them improve their accuracy. Additionally, studies on CF inform L2 research on the importance of providing such correction for language development. Therefore, it is also in this interchange of ideas between researchers and teachers that relevant issues in the context of CF may arise, because “pedagogy should be research informed and [...] research will benefit from being pedagogy informed” (Ellis, 2017, p. 13).

The generalizability of the present research findings should be approached with caution due to several limitations. Firstly, the study involved a specific group of 9th-grade EFL students from a single state school in Portugal. Additionally, the assignment of classes to CF strategies was limited to two intact classes in the case of explicit correction, recast and prompts, and one intact class in the case of the control group. The absence of video or audio recordings of the lessons further constrained the ability to ensure consistent implementation of CF strategies. Participant fatigue may also pose limitations on the study's conclusions. Future studies might want to consider different populations and different instructional settings. CF is, to the best of our knowledge, an underexplored topic in the Portuguese context across all age groups and instructional settings. While the present study may have contributed to shedding some light on the effectiveness of CF strategies on a particular TF - the past simple in English - more research in FL classrooms in Portugal is clearly needed. Future research might investigate individual variables, other school years, geographical areas and FLs.

## References

- Ammar, A. (2008). Prompts and recasts: Differential effects on second language morphosyntax. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(2), 183-210.
- Ammar, A., & Spada, N. (2006). One size fits all? Recasts, prompts and L2 learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 543-574.

- Carrol, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and implicit negative feedback: an empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalizations. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 357-366.
- Council of Europe (CEFR) (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. (1998). Beyond focus on form: Cognitive perspectives on learning and practicing second language grammar. In C. Doughty, & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 42-63). Cambridge University Press.
- Doughty, C., & Varela, E. (1998). Communicative focus on form. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Egi, T. (2010). Uptake, modified output, and learner perceptions of recasts: learner responses and language awareness. *The Modern Language Journal*, 94, 1-21.
- Gonçalves, M., Coelho, M., & Gonçalves, A. (2015). *iTeen 9*. Areal Editores.
- Goo, J. (2012). Corrective feedback and working memory capacity in interaction-driven L2 learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 34, 445-474.
- Ellis, R. (2005). Measuring implicit and explicit knowledge of a second language: A psychometric study. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 141-172.
- Ellis, R. (2006). Researching the effects of form-focused instruction on L2 acquisition. *AILA Review*, 19, 18-41.
- Ellis, R. (2007). The differential effects of corrective feedback on two grammatical structures. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational Interaction in Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 339-360). Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2017). Oral corrective feedback in L2 classrooms: what we know so far. In H. Nassaji & E. Kartchava (Eds.), *Corrective feedback in second language teaching and learning: research, theory, applications, implications* (pp. 3-18). Routledge.
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006) Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 339-368.
- Gurzynski-Weiss, L., & Baralt, M. (2015). Does type of modified output correspond to learner noticing of feedback? A closer look in face-to-face and computer-mediated task-based interaction. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 36(6), 1393-1420.
- Han, Z. (2002). A study of the impact of recasts on tense consistency in L2 output. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 543-572.
- Ishida, M. (2004). Effects of recasts on the acquisition of the aspectual form '-te i-(ru)' by learners of Japanese as a foreign language. *Language Learning*, 54, 311-394.
- Iwashita, N. (2003). Negative feedback and positive evidence in task-based interaction: Differential effects on L2 development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 25, 1-36.
- Kartchava, E. (2012). *Noticeability of corrective feedback, L2 development and learner beliefs* [PhD thesis, Université de Montreal]. Papyrus Institutional Repository. <https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/handle/1866/8531>
- Lantolf, J. (2006). Sociocultural theory and L2: state of the art. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 67-109.

- Leeman, J. (2003). Recasts and L2 development: beyond negative evidence. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 25, 37-63.
- Li, S. (2010). The effectiveness of corrective feedback in SLA: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 60, 309-365.
- Ligon, F., & Tannenbaum, E. (1990). *Picture Stories: Language and Literacy Activities for Beginners*. Longman.
- Loewen, S., & Philp, J. (2006). Recasts in the adult English L2 classroom: Characteristics, explicitness and effectiveness. *The Modern Language Journal*, 90, 536-556.
- Long, M. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot, R. Ginsberg, & C. Kramsch (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 39-52). John Benjamins.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie, & T. K. Bhatia (eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). Academic Press.
- Long, M., Inagaki, S., & Ortega, L. (1998). The role of implicit negative feedback in SLA: Models and recasts in Japanese and Spanish. *Modern Language Journal*, 82, 357-371.
- Lyster, R. (1998). Recasts, repetition, and ambiguity in L2 classroom discourse. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 20, 51-81.
- Lyster, R. (2004). Differential effects of prompts and recasts in form-focused instruction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19, 37-66.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 20, 37-66.
- Lyster, R., & Izquierdo, J. (2009). Prompts vs. recasts in dyadic interaction. *Language Learning*, 59, 453-498.
- Lyster, R., & Saito, K. (2010). Effects of oral feedback in SLA classroom research: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32, 265-302.
- Lyster, R., Saito, K., & Sato, M. (2013). Oral corrective feedback in second language classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 46, 1-40.
- Mackey, A. (2007). Interaction as practice. In R. Dekeyser (Ed.), *Practice in a second language: Perspectives from applied linguistics and cognitive psychology* (pp. 85-110). Cambridge University Press.
- Mackey, A., & Goo, J. (2007). Interaction research in SLA: A meta-analysis and research synthesis. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition: A collection of empirical studies* (pp. 407-452). Oxford University Press.
- Mackey, A., & Philp, J. (1998). Conversational interaction and second language development: Recasts, responses, and red herrings? *Modern Language Journal*, 82, 338-356.
- McDonough, K. (2007). Interactional feedback and the emergence of simple past activity verbs in L2 English. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition: A collection of empirical studies* (pp. 323-338). Oxford University Press.
- McDonough, K., & Mackey, A. (2006) Responses to recasts: repetition, primed production, and language development. *Language Learning*, 56, 693-720.

- Nicholas, H., Lightbown, M., & Spada, N. (2001). Recasts as feedback to language learners. *Language Learning*, 51, 719-758.
- Norris, J.M., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50(3), 417-528.
- Oliver, R., & Grote, E. (2010). The provision and uptake of different types of recasts in child and adult ESL learners. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 33(3), 26-41.
- Pawlak, M. (2014). *Error Correction in the Foreign Language Classroom: reconsidering the issues*. Springer Verlag.
- Révész, A. (2007). *Focus on form in task-based language teaching: recasts, task complexity, and L2 learning*. [Unpublished PhD dissertation]. Columbia University.
- Sagarra, N. (2007). From CALL to face-to-face interaction: the effect of computer-delivered recasts and working memory on L2 development. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition* (pp. 229-248). Oxford University Press.
- Sheen, Y. (2004). Corrective feedback and learner uptake in communicative classrooms across instructional settings. *Language Teaching Research*, 8(3), 263-300.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook, & B. Seidhofer (eds.), *Principle and practice in applied linguistics: studies in honour of H. G. Widdowson* (pp. 125-144). Oxford University Press.
- Yang, Y., & Lyster, R. (2010). Effects of form-focused practice and feedback on Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of regular and irregular past tense forms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(2), 235-263.