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Camouflaged Uptake Following Incidental Focus-on-Form Episodes

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ABSTRACT

The efficacy of focus-on-form (FonF) within the context of communicatively-oriented language activities is measured via uptake. Uptake is defined as learners' verbal responses immediately following either preemptive or reactive FonF instruction (Loewen, 2004). The present study investigated what is (not) meant and (not) measured through this definition of uptake. Drawing on the audio-recorded analysis of 20 hours of communicatively-oriented interactions in an intermediate IELTS class with two teachers, this study investigates the frequency of preemptive and reactive incidental FonF, and the subsequent occurrence of uptake in an English as a foreign language context. This study also provided an in-depth qualitative analysis of these classes through field notes, learner notes, and video-recorded data to explore the instances of uptake moves that were not captured through audio-recorded data. The quantitative findings of this study demonstrated a very low and disappointing uptake rate. Furthermore, the study did not find a significant difference between reactive and preemptive FonF in terms of uptake rate. Nonetheless, the qualitative data revealed a myriad of uptake instances not observable via the initial data analysis. Based on these findings, a new definition of uptake is suggested, which includes *camouflaged* uptake and learners' immediate oral responses to FonF. Since uptake is used to gauge the efficacy of incidental FonF in primarily meaning-oriented classes, it is concluded that audio-recorded data just show the tip of the iceberg as far as the uptake rate is concerned. Thus, second language acquisition researchers are recommended to employ multiple indices to examine the effectiveness of FonF instruction.

1. Introduction

Hatch (1978)^[10] underscored the significant role of interaction in second language (L2) learning. Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1983, 1996)^[14] and Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985, 1995)^{[30][31]} argue that L2 learners benefit from attending to linguistic forms as they arise incidentally in the context of meaning-oriented interactions. Such incidental and brief attention to linguistic features in communicatively-oriented activities

is termed as "focus on form" (FonF) (Long, 1991).^[15] Long and Robinson (1998)^[17] conceptualize incidental FonF as "an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and one or more of the learners-triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23). On the other hand, the efficacy of corrective feedback is usually determined by uptake rate. According to Chaudron (1977),^[1] the primary immediate gauge of the efficacy of any corrective feedback would be a frequency count of the learners' correct responses

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following each type. Lyster and Ranta (1997)^[22] describe uptake as “a learner’s utterance that immediately follows the teacher’s feedback” (p. 49). Based on their definition, uptake refers to a reaction in some way to the teacher’s intention to raise the learner’s attention to some aspect of the learner’s initial utterance as illustrated in extract one in section 2.1. While Lyster and Ranta’s study examined uptake only concerning the reactive FonF, Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001a, 2001b)^{[12][13]} expanded the concept of uptake to include preemptive as well as reactive FonF. Given the paramount importance of uptake as a metric to evaluate the efficacy of FonF practices in the communicatively-oriented language teaching activities, this study provided a critical assessment of how uptake is gauged in the literature. In addition, this study examined if the current definition of uptake accounts for all uptake instances and introduced the concept of camouflaged uptake.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Incidental FonF

Incidental FonF (Long, 1991)^[15] is not planned, and attention to an extensive number of linguistic features occurs spontaneously in the course of communication-focused activities. In contrast, in planned FonF, an intensive number of preplanned linguistic features are incorporated into meaning-oriented activities (Ellis, 2001).^[3] Long and Robinson (1998)^[17] categorized incidental FonF into reactive and preemptive ones. Reactive FonF occurs when “learners produce an utterance containing an actual non-target utterance, which is usually addressed by the teacher but sometimes by another learner. Thus, it supplies learners with negative evidence” (Ellis et al., 2001a, p. 413).^[5] The following is an instance of a reactive “focus-on-form episode” (FFE) taken from the data in the present study:

Extract 1: Reactive FFE with uptake

S: so he is at the university for 9 years

T: *he has*

S: =*has been* at the university for 9 years

T: yes.

As this instance of reactive FFE shows, the teacher reformulates the learner’s erroneous utterance using the corrective feedback of recast as one type of reactive FFEs. The learners may use the teacher’s corrections in their non-target utterance, acknowledge it by a verbal signal, or may not notice or ignore the teacher’s corrective feedback.

Preemptive FonF is the second major category of FonF instruction. According to Ellis et al. (2001b),^[6] preemptive FonF deals with a linguistic problem similar to reactive

FonF. Nonetheless, the nature of the linguistic problem that is addressed is somewhat different. Ellis et al. (2001b)^[6] note that “preemptive focus on form involves the teacher or learner initiating attention to form even though no actual problem in production has happened. In other words, preemptive focus on form addresses an actual or a perceived gap in the learners’ knowledge” (p. 414). Based on Varonis and Gass (1985),^[33] the discourse in preemptive FonF consists of exchanges involving a question and response. Some instances of preemptive FonF make this distinction clear. Teachers sometimes predict a gap in the learners’ knowledge and seek to address it, as illustrated in this extract taken from the present study:

Extract 2: Teacher-initiated preemptive FFE

T: ...Look at the diagram on page 37. There are 7 cities.

It is about population,

homes with electricity, hate crime rate, degree of ambient noise. *What does ambient noise mean?*

Ss: *atmosphere, environment*

T: *in the context of this sentence, noise pollution, the amount of noise in various cities*

In this instance, the class is discussing mega-cities. The teacher takes time out from focusing on meaning to address a linguistic gap in the learners’ lexical knowledge, that is, the item “ambient noise”. Although such decisions interrupt the flow of communicative interactions and disrupt the meaning-centeredness of the activity, they highlight a specific form, assuming that this is justified because the form in question was deemed problematic to the learners in some way. Ellis et al. (2002)^[7] maintain that “teacher-initiated focus on form is initiated either by a query directed at the learners or by an advisory statement” (p. 428). One of the shortcomings of this type of teacher-initiated preemptive FonF is that the gap may not presumably be the learner’s actual gap (Ellis et al., 2001b).^[6] Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] post that “in learner-initiated preemptions, however, the gap is presumably real” (p. 415). In the next extract, it seems reasonable to assume that the learner does not know the meaning of “rush hour”:

Extract 3: Learner-initiated preemptive FFEs

T: During rush hours, the degree of speed is very low.

S: *What does Rush hour?*

T: *It means the noisy hour, for instance, at, 6:30 to 7.*

S: Yes

T: *During Ramadan, it is rush hour; all individuals are rushing home to break their fast, ha! (students laugh)*

2.2. Effectiveness of FonF Instruction

The efficacy of FonF instruction is gauged through uptake. In a series of studies, Lyster (1998a, 1998b, 2002)^{[18][19]}

^[20] uses it to refer to learners' response to the corrective feedback they receive from teachers on their efforts to communicate. Lyster and Ranta (1997)^[22] define uptake as "learner'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 learner's initial utterance" (p. 49). Whereas Lyster and Ranta have related uptake to the provision of corrective feedback, Ellis et al. (2001a, 2001b, 2002)^[5]^{[6][7]} take a broader perspective on learner uptake. They argue that uptake could happen even when the previous move does not involve corrective feedback. For instance, there are occasions in communicatively-oriented lessons where learners' attention is raised to a linguistic form (e.g., by asking a question), thereby eliciting not a teacher corrective feedback move but a teacher response move. In such learner-initiated FonF, learners still have the opportunity to react, for example, by acknowledging the previous move or by attempting to employ the feature in focus in their spontaneous language use.

The definition suggested by Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] is as follows: 1. Uptake is generated by learners; 2. The uptake move is optional (i.e., a FonF does not require the learner to generate an uptake move); 3. The uptake move happens in episodes where learners have shown a gap in their linguistic knowledge (e.g., by asking a question, making an error, or failing to respond to a teacher's question); 4. The uptake move happens as a reaction to some previous move where another participant (the teacher) either implicitly or explicitly provides information about a linguistic form (p. 286). The author adopted this expanded definition suggested by Ellis et al (2001a)^[5] in counting uptake frequency moves in the present study.

Uptake is successful when it shows that a learner could use a linguistic feature correctly or has understood the linguistic forms. It is noteworthy that such success does not reveal that the feature has been acquired (Ellis, 2005;^[4] Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003).^[23] To gain and indication of acquisition, it is necessary to show that the learners possess the autonomous linguistic ability to employ the feature, for instance, by examining whether learners could generate the form correctly on subsequent occasions without prompting. Nevertheless, there are theoretical grounds for indicating that uptake may contribute to acquisition. First, as Lyster and Ranta (1997)^[22] pointed out, uptake helps learners to "practice" using linguistic forms, and thus may help them to retrieve linguistic forms automatically. Second, Swain (1985, 1995)^{[30][31]} has argued that "comprehensible input" is inadequate to achieve a considerable level of linguistic competence, and that "pushed output" fosters acquisition

as it makes learners process language syntactically rather than semantically. It also enables learners to modify their erroneous hypotheses on the target language. Learners' attempts to employ linguistic features that they have either previously used incorrectly or received explicit information could be seen as one type of pushed output. Uptake, then, may create the opportunities needed for language acquisition to occur, and it is for this reason that it has attracted the attention of researchers to measure the efficacy of FonF instruction (Ellis et al., 2001a).^[5] Therefore, this study is informed by the following research question:

How often does uptake occur in incidental FFEs in general, and in reactive and preemptive FFEs in particular?

3. Method

In order to respond to the research question, teacher-learner interactions between teachers and learners were audio-recorded. All the audio recording were transcribed. All FFEs were identified and categorized. FFEs were divided into reactive and preemptive episodes. The amount of uptake following FFEs were examined. Therefore, the overall design of the study involved the identification of FFEs, categorization of FFEs into reactive and preemptive types, and the analysis of uptake rate following FFEs.

3.1. Context

One English as foreign language (EFL) class at a private English language school in Urmia, Iran was selected as a research site for data collection. In this language school, preparation classes are held for International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam. The classes are divided into nine proficiency levels with pre-intermediate and intermediate levels representing levels five and six, respectively. The participant learners' proficiency level was gauged to be pre-intermediate based on the results of an in-house placement IELTS test administered in the research site. Therefore, an IELTS preparation class representing level five and level six was observed.

In this private language institute, the EFL learners met twice per week, and every class lasted for 60 minutes. The coursebook used in the observed classes was *Focus on IELTS* (O'Connell, 2002).^[25] This coursebook contains various sample sections and questions relevant to the academic IELTS test. The coursebook integrates language skills of listening, writing, reading, and speaking tasks similar to the actual IELTS test. The coursebook contains lessons taken from authentic sources, which are primarily

meaning-oriented, meaning that they have no preselected linguistic focus. During the class observations, the researcher noted that some tasks and discussion questions were incorporated into content of the lessons to engage learners with the topics and to simulate the IELTS exam's sub-sections. A number of activities such as role-plays, jigsaw tasks, class discussions, opinion-gap tasks, reading comprehension activities, etc. were incorporated into class activities in the observed class. Learners were required to discuss their understandings of readings, opinions on the topic, and their answers to the various types of tasks following a reading passage in class. Listening activities included fill in the blanks. The listening tasks were based on mini lectures on social and academic English in authentic contexts. Listening tasks were accompanied by pre-listening and post-listening activities to engage learners with topics thematically. Regarding writings, there was a brainstorming activity on the writing topics in class. The learners were encouraged to speak about the writing topics, listening prompts, and to engage with class activities as much as possible.

3.2. Participants

3.2.1 Teachers

A total of two EFL teachers participated in this study. Teacher one (male, 45 years old, PhD in TEFL) has been teaching English for 10 years. Teacher two (female, 30 years old, MA in TEFL) had six years of EFL teaching experience. They taught the same group of EFL learners in two consecutive semesters using the same coursebook, namely *Focus on IELTS* (O'Connell, 2002).^[25] The book contained 30 chapters and was to be covered in two 18-session semesters. The first teacher taught the first nine units, and the second teacher taught the last nine ones.

3.2.2 Learners

The learners consisted of 14 university learners, seven males and seven females majoring in engineering or medicine. They were from language backgrounds of Turkish and were speaking Persian as the official language of Iran. Their ages ranged between 20 and 39 years. The learners paid tuition to attend IELTS classes and were highly motivated. Most of the learners were attending these IELTS preparation classes to take the IELTS exam and eventually apply to universities abroad.

3.3. Procedure

The first researcher observed the communicatively-oriented classroom activities in the IELTS classes. All

FFEs were identified and transcribed in teacher-learner interactions. The study consisted of two main stages of (1) identifying FFEs in a corpus of audio recordings taken from naturally occurring communicative activities; (2) a detailed description and categorization of the FFEs in the data.

Three mini-size MP3 wireless recorders were placed in the class to capture whole-class teacher-learner interactions. Therefore, any interaction involving the teacher and the whole class were audibly audio-recorded. However, the interactions between learners in pairs or between the teacher and individual learners in pair were not audibly recorded and were not included in the analysis. Williams (1999)^[34] found that relatively little FonF occurs in interactions between the teacher and individual learners. Therefore, limiting the analysis to only teacher-learner interactions is a limitation of this study. A total of 10 hours of meaning-focused instruction from each class, totaling 20 hours of data constituted the corpus in this study.

Furthermore, to collect qualitative and confirmatory data to cross-check the audio-recorded data, the first researcher observed the classes as a non-participant observer and took field notes while not disrupting the teaching process. A total of nine hours of instruction were also video-taped for the same purpose using a wall-mounted camera.

Finally, after obtaining learners' consent, their notebooks and materials were checked to record any notes they took during their class attendance. Both participant learners and teachers were ensured that checking their handouts, notebooks, and other materials used in the class is for associating their notes with the ongoing interaction, and all the recording of their notes will be kept confidential and used for only the research purposes. Any recordings of the learners' notebooks, handouts, etc., were destroyed upon the completion of this study. It should be noted that no effort was made to manipulate the frequency or characteristics of incidental FonF practices. The teachers were not informed that the researchers intended to examine reactive and preemptive FFEs. They were only told that the study aimed at analyzing classroom interactions during meaning-centered classes. Therefore, it stands to reason to expect that these observations represent what actually occurs in these EFL classes in the context of Iran.

3. 4. Data analysis

To identify and categorize FFEs in the recordings, the categorization system developed by Ellis et al. (2002)^[7] was used. First, two major categories of FFEs (i.e.,

preemptive and reactive FonF) were identified. The researchers first identified FFEs in the teacher-learner interactions where participants took time out from meaning-focused activities to address issues of linguistic nature termed Focus-on-Form Episodes (FFE). When the teachers or the learners incidentally interrupted a meaning-oriented interaction and briefly raised their attention to formal aspects of language preemptively or reactively, these episodes were identified as FFE. An FFE was defined as the discourse from the point where the focus on the linguistic form begins to the point where it ends (Ellis et al., 2001a).^[5] Next, FFEs were divided into reactive or preemptive ones. Finally, every FFE was analyzed in terms of whether it contained uptake.

The following example illustrates an FFE. In this FFE, the learner raises a query to know the meaning of a word during a discussion activity. The following utterances are related to the linguistic structure of *spoil*, and all these utterances constitute an FFE.

Extract 4: An example of FFE

S: *excuse me, teacher; what does spoil mean?*

T: what?

S: =spoil

T: so let's imagine you're my child

S: mhm

T: and you keep saying give me this, give me that, give me cookies, give me sweets, let me play, and I always say yes, yes, I spoil you. Spoil means giving you too much attention as you always get what you want.

T: so

S: *they always get her whatever; they spoil her; mm,*

This is also an example of uptake in a preemptive FFE. The learner asked a question on the meaning of *spoil*, and the teacher provided the meaning. In lines 9 and 11, the learner responds to the FonF by using part of the teacher's definition of *spoil* in her own production. Therefore, this utterance by the learner is marked as an uptake move.

Once all FFEs were identified, they were transcribed by the second researcher. Both researchers listened to the audio recordings to crosscheck the accuracy of their transcriptions. To check the inter-rater reliability in coding the data into preemptive and reactive FFEs and the occurrence of uptake, a research-assistant independently coded 10 percent of the data to ensure the inter-rater reliability. The inter-rater reliability was found to be 86% agreement in the identification of FFEs and their categorization into reactive and preemptive episodes.

4. Results

Figure one illustrates the frequency and percentage of all incidental FFEs observed in 20 hours of meaning-centered

teacher-learner interactions in an IELTS class during two semesters. The frequency of FFEs indicate the number of timed learners' attention was shifted to linguistic forms during communicative activities.

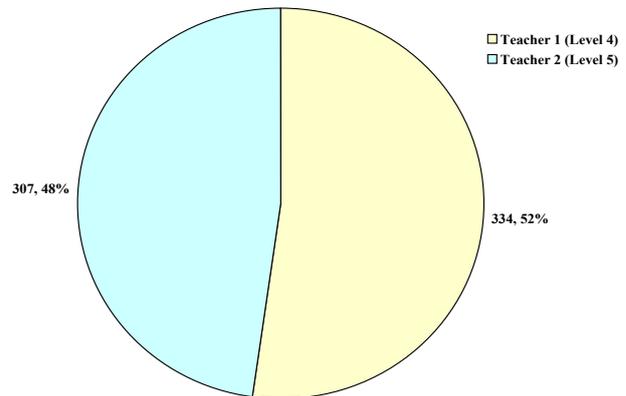


Figure 1. Total FFEs distribution in two classes

Overall, 641 instances of FFEs were identified in 20 hours of communicatively-oriented interactions with 52% and 48% of FFEs in IELTS level five and six classes, respectively. The findings show that an average of one FFEs occurred every 1.9 minutes of the classroom time.

Following any instance of an FFE, learners have the option to generate uptake by incorporating the linguistic information in FonF into their production. As mentioned before, uptake is an optional learner move. With respect to the efficacy of FFEs in terms of uptake rate, Table 1 presents the number of FFEs found followed by an uptake in both classes separately and all together.

Table 1. FFEs and Uptake

LRE & IELTS Levels \ Uptake	LREs	Uptake
Teacher 1 (Level 5)	335	72 (22%)
Teacher 2 (Level 6)	306	43 (13.3%)
Total	641	115 (18%)

Out of 335 instances of FFEs in level 5, 22% of the FFEs resulted in uptake. However, uptake occurred even less frequently in level 6. At level 6, there were only 43 uptake moves. Therefore, the findings showed a low occurrence of uptake. The overall percentage of uptake indicates that the learners signaled their understanding of FFEs and verbally acknowledged them in 18% of the instances of FFEs. Roughly one in six FFEs led to the occurrence of uptake as it is defined in the literature. The chi-square analysis did not reveal any significant

difference between the frequency of FFEs and uptake moves, $\chi^2(1df, N=756) = 3.62, p < .055$.

In this study, the proportion of uptake moves following preemptive and reactive FFEs was also investigated as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Uptake in Preemptive and Reactive FFEs

FFEs & Uptake IELTS Levels	Reactive FFEs	Uptake in Reactive FFEs	Preemptive FFEs	Uptake in Preemptive FFEs
Teacher 1 (Level 5)	111	41 (36.7%)	221	32 (15%)
Teacher 2 (Level 6)	57	31 (56%)	252	11 (4.4%)
Total	168	72 (92%)	473	43 (18%)

Out of all 115 instances of uptake in this study, a total of 72 uptake moves occurred following reactive FFEs, and 43 uptake moves occurred following preemptive FFEs. Therefore, the majority of reactive FFEs led to uptake, while it was not the case with preemptive FFEs. The chi-square analysis did not show a significant difference between the amount of uptake moves following preemptive and reactive FFEs, $\chi^2(1df, N = 115) = 3.10, p < .076$.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Current Definition of Uptake

This study examined the concept of uptake as a metric to gauge the efficacy of incidental FonF in promoting L2 learning. An extensive number of studies have used uptake as an indication of the efficacy of incidental FonF (e.g., Ellis et al., 2001a, 2001b, 2002;^{[5][6][7]} Loewen, 2004a, 2004b;^{[12][13]} Lyster & Ranta, 1997;^[22] Mackey et al., 2003;^[23] Oliver, 2000,^[28] to name but a few). The findings of this study showed that the frequency of uptake moves following FFEs was low as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. The considerably low number of uptake moves following FFEs indicate that learners verbally incorporated FFEs in their immediate productions only in 18% of total FFEs.

In addition, there was not any significant difference in the frequency of uptake in the two levels. However, uptake moves were found to be more common following reactive FFEs than preemptive FFEs. Out of 168 instances of reactive FFEs, 44% resulted in uptake, while only 9% of 473 preemptive FFEs culminated in uptake.

The markedly low occurrence of uptake found in this study differs from the findings of Ellis et al. (2001a).^[5] Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] found that uptake occurred in 74% of the FFEs in 12 hours of meaning-focused lessons in two English as a second language (ESL) classes. In addition,

the findings of this study found no significant association between reactive and preemptive types of FFEs and uptake rate. In contrast, Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] found that uptake was more frequent in reactive FFEs.

Lyster and Ranta (1997)^[22] examined uptake rate in four classes (18.3 hours of instruction) at Grade 4 French immersion lessons in Canada and found that only 27% of the reactive FFEs led to uptake. Similarly, Mackey and Philp (1998)^[24] investigated planned FonF and found that only 33% of corrective feedback led to uptake. Likewise, Oliver (1995)^[27] examined primary school children and found that less than 10% of corrective feedback led to uptake. Oliver (1995)^[27] argues that 16% of the time, it was not possible to produce uptake, and 55% of the time, it was not appropriate to produce uptake when it was followed by a yes or no question. Finally, Pica (2002)^[29] investigated discussion activities in two content-based classes in a university-based English language institute and found that limited opportunities existed for either negative feedback or uptake. Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] suggest that these studies' different contexts may explain the differences in the findings. Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] argue that some of the reported studies involved school-aged children rather than university learners. Therefore, younger learners might be less likely to produce uptake. Additionally, the immersion context of several of the studies may be responsible for decreased attention to linguistic form and more attention to meaning, since "the emphasis in an immersion program is not on studying the language, but on studying the content of the curriculum in the second language" (De Courcy, 2002, p. 5).^[2] These conflicting findings suggest that the effectiveness of incidental FonF in learners' production of uptake may vary depending on the context.

Ellis et al. (2001a)^[5] posit that private language school settings as examined in the present study may help learners notice linguistic form, even if they engage in meaning-focused activities during their class attendance. Nonetheless, the findings of this study does not support their argument. In this stud, the occurrence of uptake was very low despite the fact that this study was conducted in a private language school with highly motivated learners. While the production of uptake is argued to be potentially beneficial for L2 learners (Ellis 2001a;^[5] Lightbown 1998),^[11] lack of the production of uptake does it indicate that EFL learners in the observed class did not benefit from FonF as reported in the literature.

Several studies examined the role of gender and found that gender difference plays a role in the non-native speakers' production of uptake (e.g., Gass, 2003;^[8] Gass & Varonis, 1986).^[9] Gass and Varonis (1986)^[9] found that

men and women participate in conversation differently in native-speaker and non-native speaker interactions. Men tend to take advantage of conversation in a way that allows them to produce a more significant amount of uptake as opposed to women. Gass and Varonis (1986)^[9] found that “men took greater advantage of the opportunities to use the conversation in a way that allowed them to produce a greater amount of comprehensible output, whereas women utilized the conversation to obtain a greater amount of comprehensible input” (p. 349). These findings partially imply that gender differences may play a role in communicative interactions and as a result, it may influence the extent of uptake produced by female students in the context of meaning-focused classes.

Several researchers (Ohta, 2000)^[26] argue against using uptake as a metric for learning L2 because uptake is a discourse phenomenon, which may or may not refer to the psycholinguistic processes involved in L2 development. Mackey and Philp (1998)^[24] investigated native speaker and non-native speaker dyad negotiated interactions and found that recasts led to the acquisition of question forms irrespective of learners’ uptake production. Hence, Mackey and Philp (1998)^[24] argue that uptake is not a reliable measure of the efficacy of FonF in fostering L2 development. Furthermore, even researchers who have used uptake to measure the potential L2 learning have acknowledged that uptake does not guarantee L2 learning (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997;^[22] Ellis et al., 2001).^[3]

Given that uptake is an optional move (Ellis et al., 2001a),^[5] it may not necessarily occur after the provision of FonF. Learners may opt not to generate uptake despite the existence of an opportunity to produce uptake. Likewise, learners may not necessarily have a chance to produce uptake as an immediate verbal response to an FFEs. Oliver (2000)^[28] maintains that learners may have no opportunity to respond to the teacher’s FonF when the teacher continues their turn. Lack of production of uptake does not indicate that the linguistic form has not been noticed. Mackey and Philp (1998)^[24] argue that “noticing and learning” is possible without uptake production. Mackey and Philp’s (1998)^[24] experimental study showed that some learners can benefit from FonF even if they do not generate uptake following corrective feedback.

5.2. A modified definition of uptake

Although the explanation in the section mentioned above may explain the low frequency of uptake moves found in this study, the researchers relied on the qualitative analysis of the audio and video recordings and field notes to provide a more comprehensive picture of the occurrence of uptake. The qualitative analysis of FFEs revealed

that many uptake moves are not included in the current definition of uptake in the literature.

The researchers examined the learners’ notes taken during the class time to ensure that their notes contained the FFEs identified in the audio-recordings. Through the analysis of learner notes and video-taped data, the researcher found that whenever an FFE took place, the learners just took notes on a large number of occasions, and none of the learners acknowledged their noticing in the form of verbal uptake during that episode. To illustrate the point, let’s consider extract 5 taken from the present study. In this extract, when explaining the answer to a reading question, the teacher preemptively highlights the meaning of ‘housed’ by asking a query. Since no one supplies a response, the teacher finally elaborates on the meaning of this lexical item.

Extract 5:

T: the dead media project is housed (*Teacher reading from a reading passage*).

Here HOUSED means?

Ss: (*silent*)

T: Where you can find, is situated, is located, placed, situated (.)

House is used as a verb here.

Based on this extract, it can be assumed that learners initially did not know or were not sure about the exact meaning of ‘housed’ in this context, and their teacher decided to tap into their linguistic gap by raising attention to this lexical item. However, no one in the class attempted to verbally acknowledge his or her understanding or noticing of this teacher-generated preemptive FFE, apparently, uptake did not take place following this FFE based on the currently used definition of uptake in the literature. On the other hand, the qualitative data indicated that most of the learners decided to note down the meaning of ‘housed’ in this context. The researcher found that almost 80% of the learners noticed the given FFE and decided to note it down though in different forms. Some wrote synonyms such as “housed =located or situated”, and two other learners wrote, “housed (verb)”.

Learner notes demonstrate that the learners did notice their teacher’s preemptive FFE and felt the need to write it down, although they did not acknowledge it verbally in the class. On such an occasion, even the teacher is sure that initially, they did not know the exact meaning of ‘housed’ in this context. Thanks to her brief departure from the ongoing meaningful activity and linguistic explanation, the “hole” (Swain, 1998, p. 66)^[32] in their linguistic competence is most probably filled. Therefore, an uptake move on the learners’ part, although it was not manifested verbally.

The following are sample focus on form instances that no uptake was found in the analysis of the audio-recordings. At the same time, learners did decide to note them down with or without their synonyms and sometimes with their equivalent meanings in Persian in their books or notebooks:

that is why = *for this reason*; early-riser; on the whole = *in general* = *overall*; bear in mind = *keep in mind*; with respect to = *with regard to* = *considering* = *regarding*; at the moment = *right now*; once in a blue moon = *very rarely*; a 15-year old boy or 10-watt bulb (NB: *instances of hyphenated adjectives as the teacher highlighted them*); Islamic dress code; regardless of = *irrespective of*; a piece of advice / a piece of music (NB: *confusing examples of uncountable nouns which are considered as countable in Farsi and the teacher emphasized this contrast*); refresh = *brush up*; follow fashion = *fashion-conscious*; *get used to* + *V* + *ing*; make ends meet = *dakhlo kharj ra yeki kardan*; breach of promise = *zire ghovlesh zadan*; room for improvement = *ja baraye behbud*; birds of the same feather flock together = *kabuter ba kabuter baz ba baz*; if = *provided that* = *beharte inke*.

These instances are just a few from an extensive collection of the learners' notes taken during their classroom interactions, proving their conscious efforts mark their noticing of lexical, syntactic, idiomatic, collocational, or other sorts of gaps in their English.

Such evidence may indicate a substantial number of preemptive or reactive FFEs where no learner acknowledged uptake verbally. However, some learners tended to take a note of it in their notebooks. Such instances of uptake are called "*camouflaged uptakes*" in this study.

Concerning Long's (1991)^[15] definition of FonF instruction, the efficacy of incidental FonF is measured by learners' willingness or ability to shift their attention to form spontaneously. Based on the psychological viewpoint, extroverted learners who are not afraid to make mistakes may tend to express their noticing of FFEs and take the initiative to produce uptake orally. In contrast, introverted learners may opt to take notes of uptake rather than verbally producing uptake.

In addition, reactive and preemptive FFEs could be contextually prominent as shown in Extract 6.

Extract 6:

S: I think a lot of people may like visiting mountains, lakes, skiing places, and wild animals. These tourists are not interested in big cities or old places. What do we call these tourists?

T: very interesting idea, these tourists are called eco-tourists. Eco-tourism (*Writing 'eco-tourism on the board*).

Eco-tourism is a growing industry in the world.

Loewen (2004a)^[12] argues that when learners initiate an FFE, they often look for explicit information about a linguistic form, including an explanation of a grammatical item or explanation of the meaning of a lexical item. The learners often use signals such as 'oh' or 'yeah' to acknowledge the receipt of such information with no oral acknowledgement. For instance, in an FFE targeting vocabulary (see Extract 3 in section 2.1), the learner did not repeat the definition of vocabulary provided for them. As a result, the learner did not produce uptake in the traditional sense presented in the literature. In the cited preemptive FFE in Extract 3, the teacher focused on the meaning of '*rush hour*' and mentioned the context of fasting month in Islamic countries. By activating learners' schematic knowledge through mentioning Ramadan, there was no opportunity for the learner to acknowledge their incorporation of that lexical item into speech and no need to generate uptake in the verbal form.

Moreover, it was observed that learners sometimes integrated the linguistic points highlighted through an LRE not immediately but later on in their productions. Concerning extract 6, no immediate uptake was observed. However, some moments later, when the class was discussing on the benefits of tourism to the host country, the same student who asked about 'ecotourism' came up with the following utterance:

Extract 7:

S: Eco-tourism can protect environment and wild animals (.)

Local people will try to save their nature because they make money by that. For example, they will stop hunting birds or tigers.

T: Good idea, this is already happening in Africa

Such instances of uptake moves can be termed as delayed uptake rather than immediate uptake. Since the learner in the cited example was not exposed to any other input other than the previous incidental LRE on 'ecotourism', any incorporation of ecotourism in his utterances at any time within that session can be attributed to the previously observed focus on form episode. In conclusion, the researcher tends to believe that any intra-session acknowledgment of an LRE uttered either immediately or in a delayed manner can be regarded as an uptake move.

Nonetheless, regarding reactive FFEs, when learners make a linguistic errors, they should produce the correct form (Lyster, 2004)^[21] as Extracts 8 and 9 illustrate.

Extract 8:

S: so it's not convenient than city life

T: it isn't as (.) convenient

S: it isn't as convenient as city life

T: yeah you have access to many facilities in a city

Extract 9:

S: there aren't enough amount of computers in our schools.

T: There aren't enough ..? number

S: yes, number, computer is a countable noun. (*Teacher nods approvingly*).

S: ya, there aren't enough number of computers in our schools.

The government should create these facilities in the schools.

Extracts 1 (see section 2.1), 8, and 9 illustrate reactive FFEs, which necessitate the occurrence of uptake and learners' acknowledgment of the linguistic forms highlighted by the teacher reactively. These findings partially explain the low occurrence of uptake found in this study and the higher proportion of uptake following reactive FFEs than preemptive FFEs.

6. Conclusion

The occurrence of uptake is deemed to indicate the effectiveness of incidental FonF in facilitating L2 acquisition (Lyster, 2004).^[21] On the other hand, there are conflicting findings in the literature on the frequency of the occurrence of uptake. Therefore, this study was an attempt to provide a more detailed picture of the occurrence of uptake as a measure of learners' noticing of target forms and uptake. The quantitative and qualitative examination of the frequency of the production of uptake by learners and learners' note taking of target forms rather than verbally acknowledging noticing FonF by uptake indicate that the concept of uptake needs to be redefined and expanded to take into account non-verbal generation of learner uptake in FFEs. The findings of this study indicate that learners' written, non-verbal, and paralinguistic acknowledgments such as nodding following an FFE should be considered as an instance of uptake. Hence, the findings of this study call for analyzing uptake in terms of both verbal and non-verbal clues, and oral and written incorporation of FFEs. Finally, the findings of this study emphasize the significance of taking the instructional context and local culture into account in investigating the efficacy of incidental FonF gauged through uptake rate.

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