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Role of focus-on-form instruction, corrective feedback and uptake in second language classrooms: some insights from recent SLA research.

Oksana Afitska

University of Sheffield

A considerable number of studies on focus-on-form instruction, corrective feedback and uptake have been carried out in the field of SLA research over the last two decades. These studies have investigated the above mentioned concepts from different perspectives, in a number of different contexts, and in a number of different ways. This paper systematically reviews recent research on focus-on-form instruction, corrective feedback and uptake, attempts to systematise what is known about these issues, and reveals gaps which have not been yet addressed by research.

Introduction

It is a common practice in many second language classrooms that teachers provide learners with focused linguistic input to address gaps in their interlanguage and correct non-target-like utterances. Over the last decade or so, this practice has become common not only in the context of second language (L2) classrooms but also in many immersion and mainstream classrooms with learners of English as an additional language (EAL) or a second language (ESL). In the UK specifically, this shift has largely been determined by the requirements of official policy (SCAA 1996; DfEE 1999; DfES/NNFT 1999; QCA 1999; TTA 2000; DfEE 2000; DfES 2001; Ofsted 2002; DfES 2003; Barwell 2004) which has stated that all teachers, both mainstream class teachers and language support teachers, in all lessons should provide EAL/ESL learners 'who are in the process of learning English on their entry to school' (SCAA 1996: 2) with appropriate language support and assist their language development. Class teachers typically provide this assistance in the similar ways to L2 teachers in L2 classrooms: they focus on various linguistic forms during their subject lessons, they provide feedback and facilitate learner participation and contributions during lessons.

In this paper, I focus on three theoretical concepts relating to this 'assistance' of language development: focus-on-form instruction, corrective feedback and uptake. I aim to provide a systematic account of research evidence to date on the role and effectiveness of these components in promoting, learners' L2 development in immersion, mainstream with EAL/ESL support (where there has been limited research to date), and second language classrooms. In this way, I review recent developments in official L2 learning policy and explore the extent to which these developments have been fulfilled.

Focus-on-form instruction

Focus on form may be characterised as a type of instruction that 'overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally, in lessons where the overriding focus is on meaning or communication' (Long 1991: 45-46).

These linguistic elements are dealt with either intensively (systematically) or extensively (incidentally), but the primary focus of the class always lies on communication. Thus focus on form is opposed to *focus on form**S*** where the primary focus of instruction is on linguistic forms. Focus on form is typically transitory in nature - it occurs occasionally and does not supplant the primary focus on meaning (Ellis et al. 2001b: 283-284). Basturkmen et al. (2002: 2) state: 'focus-on-form instruction provides learners with the opportunity to take 'time-out' from focusing on message construction to pay attention to specific forms and the meanings they realise'. This shift from focusing on message to focusing on language 'induces learners to notice linguistic forms in the input which may assist the process of their interlanguage development' (ibid).

In broadly focused or *extensive* incidental focus-on-form instruction, a number of different linguistic forms, which have *not* been pre-selected, may be addressed in the context of a single lesson (Ellis 2001). Conversely, where focus-on-form instruction is *systematic* (also referred to as *intensive* or *planned*) it 'involves intensive attention to pre-selected forms' (Ellis 2001: 17). This kind of focus on form is similar to focus on form**S** in that it focuses on pre-selected forms, but that is the only similarity.

In what follows, I examine research on focus on form in relation to the following areas: its impact on language learning, its use in communicative language teaching (CLT) classrooms, its effectiveness depending on type and its use by learners and by teachers – the core areas addressed in recent SLA research.

Impact of focus-on-form instruction on language learning

SLA researchers have long been interested in whether focus on form positively affects the second language acquisition of learners learning in predominantly communicative classrooms. A review of research over the last 20 years provides strong evidence to show that focus on form may lead to the improvement of linguistic knowledge. Early evidence appeared in Lightbown and Spada's (1990) study which investigated the effects of focus on form and corrective feedback provided in the context of communicative language teaching. They found that, compared with meaning-focused instruction alone, 'form-based instruction within a communicative context contributed to higher levels of linguistic knowledge and performance' (443). This finding was supported by Doughty and Varela's (1998) experimental study, which revealed that learners who had received focus-on-form instruction improved, both in terms of the number of attempts they made to produce the linguistic target (past time reference) and the accuracy of their attempts. Harley (1998) also explored whether an early instructional focus on form could influence immersion students' acquisition of French grammatical gender, which had been found to be a persistent problem. Her study suggested that instructional focus on form could have lasting beneficial effects, not just for adult learners but also for learners as young as 7 or 8.

Muranoi (2000) conducted a quasi-experimental study that examined whether guiding learners to focus on form through interaction enhancement (or modifying otherwise meaning-focused interaction patterns) could help first-year Japanese college students in learning how to use articles in English. He found that interaction enhancement plus formal debriefing had a greater impact on learners' acquisition of English articles than interaction enhancement plus meaning-focused debriefing; feedback on form was more beneficial for learners' language

development than just feedback on content. A couple of years later, Ellis (2002) reviewed 11 studies which examined the effects of form-focused instruction on learners' free language production and concluded that focus on form could contribute to the acquisition of implicit knowledge, defined as learners' intuitive awareness of linguistic norms and their ability to process language automatically.

Mennim (2003) conducted an experimental study which aimed to find out whether students could take advantage of a rehearsal of their final oral presentation in order to make improvements to their spoken output. He found that students managed to recall many of the corrected forms and reformulations, and that final presentations showed significant improvements in pronunciation and grammar, and in the organisation of content. Following this, Lyster (2004) conducted a quasi-experimental classroom research study which investigated the effects of focus on form and corrective feedback on immersion students' ability to accurately assign grammatical gender in French. Here again, the author found that there was a significant increase in the ability of students exposed to focus on form to correctly assign grammatical gender.

Loewen's (2005) observational study confirmed the earlier studies, finding again a positive impact for incidental focus-on-form instruction: learners were able to recall the linguistic targets correctly or partially correctly nearly 60% of the time one day after the focus-on-form episode, and 50% of the time two weeks later. More recently, Bouffard and Sarkar (2008) investigated the effects of focus on form on 8-year old learners' language awareness and learning. Specifically, they found that learning metalinguistic terminology and working in groups to focus on form, helped the young learners notice and analyse their own errors and improved their ability to repair them. This finding points again to the impact that focus on form can have on promoting learners' language awareness and learning.

Use of focus-on-form instruction in CLT classrooms

Despite the many studies pointing to the positive effects on language learning of focus on form in communicative classrooms, a note of warning was sounded by Lyster and Ranta (1997). They cautioned that focusing on form in communicative or task-based classrooms could undermine the flow of communication. This issue was then addressed by a number of SLA researchers. Seedhouse (1997) set out to explore whether, and to what extent, an effective combined focus on form and meaning could be achieved in practice. He found that *reactive* focus on form could be provided without unduly interfering with a focus on meaning; this is where the teacher draws attention to form implicitly, i.e., when he/she 'correct[s] a form without any overt or explicit negative evaluation or indication that an error has been made' (Ellis et al. 2001b: 289). Similarly, Doughty and Varela (1998) found that it was possible to incorporate a focus on form without threatening the content of classes as long as the focus-on-form tasks were carefully created and incorporated into authentic content lessons. These findings were supported by Ellis et al.'s two studies (2001a; 2001b) which both concluded that focus on form could occur without disturbing the communicative flow of a classroom.

Effectiveness of different types of focus-on-form instruction

Given evidence that focus on form can successfully be incorporated into communicative lessons without disturbing their flow, the question arises of what

type of focus on form was the most effective. Spada, in her 1997 review of research, concluded that learners benefited most from form-focused instruction operationalised as a combination of metalinguistic teaching and corrective feedback, provided within an overall context of communicative practice. Metalingusitic teaching corresponds to *explicit, planned* or *pre-emptive* incidental focus on form, while corrective feedback is *reactive incidental* focus on form which can be either *explicit* or *implicit*. Spada's conclusion suggests that both *explicit* and *implicit* focus on form may be needed to help learners get the greatest benefit from language lessons.

Lyster (2004) specifically found that focus-on-form instruction was more effective when delivered with '*prompts*' rather than '*recasts*' or no feedback. Prompts are an *implicit* form of corrective feedback where the expert language user (usually the teacher) responds to an error by eliciting a response from the learner; recasts are also an *implicit* form, but here the expert reformulates the learner's inaccurate utterance. Loewen (2004) also investigated which types of incidental focus-on-form episodes (FFEs) best predicted learner uptake in general, and successful uptake in particular. He found that the features which predicted uptake were *complexity*, i.e. when the FFEs involved multiple turns between teacher and student; *timing*, i.e. when the FFEs took place in immediate response to a problematic learner utterance; and *elicitation*, i.e. when the teacher attempted to draw out from student(s) the accurate language form or information about a language form, rather than providing it themselves. In addition to these features, successful uptake was predicted by FFEs that were *code-related* (i.e. which responded to a learner utterance involving inaccurate use of a linguistic item but not miscommunication); *reactive* (involving error correction), and had a '*heavy'* focus on form (i.e. involved overt direct emphasis on form).

Ellis (2002) and Fuente (2006) have further suggested that *explicit* focus on form may be more effective in promoting learning than *implicit* focus on form. Ellis (2002) identified two variables - choice of target and the extent of instruction – which influenced the degree of success of focus-on-form episodes: the *more explicit* and *detailed* the instruction was, the greater the chances that learners would benefit in terms of their target language development. Similarly, Fuente (2006), investigating the effects of three vocabulary lessons (one traditional and two task-based) on the acquisition of basic meanings, forms and morphological aspects of Spanish words, found that a task-based lesson with an *explicit* focus-on-form component seemed to be more effective in promoting acquisition of word morphology than a task-based lesson without any explicit element.

My review above highlights the diversity of findings from research on the effectiveness of focus-on-form instruction: Spada (1997) suggested that both explicit and implicit focus on form may be needed to promote language learning, while Lyster (2004) and Loewen (2004) found a positive impact for implicit eliciting focus on form. Research by Ellis (2002) and Fuente (2006) seems to support explicit focus-on-form strategies. This diversity clearly indicates the need for ongoing research on how explicit and implicit focus on form may influence language learning differently.

Focus-on-form instruction: research on learners

As we have seen above, a key issue in the debate on focus on form is whether learners can effectively focus both on meaning and on form. Students surveyed by

Doughty and Varela (1998) felt they were capable of paying attention to meaning, communication and form simultaneously. However, Williams' (1999) study revealed that while learners did occasionally initiate attention to form (reflecting their ability to attend simultaneously to form and content), such instances were in fact rare. More proficient learners were more likely to pay more attention to form than the less proficient, and student-initiated focus-on-form episodes were generally focused on the lexical aspects of the language. This latter point was also confirmed by Ellis et al's (2001a) study.

Another related question for learner-focused research is learners' ability to focus on form *independently*, and to benefit from this without a teacher or other 'expert' being involved. We refer to this as 'learner-driven linguistic noticing', the learner's autonomous ability to pay attention to form and notice gaps in his/her language knowledge. Mackey (2006), Mennim (2007) and Hanaoka (2007) have all suggested that there may be a positive relationship between the learners' ability to notice their linguistic gaps and their subsequent L2 learning. Mackey (2006) found a positive relationship between interactional feedback in the classroom, the learners' reports of noticing and their L2 learning, at least in relation to some targeted forms: 83% of those learners who noticed targeted question forms also learned them, while the percentages were 50% for plural forms and only 20% for past tense forms. Similarly, Mennim's (2007) study examined the effects of classroom exercises encouraging noticing and conscious attention to form, and found that over a nine month period, learners' accuracy in the use of the target word was much improved. Finally, Hanaoka (2007), examining the relationship between learners' output, noticing and learning, found that (a) participants noticed overwhelmingly lexical features as they autonomously identified their respective problems, found solutions by looking at language models, and incorporated them in subsequent revisions; (b) more proficient learners noticed significantly more features than less proficient learners when they compared their original output with two language models; and (c), most importantly, among the features of the language models that the participants noticed, those that were related to the problems that they had noticed through output were incorporated at a higher rate and were also retained longer than unrelated features. The above research on learner-driven independent focus on form was undertaken with older language learners; however, Bouffard and Sarkar (2008) have argued that children as young as 8 may be mature enough to attend to form if they are taught how to.

Focus-on-form instruction: research on teachers

Basturkmen et al (2004) conducted a case study which examined teachers' stated beliefs about communicative language teaching and the role of incidental focus on form, comparing their stated beliefs with their focus on form practices in the performance of a communicative task. They found discrepancies between beliefs and practice, in particular in relation to when it was legitimate to take time out from a communicative activity to focus on issues of form, and in relation to preferred error correction technique.

Mackey et al (2004) meanwhile explored whether ESL teachers' use of incidental focus on form was influenced by their level of experience. They found that experienced ESL teachers used incidental focus on form more frequently than inexperienced teachers. Further, even though inexperienced teachers seemed to benefit from a teacher education workshop encouraging awareness of

opportunities for incidental focus on form in the L2 classroom, they did not all translate this awareness into consistent practice right away. These findings suggest that more work may need to be done with teachers in order to make their teaching more consistent and effective for promoting learners' language development.

Table 1 below summarises key findings from the research reviewed above on focus on form.

Table 1: Key findings from research on focus on form

Focus	Finding	Source
Impact of focus-on-form instruction on language learning	Focus on form seems to have positive impact on learners' linguistic development	Lightbown and Spada (1990), Doughty and Varela (1998), Harley (1998), Muranoi (2000), Ellis (2002), Mennim (2003), Lyster (2004), Loewen (2005), Bouffard and Sarkar (2008)
Use of focus-on-form instruction in CLT classrooms	Focus on form may occur without interfering with the communicative flow of the lessons	Seedhouse (1997), Doughty and Varela (1998), Ellis et al (2001a 2001b)
Effectiveness of focus-on-form instruction depending on type	Using both explicit and implicit focus-on-form strategies can promote language learning	Spada (1997)
	Using implicit eliciting focus on form can promote language learning	Lyster (2004) and Loewen (2004)
	Using explicit focus-on-form strategies can promote language learning	Ellis (2002) and Fuente (2006)
Research on learners	Learners believe that they can attend to form and meaning at the same time	Doughty and Varela (1998)
	Learner-driven independent focus on form (learner noticing) seems to have positive impact on their L2 proficiency	Mackey (2006), Mennim, (2007), Hanaoka (2007)
	When learners initiate focus on form they seem to address lexical aspects in particular	Williams (1999), Ellis et al (2001a)
	More proficient learners are likely to pay more attention to form than less proficient learners	Williams (1999)
Research on teachers	Discrepancies in teacher beliefs and practice in relation to their use of focus on form in communicatively oriented classrooms	Basturkmen et al (2004)
	Teachers' experience seems to play a role in teachers' use of focus on form	Mackey, et al (2004)

Corrective feedback

Iwashita (2003: 2) defines corrective feedback as 'some kind of native speaker response to what the learner has said'; it may in fact be better understood as some kind of response from a more expert language user, often a teacher. Responses may be positive (such as confirming an utterance) or negative (such as indicating an utterance is inaccurate or insufficient in some way). Negative feedback and corrective feedback are sometimes used interchangeably. For example, Chaudron's (1977: 31) definition of corrective feedback as 'any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands

improvement of the learner [non-target-like] utterance' appears quite similar to Oliver and Mackey's (2003: 519) definition of negative feedback as 'feedback provided in response to learners' non-target-like production'. In what follows, I examine SLA research on corrective feedback in relation to the following issues: impact on language learning, use in CLT classrooms, effectiveness, and learner pair-correction.

Impact of corrective feedback on language learning

There has been debate among SLA researchers as to whether positive or negative feedback best facilitates learners' L2 development and acquisition. Oliver (2000: 120) defines positive evidence as 'the input or models that language learners receive about the target language'; it provides learners with 'examples of *acceptable* target language sentences' (Nicholas et al 2001: 722, my emphasis). Some researchers suggest that provision of both positive and negative feedback is important for promoting second language acquisition (Bley-Vroman 1986; Rutherford and Sharwood Smith 1985 1988; White 1987; Doughty and Varela 1998; Lyster 1998b). Others, however, favour a single perspective: Sanz and Morgan-Short (2004: 69), for example, state that 'it is enhanced positive evidence, rather than negative feedback, that affects acquisition'. However, Long (1996) had already argued more specifically that 'negative feedback obtained during the negotiation work or elsewhere may be facilitative of L2 development, at least for vocabulary, morphology and language-specific syntax, and essential for learning certain specifiable L1-L2 contrasts' (Long 1996: 414). Lightbown and Spada (1990: 119) suggest that 'allowing learners too much 'freedom' without correction and explicit instruction may lead to early fossilization of errors'. Following Long, Iwashita (2003) suggests that negative feedback is facilitative in that it 'might draw learners' attention to mismatches between input and output' (Iwashita 2003: 2) while McDonough (2005) similarly states that 'negative feedback through interaction may contribute to L2 development by informing learners about the comprehensibility of their utterances and by raising their awareness of language' (McDonough 2005: 81).

Use of corrective feedback in CLT classrooms

Research reviewed above suggests that teachers and learners are able to focus on form in the context of communicative language classrooms without disturbing the communicative flow of lessons. Sheen (2004) found that provision of corrective feedback in particular could occur without undue interference to the communicative flow of lessons. Corrective feedback occurred frequently in all four of the teaching settings he examined, and recasts seemed to be the most frequent feedback type. This confirms earlier findings by Nabei and Swain (2002) and Lyster and Ranta (1997). Research by Panova and Lyster (2002) also indicated teachers' preference for implicit types of feedback (recasts and translation) and more recent studies confirm this: Davies (2006) found that recasts were the technique most commonly used by teachers, as did Lyster and Mori (2006) in their study comparing the immediate effects of explicit correction, recasts and prompts in two different instructional settings.

Recently, Yoshida (2008) conducted an interview study that investigated teachers' choice and learners' preference for corrective feedback types. The study

revealed that even though most learners surveyed preferred to have an opportunity to think about their errors and to attempt to correct them *before* receiving correct forms by recast, the teachers chose recasts because of time limitations in their classes and their awareness of learners' cognitive styles. The teachers commented that they would choose elicitation or metalinguistic feedback when they felt learners were able to work out correct forms on their own. Yoshida's study may shed some light on understanding why teachers choose recasts despite the fact that they appear not to be the most effective corrective technique in the language classroom.

Effectiveness of corrective feedback

Various SLA researchers have argued that not all corrective feedback is effective; for example, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005: 124) comment that 'simply providing the correction of the error may be not enough to make the student repair the error'. According to Nassaji and Swain (2000: 49) the effectiveness of corrective feedback may 'depend on the degree to which it *explicitly* tells the learner about the error'. Earlier, Roberts (1995) had suggested two key factors influencing effectiveness: (1) the *learner's awareness* of the fact that he/she is being corrected, and (2) his/her *understanding* of the nature of the correction.

Mackey and Philp (1998) highlight the importance of the learner's *developmental* readiness in assessing the effectiveness of corrective feedback: they found, for example, that recasts did not enable learners to acquire forms that they were not developmentally ready to acquire. Nassaji and Swain (2000: 36) make the point more specifically that 'the usefulness of corrective feedback may be highly dependent upon the nature of the transaction and mediation provided by the expert [teacher] to the novice [learner]'. They investigated whether the impact of corrective feedback depended on the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The concept of the ZPD, developed by Vygotsky (1978), refers to 'the distance between the [learner's] actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable pairs' (86). This is similar to the notion of developmental readiness in that it emphasises that a learner may be able to acquire new information with another's more expert assistance. Nassaji and Swain found that corrective feedback provided within the learners' ZPD had a greater impact on acquisition of English articles than feedback provided randomly, taking no account of learners' ZPD. They conclude that *any* type of error treatment can be effective so long as it is 'negotiated between the learner and the teacher and [is] provided at the right point or within the learner's ZPD' (Nassaji and Swain 2000: 36). We review below the research which investigates specific types of corrective feedback and their impact on learner uptake.)

Han's (2002) study also pointed to the importance of learners' developmental readiness in determining the effectiveness of recasts to promote acquisition of new linguistic items. She suggested that in addition, *individualised attention* might be necessary for recasts to facilitate learning. Similarly, in a case study investigating the relationship between one student's awareness of classroom recast feedback and her L2 learning, Nabei and Swain (2002) found that the student was more likely to notice teacher feedback in group contexts where she had more individualised attention than in teacher-fronted whole class interaction.

A further variable that seems to influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback is *task familiarity*. Revesz and Han (2006) examined the impact of two task variables - *task content familiarity* and *task type* - on the efficacy of recasts to promote ESL learners' production of the past progressive. They found that participants who received recasts during tasks with familiar content displayed greater accuracy in subsequent L2 oral production, and to a lesser extent in written production, than those who received recasts during tasks where the content was not familiar. Similarly, Mackey et al (2007), in their study of young ESL learners' task-based conversational interactions, found that (a) learners who were engaged in procedurally familiar tasks had more opportunities to use corrective feedback, and (b) learners who were engaged in tasks that were familiar in both content and procedure showed more 'uptake', i.e. actual use of feedback.

The amount of time devoted to corrective feedback and its explicitness may also influence its effectiveness. Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) study of teachers' and students' evaluations of corrective feedback in recordings of an EFL classroom found that both groups felt the most effective corrections occurred when more time was allocated to corrective feedback, and therefore longer explanations were given. This complements the findings of Nassaji and Swain (2000), who found that more direct and explicit prompts (i.e., prompts which involved extended, detailed explanations) tended to be more useful than less direct implicit prompts. In similar vein, Sheen (2007) found that learners receiving explicit linguistic explanations in addition to correction of their errors benefitted from the feedback more than learners who received corrective feedback only. It should be noted that in Sheen's study, this relationship was mediated by learners' degree of aptitude for language analysis.

Sanz and Morgan-Short (2004), on the other hand, came up with rather different results in their experimental study of the effects of computer-delivered, explicit information on the acquisition of Spanish word order. They compared four groups comprised of [+/- Explanation] and [+/- Explicit Feedback], and found that all groups, including the one which received neither explanations nor explicit feedback, improved similarly on interpretation and production tests. It was on this basis that the authors concluded that positive evidence alone, what they call 'task-essential practice', may be sufficient to promote L2 acquisition (36).

Finally, one more variable that may influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback types is *the type of instructional context* in which learners study a second language. In their observational study of two immersion classrooms, Lyster and Mori (2006) found that prompts were more likely to trigger repair in classroom settings where the communicative orientation provided only limited emphasis on accuracy; whereas recasts were effective for learners in classrooms where there were regular opportunities for controlled production practice with an emphasis on accuracy.

Corrective feedback: learner pair-correction

In the communicative classroom, opportunities for interaction – and therefore potentially for feedback - are often provided through student pair work. Some research indicates, however, that learners are more likely to ignore negative feedback in pair work than they are in the teacher-fronted lessons (Oliver 2000). Further, affective factors may influence the impact of any corrective feedback;

Morris and Tarone (2003) found that when learners have negative feelings about their conversation partners, they tend to interpret corrective feedback not as help, but as criticism. They do not make proper use of corrective feedback and keep making the same errors in subsequent performances. Thus, learners' readiness to accept corrective feedback seems to be influenced by (a) the social role of the person providing it (a teacher's corrections seem to be appreciated much more than learners' corrections), and (b) interpersonal relationships (corrections provided by 'a friend' seem to be accepted more readily). Research here has shown *how* learners react to corrective feedback provided by their pairs (see Oliver 2000; Morris and Tarone 2003), but the *effectiveness* of such feedback in terms of its capacity to promote learning has not been investigated in detail.

Table 2 below summarises the key findings from the research on corrective feedback.

Table 2: Key findings from the research on corrective feedback

Focus	Finding	Source
Impact on language learning	Corrective, or negative, feedback seems to be capable of facilitating L2 development	Long (1996), Iwashita (2003), McDonough (2005)
Use in CLT classrooms	Corrective feedback may occur without disturbing the communicative flow of the lessons	Sheen (2004)
	Recasts seem to be the most common feedback type that teachers tend to use in their language classrooms	Lyster and Ranta (1997), Panova and Lyster (2002), Nabei and Swain (2002), Sheen (2004), Davies (2006), Lyster and Mori (2006)
Effectiveness	Effectiveness of 'corrective feedback' can be influenced by the following variables: - degree of explicitness	Nassaji and Swain (2000), Sheen (2007)
	- length of explanation	Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005)
	- time variable	Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005)
	- learner awareness of the fact that he/she is corrected	Roberts (1995)
	- learner developmental readiness	Mackey and Philp (1998), Nassaji and Swain (2000), Han
		(2002)
	- understanding of the nature of correction	Roberts (1995)
	- type of feedback	Lyster and Ranta (1997), Mackey and Philp (1998), Panova and Lyster (2002), Sheen(2004), McDonough (2005)
	- individualised attention	Han (2002)
	- content and/or procedure familiarity	Revesz and Han (2006), Mackey et al (2007)
	- type of instructional context	Lyster and Mori (2006)
Learner pair-correction	Learner's readiness to accept corrective feedback from his/her pair may be influenced by social role of the person who provides it	Oliver (2000)
	& by interpersonal relationships between learners	Morris and Tarone (2003)

Uptake

I now turn to studies of the outcomes of focus-on-form episodes, or what is known as 'uptake' or 'modified output'. Several definitions of uptake are suggested in the academic literature. In an early definition, Allwright (1984) used the term uptake to refer to 'what learners are able to report learning during or at the end of the lesson'. Lyster and Ranta (1997), however, define uptake as 'different types of student responses, immediately following the feedback, including responses with repair of the non-target items as well as utterances still in need of repair'. Ellis et al. (2001b: 286) build on this definition, stating that uptake is:

> ... an optional student move which occurs in episodes where the learner has demonstrated a gap in his/her knowledge [for example, by making an error, by asking a question, or by failing to answer a teacher's question] and which is a reaction to some preceding move in which another participant [usually the teacher] either explicitly or implicitly provides information about a linguistic feature.

In what follows, I examine the research on uptake, focusing on its impact on language learning, its occurrence in SLL classrooms, and the variables which influence its occurrence.

Impact of uptake on language learning

There has been considerable research on uptake (Mackey et al 2000; Oliver 2000; Ellis et al 2001a; Panova and Lyster 2002; McDonough 2005). Some argue that learner uptake plays a positive role in learners' second language development (McDonough 2005; Loewen 2005); others, even though they admit that uptake may be an important and observable source for understanding the impact of the feedback, doubt that it leads to long-term learning (Nabei and Swain 2002; Morris and Tarone 2003). They argue that 'learners' uptake may not fully represent their cognitive processing of the feedback' (Nabei and Swain 2002: 45).

Specifically, Morris and Tarone (2003: 328) suggest that 'uptake, in the form of recast repetition, may not be a reliable indicator of acquisition' while Nabei and Swain (2002: 45) point out that a 'learner's immediate response after recast feedback might not be appropriate evidence for evaluating its effect [i.e., for assuming that acquisition has taken place]'. Yet there does seem to be some evidence suggesting that uptake may have a longer-term impact: Ishida (2004), for example, observed that overall learner accuracy increased significantly in correlation with the number of recasts provided during a treatment period, and the accuracy rate was sustained. McDonough (2005) considers that uptake (the author calls it modified output) 'may contribute to target language development by strengthening knowledge representation that learners already have stored and by encouraging automatic retrieval of linguistic forms' (McDonough 2005: 83). He found that when learners produced more complex or accurate forms in modified output, they were more likely to produce these forms in subsequent utterances, again suggesting sustained impact. Loewen (2005) in similar vein observed that successful uptake in focus-on-form episodes served as a significant predictor of

correct test scores, further evidence to support the assumption that uptake reflects or indeed promotes language development.

Occurrence of uptake in L2 classrooms

Since research provides evidence that uptake may promote L2 learning, it becomes interesting to investigate rates of learner uptake in language classrooms. Mackey et al (2000) conducted an observational study which revealed that uptake occurred in more than half (52%) of all feedback episodes, a relatively high rate. Similarly, Ellis et al (2001a) found that learner uptake after incidental focus on form was generally high and successful in the immersion classrooms they examined. Similarly, Panova and Lyster's (2002) observational study of the range and types of teacher feedback, and their relationship to learner uptake and immediate repair, found relatively high rates of learner uptake (47%) but rates of learner uptake with immediate repair were low in the examined classrooms (16%).

Nabei and Swain (2002) set out to explore why in some studies researchers have observed very low rates of uptake. Analysing a study by Oliver (1995), they show how teacher recasts may not always be associated with discourse opportunities for learners to demonstrate uptake; i.e., where an uptake move might be impossible because a topic continuation move had already taken place, or where it was clear that an uptake move was not expected. When these cases were excluded from Oliver's study, the proportion of recasts triggering uptake increased from 10% to 35%. One more finding in favour of uptake is provided by Oliver's (2000) study investigating the provision and use of negative feedback, depending on the age of the learners and the context of interaction. His findings indicated that when the opportunity was available, and when it was appropriate to do so, *all* learners (adults and children) *frequently* used feedback in their subsequent language production, thus demonstrating uptake.

Variables influencing occurrence of uptake

It has been argued that *implicit eliciting feedback* types are most conducive to learner uptake. McDonough's (2005) study supports this, in that teachers' clarification requests correlated positively both with ESL students' modified output and their question development. A second variable that seems to affect the occurrence of learner uptake, according to Ellis et al (2001a), is *the complexity of a FoF episode*. The researchers found that the rates of learner uptake were higher when the negotiation episodes were complex, i.e. included more than the basic three turns of initiation (learner's error), response (teacher's corrective feedback), and follow up (uptake). Further, when learners understand what has been corrected, they are more likely to modify their output after correction. Mackey et al (2000) found that learners seemed to have generally accurate perceptions about those feedback episodes for which they had uptake. Thus a key variable to affect rates of learner uptake seems to be *learner understanding of the source of the problem*.

Finally, it was observed by Ellis et al (2001a) that students were more likely to uptake a form (i.e., incorporate it into an utterance of their own) if the focus-on-form episode was *student-initiated,* rather than teacher-initiated. A similar observation was made by the same researchers in another study (Ellis et al 2001b) which examined learner uptake from incidental and transitory focus on form. Ellis

et al's findings here suggest a link between the phenomenon of 'noticing' in second language classrooms and the occurrence of 'successful uptake'. Basturkmen et al (2002), in an observational study to identify the relationship between the use of metalanguage and the occurrence of student uptake moves in focus-on-form episodes in communicative classrooms, found that there was a significant relationship between student-initiated focus on form, their use of metalanguage and the occurrence of uptake.

Table 3 below summarises the key findings from the research on uptake.

Table 3: Key findings from the research on uptake

Focus	Finding	Source
Impact of uptake on language learning	Uptake may promote L2 development	McDonough (2005), Loewen (2005)
	It is unclear whether uptake following recasts may promote L2 development	Nabei and Swain (2002), Morris and Tarone (2003)
Uptake in SLL classrooms	The rates of learner uptake are relatively high in the language classrooms	Mackey et al (2000), Oliver (2000), Ellis et al (2001a), Panova and Lyster (2002)
	The rates of learner uptake *with immediate repair* are generally low in the language classrooms	Panova and Lyster (2002)
Variables influencing occurrence of uptake	Occurrence of uptake may be influenced by the following variables: - type of feedback – implicit eliciting feedback	McDonough (2005)
	- complexity of 'focus-on-form' episode	Ellis et al (2001a)
	- learner understanding of the source of problem	Mackey et al (2000)
	- explicitness of language-focused exchanges	Oliver and Mackey (2003)
	- 'student initiated focus on form'	Ellis et al (2001a, 2001b), Basturkmen et al (2002)

Conclusion

Based on this review of research conducted in L2 classrooms, immersion and mainstream classrooms, there appears to be support for the requirements of the UK's EAL/ESL policy, that *all* teachers should support second language development - in effect, through focus on form - in the course of their teaching. This includes allowing enough lesson time for focus on form in communicatively oriented lessons, use of various focus-on-form strategies to promote language acquisition - be they implicit or explicit - and acknowledging the fact that learners, particularly at later stages of their development, can play an important role in facilitating their own language development when provided with opportunities to take greater control. Moreover, the research reviewed does appear to demonstrate that corrective feedback can play a positive role in supporting L2 acquisition when provided more explicitly, incorporating longer explanations, at the stage when learners are developmentally ready to understand and internalise it,

and when learners are aware of the fact that that *linguistic* feedback is being provided.

Learner uptake also seems to play an important role in supporting L2 acquisition and research has demonstrated that overall, teachers are aware of the importance of eliciting this from the learners. Nevertheless, depending on the settings researched, there seems to be variation in the amount and quality of learner uptake, and whether that uptake corresponds to longer term acquisition or not. More research is needed in order to further investigate the impact that uptake may have on learners' language development, particularly the uptake moves which follow teacher recasts.

Another area requiring further investigation is that related to the nature of focus-on-form instruction and the impact that its specific types - implicit and explicit focus on form - may have on facilitating learners' language development. Finally, even though research has demonstrated that overall, teachers in communicative classrooms do focus on form, there are still inconsistencies between what teachers believe they do and what they actually do in the classroom. The implications for practice are that more work may need to be done with teachers at a local level – as part of in-service training, for example - in order to ensure their teaching is more consistent and effective in promoting learners' language development.

Finally, it should be noted that almost all of the reviewed studies were carried out in the contexts of either second language or foreign language classrooms, with only a few in the context of immersion and mainstream classrooms with EAL/ESL learners. The majority concerned adult participants, with only a few focusing on younger learners. Many studies of focus on form, corrective feedback and uptake take the form of an experimental design in highly controlled conditions. It was, for example, observed by Ellis and Sheen (2006) that in natural classroom situations, recasts were typically of the extensive type, as opposed to many controlled studies where recasts were typically focused and intensive. There is therefore a clear need for further studies which investigate the use of focus-on-form instruction, corrective feedback and uptake in authentic classroom contexts, and in a greater variety of contexts. Investigations of immersion and mainstream classrooms in the UK where learners learn English not as a second or foreign language, but as an additional language, and where the focus is on young learners, typically between 8 and 10 years old, are few and far between, and yet, provide a classroom context where emphasis is authentically on communication and meaning, and where recent policy has encouraged focus on form.

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