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Examining the Causes Underlying Learners' Clarification Requests in EFL Context

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Abstract

For decades, Corrective Feedback (CF) has received considerable attention in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and a wide scope of research has been conducted on this subject. Clarification Requests (CRs), one of the corrective feedback types, refers to a conversational strategy used when there is ambiguity or incomprehension. In the second language (L2) learning context, CRs is a highly neglected area that deserves due attention. In order to comprehend the reasons for learners' lack of apprehension encountered in the L2 learning process, more studies should be conducted in this area. This paper, therefore, aimed to develop a scale investigating the underlying causes for CRs made in the language learning process. After constituting the statements of the scale (which were based on students' written responses) a pilot study was performed with 100 preparatory classroom students in a public university in Alanya, Antalya, Turkey. After the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the CRs scale was determined to have two essential factors (F1: language and learner-related factors, F2: concentration or motivation-related factors), consisting of 13 statements, each representing a different cause for CRs. To verify the findings obtained from the pilot study, the main study was conducted with the participation of 138 learners, and the factor structure of the developed scale was confirmed after the confirmatory factor analysis. Findings of this study have also shown that language-related factors (e.g., unknown vocabulary, lack of language proficiency) are the most common causes of CRs.

Keywords: Corrective feedback; Clarification requests; Ask for clarification

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Introduction

For a long time, there has been a growing amount of discussion on the sources of learners' mistakes and errors in the language learning process (Dulay & Burt, 1974). Even though the terms ‘error’ and ‘mistake’ appear identical at first glance, there is a fundamental distinction between these two terms. Errors show where a student's understanding is lacking; they arise when the learner is unsure about what is correct. Mistakes, on the other hand, designate rare failures in performance; they occur when the learner is unable to accomplish what he or she understands in a specific situation (Ellis, 1997). In a similar point of view, Corder (1967) claimed that a mistake is related to physical conditions e.g., fatigue, or to psychological conditions of the learners such as emotions, and an error is the result of a transitional competence in L2.

Learners' errors are a natural part of their language learning process; teachers, in this process, should expect and accept these mistakes from their students. There have been numerous debates throughout the years on whether or not students' mistakes should be corrected, when they should be corrected, and what kind of errors should be corrected (Burt, 1975; Pawlak, 2013). Dulay and Burt (1974), in this regard, denoted that errors do not indicate poor learning or the need for instructional intervention. On the other hand, according to Hendrickson (1978), correcting language learners' oral and written errors enhances their foreign language proficiency more than if the errors are left untreated. Looking at the categorization of learners’ errors, Brown (2000) mentioned several error types in his book some of which were global errors which “hinder communication; they prevent the hearer from understanding some aspect of the message” and local errors, which do not prevent the message from being heard, usually because “there is just a slight violation of one segment of a phrase, enabling the hearer/reader to make an appropriate judgment about the intended meaning” (pp. 231-232). Therefore, he claimed that local errors usually do not need to be corrected, since the message is obvious and correction may interrupt the student's flow of speech.

The term, ‘feedback’ or more specifically, ‘Corrective feedback (CF)’, in the L2 context, refers to the responses given to students on linguistic errors they make in their oral or written production in a second language (L2) (Sheen & Ellis, 2011). Feedback provided in either the oral or written form during the language learning process has been believed to facilitate this process and contribute to the development of learners’ language proficiency

(Mackey, 2006). According to Lyster et al. (2013), CF is critical in the type of scaffolding that teachers must offer to individual students in order to support ongoing L2 improvement.

The comprehensive studies on corrective feedback in L2 learning have started with the definition and the categorization of different corrective feedback types employed in the teaching and learning process. Lyster & Ranta (1997), in this sense, listed the distinct types of corrective feedback in six categories in their study; explicit correction, recast, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. The latter studies conducted in this field have mostly incorporated the effectiveness of CF (Ellis et al., 2001; Li, 2010; Russell & Spada, 2006) and learner or teacher preferences or their attitudes towards CF (Yang, 2016; Yoshida, 2008). Despite the fact that there is much research on corrective feedback in the literature, there is no particular study focusing on clarification requests (hereafter CRs), which is one of the most common forms of corrective feedback. On the other hand, examining the underlying causes of learners' CRs in the language learning process is believed to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and problems encountered in this process. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the potential causes of learners' CRs in the L2 setting by addressing the following research question.

What are the causes underlying learners' clarification requests in the language learning process?

Theoretical Framework

Corrective Feedback

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), corrective feedback (CF) has received a substantial amount of attention for decades. The term 'corrective feedback' refers to "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance" (Chaudron, 1977, p. 31). CF is the type of feedback that students receive when they make linguistic mistakes in their oral or written production in a foreign language learning process. According to Sheen (2004), corrective feedback is "an umbrella term that covers implicit and explicit negative feedback occurring in both natural conversational and instructional settings" (p. 264).

Lyster and Ranta (1997) listed the six types of main corrective feedback types, shown and explained in detail in the following table:

Table 1. Corrective Feedback Types (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Corrective Feedback Type	Definition	Example
Explicit correction	the process of providing the learner with direct forms of feedback, explicitly stating that the learner's response is wrong (Carroll & Swain, 1993).	S: I am always wake up at 7. T: Not I am. You should say I always wake up at 7.
Recast	utterances in which one or more sentence components (such as subject, verb, or object) are changed while the essential meanings remain the same (Long, 1996).	S: There is an book in my bag. T: There is A book in my bag.
Clarification requests	using question forms such as "Pardon?", "I'm sorry?" in the situations where the learner's utterance is not fully understood (Suzuki, 2004).	S: Who do you travel with your friend? T: I'm sorry, what?
Metalinguistic feedback	provides either comment, facts, or questions on the well-formedness of the student's speech, but does not provide the right form directly (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).	S: I need to talk to he. T: He is a subject pronoun, you should use the object pronoun in this sentence.
Elicitation	a corrective technique that prompts the learner to self-correct (Panova & Lyster, 2002)	S: This meeting is very importanter. T: This meeting is very …? S: Important.
Repetition	a verbatim repetition of a student's statement, often with altered intonation to emphasize the mistake (Lyster et al., 2013).	S: I eated my cake! T: I EATED my cake? S: I ate my cake.

Many researchers have debated which sort of corrective feedback would be most effective in correcting learners' mistakes and promoting second or foreign language development up to this point. Regarding the effect of corrective feedback, studies generated in this field have revealed positive results in general, but different findings for the distribution of different forms of feedback and their effects on learning in different contexts have prevailed (Sheen, 2004).

Lyster and Ranta (1997), in their study, investigated the most common feedback types used during the teaching process. Prior to initializing their study, they listed six types of feedback; repetition, recast, elicitation, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, and explicit correction. Findings of their study have revealed that recast, as corrective feedback is the most common one, making up 55% of all other feedback types, followed by elicitation, (14%), clarification request (11%), metalinguistic feedback (%8), explicit correction (%7), repetition (%5).

Panova and Lyster (2002), in a similar study, examined the most frequent seven feedback types: recast, repetition, translation, elicitation, explicit correction, clarification request, and metalinguistic feedback. Recast and translation of learner mistakes were the most commonly utilized forms of feedback, with recasts accounting for more than half of all feedback turns. Recast, in total, accounted for 55% of the feedback moves, followed by translation technique (%22), clarification request (%11), metalinguistic feedback (%5), elicitation (%4), explicit correction (%2), repetition (%1).

Clarification Requests

The term clarification request (CRs) refers to a conversational strategy used when there is ambiguity or incomprehension. It is an interrogative utterance by which the speaker requests an explanation, confirmation, or repetition of a statement previously provided by the listener who was not fully comprehended (Cicognani & Zani, 1988).

A clarification request is intended to encourage reformulation or repetition from the student regarding the form of the student's ill-formed statement. This form of response typically demands clarification of the meaning as well. Clarification requests are utilized when problems with the form impact the comprehensibility of the utterance due to the students' low language proficiency level (Panova & Lyster, 2002).

It is essential to have the capacity to recognize and respond to listener input in order to operate in conversation and improve one's conversational skills. This growing awareness is visible in sequences in which the student provides repairs in response to indicators that a message was not comprehended. Participation in conversational repair sentences, therefore, is an essential aspect of the language learning process (Brinton et al., 1986).

During the conversation, CRs mainly occur in two forms: non-verbal and verbal forms. Using mimics or gestures to ask for clarification is the non-verbal form (Cherry,

1979). Clarification markers in a rising intonation (e.g. what?, hey?), repetition (partial, whole, or with expansion or syntactic reformulation) (Brown, 1968; Cherry, 1979; Corsaro, 1977; Langford, 1981; Robinson, 1984), interpretation (e.g. did you mean …?) (Moerk, 1977), and the statement of incomprehensibility (e.g. I did not understand) (Robinson, 1984) are the verbal forms used to ask for clarification in an ongoing conversation (Cicognani & Zani, 1988).

Table 2. Types of Clarification Requests

Types of CRs	**Forms**	**Example**
Non-verbal (Cherry, 1979).	gestures and mimics	S: what time … school? T: *tends his/her ear*
Verbal (Brown, 1968; Cherry, 1979; Corsaro, 1977; Langford, 1981; Moerk, 1977; Robinson, 1984).	clarification markers	S: my friends … question. T: What?
	repetition (partial)	S: I want the *mispronounces a word* T: Do you want what?
	repetition (whole)	S: I want to say the answer. T: Do you want to say the answer?
	repetition (with expansion or syntactic reformulation)	S: I … out? T: I want to go out?
	interpretation	S: I… answer … *looks puzzled* T: You do not know the answer?
	statement of incomprehensibility	S: What time … finish? T: I haven't understood.

Despite the fact that numerous research has focused on different forms of oral corrective feedback, clarification requests as part of oral corrective feedback has received little attention. To put it another way, there is not much research investigating the causes of learners' clarification requests during the foreign language learning process. In this regard, this study will be a pioneer for future research in this field as it deals with a subject that has not previously been addressed extensively.

Methodology

The current study is a scale development study employing a sequential exploratory mixed design in which the researcher explores qualitative data and applies it to the quantitative research dimension (Creswell, 2013).

This research aimed to develop a five-point Likert scale (from 1 to 5, indicating 1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-usually, 5-always) whose each statement represents a different cause for CRs in order to understand the underlying causes of learners' CRs and to examine the most common causes of CRs in the foreign language process. The statements of the CRs scale were written with reference to the collected qualitative data, the CRs scale was later applied to the participants, and the quantitative data was collected and analyzed in the following phase.

This research is grounded on Long's interaction hypothesis which specifies that interactional processes improve second language acquisition because interaction connects "input, internal learner capacities, especially selective attention, and output in productive ways." (Long, 1996, pp. 451-452). Negotiating meaning and providing recasts are two helpful interactional techniques which might provide corrective feedback by letting learners know that their utterances were problematic. Modified output is another interactional process that can occur as a result of feedback (Mackey, 2006).

Research Context

The current research was conducted during the spring semester of 2021-2022 in a public university in Alanya, Antalya, Turkey, and the data were collected from engineering students, aged 18 to 21, living in Alanya, taking 25 hours of foreign language classes per week in the university's English preparatory program. The language proficiency levels of the participants are B1+ (Intermediate Plus) and B2 (Upper-Intermediate).

Qualitative data (students' written responses) were collected from 17 preparatory classroom students (f=2, m=15). The pilot study was conducted with the participation of 100 preparatory classroom students (f=30, m=70), and for the main study, 138 preparatory classroom students (f=46, m= 92) were involved.

Procedure

Prior to the data collecting procedure, after determining data collection tools to be utilized in this research, an application was filed to the Alanya University Ethics Committee to ensure that the research is ethically appropriate. Following clearance from the Ethics Committee (see Appendix A), data for this study were gathered from university preparatory class students at a public university in Alanya, Antalya, Turkey, during the spring semester of 2021-2022.

Participants were informed about the research before the data collection, and it was emphasized that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and the data for this research would not be used for any other purposes without the participants' permission. The researcher also reflected that participants might quit whenever they wanted and that the research results would be shared with them if they so desired.

To create the statements (items) of the CRs scale, written responses of 17 university preparatory classroom students regarding the causes of CRs they made during the learning process were collected and analyzed with the content analysis method. Subsequent to the qualitative data collection process, 20 items, each representing a different cause of CRs, were written for the CRs scale and expert opinion was taken from two specialists working in the field of educational sciences and foreign language education. With regard to their comments, a few minor changes were made on the prepared items and the scale was piloted with the participation of 100 university preparatory classroom students, to see the factor structure of the CRs scale.

After the pilot study was conducted and performed, 7 items, which were determined to have lower reliability value, were excluded from the CRs scale after item analysis and factor analysis were performed. Thus, it was determined that the CRs scale would consist of two factors embracing 13 statements. To verify the findings obtained from the pilot study, the main study was conducted with the participation of 138 university preparatory classroom students, and the factor structure of the CRs scale was confirmed in the main study.

Data Collection Tools

Students' Written Responses

To comprehend the causes underlying CRs and to generate the statements of the CRs scale based on their responses, , learners were requested to think and write about the causes of the clarification requests they made during the learning process. In this regard, the participants were given thirty minutes to complete the task, with no word constraints for the written responses.

Clarification Request Scale

In order to investigate the causes underlying learners' clarification requests, the CRs scale (which initially encapsulated 20 statements, each representing a different cause for CRs

that were based on the written responses of 17 participants) was formed and piloted before the actual study with the participation of 100 students. After the data collection process for the pilot study, exploratory factor analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences v. 21) program to see the factor structure of the developed scale. After the exploratory factor analysis, the CRs scale was determined to have a two-factor structure (F1: language and learner-related factors, F2: concentration or motivation-related factors), consisting of 13 statements. To determine the reliability value of the developed scale, Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated and was found to be .844, indicating that the CRs scale is highly reliable (Cortina, 1993).

Having determined that the prepared questionnaire was applicable and reliable enough, the actual study was performed with the participation of 138 students, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using LISREL (Linear Structural Relations), a statistical program package particularly designed to estimate structural equation models (SEMs), to verify the factor structure of the developed scale. The findings of the confirmatory factor analysis have confirmed the factor structure of the CRs scale.

Results

During the development of the CRs scale, the written responses of the 17 student volunteers corresponding to the causes of the clarification requests they made during the learning process were gathered to form the statements (items) of the scale. The collected responses were then analyzed with the content analysis method. The following table illustrates the content analysis results of students' written responses, including related codes and themes/categories.

Table 3. Content Analysis Results of Written Responses

Themes/Categories	Code(s)	Frequency / Participant(s)
unknown vocabulary	vocabulary	6 (S1, S3, S8, S10, S11, S12)
	word	3 (S1, S4, S16)
	familiar	2 (S1, S16)
the lack of language proficiency	language difficulties	2 (S6, S8) 1 (S6)
ask for simplification/examples	simple example	1 (S1) 1 (S1)
complicated materials/tasks	material activities	2 (S10, S14) 2 (S2, S14)
learning anxiety	anxiety	1 (S15)

complicated instruction	instruction	2 (S11, S13)
	complex	1 (S13)
concentration problems	focus	2 (S2, S15)
	attention	2 (S2, S6)
	concentration	1 (S7)
the lack of motivation	motivated	1 (S5)
the lack of interest	interest	2 (S4, S17)
teacher's pronunciation	pronunciation	1 (S4)
activity instruction mismatch	inconsistency	1 (S7)
distractors	distractors	1 (S3)
	behaviors	1 (S3)
the lack of listening practice	listening	2 (S9, S17)
	practice	2 (S9, S17)
negative experiences	experience	1 (S15)

For some participants, the lack of vocabulary or unknown words used in the instruction given by teachers to learners during the teaching process was considered as the most common causes of CR.

> I think the reason why instruction is not understood is the lack of vocabulary. I can understand better when simple and familiar words are used. (S1)

> The lack of vocabulary that I have is the biggest factor in my inability to understand the given instructions. (S3)

The lack of language proficiency, inability to master the grammar rules properly, and problems understanding the sentence forms are among the causes of CRs.

> […] Sometimes I have difficulties in understanding when I am not good at the target language. (S6)

> In my opinion, the lack of language proficiency may result in poor understanding of the given instructions. (S8)

Some participants stated that during the learning process, they intentionally make CRs so that their instructors make simplifications or give extra examples about the given instruction.

> Sometimes I think that expressing the instruction in a simpler way or supporting it with examples will make it easier for me to understand the instruction given. (S1)

The difficulty of the task or the material used in the teaching process were considered as one of the causes of CRs.

> The complexity of the materials used in the lessons or the use of incorrect resources that are not suitable for the level of the student can sometimes cause the student not to understand the instruction given. (S10)

> […] We may experience problems because the instructions used in the course materials or activities are complex or are above the student's level. (S14)

Some of the students expressed that the learning anxiety that they have may sometimes cause them not to understand the given instruction.

> The reason we don't understand the given instructions can sometimes be due to […] the anxiety we have. (S15)

For some learners, the language used to give an instruction which includes long and complex structured sentences that learners are unfamiliar with are one of the causes of CR.

> Sometimes the complexity of the activity or the instruction given for that activity can make it difficult for me to understand. (S11)

> Sometimes I find it difficult to understand because the instructions given during the lesson are either so long or so complex to understand. (S13)

For some participants, not concentrating enough on the lesson causes them to make CRs.

> Sometimes I have difficulty understanding the instruction given because I cannot focus enough on the lesson or do not pay attention properly. (S2)

> Due to the lack of attention, I can miss some important points, which causes the instruction given to be poorly understood by me. (S6)

The lack of motivation, or interest, according to some participants, seemed to be the other cause of CRs.

> As I am not motivated enough to learn, I may not understand the instructions given at times. (S5)

> Sometimes there may be some points that I don't understand because I lost interest in the lesson. (S4)

> The fact that the topic does not attract enough attention, or not appealing enough for the learners are among the main factors. (S17)

Interestingly, for one of the participants, the teacher's pronunciation may cause learners to do CRs.

> The fact that the teacher uses a word whose pronunciation I am not familiar with during the instruction-giving process can make it difficult for me to understand. (S4)

A participant expressed that the inconsistency between the given instruction and the task may cause CRs.

> Sometimes the inconsistency between the instruction given and the activity may prevent me from participating in the activity. (S7)

Distractors are among the other causes of CRs, for some participants.

> Sometimes I have problems understanding the instruction given due to the behavior of my friends in the classroom or some distracting factors. (S3)

Some participants claimed that a lack of listening practice makes it difficult to comprehend the instructions given to them.

> Because we do not practice listening enough, we may have difficulty understanding the instructions given. (S9)

Finally, for some of the participants, negative experiences that they had during the language learning process in the past had an impact on their understanding.

> The reason we don't understand the given instructions can sometimes be due to negative experiences we have had in the past […]. (S15)

Upon analyzing the students' written responses, 20 statements, each representing a different cause for CRs, were written by the researcher. The prepared scale's content validity was confirmed by consulting two specialists in the fields of foreign language education and educational sciences. After which, in order to determine its reliability and validity, the pre-application of the prepared scale form was performed with 100 participants, which was five times the number of items on the scale. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), when developing a Likert-type scale, the number of participants in the pilot study should be at least five times the number of items on the scale, indicating that this ratio can provide appropriate

estimates, and the studies including participants less than this number may yield suspicious results.

After collecting data for the pilot study, validity and reliability analyses were performed respectively. In this sense, item analysis was initially performed. According to Ferketich (1991), if the item correlation value is less than 0.30, the item may not be related to the problem being measured. Therefore, 7 items, with a corrected item-total correlation lower than 0.30, were excluded from the scale for the current study. The following table illustrates the analysis results of the remaining 13 items.

Table 4. Item Analysis Results of the CRs Scale

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	**Scale Variance if Item Deleted**	**Corrected Item-Total Correlation**	**Squared Multiple Correlation**	**Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted**
Teacher's pronunciation	28.8900	64.665	0.430	0.369	0.837
Lack of listening practice	28.0200	60.101	0.520	0.396	0.832
Lack of proficiency	27.8900	61.574	0.559	0.396	0.829
Complicated materials/tasks	28.9400	60.804	0.639	0.496	0.824
Learning anxiety	28.3500	61.583	0.474	0.352	0.835
Complicated instruction	28.4800	63.202	0.560	0.444	0.830
Unknown vocabulary	27.6000	63.859	0.478	0.308	0.834
Negative experiences	28.5900	60.002	0.516	0.313	0.832
Activity instruction mismatch	29.1000	66.576	0.398	0.362	0.839
Concentration problems	28.3800	60.117	0.574	0.572	0.827
Distractors	28.6700	64.203	0.450	0.444	0.836
Lack of interest	28.6000	66.101	0.315	0.283	0.844
Lack of motivation	28.4500	61.038	0.553	0.478	0.829
Cronbach's Alpha = 0.844					

Following that, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), used to assess the sampling adequacy of the collected data, and Bartlett's test were performed to determine if the data gathered within the scope of the current research were adequate for factor analysis. The fact that the KMO value is larger than 0.60 implies that the data is suitable for the factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974).

Table 5. KMO-Bartlett's Test Results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.817
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square ($\chi 2$)	399.457
	df	78
	Sig. (p)	0.000

The KMO value was determined to be significant at 0.817>0.60 level, and the Bartlett Sphericity Test result was found to be significant at p<0.01 level. These values indicate that the sample size is appropriate for factor analysis and that the data came from a multivariate normal distribution (Kaiser, 1974).

After determining that the data was suitable, exploratory factor analysis was performed and it was thus determined that the CRs scale consisted of 13 items and 2 factors that explain 47,580% of the total variance; they were also free from the overlapping items as shown in the following table.

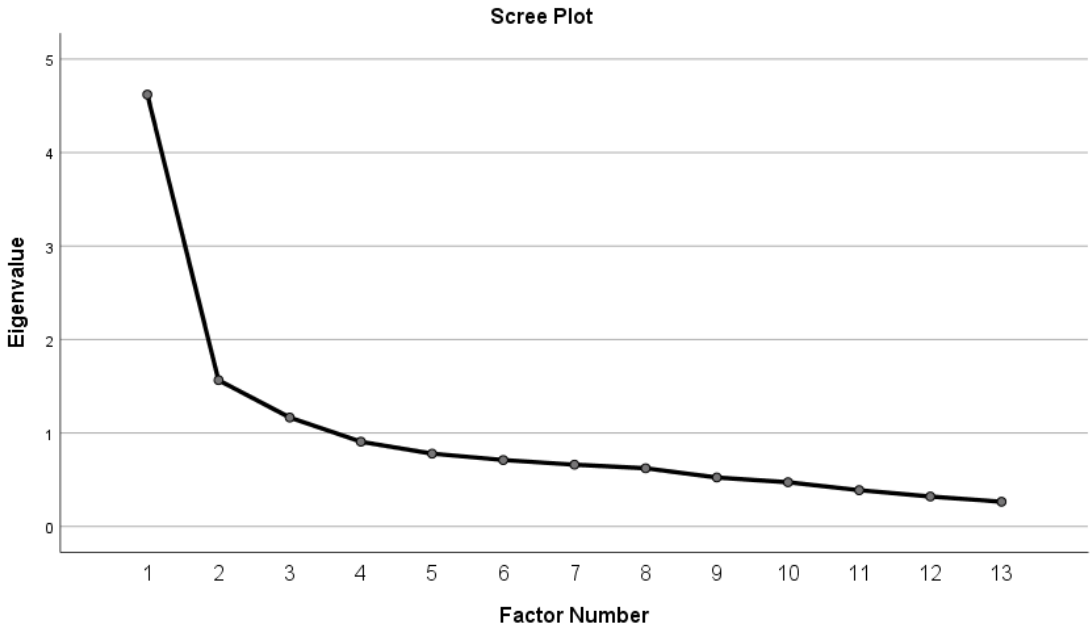

Figure 1. *Scree plot of CRs Scale*

The scale's common factor load values were examined, and it was revealed that the load values ranged from .387 to 911, with no overlap between factor loads. The Cronbach's Alpha values of two factors were found .817 and .715 respectively, indicating that the reliability values of the factors are within the acceptable level (Cortina, 1993).

Table 6. Factor Loadings of Items

Number	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Reliability
1	Teacher's pronunciation	.712		.817
2	Lack of listening practice	.671		
3	Lack of proficiency	.622		
4	Complicated materials/tasks	.578		
5	Learning anxiety	.556		
6	Complicated instruction	.552		
7	Unknown vocabulary	.494		
8	Negative experiences	.450		
9	Activity instruction mismatch	.387		
10	Concentration problems		.911	.715
11	Distractors		.614	
12	Lack of interest		.557	
13	Lack of motivation		.460	

Having performed exploratory factor analysis, the items under each factor were examined and the first factor, therefore, was named "Language and learner-related factors", while the second one was named "Concentration or motivation-related factors".

Following that, to verify the findings obtained from the pilot study, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed. Considering the fact that the scale should be applied to at least 'ten times' more participants than the number of items (13) on the scale, the main study was conducted with the participation of 138 students, which represents the required sample size for factor analysis (Kline, 2005). The path diagram and the goodness of fit index values of the scale obtained after the confirmatory analysis have indicated in the following figure.

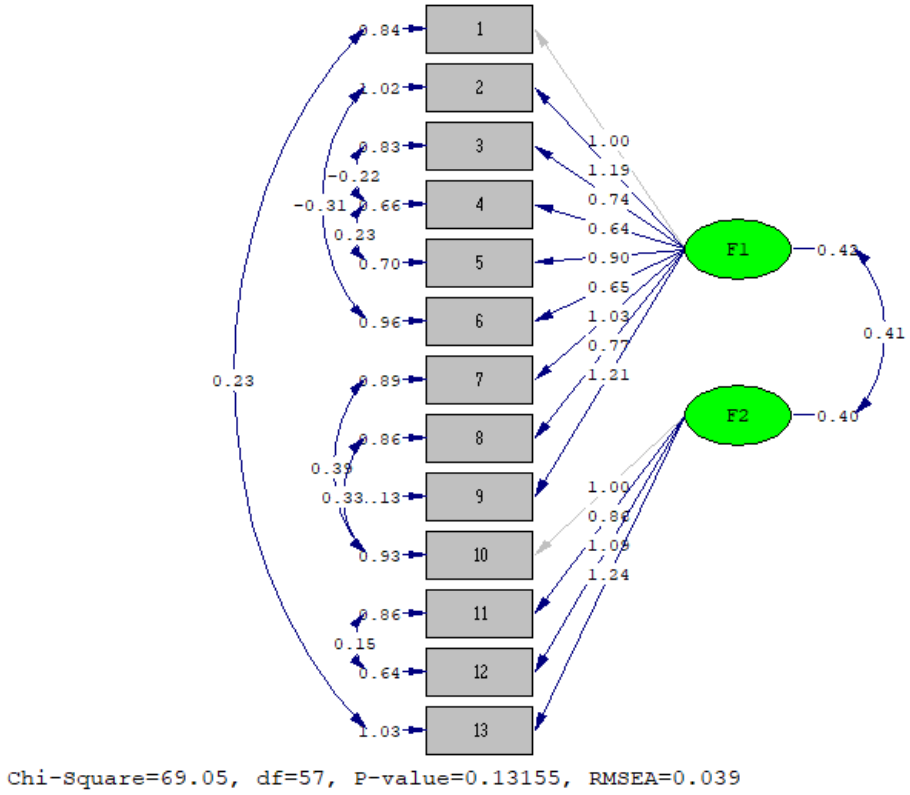

Figure 2. *CRs Scale Path Diagram*

Table 7.The Goodness of Fix Index of CRs Scale

x^2/df	p	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	AGFI	NNFI	NFI	RMR	SRMR
1.211	0.000	0.039	0.99	0.93	0.89	0.99	0.94	0.070	0.058

The reported goodness of fit indices must be within acceptable limits for a model to be accepted as a whole (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). The fit indices obtained as a consequence of CFA were found to be within acceptable or perfect fit indices, demonstrating that these findings confirm the previously described factor structure.

After the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), in order to investigate the most common and the least common factors underlying learners' requests for clarification, the CRs scale was applied to those students who participated in the main study.

Before the application of the developed scale, learners were asked about the frequency of CRs they made during the language learning process and their preferences concerning the language to be used in the clarification.

The following table, therefore, contains related information.

Table 8. The frequency of CRs made by learners

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Never	10	7.2
Rarely	57	41.3
Sometimes	39	28.3
Often	16	11.6
Always	16	11.6
Total	138	100

The participants stated that they employ CRs as an oral corrective feedback technique mostly rarely (41.3%) and sometimes (28.3%).

Table 9. Preferences of learners for the language to be used in the clarification

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Native language (totally)	3	2.2
Target language (totally)	34	24.6
Target language (mostly)	89	64.5
Native language (mostly)	12	8.7
Total	138	100

The table above has shown that during the language learning process, learners tend to receive feedback mostly (64.5 %) or totally (24.6%) in the target language.

Following that, the causes of CRs were investigated by means of the developed scale and the most common to least common causes of CRs were shown in the following table.

Table 10. The most and the least common causes of CR.

N	Causes of CR	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Unknown vocabulary	3.2174	1.03048
2	Lack of proficiency	3.1159	1.12095
3	Lack of listening practice	2.7464	1.28473
4	Learning anxiety	2.5000	1.26866
5	Concentration problems	2.4420	1.16530
6	Complicated instruction	2.3768	1.01954
7	Lack of interest	2.3551	1.15765
8	Negative experiences	2.2246	1.31814
9	Distractors	2.2246	1.05345
10	Lack of motivation	2.0870	1.06352
11	Teacher's pronunciation	1.9783	1.07708
12	Complicated materials/tasks	1.8913	1.05806
13	Activity-instruction mismatch	1.7391	0.90662

Examining the table above, it can be inferred that language-related reasons i.e., unknown vocabulary, the lack of language proficiency, or practice come at the top of the CRs

made by the learners during the foreign language learning process. Material or task-related tasks, on the other hand, were considered as the least common causes of CRs.

Conclusion

In this investigation, the aim was to examine the potential causes underlying L2 learners' clarification requests and, accordingly, to develop a scale, which can be helpful in apprehending the most common and the least common causes of CRs in the language learning process. In this regard, written responses of university preparatory classroom learners studying in a state university in Turkey were gathered and analyzed to generate the items (statements) of the intended scale.

Having collected the data, the CRs scale, enclosing 20 statements, each representing a different cause for CRs, was formed and a pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability and the validity of the scale. In this sense, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), with the participation of 100 students, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with the participation of 138 students, were performed respectively, and the CRs scale was determined to have two main factors; F1: language and learner-related factors, F2: concentration or motivation-related factors, consisting of 13 statements.

The application of the CRs scale revealed insightful findings embodying the prevalence of language-related factors as the primary drivers of CRs among learners. Factors such as unknown vocabulary, lack of proficiency, and insufficient listening practice emerged as key challenges faced by learners in their language learning journey. Teachers' pronunciation, complicated materials or tasks, and activity-instruction mismatch were perceived by the participants as the least common causes for CRs.

Overall, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on corrective feedback in language learning by offering a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing learners' clarification requests. By addressing these factors in instructional planning and feedback provision, educators can create more supportive and conducive learning environments for L2 learners.

Limitations and Suggestions

Findings of the current study indicated that language and learner-related factors, as well as concentration or motivation-related factors, are the primary causes of CRs. However,

due to differences in educational systems or among individuals, the findings of this study may not be applicable in other situations. As a result, further research in various contexts, encompassing larger sample sizes, or the use of alternative data collection tools, may be required to fully understand the causes of CRs. Such extensive research would be extremely beneficial in better understanding this issue and increasing the quality of education in the language learning context.

The Conflict of Interest Statement

In line with the statement of Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), we hereby declare that we had no conflicting interests regarding any parties of this study.

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The Research and Publication Ethics Statement

Data collection for this study was initiated after obtaining the ethical approval from the University's Social and Humanities Ethics Committee on 27.04.2022 with the reference number 2022/18.

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APPENDICES

A- Clarification Requests (CRs) Scale (Turkish Version)

Derste verilen talimatları (yönergeleri) anlamama sebebim...		asla	nadiren	bazen	sıksık	her zaman
1	… öğretmenimin telaffuzuna aşina olmamamdan dolayıdır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2	… yeterince dinleme pratiği (listening practice) yapmamış olmamdan kaynaklanmaktadır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3	… İngilizce dil yeterliğimden (İngilizcemin yeterli olmamasından) kaynaklanmaktadır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4	… derste kullanılan materyallerin ya da aktivitenin karmaşık olmasından dolayıdır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5	… dil öğretim sürecinde sahip olduğum endişeden dolayıdır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6	… verilen talimatların (yönergelerin) karmaşık dil yapısı içermesinden dolayıdır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7	… kurulan cümle içerisindeki ilgili kelimeyi bilmiyor oluşumdandır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8	… geçmişte dil öğrenme sürecinde yaşadığım olumsuz deneyimlerden kaynaklanmaktadır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9	… aktivite ile verilen talimatın (yönergenin) uyumsuz olmasından dolayıdır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10	… yaşadığım odaklanma probleminden kaynaklanmaktadır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11	… ders esnasında dikkatimi dağıtan etkenlerden dolayıdır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
12	… derse ya da konuya karşı ilgisiz olmamdan kaynaklanmaktadır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13	… dil öğrenme sürecinde sahip olduğum motivasyon eksikliğinden kaynaklanmaktadır.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

B- Clarification Requests (CRs) Scale (English Version)

The reason why I don't understand the instructions given in the lesson is …		never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
1	… because I am not familiar with my teacher's pronunciation.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
2	… due to the fact that I have not done enough listening practice.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
3	… due to my foreign language proficiency.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
4	… due to the complexity of the materials or activity used in the lesson.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
5	… because of the anxiety I have in the language learning process.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
6	… because the given instructions contain a complex language structure.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
7	… because I do not know the related word used in the given instruction.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
8	… because of the negative experiences I have had in the language learning process in the past.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
9	… because of the mismatch between given instruction and the activity.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
10	… because of my concentration problem.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
11	… because of the factors that distract me during the lesson.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
12	… because I am not interested in the lesson or the subject.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13	… due to the lack of motivation I have in the language learning process.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**