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# THE IMPACT OF INTERACTIONAL FEEDBACK ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNER'S ANXIETY IN GRAMMAR LEARNING

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study was conducted to investigate the impact of interactional feedback on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety in grammar learning. To that end, an OPT test was administered to 200 learners learning English language in Shokouh Institute in Salmanshahr, Mazandaran, Iran. Learners who scored between one above and below the standard deviation were selected for the study, because this study focused on preintermediate learners. So 60 learners were selected for this study and they were divided into experimental and control groups contained 30 learners. Then a foreign language classroom anxiety scale, FLCAS (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986) and grammar test were administered to both groups as a pre- test to take their foreign language learning anxiety and initial knowledge of grammar. The experimental group received treatment based on interactional feedback (recast type) for one semester (eighteen sessions). However, the control group received direct feedback (traditional way). Finally both groups sat for the post- test of the same FLCAS questionnaire test and a grammar test. The results computed and analyzed through SPSS (statistical package for the social sciences) and it was explored that interactional feedback had a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety regarding grammar learning.

Key Words: Interactional Feedback (IF) - Recast- EFL Learning Anxiety- FLCAS - Grammar

#### INTRODUCTION

In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), whether or not to teach grammar has been an on going debate for many years. Nassaji and Fotos refer to Krashen's (1981) claim that language could be learned naturally and unconsciously without the need of formal grammar instruction. While the importance of grammar learning in L2 is well-established, many approaches exist that claim to facilitate the L2 grammar process, processing instruction, interactional feedback, textual enhancement, task-based instruction, discourse-based approach. One of the methods discussed by Nassaji and Fotos is the use of interactional feedback in improving L2 learners' grammatical abilities.

The use of modern communicative language teaching approaches in the language classrooms and the wide spread use of English Language have increased the demand to learn good communication skills but existence of such feelings in the learners may prevent them from achieving the desired goal. Consideration of learners' anxiety reactions in learning another language is deemed highly important in order to assist them to achieve the intended performance goals in the target language.

In this study, the effect of one type of interactional feedback method recast on EFL learner's anxiety in grammar learning will be regarded. In this paper different topics were discussed. To show the importance and goal of the study, at first significance of the study was explained. The statement of the problem explained clearly the problems and difficulties of the EFL learner in grammar learning and their EFL anxiety and showed how these problems were improved. To fulfill the purpose of this study, research questions were raised which were to see whether interactional feedback had any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety and grammar learning and then hypotheses were formulated based on the research questions. At the end of this paper implication of the study and Suggestions for further study were discussed and explained. This research was done in limited areas and with limited learners.

# Significance and Purpose of the Study

In the field of language learning, students are confronted with a great deal of anxiety in the foreign language. Grammar plays an important role at Iranian English classroom, it has also developed its roles in

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the Iranian educational contexts, and it is now a well-established area in the field of language teaching and learning in the country. Although students know the importance of learning grammar and its great role on their academic studies, they feel grammar mostly seem challenging to them. Teachers can reduce this anxiety by using different strategies. Interactional feedback is one of these strategies. It would make them approach a grammar more enthusiastically. Yet, despite all the current researches demonstrating the important contribution of learners' anxiety and background knowledge of grammar, this factor is not being considered consistent in learner's grammar learning. By considering the importance of grammar, the current study investigated the influence of interactional feedback on the performance of EFL learners' grammar learning with regarding language learning anxiety.

# Statement of the Problem

In most EFL contexts, where students of English have few chances to contact foreigners, anxiety happens to the most learners. However, when students enter higher levels of education, they are anxious in grammar learning time. So it seems that there must be some fundamental problems in grammar learning. Unfamiliar grammar for foreign language learners usually causes difficulty, and anxiety. According to Spielberger (1983) and Macintyre and Gardner (1994), anxiety can be described as the subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Anxiety is also defined as a state of uneasiness or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening. Language anxiety has been said by many researchers to influence language learning. According to Krashen (1985b) and Horwitz et al., (1986), anxiety contributes to an affective filter, which prevents students from receiving input, and then language acquisition fails to progress. Whereas facilitating anxiety produces positive effects on learners' performance, too much anxiety may cause a poor performance (Scovel, 1991). When subjects demonstrate greater general anxiety, their grammar scores tend to decrease. To solve the problem, interactional feedback strategy may be a reply to the need and problem of the students. Interactional feedback, as defined by Nassaji and Fotos, refers to various negotiation and modification strategies such as recast, repetitions, clarification requests, confirmation checks, and the like, which are made by learners or directed to them to facilitate understanding. Such interactions draw the learners' attention implicitly or explicitly to aspects of the target language such as grammatical forms, (p. 132). Therefore, this study aims at testing the effect of interactional feedback on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety regarding grammar development.

# Research Questions

In order to tackle the problem of the research in a consolidated way, the research questions have been formulated as follows:

- Q1.Does interactional feedback have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety in grammar learning?
- Q2.Does interactional feedback have any significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' grammar achievement?

# Research Hypotheses

To answer the research questions of the study, research hypotheses have been formulated as follows:

- 1. H0: Interactional feedback does not have any significant effect on EFL learners' Anxiety in grammar learning.
- 2. H0.: Interactional feedback does not have any significant effect on EFL learners' grammar achievement.

#### Review of Literature

Many studies have been conducted on grammar learning and EFL learning anxiety and also, interactional feedback. Grammar can be seen as a device which language users call upon when motivated by a communicative need to make their meanings clear. In this sense, as Widdowson concludes, grammar is not a constraining imposition but a liberating force: it frees us from a dependency on context and the limitations of a purely lexical categorization of reality (1990:86). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) argue that grammar models should take account of not only form and function but meaning as

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well. Humanistic approaches emphasis the importance of the inner world of the learner and place the individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions at the forefront of all human development. There are aspects of the learning process that are often unjustly neglected, yet they are vitally important if we are to understand human learning in its totality. We will therefore begin by considering some major aspects of humanism, before linking such a view with social interactionism. The most well-known proponent of the psychic viewpoint was Sigmund Freud whose theories about human emotional development have had a powerful influence on the development of clinical psychology across the world, but less apparent influence on educational psychology. According (Horwitz and Young, 1991; Macintyre, 1999) there have been essentially two basic approaches to the study of anxiety in the L2 domain. These are called (1) the anxiety transfer, and (2) the unique anxiety approach, which is reflective of different conceptualizations of L2-related anxiety the assumption behind the first approach is that the anxiety experienced in an L2 context is simply the transfer of other forms of anxiety into the L2 domain. This means that individuals who are generally anxious or experience anxiety in certain types of situations are presumed to have a predisposition to also experience anxiety when learning or using a foreign language. In more specific terms, anxiety in the L2 context has been viewed either as (1) the manifestation of a general trait of anxiety-defined as anxiety-proponeness, i.e., a tendency to experience anxiety in a wide range of situations (Spielberger, 1983), or (2) the transfer of some situation-specific anxiety-defined as anxiety experienced in certain well-defined situations, for instance when taking a test or speaking in public (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991a; MacIntyre, 1999). A number of studies have investigated the effects of different feedback strategies on the improvement of students' grammar learning and its effect on learners' anxiety. Classroom interaction consists of two types: Non-verbal interaction and verbal interaction. Nonverbal interaction is related to behavioral responses in class. It means students interact through their behaviors such as head nodding, hand raising, body gesture, and eye contact. Verbal interaction, on the other contrary, contains written interaction and oral interaction. Written interaction is the style of interaction in which students write out their ideas and thoughts, it means they interact with others through written words, documents and so forth. By contrast, oral interaction implies that students interact with others by speaking in class, answering and asking questions, making comments, and taking part in discussions. These two types of interaction are summarized by Robinson (1997): "Interaction is the process referring to "face-to-face" action. It can be either verbal channeled through written or spoken words, or non-verbal, channeled through tough, proximity, eye- contact, facial expressions, gesturing, etc." (Robinson, 1994). There is two types of feedback, direct and indirect. Direct feedback occurs when teachers locate errors and provide the correct forms. Indirect feedback, on the other hand, occurs when the teachers indicate in some way that an error exists but do not provide the correct linguistic form or structure. Lee (2003a) further made a distinction between two types of indirect feedback: direct prompting of error location (i.e., direct location of errors) and indirect prompting of error location (i.e., indirect location of errors). For direct prompting of error location, teachers just locate errors by underlining or circling the errors, or they put correction codes right above or next to the errors underlined or circled to indicate error types. Second language acquisition researchers have claimed that feedback provided during conversational interaction facilitates second language (L2) acquisition. A number of experimental studies have supported this claim, connecting interactional feedback with L2 development. Researchers have suggested that interactional feedback is associated with L2 learning because it prompts learners to notice L2 forms. Nassaji and Fotos (2004) draw the readers' attention to an important distinction between two types of negotiation; "negotiation of meaning" which repairs communication problems and "negotiation of form", which are interactional strategies used in repairing L2 learners' ungrammatical responses. The authors explain that there are many studies in the literature which have explored the effectiveness of interactional feedback for L2 learning in general, and some of these studies have concentrated on the effect of such feedback on the progress of L2 grammar forms in particular. In their article, the authors cite over 20 studies done in this area dating back from 1997 to 2003. A closer look at these studies shows that each study focuses on a specific area. For instance, while some studies

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focus on the effect of interactional feedback for L2 grammar, as the development of English questions or the learning of past and conditional sentences, you will find that other studies focus on the effectiveness of interactional feedback in response to different types of errors (e.g., lexical errors, phonological errors, etc.) or they may even investigate the use of these interactional strategies in the context of adult ESL writing. Clearly, the focus of attention in most of these studies is very different; however, the results are almost the same. Most of the findings in these studies point to the fact that using interactional feedback in L2 classrooms helps in promoting L2 learning. Long's interaction hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1996 and 2006) proposes that second language learning is facilitated through interactional processes because of the role of interaction in connecting 'input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive way's (Long, 1996). Helpful interactional processes include the negotiation of meaning and the provisions of recast, both of which can supply corrective were problematic. A further interactional process that can result from feedback is known as modified output, and has also been claimed by Swain (1995, 1998 and 2005). Recast, a type of corrective feedback that is generally defined as involving the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). Although this general definition of recasts exists, there is a considerable amount of variation in researchers' more specific definitions of recasts (Ellis and Sheen, 2006; Nicholas et al., 2001 for more discussion). For example, Long (2006) added that a recast is the reformulation of the immediately preceding utterance and that the focus of the interaction should be on meaning.

Examples (Ellis and Sheen, 2006):

- T: Where you were in school?
- S: I stand in the first row.
- T: You stood in the first row? (Recast)
- S: Yes, in the first row, and sit, ah, sat the first row.
- S: Korean is faster.
- T: Is faster. (Recast)
- S: Is faster than English.

In this study, interactional feedback recast model and its effect on the EFL learners' anxiety and their grammar achievement will be investigated.

# MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Participants of the Study

The participants were 200 Iranian EFL learners between the ages of 12 and 14 in Shokouh institute of Salmanshahr, Mazandaran, Iran. The subjects' scores on the OPT test were based on a consistent criterion for assigning participants into the proficiency levels. Those receiving scores one below the standard deviation were categorized as low-proficiency students, and those obtaining scores one above the standard deviation as high- proficiency students. So 60 students whose scores were between one below and above standard deviation that were at the same proficiency were selected for the study. Then a foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS questionnaire test) and grammar test were administered to both groups as a pre- test to take their foreign language learning anxiety and initial knowledge of grammar. The experimental group received treatment based on interactional feedback (recast type) for one semester (eighteen sessions). However, the control group received direct feedback (traditional way) . Finally both groups sat for the post- test of the same FLCAS questionnaire test and a grammar test.

#### **Materials**

Three types of material were used in this study. The first type included OPT test which was used to ensure the learners be at the same level of proficiency and to make them homogenous. The second type was a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS questionnaire) test that was used as pre and posttest. The questionnaire consisted of 33 questions that covered all of the aspects of Foreign language learning classroom anxiety (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). The third type of instrument test included a grammar test as a pre and post-test.

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#### Procedure

The following steps were taken in the course of the present investigation:

As it was already noted, the participants were being homogenized by OPT test and randomly assigned into two groups. Each group embraced 30 students. Then, the pre-test of foreign language classroom anxiety scale, FLCAS questionnaire, (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986) and grammar test were run in order to check the learner's initial learning anxiety and subject knowledge of grammar performance. The whole research project took place in almost eighteen sessions (one semester). One group (experimental) received instruction based on interactional feedback (recast type) and another group (control) received instruction based on traditional way (direct feedback) for learning grammar. At the end of the sessions, EFL learning anxiety questionnaire and grammar test were administered as posttest in both groups which the learners were supposed to fill questionnaire and answer the grammar test. Then on the basis of these questionnaire and test results, the impact of treatment on experimental group was determined.

#### Statistical Analysis

In this study data was analyzed based on computer assisted program statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) software.

#### RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

# Introduction

This part represents the result and analysis of the data.

# Restatement of Hypotheses

The present study was carried out to investigate the effect of interactional feedback on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety in grammar learning. The result of the research data for studying the hypotheses is based on descriptive statistics (mean & standard deviation), inferential statistics of t-test, and multivariate covariance analyses (MANCOVA). The multivariate covariance analysis (MANCOVA) allows us not only examine the effect of different dependent variables, their interaction, and rejecting the effect of other variables, but also shows the relationship between different dependent variables. All of these can be done simultaneously. So, it can examine the difference between different levels of one dependent variables and also their difference in new combination of several dependent variables.

It can be showed four statistical tests, including: PILAPI trace, HOTELLING trace, WILKS'LAMBDA, and the ROOY's largest root. All of them show that weather the difference between levels of independent variables in linear combination of dependent variables is significant or not. If the intended variable have two levels, the reported tests of F, are similar to each other, and if it is more than two levels, the reported tests of F for all the four tests is usually different. Most researchers reported the WILKS' LAMBDA and in this study, the WILKS' LAMBDA is reported.

If the result is significant, one of the ways to follow the results is to refer to univariate variance analysis, that show which one of the dependent variables help to the signification of ultimate result that in this case for avoiding of committing the first type error, BONFERRONI test is accomplished.

Before doing the multivariate covariance analyses (MANCOVA), studying the following points is necessary:

- 1. The existence of linear relationship between dependent variables which is done by the examining of dispersion figure between each pair of dependent variables.
- 2. The existence of homogeneity of variance and covariance matrix.
- 3. The univariate and multivariate data have normal distribution.

All of these will be examined in this research. With study of diagram that has obtained of relationship between dependent variables it is conducted that there is linear relationship between dependent variables.

# Result of the Relationship between Dependent Variables

According to diagram in figure 1 that has obtained of relationship between dependent variables, EFL learner's anxiety and grammar learning, it is conducted that there is a linear relationship between dependent variables. This relationship presents in bellow diagram.

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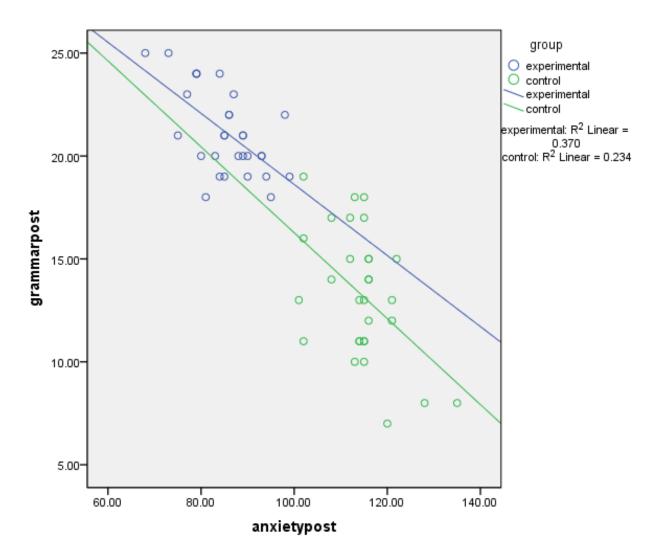


Figure 1: Relationship between Dependent Variables of Learners' Anxiety and Grammar Learning

Also, by examining the result of Box-test, it was showed that Box-test is not significant (BoxsM=7.633, F= (3, 605520.000) = 2.449, P= 0.062). So, the equality of variance and covariance matrix is not rejected. The amount of correlation between dependent variables is showed in table1.

The data of table.2 shows that there is difference between the means of control and the experimental group in dependent variables. These differences are significant in both variables and this is showed that the experimental group had a remarkably better performance than control group. The result of modified mean and covariance for dependent variables are presented in table 3.

The result of correlation shows that there is significant relationship between dependent variables lower than "0.90" (>90). Therefore, using of MANCOVA is possible. Statistical characteristics of dependent variables in two groups of experimental & control, is shown in Table.2

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Table1: Correlation coefficient between dependent variables of learners' anxiety and grammar learning

	Grammar			
Compilations	**0.875			
Anxiety		p**<./01		

Table2: Statistical characteristics of dependent variables in two groups (experimental & control)

		-						
Variable	Group	Mean	SD	SE	MD	T	df	P
Anxiety	Experimental	85.43	7.271	1.327	28.966	15.414	58	0.000
	Control	114.40	7.285	1.330	28.966			
Grammar	Experimental	21.13	2.063	0.376	7.866	11.469	58	0.000
	Control	13.26	3.139	0/573	7.866			

Table3: Modified mean and standard error of dependent variables in control and experimental groups

	Experimental Group		Contro	Control Group		Covariance	
Variable	Mean	Standard Error	Mean	Standard Error	F(56,1)	P	ETA
Anxiety	85.91	.947	113.91	0.947	427.179	.000	0.884
Grammar	21.26	.322	13.13	0.322	310.531	.000	0.847

In the above table, we can see the mean of dependent variables. The means shows that the mean of experimental group in anxiety is lower and in grammar learning is higher than control group.

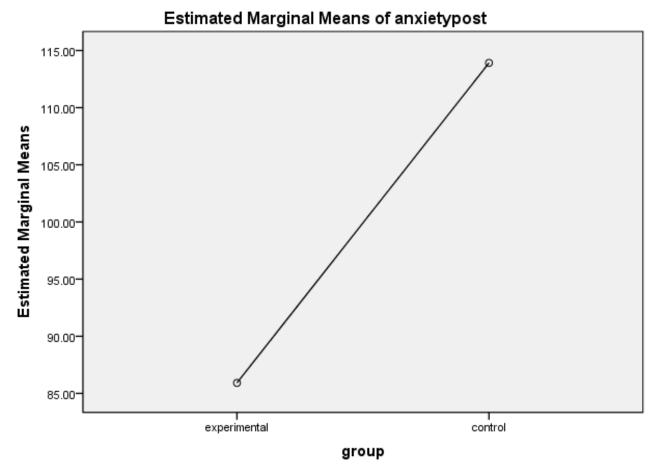
Also table of univariate covariance analysis ANCOVA is shown that there are two dependent variables. By dividing 0.05 into 2 the BONFERNI correction is performed, therefore the amount of significant is smaller than 0.025. This is true about both variables. The amount of ETA represent that approximately 88 percent of anxiety variance and approximately 85 percent of grammar variance are considered for group variable. With regard to data in tables 3 the below results are summarized.

# Testing Hypotheses

1: Interactional feedback does not have any significant effect on EFL learners' Anxiety in learning grammar.

According to covariance result in table 3, we can see that, there is significant difference between adjusted means of two group's anxiety (F(1,26)=427/179,P=0.000,ETA=0.884).

For clarifying this point, the information of this section is shown in diagram 2. If put twofold levels of experimental and control group in horizontal axis and dependent variable anxiety in vertical axis, the lines of means will be such as following:



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: anxietypre = 113.8833, grammarpre = 12.7833

Figure 2: Showing the Means of Anxiety in Two Groups (Experimental and Control)

The above diagram shows clearly that experimental group of the EFL learners that had treatment Interactional feedback, have lower anxiety than control group.

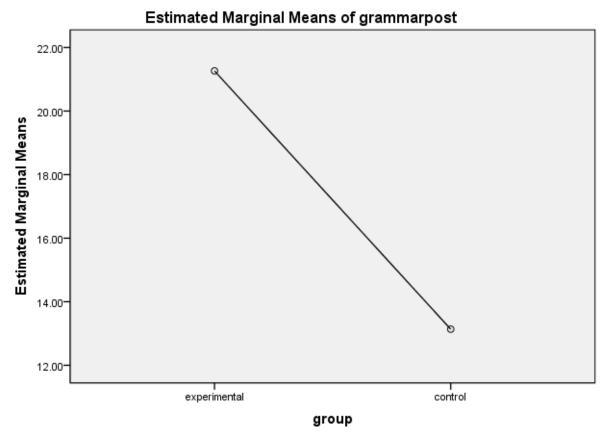
2: Interactional feedback does not have any significant effect on EFL learners' Grammar achievement.

The results of covariance table shows that, there is significant difference between two groups (experimental and control group) in grammar variable (F (1, 56) = 310.531, P=0.000, ETA=0.847).

To clarify the above points the information related to this section is shown in diagram 3. If put two fold levels of experimental and control group in horizontal axis and dependent variable grammar learning in

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vertical axis, the lines of means, will be shown in the following figure.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: anxietypre = 113.8833, grammarpre = 12.7833

Figur3: Showing means of grammar learning in two groups (experimental and control)

This diagram shows clearly that experimental group takes higher grade in grammar testing than control group.

#### Conclusion

By this conclusion, the results of data analysis in this study were confirmed. As a result the null hypotheses "interactional feedback has no significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety and grammar learning was rejected, so it can be concluded that interactional feedback have a significant effect on Iranian EFL learners' anxiety and grammar achievement. On the basis of the findings of this study, it is possible to make the following statement about Iranian EFL learners' anxiety and grammar learning: The learners who were taught by interactional feedback are superior in alleviating language learning anxiety and promoting in grammar learning.

#### **Implication**

The findings of the present study have several pedagogical implications. First, the results should reassure the teachers who currently employ spontaneous, extensive interactional feedback (recasts) in their L2 classrooms. Previous studies that have examined intensive recasts may have made teachers feel that recasts could only be beneficial if they were provided intensively. The present study shows that recasts can be effective when provided in response to a wide range of linguistic errors, even if some linguistic forms receive only one recast. Therefore, teachers should not be discouraged from incorporating

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spontaneous, extensive recasts into communicative-based oral interaction with their students. In addition, the benefit of recasts demonstrated in the present study provides motivation for the inclusion of instruction on recasts in teacher training programs. Specifically, teachers-in-training should be made aware of what interactional feedback" recasts" are, their benefits to students, and how they can be incorporated into meaning-based student-teacher interaction in order to achieve focus-on-form goals within the classroom. Finally, the findings from the current study indicate that students often think that their correct utterances are ungrammatical and this may cause anxiety. Perhaps more attention should be given by teachers to grammatical utterances; teachers should use positive-reinforcement to let students know when they are producing grammatical utterances. This could take the form of either verbal cues (Correct, Well expressed etc.) or non-verbal cues (thumbs up, nodding, etc.). This study provides some support for the role of interactional feedback in L2 development in the L2 classroom. Specifically, the findings suggest that interactional feedback (recasts) may be effective in different ways. As this was the first study to measure development in terms of both developmental stages in grammatical accuracy and in reducing EFL learning anxiety, this study is contributes to the growing body of literature concerning the similarities and differences in how interactional feedback (recast type) function in the L2 classroom about EFL learners' anxiety and grammar learning.

# Suggestions for further study

During the course of this study several interesting areas emerged that were also linked with feeling of anxiety on part of students. These areas were, however, outside the scope of this dissertation. The researcher believes that these are fertile areas for future research:

- 1. The other domain of language (vocabulary and listening) skill can be investigated through the EFL anxiety questionnaire.
- 2. The impact of other types of interactional feedback (such as reformulation and elicitation) on grammar learning need to be investigated.
- 3. The relationship between gender and language anxiety and grammar learning: This is a relatively new area of study and one which could provide very interesting results on the impact that gender differences have on language anxiety and ultimate grammar learning success.

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