Interaction and Feedback: which techniques are used in nurseries to enhance language development?

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Motivation

'In 2017 there was an 83.6% increase in the number of pupils starting at primary school with a speech and language communication difficulty.' (Nasen, 2017)

A large proportion of research has lacked ecological validity and there also is a lack of evidence of the value of recasts in FLA from the field itself (Sieglar, 2005)

Introduction & Background

Approaches to language acquisition
- Chomsky's (2000) Universal Grammar
- Tomasello's (2009) usage-base approach

Recast
'utterance that rephrases a child's utterance by changing one or more sentences components … while still referring to its central meanings'
(Long, 1996: 40)

- substantial research regarding the value of recasts in SLA
- no evidence to suggest the value in FLA (Wacha and Liu, 2016; Goo, 2012)

Research Questions:
1. How are recasts and feedback used in nurseries to support language development?
2. What other methods are used to enhance language development?

Method

Subjects
- 2 children:
  - Child A (36 months)
  - Child B (27 months)
- 2 data collection points:
  - DC1 in November 2018
  - DC2 in January 2019

Procedure
- data collected in a nursery
- one-to-one child-practitioner interactions audio recorded
- recorded interactions were transcribed and analysed
- practitioners also completed a questionnaire probing their knowledge of FLA

At each DC point:
- subjects were assigned to one of Yule's (2010) developmental stages
- Mean Length of Utterance (MLU, Miller 1981: 27) was calculated and compared to age range interactions were then analysed for methods of feedback

Example 1: Successful recast (SR)

1	CB:	I Knock over
8	PR:	You did (.) you've knocked it over ↑
9	CB:	Yes
10	PR:	Has it fallen apart ↑
11	CB:	No
12	PR:	No (.) Good boy (.) it hasn't (3) what's happened ↑
13	CB:	I knocked it over

Example 2: Unsuccessful recast (UR)

1	CA:	FIRE under there (1) there is ↑
2	Pr:	=<There is fire under there> (.) if your-if you were to put your pig there (.)what would happen to your pig↑ (3) with the fire (2) what would happen↑
3	CA:	U:hh

Example 3: Pronunciation recast

1	CB:	A bock↑
2	Pr:	It is↑ the bl::ock (.) it is the yellow block
3	CB:	Yeyyo bl::ock
4	Pr:	Go::od boy↑ nice talking X↑

Conclusion
- tackles key issues raised by Sieglar (2005) to investigate recasts in FLA
- data supports Tomasello's (2009) usage-base approach/ interactionist model
- methods used by practitioners and the environment of a nursery may contribute substantially to language development.
- adopting strategies such as recasts, may help to potentially reverse the worrying trend observed by Nasen 2017
- Caveat: as a small-scale study, this can only provide indicative results

Key Findings

Developmental stages and MLU
- Child B made the most significant improvement; MLU increased by 0.6
- Child A also showed improvement but was already more advanced at DC1

Interaction
- practitioners showed clear differences in interactions, adapting to each child's linguistic abilities (Table 1)

Feedback
- recasts not always noticed and thus do not always trigger a change in the child's utterance
- direct questions prevent the child form responding to the recast (Ex 2)
- both positive and negative feedback are used (cf. Byrd, 2005)

Questionnaire
- identified key issues within the field
  - larger class sizes
  - increasing numbers of students with language difficulties (cf. Nasen, 2011)

Table 1: Results from both data collection points

	Age	Stage	MLU	Average MLU/Age	R	SR	UR	IRF	Positive Feedback
Child A (DC1)	36	Telegraphic	4.07	3.16	8	0	8	23	9
Child A (DC2)	38	Telegraphic	4.27	3.47					
Child B (DC1)	27	Two-word	1.5	1.92+	21	9	12	15	17
Child B (DC2)	29	Telegraphic	2.17	2.54					
Total					29	9	20	38	26

References

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