

AN ANALYSIS OF UPTAKE FOLLOWING TEACHER'S FEEDBACK IN THE EFL CLASSROOM¹

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ABSTRACT. *The present study investigated learners' uptake after the provision of corrective feedback on the part of the teacher. One group of learners received a more implicit type of feedback and the other a more explicit type each time a mistake on the targeted grammatical features was made. Our findings suggest that learners' uptake is highly associated with the type of feedback provided, in the sense that explicit feedback was mostly followed by self- and peer-repair and implicit feedback was vastly accompanied by repetitions and topic continuations. These two kinds of feedback may therefore have important implications for restructuring the learner's interlanguage grammar, a fact that is claimed to lead to acquisition.*

KEYWORDS. *Uptake, corrective feedback, repair.*

RESUMEN. *Nuestro estudio investigó la respuesta de los aprendices que sigue a la retroalimentación correctiva por parte del profesor (uptake). Un grupo de aprendices recibió un tipo de retroalimentación más implícito y el otro un tipo más explícito cada vez que se cometía un error en uno de los dos aspectos gramaticales en que el estudio se centraba. Nuestros resultados indican que el uptake está fuertemente asociado con el tipo de retroalimentación recibida, ya que el tipo más explícito consiguió un mayor número de correcciones (tanto de la persona que cometió el error como por parte de un compañero). Estas dos clases de retroalimentación pueden tener grandes implicaciones en la reestructuración de la interlengua del aprendiz, un hecho que puede facilitar la adquisición.*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Uptake, retroalimentación correctiva, corrección.*

1. CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK AND UPTAKE

Corrective feedback has widely been the centre of interest in classroom language learning. It is a reactive pedagogical strategy that emerges when the teacher identifies an error. According to Brown (1988), feedback has to be genuinely responsive, so that

learners are allowed to experience the effect of what they utter as a guide in their subsequent output. Brown (1988: 16) believes that feedback must be more than encouragement, as “empty and automatic encouragement is often pointless”. A genuine response from the teacher provides some indication to learners of the effectiveness of their utterances. The debate of corrective feedback focuses, on the one hand, on concerns about whether errors should be corrected, and if so, how and when they should be treated, and on the other, on whether feedback is of any use in language learning. Feedback may serve the function of making learners notice the mismatch between the input they are exposed to and their output. This mismatch may be enhanced in an implicit or in an explicit way. Implicit corrective feedback refers to ways which indicate that the learner’s output is somehow erroneous, and needs to be reformulated. In turn, explicit corrective feedback involves the explanation of a formal aspect after an error has been made. A number of studies have been carried out which investigate both types of feedback. For example, Doughty (1991) conducted research on the effects of enriched input on the acquisition of relative clause structures by adult intermediate learners. The subjects of the study were divided into three groups: in the meaning oriented group (MOG), learners completed a series of reading tasks that required them first to read the text for general understanding and then read each sentence separately, with the opportunity to obtain help in the form of lexical and semantic rephrasing. The rule oriented group (ROG) received an explanation of the rules for relativisation with examples. Finally, the control group simply viewed the sentences in the text without any assistance. Doughty (1991) concluded that all three groups showed some gains in the post-test, with the MOG and the ROG performing similarly and both gaining more than the control group.

Lightbown and Spada (1990) analysed the effect of explicit corrective feedback in an intensive communicative classroom having English as an L2. Their results corroborated the hypothesis that the teaching of formal aspects in a communicative setting positively contributed to the learners’ linguistic accuracy.

Implicit corrective feedback has also been widely investigated and can be implemented in different ways. For instance, Lyster and Ranta (1997) carried out their study in immersion classrooms in Montreal at primary level. These authors audio-taped four teachers whose lessons were transcribed. The findings of the study revealed that recasts were the most used technique by the teachers (55% of the cases), followed by elicitation (14%), clarification requests (11%), metalinguistic feedback (8%), explicit correction (7%) and repetition (5%). The results of both types of corrective feedback point to the fact that it is significant to L2 development because it provides the learner with an opportunity to reflect on the utterance and consider other possibilities. The benefits of corrective feedback are also applicable to the foreign language context, in the sense that it may trigger the cognitive processes required for acquisition.

When learners are presented with corrective feedback, they have a wide range of responses at their disposal, what has been called *uptake*. This term has been used in second language acquisition (SLA) literature with two different meanings. One first meaning is the one used by Allwright (1984) in which uptake refers to what learners are

able to report learning during or at the end of the lesson. Some studies of uptake carried out under this first sense are, for example, Slimani's (1992) and Alcón's (1994). A second meaning of uptake is offered by Lyster (1998b), who uses it to refer to the learners' response to the feedback they receive from teachers. Lyster and Ranta (1997: 49) have provided the following definition of uptake:

uptake [...] refers to a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance (this overall intention is clear to the students although the teacher's specific linguistic focus may not be).

In our study, this second meaning of uptake is the one we adopted, since we paid attention to the students' reaction when feedback was provided by the teacher in the foreign language (FL) classroom. This widened the scope of research, as studies of students' uptake have been carried out mostly in immersion contexts. Therefore, our goal was to ascertain whether learners' uptake was related to the feedback offered.

2. METHOD

2.1. *Participants*

The subjects of the study belonged to two groups of first-year university students (Group 1, $n=32$; Group 2, $n=16$). They shared the following characteristics: (i) they were all Spanish, and (ii) their level of proficiency in English was lower-intermediate. Their ages ranged from 17 to 22 years old and the vast majority of subjects had studied English as a foreign language between 4 and 7 years. The researcher who conducted the study was the teacher of both groups, that is to say, she taught the classes.

2.2. *Grammatical features in focus*

The study focused on two grammatical items: articles (definite/indefinite and zero article) and second conditional. As the participants had a low-intermediate level of proficiency in English, we considered that these two grammatical forms would suit their interlanguage on the basis of the *teachability hypothesis* (Pienemann 1985). We adhered to this hypothesis because, as Pienemann (1989) suggested, instruction directed at structures that are next in line to be acquired according to a well-defined developmental sequence is effective in moving learners along the sequence. In contrast, instruction directed at structures that are too developmentally advanced for the learners have been proven to be ineffective. Moreover, in the focus on form (FonF) field, it is claimed that some likely candidates for FonF are, on the one hand, those that are not important for communication to be successful, and on the other, those that are likely to be misanalysed by learners. In this sense, we believe that both articles and second conditional fall into these categories because first, articles are not essential for successful communication, and second, the

conditional can be easily misanalysed by students. As Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) point out, conditional sentences are known to be difficult for many learners because of the syntactic and semantic complexities of the structure.

A further reason for selecting the two grammatical features at issue was the fact that these targeted forms were emergent in the learners' interlanguage. By this we mean that our learners had already started to try the forms in their output. Indeed, in a number of oral and written activities carried out before the beginning of the study, we realised first, that our learners misused both grammatical forms, and second, that they were able to understand input which contained definite/indefinite articles, zero article, and second conditional.

2.3. *Data collection procedure*

Prior to the performing of the tasks, the students were instructed, by means of communicative tasks, on the use of articles and second conditional. After this instructional phase, each group of learners formed self-selected dyads in order to carry out four different tasks, namely, dictogloss, text reconstruction (TR)², multiple choice (MC) and cloze test (CT). Despite the fact that these two last tasks are examples of more traditional grammar-based exercises, they have been widely used in L2/FL studies (e.g. Storch 1998, 1999; García Mayo 2002). The reason for including both MC and CT was that learners had to interact in order to agree on the appropriate grammatical forms.

The four tasks followed the same pattern: each dyad was given a single copy of the task; then, in order to encourage joint production (Storch 1998), they had to discuss their suggestions on the correct form to write down, and the teacher provided them with feedback whenever a mistake was made. The tasks were tape-recorded and transcribed.

The study's implementation was developed as follows: the two groups of learners carried out the four tasks containing a number of obligatory contexts in which one of the grammatical forms targeted had to be provided (i.e., definite/indefinite article, zero article, and second conditional). The students' joint work produced output, which was not corrected if it was right, and then the subjects continued with the next obligatory context, or if the output was wrong, the teacher provided feedback. This feedback could cause a correct modification of the subjects' output or no response. In both cases, there was topic continuation. If the teacher's feedback resulted in incorrect subjects' output, there was again provision of feedback to cause a correct modification of output, which was followed by a topic continuation.

Two combinations of feedback were offered to our participants: Group 1 received combination A (repetition of error and recast) and Group 2 received combination B (metalinguistic information and elicitation). Typical examples of these two combinations are as follows:

Example 1: Combination of feedback A (repetition of error and recast)
Text reconstruction, Dyad 9
S1: *if I was*

T: *if I was? If I were*
 S1: *if I were the president of the world*

Example 2: Combination of feedback B (metalinguistic information and elicitation)

Dictogloss, Dyad 3

S2: *if I would*

S1: *know*

T: *but "if" needs a past tense, it's not "If I would know", if I... past tense*

S1: *if I knew a film director*

When learners receive feedback on their erroneous output, they may react to it in different ways. As said above, this reaction has been termed *uptake*, and it may include a repetition of the feedback, an acknowledgement, a repair, etc. Drawing on this definition of uptake, we aimed at examining what type of feedback would provide better uptake rates. Our data were analysed by focusing on the number of uptake types after the teacher's feedback. Afterwards, we classified these uptake types into eight categories: self-repair (the student who commits the error repairs it himself), peer-repair (a peer corrects the error), incorporation (the student incorporates the teacher's feedback into his output), repetition (the student repeats the teacher's feedback), acknowledgement (a back channel suggests that the feedback has been understood), topic continuation (the student continues with the next obligatory context), same error (the mistake is made again after teacher's feedback), and combination (the mixture of any other types of uptake). Next we present examples extracted from our transcripts that will help us illustrate each category:

- Self-repair: Multiple choice, Group 1, Dyad 7
 S2: *I had*
 T: *I had?*
 S2: *no, I would, second conditional*
- Peer repair: Text reconstruction, Group 2, Dyad 8
 S2: *if I was president*
 T: *"was" is not possible*
 S1: *were, were*
- Incorporation: Dictogloss, Group 1, Dyad 6
 S2: *in this country I will see the most interesting places*
 T: *I will see? I would see*
 S2: *I would see the most interesting places in the morning*
- Repetition: Multiple choice, Group 1, Dyad 16
 S2: *o nada... no lo sé*
 T: *nothing? A window*
 S2: *a window*

- Acknowledgement: Dictogloss, Group1, Dyad 13
 T: *I will go?*
 S2: *no*
 T: *I would go*
 S2: *sí*
- Topic continuation: Dictogloss, Group 1, Dyad 14
 S1: *would... most interesting*
 T: *most interesting? The most interesting*
 S1: *buildings in the morning*
- Same error: Text reconstruction, Group 2, Dyad 2
 S2 : *and the cars run*
 T: *we're talking in general, and...*
 S2: *the cars run*
- Combination: Multiple choice, Group 1, Dyad 16
 S1: *él tendría más amigos si él... wouldn't be*
 T: *wouldn't be? Weren't*
 S2: *weren't, no? Weren't... si no fuera... Sorry I'm late. I was at*

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The eight types of uptake we have considered above were distributed in the learners' output as Table 1 shows. We have not separated articles and conditionals because we were only interested in ascertaining the different kinds of uptake in both types of grammatical aspects.

GROUP 1

	DICTOGLOSS	TR	MC	CT	TOTAL
repetition	15	17	10	19	61
incorporation	11	18	5	10	44
self-repair	3	5	10	9	27
peer-repair	0	0	6	6	12
acknowledgement	2	7	13	10	32
same error	0	0	0	0	0
topic continuation	12	20	9	8	49
combination	4	14	8	9	37

GROUP 2

	DICTOGLOSS	TR	MC	CT	TOTAL
repetition	0	0	0	0	0
incorporation	0	0	0	0	0
self-repair	23	32	17	26	98
peer-repair	2	10	6	11	39
acknowledgement	0	0	0	0	0
same error	0	1	0	0	1
topic continuation	0	4	0	1	5
combination	0	0	0	2	2

Note: TR= text reconstruction; MC= multiple choice; CT= cloze test

Table 1. Uptake types following teacher's feedback per task in Group 1 and 2.

According to the above table, three features come to our attention. First, self-repair seems to be the most used type of repair after obtaining Combination of feedback B (27 self-repairs in Group 1 and 98 in Group 2). Second, repetition seems to be a common type of uptake following Combination of feedback A, as learners repeated the recast provided by the teacher in 61 cases. In contrast, it did not occur even once after combination B, since the learners did not have a model to repeat but instead they had to look for the answer using the teacher's clues. The third outstanding feature of Table 1 is that in many occasions our learners simply continued with the next sentence or obligatory context, as the number of topic continuations shows (49 times in Group 1 and 5 in Group 2). Such a big difference may be due to the fact that for Group 1, when feedback in the form of recast was provided, our learners already had the correct grammatical aspect, so they could continue with the next item. On the contrary, Group 2 had to work on the correct form after the teacher's feedback. Therefore, they used some other types of uptake rather than topic continuation.

We applied statistical analysis (Kruskal-Wallis test) in order to determine whether there were significant differences between the two groups as far as uptake rates are concerned. Table 2 features only the uptake types that achieved significant differences.

	Group	Rank	Significance
Self-repair dictogloss	1	20.13	.000*
	2	33.25	
Self-repair TR	1	19.48	.000*
	2	34.53	

Self-repair MC	1	21.50	.010**
	2	30.50	
Self-repair CT	1	19.78	.000*
	2	33.94	
Peer-repair dictogloss	1	23.50	.043**
	2	26.50	
Peer-repair TR	1	20.50	.000*
	2	32.50	
Peer-repair CT	1	21.92	.023**
	2	29.66	
Incorporation dictogloss	1	26.50	.031**
	2	20.50	
Incorporation TR	1	27.50	.006*
	2	18.50	
Incorporation CT	1	26.50	.031**
	2	20.50	
Repetition dictogloss	1	27.00	.013**
	2	19.50	
Repetition TR	1	28.00	.002*
	2	17.50	
Repetition CT	1	27.75	.004*
	2	18.00	
Acknowledgement MC	1	27.25	.009*
	2	19.00	
Acknowledgement CT	1	26.75	.020**
	2	20.00	
Topic continuation dictogloss	1	26.75	.020**
	2	20.00	
Topic continuation TR	1	27.75	.004*
	2	18.00	
Combination TR	1	26.50	.031**
	2	20.50	
Combination MC	1	26.25	.046**
	2	21.00	

* Sig. at $p < .01$

** Sig. at $p < .05$

Note: TR= text reconstruction; MC= multiple choice; CT= cloze test

Table 2. Differences between Groups 1 and 2 in terms of uptake.

The results of applying a Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that uptake seemed to be feedback-related. In other words, we can claim that depending on what combination of

feedback was provided, the uptake changed accordingly. A detailed analysis of Table 2 shows that Combination A (repetition of error and recast) was mainly followed by incorporations, repetitions, acknowledgements and combinations, with statistical significance in these four types of uptake. Uptake in the form of incorporation obtained a statistical significance in the dictogloss, TR and CT, but not in the MC. The same pattern is observed for the repetitions, which did not reach a significant difference in the MC. The different results for the MC were somehow expected, since with this type of task there was no place for learners to incorporate anything once they were provided with feedback. Acknowledgements were statistically significant only in the MC and in the CT, and topic continuations achieved significant differences in the dictogloss and in the TR. As for combinations of uptake, we found a statistical significance in both TR and MC.

Combination of feedback B (metalinguistic information and elicitation) was overwhelmingly followed by self- and peer-repair, again with statistically significant differences. In light of these findings we may claim that uptake types were dependent on the feedback provided by the teacher. As revealed by our results, more implicit feedback was followed by incorporations, repetitions, acknowledgements and combinations. In contrast, more explicit feedback was followed by repair, either by the same student who made the error or by a peer.

Our findings corroborate previous studies on reactive feedback, for example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) found that recasts were in general less effective in promoting repair than other types of feedback (in their study, only 31% of teacher's recasts led to uptake). In contrast, the most effective types were elicitation and clarification requests. Another study on reactive feedback is Lyster's (1998a), who argued that recasts were not conducive to learner repair because this type of feedback already provides the correct form. In our study, we also notice that Combination of feedback A, which included recasts, did not lead to any sort of self- or peer-repair, but to other types of responses such as repetitions or acknowledgements. However, some researchers suggest that despite the fact that recasts may not produce an immediate response on the part of the learner, they may have an impact on the long term (Mackey and Philp 1998). In first language acquisition research, Ohta (2001) raises claims concerning the uptake following a recast and subsequent internalisation of the form at stake. For this reason, it has been suggested that a lack of immediate uptake to recasts does not mean that learners are unable to use it at a later stage. However, even in those cases in which learners produce uptake, it cannot be equated to acquisition (Ellis *et al.* 2001b). Uptake indicates that the form has been noticed, and noticing is a crucial factor towards acquisition. Taking a broader perspective on the issue of uptake, Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001a) acknowledge that uptake can occur even when the previous move does not involve corrective feedback.

In our opinion, uptake can be regarded as successful when it shows that a student can use a feature correctly or has understood a feature. Of course, such success does not indicate that the feature has been acquired. As Table 3 illustrates, the highest percentages in Group 2 belonged to self- and peer-repairs:

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Repetition	100% (61/61)	0%
Incorporation	100% (44/44)	0%
Self-repair	21.6% (27/125)	78.4% (98/125)
Peer-repair	29.2% (12/41)	70.7% (29/41)
Acknowledgement	100% (32/32)	0%
Same error	0%	100% (1/1)
Topic continuation	90.7% (49/54)	9.2% (5/54)
Combination	94.5% (35/37)	5.4% (2/37)

Table 3. Percentages of the total number of uptake types in Groups 1 and 2.

Despite the fact that the provision of explicit feedback resulted in a higher occurrence of repairs, we cannot posit a direct line between uptake and acquisition. The only point we wish to raise is the fact that self- and peer-repairs may be, in our view, powerful indicators of the learners' noticing of the mismatch between their output and the correct target-like form. Consider the following two examples belonging to the same dyad:

Example 3: Text reconstruction, Group 2, Dyad 2

S1: *the world. If I... ¿verbos también faltan? If I would, no?*

T: *if I would? This is a conditional, you need a past, if I...*

S1: *if I were*

Example 4: Text reconstruction, Group 2, Dyad 2

T: *"if" has to be followed by past. If I...*

S2: *if I*

T: *past tense. If I...*

S2: *if I had, if I had*

In these two self-repairs, both S1 and S2 arrive at the correct answer thanks to the teacher's help. These learners have thus detected their erroneous productions and subsequently they have solved them. In our opinion, although a direct relationship between uptake and SLA cannot be posited, there are theoretical grounds for believing that uptake might contribute to acquisition. First, we adhere to Lyster and Ranta's (1997) claim that uptake helps learners to use items and thus may help them to automatise their retrieval. Second, by pushing our learners to produce output, we are making them process language syntactically, that is to say, learners attempt to use forms that they have either previously used incorrectly or received explicit information. For the above

reasons, an issue which deserves further investigation is thus the relationship between type of feedback, uptake and L2/FL acquisition.

Taking into account the fact that, under some circumstances, learners may feign comprehension of the feedback, Aston (1986) argued that on some occasions, learners pretended to have understood a non-understanding routine in order to avoid embarrassment or to keep a smooth flow of conversation. In our opinion, this behaviour can also be applied to some of the types of uptake we analysed, in the sense that a minimal form of uptake (apart from a topic continuation, in which there is no uptake) consisted of an acknowledgement, as the following example shows:

Example 5: Cloze test, Group 1, Dyad 9

S1: *es que ahí no... factory?*

T: *factory? No, I would like to work on a*

S1: *ah! Mh*

S1 simply agrees with the correct form provided by the teacher. Pica (1988) suggested that in reaction to feedback, nonnative speakers acknowledge the correction due to reasons of conversational appropriateness. What we wish to point out is the ambiguity of the learner's answer, as it may involve two opposite meanings: on the one hand, comprehension of the feedback; on the other, pretense of understanding, which may have negative consequences for acquisition. This problem of feigning comprehension can also be applied in the uptake types of incorporation and repetition. In the case of incorporation, the student integrates the correct form in his output without further signal that he has understood the correction. Similarly, a mere repetition of the target-like item does not prove that the student knows why he has been corrected. However, the problem of feigning comprehension may be solved when the learners' uptake is more substantial, that is to say, when the learners show understanding of the teacher's feedback. This is the case of self-repairs, peer-repairs and combinations of uptake. In our study, combinations consisted mainly of acknowledgement and repetition, but also repetition and incorporation, as the following examples illustrate:

Example 6 (acknowledgement and repetition): Multiple choice, Group 1, Dyad 10

T: *window? No*

S2: *window*

T: *a window*

S2: *ah, claro, a window*

Example 7 (repetition and incorporation): Text reconstruction, Group 1, Dyad 14

T: *if I would have? If I had*

S2: *tuviese*

S1: *had... if I had lot of power*

The two examples above show that due to those combinations, the learners' uptake is more tangible and we are freed from the drawback of learners pretending to understand. This, in turn, implies that the learners have noticed the mismatch between their interlanguage and the target language, a crucial issue towards acquisition.

4. CONCLUSION

We set up this study in order to examine how learners reacted to different types of feedback each time they made a mistake on one of the grammatical features the study addressed (articles and conditionals). Our findings point to the fact that a specific kind of feedback seems to provide a certain type of uptake. In the present study, feedback of a more implicit type (Combination A: repetition of error and recast) tended to be followed by repetitions of the recast, incorporations and topic continuations. On the contrary, more explicit feedback (Combination B: metalinguistic information and elicitation) was mostly accompanied by repairs, either by the same student who committed the error or by his peer. Drawing on these results, we may argue that Combination B achieved significant differences in comparison to Combination A in two of the eight types of feedback we analysed, that is, in self- and peer-repair. These are encouraging findings, as they give rise to challenging questions and issues related to the feedback-uptake sequence and its impact on acquisition.

Some pedagogical implications may be inferred from our findings. First, the implementation of implicit and explicit feedback in the classroom is a desirable feature, since our research has shown that, to different degrees, both types of feedback fostered on the one hand, learners' awareness of gaps in their knowledge, and on the other, the noticing of the correct version. As the concept of noticing (Schmidt 1990) has been claimed to be a necessary component towards language learning, teachers should try to enhance maximal noticing on the part of the learners. A second pedagogical implication refers to the uptake following teacher's feedback. In our study, it has been demonstrated that explicit feedback led to a higher incidence of both self- and peer-repair. This means that feedback served a double function, namely, it raised learners' awareness of the mismatch between their interlanguage and the targeted form and it also helped to find the correct solution. In this case, explicit feedback may favour the conditions for language acquisition.

NOTES

1. This study is part of a research project funded by a grant from *Fundació Universitat Jaume I* and *Caixa Castelló-Bancaixa* (P1-1B2002-05).
2. The difference between dictogloss and text reconstruction is that, in dictogloss, the teacher reads a text twice at normal speed to the learners. When the text is read the second time, the learners jot down as much information as they can and then the dyad pools its resources to reconstruct the text. In text reconstruction, learners are required to reconstruct a paragraph by means of inserting all the necessary grammatical words to produce a meaningful and grammatically correct text.

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