

# Types of Recasts and Learners' Uptake

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## Abstract

Recasts as a form of interactional feedback have attracted considerable attention in SLA literature. While earlier studies reveal that recasts generally tend not to result in uptake as frequently as other, more explicit forms of feedback, there is little research that has classified recasts and at the same time analyzed their effect category by category. The questions which the present observational study addresses are: (a) are recasts susceptible to categorization beyond the classification attempted in previous research? (b) how frequently do teachers tend to provide various types of recasts? (c) how does each of those types of recasts affect the quality and rate of uptake? Data were collected from teacher-learner interactions in communicative language lessons. Transcripts of interactions totaling 14.7 hours of interaction were examined, and error treatment sequences were analyzed and categorized primarily by criteria used in previous studies such as length, degree of emphasis, intonation, segmentation, number of focus, and number of corrections. Also, the degree to which each type of recasts gave rise to uptake was studied. The study suggests that, while recasts are generally considered to be an implicit form of feedback, they themselves in fact constitute an implicit-explicit continuum.

**Keywords:** classification, corrective feedback, recast

## Introduction

Even after decades of discussion over the benefits of corrective feedback (CF) to L2 learning, we still do not know for sure whether certain types of CF techniques are more effective than others. However, we do know from earlier research (e.g., Lyster and Ranta, 1997) that teachers draw on various types of corrective feedback during class,

and from a theoretical and pedagogical perspective, the different types of feedback do promote second language development in different ways. In order to research the effects of CF, it will be necessary both (a) to examine a wide range of types of CF and (b) to focus on each type of CF and investigate in depth how it contributes to L2 development. This study is intended to provide data for the latter line of research.

Among the corrective feedback types, recasts in particular have been receiving considerable attention. As research in this field continues to expand, empirical studies have reported varying results. While some research has revealed significant benefits of recasts (Mackey and Philp, 1998; Leeman, 2003), others stress the lack of it (e.g., Lyster, 1998). As conflicting findings have been obtained, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from them. Although there seems to be agreement among researchers as to what recast means in general terms, there is a certain degree of variability in researchers' specific definitions. Some of the earlier research has not taken this into consideration, and its results thus defy unbiased comparison and interpretation. The present study addresses this problem. The study is twofold: it 1) classifies recasts on the basis of different features and 2) analyzes their effect category by category using uptake as a measure of their effect.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Theoretical Benefits of Recasts**

The literature in the area of corrective feedback has employed terms that have sometimes been defined slightly differently by individual researchers, but the definitions listed in Table 1 share features commonly used in the course of operationalization of recasts and their effects.

**Table 1 Definitions of Recasts**

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- a) “*Recasts* involve the teacher’s implicit provision of a correct reformulation of all or part of a student’s ill-formed utterance” (Lyster and Ranta, 1997: 46-47)
- b) “Recasts are utterances that rephrase a child’s utterance by changing one or more sentence components while still referring to its central meaning” (Long, 1996: 434)
- c) “A response was coded as a recast if it incorporated the content words of the immediately preceding incorrect NNS utterance and also changed and corrected the utterance in some way (e.g., phonological, syntactic, morphological, or lexical)” (Braid, 2002: 20)
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Research findings have suggested theoretical explanations as to how recasts in particular may be efficient for language learning. Reasons frequently cited include 1) implicitness, 2) learner-centeredness, 3) unobtrusiveness, and 4) dual function of positive and negative evidence provided by recasts. Now, compare the examples below:

**Example 1 (Mackey and Philp, 1998: 344)**

- NNS: what what they doing?  
NS: what are they doing? (←recast)  
NNS: yeah  
NS: they’re signing a contract

**Example 2 (Doughty and Varela, 1998: 124)**

- Jose: I *think* that the worm *will* go under soil.  
Teacher: I *think* that the worm *will* go under soil? (←repetition)  
Jose: (no response)  
Teacher: I *thought* that the worm *would* go under the soil. (←recast)  
Jose: I *thought* that the worm *would* go under the soil.

**Example 3 (Sheen, 2006: 373)**

- S: What’s feed up?  
T: fed (← short & segmented)

**Example 4 (Sheen, 2006: 375)**

S: I think world people will don't need any food

T: Will NOT need any food, ah. (←segmented & stressed)

As can be seen from the above examples, recasts come in all shapes and sizes. In Example 1 the teacher rephrases the learner's erroneous utterance (by adding *are*) in a subtle manner. No additional attention is drawn. As the student does not make an utterance that reflects the feedback, it is questionable whether the learner has noticed the negative evidence. In Example 2, the teacher draws on two CF techniques. First the teacher points out to the student that he or she has made an error by repeating the learner's erroneous utterance. When the teacher realizes that this was not successful in drawing the learner's attention, the teacher tries again by providing recasting. This triggers the learner's move to correct the original utterance. In Example 3, the teacher simply provides the correct past tense form of *feed*; this simple move in fact makes the correction more noticeable for the learner. Finally in Example 4, the teacher focuses on the erroneous point and in addition highlights the correct form by using stress. Again, the correction is more overt as compared to Example 1. The prevailing view in the recast literature is that recasts constitute an implicit form of negative feedback; however, as we have seen, recasts may occur implicitly in the context of a conversational move or explicitly in the form of an overt correction. In other words, the degree of saliency of recasts may vary depending on the method utilized.

**1.2 Features of Different Recasts**

Although adequate empirical studies have yet to be made to identify the features of different recasts that may influence the saliency of recasts, previous studies have already detected some of the possible features. These features include length, intonation, stress, segmentation, and the number of changes.

Sheen (2006) collected recasts arising naturally in communicative ESL and EFL classrooms and examined the relationship between different characteristics of recasts and learner uptake/repair. She asserts that characteristics such as length of recasts (short vs. long), linguistic focus (pronunciation vs. grammar), types of change (substitution vs. addition), mode (declarative vs. interrogative), the use of reduction

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(partial recasts) and the number of changes (one vs. multiple) influenced the explicitness of recasts. The recasts arising in her study were short, more likely to be declarative in mode, reduced, repeated, with a single-error focus, and they involved substitution rather than deletions and additions. These characteristics were observed to be positively related to learner uptake and/or repair. She explains that such recasts are explicit rather than implicit and therefore more likely salient.

A similar study was conducted by Loewen and Philp (2006). Again the researchers detected six features (same as those in Sheen, 2006). However, in their study they went a step further to investigate not only the relationship between characteristics of recasts and learner uptake but the learners' subsequent exploitation of different recast types in terms of posttest performance. They found that stress, declarative intonation, one change, and multiple feedback moves were predictive of successful uptake, whereas interrogative intonation, shortened length, and one change promoted posttest performance. They suggest, too, that recasts vary in implicitness and that these differences may have an impact on their effectiveness, in terms not only of immediate uptake but also of subsequent performance.

### 1.3 Uptake

Uptake, according to Lyster and Ranta (1997: 49) is defined as "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." A number of descriptive studies have evaluated the effectiveness of recasts based on the rate of learner uptake (e.g., Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Sheern, 2006; Egi, 2010). Studies using uptake as a measure of learning propose that it is in fact a sign that learners have taken a step toward learning (Loewen, 2005: 382). Lightbown (1998: 193) says, "A reformulated utterance from the learner gives some reason to believe that the mismatch between learner utterance and target utterance has been noticed, a step at least toward acquisition".

Researchers have been investigating the relationship among recasts, learner responses, and development. Previous classroom-based studies that have measured learners' L2 development through test performance have suggested that interactional feedback that elicits learner responses might have a more positive impact on learners than those that do not elicit responses. Havranek's (2002) classroom research on

English as a foreign language (EFL) learners reported that interactional feedback that elicits responses might have a greater impact on test performance than recasts. She studied 207 EFL learners across different ages and proficiency levels who received 1,700 instances of interactional feedback from their teachers. After the observation period, she administered class-specific tests that elicited the learners' knowledge of the linguistic forms that had been targeted in the feedback. Feedback that highlighted the correction provoked learners to direct their attention to the error and make the correction. In this sense, recasts were not as effective; however, when learners did produce immediate repetition after the recast, they were more likely to remember those forms. Mackey, Gass and McDonough (2000) reported a similar finding as their learners too were more likely to perceive the corrective intention of recasts when they had repeated them.

These findings can also be supported by Egi's (2010) study in which she looked into learners' perception of recasts. Her study investigated whether the quality of uptake (repair and modification) was related to learners' perceptions. She found that when learners acknowledged recasts as CF and/or notice IL-TL discrepancy, they were more likely to modify the errors. In contrast, with the use of stimulated recall she reported that learners rarely reported noticing the corrective intent of recasts in episodes where they repeated exactly the same mistakes in their uptake. Her study demonstrates how learners' responses to feedback, especially those that take the form of repair or modified output, are predictive of subsequent second language development (the terms 'repair' and 'modified output' will be explained in detail in the coding section).

## **2. Present Study**

### **2.1 Research Questions**

In summary, research that has detected the different features of recasts has asserted how some recasts may enhance salience of positive and negative evidence depending on the way recasts are provided (Loewen and Philp, 2006; Sheen, 2006). Such recasts trigger uptake, which provides opportunities for production practice. From this perspective one may say that recasts can function as a catalyst in their immediate production and, ideally, short and long term language learning. To this end, the present observational study addresses the following questions: 1) What are the

main characteristics of the recasts found in adult L2 communicative lessons? 2) Which of these characteristics of recasts are related to learner uptake and repair?

## 2.2 Methodology

### 2.2.1 Participants

The data were collected at a private language school in Tokyo, Japan. 22 teachers, all native speakers of English with varying levels of teaching experience, and 22 students, all Japanese EFL learners, participated in this study. The school administered a placement test and the individual students were assigned to classes according to these levels. Data on learners' utterances will not be presented here, as this study is intended to investigate the characteristics of recasts arising in communicative language lessons, and individual learner differences are thus beyond the scope of the study.

### 2.2.2 Observation

Twenty-two 40-minute lessons were recorded on an IC recorder and a total of 343 recast episodes arising from the dyadic interactions were coded and transcribed. The types of interaction included role-plays, discussions, information gap activities, reading and listening comprehension activities, summarizing, and free conversation, all of which focused primarily on meaning. The classes proceeded in accordance with a predetermined manual and textbook, but no fixed ways of teaching were prescribed.

## 2.3 Coding

### 2.3.1 Recasts Categories

The coding scheme employed in this paper is the same as that used in Asari (2011), which is summarized in the appendix.

### 2.3.2 Uptake

Uptake was operationalized as any verbal response by the learner immediately following teacher recasts. Error treatment sequences involved teachers' provision of recasts followed by either "uptake" or "no uptake". Drawing on existing categories of uptake sequences (See Lyster and Ranta, 1997, and Egi, 2007, for example) uptake was then coded as either "repair" or "needs repair". For the purposes of this study, any

verbal responses that fit the property described in Table 2 (repair, needs-repair modified, needs-repair unmodified, and acknowledgement) were considered “uptake” and the relationship between characteristics of recasts and learner uptake was examined. The relationship between characteristics of recasts and learners’ “repair” was then examined separately, as learners’ modified output in the form of “repair” is known to be more likely to be committed to long-term memory (See Ammar, 2008: 199; Mackey *et al.*, 2010: 505). From the total number of recasts detected in the data collection, those episodes where teachers provided recasts that were followed by a topic continuation move and allowed no chance for learner uptake were coded as “no opportunity” and were excluded from this analysis.

**Table 2 Uptake types and definitions**

Uptake type		Definition
<b>Repair</b>		Cases where participants successfully corrected the original error that had triggered a recast by either a) repeating all or part of the recast or b) incorporating the recast in to a longer statement.
<b>Needs-repair</b>	<b>Modified</b>	Cases when the participants modified the problematic form incorrectly or only partially correctly.
	<b>Unmodified</b>	Cases when participants repeated the original error with no modifications, expressed difficulty responding to the recast linguistically, or circumvented the problematic form altogether even though the response was clearly a reaction to some aspect of the recast.
	<b>Acknowledgment</b>	Cases when learner simply acknowledged the recast (e.g., by saying “yes”, “no”, “I see”).
<b>No uptake</b>		Cases when there was no response or reaction following recasts

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Research Question 1

The results revealed a strong tendency in teachers' preferences: a majority of recasts provided by NS instructors are short (75.22%), unstressed (83.67%), more likely to be declarative in mode (91.84%), and with a single change (83.09%). Table 3 shows the frequency of recasts in each category.

#### 3.2 Research Question 2

In order to answer research question 2, 93 recast episodes that constituted "no opportunity" (see coding section for definition) were excluded from the analysis. The relationship between the different characteristics of the recasts and students' uptake/repair was then analyzed using Pearson's chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) with the alpha level set at .05. As shown in Table 4, there was no feature that led to significant differences in uptake.

Table 5 shows the frequency of repair in uptake corresponding to the characteristics of recasts, together with the chi-squared results. Three characteristics – length, segmentation, and intonation – were significantly related to learner repair. Short recasts consisting of fewer than five morphemes (88.32%), segmented (72.73%), and declarative recasts (71.28%) elicited higher rate of repair than longer (18.78%), whole (44.37%), and interrogative recasts (31.25%).

**Table 3** Number and percentage of characteristics of recasts

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Length of Recast		
Fewer than five morphemes	258	75.22%
Five or more morphemes	85	24.78%
Total	343	
Segmentation		
Segmented	190	55.39%
Whole	153	44.61%
Total	343	

Emphasis		
Unstressed	287	83.67%
Stressed	56	16.33%
Total	343	
Cue		
Recast only	298	86.88%
Cue plus recast	45	13.12%
Total	343	
Intonation		
Declarative	315	91.84%
Interrogative	28	8.16%
Total	343	
Number of Changes		
One change	285	83.09%
Two or more changes	58	16.91%
Total	343	

**Table 4 Chi-square analysis of characteristic of recasts and uptake**

Category	Uptake	Percentage*	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Length of Recast					
Fewer than five morphemes	197	75.48%			
Five or more morphemes	55	62.50%			
Total	252		0.927	1	0.336
Segmentation					
Segmented	159	80.30%			
Whole	93	61.59%			
Total	252		2.456	1	0.117
Emphasis					
Unstressed	208	71.72%			
Stressed	44	55.70%			
Total	252		1.470	1	0.225
Cue					

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Recast only	213	70.07%			
Cue plus recast	39	86.67%			
Total	252		0.812	1	0.368
Intonation					
Declarative	236	83.69%			
Interrogative	16	50.00%			
Total	252		2.659	1	0.103
Number of Changes					
One change	214	73.54%			
Two or more changes	38	65.52%			
Total	252		0.258	1	0.611

*\*Percentage of recast episodes that led to learner uptake*

**Table 5 Chi-square analysis of characteristics of recasts and repair**

Category	Repair	Percentage*	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Length of Recast					
Fewer than five morphemes	174	88.32%			
Five or more morphemes	37	18.78%			
Total	211		60.061	1	0
Segmentation					
Segmented	144	72.73%			
Whole	67	44.37%			
Total	211		7.331	1	0.007
Emphasis					
Unstressed	172	59.31%			
Stressed	39	49.37%			
Total	211		0.709	1	0.4
Cue					
Recast only	176	57.89%			
Cue plus recast	35	77.78%			
Total	211		1.465	1	0.226
Intonation					

Declarative	201	71.28%			
Interrogative	10	31.25%			
Total	211		5.096	1	0.024
Number of Changes					
One change	185	63.57%			
Two or more changes	26	44.83%			
Total	211		1.904	1	0.168

*\*Percentage of recast episodes that led to learner uptake*

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Research Question 1

The current database showed that recasts arising in this study were similar to those found in Sheen's (2006) and Loewen and Philp's (2006) studies. That is, recasts provided by NS teachers tend to be short (less than five morphemes), unstressed, in the declarative mode, and targeted towards one change. This suggests a possibility that teachers in communicative language classrooms prioritize meaning over form. For example, features such as stress and intonation could contribute to higher salience on form; thus, by maintaining the unstressed and declarative tone, the flow of the communication is less likely to be interrupted.

The fact that a majority of recasts were short may be attributed to learners' proficiency level. Many of the learners in the present study did not have the competence to produce long utterances (constituting of more than five morphemes). For this reason, the recasts naturally became short. Observe the following examples (Example 5 and Example 6).

#### **Example 5**

S Yesterday I used phone.

T **I used MY phone**

S My phone

**Example 6**

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- S He feel bad  
T **He feels bad**  
S He feels bad.
- 

Also, the teachers in this study provided spontaneous recasting immediately after the error. This could also explain the reason for the abundant use of short recasts. Moreover such spontaneous recasting could be related to the number of 'whole recasts'. Whereas half (44.61%) of the instances were those of a 'whole' correction, Loewen and Philp (2006) found most recasts (69.3%) to be 'segmented'. As can be seen from Example 7 and Example 8, the timing of the provision is swift and immediate. The merit of quick correction is that the lapse of time between the mistake and the correction is minimized. And as the corrections continue until the student has been able to express the full utterance without any error, the extended sequence may have a positive effect on the learner by highlighting the error and by allowing production practice through modified output.

**Example 7**

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- S **How long has he been working in the construction industry?**  
T My father works in  
S **My father has been**  
T My father has been working in
- 

**Example 8**

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- S Do you have time for drinking?  
T **Do you have time**  
S Do you have time for drinking tonight?  
T **For A drink**  
S For a drink  
T **Do you have time for a drink tonight?**  
S Do you have a time

- T    **Do you have time**  
 S    Do you have time for a drinking  
 T    **For A drink tonight.**  
 S    Do you have time for a drink tonight?  
 T    Good.
- 

From the present database, a new type of recasts was detected. In some instances recasts were made more overt with prior delivery of a verbal cue to signal the learner that an error has been made. See Example 9 and Example 10. With an additional sound (“Ah!” or “Oh” for example) before a correction, the learner is made more aware of the teacher’s subsequent correction. This type of recast was named ‘cued plus recast’ (Asari, 2011: 420). However, the finding must be interpreted with caution as the raw frequencies and percentage of this kind of feedback are quite low.

#### **Example 9**

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- S    **I work in corporate department**  
 T    **!!! I work in THE**  
 S    **I work in the corporate department**
- 

#### **Example 10**

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- S    Three pizza.  
 T    **Three pizza?** For two people? Who did you go with  
 S    Go with colleagues  
 T    **!!! Went with**  
 S    I went with colleagues
- 

## **4.2 Research Question 2**

Several features of recasts were related to repair – short, segmented, and declarative. A number of studies have found that shorter and segmented recasts that are targeted towards one error (see Example 11 and Example 12) are more noticeable and require less of a load on learners’ working memory, thus producing higher rates of repair. For example, Egi (2007) examined how learners interpreted recast features,

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linguistic target, length, and the number of changes. She found through introspective reports how length and the number of changes affect learners' interpretation of recasts. The analysis revealed the potential ambiguity of longer recasts targeted towards multiple errors. On the other hand, when recasts were shorter and involved fewer changes, the learners were significantly more likely to interpret recasts as negative feedback.

In Philp's (2003) laboratory study in which she tested learners' ability to recall recasts, she found that shorter recasts (recasts that consist of fewer than 5 morphemes) resulted in noticing with a more accurate focus. In addition, recasts that are closer to the trigger utterance (fewer changes) may be of greater benefit to learners as they allow learners to conduct cognitive comparison more easily. This supports Lyster's (1998) claim that shorter, reduced recasts may be less onerous on learners' working memory and thus make it easier for them to compare their interlanguage form (IL) with the target form (TL).

### Example 11

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S It allows you to talking  
T **Talk**  
S Talk about another person.

---

### Example 12

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S Quick service and waitress is  
T **Was**  
S Was. Her age was

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Finally, as in Sheen's (2006) study, interrogative recasts in this study were significantly related to less repair, but not to less uptake. As can be seen in Example 13, interrogative recasts tend to make learners respond immediately by saying "yes" or "no" and are thus indistinguishable from confirmation check. Thus, although the overall uptake rate of interrogative recasts is not so low, these recasts may in learners' judgment be nothing more than acknowledgement of the content of their utterance rather than negative evidence. Lyster (1998) warns that some recasts are ambiguous to students, and that from the perspective of both learners and teachers the corrective

reformulations incorporated into recasts may easily be overridden by their functional properties in communicative classrooms. If this is indeed the case, Sheen's (2006: 385) explanation that "a likely reason for higher repair following declarative recasts is because of its discursal function rather than because it makes the corrected form more salient" would be appropriate. However a stimulated recall that seeks learners' perspective requires investigation.

### **Example 13**

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T     **For you, what are the three foods you hate?**

S     I ate every food.

T     **You can eat any food?**

S     I hate natto

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## **5. Conclusion and Future Research**

To summarize, the teachers in this study used recasts that were mainly short, unstressed, more likely to be declarative in mode, and aimed at a single change. Furthermore, short, declarative and single change recasts were related to learner repair. Recasts are known to be less capable of eliciting uptake than other feedback types. But, in fact, according to the previous research that has detected different features of recasts, some recasts may enhance salience of positive and negative evidence depending on how they are provided (Loewen and Philp, 2006; Sheen 2006). Indeed, as a result of the present study, some recasts turned out to be successful in triggering uptake, which provides opportunities for production practice.

The present study has the following limitations. First, it is merely observational. Research in an experimental setting would provide further evidence as to which recast types are beneficial for language development. Secondly, uptake may not fully capture learning: learning may take place without uptake and may later manifest itself in learners' oral production, in the form of stimulated recall, for example. Thirdly, the present study focused on NS-NNS dyadic instruction and did not cover classroom settings, where the overall high rate of repair and uptake observed in the present study might not be achieved. Lastly, different learner levels and target structures were covered indiscriminately by a single database. Research that overcomes these limitations might shed more light on how recasts can be used to promote second language development.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A Recast Characteristics

<b>Length of Recast</b>		
Fewer than five morphemes	Length of the entire recast utterance contains fewer than five morphemes	S: But in the Monday T: On Monday
Five or more morphemes	Length of the entire recast utterance contains five or more morphemes	S: Where would you go jogging? T: Where would you like to go jogging?
<b>Segmentation</b>		
Segmented	The recast provides a partial recast of the learner's utterance	S: They spend 20% time T: OF their time
Whole	The recast is an entire recast of the whole trigger utterance	S: I leave home seven T: I leave home at seven
<b>Emphasis</b>		
Unstressed	Linguistic item that is recast is not given atypical stress	S: I stop by on Sunday T: That's right. On Sundays
Stressed	Linguistic item that is recast is given atypical stress, through pitch, additional pausing and emphasis	S: Finally I go to bed midnight T: Go to bed AT midnight
Cue plus recast	The recast is provided with an additional signal	S: I eat once a two week T: Ah! Once every two weeks
Recast only	The recast is provided without an additional signal	S: And they decided to something T: Decided on something
<b>Intonation</b>		
Declarative	The recast is provided with falling intonation as a declarative statement	S: They like to increasing to expand their business T: Yes. They'd like to expand their business

Interrogative	The recast is provided without an additional signal	S: There were some problem T: There were some problems?
<b>Number of Corrections</b>		
One correction	Recast includes one correction to the learner's trigger utterance	S: My previous company, one of manager T: One of the THE manager
Two or more corrections	Recast includes two or more corrections to the learner's trigger utterance	S: Leader in industry seeking area operations manager T: Leader in the industry IS seeking an area operation manager

**Appendix B Transcription Key**

Symbol	Meaning
S	Student
T	Teacher
CAPITALS	Emphasis
?	Rising intonation
!!!	Cue