Challenging Assumptions
Looking In, Looking Out

Students' perceptions of corrective feedback

Eve Kagimoto
Kurume University
Michael P. H. Rodgers
Fukuoka University

This study investigates student perceptions of corrective feedback in oral English classes at a university level. A total of 139 participants from two universities in southern Japan completed a 25-item survey. Results showed that metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction were the preferred types of oral feedback and also those perceived to be the most useful. Clarification requests and repetition were the least preferred types of feedback and perceived to be the least useful. The findings indicate that student preferences towards different types of feedback strongly reflect the extent to which they perceive them to be useful. The results also show a preference for explicit forms of correction, which lie in contrast to current, communicative language teaching approaches and present trends in error correction in the language classroom. Pedagogical implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

本論文は、総合大学におけるオーラル英語授業の中で、学習者の誤りに教師が指摘したフィードバックに対して、学習者がどう感じとらえたかを分析したものである。日本の2つの大学から139名の学習者が25項目のアンケートに回答し、対象とされた。結果として、学習者が最も好み、役に立つと考えたのは、教師からのメタ言語的フィードバックと明示的なフィードバックであった。教師から学習者へ再度明確に言い直すよう要求したり、教師が再度同じように言い直しても、学習者は、役に立つとは感じず、好まれないフィードバックの方法であった。こうした結果は、学習者の種々のタイプのフィードバックに対する好みが、学習者が役に立つと感じる程度に強く相関していることを示唆した。また、誤りを明らかに訂正することを好む傾向は、現在のコミュニカティブ・ランゲージ・ティーチングと授業中の誤り訂正における現在の傾向に対照的であったことも示唆された。この研究の教育学的意義と限界を検討した。

CHALLENGING
LOOKING IN
LOOKING OUT
ASSUMPTIONS

Issues surrounding corrective feedback have been researched from a variety of different standpoints and remain of interest to both teachers and researchers. From a pedagogical standpoint, teachers have sought to find answers to practical questions such as how and when to correct errors made by students in the classroom. At a more fundamental level, researchers have attempted to investigate the nature of corrective feedback and its relationship to language acquisition (Carroll & Swain,1993; Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Long, Inagaki & Ortega, 1998; Loewen, 2004). Yet despite the widely recognized importance of corrective feedback and its crucial role in the classroom, few studies have sought to investigate student preferences toward different types of feedback, particularly in terms of error correction in the oral classroom.

Previous research into student beliefs towards language learning and error correction suggests that students may have widely differing views from teachers regarding how errors should be corrected in the classroom (Schulz, 2001). As it is widely recognized that a difference in beliefs can lead to student frustration and demotivation (Dornyei, 2003; Sakui & Gales, 1999), it would seem worthwhile to further investigate students' attitudes towards different kinds of feedback and gain a deeper insight into their preferences for specific feedback types. In order to shed some light on this issue, this study examines students' preferences and perceived usefulness of six different types of oral feedback. The study begins by summarizing the relevant literature and outlining the six feedback types as defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997). The methodology and results of the study are then discussed along with suggestions for future research.

Literature review

The majority of research examining corrective feedback in the oral classroom to date has focused on providing descriptive accounts of the nature of corrective feedback in the classroom (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), accounting for the frequency of use of each feedback type (Kato, 2007; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Suzuki, 2004) and examining its relationship with language acquisition (Braidi, 2002; Leeman, 2003; Lyster, 2004; Sheen, 2006) . In their seminal study, Lyster and Ranta (1997) outlined six different types of oral feedback, which were found to commonly occur in the language classroom based on the results of observational studies in French immersion classes. The feedback types were categorized as: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition.

Explicit correction

Explicit correction refers to the explicit provision of a correct form and the clear indication of the non-target-like feature used.

(1) Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: No, not go – went. You should use the past tense.

Recasts

Recasts refer to the reformulation of a student's utterance with the non-target-like feature changed to a correct form. The correction may be accompanied by accentuated word stress or intonation.

(2)   Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: I see…you <u>went</u> for a walk last weekend.

Note: Underlining indicates added stress

Clarification request

A clarification request occurs when a teacher has misunderstood or failed to understand a student's utterance. The teacher then asks for clarification in order to obtain a reformulated version of the utterance.

(3)   Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: Sorry? Would you say that again?

Metalinguistic feedback

Metalinguistic feedback refers to when teachers use the students' current knowledge of English grammar, lexis, etc., to try and elicit a self corrected response from the student .

(4)   Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: How about the past tense?

Elicitation

Elicitation refers to when teachers directly elicit the correct form of an utterance from a student. The correction is often accompanied by accentuated word stress or intonation.

(5)   Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: Really? I <u>drove</u> a car last weekend. I <u>played</u> tennis…I <u>go</u> for a walk?

Repetition

Repetition refers to when the teacher repeats a student's utterance simply adjusting the intonation so as to highlight the error.

(6)   Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: I <u>go</u> for a walk last weekend.

In the same study, Lyster and Ranta (1997) also examined the degree of frequency with which each feedback type was used. Results showed that recasts were by far the most common form of feedback in the classroom, accounting for 55% of all corrective feedback given, while other types, such as explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback, accounted for as little as 7% and 8% respectively. Although there is evidence to suggest that the frequency and amount of each type of feedback may be dependent on the task under observation (Mackey, Oliver & Leeman, 2003; Oliver, 1995, 2000), several studies in classroom settings have shown that recasts are consistently prevalent and the most widely used form of feedback in a communicative classroom setting (Doughty, 1994; Iwashita, 2003; Kato, 2007; Panova & Lyster, 2002). While recasts have been found to be the most prevalent form of feedback however, there remains some doubt as to how effective they are in terms of ultimate learner uptake and in particular, how their efficacy compares with other types of feedback used in the classroom.

The supposed effectiveness of each feedback type is arguably determined by its relationship with language uptake. In their study, although Lyster and Ranta (1997) found recasts to be the most common form of feedback, they also found them to be the least likely to lead to successful

uptake. These results added further support to a previous study in which Oliver (1995) also found that fewer than 10% of recasts were incorporated into the speakers following utterances. Although implicit forms of feedback such as recasts may be frequently used in the communicative classroom therefore, there is still uncertainty as to how effective such forms of correction are in leading to student uptake.

One of the well-documented potential problems with implicit correction is to what extent the students actually notice the teacher's provision of feedback. In a study by Mackey, Gass, and McDonough (2000), they found that grammatical corrections were much less likely to be noticed than lexical or phonological corrections. This may in part have been due to the fossilized nature of many grammatical mistakes, making correction less noticeable. As several researchers have argued that noticing or attention to form is necessary for language acquisition to take place (Schmidt, 1994, 2001; Long 1996), an awareness of the feedback being provided would seem a critical aspect of the correction process and a necessary first step if feedback is to ultimately lead to language gains.

While several of the issues surrounding corrective feedback are thus fundamental to language learning, it is surprising that, to our knowledge, no study to date has sought to examine student preferences and perceived usefulness regarding different types of oral feedback available in the language classroom. Although students' preferences and perceived usefulness of feedback types can not be directly related to language learning, the indirect effects of how students perceive feedback may have an influence on how the students ultimately deal with the feedback received in the classroom. A feedback type, which is well liked and perceived as useful, for example, may be adhered to more conscientiously than a feedback type that is disliked and deemed as irrelevant. Although obviously, attitude is only one of a myriad of factors which may influence how students utilize feedback, it is nonetheless an important variable which warrants further attention.

Research questions

In order to shed further light on student perceptions of corrective feedback in the oral classroom therefore, the following research questions were investigated:

(1)   What are university students' preferred types of oral feedback?

(2)   Which types of oral feedback are perceived to be the most useful?

(3)   What is the relationship between the preferences and perceived usefulness of each feedback type?

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were 139 first to third year students at two universities in southern Japan. The participants were 62% male and 38% female, aged from 18 to 21. Of the 139 participants, 53 were enrolled in two complete classes of 24 and 29 students at a mid-sized national university and 86 were enrolled in four complete

classes of approximately 20 students at a mid-sized private university. They were all enrolled in oral or writing classes, which met for 90 minutes once a week under the instruction of one of the two authors. The classes were not leveled, however the general level of students at the national university was regarded as being higher than that of the private university based on university entrance exam policies. All participants had on average 8 years of prior English education.

Instrument

A 25-item survey was designed as shown in Appendix 1 and printed in a booklet format. Except for the boxed conversation examples, which were written in English, the survey was presented entirely in Japanese. Pilot administration of the survey showed that students had some difficulty in understanding the phrase *past tense*, and as such, a Japanese definition was provided as a glossed term below each text box in which it was used. All other words used in the conversation examples were taken from the first 1000 words of the General Service List (West, 1953) and were therefore assumed to be easily understandable to students at a university level. The first 12 items of the survey related to the six types of oral feedback outlined in the literature review: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. The following 8 items addressed four forms of written feedback: audience, assistant, evaluator, and examiner. Each example of a feedback type was followed by 2 items using a 7-point semantic differential scale. The items used two sets of bipolar adjectives: like and dislike, useful and useless. For example:

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: I see…you <u>went</u> for a walk last weekend.

Like ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Dislike**
Useful____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useless**

Each conversation example started with the same mistaken student utterance: *I go for a walk last weekend*. It was hoped that using the same initial example would allow students to discriminate more easily between the different feedback types. Participants were required to respond by marking a cross in one of the seven blanks along the continuum. The position of the *positive* and *negative* poles was varied throughout the items in order to avoid superficial responding or a position response set (Aiken, 1996). As pilot test results of the study showed that students would be more able to clearly differentiate the different types of oral feedback if the written prose was accompanied by an audio, a CD of all the oral feedback examples was recorded. To make the audio as authentic as possible, a young native Japanese woman aged 27 supplied the voice of the student while one of the authors recorded the voice of the teacher.

The final five items on the survey sought to gain biometric data including the participant's age, gender, grade in college, number of years of English study, and level of interest in English. The biometric questions were placed at the end of the survey in line with Dornyei's recommendation to make starter questions more involving and to leave the sensitive data until the end (Dornyei, 2003).

Procedures

The survey was distributed during the final 20 minutes of the penultimate class in a 13-week semester. The penultimate class was chosen to avoid conflicts with exams taking place in the final classes. The participants were instructed to read the instructions on the front page of the survey (Appendix 1) and were then asked to open their booklets. As the first half of the survey regarding oral corrective feedback was accompanied by an audio CD, the participants were asked to mark each item in turn after hearing the audio example. A CD of all the oral feedback examples was played throughout the first section of the survey. When all students had finished the first section of the survey, they were instructed to progress to the second section, which they were free to complete in their own time. On finishing the survey, the students were allowed to leave the classroom. In order to ensure familiarity with all the feedback types, the authors, who were responsible for all classes from which participants were drawn, made an active attempt to include the feedback types outlined in the survey throughout the preceding semester. Both teachers tried to include all six feedback types within each 90 minute class during the 11-week period preceding the study. As students had on average 8 years of prior English learning experience in addition to the 11-week period with the instructors, it was assumed that they would be suitably familiar with the different feedback types.

Results

Of the six oral feedback types, metalinguistic feedback was found to have the highest mean (4.56) on the like / dislike preference scale suggesting that, for the participants in this study, it was the most popular type of feedback. Explicit feedback was also shown to be one of the preferred feedback types with a mean of 4.51. Repetition recorded the lowest overall mean at 2.46. As this was lower than the central point 3.5 on the 7-point scale, it indicated that repetition was viewed negatively, and largely disliked by the participants. Clarification requests also showed a mean below that of the central point, suggesting that they were also a disliked form of feedback.

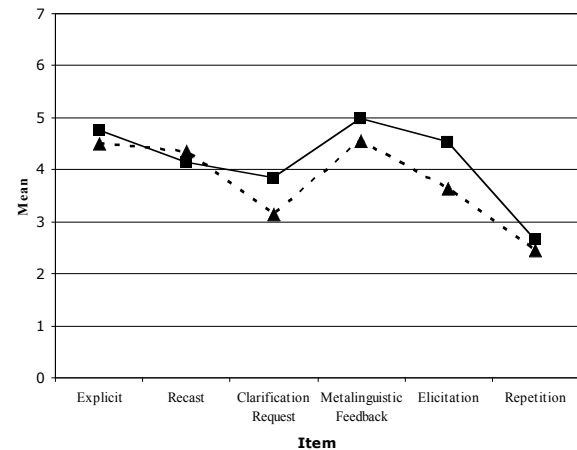### Table 1. Preferences for oral corrective feedback by type

	Feedback Type	Mean Score
1.	Metalingustic feedback	4.56
2.	Explicit correction	4.51
3.	Recasts	4.35
4.	Elicitation	3.63
5.	Clarification request	3.13
6.	Repetition	2.46

In terms of the perceived usefulness of different feedback types, metalinguistic feedback also showed the highest mean (4.98) and was followed by explicit feedback with a mean of 4.75. Similarly to the results of preferences for feedback types, repetition and clarification requests were perceived to be the least useful types of feedback with mean scores of 2.64 and 3.83 respectively. Only repetition showed a mean of fewer than 3.5, suggesting that all other feedback types were deemed to be useful to some degree.

Table 2. Perceived usefulness of oral corrective feedback by type

	Feedback Type	Mean Score
1.	Metalingustic feedback	4.98
2.	Explicit correction	4.75
3.	Elicitation	4.52
4.	Recasts	4.13
5.	Clarification request	3.83
6.	Repetition	2.64

Aside from recasts, which scored 0.22 lower on the mean for perceived usefulness than that of likeability, all the feedback types showed higher mean values for the perceived usefulness than the likeability. In addition, except for recasts and elicitation, whose rankings were reversed between preferences and perceived usefulness, each feedback type remained in the same ranked position with metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction consistently ranking number one and two, and clarification requests and repetition ranking number five and six.

Figure 1. Preferences and perceived usefulness of oral corrective feedback by type

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate student preferences and perceived usefulness toward six types of oral corrective feedback. The results showed that of the six types, metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction, with means of 4.56 and 4.51, were the most preferred types of feedback. Clarification requests and repetition, showing means of 3.13 and 2.46, were the least preferred types. Similarly, in terms of the feedback types which students perceived to be the most useful, metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction showed the highest means of 4.98 and 4.75, while clarification requests and repetition recorded the lowest means of 3.83 and 2.64.

In terms of student preferences towards different types of feedback, the results show that students generally prefer more explicit forms of correction. Metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction, which ranked number one and two in terms of student preferences, provided the most explicit types of feedback investigated. Equally, repetition, which was considered to represent the most implicit form of feedback in that the initial utterance remained unchanged with a difference only in intonation, ranked number six and was found to be the least popular. These results therefore further support the findings of previous studies on student and teacher beliefs, which suggest that students prefer more explicit forms of correction while teachers generally prefer more implicit types (Schulz, 2001).

This potential mismatch between the way in which students wish their erroneous utterances to be corrected and the way in which teachers are using corrective feedback in the classroom is further highlighted in terms of the frequency of use of different feedback types. As stated above, the most common form of feedback, accounting for over half of all feedback given in the classroom, is that of recasts (Iwashita, 2003; Kato, 2007; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In contrast, explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback have been found to account for only 7% and 8% of feedback in the classroom (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). In terms of student preferences however, metalinguistic feedback and explicit correction were found to be the most popular, as well as the most useful types of feedback, and as such may deserve greater attention in the language classroom. In addition, recasts, which are currently the most common form of feedback used by teachers, were found to be relatively well liked with a mean of 4.35 and third ranking but were perceived to be less useful, with both the mean and ranking dropping to 4.13 and 4 respectively.. Of all the six types of corrective feedback, recasts were the only type for which the perceived usefulness score fell below that of the preference, suggesting that students may also be aware of the limitations which recasts carry in terms of the necessity for noticing. Further research, including observational studies of the types and frequency of corrective feedback actually used by the two instructors in this study however, may be necessary to confirm the precise relationship between corrective feedback use and student preferences.

Aside from the result for recasts, the means for the preferences and perceived usefulness for each feedback type were highly similar, with the score for perceived usefulness slightly higher for each type of feedback than that for preference. To a great extent therefore, the results reflect each other, and aside from the middle two rankings, the rankings of each feedback type remain the same. Unfortunately, what is not clear from this study is the extent to which the preferences for each feedback type are dependent on the perceived usefulness and vice versa. In other words, the results are not enough to show a causal relationship between the two factors and the degree to which one factor may influence the other. For example, does a high degree of perceived usefulness of a feedback type lead to it being well-liked or is a well-liked form of feedback automatically perceived to be more useful? Further research into the relationship between these two variables may help shed more light on this issue and further deepen our understanding of student perceptions towards feedback and

their role in second language acquisition. In addition, further research is also needed to investigate students' past foreign language learning experiences and how familiarity with particular feedback types may influence student preferences toward them.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that teachers need to pay more attention to explicit forms of feedback in the classroom. While the provision of explicit forms of feedback may appear to contrast with the widely accepted approaches found within meaning-focused communicative language teaching, the results of this study suggest that not only do students prefer explicit forms of correction but they also find them to be the most useful. In order to accommodate student preferences and increase motivation towards language learning therefore, it may be necessary to reconsider feedback types used in classrooms and seek ways to provide students with a more a balanced variety of corrective feedback types.

Acknowledgments

Eve Kagimoto has taught English for 7 years in Tanzania, Europe, and Japan. Her current research interests include student demotivation, the role of corrective feedback in SLA, and vocabulary acquisition. <kagimoto_eve@kurume-u.ac.jp>

Michael Rodgers is presently teaching at Fukuoka University. He has been teaching English at various institutions in Japan since 1996. His research interests include vocabulary coverage in media and student-teacher classroom beliefs. <michaelphrodgers@gmail.com>

References

Aiken, L. (1996). *Rating scales and checklists: Evaluating behavior, personality, and attitudes*. New York: John Wiley.

Braidi, S. (2002). Reexamining the role of recasts in native-speaker / nonnative-speaker interactions. *Language Learning*, 52(1), 1-42.

Carroll, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and implicit negative feedback: An empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalizations. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 15, 357-376.

Dornyei, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Doughty, C. (1994). Finetuning of feedback by competent speakers to language learners. In J. Alatis (Ed.), *Strategic interaction and language acquisition: Theory, practice, and research, GURT*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.

Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 28, 339-368.

JALT2007 — Challenging Assumptions

Iwashita, N. (2003). Negative feedback and positive evidence in task-based interaction: Differential effects on L2 development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 25 (1), 1-36.

Kato, M. (2007). Corrective Feedback in oral communication classes at a Japanese senior high school. *The Language Teacher,* 31(3), 3-8.

Leeman, J. (2003). Recasts and second language development: Beyond negative evidence. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 25, 37-63.

Loewen, S. (2004). Uptake in incidental focus on form in meaning-focused ESL lessons. *Language Learning*, *42*(1), 153-188.

Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In Ritchie, W. C. and Bhatia, T. K. (Eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition.* San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Long, M.H., Inagaki, S., & Ortega, L. (1998). The role of implicit negative evidence in SLA: Models and recasts in Japanese and Spanish. *The Modern Language Journal, 82*, 357-371.

Lyster, R. (2004) Differential effects of prompts and recasts in form-focused instruction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 20*(1), 51-92.

Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 19*(1), 37-66.

Mackey, A., Gass, S., & McDonough, K. (2000). Do learners recognize implicit negative feedback as feedback? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 22*(4), 471-497.

Mackey, A., Oliver, R. & Leeman, J. (2003). Interactional input and the incorporation of feedback: An exploration of NS-NNS and NNS-NNS adult and child dyads. *Language Learning*, *53*, 35-56.

Oliver, R. (1995). Negative feedback in child NS/NNS conversation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 17*, 459-481.

Oliver, R. (2000). Age differences in negotiation and feedback in classroom and pair-work. *Language Learning, 50*, 119-151.

Panova, I., & Lyster, R. (2002). Patterns of corrective feedback and uptake in and adult ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, *36*(4), 573-595.

Sakui, K. & Gales, S. J. (1999). Investigating learners' beliefs about language learning. System, *27*, 473-492.

Schmidt, R. (1994). Deconstructing consciousness in search of useful definitions of applied linguistics. *AILA Review*, *11*, 11-26.

Schmidt, R. (2001). Attention. In Robinson, P. (Ed). *Cognition and Second Language Instruction* (pp. 3-32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schulz, R. A. (2001). Cultural differences in student and teacher perceptions concerning the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback. *The Modern Language Journal*, *85*(2), 244-258.

Sheen, Y. (2006). Exploring the relationship between characteristics of recasts and learner uptake. *Language Teaching Research*, *10*(4), 361-392.

Suzuki, M. (2004). Corrective feedback and learner uptake in adult ESL classrooms. *Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics*, 4(2). Teachers College: Columbia University.

West, M. (1953). A General Service List of English Words. Longman: London.

Appendix 1

Survey preferences and perceived usefulness of corrective feedback

We would like to ask you to help us by answering the following questions concerning foreign language learning and teacher feedback. This is not a test so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We are interested in your personal opinion. Please give us your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the investigation. All results will remain entirely confidential. Thank you for your help.

Below are six examples of different types of **oral** feedback your teacher may provide you with in the classroom. Using the scale below please mark an · to show 1) the extent to which you like the form of feedback and 2) the extent to which you feel the feedback is useful. An example is written below.

EXAMPLE

Student: She like flowers.

Teacher: She <u>likes</u> flowers.

Like ____:·_:____:____:____:____:____ **Dislike**

Useful____:____:____:____:·_:____:____ **Useless**

SURVEY

1. <u>Oral Example 1</u>

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: No, not go – went. You should use the past tense.

Like ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Dislike**

Useless ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useful**

2. <u>Oral Example 2</u>

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: I see…you **_went_** for a walk last weekend.

Dislike ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Like**

Useful____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useless**

3 <u>Oral Example 3</u>

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: Sorry? Would you say that again?

Like ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Dislike**

Useful____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useless**

4 <u>Oral Example 4</u>

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: Past tense?

Dislike ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Like**

Useless ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useful**

5 <u>Oral Example 5</u>

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: Really? I **_drove_** a car last weekend. I **_played_** tennis…

I **_go_** for a walk?

Like   ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Dislike**

Useful____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useless**

6 <u>Oral Example 6</u>

Student: I go for a walk last weekend.

Teacher: I go for a walk last weekend?

Like   ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Dislike**

Useful____:____:____:____:____:____:____ **Useless**

Please fill-in the following information for our records. It will remain entirely confidential.

7   **Age:** _____

8   **Sex:** Male   Female

9   **Year In University:** 1 2 3 4

10   **Number of years studied English:** _____

11   **Level of interest in English:**   low medium high