How do context and low L1 literacy of non-native speakers of English affect their noticing of L2 learner recasts?

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HOW DO CONTEXT AND LOW L1 LITERACY OF NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AFFECT THEIR NOTICING OF L2 LEARNER RECASTS?

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Farhiya (not her real name) was a new student to my beginning adult English as a second language (ESL) class. A strong woman with an intense gaze and big smile that lighted her face when she walked in each day, Farhiya was a single mother who arrived in the United States with her six children in the spring of 2010. Prior to arriving in the USA, she had lived in a refugee camp in Kenya for 12 years after fleeing her native Somalia. She spoke almost no English her first day and arrived in class with only her registration form given to her by the office. She listened intently in classes, repeated new vocabulary phrases with the class, and sought clarification from other Somali students, but told me the first day, “Teacher, no English, no ABC!”

As new students entered my beginning English class in downtown Minneapolis at a private, non-profit adult education center, I would ask questions – often with translation help from higher level students – about their first language, how long they had been in the United States, and if they had studied English before. Very often I would hear the same response: “Teacher, no reading, no writing, no ABC!”

I have encountered adults with limited literacy skills in my beginning ESL classes for adults at an Adult Basic Education (ABE) center in downtown Minneapolis. Students enroll in classes voluntarily and attend for free. The students in my classes at the adult learning center represent a diverse mix of native languages from Central and South America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and East Africa, including Arabic, French, Spanish,
Somali, Oromo, Amharic, Swahili, Tibetan, Vietnamese, and Russian. Just as students represent a wide range of languages, so too individuals come from a variety of economic, academic, and personal situations. Some have grown up in relative comfort and safety surrounded by family and friends, while others have faced devastating loss of family and communities, living for years in war-torn cities and refugee camps. Some have completed high school and beyond in their native counties, while others have had limited formal education.

I soon realized through classroom observations and informal student conversations that these differences in educational experiences seemed reflected in the way individuals approached the second language (L2) classroom experience. While some arrived with a notebook, a bilingual dictionary, and sharpened pencils in hand, others brought only their registration paper and laid it quietly on the table as they listened intently and sometimes attempted to repeat after me, but made no move to write anything down.

Different students also appeared to respond differently to our interactions in the classroom. As students gained vocabulary and learned basic verb tenses such as the simple present and the present progressive, I found myself often repeating model phrases or providing recasts of students’ word order and grammatical morphemes. I noticed that some would “catch” my recasts, noticing that I was trying to give them a correction, and repeat their phrase with changes following my example, but others would merely repeat their incorrect phrase again without changes, seemingly not hearing the difference. Sometimes, I noticed that students with lower levels of literacy seemed to struggle to
differentiate between certain grammatical patterns (especially the difference between the simple present and the present progressive constructions) and repeat my recasts incorrectly, while others seemed to catch the fine differences. It made me wonder if one’s ability to hear small differences in syntax and morphemes and repeat them correctly could be related to literacy. I also began to wonder if one’s level of written literacy positively or negatively influences students’ oracy, or oral proficiency, progress. While the lower level literacy students in my class represent different L1 populations, many of these low literacy students are Somali. Even though speakers of other native languages are also included in this study, including low literacy students of Arabic and Spanish, since Somali limited literacy students represented over 50% of my ESOL class, I was first motivated by this language group.

Shifts in Immigrant Populations in Minnesota

The population of Somali immigrants has increased significantly in Minnesota in recent years. Many Somalis have resettled outside of their homeland and constitute a diaspora around the world. Many have come to the United States, and a large number have settled in Minnesota. Recent official numbers within the last decade from 1990 to 2000 estimate 10,000 to 25,000 Somalis in Minnesota, but actual numbers may be as high as 50,000 or more due to population growth (Konningen, 2004; Corcoran, 2008). To contrast these numbers with other immigrant communities in Minnesota, official estimates place the Latino population as the largest foreign-born group at over 175,000 and around 60,000 Hmong in 2004 (Konningen, 2004). According to these statistics, Somalis constitute the third largest immigrant group in Minnesota with high rates of
population growth. Additionally, many Somali immigrants have settled in communities in Minneapolis. One area that has drawn a high population of Somalis is the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. As this neighborhood is close to downtown Minneapolis and the adult learning center by a number of bus routes, many students who attend the adult learning center come from that area.

The conditions of Somali resettlements, often in refugee camps, prior to arrival in a new host country have led to interrupted schooling or little formal education; as a result, many Somalis lack high levels of literacy, the ability to read and write, in their first language. This difficulty then is compounded when arriving in the U.S.A. Here, individual literacy has long been a valued part of American society (Hass, 1996). As a result, new Somali immigrants arriving in the United States may face an uphill battle of not only adjusting to a new language and culture, but also of encountering a heavily text-based society.

While my experiences with Somali speakers of low literacy first drew my notice to the challenges of individuals from highly oral cultures to a more highly text-based society, further inquiry reveals that other populations of immigrants in Minnesota have faced similar literacy challenges. As the Hmong immigrant population from Southeast Asia doubled in Minnesota in the 1990s, many came from agricultural backgrounds and had limited native language literacy (Duffy, 2007). Low native language literacy also appears to varying degrees in other immigrant communities including those from Spanish-speaking areas and some parts of Africa, where students’ lack of prior schooling
may be attributed to family economic pressures, work, civil unrest, cultural customs, or a combination of such factors (Chamot, 2000).

A question of interest for researchers of second language acquisition (SLA) is how a learner’s written literacy in his or her first language affects his or her ability to acquire a second language (L2). Second language acquisition (SLA) research has focused significant attention on the effects of learners’ first language (L1) literacy on their acquisition of L2 literacy, but an area of increasing interest is the effect of L1 literacy on L2 oracy, or oral language development. My experiences with Somali low literacy learners in my ESL classes have led me to the following questions: Does literacy, the ability to read and write, in one’s first language have an impact in one’s ability and process of learning to speak in a second language? How does it affect students’ mental processing of oral input in their L2 as well as their ability to recognize and retain corrections of their L2 errors? These broad considerations led me to consider what might be effective means of language correction for low literacy learners.

Recasts and Second Language Students

In addition to the question of whether low native-language literacy affects my students’ ability to accurately recognize corrections in my recasts and repeat them correctly, I also began to consider whether recasts themselves are helpful means of language correction. A recast is “an immediate correct reformulation of an L2 learner’s erroneous utterance” (Tarone, Bigelow, and Hansen, 2009, p. 29). I considered that perhaps students’ challenge to repeat recasts is related to the circumstances in which the recast takes place—that is, the setting, manner, and overall context in which I repeat their
phrase—as well as the possible effects of their native language literacy. As I further researched the topic of recasts, I have found that recent investigations have questioned the effectiveness of teacher recasts as a means of correction that leads to student understanding and second language (L2) improvement (Loewen & Philp, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Philp, 2003). In such research, the effectiveness of the correction is measured in uptake, a student’s short-term retention of the new form, which is demonstrated by their ability to accurately repeat the teacher recast (Braidi, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). A recent study by Mejía (2011) suggests that student uptake may be influenced by the level of context in which the recast takes place, including increased visual aids and a greater awareness of the meaning and function of the phrase.

With increasing numbers of refugees and immigrants from low-literacy backgrounds, of particular relevance to ESL teachers is whether teachers’ corrective feedback in the classroom is effective for these learners. Good teachers recognize the importance of looking for ways to improve their own teaching, to encourage the development of their students’ language skills, and to reach their students more effectively. If I can understand better how literacy levels affect their speaking and oral processing abilities, I believe I can be better prepared to investigate and take appropriate steps to help these lower-level literacy students improve their oral skills.

As immigrant populations shift and as Somali immigration continues in Minnesota, I believe there is a growing urgency for other ESL teachers to be aware of the specific challenges and needs facing low literacy populations as well. Limitations in oral progress due to possible differences in oral processing between lower and higher levels of
literacy may slow newcomers’ integration into the host society and their ability to achieve work and educational goals in the United States. Research in the effects of recasts on oral language development for low literacy students may assist other teachers with similar low-literacy populations from Somalia or other countries. If lower-level literacy learners do not understand the recasts and the ways we use them to correct errors in the classroom, we teachers need to find other ways to give corrective feedback.

The effectiveness of teachers’ corrective feedback in the classroom is important not only to teachers but even more so for the newcomers themselves in their acquisition of oral skills. Questions such as how literacy levels affect students’ oral progress and how lower literacy learners may process oral language differently in the L2 classroom may also help students themselves reflect metacognitively on their own learning and thought processes. Insights into this area could help learners themselves better understand steps they may need to take on their path to greater oral and written proficiency.

Connections to Previous Research

Previous language research has focused on differences between phonemic awareness and syntactic awareness between lower-level literacy and higher-level literacy speakers of the same L1 (Adrian, Alegría, & Morais, 1995; de Gelder, Vroomen, & Bertelson, 1993; Read, Zhang, Nie, & Ding, 1986). In addition, there is a sizeable body of second language acquisition research to date that has focused on fully literate learners acquiring a second language, or on the effects of low literacy in the L1 on literacy development in the L2 (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Van de Craats, Kurvers, & Young-Scholten, 2006). An issue of increasing relevance, however, is how individuals with low
levels of literacy in their L1 may achieve high levels of oral proficiency and success in their L2.

In comparison to research on phonemic awareness of L1 speakers with differing levels of written literacy and research on effects of L1 literacy on L2 literacy, significantly fewer resources address the effects of L1 literacy on L2 oral development and cognitive processing, and of these only a handful of these investigate low L1 literacy learners (Bigelow, Delmas, Hansen, & Tarone, 2006; Tarone, 2010). These studies investigate whether low level literacy learners notice teacher recasts in the same way as higher level literacy students, and whether such learners are more likely to focus on linguistic structure (syntax) or on the semantics (meaning) of a phrase. Some researchers believe that literacy readiness affects ESL students’ ability to recognize and reproduce correct responses to their teachers’ recasts of grammatically incorrect output (Philp, 2003; Tarone et al., 2009). Meaningful context may also impact learners’ uptake (Mejía, 2011). Meaningful context includes information familiar to the participants and are a part of people’s daily environments rather than strictly academic environments (Mejía, 2011). Meaningful context may extend not only to everyday texts such food labels, signs, health forms, and maps, but also to everyday settings and functions of oral exchanges such as the grocery store, bank, and family life, even if text is not involved. While non-academic contexts that are familiar to low-literacy learners may have an impact on their oral uptake, as Mejía’s study (2011) suggests, the connection between meaningful context and uptake for low-literacy learners is an important consideration that has not yet been addressed in existing research on low-literacy learners and their oral processing.
Research Question

With these two considerations—the effects of native language literacy on oral L2 language development, and the effectiveness of teacher recasts as associated with meaningful context in the classroom for student L2 improvement—I am investigating the effectiveness of recasts with low-literacy students. I want to find out how low L1 literacy and the level of context may influence adult students’ ability to recognize and repeat recasts correctly. Specifically, my research question is as follows:

To what extent do low-literacy second language learners’ responses to recasts of oral questions depend on the level of meaningful context associated with the question?

Conclusion

In the following chapter, the literature review, I will provide a definition of oracy and literacy. I will also review research on literacy and its connection to L1 oracy (oral skills), explain in more detail the current gap that exists in research regarding literacy and L2 oral skills, and discuss recent research that has begun to investigate immigrant populations with low literacy and literacy’s connection to L2 oral processing skills. Finally, the literature review will look at various studies that investigate the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), the use of recasts as a means of detecting students’ ability to notice grammatical forms in the L2, and the level of the context of the recast.

The third chapter will describe the methods and procedures of the present study and detail how the present study was conducted. In the fourth chapter, the progress and the results of the study will be discussed, and information gathered from the research will
be summarized. In the final chapter, the results will be analyzed, the findings discussed, and the implications of the present study placed in the context of other related studies and ongoing SLA research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the present chapter, I provide a review of literature and prior research on topics relating to the present research question, which is as follows: To what extent do low-literacy second language learners’ responses to recasts of oral questions depend on the level of meaningful context associated with the question? First, I provide definitions of oracy and literacy as the term is understood in the present study. Then, I review research on literacy and its connection to L1 oracy, explain in more detail the current gap that exists in research regarding literacy and L2 oral skills, and discuss various studies that investigate the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) and the use of recasts and prompts in L2 classrooms as a means of reflecting students’ ability to notice and correct grammatical errors in their L2. Finally, I look at recent research that has begun to investigate immigrant populations with low literacy and literacy’s connection to L2 oral processing skills. These studies and the observations from my classroom led me to the formulation of my research question.

Oracy and Literacy

Tarone et al. define oracy as follows: Oracy represents “the individual’s ability to use a set of oral language processing and production skills in communication” (2009, p. 7). Thus, oracy is equivalent to oral communication skills in a given language. Throughout this paper, oracy will be a term equivalent to oral language development.
Literacy has been defined broadly and in a multifaceted manner, extending from the ability to read and write to other forms of text and electronic interaction such as media literacy (Brooks, 2010), visual literacy (Alberto, Fredrick, Hughes, McIntosh, & Cihak, 2007), and sociocultural literacy (Bhattacharya, 2010; Saracho, 2007; van Enk, Dagenais, & Toohey, 2005). While the present researcher recognizes the importance of situating literacy in its social, functional, and political contexts, this study is primarily concerned with the limited definition of literacy as the skills with which one codes and decodes oral language within an alphabetic system. These skills, otherwise known as alphabetic print literacy, are the foundation for literacy in many European and American languages, including English.

While there is a sizeable body of second language acquisition research to date that has focused on fully literate learners acquiring a second language, there is a surprising lack of investigation regarding the SLA and cognitive processes of low-literacy adult L2 learners. Learners with lower levels of literacy are found around the world (CIA World Factbook, 2010). Such learners may be considered preliterate, including those who have been raised in cultures in which literacy is less common or where a written language is just being developed (Burt & Peyton, 2003; Van Lehman & Eno, 2002), or nonliterate, including those coming from societies with a literacy background yet who individually did not acquire literacy (Burt & Peyton, 2003). Often, these individuals speak not just one language but multiple languages, yet there is little information on the L2 processing skills of these low-literacy adults. Some researchers suggest that this is due to the greater proximity of SLA researchers to highly literate learners and a lack of accessibility of low-
literacy learners (Tarone et al., 2009). Encouraging developments in recent research have begun to address this void (Faux, 2007; Tarone, 2010; Van de Craats et al., 2006), but immigration patterns among lower-level literacy populations to the United States provide further opportunities.

Print Literacy in Somali History

As previously noted in the Introduction, the United States has become home to a large Somali refugee population. This increase is due to circumstances in Somalia. In 1991, the Somali Civil War began, effectively destroying institutions of organized learning (Putman & Noor, 1993). Libraries, schools, and universities were especially targeted for violence (Abdi, 1998). Since then, almost half of Somalia’s population has fled the country or been dislocated from their homes. Many relocated to Kenyan refugee camps where formal educational opportunities were limited and daily activities focused on survival (Farid & McMahon, 2004). As a consequence of the upheaval preceding and continuing during the civil war, many Somali adults under the age of 30 have had limited or non-existent formal educational opportunities. For some Somalis (both men and women), their first time to enter a formal educational setting is the first day they set foot in an ESL class.

In addition to interrupted schooling due to civil unrest, Somali culture is one of a predominantly oral tradition. In fact, prior to 1972, the Somali language had no written form (Putman & Noor, 1993). Written Somali today uses Romanized letters to express Somali oral units phonetically. Somali culture values its oral tradition cultivated through poetry, stories, and proverbs. As a result, many non-literate adults are able to demonstrate
high memory skills and retell stories accurately after hearing them only once (Farid & McMahon, 2004). The oral literacy tradition is a rich part of Somali heritage.

In contrast, the American culture in the United States is a highly text-based society. While literacy rates have fluctuated over the course of American history, an emphasis on literacy has early historical roots (Hass, 1996). Though statistics on literacy in the United States vary from around 79 to 99% depending on the source and the definitions of functional and alphabetic literacy employed, it is nonetheless almost universally admitted that literacy is a major factor in social and economic life in the United States (CIA World Factbook, 2010; Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002). New Somali immigrants arriving in the United States may therefore face an uphill battle of not only adjusting to a new language and culture, but also in encountering a heavily text-based society.

L1 Literacy and Oral Language Processing

Previous SLA research on oral language processing and literacy has tended to focus on differences between phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and syntactic awareness between lower-level literacy and higher-level literacy speakers of the same L1. Phonemic awareness may be defined as awareness of oral speech as comprised of linguistic units or “pieces” of sound that can be separated and put together for meaning. Phonological awareness is the concept that written words (letters and letter combinations) represent certain sounds which represent meaningful linguistic units (Tarone et al., 2009). Morphosyntactic awareness refers to speakers’ awareness of morphemes and word order in a sentence being grammatical or ungrammatical (Mackey
et al., 2000). As few investigations have focused on the oral language development of preliterate learners acquiring their L2, it may be helpful to turn to the broader foundation of oral language processing and L1 literacy research first to see what conclusions may apply to L2 oracy as well. Particular areas of L1 literacy that concern oral language are phonological and phonemic awareness.

Research on L1 literacy and L1 oral language indicates that phonemic awareness begins developing in native-speaking children around the ages of 6 to 7, around the same time that they begin acquiring literacy skills (Ferreiro, 1994; Olson, 2002; Snowling, 1998; Verhoeven, 2002). Prior to that, some evidence suggests that children tend to think in sentences or whole thought groups, rather than in individual words (Ferreiro, 1978). They also tend to think of words as pictorial representations of the things themselves, such that bigger objects have bigger words attached to them, and smaller objects have smaller words (Ferreiro, 1991). In a text-rich environment with signs, books, posters, and other written forms, children often try to create letter-like forms using that look like shapes and later like letters they see around them (Fields, Groth, & Spangler, 2008). As children acquire languages with phonetically-based alphabetic systems, they begin to realize that certain letters have particular sounds, they may begin to associate these letters and sounds with words and inventively spell words according to the sounds they hear. Interestingly, some researchers have noted that children tend to produce these creative spellings differently depending on the phonetic rules of their language. Native English-speaking emergent readers, for example, tend to produce writings with mostly consonants, whereas native Spanish-speaking emergent readers tend to produce word
approximations using mostly vowels (Fields et al., 2008). Thus, research in the emergent literacy of children points to the importance of phonemic awareness in phonological awareness.

While researchers agree that phonemic awareness is tied to phonological awareness and that both are integral parts of alphabetic literacy and start at an early age in native speakers, not all researchers agree as to which comes first (Ferreiro, 1994; Snowling, 1998; Olson, 2002; Verhoeven, 2002). Does literacy create phonemic and phonological awareness, or the other way around? Some have maintained that children’s literacy acquisition follows and rests on their oral processing ability (Snowling, 1998; Verhoeven, 2002; Thompkins & Binder, 2003). Thompkins and Binder’s study is an example of support for the view that literacy is supported by phonological awareness. Thompkins and Binder (2003) evaluated the phonological awareness and short-term memory of 60 functionally illiterate adults compared with 99 children of the same reading level as the adult participants. They investigated what role phonological awareness played in the completion of specific phonemic tasks, including phoneme manipulation, phoneme deletion, and phonological spelling. They also evaluated both groups’ performance on certain low-level reading tasks. They concluded that higher phonological awareness resulted in higher reading scores for both adults and children.

In contrast with the view that phonemic and phonological awareness precede literacy skills, other researchers have maintained that phonemic and phonological awareness are results of being taught alphabetic systems of writing. Olson (2002) has supported his view that learning to read and write with a phonetic system creates
phonological awareness in his interpretations of various studies by other researchers such as Ferreiro (1994) and Moro (n.d., as cited in Olson). Olson claims that written literacy involves not only learning the properties of a particular writing system but also involves concepts that directly connect to phonemic awareness. He states, “To segment words, the child has first to learn that an utterance can be segmented into words” (p. 156), thereby pointing to his references to other research that pre-literate children interpret words as they interpret pictures—without the concept of a word per se. Olson references studies in which Ferreiro and Moro have conducted phonological exercises with both children and adults; both have found that children and adults did not have a sense of segmenting language into words or even sounds until they were introduced to sound segmentation via phonetic script. Olson concludes that thinking in words with spaces between them leads students in the L1 to the idea of grammar and correct syntactical patterns. He maintains that children in alphabetic societies use the alphabetic structure to categorize mentally their thinking about correct grammar. This supports his earlier affirmation that “we dissect language along lines laid down by our scripts,” that is, the writing system leads to the awareness of linguistic structures (Olson, 1994, p. 68).

Other researchers nuance the “which comes first?” question by noting that the question may be more complicated with children as they are going through developmental stages. Differences between performance in phonemic and phonological tasks by illiterate and literate adults of the same L1, on the other hand, could distinguish whether literacy creates phonological awareness, or vice versa (Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Tarone et al., 2009). As Goswami and Bryant note, if alphabetic reading causes
phonological awareness, one would expect a difference in phonemic manipulation tasks between illiterate and literate adults, whereas if phonological awareness precedes alphabetic print literacy, one would expect no differences between illiterate and literate adult.

Research on phonological awareness of illiterate adults in their L1 points to the conclusion that some aspects of phonological awareness seem predicated on alphabetic print literacy, whereas other areas do not show a strong correlation between alphabetic print literacy and manipulation of phonemic units. Adrian et al.’s study (1995) on the phonological abilities of Spanish illiterate adults demonstrates differences in kinds of phonological tasks. The researchers compared the metaphonological abilities of 3 groups – illiterate adults unable to read in Spanish, “poor readers,” and “better readers” in an attempt to understand these groups’ thought processes about their phonological capabilities. The study focuses on a series of tests including reading ability, phonetic discrimination, rhyme detection, syllable detection (identifying the number of syllables in a word), phoneme detection (identifying individual, meaning-distinctive sounds in a word), syllable deletion (for example, in careful take away the syllable –ful; what word do you have?), phoneme deletion (for example, in plants take away the /l/ sound; what word do you have now?), word reversal (reverse the word cat for example to tac), and phoneme reversal (switch the sounds /t/ and /æ/ in ta; now what word is it?). Results reveal that for some kinds of tasks, all groups performed equally well or without enough consistent difference between groups to draw a conclusion regarding the effects of illiteracy on oral processing skills, but other tasks revealed a significant difference
between groups of different literacy levels. The authors conclude that phonological sensitivity (people’s ability to hear differences between phonemes) is not affected by levels of literacy, but that phonemic awareness, defined as the ability to segment speech on the basis of phonemes, is affected by the degree of literacy, with higher literacy students able to accomplish these tasks more easily. Such results are significant not only because they indicate that phonological sensitivity is different from phonemic awareness in the L1, but also that alphabetic print literacy affects one’s ability to segment and manipulate sounds on the phonemic level. Lower levels of literacy can mean less facility in manipulating sound units.

As in Adrian et al.’s (1995) study, Dellatolas, Willadino-Braga, Souza, Filho, Queiroz, and Deloche’s Brazilian study (2003) points out that phonological sensitivity is different than phonemic awareness. Dellatolas et al.’s study addresses a similar question related to phonological development and phonemic awareness in illiterate adults, investigating which specific cognitive processes are reading acquisition dependent. Participants in the study included over 2/3 adults and 1/3 children. In the study, participants were issued 20 tests exploring different aspects of neuropsychological skills. The authors conclude that literacy does not affect the perceptual level but does affect speech segmentation abilities (related to phonemic awareness), suggesting a set of different oral processing skills for literate students in certain tasks. Also, Dellatolas et al.’s study (2003) is valuable because it looked at manifestations and results of lower literacy in both adults and children and found little difference in phonemic awareness with low literacy.
The previous studies have looked at illiteracy or low level literacy in adults and compared them with either children of similar reading levels or with high level literacy adults speaking the same L1. As some researchers have noted, there may also exist a difference in phonological awareness between adults literate in a logographic language such as Chinese and adults literate in alphabetic languages (de Gelder et al., 1993; Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Read et al., 1986). Read et al.’s study (1986) focuses on two groups of adult Chinese (30 participants in all) comparable in educational level, intelligence, and cultural background and speaking the same language. Yet one group had attended high schools that only taught Chinese characters (the logographic group), while the other group had learned both characters and Pin Yin, the phonetic script used to represent the sounds and tones of each character. The researchers find that adults with an alphabetic literacy background (in Pin Yin) have significant mastery over the group of individuals with only logographic skills when it comes to segmenting oral language. The researchers conclude that the ability to manipulate segments or linguistic units on the phonemic level is a result of the acquisition of alphabetic literacy.

The results of such studies indicate that there is a strong relationship between higher levels of phonemic awareness and the ability to manipulate certain sounds. This is an ability that has been more recently dubbed by some researchers linguistic literacy (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002) introduce the notion of linguistic literacy, defined in part as the ability to create linguistic representations (orally or in written form) that can be manipulated for metalinguistic reflection. Ravid and Tolchinsky do not hold either oral or written language as primary, a
view that in my experience seems less common than the view that language is primarily
oral. The authors maintain that initially, language knowledge is implicit as the learner of
the L1 focuses on meaning rather than form, but that later this language knowledge
becomes explicit as learners need to be able to have an analytical awareness of the
language in order to be able to exercise and manipulate it. With this growing awareness,
students may create and manipulate linguistic units, but the authors maintain that older
lower literacy students may nonetheless find such skills more difficult.

Low L1 Literacy and L2 Oral Language Processing

The connections between L1 literacy and L2 oral processing have received less
attention in SLA than the question of L1 literacy and its impact on L1 oral processing.
This may be due, as noted above, to higher rates of contact between SLA researchers and
highly literate learners acquiring their L2. Previous language research has tended to focus
on differences between phonemic awareness and phonological awareness between lower-
level literacy and higher-level literacy speakers of the same L1, but fewer researchers
have addressed the effects of low literacy in the L1 on oral proficiency development and
success in their L2.

Tarone and Bigelow (2005) extend the notion of linguistic literacy from Ravid
and Tolchinsky (2002) to L2 learners. Tarone and Bigelow note the growing presence of
immigrant and refugee English language learners (ELL) with limited formal education in
the United States and discuss additional elements that low literacy may bring to the ESL
oral proficiency instruction, focusing on the work of first language acquisition (FLA)
researchers who have examined the relationship between alphabetic script literacy and
oral language processing skills in terms of formal linguistic segments encoded in script. Tarone and Bigelow’s research will be discussed in further detail below, including their research on oral processing and its implications for learners not literate in any alphabetic script.

Yet, while there is evidence to suggest that low L1 literacy affects L2 oral language processing, specifically in the form of sensitivity to linguistic units on the phonemic levels, there is surprisingly little SLA research that has addressed this question. The relatively untouched question of how L1 literacy affects L2 oral language processing has bearing on other foci of SLA research, including stages of L2 oral language acquisition, awareness of linguistic form, and the roles of corrective feedback in the classroom. Looking at the role of recasts with low literacy learners may challenge previous assumptions of L2 oracy acquisition if there is evidence that preliterate L2 learners differ from literate L2 learners in their oral processing, manifested in the way they respond to oral corrective feedback.

Oral Corrective Feedback and Recasts

With the suggestion that low L1 literacy limits sensitivity to linguistic form on certain phonemic levels, there is reason to investigate how low literacy L2 learners notice and respond to oral corrections. Is their sensitivity to these forms the same as highly literate L2 learners, or do preliterate L2 learners tend to notice and interpret these units differently? A review of research on corrective feedback in L2 classrooms reveals insights into the use of certain kinds of oral corrections for literate learners.
Lyster and Ranta (1997) have noted that the six most frequently used forms of corrective feedback in the L2 classrooms they observed included recasts, elicitation (prompts), clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction (either immediate or delayed), and repetition. In their 1997 study, they have investigated recasts as forms of corrective feedback and learner responses in the form of uptake in over 18 hours of observation in four French L2 classrooms. They defined uptake as the learner’s immediate repair to his or her language error in response to the teacher’s restatement of the incorrect point. Uptake occurs when the learner successfully recognizes the error and corrects it in the restatement, or when the student attempts to correct the error but creates an utterance that still needs modification.

Of the different types of feedback, each of the four teachers in Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) study used recasts with the highest frequencies relative to their other corrections, accounting for over half (55%) of their total corrective feedback. Additionally, they have found that while recasts were the most popular classroom feedback technique, only 31% of the recasts led to learner uptake, and only 18% led to correction, in contrast with other forms of correction which had higher rates of both uptake and repair. As a result of these findings, Lyster and Ranta (1997) have challenged the effectiveness of recasts in the classroom relative to other forms of corrective feedback and suggested that teachers opt for corrective measures with higher rates of uptake and repair. They have further suggested that the apparent limited effectiveness of recasts could be due to ambiguity that may surround the recast, especially with form-focused recasts in a classroom activity primarily focused on meaning exchanges. They have noted that in these classrooms,
teachers also tended to affirm students’ grammatically correct utterances through repetition, possibly leading to greater confusion.

Mackey, Perdue, and McDonough (2000) likewise have noted the ambiguity that accompanies the use of recasts, but have further observed that different kinds of errors tended to elicit different types of feedback from a native speaker partner when working together with a non-native speaker. Patterns in the use of recasts and other types of feedback may therefore lessen their ambiguity in the classroom. Mackey et al.’s study (2000) was motivated by Long’s interaction hypothesis (1996), a view that advocates the notion of negotiated learner interaction as an important factor in SLA, specifically because negotiation of meaning allows learners to receive meaning-based feedback on their output. Mackey et al.’s study (2000) explored learner perceptions of 10 ESL and 7 Italian L2 learners of feedback they received in dyadic task-based interactions in which native and non-native speakers were paired. Researchers video-recorded learner interactions during the task-based project, showed learners the videos, and asked them to reflect on their thoughts when they first received the feedback, specifically asking what linguistic issue the feedback targeted—phonological, lexical, semantic, morphological, or syntactical issues.

Mackey et al. (2000) have found that the NS partner tended to use recasts for morphological and syntactic feedback, but tended to engage in lengthier interactions when the negotiation focused on an issue relating to meaning or pronunciation. Additionally, Mackey et al. have noted that learners tended to provide fairly accurate identifications and assessments of their errors during correction in the pair interactions,
but were less perceptive of corrections to their morphology or syntax, possibly due to the conversational context of the feedback. While learners tended to notice these corrections, they often misunderstood them as affirmations of comprehension from the listener or as phonological or lexical corrections rather changes in morphology and word order, even though the majority of recasts were targeted at morphosyntactic errors. Lower levels of learner noticing of morphosyntactic feedback may reflect a number of different learner or situational factors that require further research. One of these factors could very well be low level L1 literacy.

Philp’s study (2003) on non-native speakers’ (NNS) noticing of native speakers’ (NS) recasts likewise suggests the importance of looking at various factors in NNS’s abilities to recall recasts. Philp (2003) looks at NNS uptake of NS recasts by analyzing thirty-three adult ESL students working with an NS in picture-based tasks. Each time the NS heard the NNS use an ungrammatical structure, the NS would stop and recast the statement correctly. Evidence of learner uptake (NNS recall demonstrated through correct noticing and repetition of target structures) showed that NNS speakers noticed 60-70% of recasts, but their ability to repeat the alteration correctly varied with the length and number of changes in the recast. Philp also attributes such variations to NNS’s level of interlanguage grammar (IL), or the NNS’s current and still developing L2 grammar knowledge, to familiarity with the target structure used in the recast, and phonotactic familiarity (the similarity of sounds in the L2 as compared to the learner’s L1). While Philp’s study employs highly literate, university-level ESL students, she indicates the need for further research in broader contexts with less educated learners.
The above studies by Lyster and Ranta (1997), Mackey et al. (2000), and Philp (2003) suggest that both the type of correction embedded in the recast (such as morphological, syntactic, phonetic corrections) as well as the overall conversational context of the recast can affect the explicitness of the correction intended by the recast. The possibility of differing levels of clarity for the learner suggests the importance of looking at various factors which may be involved in NNS’s abilities to recall particular recasts, such as context (Mejía, 2011). Additionally, as these studies represent previous research regarding the use of recasts with highly educated learners who were literate in their L1, looking at the role of recasts with low literacy learners may challenge previous assumptions of L2 oracy acquisition if there is evidence that preliterate L2 learners differ from literate L2 learners in their oral processing.

The Noticing Hypothesis and Awareness of Linguistic Forms

The use of recasts in L2 situations reflects the concept of noticing, the idea that L2 learners must first notice (consciously focus on) new linguistic features before they can acquire these features (Schmidt, 1990). Schmidt, one of the key proponents of this view, suggests that during the course of the L2 acquisition process, the amount of L2 input that students receive is too much for them to consciously attend to all at once; thus learners focus on or “notice” select parts of language structures that lead to language uptake (Schmidt, 1990). In later explications, Schmidt nuances this view by distinguishing between mere registration of a form and actual noticing, where the information is stored in the short term or long term memory (Schmidt, 1993).
Robinson’s review and proposed model (1995, 2002) for understanding the roles of attention and memory in second language acquisition builds on a view of language presented by Schmidt (1990). Schmidt (1990) has maintained that conscious or explicit awareness of input, otherwise called noticing, is necessary for the eventual acquisition of particular aspects of language. Robinson (1995, 2002) has proposed a model from recent research on attention and memory that noticing includes an aspect of “awareness,” the ability to consciously recognize or identify particular grammatical patterns, and that this is necessary for “rehearsing” the information in one’s short-term memory and subsequently coding it into long-term memory, leading to acquisition of the new language form.

Robinson (1995, 2002) has suggested that short-term memory capacity limits a learner’s noticing capacity. This conclusion has significant ramifications for learner recasts. The longer the phrase or the more complex it is, the harder it will be for the learner to notice all the changes. The less that learners are able to notice, according to Robinson’s model, the less learners will be likely to convert these changes into long-term memory leading to acquisition.

The previous studies highlight the importance of noticing language forms in second language acquisition. So too, some researchers have argued for the importance of noticing in recasts, a form of explicit feedback (Loewen & Philp, 2006; Philp, 2003). In these studies, “noticing” includes not only a learner’s recognition that explicit feedback has been given in the form of a recast, but also the learner’s noticing of the particular grammar structure being corrected in the recast.
Nicholas, Lightbown, and Spada (2001) maintain that recasts are a form of implicit rather than explicit feedback because while they focus on form—whether it be phonological, morphological, or syntactical—they do not isolate the particular feature for correction. Instead, the educator embeds the correction in the context of the phrase and does not even interrupt the flow of interaction.

The implicit nature of recasts may also raise questions about their effectiveness. Nicholas et al. (2001) note that in the context of meaning interactions, an overt signal may be necessary to draw learners’ attention to the change, such as a recast with a change in emphasis or with an additional signal so that the learner can identify the interlocutor’s interjection first as a correction, and specifically as a correction focused on change rather than on meaning. This call for greater explicitness with recasts agrees with Lyster and Ranta’s conclusions (1997) following their study of recasts in French language classrooms. Lyster and Ranta (1997) challenged the efficacy of recasts due to lower rates of learner uptake as compared with other forms of correction, hypothesizing that a lack of distinction for learners between meaning and form-focused recasts rendered them less “noticeable” or distinguishable for L2 students. In Nicholas et al.’s survey of grammar-focused classrooms, communicative-focused classrooms, and dyadic experimental studies (2001), the researchers observe that in language classrooms focused on form and in experimental form-based dyadic studies, recasts had higher levels of learner uptake in contrast to classrooms focused on meaning exchanges. The authors conclude that recasts are most effective as corrective feedback in situations where it is explicit to the learner that the recast corrects the form rather than content or meaning of their output.
Loewen and Philp’s study (2006) of incidences of recasts in twelve adult ESL classrooms in New Zealand has investigated the effectiveness of this widely used form of teacher correction with specific emphasis (in agreement with Nicholas et al.’s emphasis [2001] on the explicitness of recasts) on their level of explicitness or “noticeability”. After analysis of a total of seventeen hours of classroom observation, they have found that recasts are initiated in response to different kinds of learner errors and that stress, declarative intonation, and multiple similar recasts all increased the likelihood of successful learner uptake, whereas interrogative intonation, fewer syntactic elements corrected, and shorter lengths of the recasts were likely to indicate better recall on post-test measures.

Loewen and Philp (2006) have also suggested that learners’ uptake and successful recall on post-test assessments may be positively influenced by the level of explicitness and by certain prosodic and contextual cues that teachers provide. These observations point to the usefulness of successful learner noticing and uptake of recasts in the classroom setting as a stepping stone of successful acquisition. Agreeing with previous studies (Philp, 2003), Loewen and Philp (2006) further suggest that limitations on students’ abilities to notice and respond to recasts, such as may be the case with lower literacy students, may impede progress in their L2 acquisition.

Building on the idea of classroom factors in the explicitness and effectiveness of recasts, Lyster and Mori (2006) raise the counterbalance hypothesis, a view that the type of correction students receive in the classroom acts as a counterbalance to the type of instruction which they receive. Lyster and Mori (2006) claim that the explicitness of oral
corrections will be more effective in the classroom if such corrections counterbalance and are distinct from the type of manner of instruction and types of activities generally shared in the classroom. Lyster and Mori (2006) found that in French immersion classrooms where recasts were common, prompts resulted in greater student uptake and repair, whereas in Japanese immersion classrooms where prompts were the general form of correction, recasts resulted in improved uptake and student error correction. The researchers suggest that the difference of form heightens their explicitness for students, leading to greater uptake for the less-common kind of feedback as compared to other forms more commonly used.

Research with Low Literacy Adults and Noticing of Recasts

If research on recasts as corrective feedback in L2 settings points to the usefulness of successful learner noticing and uptake of recasts in the classroom setting as a stepping stone of successful L2 acquisition, provided that the recasts are explicit and that learners notice them, the effectiveness of certain kinds of oral correction including recasts for illiterate or low-level literacy L2 speakers is less examined. Is noticing easier for low literacy L2 learners who have to rely more strongly on oral input for acquisition, or is it more difficult for L2 learners due to (potentially) reduced awareness of linguistic forms?

Returning to the notion of linguistic literacy and input (oral corrective feedback such as recasts) in L2 processing, Bigelow, Delmas, Hansen, and Tarone (2006) broaden their investigation of linguistic literacy to the effects of a lack of L1 literacy on L2 oral skills by comparing illiterate and low-literate L2 learners with moderate-level literacy L2 learners. Their study specifically targets the impact of alphabetic script literacy on the
processing of oral corrective feedback in SLA. As this study will include a partial
reduplication of their study, their methods will be discussed in further detail in the
methodology chapter.

Bigelow et al. (2006) expand on the claim that only individuals who have
acquired alphabetic literacy acquire linguistic literacy, the ability to create (among other
skills) linguistic representations that can be manipulated by the speaker. The authors
focus on students’ response to oral recasts. Specifically, the authors focus on comparing
how students with a low alphabetic literacy background respond differently from higher
literacy L2 students to recasts as corrective oral feedback. They maintain that particular
aspects of noticing grammatical forms in these recasts are inextricably tied to alphabetic
literacy, and that higher literacy levels positively factors into L2 learners’ ability to recall
recasts correctly.

Bigelow et al.’s study (2006), later extended, constitutes a major contribution to
the research on the SLA of adult ESL students and the effects of lower literacy on oral
processing skills (Tarone et al., 2009). In their expanded study, the authors specifically
focus on how low literacy Somali adults noticed and altered their L2 production in
response to corrective feedback in the form of teacher recasts of grammatical forms. The
researchers compare how four higher-level literacy and four lower-level Somali adult
students respond differently to recasts and their ability to notice variations in
phonological and syntactic form. Alphabetic print literacy was the independent variable
and the basis for dividing students into the 2 groups. The study focused on 3 areas of
analysis:
a) The relationship of literacy level and the ability to notice recasts of their grammatical errors in question formation

b) The 2 groups’ ability to do oral elicited-imitation tasks as compared to their noticing of recasts using dyadic picture retelling (where the NS researcher would elicit a story from pictures and the NNS participant would respond)

c) The grammatical forms of the 2 groups in telling the same oral narrative.

In addition to these 3 areas of quantitative testing, the researchers also develop a qualitative piece based on the performance of one learner and identify patterns and behaviors not predicted by their research questions in the quantitative section. In order to make the recasts more explicit and noticeable, the researchers also accompany each recast with a knock on the table to alert the participant to repeat the recast. All conversations were recorded and later analyzed. The authors find that the low literacy students have greater difficulties with noticing and repeating recasts (length and complexity of the recasts were 2 factors affecting successful uptake) in the first two tasks than the higher literacy participants, and that they tended to use more simplified grammatical forms in retelling the stories. They conclude that low L1 literacy has a significant effect on L2 oral processing and the participants’ ability to notice the way in which the NS output changes in order to adjust their own output accordingly.

Picking up on the question of adult low literacy second language students and oral processing, Mejía’s recent study (2011) of 14 adult learners represents one of the most recent developments in current adult low literacy research. Mejía (2011) investigates how accurately adult low literacy ELLs recall oral corrective feedback as compared to
moderate literacy ELL students. In addition to native and second language literacy and oral language assessments, Mejía uses two types of tasks to measure how well learners recall question formation: elicited imitation, in which the participants repeat questions stated by the researcher, and recasts of learner-generated question formation, in which the participants recall oral corrective feedback provided by the researcher. Her findings indicated while that moderate level literacy participants outperformed and seemed to process oral linguistic units more easily (and accurately) than the low literacy group, the low literacy group’s accuracy of recast improved in the most highly contextualized task. The increased context involved images with familiar scenes that mirrored participants’ personal experiences and suggested a unified story. She suggests that highly contextualized meaning and function possibly contribute to increased accuracy learners’ uptake. Meaningful context includes information familiar to the participants and are a part of people’s daily environments rather than strictly academic environments (Mejía, 2011). Meaningful context extends to everyday settings and functions of oral exchanges such as tasks accomplished at the grocery store, bank, and in family interactions, even if text is not involved. This finding suggests the possibility that the level of context in which a recast takes place may be an important influence on low level literacy students’ ability to recall the recast.

Conclusion

The present review of literature has presented definitions of oracy and literacy. It has identified major findings in the connection between alphabetic literacy and L1 oracy with respect to L1 oral language processing and phonological awareness. These studies
have shown that adults’ phonological awareness differs in the L1 between literate and illiterate speakers. Additionally, the concepts of awareness of linguistic forms, “noticing,” and recasts as corrective oral feedback were discussed, both as they have applied to highly literate L2 learners and low literacy L2 learners. The effectiveness of recasts is questioned when there is ambiguity surrounding their use (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Mackey, Purdue, & McDonough, 2000; Nicholas et al., 2001), but their usefulness in contributing to successful learner uptake of linguistic forms seems to increase when recasts are more explicit (Bigelow et al., 2006; Loewen & Philp, 2006).

While previous research shows that low alphabetic literacy participants differ in their oral processing abilities with some phonological manipulation tasks from literate L1 speakers, seeming to suggest that the same would be true for preliterate learners and oral language processing in their L2, almost no research has touched on this gap as yet. Bigelow et al.’s study (2009) and Mejía’s (2011) study constitute two recent developments in research with low literacy L1 learners and L2 oral language processing.

The aim of the present study is to shed more light onto this topic. I seek to address the following research question:

How does low alphabetic print literacy in the L1 affect L2 students’ ability to respond to recasts? Specifically, to what extent do low-literacy second language learners’ responses to recasts of oral questions depend on the level meaningful context associated with the question?

The next chapter will outline in more detail the participants, methods, and tools of data collection used in the present research.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study seeks to investigate the accuracy of adult low literacy ELLs’ recall of oral corrective feedback and if accuracy is affected by the level of context in which the recast takes place. As indicated in the previous literature review chapter, previous research points to the conclusion that fully literate L1 speakers process certain aspects of oral language and linguistic units differently than L1 speakers with lower levels of literacy. Previous research also lends support to the notion that L2 speakers with higher literacy levels process oral language differently than lower level literacy L2 speakers of the same language backgrounds, and that context may be a factor in lower level ELLs’ ability to recall recasts correctly.

My research question—the goal of this present study—was to compare the oral performance of L2 learners of low and moderate levels of literacy on three kinds of oral tasks with varying levels of contextualization and to assess differences in their abilities to notice and correctly repeat grammatical recasts in each of these tasks.

In order to conduct this research, I interviewed participants to gather information on their literacy background. I conducted native and second language literacy assessments. I recorded student responses to three activities, one in which the researcher provided oral corrective feedback to learner errors in elicited imitation, and two in which the researcher provided corrective feedback to student-generated questions.
Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I describe my research design. I have chosen to model this study based on previous research studies with low literacy adults, and thus I explain my choice of research design plus my modifications to others’ procedures based on previous research and my current setting. Second, I describe my methods and tools of data collection. Third, I describe how the data was analyzed for each of the data collection tasks. The final section of the methods chapter summarizes the main points and introduces what will follow in the following chapters.

The following statement is my research question:

How does low alphabetic print literacy in the L1 affect L2 students’ ability to respond to recasts? Specifically, to what extent do low-literacy second language learners’ responses to recasts of oral questions depend on the level meaningful context associated with the question?

Research Design

Since my research question focuses on the level of context associated with the question recast, it was necessary to include tasks in which the level of meaningful context is a variable. In a task with low context, the researcher generated the question without visual aids or a conversational context, and simply asked the participant to repeat the question. In a task with increased context, the participants saw images of unrelated objects on a page and generated questions to ask the researcher about physical differences between the objects such as size, color, and shape. In a task with a higher level of context, the question were generated by the participant in the context of gathering
information about a story that is accompanied by pictures of scenes that are familiar to students’ experiences. The percentage of grammatically accurate recasts for each task was measured between the lower and moderate level literacy groups and the rates of accuracy compared between the two literacy levels.

Before beginning this study, I had noticed patterns of responses to recasts in my lower and mid-level literacy students and wanted to understand if my observations were mere coincidence or based on genuine differences. Thus, I chose a research design with quantitative methodology to be able to compare these two groups. As noted in earlier chapters and above in the research question, my purpose is to explore the nature of alphabetic print literacy in the L1 with oral language processing in the L2. As a model of a research design for the present study, I decided to partially replicate three studies. The first was Philp’s study (2003) on oral processing of implicit negative feedback. This study was chosen as a research model for two specific reasons. First, this study elicits oral samples from participants with tools that contained only pictures and thus did not require any alphabetic literacy. Although Philp’s study includes only high-level literacy learners, the use of pictures to elicit narratives and engage nonnative speakers with native speakers in conversational interactions could easily be adapted for low-level literacy for noticing recasts.

The second study for partial replication came from Tarone et al.’s literacy and oral SLA study (2009) on low-literacy Somali participants’ noticing of recasts. Tarone et al. (2009) also replicate parts of Philp’s study (2003) due to the non-literacy-based nature of its oral tasks as well as the way it integrated noticing, interactions, and recasts – a
matrix of growing interest in the SLA research community. Tarone et al. (2009) choose to focus specifically on the Somali population in Minneapolis and thus shape their methods and data collection tools around a heightened understanding of this community in the Cedar-Riverside area. Because the present study also interacts with this population, Tarone et al.’s study (2009) seems an especially appropriate one for modeling and adapting for the present research. Tarone et al. (2009) include quantitative assessments of L2 oral language proficiency, quantitative assessments of L1 and L2 literacy, and elicit a dialogue between the researcher and the participant using pictures that tell a story. A specific characteristic of their study is the use of a signal (in their case, a knock on the table) before the researcher provides the recast to alert the learner to stop and repeat the recast. In this way, the researchers are able to avoid ambiguity as to the nature of the recast (i.e., to indicate that it is for correction, not simply the researcher’s repetition for emphasis or affirmation) and therefore are better able to evaluate the learners’ abilities to recognize the feedback and correct their output.

A third study which serves as the basis of my research is Mejía’s (2011) of low literacy adult learners and their ability to recall recasts of questions in elicited imitation, spot-the-difference, and story completion tasks. Mejía likewise followed Philp’s study (2003) and Tarone et al.’s study (2009) technique of signaling recasts using the non-verbal cue of knocking.
Data Collection

Setting

The setting of the study was an Adult Basic Education (ABE) center in downtown Minneapolis. The educational program at this center is designed to address the ESL and job skills training needs of a diverse range of immigrant students in order to help them achieve their academic, economic, and personal goals.

Participants

The participants in this study totaled 11 adult ESOL students from one ABE site. While a total of 18 adult ESOL students initially agreed to participate in the study, seven later opted not to participate, were not available when the researcher visited the research site, or had incomplete interview sessions. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 67 and had resided in the United States from less than six months to twenty years, though the majority of participants had resided in the United States for five years or less. Participants were chosen based on their CASAS scores and knowledge of students’ literacy level drawn from classroom observations and intake data. Participants varied in their backgrounds of formal education.

Because of the limited number of Somali speakers available, those who participated in the study were native speakers of Arabic, French, Somali, and Spanish. Most of the Somali participants (four out of five) expressed that they also spoke or understood other languages such as Amharic, French, or Arabic. Among the multilingual participants, their native language was determined as the language which they learned as children from their families and in which they communicated most frequently with their
families and home communities. In the case of one participant, the classification of “native language” was difficult to determine, as the language which he learned first as his native language was not the primary language of communication in his family or education. While he claimed the language of Masalit (a language of Darfur) as his native language, he expressed that the language of his education, daily communications, and family life, was Arabic. Since a native language literacy assessment was not available in the language of Masalit, he was given an Arabic literacy assessment.

A majority of participants represented urban upbringings (9 participants) in contrast to rural areas or small towns (2 participants); additionally, four of the five Somali speakers had lived in another country outside of their homeland as refugees in Kenya or Ethiopia. While those from refugee camps experienced limited formal education in their native language (between 0 to 4 years) and no formal education in a non-native language, for others, residence in a large city did not necessarily correspond to a higher number of years of formal education. Some from large cities received no formal education in their native language, whereas the two from rural areas had at least six years of formal education. Overall, years of formal education in a native language or otherwise ranged from 0 to 17 years. French and Spanish speakers generally had more formal education and higher literacy levels than the Somali and Arabic speakers. For all participants, formal English language instruction ranged from one month to approximately five years.

In accordance with their previous experience with formal education, participants also varied with respect to their levels of literacy backgrounds. Some had only begun to
read and write in any language, either their L1 or L2, after arriving in the United States.

Of these, some began to acquire literacy only in their L2. Others began learning to read and write in their native language, either in a previous country or in the U.S.A., before beginning their English studies. As well as their literacy level, participants were also chosen based on willingness to participate in the study and because their consistent attendance over a number of months had allowed me to develop a more comfortable and familiar relationship as a teacher at their learning center. All participants were assigned pseudonym initials to protect their identities. See Table 1 for participant data.

Table 1: Participant Data

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<td>HB</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>HB</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RK</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes (Ethiopia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>HB</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Yes (Ethiopia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZA</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Yes (Kenya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Masalit/Arabic</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Arabic: 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>HB</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Yes (Darfur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>4 years (in Guatemala)</td>
<td>LI</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the individuals were at similar levels of oral proficiency, as all were in approximately the same beginning level of English class. At the adult learning center where this study was conducted, there are two beginning level classes in the morning: Level 100A for lower level beginners and Level 100B for higher level beginners. In the afternoon, these two levels are combined into level 100A&B. Participants of the afternoon class Level 200 for low intermediate speakers were also included. The center’s speaking and listening proficiency assessments were considered sufficient for oral proficiency placement in this study.

Participants in this study attended two sets of ESL classes a day: English speaking and listening, and English reading, writing, and grammar from 9:00 in the morning to 12 noon, or from 1:00 to 4:00 in the afternoon. The data were collected during the class session times but in a pull-out format in which the researcher spoke individually with each participant. As much as possible, these pull-out sessions occurred during the reading, writing, and grammar classes such that students were otherwise not disrupted from the regular flow of their routine.

Literacy Assessment

Participants’ native language literacy as well as English literacy level was assessed using the Native Language Literacy Screening Device (NLLSD) created by the University of the State of New York. The NLLSD was used to group participants into two groups by native language literacy level (either low or moderate literacy). To interpret the results of this screening device, a supplemental observational rubric designed by Tarone et al. (2009) and modified by Mejía (2011) was used in order to
assess student behavior as the student completed the assessments, such as confidence while reading and reading fluency. The participant’s numerical score was rated by the researcher, and participant’s literacy rating group was the mean score of their native and English literacy scores. Participants’ literacy levels ranged from 3.5 (low literacy) to 8.5 (moderate literacy) on a scale of 3-9. A mean literacy score of 7 divided the Low Literacy group from the Moderate Literacy group. Participants having a mean literacy score of less than 7 were considered Low Literacy, while participants with a mean literacy score of 7 or higher were placed in the Moderate Literacy category. Since the NLLSD scale was intended for use with second language students of lower literacy, it was not intended to differentiate between moderate and high levels of literacy and thus a higher number on the scale did not necessarily signify a high literacy level. Table 2 contains an overview of participants’ literacy ratings and literacy group placements.

Table 2: Literacy Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Native Language)</th>
<th>Literacy Rating (English)</th>
<th>Literacy Mean</th>
<th>Literacy Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5 Low literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 Low literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 Low literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RK</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.5 Low literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.5 Low literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5 Moderate literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 Moderate literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZA</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5 Moderate literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.5 Moderate literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.5 Moderate literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.5 Moderate literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Oral Assessment

Participants’ English oral proficiency ratings were taken from the Adult Basic Education center’s oral proficiency level designations. Participants were members of speaking and listening classes of either the level 100A (Low beginner), 100B (High beginner), or 200 (Low intermediate). Table 3 and Figure 1 present the oral proficiency of participants according to their class attendance. It was found that oral proficiency ratings did not necessarily correspond to literacy proficiency ratings, and in fact, in some cases low beginners in their oral proficiency were also those who ranked the highest in the group on their literacy ratings.

Table 3: Oral Proficiency Ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Oral Proficiency Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Low beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Low beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RK</td>
<td>Low beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Low beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>High beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>High beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>High beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>High beginner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Low intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB</td>
<td>Low intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZA</td>
<td>Low intermediate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Technique 1: Initial Introductory Interview

Participants were interviewed in their native language to determine if they met the requirements of the study, including expressing a willingness to participate in the study and low levels of academic experience in their first language. Translators for all languages represented among the participants were present to sight-interpret the consent form into their native language. If the participants agreed to the study and signed the consent form, the tape recorder was turned on for the duration of the time between the researcher and participant, and they were asked basic questions about their educational experiences in their first and second languages, such as “Where are you from?” and “Did you go to school in your country?” (see Appendix A). The purpose of this conversation was to put the participant at ease and detract from any sense of nervousness or awkwardness on the part of the student.
**Data Collection Technique 2: Literacy Assessment**

Participants’ native language literacy as well as English literacy levels were assessed using the Native Language Literacy Screening Device (NLLSD) created by the University of the State of New York and provided by Mejía (2011) (see Appendix B). Somali translations were provided by Mejía (2011); other translations of native language literacy screening devices were produced by the researcher and checked for accuracy with native speakers of each language. The NLLSD was used to group participants into two groups by native language literacy level (either low or moderate literacy). To interpret the results of this screening device, the present researcher used a supplemental rubric designed by Tarone et al. (2009) and modified by Mejía (2011) (see Appendix C) in order to assess student behavior as the student completed the assessments, such as confidence while reading and reading fluency.

The native language and second language literacy assessments were completed after the participant completed the introductory interview (see Appendix A) and one or more of the recall tasks. While the participants completed the literacy assessments, the researcher completed the observational rubric quietly. The introductory interview was placed first to help the participant feel at ease before completing the literacy assessments.

**Data Collection Technique 3: Elicited Imitation**

The researcher used 28 questions originally employed by Mejía (2011) (see Appendix D). Each question consisted of eight syllables with varying question formations, including inverted subject-verb order (e.g., “Is she nice to the young children?”), interrogative pro-forms with “do” insertion (e.g., “Where do I buy the best...”)
coffee?"), negative tags (e.g., “She is learning fast, isn’t she?”), and indirect questions (e.g., “Can you explain how it happened?”). The researcher informed the participants that they would hear the question one time and that they were to repeat the question, as much as they could remember. If the participants could not remember any of the question to repeat it, the researcher waited until the participant indicated this. After the participants attempted a first recall, if an error were present in the participant’s response, the researcher knocked on the table to signal a second recast and repeated the original question again, allowing the participant to attempt a second recall. This task involved a low level of context, as the questions were teacher-generated and there were no visuals, meaningful conversational context, or story connected with the questions.

**Data Collection Technique 4: Spot-the-Difference Task**

Participants were given individual pages with pictures of various household or everyday items that they would be likely to see on a regular basis (see Appendix E). One or two color photographs appeared on each page. The researcher had corresponding pages with pictures of similar but non-identical pictures. The participants were instructed to ask the researcher questions to find the differences between the two items. The purpose of this task was to elicit questions from the participant. As the participant asked questions, each time he or she made a grammatical error, the researcher would knock twice on the table to indicate that the student was to stop and repeat a forthcoming recast. The researcher then recast the participant’s erroneous question, and the participant then attempted to recall the recast, after which the researcher answered the question. The use of the knocks to signal the recast was a replication of both Philp (2003) and Tarone et al.
(2009)’s studies, both of which used a non-verbal signal to indicate for the student to repeat the recast phrase. In this technique, Philp and Tarone et al. follow Baddeley’s study (1990), which concludes that a non-verbal auditory cue is better than a verbal cue because the former does not affect as strongly the flow of the dialogue. The process of knocking and recasting was modeled before beginning the task, and prior to each set of pictures, the researcher first modeled sample questions for the given item. This task included an increased level of context in the form visual support and a meaning-based activity in which the participant asks questions with the purpose of finding differences between the researcher’s page and the participant’s page.

Data Collection Technique 5: Story Completion Task

The story completion task was replicated from hand-drawn images from the study by Tarone et al. (2009) (see Appendix F). These images were chosen because they model the Language Experience Approach (LEA) for building literacy with emergent readers, a method with which the participants are familiar. The LEA represents a method of differentiating instruction that has been advocated for K-12 classrooms where students represent differing levels of reading readiness (Nessel & Jones, 1981). The LEA also has been applied as a method of differentiating instruction and targeting varying levels of L1 and L2 literacy in ESL classrooms (Curran, 2007; Dixon & Nessel, 1983; Freeman & Freeman, 2002), although as Curran (2007) notes, less SLA literacy research has targeted adult ESL or EFL students.

In the story completion task, the researcher explained that we would look together at a story and that we would talk together about the pictures. The researcher revealed the
pictures one at a time and the participant asked questions about the pictures to ask what the story was about. In some cases, the researcher would model a few questions with separate pictures to demonstrate the procedure, such as, “What is he doing?” or “How does she feel?” Then the researcher began and uncovered the first picture of the story to ask similar questions, followed by the next picture in the sequence. This continued until all the pictures were revealed. As participants asked questions, the researcher signaled errors in question formation and elicited recalls with a knock in the same way as the spot-the-difference task.

The story completion task included the highest level of context, as the questions were generated by the participant in the context of gathering information about a story that is accompanied by pictures of scenes that are familiar to students’ experiences. In this task, the conversation was very meaning-based and purpose-driven, as the learners asked questions to discover the story, and the pictures represented not random objects but a unified story.

Procedure

Data Collection

Data was collected in one or two sessions, depending on participant and interpreter availability. Data was collected in the following order:

1. Consent form
2. Introductory Interview (in English, with native language translation orally provided by interpreter)
3. Elicited Imitation questions
4. Spot the Difference task
5. NLLSD in native language
6. Story Completion task
7. NLLSD in English

Participants were grouped into two groups according to their native language literacy score from the NLLSD, using Mejía’s adaptation of Tarone et al.’s rubric (see Appendix C).

Analysis of Data

Literacy Assessment

Participants’ literacy levels were based on their performance from the NLLSD assessment using Tarone et al.’s rubric (see Appendix C). The scores ranged from one (very low) to nine (moderate to high). The scores of both the native language and the English score were combined to determine an overall literacy score. Once the scores were calculated, the participants were divided into groups of low and moderate literacy.

Recall Tasks

In each of the recall tasks, participants’ responses were audio recorded and transcribed. Recalls were analyzed according to 3 categories: No Recall, Ungrammatical Question Formation, or Grammatical, following Mejía’s previous study with oral recall and low-literacy adults (2011). No Recall indicated that the participant was unable to repeat the recast or that the recast was so minimal as to be un-ratable. For example:

Researcher: Who is he?
Participant: …car…?
Ungrammatical Question Formation indicated that the participant was able to repeat the recast partially, but not completely correctly. In ungrammatical question formation, the recast counted as ungrammatical if the participant’s utterance lacked correct question form.

Researcher: What’s his name?
Participant: What his name is?

Grammatical recall was assigned when the participant was able to repeat the recast completely with grammatical question word order. Additionally, following the practice in Mejía’s study (2011), grammatical recall was assigned when the participant response corresponded to fully correct grammatical output in question form yet perhaps did not identically match the original recast. For example:

Researcher: What’s his name?
Participant: Is his name Abdi?

Responses that were grammatically correct but not in question form were not counted.

In a task with low context, the participant simply repeated the researcher-generated question, whereas in a task with a higher level of context, the question was generated by the participant in the context of gathering information about a story that was accompanied by pictures of scenes that were familiar to students’ experiences. The percentage of grammatically accurate responses for each task was measured and compared to the percentages of partially modified responses and responses with no corrections for both the lower and moderate level literacy groups. Then the rates of
accuracy for each literacy group were compared to see if there was a connection between accuracy of recasts between the low and high context tasks.

In this study, attempts were made at all times to respect participants’ dignity and respect. All participants signed consent forms affirming their willingness to participate. All consent forms were translated orally into the participants’ native languages by advanced English level adult ESOL students or by the researcher. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonym initials were used in place of their real names, data was closed, and identities are not otherwise disclosed.

Summary

This research methods section has restated the research question and discussed the research method, the participants, the setting, the data collection tasks, the procedures, the analysis of the data. It has also explained the research design and the previous studies which the present study partially replicates.

The following chapter discusses the results of the data collection through a summary of the data collected, including the types of recasts produced and the frequency and complexity of each. Chapter four also places the results of this study in the light of other studies regarding recasts, SLA, and second language instruction. Following the results chapter, the final chapter discusses the implications of this research for SLA and second language teaching and learning.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study took place at one non-profit institution in a large metropolitan city in the upper Midwest. I collected data through structured interviews which included speaking activities and literacy assessments. Through this data, I sought to answer the following question:

How does low alphabetic print literacy in the L1 affect L2 students’ ability to respond to recasts? Specifically, to what extent do low-literacy second language learners’ responses to recasts of oral questions depend on the level of meaningful context associated with the question?

This chapter will address both group and individual results for the Elicited Imitation, Spot-the-Difference, and Story Completion tasks.

Elicited Imitation Task

The results of the Elicited Imitation Task, in which participants repeated 28 eight-syllable questions asked by the researcher, show that Moderate Literacy participants achieved higher rates of Grammatical Recall than the Low Literacy participants during the first recall, yet during the second recall task Low Literacy and Moderate Literacy groups exhibited nearly the same percentages of Corrected Recall. Oral proficiency level was also a positive factor for recall accuracy.
Elicited Imitation: First Recall

Participants initially heard each question once. They were instructed to repeat the sentence as accurately as possible. If they repeated the question exactly, the question was not repeated. If they did not respond or there was an error, the researcher knocked on the table to signal the recast, repeated the correct form, and the participant repeated again. This procedure represents a departure from Mejia’s (2011) elicited imitation task where the question was spoken only once. As in Mejía’s study, each recall was then categorized as No Recall, Ungrammatical question-formation, or Grammatical. In the present study, both the initial recall and, if the question were repeated, the second recall, were analyzed according to these three categories. Table 4 represents the results of participant recalls after the first recall.

Table 4: Elicited Imitation 1st Recall by Literacy Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI 1st Recall: Low Literacy</th>
<th>No Recall</th>
<th>Ungrammatical Q-form</th>
<th>Grammatical</th>
<th>Total Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI 1st Recall: Moderate Literacy</th>
<th>No Recall</th>
<th>Ungrammatical Q-form</th>
<th>Grammatical</th>
<th>Total Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The totals of No Recall, Ungrammatical Question Formation, and Grammatical question formation were summed according to Literacy Group. As the Low Literacy and Moderate Literacy groups contained different numbers of participants, percentages were used to reflect overall totals. Figure 2 presents these percentages by literacy group.
Among the responses for participants’ first recall in the Elicited Imitation task, the Moderate Literacy group scored 40% Grammatical recall while the Low Literacy group demonstrated only 19% Grammatical recall. Grammatical question formation was assigned when participants demonstrated the correct question-formation syntax and included appropriate subjects and auxiliaries even if the wrong question word was substituted or if there were minor differences in the target form and the recalled information. Discrepancies not related to the question form, such as a dropped article, a dropped preposition, an article substituted with a preposition, a dropped morpheme, an alternate form of the same verb, or minor pronunciation differences (provided that the word’s lexical function remained constant – e.g., a verb was substituted for a similar-sounding verb or a noun substituted for a noun) were irrelevant to the rating.
Grammatical recalls constituted approximately 31% of all participants’ recalls. The following are examples of Grammatical recalls:

Researcher: Are the red apples a good price?
Participant RK: Are the red apples good price?

or

Researcher: Who will he live with in New York?
Participant UB: Who will live in New York?

or

Researcher: Can you explain who she just called?
Participant ZA: Can you explain who just come?

The Low Literacy group exhibited higher levels of No Recall responses (22%) compared to the Moderate Literacy group (19%). No Recall was assigned when the participant could not remember any part of the question or when he or she repeated parts of the sentence conveying similar sounds or semantic information to the original but not enough syntactic, morpho-syntactic, or lexical information to warrant an Ungrammatical rating. Overall, No Recall constituted approximately 20% of all participants’ responses. The following represent examples of No Recall ratings:

Researcher: Can you explain who she just called?
Participant MM: Can … plain …car?

or

Researcher: What is your new baby son named?
Participant RS: What … baby new?
The Low Literacy Group also had higher levels of Ungrammatical responses compared to the Moderate Literacy group (59% in the Low Literacy group to only 41% in the Moderate Literacy group). Ungrammatical question formation was assigned when the participant demonstrated some recall of the interrogative information but did not use the appropriate question formation such as subject-verb inversion when necessary, and/or was missing the subject, verb, or appropriate auxiliary verb as necessary for the question type. Approximately 49% of all participants’ question recalls were rated Ungrammatical. The following represent examples of Ungrammatical ratings:

Researcher: How are Tom’s new friends from Roseville?

Participant SF: How Tom new friend Roseville?

or

Researcher: Who didn’t they ask to the game?

Participant IB: Who didn’t ask to the again?

or

Researcher: Can you explain where the bank is?

Participant AB: Can you explain where’s the bank?

Additionally, if a participant’s recall altered the original target question form, this too was counted as Ungrammatical even if the resulting recall could be considered Grammatical, because the recall lacked elements particular to the target. The following are examples where the participants’ responses were counted as Ungrammatical due to divergences from the appropriate embedded question form or tag form:

Researcher: Can you explain where the bank is?
Participant MM: Where is the bank?

or

Researcher: They are coming today, aren’t they?

Participant FN: They are coming today, I think?

Overall, Moderate Literacy participants had more accurate grammatical recall than the Low Literacy group, a finding that confirms the findings of both Tarone et al. (2009) and Mejía (2011), both of which found that higher literacy participants achieved higher accuracy of recall in elicited imitation tasks than lower literacy participants.

Results of the first recall by literacy group are shown in Figure 2.

Aside from literacy level, oral proficiency (OP) level was another factor that could account for differences in participants’ accuracy of recall. Participants represented individuals who ranged from Low Beginner (LB) to High Beginner (HB) to Low Intermediate (LI) levels of oral proficiency. Recall accuracy was analyzed according to oral proficiency.

In this analysis, oral proficiency played a role in higher levels of recall accuracy. The percentages of Grammatical recall were highest among the Low Intermediate OP group, which had 49% Grammatical recall as compared to 22% No Recall and 29% Ungrammatical question formation responses. Among the High Beginner OP participants the Moderate Literacy group had 46% Grammatical recall as compared to the Low Literacy group which had only 11% Grammatical recall, yet the combined High Beginner rate of Grammatical recall was half (28.5%) of the Low Intermediate group’s (49%). In addition, the Low Beginner OP group had 30% No Recall as compared to the High
Beginner group’s, which had only 14% No Recall. Interestingly, the rates of Ungrammatical recall were both around 57% for both the Low and High Beginner OP groups. Figure 3 illustrates the Elicited Imitation first recall results for the groups by oral proficiency levels.

Figure 3: Results of Elicited Imitation 1st Recall by Oral Proficiency Group

Of all the participants, FN had the highest percentage of grammatical responses (67%). Of the top four participants who had 50% or higher percentage of Grammatical responses, one came from the Low Literacy group and the other three from the Moderate Literacy group. Of all the participants, two had 0% Grammatical recall: MM (Low Literacy High Beginner OP) and CR (Moderate Literacy Low Beginner OP).

Additionally, two Spanish-speaking participants who ranked the highest literacy level of 8.5, CA and CR, also represented the highest percentages of No Recall (39% each) of all
the participants. Figure 4 below illustrates individual participant data by literacy and oral proficiency levels.

**Figure 4: Elicited Imitation 1st Recall Individual Responses by Literacy and OP Level**

As shown in Figure 4, on the individual level most participants in this study had the largest percentage of their first recall responses in the Ungrammatical Question Form category. This stands in contrast with Mejía’s (2011) results, where most participants’ responses were categorized as Grammatical. This difference could be attributed to the fact that the present study included speakers of a Low Beginner Oral Proficiency level in addition to High Beginning and Low Intermediate, whereas Mejia’s study included only those ranked as Novice High and Intermediate Low oral proficiency. Nonetheless, in the present study, those with higher percentages of Grammatical recall as compared with their percentages of No Recall or Ungrammatical responses spanned all
oral proficiency levels and thus included individuals of Low Beginning, High Beginning, and Low Intermediate oral proficiency.

Elicited Imitation: Second Recall

The results of the second recall of the elicited imitation task represent an interesting change from the first recall. Unlike the first recall in which Moderate Literacy participants achieved greater recall accuracy, during the second recall task, not only did the Low Literacy group achieve a higher percentage of overall Corrected Recalls, but the Low Literacy group also showed a greater percentage of Grammatical second recalls overall.

In a departure from Mejía’s (2011) elicited imitation task where the question was spoken only once, in the present study, if participants had a No Recall or Ungrammatical response after the first recall, the researcher knocked on the table to signal the recast, repeated the correct form, and the participant repeated again. This procedure sought to identify if literacy level impacted participants’ ability to correct their grammatically-incorrect question formations after hearing the recast orally. Although the participants sought to recall their previous utterances, the recast still represents a low context task in which the original questions were researcher-generated and disconnected from a larger context such as questions around visual objects or conversational discourse around a story.

Participants’ second recalls were analyzed according to whether or not they represented grammatical improvement from the first recall. Thus, participant responses were divided into two groups: Corrected Recall, or those which indicated grammatical
improvement in the question formation from the first recall to the second recall, and Non-Corrected Recall, which indicated no improvement in grammatical question formation from the first recall to the second.

Corrected Recall was assigned when a participant’s first response moved from a No Recall to an Ungrammatical question formation, from a No Recall to a Grammatical question formation, or from an Ungrammatical to a Grammatical question formation. Thus, participants’ second recall was categorized as Corrected Recall even if the second recall did not achieve a Grammatical rating. The following represent examples of Corrected Recall:

Researcher: When was the old blue car repaired?

Participant RK (1st recall): Are … blue car?

(knock)

Researcher: When was the old blue car repaired?

Participant RK (2nd recall): Was the old blue car repaired?

or

Researcher: Why isn’t the child talking?

Participant MM (1st recall): Why children talking?

(knock)

Researcher: Why isn’t the child talking?

Participant MM (2nd recall): Why isn’t child talking?

Non-Corrected Recall was assigned when the participant’s second recall remained the same as the first response or if both recalls were categorized as No Recall or
Ungrammatical question formation. Non-Corrected Recall applied even if the second recall was altered from the first but did not improve grammatically. The following represent examples of Non-Corrected Recall:

Researcher: Has she moved to a new house yet?

Participant UB (1\textsuperscript{st} recall): She move new house?

(knock)

Researcher: Has she moved to a new house yet?

Participant UB (2\textsuperscript{nd} recall): House new house is it?

Among the responses for participants’ second recall in the Elicited Imitation task, the Low Literacy and Moderate Literacy groups exhibited nearly the same percentages of Corrected Recall. Although the Low Literacy group had more total questions for recall overall (102 in the Low Literacy group to 95 in the Moderate Literacy group), the Moderate Literacy group scored 56\% of Corrected Recall while the Low Literacy group demonstrated 57\% Corrected Recall. Since there were unequal numbers of Low Literacy and Moderate Literacy participants as well as different numbers of total second recall questions between the two literacy groups, Table 5 shows the total number of second recall by both number and percentages of Corrected and Non-Corrected Recall.
Table 5: Corrected and Non-Correct Recall by Literacy Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Recall: Low Literacy</th>
<th>Non-Corrected Recall</th>
<th>Corrected Recall</th>
<th>Total Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Recall: Moderate Literacy</th>
<th>Non-Corrected Recall</th>
<th>Corrected Recall</th>
<th>Total Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the responses for participants’ second recall in the Elicited Imitation task, Corrected Recall was divided into three types: when a participant’s first response moved from a No Recall to an Ungrammatical question formation (NR→UG), from a No Recall to a Grammatical question formation (NR→G), or from an Ungrammatical to a Grammatical question formation (UG→G). Out of the total of Corrected Recall responses, the Low Literacy group exhibited the greatest percentage of combined corrections from a No Recall or Ungrammatical question formation to a Grammatical question formation (69%) whereas the Moderate Literacy group exhibited a lower percentage of Corrected Recalls that resulted in Grammatical question formations (66%). Interestingly, not only did the Low Literacy group achieve a higher percentage of overall Corrected Recalls, but the Low Literacy group also showed a greater percentage of Grammatical second recalls overall. Table 6 shows these data.
Table 6: Grammaticality of Corrected Recall by Literacy Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corrected Recall: Low Literacy</th>
<th>No Recall to Ungrammatical Q-form</th>
<th>No Recall to Grammatical</th>
<th>Ungrammatical Q-form to Grammatical</th>
<th>Total Recalls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corrected Recall: Moderate Literacy</th>
<th>No Recall to Ungrammatical Q-form</th>
<th>No Recall to Grammatical</th>
<th>Ungrammatical Q-form to Grammatical</th>
<th>Total Recalls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A noteworthy difference in these Corrected Recall results is that unlike first recall, where overall Moderate Literacy participants had more accurate grammatical recall than the Low Literacy group, in the second recall there was only a slight difference in the percentages of overall Corrected Recalls between the Low and Moderate Literacy groups, and similarly a slight difference in the percentages of Corrected Recalls that resulted in Grammatical responses. Although the Elicited Imitations questions were the most de-contextualized of all the question tasks, repetition of the original utterance nonetheless allowed the Low Literacy participants to achieve higher grammaticality of their question formation at nearly equal rates as their Moderate Literacy peers.

Just as with the First Recalls, the second recalls were analyzed to determine if oral proficiency level corresponded with recall ability. Overall, higher oral proficiency did tend to lead to a higher percentage of Corrected Recalls. High Beginner (HB) and Low Intermediate (LI) oral proficiency participants achieved higher levels of Grammatical recalls overall as compared to the Low Beginner (LB) participants. The two highest levels of oral proficiency achieved an average of 59% Grammatical recalls (50% for Low
Literacy HB, 83% for Moderate Literacy HB, and 44% for Moderate Literacy LI) as compared to the Low Beginner (LB) participants, who achieved an average of only 41% (53% for Low Literacy LB and 29% for Moderate Literacy LB). Interestingly, the highest percentage of Ungrammatical to Grammatical changes occurred with the High Beginner group at a rate of nearly 66%, in contrast with the Low Beginner group’s 41% and the Low Intermediate group’s 44%. Figure 5 shows these results.

Figure 5: Results of Elicited Imitation 2nd Recall by Oral Proficiency Group

To simplify these findings, second recall results were also grouped according to Ungrammatical or Grammatical. The High Beginner Group overall achieved the highest rate of change to Grammatical question formation at 82%, ahead of the Low Beginners (61%) and the Low Intermediates (63%). Overall, however, on the second recall, Grammatical Recall outweighed the Ungrammatical for all oral proficiency levels. This finding could indicate that although the Elicited Imitations questions were the most de-
contextualized of all the question tasks, repetition of the original utterance nonetheless allowed all oral proficiency levels to achieve much higher rates of grammatical question formation on the second try. Figure 6 shows these overall percentages by oral proficiency level.

**Figure 6: Ungrammatical versus Grammatical Corrected Recalls by Oral Proficiency**

Spot-the-Difference Task

Participant responses to the Spot-the-Difference and Story Completion tasks were analyzed using Tarone et al.’s (2009) categories of Correct Recall, Modified Recall, or No Recall. Correct Recall was assigned when the recall exactly matched the recast. Modified Recall was assigned when there were some changes from the recast contained in the recall but not all changes were present and the question formation remained ungrammatical. No Recall answers were those which did not include any changes from the recast. Table 7 presents Spot-the-Difference totals.
### Table 7: Spot-the-Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Literacy</th>
<th>No Recall</th>
<th>Modified Recall</th>
<th>Correct Recall</th>
<th>Total Recalls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moderate Literacy</th>
<th>No Recall</th>
<th>Modified Recall</th>
<th>Correct Recall</th>
<th>Total Recalls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Spot-the-Difference task, both low and moderate literacy participants achieved correct recall nearly 51% of all recasts. Unlike the findings from Mejía’s study (2011) where moderate literacy participants achieved higher rates of correct recall, in this study the moderate and low literacy groups had nearly equal percentages. The moderate literacy group, however, achieved a higher rate of Modified Recall (approximately 42%) as compared to the low literacy group (approximately 31%). Likewise, the moderate literacy group evidenced a noticeably lower rate of No Recall (7.5%) as compared to the low literacy group (18%). Like Mejía’s study (2011), these results confirm the findings of Tarone et al. (2009) that higher level literacy participants will generally achieve greater accuracy in recalling recasts than lower literacy participants. Figure 7 below illustrates these differences.
Based on oral proficiency level, High Beginner (HB) and Low Intermediate (LI) oral proficiency participants achieved higher levels of accuracy in recalls overall as compared to the Low Beginner (LB) participants. Low Beginners of Moderate Literacy had notably higher percentages of Correct Recall (100%) than the Low Literacy participants (39%), yet Low Literacy High Beginners exhibited greater Correct Recall (63%) to their Moderate Literacy counterparts (40%). Low Intermediate participants of Moderate Literacy achieved 53% Correct Recall. Thus, recall accuracy generally improved with oral proficiency level. Results are shown in Figure 8.
On an individual level, the majority of participants achieved Correct Recall for the majority of their total number of recalls. Only four participants out of eleven (RK, RS, UB, and ZA) had fewer Correct Recalls than their Modified Recalls. Of all the participants, CR, IB, and FN had the highest rate of recall at 100%. Interestingly, both IB and CR were Low Beginner OP, with IB in the Low Literacy group and CR in the Moderate Literacy group. Individual results are found in Figure 9.
Story Completion Task

As with the Spot-the-Difference task, results to the Story Completion task were analyzed according to the categories of Correct Recall, Modified Recall, or No Recall. Participant responses requiring recasts ranged from 8 to 16 total questions, with an average of 11 questions for each Low Literacy participant and 9 questions for each Moderate Literacy participant.

Results with the Story Completion task differed slightly from the Spot-the-Difference task in that a greater difference between the Low Literacy and Moderate Literacy groups was evident. Most notably, the Moderate Literacy group achieved nearly 75% of Correct Recall in comparison to the Low Literacy group which achieved only 36%. Correspondingly, the Low Literacy group had more Modified Recalls (43%) compared to the Moderate Literacy group (20%). Additionally, the Low Literacy group
had 21% No Recall, in contrast with the Moderate Literacy group which had a mere 5.5% of No Recall responses. These results are distinct from those of Mejía’s study (2011), in which both groups had similar percentages of No Recall. Of all participant responses, each of the Moderate Literacy participants had more Correct than Modified or No Recall responses, whereas only two of the five Low Literacy group members had higher numbers of Correct Recall than Modified Recall. Such results confirm the findings of Tarone et al. (2009), which indicate that higher-level literacy participants will likely achieve greater accuracy of recalling recasts than lower-level literacy participants. Results can be seen in Table 8 and Figure 10 below.

Table 8: Story Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Literacy</th>
<th>Moderate Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Recall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified Recall</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct Recall</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Recalls</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on oral proficiency level, the most striking difference in accuracy between the Low and Moderate literacy groups was the High Beginner group, in which the Low Literacy HB achieved an average of 30% of Correct Recall and 41% Modified Recall as compared with the Moderate Literacy HB, who achieved 76% Correct Recall and 19% Modified Recall. These results are similar to the findings of Mejía’s study (2011), which reported a similar disparity between the Low and Moderate Literacy groups of the High Beginner level. Of the Low Beginner group, there also existed a disparity although not as drastic: the Low Literacy LB achieved 42% Correct Recall as compared with the Moderate Literacy LB group at 67% Correct Recall. Members of the Low Intermediate group consistently had higher levels of Correct Recall. Thus, although oral proficiency did seem to positively affect rates of Correct Recall, literacy level seemed to be a more influential factor in differences of recall accuracy. The results are shown in Figure 11.
Individually, MM had the highest number of questions requiring recasts (16 total). CS had the highest rate of Correct Recall at 100% (8 of 8 questions), followed by AB at 90% and IB at 78%. Additionally, four participants achieved Modified or Correct Recall 100% of the time (that is, they had 0% No Recall responses).

Some individuals achieved greater accuracy of Correct Recall in the Story Completion task as compared with the Spot-the-Difference task. Overall, a total of five participants demonstrated increased percentages of Correct Recall during the Story Completion task: RK, AB, UB, CA, and ZA. Four of these five individuals were Moderate Literacy and either High Beginner or Low Intermediate oral proficiency. The remaining six participants (five Low Literacy and one Moderate Literacy) achieved slightly lower percentages of Correct Recall on the Story Completion task. Additionally, the rates of No Recall responses decreased in the Story Completion task for three participants, in addition to the four who maintained their 0% No Recall rate. Of the remaining five who showed an increase of No Recall responses, the rates were slight (for
example, RS’s rate increased from 17% to 22%). Correct Recalls increased substantially for participants RK, UB, and ZA, all three of whom were Somali-speakers (one Low Literacy and two Moderate Literacy). This finding is similar to Mejía’s (2011) study, in which Correct Recalls increased substantially for two participants, an incidence which Mejía suggests may be due to more highly contextualized meaning and function. Results are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Story Completion Individual Results

Conclusion

In this chapter the results of the data collection were presented. Accuracy of participant recall was measured in three interactive tasks in which participants were asked to repeat grammatically correct questions. In the Elicited Imitation task, these questions were generated by the researcher and the participant repeated. In the Spot-the-Difference and Story Completion tasks, the questions were participant-generated and recast by the researcher when ungrammatical. Results were compared by literacy and oral proficiency
levels. Most notable results indicate that Moderate Literacy group outperformed the Low Literacy all three tasks across oral proficiency levels. In addition, higher oral proficiency level tended to lead to higher accuracy of recall, but not always, as was the case in the second recall of the Elicited Imitation task, and in the Story Completion task in which Low Beginner participants achieved higher rates of Correct Recall as compared with their Modified Recall or No Recall. In chapter five, I will discuss my major findings with implications for teaching as well as suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This study has attempted to answer the following questions: How does low alphabetic print literacy in the L1 affect L2 students’ ability to respond to recasts? Specifically, to what extent do low-literacy second language learners’ responses to recasts of oral questions depend on the level of meaningful context associated with the question? This chapter will include the major findings of this study, its limitations, implications for teachers of English as Second Language for adults, and areas of further research.

Major Findings

Certain patterns emerged from the data of this study. As in Mejia’s (2011) study, in this study the participants of the Moderate Literacy group outperformed the Low Literacy group in all three tasks (Elicited Imitation, Spot-the-Difference, and Story Completion) with a few interesting exceptions in the Elicited Imitation task. During the first recall portion of the Elicited Imitation task, most participants (both Low and Moderate Literacy) had the largest percentage of their responses in the Ungrammatical Question Formation category, a difference from Mejia’s (2011) results where most participants’ responses were categorized as Grammatical. While both the Low Literacy and Moderate Literacy groups had close rates of No Recall (22% and 19%, respectively), two of the five Moderate Literacy participants who ranked the highest literacy level of 8.5, CA and CR, also represented the highest percentages of No Recall
(39% each) of all the participants. This could be because Low Literacy participants were more willing to attempt recalls or were more adept at processing and producing the sounds orally (even though they might not recognize the word) as compared to a more highly literate person who felt hesitant to repeat sounds he or she did not understand.

During the second recall of the Elicited Imitation task, not only did the Low Literacy group achieve a slightly higher percentage of overall Corrected Recalls (57% of Low Literacy 2nd recalls compared with 56% of Moderate Literacy recalls), but the Low Literacy group also showed a greater percentage of Grammatical second recalls overall (69% in the Low Literacy group to 66% in the Moderate Literacy group) (see Table 6). The lack of substantial difference between the Low and Moderate Literacy groups in achieving Grammatical responses in the Corrected Recall portion of the Elicited Imitation task could indicate that even though the questions of the Elicited Imitation task were initiated in a de-contextualized manner without the support of visuals or a meaningful dialogue, continued repetition not only aided the Low Literacy group to achieve higher rates of grammaticality than they otherwise would have achieved, but possibly better supported their understanding of key words and syntactic structures. As Lyster and Ranta’s study suggests (1997), uptake may be greater in grammatically-focused tasks in contrast with meaning-based or more highly contextualized classroom tasks where the noticeability of the recast may be lessened due to students’ attention to the meaning-based elements of the task. Since the Elicited Imitation task was focused primarily on correct repetition and did not require participants to notice grammatical forms in a more contextualized meaning-based task, it may have been easier for Low Literacy students to
achieve greater accuracy of recall than in a more highly contextualized task. Additionally, as Lyster and Mori’s counterbalance hypothesis suggests (2006), recasts in the classroom are more effective when they are obtrusive or divergent from the teacher’s standard method of feedback. While recasts are often used by teachers as a way to “sneak in” corrective feedback without halting the flow of a lesson, the second recall of the Elicited Imitation task raised its level of conspicuousness, possibly enhancing its effectiveness. Repeated recasts could reshape the dynamics of using recasts in the classroom, thereby increasing the rate of uptake on a second recast for both low and moderate literacy students.

In addition to an increased level of recast noticeability due to repetition, such reiterations possibly allowed participants of both literacy levels to achieve improved comprehension of the questions. Although increased comprehension cannot be demonstrated, it is important to note that missing lexical items such as subject nouns or pronouns that the participant apparently failed to understand or recall the first time were often included in their second recall. Interestingly, this agrees with Tarone et al.’s (2009) observation that low literacy participants had higher instances of lexical uptake than morphosyntactic uptake, suggesting that low alphabetic literacy does not affect language learners’ uptake of lexical feedback in the same way it may affect morphosyntactic uptake. Even with a low degree of context, repetition of the original questions allowed the Low Literacy participants to achieve higher grammaticality of their question formation at practically equal rates as their Moderate Literacy peers.
During the Spot-the-Difference and Story Completion tasks participants of the Moderate Literacy group generally out-performed the Low Literacy group and achieved greater accuracy of recall. While the Low and Moderate groups both achieved 51% Correct Recall on the Spot-the-Difference, the moderate literacy group, however, achieved a higher rate of Modified Recall and evidenced a noticeably lower rate of No Recall as compared to the Low Literacy group. Similarly, during the Story Completion task, Moderate Literacy participants consistently achieved greater levels of Correct Recall by over 35%. Like Mejía’s study (2011), these results confirm the findings of Tarone et al. (2009) that higher level literacy participants will generally achieve greater accuracy in recalling recasts than lower literacy participants.

During the Story Completion task, Correct Recalls increased considerably for participants RK, UB, and ZA, all three of whom were Somali speakers (one Low Literacy and two Moderate Literacy) as compared with the Spot-the-Difference task. The considerable difference may be due in part to the fact that in the Story Completion task, participants received feedback on self-generated utterances, thereby removing the necessity of having to at once decode and comprehend prior input prior to recall, as Tarone et al. (2009) note. The original utterances by the participants were naturally at the level of their production grammar, instead of representing question formations that students perhaps had not encountered yet in their ESL classes. Thus, during recall, the participant could focus on the morphosyntactic change presented in the researcher’s recast.
The dramatic increase in Correct Recalls during the Story Completion task for three participants may also be due to a more highly contextualized setting. The task entailed a dialogue between the participant and researcher in which the participant needed to formulate questions that were meaningful to his or her understanding of the story. Additionally, the story involved a number of scenarios that are likely familiar to the participants. The scenarios were supported with a topic focus (a continuous story line) and visual supports in the form of pictures. Furthermore, the participants could have had increased motivation for correct question formation, since such questions might reappear in other conversations the participants might have. One participant (ZA) actually stopped to write some of the questions in her notebook during the exchange. The increased level of Correct Recalls is similar to an outcome in Mejía’s (2011) study, in which Correct Recalls increased considerably for two participants, an incidence which Mejía likewise suggests may be due to more highly contextualized meaning and function of the questions.

Although Correct Recalls increased for three participants in the final task, for another four Low Literacy participants (IB, RS, MM, and SF), percentages of Correct Recalls dropped, in some cases drastically (for example, for SF from 89% to 36%, or for MM from 50% to 25%). This may be due to the fact that as the level of context increased in the form of a meaningful dialogue about a story, supported by images, that participants misread the recasts as affirmations rather than corrections, or were more engaged in understanding the circumstances and new vocabulary of the story than about grammatical form. This corresponds with a finding in Tarone et al.’s (2009) study, in which it was
noted that participants of Low Literacy seemed to have trouble noticing form-focused recasts even after multiple repetitions but had less difficulty with lexical or semantic uptake, possibly indicating that the participants were not processing morphosyntactic feedback in the way they were processing semantic or lexical feedback. Additionally, as Lyster and Mori’s counterbalance hypothesis maintains (2006), noticeability of recasts as a grammatically-focused correction may be counterbalanced by the level of meaningful context in the task. In a situation of higher context in which the participant and researcher (or student and teacher) are negotiating meaning to accomplish a particular end (such as understanding a story), this could mean that ELLs might misinterpret recasts as semantic or lexical rather than morphosyntactic feedback and consequently not perceive the correction as the researcher or teacher intended.

Limitations

There were at least three limitations of this study. First, this study had a relatively small size of only eleven participants. There were not enough Low Literacy participants of higher oral proficiency, nor enough Moderate Literacy participants of Low Beginner oral proficiency, to give a balanced comparison for each proficiency level.

Secondly, the range of native languages represented among the participants could have affected individual results, as some languages may have more similar phonetic patterns to those of English than others.

Thirdly, the categorization of grammatically correct recalls included formations that could nonetheless be unclear to a native English speaker. For example, the recalled question, “Do you know where teachers is?” by one participant (IB) during the Elicited
Imitation task lacked subject-verb agreement yet was categorized as Grammatical due to its correct placement of the subject and verb within the indirect question.

Additionally, this study did not examine the influence of participants’ familiarity with a formal educational system similar to that encountered in the United States on their oral language processing. Thus, differences of oral language processing could be impacted not only by literacy level but also by length of time in the school system.

Finally, this study included ESOL students at very low levels of oral proficiency. These participants in particular frequently expressed hesitation to respond due to the difficulty of the questions in the Elicited Imitation task as well as reticence to generate questions during the Spot-the-Difference and Story Completion tasks. (“Teacher, no English!”) Even though they did so with encouragement from the researcher, the low level of oral proficiency meant that many of their questions in the second and third tasks were repetitive in form and focused on lexical items. In addition to unfamiliar lexical and grammatical items, a heightened sense of anxiety could have been a factor in their ability to recall recasts accurately in all of the tasks, yet this possibility was not factored into the results and would be an interesting topic for further research.

Implications

While literacy and contextual levels are just a couple of many factors that affect an individual’s ability to learn a second language, these two factors appear to be important influences in the oral second language development of adult ESOL students of low literacy. Low Literacy ESOL adult students appear to process morphosyntactic feedback differently from Moderate Literacy students. Because of this, oral recasts
focused on morphosyntactic changes appear to be less effective forms of feedback for low literacy students. Since recasts as a form of corrective feedback in the classroom may not be as noticeable to low literacy students, alternative forms of feedback that allow students to consciously focus on these morphosyntactic changes would likely be more noticeable and therefore more effective (Schmidt, 1990). If recasts are to be used, the repeated recast and the knock procedures used in the present study could be ways of heightening their noticeability and efficacy.

In addition, low literacy individuals more likely will benefit from the use of high-context tasks supported by visuals, meaningful context, and learner-generated questions to support their second language development, especially in English question formations. This means that second-language activities that provide a motivation for finding out information (such as Spot-the-Difference or Information Gap tasks) and include higher levels of familiarity and functionality are more suitable techniques for initiating literacy tasks with low literacy learners than simple rote repetition of grammatically correct question forms without other contextual support.

Furthermore, the fact that a number of low literacy participants evidenced higher rates of No Recall during the Story Completion task could indicate that students could be easily confused as to whether a teacher’s recast is intended to address a morphosyntactic item, a lexical item, or whether it constitutes a confirmation (through repetition) of the student’s meaning. Recasts in the classroom will probably not be as effective for Low Literacy students during meaning-based tasks, given that during a task where an exchange of meaning drives the dialogue, it may be easier for these students to fail to
notice grammatical changes, as occurred for a number of Low Literacy participants
during the Story Completion task. This means that teachers need to be clear to their
students that the recast is *corrective* feedback and draw increased attention to the form. It
may also be beneficial for teachers to focus on one item at a time—meaning, then
grammatical question formation.

A focus on contextual lessons is the approach taken by Vinogradov (2008) to
build literacy with low literacy ESOL adult learners. Vinogradov suggests a whole-part-
whole method for emergent literacy adults in which the teacher initiates lessons with
topics that are relevant to learner experiences and needs. By first introducing images,
concepts, words, and expressions that are familiar to the learners (the whole), then
moving to the decoding of sounds, words, and word families (parts), then introducing a
story utilizing both text and images (whole), teachers can use context to connect the
familiar to the unfamiliar and bridge the gap from concrete topics to abstract text.

For me personally as a teacher of adult ESOL students, I have come to see the
importance in repetition for learners of all literacy levels, yet with an increased need to
support such repetition with realistic visuals and relatable stories derived organically
from students’ experiences and needs. Such steps would allow students to participate
actively in a meaningful, high-context dialogue even within an academic setting, and
allow low literacy students to grow in their understanding of the connection between
spoken language and text. While in the past I have tried to use certain Whole-Part-Whole
techniques in my adult classroom, I see even better reason to implement Vinogradov’s
(2008) suggestions for contextual lesson planning, as I see that it is research-based and
addresses adult ESOL learners’ particular oral and literacy needs in a way that is meaningfully learner-centered.

Additionally, as a teacher I more clearly see the need to make sure that I am very intentional about the purpose of each classroom activity, to introduce meaning-based tasks before form-focused assignments, and to limit such tasks to one specific purpose, either grammar-focused or meaning-focused. By ensuring the clarity of each task, I would allow lower literacy students as well as higher level literacy to work towards mastery of individual language points before moving towards higher level synthesis and integration of skills.

Further Research

This study raises numerous questions that merit further study. A study with more participants could address the following questions: How much of an effect does even a small amount of literacy background have on oral processing abilities in a second language? How can researchers elicit a wider variety of questions during the tasks requiring participant generation of questions? Which parts of speech were most difficult for adult ESOL low literacy learners to recall? Was correction of question word order easier for participants depending on its position in the sentence? In other words, was correct recall affected by the position of the error in the student’s original utterance? Is the level of the question in the typical L2 English question development sequence related to the learners’ ability to recall it? What is the effect of using a highly contextualized task with less on an intimidation factor? Would recasts before more effective for low literacy as well as moderate literacy participants if the vocabulary and question forms were
already familiar? Is uptake of the questions connected to their difficulty according to second language acquisition patterns? How can teachers continue to foster second language literacy development for low literacy ESOL learners?

Conclusion

The present study has sought to address an area of importance for teachers of adult ESOL students regarding the effectiveness of oral feedback in the classroom, specifically considering the level of contextualization of the feedback. The results of this study will be shared with my research site as well as with other local teachers and administrators through Hamline University, and I hope with other teachers of adult ESL at state ESL conferences. The process of investigating this topic and writing a capstone has been a long journey but has led me to an increased appreciation of second language learners’ needs, a personal experience for which I am grateful. Literacy is a highly valuable tool, not only for its importance in a society dependent on text, but additionally as a factor which appears to affect second language learners’ oral processing skills in their second language. This study underscores the difference of oral language processing for low literacy learners, and stresses the importance of context for adult low literacy ESOL students in their acquisition of second language literacy. It is hoped that this study will encourage further research into the experience and best teaching practices of low literacy English language learners so that this unique population may not only reflect metacognitively on their own learning and thought processes, but also progress on their path to greater oral and written second language proficiency.
Appendix A: Introductory Interview Question Examples

(Adapted from Mejía, 2011)

**Questions**
Can you tell me about yourself?
Where are you from? (city or country)
How many people lived in your town/ area of the city?
Was there a school near your home?
Did you have the opportunity to go to that school?
If yes:
What was the school like?
How many students were in your class?
How many students were in your school?
What were the teachers like?
What did you study?

If no:
Did anyone from your family go to school?
Who taught you the things that you know?
How many languages do you speak?
How did you learn X language or X occupation?
How/when did you learn to read and write?

Was your mother able to go to school? If yes, for how long?
Was your father able to go to school? If yes, for how long?
How long have you studied English?
What class are you in now?
Appendix B: Literacy Assessment

NATIVE LANGUAGE LITERACY
SCREENING DEVICE
(ENGLISH)

Dear Student:

Please fill out the form by yourself.

If you cannot answer all the questions, fill out the parts that you can and leave the rest of the form empty.

Thank you.
Today's Date: ____________________________________________
Name: ________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________
Telephone: _____________________________________________
Date of Birth: __________________________________________

1. Where were you born?
   ______________________________________________________

2. In what year did you come to the United States?
   ______________________________________________________

3. How many years did you go to school in your country?
   ______________________________________________________

4. Have you attended English classes in the United States before now?
   ______________________________________________________

5. Are you married?
   ______________________________________________________

6. Do you have children?
   ______________________________________________________
7. What language do you speak at home?

8. Do you read any newspapers or magazines in (insert language of this questionnaire)?

9. What kind of work do you do?

10. What do you like to do when you have free time?

Thank you for answering these questions.

On the following pages are some stories about other students who came to school to learn English.

Please read the stories.
Story #1.

I am happy.

I feel like I am learning.

I am learning to speak English.

I am starting a new life in this country.

In school, my classmates and my teacher help me to learn.

---

Story #2.

My son speaks English.

He speaks English with his friends.

I speak to him in insert the language of this questionnaire.

He speaks to me in English.

Speaking English is very hard for me.

So now I come to this school to learn English.
Story #3.

I came to the United States in 1982.

I came to this school for adults, because I wanted to learn English. My first day at school, I felt nervous.

When I was a child, I couldn't go to school. I had to work to help my family.

My first day at this school for adults, I didn't know what to expect. But my teacher is very nice, and the other students are very nice.

Now I don't feel nervous.

Story #4.

I am 25 years old. I have two daughters. I came to the United States, because I wanted a better life for my daughters. I want to get a good job.

Now I come to this school for adults. We practice English in the classroom. I try to practice English at home but that is not easy. All my friends speak insert the language of this questionnaire. Sometimes I watch English programs on television.

It's not easy to find time to come to school. I'm doing it for my daughters.
We hope you liked the stories about the students who came to school to learn English.

On the lines below, try to write something about yourself. Tell us why you want to learn English, or anything else you would like to tell us.
Appendix C: Literacy Rating Scale

From Tarone, Bigelow and Hansen (2009) and Mejía (2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATING</th>
<th>NATIVE LANGUAGE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Fluency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Follows text with pen; much sub-vocalization; slow speed of reading; retraces/backtracks in text; much difficulty with comprehension; solicits researcher for help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Begins slowly then accelerates; shows some difficulty with decoding; may follow with pen or other finder and/or sub-vocalize; frequently reads twice and much faster the second time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Very comfortable reading; few sub-vocalizations; relatively quick speed; little difficulty with comprehension; may comment on perceived spelling errors in translation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is able to write in another language; is not able to or will not write in their native language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Writes with difficulty in their native language; may protest that they do not know how to spell; sub-vocalization; may solicit help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Writes in native language without any assistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Expresses reluctance to read or write in native language; may say they are unable to do it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Makes an effort, but is insecure about their skills; asks questions throughout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Approaches task without hesitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATING</th>
<th>ENGLISH LANGUAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading Fluency</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Begins slowly then accelerates; shows some difficulty with decoding; may follow with pen or other finder and/or sub-vocalize</td>
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<td>Very comfortable reading; few sub-vocalizations; relatively quick speed; little difficulty with comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is able to write in native language; is not able to or will not write in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Writes with difficulty in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Writes in English without any assistance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is unable/unwilling to attempt a single word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Makes an effort, but is insecure about their skills; asks questions throughout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Approaches task without hesitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Elicited Imitation

Elicited Imitation Question formation
1. Where do I buy the best coffee?
2. Why hasn’t your friend come to class?
3. What is your new baby son named?
4. What is the new drug store selling?
5. Is she nice to the young children?
6. Do you know where the teacher is?
7. How do you get to the bus stop?
8. They are coming today, aren’t they?
9. When will you be coming to school?
10. Are the red apples a good price?
11. She went to the nurse, didn’t she?
12. Who didn’t they ask to the game?
13. How are Tom’s new friends from Roseville?
14. When was the old blue car repaired?
15. Have they opened the new store yet?
16. Can you explain who she just called?
17. Who will he live with in New York?
18. What do they learn at the movies?
19. Where are the kids going Friday?
20. Why has she gone to the shoe store?
21. Why isn’t the child talking?
22. Has she moved to a new house yet?
23. Can you explain where the bank is?
24. Are you starting a new job soon?
25. Who cleaned all the dirty dishes?
26. Has he taken the new test yet?
27. She is learning fast, isn’t she?
28. Can you explain how it happened?
Appendix E: Spot the Difference Task

![Teapot and Umbrella](image)
Appendix F: Story Completion Task
REFERENCES


