Teachers' intentions and Learners' Cognition of Feedback

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Abstract

Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) focuses on the outstanding facilitating role of feedback in accordance with the linguistic and communicative success and failure of learners' utterances. A number of SLA researchers have investigated the effectiveness of recasts, prompts, and models; however, little research has empirically tested the direct link between teachers' intentions and correctness of learners' cognition. This study aims at materializing teachers' intentions with paralinguistic devices and length of feedback on increasing learners' cognition. Thus 45 learners of English with intermediate level assigned to three groups as the participants for each of the two hypotheses while employing Chi-square as statistical means of analysis. The results proved the paralinguistic devices presumption in recasts and prompts, and models, though length of feedback showed a significance relationship in recasts and models, but not in prompts. The study carries significant implications for SLA researchers and language teachers.

Key words: *Intention, cognition, recasts, prompts, models*

1. Introduction

On the basis of Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996), interaction facilitates learning by integrating input, output, corrective feedback, and selective attention in a meaningful context. The pedagogical outcome of this Hypothesis is Focus on Form (F o F) instruction proposed by Long (1991) referring to drawing learners' attention to certain forms incidentally by communicative negotiation. This can be realized by interactional feedback such as recasting and modeling as two types of implicit feedback while the former embodies negative evidence, the latter represents positive evidence. In addition, prompting as an explicit feedback embodies negative evidence (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

There were continuing discussions on learners' perceptions about interactional feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 1998a, 1998b; Moroishi, 2002; Philp, 2003; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Yoshida, 2008; Mackey, 2007). This study tries to contribute to the discussion by reporting and discussing an empirical study the author conducted in 6 EFL classes in Iran on the relationship between teachers' underlying intentions when they present recasts, prompts, and models and correctness of learners' cognition as a result of that. In fact teachers' intentions materialized with explicit factors including paralinguistic devices and length of given feedback may relate to learners' ability to recognize gaps or contrasts between teachers' feedback and target like utterances by cognition the focus of feedback. The author focused on teachers' intentions while linguistic targets were phonology, lexis, and grammar at the time of presenting feedback in the form of declarative and interrogative utterances. The existing study ceases to follow the previous studies in that it focuses on three widely used interactional feedback that seems to be ambiguous by emphasizing on teachers' roles as decision makers in classrooms and providing the most comprehensive analysis of learners' cognition about recasts, prompts, and models in relation to teachers' intentions at the time of presenting feedback in a communicative environment.

Conceptual framework of the study

The reported study is on the basis of teachers' intentions that can be examined as a specific aspect of cognition and learners' perceptions when they obtain interactional feedback or focus on form techniques

as a particular aspect of teaching called Focus on Form instruction (F o F) that its foundation is Interaction Hypothesis proposed by Long (1996). The writer argues these concepts below.

Teachers' intentions

In recent years, teachers are viewed as constructers of their own personal teaching behavior; thus teaching is a thinking activity. Since teachers' beliefs indicate to what teachers know, believe, and practice (Borg, 2003), it is important to be aware of vital roles of teachers in the implementation of new approaches (Bullock, 2011).

Another controversial area in the field of teachers' beliefs is that they are difficult to be observed or measured and as a result, they have difficulty in investigation (Pajares, 1992); although by operationalising specific beliefs, choosing a proper methodology as well as constructing a thoughtful design, they can be investigated (Borg, 2003). Furthermore teachers' beliefs are inconsistence with their practice most of the time (Bullock, 2011). Fang (1996) believes that the inconsistency is due to the complexities of classroom life.

Ajzen (1991) proposed the theory of Planned Behavior in order to relate beliefs to practice by focusing on behavioral intentions or determination and decision of a person in doing something. According to Ajzen (1991) one of the influential factors in planned behavior is perceived behavioral control. For example how teachers get their students to notice the gap between their original utterances and target-like utterances when they obtain feedback. In fact perceived behavioral control has been influenced by teachers' beliefs about past experiences and anticipated difficulties.

Hence, the author took a systematic view of teachers' intentions by recognizing perceived behavioral control derived from past experiences due to the ambiguity of recasts, prompts, and models and the difficulties existing in students' cognition of feedback types when they are presented by teachers.

Learners' cognition

Since according to Mackey, Gass, McDonough, (2000) learners' perceptions about feedback is the learners' ability in noticing the focus of the feedback, this study takes noticing as perception or cognition. Furthermore, noticing in an interaction refers to learners' focus of attention during interaction, though noticing may be observed as perception by lesser and greater degrees or levels of awareness (Philp, 2003).

Yet, on the importance of perception it should be said that perception may play a role to modulate the effectiveness of interactional feedback even when factors such as length or context intensity are conductive (Mackey 2007). Roberts (1995) suggested that the important factor for the effectiveness of feedback is due to the L2 learners' cognition of correction as well as the nature of the correction. He concluded that not only students are not aware of error correction most of the time, but also they can't perceive the nature of the error.

In another study, Mackey (et al. 2000) investigated whether feedback could be perceived by learners and whether they could perceive its target accurately or not. They concluded that learners recognized lexis most often and the least recognition was about morphosyntactic feedback. Again, similar to Roberts' (1995) result, Mackey (et al. 2000) observed a discrepancy between feedback and learners' perceptions so that the learners' perceptions could not overlap the teachers' intentions in providing feedback. Also Moroishi's finding (2002) showed that learners didn't understand teachers' models more than 25% , while in recasts the rate of understanding is more than 50%. Lyster (2004) argued that provision of prompts in communicatively classrooms were more effective for the learners' improvement in written tasks compared to recasts. Moreover, in another study Panova and Lyster (2002) found that recasts happened most often, whereas proficient learners noticed recasts better than less proficient one. Results of previous studies conducted in varied contexts reveal that teachers use more frequently recasts than other

types of feedback. However, recasts don't trigger learners' understanding of the teachers' intentions in providing feedback. The low rate of learners' understanding of the teachers' choice of feedback may be diminished as teachers add an explicit component at the time of providing feedback.

This study finds a probable relationship between teachers' intentions by adding explicit components in the form of controlling the length of feedback or paralinguistic devices at the time of presenting feedback and learners' cognition of correction to make aware learners of feedback types and the nature of error.

Focus on Form instruction and its induced techniques

Focus on form instruction, a feature of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Basturkmen, Loewen, Ellis, 2004), is an integration of form focused instruction and meaning focused instruction (Davies, 2006). It attends to form as it occurs in learners' communication like in natural language acquisition. It should be noted that it deals with linguistic problems when learners experience in actual language use (Ellis, 2001).

Incidental Focus on Form that is one type of Focus on Form instruction results in extensive instruction so that a wide range of grammar, lexis, phonology, and pragmatic forms may compete for learners' attention (Ellis, 2001).

This study takes up incidental Focus on Form instruction since in this kind of instruction the decision makers are teachers who must determine how to respond to learners' problems during interaction. Therefore, in this study teachers as decision makers give three kinds of focus on form techniques including recasts, prompts, and models in affirmative and interrogative forms when learners produce linguistic non-target-like utterances. Teachers, in their attempts in order to make consistent their beliefs with their practice, show their intentions by adding explicit components such as length of feedback and paralinguistic devices at the time of providing feedback in order to diminish the ambiguity among these three widely used feedback moves.

Interactional Feedback, Ambiguity, And Its Recognition

Although there are a few number of studies on learner cognitive reactions, i.e. learners' response to corrective feedback, (Mackey, 2007), the existing studies have provided some crucial insights. Although recasts and other forms of corrective feedback are likely less ambiguous in form-focused instruction, where feedback focuses on a single linguistic item (Lyster, 2002), in incidental focus on form instruction feedback has a variety of forms and it is difficult to restrict teachers to provide a single form of feedback. Thus recasts and other forms of interactional feedback may seem more ambiguous.

Some previous researchers have wondered how learners can probably distinguish recasts from models (Lyster, 1998a, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002), and others have argued cognitive-developmental factor in the recognition of recasts (Mackey, 1999; Mackey, Philp, Egi, Fugii, & Tatsumi, 2002; Philp, 2003).

So some researches are needed to find ways to diminish the ambiguity among feedback types. This empirical study relates teachers' intentions in presenting feedback to learners' perceptions about recasts, prompts, and models. These underlying intentions include length of feedback and paralinguistic devices at the time of providing feedback. In fact, this study concerns learners' ability to recognize gaps between teachers' recasts or prompts and their initial utterances on the one hand, and teachers' provision of models in order to appreciate correct utterances on the other.

Aims of the study

In accordance with the above objective, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Will teachers' intentions be related to learners' cognition of recasts, prompts and models regarding length of feedback?

   Hypothesis 1: Learners' cognition of recasts, prompts, and models will be higher by teachers' intentions regarding short utterances.

2. Will teachers' intentions be related to learners' cognition of recasts, prompts and models regarding paralinguistic devices?

   Hypothesis 2: Learners' cognition of recasts, prompts, and models will be higher by teachers' intentions regarding paralinguistic devices.

Participants

Three non-native teachers and forty-five students were involved in this study. All of the learners of English were female, aged 15-17 and were registered in regular classes at the same time. The type of instruction learners were exposed to was incidental focus on form. All learners were at intermediate level and they were learning English about 6 years, and were known as Foreign Language Learners with three different L1 background including Turkish, Kurdish, and Farsi. The research task was done through twelve sessions for testing each hypothesis. Each session took about 50 minutes. The speaking goals of classes (three classes for each hypothesis) were two picture descriptions.

Issues of Methodology

This section presents issues of methodology, material and procedure , the data collection procedures in the following two conditions: a) providing recasts, prompts and models with considering the length of utterances, and b) providing recasts, prompts and models while adding another explicit component as paralinguistic devices.

This study probes NNSs' (non-native speakers) cognition of three types of feedback during student-teacher interaction by stimulated recall methodology (Gass, & Mackey, 2000). In order to utilize this method, all sessions were video-taped during student-teacher interactions. The video-tape was rounded and played back for the purpose of coding the focus on form episodes (FFEs) with the presence of both the researcher and the teachers. To increase coding accuracy, it was done immediately after the completion of activity in each session. Learners and teachers watched video-tapes of interactions and were asked to introspect their thoughts or recall what was their focus of attention at the original interaction by the system emphasized by (Gass, et al., 2000). In other words, stimulated recall involves verbal articulation of noticed feedback resulted from detection of input (Philp, 2003). Meanwhile, the stimulated recall occurred immediately after coding the FFEs for each session can increase the accuracy of recall in teachers and learners. The author paused the tape after episodes when recasts, prompts, and models were provided by teachers, then the learners were asked to recall their thoughts when the original interaction was going on.

The recall procedure was designed to draw learners' original perceptions about the provision of recasts, prompts and models and how teachers' intentions in providing feedback relates to learners' correctness of cognition. This elicitation is to uncover information about their cognition when they were taking part in the interaction. Each recall session took about twenty minutes.

Procedures and data collection

Each of the learners carried out negotiated interaction (learner-teacher negotiation). The negotiation activity was a two-way information exchange activities, including two picture description activities that involved teacher-student interaction. The activities were designed so that learners could have the opportunities of receiving interactional feedback in response to communication problems with linguistic features, including lexis, phonology and grammar. The researcher presented in the class as a non-participant observer to focus on the provision of feedback by the teachers and students' response. Each session lasted for approximately fifty minutes, while it was video-taped.

The data set comprised transcriptions of the provision of recast, prompt, and model episodes and the learners' recall comments were subjected to two rounds of coding, according to: a) providing recasts, prompts and models in some instances with short utterances (not more than five morphemes) and in some other cases with long utterances (more than five morphemes). b) providing recasts, prompts and models with or without paralinguistic devices.

The researcher's coding was based on teachers' comments in response to the question "What were you thinking at the time you provided feedback to the learner?" In the next part, learners' comments were considered as the basis for coding : cognition of gap or no cognition of gap. Cognition was operationalized as interpretive comments on the intention of a teacher's feedback to a learner's utterance.

The first round of coding of recasts, prompts and models focused on providing feedback by giving a long or short length of feedback. The example below for recast is a case of the provision of short feedback by the teacher that ended in cognition and the example for prompt and model is a case of long feedback that ended in no cognition. All examples in this article come from the present study.
a) Recasts or reformulation of learners' erroneous utterances (Ellis, 2003): short utterances with cognition of gap

L1: It is going to* rain.
T2: Oh, (.) is raining.
L1: Yeah, (.) It is raining.
T2: Oh, Yeah, It is raining.

b) Prompts or repetition of learners' erroneous utterances by highlighting the error with changing intonation and extra stress leading to self- repair (Ellis, 2003): long utterances with no cognition of gap
L2: The boy has a flower in him* hand.
T2: What? The boy has a flower in him* hand.
L2: Yeah, he has.

c) Models or positive feedback affirms   a learner's response to activity, thus it shows the linguistic correctness of the utterance (Farrokhy, & Rahimpour, 2011) : Long utterance with no cognition
L3: There are four cows / kauz / in the field.
T2: Oh, yes. There are four cows in the field.
L3: Right.

The second round of coding of interactional feedback focused on presenting feedback with and without paralinguistic devices. The examples here, suggest the cognition of feedback and as a result the gap.

a) Recasts
L1: There are wooden, um, fa—nces / fa: ns s / around the field.
T3: Oh, wooden fences / fens s / (while moving shoulder and hands)
L1: Yeah, wooden fences /fens s /.

b) Prompts
L2: He had a plough in him* hand.
T3: Ok. Wait! What? In him hand? (nodding her head)
L2: Oh. Yes, um, in his hand.

c) Models
L3: There are some sheep in the field.
T3: Oh, yes. Some sheep. (nodding her head)
L3: yes, some sheep.

The symbols are as follows:

L	Learner
T	Teacher
(.)	Micro pause
---	Macro pause
*	Incorrect word
?	Rising intonation

3. Data Analysis Results

The extent teachers' intentions and learners' cognition overlap, regarding short utterances

The length of utterances was identified by the number of morphemes. According to Philp (2003), it is hard for working memory to retain information consisted of more than five morphemes. Thus the teachers in three classes were told to present interactional feedback as two forms: long or more than five morphemes and short or five or less than five morphemes.

The observation was done through 156 FFEs, while the learners received three types of feedback with a variety in length. There were 93 recasts, 39 prompts, 24 models, distributed as follows: 60 percent recasts for T1, 59 percent for T2 and 61 percent for T3. For prompts, 23 percent for T1, 25 percent for T2 and 27percent for T3, and for models,17 percent for T1, 16 percent for T2 and 12 percent for T3, that is, the least provided feedback. Also 53 percent of recasts were provided as short utterances and 47 percent with long utterances. In prompts, it varied from 51 percent for short to 49 percent to long. Furthermore, models varied from 37.5 percent short to 62.5 percent long.

Although all three focus on form techniques by the use of short utterances resulted in a better cognition, the most commonly perceived interactional feedback is recasts. Teachers intended short utterances without attending to the type of provided feedback. The result indicated a substantially higher rate of cognition of models with the provision of short utterances (Figure 1).
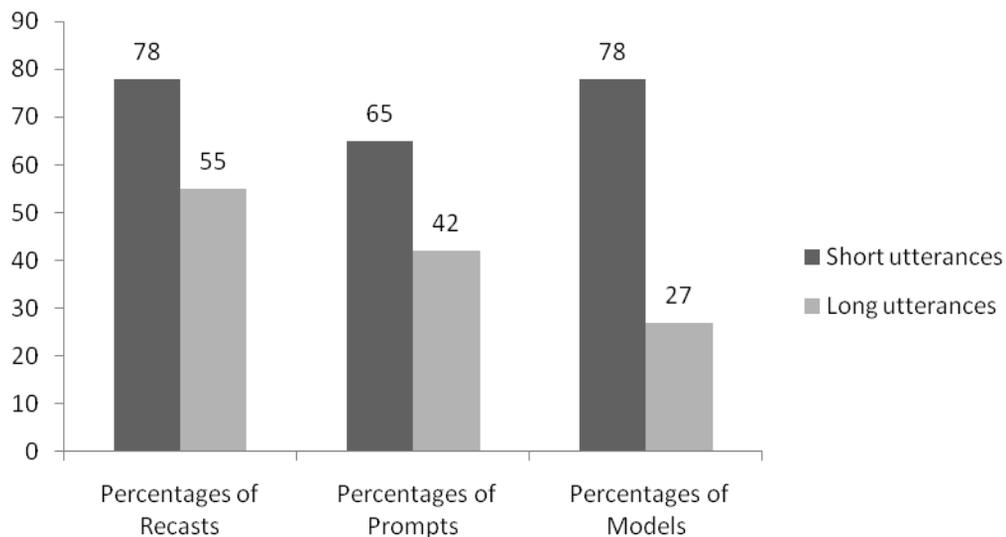

Figure 1. Percentage of episodes resulted in learners' cognition

Recasts, prompts, and models

As the percentages of cognition in learners were shown in Figure 1, it was expected that there may be a relationship between teachers' intentions in use of short utterances and learners' cognition. The researcher examined FFEs related to recasts, prompts, and models with short and long utterances and the result of episodes, that is, cognition and no cognition of them. The indication of a strong relationship between these variables was subjected to X^2 analysis to establish significance since the type of data collected was frequency. ' x^2 observed' should be greater than 3.84 at an α level of 0.05% with df = 1 for a two-tailed test to accept the hypothesis. The analysis was done in accordance with Yate's correction for a 2×2 table. The results for recasts displayed in Table 1, for prompts in Table 2, and for models Table 3.

Table 1. Results of data analysis comparing use of short utterances in learners' cognition versus long utterances in recasts

	(with cognition) recast	(no cognition) recast	Total
Short utterances	38	11	49
Long utterances	24	20	44
Total	62	31	93

The Chi-square for value turned out to be 5.21, large enough in value (5.21 > 3.84) to accept the first hypothesis for recasts. Thus there was a significant relationship between teachers' intentions in providing feedback with short utterances and learners' perceptions in recasts.

Table 2. Results of data analysis comparing use of short utterances in learners' cognition versus long utterances in prompts

	(with cognition) prompt	(no cognition) prompt	Total
Short utterances	13	7	20
Long Utterances	8	11	19
Total	21	18	39

In prompts, the Chi-square value turned out to 2.05 which was not significant (2.05 < 3.84). Thus, there was not a significant relationship between teachers' intentions in providing feedback with short utterances and learners' cognition in prompts.

Table 3. Results of data analysis comparing use of short utterances in learners' cognition versus long utterances in models

	(with cognition) model	(no cognition) model	Total
Short utterances	7	2	9
Long Utterances	4	11	15
Total	11	13	24

In models, the Chi-square value turned out to be 5.91, large enough in value (5.91> 3.84) to accept the first hypothesis in models. Thus, there was a significant relationship between teachers' intentions in providing feedback with short utterances and learners' cognition in models.

Figure (2) compares the number of feedback provided by short and long utterances to the result of episodes, that is, whether learners' cognition of recasts, prompts and models has a relationship with length of utterances or not.
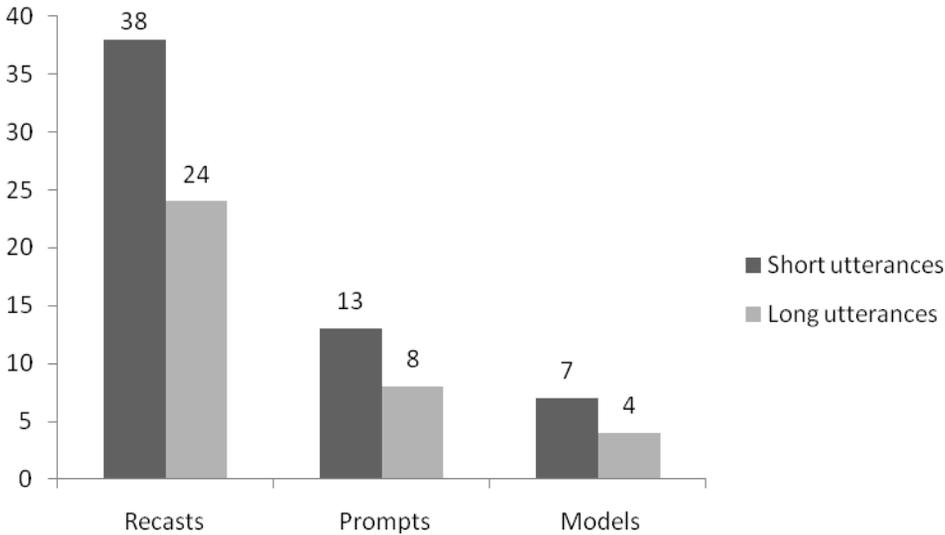
Figure 2. Frequency of use of short utterances in learners' cognition versus long utterances

The extent teachers' intentions and learners' cognition overlap regarding paralinguistic devices
The total number of learners in the three classes were 45 (n = 45), there were122 FFEs as follows: recasts varied from 60 percent for T1 to 51 for T2 and 44 for T3. Models varied from 17percent for T1, 15 for T2 to 30 for T3. Prompts were 23 percent for T1 to 34 for T2 and 26 for T3. 64 recasts, 33 prompts, 25 models or 54.45 percent recasts, 27.04 percent prompts & 20.44 percent models. While 55 percent of recasts with paralinguistic devices, and 45 percent without them, besides in prompts it varied from 58 percent 42 with and without that explicit component. Furthermore, models varied from 60 percent with paralinguistic devices to 40 percent without them.

The percentage of teachers' intentions in use of paralinguistic cues in providing feedback moves that resulted in learners' perceptions or cognition is shown in Figure 3.
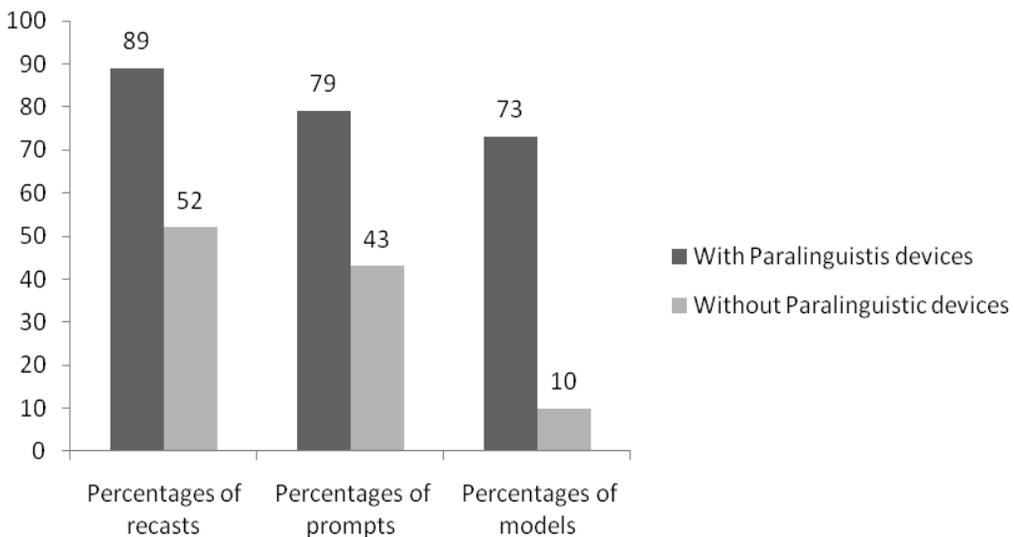

Figure3. Percentage of episodes resulted in learners' cognition

It shows the higher percentage of learners' perceptions or cognition in use of paralinguistic devices. 89 percent for recasts perceptions, 79 percent for prompts, and 73 percent for models.

Recasts, prompts, and models
After examining FFEs related to recasts, prompts, and models with the intention of paralinguistic devices and the result of episodes by the researcher, that is, cognition and no perception of them, it can indicate to a strong relationship between these variables subjected to x^2 analysis to establish significance since the type of data collected was frequency. Tabulations of the instances for teachers' intentions with and without paralinguistic devices for recasts yielded the results displayed in Table 4, for prompts Table 5, and for models Table 6.

Table 4. Results of data analysis comparing use and non use of paralinguistic devices in learners' cognition in recasts

	(with perception) recast	(no perception) recast	Total
With paralinguistic devices	31	4	35
Without paralinguistic devices	15	14	29
Total	46	18	64

The Chi-square value was 16.65, large enough in value (10.65 > 3.84) to accept the second hypothesis in recasts. Thus, there was a significant relationship between teachers' intentions in use of paralinguistic devices and learners' perceptions in recasts.

Table 5. Results of data analysis comparing use and non use of paralinguistic cues in learners' cognition in prompts

	(with perception) prompt	(no perception) prompt	Total
With paralinguistic devices	15	4	19
Without paralinguistic devices	6	8	14
Total	21	12	33

The Chi-square value was 4.53, large enough in value   (4.53 > 3.84) to accept the second hypothesis in prompts. Thus, there was a significant relationship between teachers' intentions in use of paralinguistic devices and learners' perceptions in prompts.

Table 6. Results of data analysis comparing use and non use of paralinguistic devices in learners' cognition in models

	(with perception) model	(no perception) model	Total
With paralinguistic devices	11	4	15
Without paralinguistic devices	1	9	10
Total	12	13	25

Chi-square value was 9.64, large enough in value   (9.64 > 3.84) to accept the hypothesis in models. Thus, there was a significant relationship between teachers' intentions in the provision of feedback with paralinguistic devices and learners' cognition in models.

By comparing the number of feedback presented with and without paralinguistic devices to the results of episodes, a higher percentages of learners' cognition can be proved.
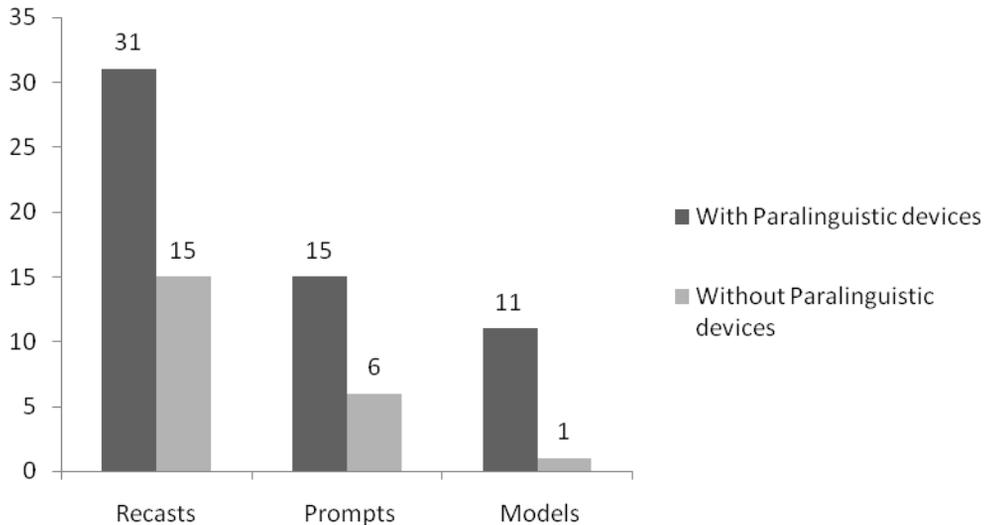
Figure 4. Frequency of use and non use of paralinguistic devices in focus on form techniques in learners' cognition

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicated a considerable overlap between teachers' intentions and learners' cognition of feedback. In fact learners' cognition of gap suggested the discrimination of recasts, prompts, and models by the learners. Concerning the results, teachers mostly had distinctive intentions when providing feedback, a great part of which were correctly perceived irrespective of their linguistic features, i.e. 65-78 percent in short utterances as well as 74-89 for paralinguistic devices. This shows that teachers' intentions shown as two putative factors in this study, enable learners to recognize the gap and discriminate feedback types thereof. In another study, it was proved that teachers' intentions with prosodic features diminished the ambiguity of recasts and prompts, but not models (Salimi, Delju, & Assodollahfam, 2011). Moreover, Lyster(2004) believed that because of recasts' ambiguity, recasts may not be most effective type of feedback to be given in comparison to other types of feedback, while as it was shown in this study teachers intentions can diminish this ambiguity. The teachers' intentions overriddes the impact of linguistic features in modulating the learners' cognition of gaps.

Replicating the study entirely or partly by different population of learners and native speaker teachers can help its findings to empirical verification. One important question that should be taken into account in a future study is that what guided teachers to decide when and how to add a distinguished intentions.

It should be noted that stimulated recall methodology was affected by its retrospective nature, so it is possible that the learners' thoughts in the present study differentiate their thought when they received feedback. In order to prevent from having comments as second thoughts, the author hold a stimulated recall session immediately after each class. Therefore learners' thoughts were new and original and they firstly commented on the distinctive features of each feedback moves. This study can lead to some important implications such as emphasizing on the role of teachers so that they can provide feedback in an effective way to make learners have better perceptions of its goals and notice gap. In this way teachers can be aware of their crucial role as facilitators by taking suitable actions in appropriate ways.

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