Examining the Impact of Gender on Task-Based Conversational Interactions Among EFL Learners: The Case of Recasts

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**Abstract**

This study aims at investigating whether the gender of EFL learners in conversational interactions influences the incidence and effectiveness of one salient type of feedback, namely, recasts. Forty EFL students who were all English teaching majors taking English laboratory classes at Islamic Azad University, Najafabad branch completed the interactional tasks with both male and female interlocutors. Their language production was analyzed for the use and provision of recasts.

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The study investigated whether (1) interactions differ according to the group type (matched vs. mixed), (2) males and females interact differently in mixed-gender groups, and (3) learners interact differently according to their interlocutors' gender. The results of statistical analysis indicate that the gender composition of the groups influenced the occurrence of recasts: there were more recasts in mixed-gender than matched-gender groups, and participants provided interlocutors of different gender with more recasts than interlocutors of the same gender, but this difference depends highly on the type of task the participants are engaged in. Thus, the gender of both learners and their interlocutors can influence the use and provision of recasts and should be considered in foreign language research and teaching.

**Keywords:** interaction, task, feedback, recasts.

### 1. Introduction

A large body of research on language and gender (Oliver, 2002; Cameron, 2003a, 2003b) has demonstrated differences between the ways that males and females use language. However, as Piller and Pavlenko (2001) has pointed out the role of gender in second language acquisition (SLA) “continues to be under-theorized and under-researched” (p.1). Since many significant differences between male and female speech have been identified in conversational interactions between native speakers (e.g. Goodwin 1990; Tannen, 1990), one area of SLA, and specifically Foreign Language Learning in which the impact of gender might be particularly significant is in research conducted within the framework of Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1996).

The Interaction Hypothesis as put forward by Long (1996), suggests that engaging in conversational interaction facilitates SLA by providing learners with opportunities to receive comprehensible input empirically demonstrated to facilitate foreign language learning.
and feedback (Gass, 1997, 2003; Long, 1996; Pica, 1994b cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004) as well as to make changes in their output (Swain, 1995 cited in Kaplan 2002). While it has been acknowledged that “input or interactional modifications may differ across classes, genders, and cultures” (Long, 1996, p. 421), most research in second language acquisition and particularly foreign language learning has not taken the ways in which the gender of the participants might influence second and foreign language interactions. Although some researchers (Gass & Varonis, 1985, 1986; Pica et al., 1991) report the numbers of participants of each gender involved in their studies, few have considered the influence that the gender of learners, or the gender groupings of the participants, might have on their interactions. Since the Interaction Hypothesis assumes that conversational interaction is a site for second language learning, differences between males and females in these interactions may influence language learning through interaction. The Purpose of the current research is, therefore, to investigate the question of whether task-based conversational interactions among foreign language learners, specifically the case of recasts, are influenced by the gender of the participants.

1.1. An Overview of the Interaction Hypothesis

Using a second language in a conversation with a native speaker or fluent non-native speaker has traditionally been viewed as a means to practice what has already been learned. The Interaction Hypothesis which was initially given prominence by Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975, cited in Kaplan 2002) and refined by Long (1983) and others (Gass and Veronis 1985; Mackey 1999; Pica and Doughty 1985), has its main claim that one route to second language learning is through conversational interaction.

Long (1996) believes that second language acquisition is facilitated by conversational interaction, which provides learners with
opportunities to receive target language input, to produce output, and, through interactional adjustments, to draw their attention to mismatches between their interlanguage and the target language. Through interaction, learners receive comprehensible input and feedback from their interlocutors, and are provided with opportunities to test target language hypotheses (Swain, 1995) as well as to ‘notice the gap’ between their interlanguage and the target language. This is where task-based language teaching can be considered as an effective way to strengthen classroom interaction. Ellis (2006) argues that classroom participants should forget where they are and why they are there and to act in the belief that they can learn the language indirectly through communicating in it rather than directly through studying it. It is probably easier to achieve when students are interacting among themselves, without the teacher being present, as the greater symmetry of social roles this affords leads naturally to the kinds of risk-taking behavior required of task-based pedagogy. This is one significant reason why pair and group work are seen as central to task-based teaching.

As Long (1996) explains, interaction facilitates acquisition because “correct form-meaning associations are strengthened both by positive evidence and negative feedback that contains positive evidence, and incorrect associations are weakened and in some cases ultimately relinquished altogether as a result both of negative evidence and prolonged absence of support in the input” (p. 430). In other words, interaction has the potential to both reinforce target like language and reduce non-target like language. During interaction, learners receive feedback on the form and meaning of their messages, modify their speech in an attempt to enhance the comprehensibility of their message, and push their interlocutors, whether native speakers (NS) or non-native speakers (NNS), to do the same. Gass and Mackey (2002) argue that receiving information on what is target like in the language at the exact time that the learner has produced a non-target
like utterance allows the learner to connect form with meaning, an important step along the road to more target like usage of a structure. This is true whether the information, or feedback, comes to the learner in the form of explicit correction or more implicitly, as a model of target like language, or negotiation for meaning. Mackey (2006) considers negotiation for meaning and the provision of recasts as two helpful interactional processes, because both can supply corrective feedback letting learners know that their utterances were problematic.

1.1.1. Feedback
Pica (1994b) points out that feedback provides learners with information about their language production, giving them the opportunity to modify their output, compare their utterances with a target like model, or explicitly discuss language form. In other words, it is the information that learners receive from their interlocutors about their language production. Feedback can be either positive, demonstrating comprehension of the learner’s language, or it can be negative, pointing out to the learner what was non-target like about his or her utterance. Feedback can be provided either implicitly, for example by demonstrating a lack of understanding of a learner’s utterance, or explicitly, by telling the learner what was non-target like about his or her utterance.

Feedback can be examined in terms of negotiation for meaning, recasts, and form-focused episodes (Pica, 1994a). However, the focus of this study is on recasts.

1.1.2. Negotiation for Meaning
Pica (1994a) describes negotiation for meaning as an activity that occurs as a result of interaction “in which learners seek clarification, confirmation, and repetition of L2 utterances they do not understand” (p. 56). As Gass (2003) has observed, negotiation for meaning provides learners with both input and feedback at the same time, and
so may facilitate SLA by focusing learners’ attention on the mismatch between their language use and target like language use.

**1.1.3. Recasts**
The problem with negotiation, the first type of feedback, is that it often does not provide learners with a model of a target like way of formulating their utterance, but this is what exactly recasts or a “correct restatement of a learner’s incorrectly formed utterance” (Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada, 2001, p. 721) do. Recent studies in the field of SLA have pointed out the use of recasts in providing learners with target like models (positive evidence) of non-target like utterances (negative feedback), as well as in increasing the salience of the feedback (Braidi, 2002; Han, 2002). Most of such studies (e.g. Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003) have indicated that feedback, especially implicit negative feedback in the form of recasts, is facilitative of SLA.

This body of research is trying to make it clear that the provision of recasts can promote language acquisition. The provision and use of recasts in an interactional setting, however, may be influenced by gender. While studies of recasts in SLA have not considered the gender of their participants as a factor in the provision of recasts, or as a factor related to the effectiveness of recasts in leading to interlanguage development, if males and females receive different amounts of recasts from their interlocutors, or if the type of group learners interact in (mixed-gender or matched-gender) influences the incidence of recasts, learners could be differentially advantaged according to their gender or gender groupings. It is possible that certain gender groupings are more conducive to the provision of recasts and, potentially, the learning that results from them.

However, Long (1996) has suggested that, it is not simply enough to receive feedback; in order for negative feedback (e.g. recasts) to be effective, learners must be able to use the feedback. One
way of measuring feedback use is through the learner’s uptake, or “the learner’s response to the information provided about a linguistic term” (Loewen, 2003, p. 318). Other studies (e.g. Lyster and Ratana, 1997) have shown that learners may not utilize feedback in the form of recasts unless they are developmentally ready to do so or the recasts are appropriate for the learners’ developmental level. Some other factors including gender of the individual providing or receiving the recast may similarly affect the interaction.

1.1.4. Form-focused Episodes

Another way to measure feedback is through the identification of times when learners focus on form (Ellis et al., 2001; Loewen, 2003). These occasions when learners focus on form are referred to as form-focused episodes (FFEs). This type of feedback is not actually a matter of concern in this study and needs a thoroughly different research.

1.2. Interactional Style

While the focus of much of the research on interaction has been on interaction in the context of second language acquisition, it is important to remember that interaction refers to exchanges between native speakers of a language as well. Researchers have found gender differences when studying these everyday interactions. Tannen’s (1990) study of same-sex friendships, for example, found that across age groups, males and females acted differently when conversing with a same-sex friend. Males and females differed in the amount of talk they engaged in, with females generally talking more overall and discussing fewer topics than males, who discussed many topics briefly.

Interactional differences have also been found in giving and receiving compliments. Holmes (1998) examined interactions involving compliments and found that women both gave (68%) and received (74%) the vast majority of compliments. While men were in the minority on both ends, they were much more likely to give a
compliment to a female (23%) than to a male (9%) and to receive a compliment from a female (17%) than a male (9%). Thus even within a linguistic behavior as gender-differentiated as compliment giving, it is not just the gender of the person giving the compliment that matters, or the gender of the person receiving a compliment, it is the interaction of these two factors.

It is apparent from these studies that, depending on the context and the individuals involved; there may be differences in interactional style between males and females. These differences may be especially important when they affect other areas of life, such as education and achievement.

1.3. Gender and Second Language Interaction
A small number of studies have addressed the question of the role of gender in second language interaction (Gass and Veronis, 1986; Kasanga, 1996; Oliver, 2002; Pica et al., 1991). The results of the few studies that have been conducted on the impact of gender in SLA have pointed to possible gender differences in second language interactions. In interactions between learners, one study found that the most negotiation occurred in male-female dyads, followed by male-male dyads and then female-female dyads (Gass and Veronis, 1986), but another study found no significant differences between male-male and female-female dyads (Oliver, 2002). When looking at individual learner language production, studies have suggested that both males and females negotiate more in mixed-gender pairings than in matched-gender pairings, males indicate non-understanding with a greater frequency than females, and in mixed-gender pairings, males dominate in both the amount of talk and the performance of the task (Kasanga, 1996). In interactions between learners and native speakers, no significant differences were found for the incidence of negotiation in different types of dyads (Pica et al., 1991), but when looking at individuals, female NS were found to negotiate more with male
learners than with female learners and female learners were found to negotiate more with female NS than with male NS. There were no significant differences for males, either learners or native speakers.

While some studies focused on the role of gender in conversational interactions, they were mostly concerned with only one type of feedback, namely, negotiation for meaning. Thus the fields of SLA and especially foreign language learning are encountered with a serious shortage of studies related to another salient type of feedback, namely recasts.

2. Statement of the Problem
As discussed in the introduction, research conducted within the framework of the Interaction Hypothesis has indicated that conversational interaction can promote SLA (Ellis et al., 1994; Han, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003). Interaction may influence learning by providing learners with multiple opportunities: to receive input, produce output, and, through feedback on the comprehensibility and grammaticality of their own production to notice the difference between their interlanguage and the target language (Gass 2003; Pica, 1994b).

Individual differences such as motivation, aptitude, working memory, anxiety, analytic ability, and the developmental level among learners may affect the ways that they interact and, possibly, the learning that results from such interaction (Mackey and Philip, 1998; Robinson, 2001). One such influence on interaction may be gender.

The research indicates that gender differences are apparent in L1 interaction beginning at an early age (Goodwin, 1990; Kyratzi and Guo, 2001). Males and females may have different educational experiences in the same classroom, use different learning strategies to different degrees, and their motivation and willingness to communicate may differ both in degree and by context. Finally, they may behave differently in mixed-gender situations than in matched-gender
contexts. Studies of gender differences in second language interactions have further suggested that there are differences between males and females in the use of negotiation signals, or indicators of non-understanding (Pica et al., 1991; Kasanga, 1996). They have also indicated that it is possible that interactions in matched-gender pairs differ from interactions in mixed-gender pairs, both in the amount and type of interaction (Pica et al., 1991).

However, despite the fact that the possible influence of gender on interaction has been called “a crucial issue” (Long, 1996, p. 421), there are relatively few studies of gender and interaction, particularly in EFL context and in terms of recasts, and these studies generally involve small numbers of participants (between 4 and 10 dyads). One very significant limitation of such studies is that they include participants with a limited set of L1s: it is unknown to what extent these findings apply to speakers of languages other than those spoken by the participants in the above studies. Although in these studies, some learner characteristics, such as proficiency level, have been considered, most of the analyses appear to have treated learners as homogeneous and have overlooked individual differences and background variables. Furthermore, while these studies offered interesting findings with regard to gender, some were not designed to investigate gender differences in interaction. None of the studies have given participants the opportunity to interact in both mixed-and matched-gender groups, but rather have compared different individuals in each condition, raising the possibility that the findings, for example, of male dominance in mixed-gender groups, may be due more to the individuals in the groups and not to a specific gender-related characteristic.

Findings of gender differences in interaction and specifically recasts therefore remain speculative, especially in EFL context. More concrete findings are necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the ways that gender might influence language learning through
interaction. If males and females use different interactional strategies, or if their interactions are influenced by whether they interact with an interlocutor of the same or different gender, it is possible that these differences might lead to differences in language learning.

The present study intends to focus on an analysis of the impact of one of interactional features, namely, recasts by males and females in mixed-and matched-gender groups in an EFL context (Persian academic community) in an effort to determine to what extent and under what conditions learner gender affects the use and effectiveness of recasts. Findings from this study will hopefully lay the foundation for future investigations of gender and second/foreign language development. The findings of this study can also be beneficial to researchers, helping them understand how gender may influence experimental findings and, ultimately, the language learning that results from interaction, and to teachers, who may wish to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of interaction in their classrooms and what implications these have for task design.

3. Research Questions
As mentioned previously, the current study aims to shed light on the impact of gender on task-based conversational interactions of foreign language learners by addressing the following major questions: Do task-based conversational interactions vary according to the gender of the participants? If so, how?

These questions are further divided into three sub-questions:
1. Do recasts, as one salient type of feedback, differ according to the group types (matched vs. mixed)?
2. Do males and females interact differently in mixed-gender groups in terms of recasts?
3. Do learners provide recasts differently according to their interlocutors’ gender?
4. Research Hypotheses:
1. Recasts do not differ according to the group types (matched vs. mixed).
2. Males and females do not interact differently in mixed-gender groups in terms of recasts.
3. Learners do not provide recasts differently according to their interlocutors’ gender.

5. Method
5.1. Participants
Primarily, a group of about 80 EFL students who were all Persian native speakers participated in this study. They were English Teaching majors taking laboratory classes at Islamic Azad University, Najafabad branch.

All participants--80 EFL students--took a pretest prior to the main phase of the experiment so that the researcher could be sure of the participants’ homogeneity. This pretest was consisted of the speaking and listening modules of IELTS. After the completion of this test, about 40 (20 males and 20 females) of the whole population of 80 whose scores were within the intermediate domain of IELTS band scores, that is between 4 to 6, were selected. The scoring was done by three independent raters, for the sake of inter-rater reliability, then the results were submitted to correlation analysis; the coefficient was 0.96. This was considered significantly high to determine that the coding was objective.

5.2. Materials
5.2.1. Treatment Tasks
Tasks have been defined by different researchers (Long, 1985; Richards, Platt and Webber, 1986; Breen, 1987; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2006, cited in Nunan, 2006) in various ways. Nunan (2006, p. 5) defines a task as:
"a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end."

Taguchi (2007) argues that a main objective in researching language tasks has been to identify a set of task characteristics based on the assumption that learner performance varies according to task characteristics.

Tasks can be either one-way, with one participant holding all of the information to be conveyed to the other, or two-way, with each participant having part of the information that needs to be shared (Ellis, 2003). Tasks can be further classified according to whether the exchange of information between participants is required, meaning that in order to complete the task, learners have to share information with each other, or optional, meaning that learners could choose to share information, but could also complete the task without doing so (Ellis, 2003). Another distinction that can be made is between tasks with an open outcome, meaning that there is no predetermined solution or right answer and tasks with a closed outcome, in which participants are trying to find a specific solution (Ellis, 2003).

Based on the findings of various researches mentioned in Ellis (2003), interaction is promoted by tasks that have a two-way, required exchange of information and a closed outcome.

The tasks selected for this study are *Picture Differences*, *Picture Placement*, and *Picture Story* which are described in table 1, below, and the characteristics of the tasks, described above are presented in table 2.
Table 1: Treatment Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture Differences</td>
<td>Without showing each other their pictures, learners must work together to identify ten differences between the pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Placement</td>
<td>Without showing each other their pictures, learners must help each other place the missing objects in their pictures of a special place (e.g. a kitchen) in order to make their kitchens identical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Story</td>
<td>Learners work together to arrange eight pictures in the correct order to tell a story and then write the story.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Task Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Flow of Information</th>
<th>Exchange of Information</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Information Gap</td>
<td>Two-way</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Placement</td>
<td>Information Gap</td>
<td>One-way repeated</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Story</td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>Two-way</td>
<td>Optional</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Picture Differences task, because each partner holds some of the information, is known as an information gap task, and requires a two-way exchange of information; all members of the group must participate in the task. Information gap tasks, and in particular picture difference tasks, have been empirically demonstrated to provide opportunities for negotiation for meaning and other types of feedback (Mackey and Oliver, 2002).

The Picture Placement also requires an exchange of information, leading to participation by all members of the groups. However, it is possible to view this task as a combination of two one-way tasks, as
each learner must share specific information about different items and their location with his or her partners.

The Picture Story task provides an opportunity for learners to work together in a situation in which a two-way exchange of information is optional. In this task, based on one used by Swain and Lapkin (1998), optional completion of the task requires a discussion and resolution by all members of the group; however one partner could simply bypass the others and institute his or her own decisions. The picture story task also adds the element of writing, not required by the other two tasks. The addition of a writing component to this task, as well as the differing characteristics of the three tasks, may shed light on the different types of interaction elicited by different types of tasks, and allow an examination of whether different task characteristics affect the role of gender in task-based interactions.

5.2.2. Design

This study employed a repeated measures design, in which participants interacted in both mixed-and matched-gender groups. There were ten groups including four participants in each. This approach was chosen to ensure that results would reflect actual differences among interactions, rather than individual differences among participants other than gender. Participants, in groups of four, completed three tasks on each of two days. In order to ensure that results from all groups were comparable, and that any differences were due to gender rather than task-ordering effects, all groups completed the tasks in the same order, and the instructions for each version of the task remained constant. Gender groupings were counterbalanced: on the first day, participants were grouped with either partners of the same gender or partners of a different gender. On the second day, participants interacted with partners of a different gender than their first partners. All interactions were audio-recorded for later transcription and coding.
5.2.3. **Data Collection Procedure**

On the first day, half of the students participated in mixed-gender groups (i.e. groups consisting of two males and two females). The other half of the students participated in matched-gender groups (i.e. groups of four males or four females). On the second day, the students who had previously completed the tasks in mixed-gender groups completed the tasks in matched-gender groups and the students who had already completed the tasks in matched-gender groups worked in mixed-gender groups. Half of the total participants in each condition completed Task Set A on Day 1 and Task Set B on Day 2; half did the opposite. All the interactions were audio-recorded.

5.2.4. **Transcription and Coding Procedures**

As mentioned earlier, participants’ speech was recorded on individual tape recorders during the task-based interactions; however, it was possible to hear all members of the group on each tape. Therefore, before transcription began, the researcher listened to all the tapes and chose, for each group interaction, the tape that had the best quality of all participants. All task-based interactions were then transcribed, from these chosen recordings, by the researcher or one of five research assistants. Following transcription from the better overall recordings, the researcher or one of two research assistants then checked the accuracy of each transcript by listening to the other participants' recording and making any necessary modifications to the transcript. The researcher and research assistants always checked transcripts of interactions they had not originally transcribed. Inter-rater reliability check of the 45% of the random samples of identified recasts from the transcribed data was subsequently done by two invited experts in the field. The percentage of agreement was 97%. As mentioned earlier, participants’ speech were recorded during the task-based interactions. Then all of the task-based interactions were transcribed by the researcher.

Interactions were then coded for the provision and effectiveness of recasts.
According to Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001), a recast is a “correct restatement of a learner’s incorrectly formed utterance” (p. 721). Recasts are examined because of the large body of research that has found recasts to be facilitative of SLA (e.g., Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003, Lyster, 1998; Oliver, 2002). Gender differences in the provision of recasts may ultimately influence acquisition. To be sure about the inter-rater reliability, 35% of the transcribed material was also coded by the two experts. Then the results were submitted to correlation analysis. The correlation coefficient was found to be 0.95.

6. Data Analysis

6.1. Incidence of recasts

The total incidence of recasts was analyzed as a proportion of recasts to total turns; thus the total number of recasts for each group and individual was divided by the total number of turns by the group or individual in the task. The following table presents the descriptive statistics for the incidence of recasts per turn by each group on each task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Group Type</th>
<th>No. of Groups</th>
<th>Mean (Standard Deviation)</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture Differences</td>
<td>MMMM</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.003 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FFFF</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MMFF</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.003 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Placement</td>
<td>MMMM</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.004 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FFFF</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.005 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MMFF</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.004 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Story</td>
<td>MMMM</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.009 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FFFF</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.008 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MMFF</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.008 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The incidence of recasts across group type was almost similar for the three different tasks. Participants provided each other with recasts more often on the picture story task, followed by the picture placement task and the picture differences task. The results of repeated measures ANOVAs comparing the incidence of recasts across group type and task are presented in the table 4 below:

**Table 4: ANOVA: Recasts in Each Group Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Source of</th>
<th>Sum of</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>194.99</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group*Task</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the repeated measures ANOVAs reveal that group type was not significant (F=0.54, df=2, p=0.59). Task was a significant
factor (F= 194.99, df=2, p=0.00), meaning that there were significantly different proportions of recasts on different tasks. Post hoc Tukeys performed on the significant finding for task reveal that there were more recasts on the picture story task than on the picture differences task (p=0.00), with no significant differences between the picture story task and the picture placement task (p=0.07) or between the picture differences and picture placement tasks (p=0.86). The interaction between task and group type was not significant (F= 1.55, df=4, p=0.19).

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the incidence of recasts per turn by males and females in mixed-gender groups.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics: Reacts by Participants in Mixed-Gender Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.002 - 0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.003 - 0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Story</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.007 - 0.009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 reveals that there is no difference among different groups in terms of providing recasts, meaning that gender was not a significant factor. Participants of both genders provided the most recasts on the picture story task, followed by the picture placement task and then the picture differences task. Thus task type can be regarded as a significant factor in the provision of recasts. The results of repeated measures ANOVAs comparing the incidence of recasts across gender and task are presented in Table 6 below:
The results of the repeated measures ANOVAs reveal that gender was not significant \((F=0.19, \text{df}=1, p=0.66)\). Task, however, was a significant factor \((F=93.54, \text{df}=2, p=0.00)\), meaning that there were significantly different proportions of recasts on different tasks.
Post hoc Tuckey’s performed on the significant finding for task reveal that there were more recasts on the picture story task than on the picture placement task (p=0.00), and more on the picture story than the picture differences task (p=0.00). There is also difference between the picture placement and the picture differences tasks but the difference is not very significant (p=0.02). The interaction between gender and task is not significant (F= 0.02, df=2, p=0.99).

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics and results of paired-samples t-tests for the incidence of recasts per turn by males and females in mixed- and matched-gender groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Group Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Paired-samples t-tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture Differences</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>t=-0.62, df=19, p=0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Matched</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>t=-2.59, df=19, p=0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Matched</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Placement</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>t=-0.62, df=19, p=0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Matched</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>t=-0.9, df=19, p=0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Matched</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture Story</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>t=0.04, df=19, p=0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Matched</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>t=-0.69, df=19, p=0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Matched</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With the exception of females on the picture placement task, the trend was for both males and females to recast their interlocutors either equally or more in mixed-gender groups than in matched gender groups. This trend was significant on the picture difference task: both males and females provided interlocutors of the different gender with significantly more recasts than interlocutors of the same gender.

7. Discussion
The previous section presented the analysis and results for each research question. This section will discuss those results with the goal of bringing together the findings from the various analyses in order to create an overall picture of the role of gender in foreign language learner interactions. The discussion will be centered on two major themes: gender effects and task effects.
7.1. Gender Effects

The incidence of recasts almost varied according to the gender composition of the groups, with participants in mixed-gender groups more likely to recast each other than participants in matched-gender groups. Example 1, in which a female learner recasts her male partner, and example 2, in which a male learner recasts his female interlocutor's non-targetlike utterance, illustrate this finding.

Example 1. Recast in MMFF group
1. Male learner: Uh-huh, front to the mixing bowls
2. Female learner: Under the mixing bowls. Mm. Hang up. You said hang up?

Example 2. Recast in MMFF group
1. Female learner: I can see the lady with, uh, sit.
2. Male learner: Mm-hmm
3. Female learner: She have the glass.
4. Male learner: She wearing glasses?
5. Female learner: Yeah.

This was also true when individual language production was examined; on the picture differences task, both males and females provided significantly more recasts to interlocutors of a different gender than interlocutors of the same gender. The concept of face threat may shed some light on these findings. Recasts may be a fairly face threatening interactional move; when one learner recasts another, he is not only telling the other learner that she is wrong, he is saying that he knows what is correct. Both males and females in this study were more willing to take this risk with an interlocutor of a different gender than an interlocutor of the same gender.

Because recasts have been empirically demonstrated to facilitate second language acquisition (e.g., Han, 2002; Iwashita, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Long et al., 1998), the fact that learners received more recasts from interlocutors of a different gender than from interlocutors of the same gender may mean that learners in different group types have different opportunities to push their interlanguage towards the target.
It is possible to claim that the mixed-gender context leads to more learning, because it is unknown whether the quantity of recasts influences development; Han (2002), for example, has suggested that factors other than quantity may influence the effectiveness of recasts. If quantity is a factor, the question of how many recasts are required to push learners' interlanguage remains. It may be that both mixed- and matched-gender groups meet some sort of minimum threshold with regard to the provision of recasts, it is equally possible that neither does. It is also possible that the gender composition of the group influences not only the incidence of recasts, but also how those recasts are interpreted by the learner receiving the recast (Morris and Tarone, 2003). What is evident from this study, however, is that the opportunities for language learning are different in the two types of groups. Learning from recasts is thought to arise, at least in part, from learner's opportunity to compare his non-targetlike utterance to a targetlike model of that same utterance. When learners in this study interacted in mixed-gender groups, they had more opportunities to make this comparison and 'notice the gap' between their interlanguage and the target, than when they interacted in matched-gender groups.

7.2. Task Effects
For all group types, the most recasts were on the picture story task. Because this task required learners to write out the story portrayed in the pictures, this task may have led learners to view language as an object, not just a tool for communication, and thus focus their attention not only on meaning but also on form (Williams, 1999).

8. Implications
The results of this study suggest that the experience of engaging in task-based interactions with other learners may be a different experience for males and females, and that learners' interactions may differ depending on whether their interlocutor is of the same or different gender.

Teachers want to give their students the best possible opportunities
to learn and use the target language. Given the findings that gender may influence learners' experiences in task-based conversational interactions; teachers may wish to encourage their students to work with interlocutors of a special gender, in the case of recasts, mixed-gender groups. Teachers should consider planning for times when learners can work together in mixed-gender groups, in order to allow them the best possible context for the learning opportunities that arise from recasts.

Teachers should also be aware that the influence of gender on task-based interactions might vary with the task the learners are engaged in, with different tasks mitigating the effect of gender differently. Tasks and task types should be carefully chosen to elicit the kinds of interactions desired. Given the finding that some tasks were more likely to uncover gender differences than others, it is important to use a variety of tasks and task types when investigating the role of gender in second or foreign language interaction. Many of these implications are relevant for language teachers as well as researchers.

9. Suggestions for Future Research
While learners were involved in more recasts when they worked in mixed-gender groups, perceptions of their interlocutors' linguistic knowledge may come into play in determining whether actual learning results from the recast. The fact that a learner concedes to her interlocutor's solution to a problem does not necessarily imply that the learner accepts the solution as worthy of incorporation into his developing interlanguage. It may be that recasts with learners of one gender may be more memorable than with learners of another gender. Qualitative research is needed to explore some of these issues.

The focus of this study is merely on the use and provision of recasts. For future research, investigations can be fulfilled concentrating on whether gender differences exist in the frequency or type of focus on form and also attempts can be made to find out whether recasts are resolved or not and in the case of resolution, the produced utterance is target like or not. Furthermore, this study is only concerned with one
type of feedback, recasts; the impact of gender can also be investigated in the light of other sorts of feedback such as negotiation for meaning and form-focused episodes.

Additional research on the role of learner characteristics and their relationship to learner gender and L2 interaction is crucial. Among the most important characteristics are ethnicity, L1, and interaction (Reid et al., 1995); future research should replicate the current study with learners who differ from the current study population in these characteristics. It would be interesting to investigate how these characteristics interact with each other by conducting a study with learners with differing L1s and educational backgrounds, as well as ages and proficiency levels.

Of course it is not only learners' gender that may influence foreign language interactions; it is possible that the gender of the teacher may play a role. Given the role of the teacher as a primary source of language input for students, research on the role of teacher's gender in foreign language interactions is crucial.

10. Conclusion
The gender composition of groups influenced the occurrence of recasts: participants in mixed-gender groups were more likely to recast each other than participants in matched-gender groups. Task was also a significant factor, with significantly more recasts occurring in the picture story task than in either of the other two tasks. In mixed-gender groups, males and females did not differ significantly on any of the measures examined. However, whether participants interacted in mixed-or matched-gender groups influenced the incidence of recasts on the picture differences task: both males and females provided interlocutors of the different gender with significantly more recasts than interlocutors of the same gender.

This study is the first systematic investigation of gender and interaction to examine recasts, an important contribution both because there were such clear findings on such measure and because these findings had clear connections to previous research in language and gender, bringing two fields of study together. This study lays the
groundwork for a great deal of research on the role of gender in task-based interactions among foreign language learners, including the role of the task the learners are engaged in, variation among individual learners, and developmental investigations of gender and foreign language learning through interaction. Most importantly, the current study clearly shows that the gender of both the learner and the interlocutor can significantly influence the incidence, provision, and effectiveness of recasts in task-based interactions among foreign language learners.

References


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