AN ANALYSIS OF IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT FEEDBACK ON GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY[1]

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1. Introduction

Corrective feedback on the part of the teacher 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. After having identified an error, the teacher can adopt two different approaches which are closely related to the distinction between implicit and explicit learning. The first approach, that is to say, explicit negative feedback, indicates overtly that there is some kind of mistake in the learner's output. In contrast, implicit negative feedback includes corrections or requests for clarifications. Our study embraced these two types of feedback since one group of subjects received implicit feedback and the other group received explicit feedback every time they made a mistake on the grammatical items targeted in the study. Our aim was to ascertain which type of feedback resulted in better accuracy rates, in both short- and long-term learning.

2. Corrective feedback

The mismatch between the input the learners are exposed to and the output they produce is widely considered in the literature. This mismatch may be tackled by

means of corrective feedback, either in an implicit or in an explicit way. However, no matter what type of feedback we provide, we agree with Brown (1988) on the fact that feedback must be more than encouragement, for "empty and automatic encouragement is often pointless" (1988: 16). A genuine response from the teacher provides some indication to learners as to the effectiveness of their utterances. The importance of feedback is expressed clearly in Zamel's words:

> the teacher's output becomes the input for the students and determines future performance and the student's output becomes the input for the teacher and determines the reaction to that performance [...] Teaching and learning are no longer exclusive roles; they become the provinces of both performers in the classroom: while the teacher instructs, the teacher learns about what must be done next, and while the learner learns, the student gives instruction about what information is lacking (1981:149).

Explicit corrective feedback involves the explanation of a formal aspect after an error has been made. In turn, implicit corrective feedback refers to ways which indicate that the learner's output is somehow erroneous, and needs to be reformulated. A number of studies have been carried out which investigate both types of feedback. Explicit corrective feedback has been widely used as a strategy in Focus on Form (FonF) studies (Doughty 1991; Lightbown and Spada 1990; White *et al.* 1991). Explicit corrective feedback can be regarded as a metalinguistic strategy, as it involves the explanation of a formal aspect when a mistake has been detected. Doughty (1991) investigated the effects of enriched input on the acquisition of relative clause structures by adult intermediate learners. The subjects of the study were assigned to 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. These learners' attention was therefore most explicitly drawn to the formal properties of relativisation via metalinguistic description. 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 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 L2. Their results corroborated the hypothesis that the teaching of formal aspects in a communicative setting positively contributed to the learners' linguistic accuracy. Likewise, Spada and Lightbown (1993), in a study with similar characteristics to Lightbown and

Spada's (1990), also demonstrated that explicit corrective feedback increased linguistic accuracy. However, and most importantly, these authors showed that their results were maintained in a delayed task five weeks after the treatment. This fact indicates that the effect of explicit corrective feedback can still be present in the long term. In this sense, short- and long-term have been operationalised differently in the literature. Nevertheless, some recent research (Muranoi 2000) allows a five-week period between two post-tests and also an interval of four to six weeks (Williams and Evans 1998).

Another study which compared the performance of explicit corrective feedback learners with others who did not receive this treatment was carried out by White *et al.* (1991). Again, the groups exposed to explicit teaching and explicit corrective feedback showed a higher level of linguistic accuracy than in control groups.

Implicit corrective feedback has also been widely investigated and can be implemented in different ways. For example, Lyster and Ranta (1997) carried out their study in several immersion classrooms in Montreal at primary level. The learners' L1 and L2 were English and French, respectively. The authors audio-taped four teachers whose lessons were transcribed. These transcriptions constituted the database for their analysis, which provided the following typology of corrective feedback:

1) *Explicit correction* refers to the explicit provision of the correct form. As the teacher provides the correct form, he clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect. Without any doubt, this strategy is an example of explicit corrective feedback, the only one described by Lyster and Ranta (1997).

   St: *La note pour le shot.* (La nota para la inyección)

   T6: *Oh, pour la, oh, pour ça. Tu veux dire pour la piqûre. Piqûre. Oui?* (Oh, para eso, para eso. Quieres decir para la inyección. Inyección. ¿Sí?)

2) *Recasts* involve the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error.

   St: *L'eau érable?* (El agua arce)

   T6: *L'eau d'érable* (El agua de arce)

3) *Clarification requests* indicate to students either that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.

   St: *Est-ce que, est-ce que je peux fait une carte sur le… pour mon petit frère sur le computer?* (¿Puedo hacer una carta para mi hermano pequeño con el ordenador?)

   T6: *Pardon?* (¿Cómo?)

4) *Metalinguistic feedback* contains either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form. Metalinguistic comments generally indicate that there is an error somewhere.

St: *Euhm, le, le éléphant. Le éléphant gronde* (Euhm, el, el elefante. El elefante gruñe)

T5: *Est-ce qu'on dit le éléphant?* (¿Se dice el elefante?)

5) *Elicitation* refers to at least three techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the student. First, teachers elicit completion of their own utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to "fill in the blank". Second, teachers use questions to elicit correct forms, and third, teachers occasionally ask students to reformulate their utterance.

St: *Le chien peut court* (El perro puede corrido)

T5: *Le chien peut court? Le chien peut…* (¿El perro puede corrido? El perro puede…)

6) *Repetition* refers to the teacher's repetition, in isolation, of the student's erroneous utterance.

St: *Le… le giraffe?* (¿La… la jirafa?)

T3: *Le giraffe?* (¿La jirafa?)

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%). On some occasions, a combination of the above strategies may be employed, as in Doughty and Varela (1998). However, this combination does not allow us to isolate the specific effects of a particular strategy. As the results showed, then, recasts were the most usual reaction to students' errors despite the fact that they were also the least appropriate technique for eliciting output correction on the part of the learners.

Corrective feedback is significant to L2 development because it provides the learner with an opportunity to reflect on the utterance and consider other possibilities. These benefits of corrective feedback are also applicable to the foreign language (FL) context, in the sense that it may trigger the cognitive processes required for acquisition (Carroll and Swain 1993). Nevertheless, not all corrective feedback techniques have been regarded as equally effective. Recent research (e.g. Lyster 1998) considers the need to explore the effect of combinations of corrective feedback, as opposed to isolated techniques. Our study took into account Lyster's suggestion, and thus we provided one group of learners with a combination of feedback A (repetition of error and recast) and the second group with a

combination of feedback B (metalinguistic feedback and elicitation). Two research questions were devised in order to analyse corrective feedback:

1) The first drew on Doughty and Varela (1998), who report the successful combination of repetition of error plus recast, and on Carroll and Swain (1993), who argue that metalinguistic feedback works better: *Which combination of feedback (A or B) results in better accuracy rates?*

2) The second drew on Mackey and Philp (1998), who showed only immediate gains in accuracy, and on Doughty and Varela (1998) who pointed to the lack of perdurability of gains in accuracy: *Which combination of feedback (A or B) lasts longer, as measured in the delayed test?*

3. Method

3.1. 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 (see 3.3 below). Their ages ranged from 17 to 22 and the vast majority of them had been studying English as a foreign language for 4 to 7 years.

3.2. Grammar points in focus

The study focused on two grammatical items: articles (definite/indefinite, and zero article) and the 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 has proven to be ineffective. Moreover, in the FonF field, it is claimed that the most suitable items for teaching at this level would be those that are not crucial for communication and those that are likely to be misanalysed by learners (Harley 1993). We believe that both articles and the second conditional fall into these categories because first, articles are not too important for successful communication, and second, the conditional can be easily misanalysed by students.

A further reason for selecting the two grammatical features mentioned above 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 the second conditional.

3.3. Data collection procedure

In Week 1 of the study, our participants filled in some background information questions which provided the researcher with information regarding their age, mother tongue, etc. They also did a Level Placement Test in order to ascertain their level of proficiency in English. In Week 2, the subjects did a dictogloss exercise and another of text reconstruction as classroom activities since they were not familiar with the performance of these two tasks.

In Week 3 of our study, the participants received instruction by means of communicative tasks on the use of articles and the second conditional. After this instructional phase, the students worked on four different types of tasks (dictogloss, text reconstruction, multiple choice and cloze test) in pairs. These tasks are examples of different degrees of overt focus on form, and they had already been used in several studies (García Mayo 2002a, 2002b; Storch 1998; Wajnryb 1990). The four tasks were carried out in four different weeks (Week 3: dictogloss; Week 4: text reconstruction; Week 5: multiple choice, and Week 6: cloze test). Immediately after the performance and the recording of each task, the students were asked to judge the grammaticality of nine sentences individually in a grammaticality judgement task (GJT). Six of those nine sentences required the use of articles and the second conditional, and three sentences were distracters. The students had to decide whether the underlined parts of each sentence were grammatical or not. If they were grammatical, they simply had to circle the underlined words. If the underlined parts were ungrammatical, they had to provide the grammatically correct version. Grammaticality judgement tasks have been previously employed in several studies (e.g. Ayoun 2001; Long *et al.* 1998; Muranoi 2000).

In order to measure the effects of the different tasks in the short term, we allowed an interval of four weeks in which there was no specific reference to either articles or the second conditional, and the students continued with their normal course content. In Week 7, after this four-week interval, the students worked on the test after treatment, which consisted of a tailor-made test including the most frequent errors the students had made in the four tasks. Finally, and again with a four-week

interval, the subjects performed the delayed test (Week 8), which was a version of the test after treatment. The course of the study is graphically illustrated in the following table:

BOTH GROUPS	
Week 1	Background information questions + Level Placement test
Week 2	Example of dictogloss and text reconstruction
Week 3	Instruction on articles and conditional + dictogloss + GJT 1
Week 4	Text reconstruction + GJT 2
Week 5	Multiple choice + GJT 3
Week 6	Cloze test + GJT 4
Week 7	Test after treatment (interval: 4 weeks)
Week 8	Delayed test (interval: 4 weeks)

TABLE 1: Study design

The four tasks used in the study followed the same pattern: each dyad was given a single copy of the task; then, in order to encourage joint production (Storch 1999), they had to discuss their suggestions on the correct form to write down, and the researcher provided them with feedback (combination A or B) whenever a mistake was made.

The procedure was as follows: the two groups of learners carried out the four tasks in pairs. Each task contained 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. If the output was wrong, the researcher provided feedback (combination A or B, depending on the group). 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:

> **Combination A: repetition of error and recast**
> Dictogloss, Dyad 8
> S1: *a important film*
> T: *a important? An important*
> S1: *an important film director I would ask him if*

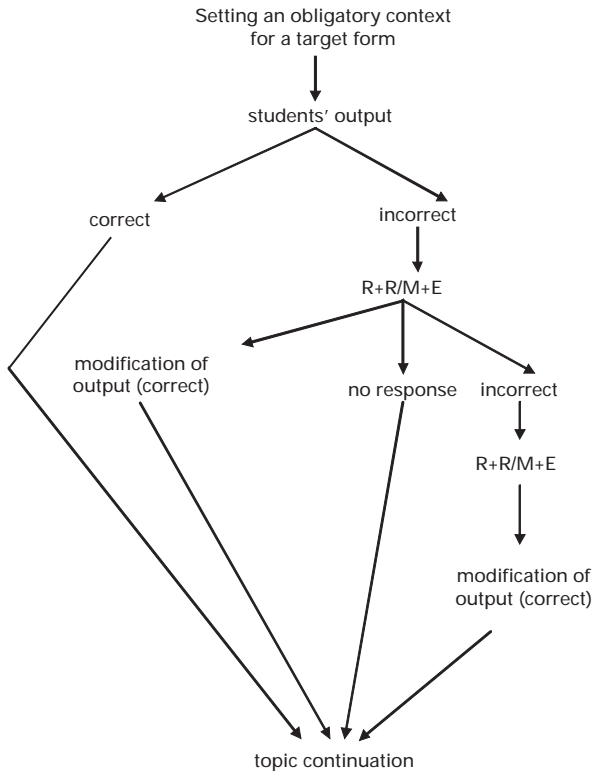**Combination B: metalinguistic information and elicitation**
Dictogloss, Dyad 7
S1: *if I know a film director*
T: *this is a conditional, you need a past. If I…*
S1: *ah! If I knew*

The teacher's feedback might elicit, from the subject, either corrected output or no response. In both cases, there was topic continuation. If the teacher's feedback resulted in incorrect output, there was further feedback designed to elicit a corrected version and thus a topic continuation. This process may be more readily understood in the following figure (adapted from Muranoi 2000):

Note: R+R= repetition of error and recast, M+E= metalinguistic information and elicitation.

FIGURE 1: Study implementation.

4. Results and discussion

As the goal of this study was to ascertain the impact of two combinations of feedback on grammatical accuracy in the short and long term, the unit of analysis we employed was the number of correct answers the students had generated in their output. Therefore, for research question 1 we took into account the correct answers generated by the students in the four tasks, in the four GJTs, and in the test after treatment. As for our second research question, we considered the number of correct answers provided in the delayed test. Table 2 shows the mean scores of correct answers in the four tasks and in the test after treatment. Unfortunately, we could not find statistically significant differences between the two groups for the GJTs.

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Dicto art	5.72	5.25
Dicto cond	4.5	4.13
TR art	7.75	7.75
TR cond*	5	4.88
MC art	5	5
MC cond	5	5
CT art	3.94	4
CT cond	6	6
Test after treat. art	6.91	5.69
Test after treat. cond**	7.09	4.31

Note: Dicto=dictogloss; art=article; cond=conditional; TR=text reconstruction; MC=multiple choice; CT= cloze test; treat.=treatment.
*Sig. at $p<.05$ level.
**Sig. at $p<.01$ level.

TABLE 2: Mean scores of correct answers in the dictogloss, text reconstruction, multiple choice, cloze test, and test after treatment.

These results reveal that there are statistically significant differences in text reconstruction conditional ($p<.05$) and in the test after treatment ($p<.01$) in favour of Group 1. In fact, a detailed analysis of the above table shows that cloze test article is the only result which is slightly superior in Group 2 (3.94 for Group 1 vs 4 for Group 2). Apart from the constants of multiple choice article and

conditional and cloze test conditional, in the rest of the tasks, Group 1, which received feedback A, obtained higher levels of accuracy. Therefore, we may claim that the combination of feedback A (repetition of error and recast) tended to provide better accuracy rates in most tasks, with significant differences in the grammatical feature of conditional in text reconstruction and in the test after treatment. Moreover, and in light of the above results, we may claim that a combination of feedback B (metalinguistic information and elicitation) did not show better accuracy rates. Our findings indicate that the combination of repetition of error followed by a recast achieved better results. In order to illustrate the two types of feedback, we present two examples from the transcripts:

> **Example 1: Dictogloss, Dyad 7, Combination A**
> S1: *if I won the lottery, I would travel to USA*
> T: *I would travel to USA? I would travel to the USA*
> S1: *ah, yes*
>
> **Example 2: Dictogloss, Dyad 7, Combination B**
> S1: *if I know a film director*
> T: *this is a conditional, you need a past. If I…*
> S1: *ah! If I knew*

In the first example, feedback is of a more implicit type, as the teacher repeats the mistake with rising intonation and then provides the recast without further explanation. Contrarily, in Example 2, there is some information about the grammatical aspect needed, which is followed by an elicitation. Here, the teacher stops before uttering the correct form so that the student can fill in the gap. It was our belief that giving our learners an explanation of their error or some information about the form required would have been more positive in helping them to become aware of that form and to internalise it. This is corroborated by the fact that, as happens in the second turn by S1 in Example 1, one does not know whether the student has internalised the recast, since he merely accepted what the teacher said. In this sense, we support Ellis *et al.*'s (2002) claim that explicit correction favours students' noticing of the correct form. However, as Table 2 demonstrates, the more implicit feedback achieved better results, above all in the conditional. This outcome is in line with Doughty and Varela (1998), whose study showed that learners who were offered recasts showed greater improvement in accuracy than the control group. When comparing our results with those of Doughty and Varela, we found a coincidence in the sense that they also focused on conditionals, and it was in the conditional where statistically significant differences were found. We may thus argue that the second conditional is a good candidate for FonF, as it is likely to be misinterpreted or misanalysed by learners. Moreover, as we have mentioned earlier, our subjects had attempted to use this grammatical feature, although erroneously.

It is for this reason that the conditional was near the learners' *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky 1978), or, as the *teachability hypothesis* maintains, our students were ready to learn this form.

We have stated above that we could not assess the four GJTs because no statistically significant differences were found between groups. However, Table 3 shows that as the study progresses, the number of correct answers increases.

	GROUP 1 (*n*=32)	GROUP 2 (*n*=16)
GJT 1	5 or more: 29 students	5 or more:14 students
	4 or less: 3 students	4 or less: 2 students
GJT 2	5 or more: 30 students	5 or more:11 students
	4 or less: 2 students	4 or less: 5 students
GJT 3	5 or more: 31 students	5 or more:14 students
	4 or less: 1 student	4 or less: 2 students
GJT 4	5 or more: 31 students	5 or more:15 students
	4 or less: 1 student	4 or less: 1 student

TABLE 3: Learners' correct answers in the four grammaticality judgement tasks.

The results of Table 3 demonstrate that, for Group 1, the number of students who obtained 5 or more correct answers grew from GJT 1 to GJT 4. This increase in accuracy may reveal that Combination of feedback A seemed to provide higher accuracy rates not only in the majority of tasks, but also in the grammaticality judgement tasks. As far as Group 2 is concerned, there were fluctuations in learners' performance, but overall, the number of students who obtained more correct answers also increased as revealed by GJT 4.

Turning to our second research question, i.e., whether there was any impact of corrective feedback on long-term learning, we considered the correct answers provided by our participants in the delayed test. By means of a Wilcoxon test, we assessed the significance of the mean scores contrasting the test after treatment and the delayed test within groups. As can be seen in Table 4, there are no statistically significant differences between the test after treatment and the delayed test in Group 1. However, as Table 5 shows, in Group 2 (cf. Table 5) we found a significant difference for the past ($p<.03$) but not for the rest of grammatical forms targeted (article and conditional).

	MEAN RANK	SIG.
Delayed test past	7.50	.224
Test after treat. past	10.05	
Delayed test a	2.00	.564
Test after treat. a	2.00	
Delayed test the	13.73	.352
Test after treat. the	14.19	
Delayed test zero article	8.50	.371
Test after treat. zero article	9.35	
Delayed test conditional	10.67	.967
Test after treat. conditional	9.40	

TABLE 4: Mean scores of correct answers of Group 1 in the test after treatment and in the delayed test.

	MEAN RANK	SIG.
Delayed test past	4.00	.03*
Test after treat. past	7.33	
Delayed test a	.00	.317
Test after treat. a	1.00	
Delayed test the	7.63	.290
Test after treat. the	6.72	
Delayed test zero article	4.79	.530
Test after treat. zero article	7.17	
Delayed test conditional	6.17	.633
Test after treat. conditional	4.42	

Note. Treat.=treatment.
*Sig. at $p<.05$ level.

TABLE 5: Mean scores of correct answers of Group 2 in the test after treatment and in the delayed test.

We carried out a further analysis of correct answers to find out whether there existed significant differences between Group 1 and Group 2. The Mann-Whitney

U test in Table 6 shows that Group 1 obtained higher mean scores of correct answers, with statistically significant differences in conditional, both in the test after treatment and in the delayed test.

	GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Test after treat. art	6.91	5.69
Test after treat. cond*	7.09	4.31
Delayed test art	7.44	6.19
Delayed test cond**	7.31	5.38

Note. art=article; cond=conditional; treat.=treatment
* Sig. at $p<.01$ level.
** Sig. at $p<.05$ level.

TABLE 6: Mean scores of correct answers in the test after treatment and in the delayed test between groups.

Drawing on the results shown in Table 5, we may claim that combination of feedback B resulted in longer retention than combination A, at least for the grammatical feature of past. This finding seems to contradict the results we obtained for short-term learning, which showed that combination of feedback A provided better accuracy rates in the short term. Ellis (2002) has argued that form-focused instruction is successful if there is an extended treatment, but this treatment does not guarantee success if the target structure is complex in nature. Ellis' assertions may be applied in part to the two types of feedback we used in our study, as the provision of feedback was intensive (every time an error occurred) and extended (it took place throughout the four tasks).

The difference between the results of short term and long term may lie in the fact that the interlanguage changes toward accuracy promoted by FonF tasks are not necessarily immediate (Doughty and Williams 1998b). These tasks may lead to restructuring of nontargetlike forms, a process which is not instantaneous but that takes time. In addition, we should take into account how input (in the form of feedback) was processed by our learners, that is to say, how the subjects' attention was drawn to the target items and its delayed effects. The issue of attention is a part of a series of studies in which Schmidt (1990, 1994) proposed that *noticing* (i.e., conscious attention to the form of input) was necessary for L2 development. This claim has become known as the *Noticing Hypothesis*. From Schmidt's point of view, noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input into intake. Intake is the third level in Gass and Selinker's (1994) model of

second language acquisition (SLA), after apperceived input and comprehended input. Intake refers to attempts by the learner to assimilate a part of comprehended input by means of testing, rejecting, modifying or confirming hypotheses. In the present study, attention to the targeted grammatical forms was drawn by means of the two combinations of feedback following learners' errors.

In the case of the specific grammatical feature that presents statistical differences between the test after treatment and the delayed test (i.e., past tense), Group 2 had received explicit corrective feedback which involved the explanation and/or information of a formal aspect when a mistake was detected. As discussed earlier, the positive effects of this type of feedback on linguistic accuracy have been reported in studies by Lightbown and Spada (1990), White *et al.* (1991), and Spada and Lightbown (1993). This latter study further showed that the effect of explicit corrective feedback was present in the long term (five weeks after the treatment). In our study, the delayed test took place 8 weeks after the last task (i.e., the cloze test) was carried out, a period we believe long enough to justify claims that learners had internalised this particular grammar point. In our opinion, the effects of FonF and corrective feedback on the delayed test can be attributed to the treatment, since the participants of the study did not receive reinforcement of the targeted form through exposure in classroom materials and activities once the experimental period was over.

Despite the encouraging finding that combination of feedback B had an impact on long-term retention of past, we cannot discard the rest of the grammatical items that did not achieve any statistically significant difference in the delayed test. As revealed by our findings, combination of feedback A had an effect on the short term; however, it may have gradually deteriorated and did not have an impact on the long run. Although it has been suggested (Lightbown 1991) that repeated communicative exposure to grammar structures tends to consolidate learner accuracy, Leow (1998) has pointed out the uncertainty of delayed effects of attention on L2 acquisition. It is also worth mentioning that several factors affecting input processing may have played a role in the results of both the test after treatment and delayed test. As Kumaravadivelu (1994) notes, factors such as motivation, extroversion and anxiety may have various effects on learners' processing and internalisation of the forms. A qualitative analysis of learners' performance on the four tasks reveals that in some dyads one member was more active and participative than his/her peer. This behaviour would correspond with the third pattern of dyadic interaction suggested by Storch (2002a, 2002b) as *dominant/passive*. In this sense, although Seliger (1983) relates quantity of interaction with learners' performance, we agree with Alcón (1994) that there is no correlation between participation and progress, as learners who keep silent can

still be actively involved in the performance of the task. The following examples show how, in this dyad, S1 dominates the conversation in detriment of S2:

> **Example 3: Dictogloss, Group 2, Dyad 5**
> T: *evenings I have dinner? You need a conditional here, in the evenings I…*
> S1: *would, if I see*
> T: *this is a conditional, so you need a past tense. If I…*
> S1: *saw an important film*
> S2: *film*
> S1: *film director I would asked him*
>
> **Example 4: Cloze test, Group 2, Dyad 5**
> T: *here you need a past. This is second conditional. She would be delighted if she… conducir ese coche*
> S1: *ja tenim el drive [we have drive already]*
> S2: *es que drive es conducir*
> S1: *sí*
> S2: *if she… quiere?*
> S1: *estaría encantada si condujera ese coche*
> S2: *si pudiese… si pudiese conducir*
> S1: *sí, could*

Although S1 clearly leads the dialogue and S2 simply accepts her partner's answer or translates it into Spanish, S2 is engaged in the conversation and trying hard to find the right answer. Her participation could be analysed easily due to the fact that our students were grouped in dyads. However, in groups of more than two learners, the task may be completed with some students assuming a minor role in the discussion of the right answer. In Examples 3 and 4 it may be argued that S2 was an introverted student or the teacher's presence made her anxious. Nevertheless, we do not think that anxiety had an inhibitory effect on our subjects, as there was no time pressure and the development of the study took place in a relaxed atmosphere which was enhanced by the fact that the subjects did not consider the teacher a stranger carrying out research in their classroom, but as their teacher helping them in specific activities. Arnold (2001) points out that for cognitive learning to occur, the learners' affective factors must be favourable. The only anxiety-provoking element could have been the tape recorder, but I observed that after the first couple of minutes, the learners forgot about it and centred on the task; besides, some learners even recognised they had enjoyed being recorded.

The finding that sustained gains (except for past tense) were not maintained in the delayed test corroborates Doughty and Varela's (1998) study, since accurate rates that were present in the immediate post-test did not endure in the delayed one delivered two months later. Research which demonstrates lasting effects in delayed

post-tests (e.g. Mackey 1997) has, according to Doughty and Williams (1998b) two features: first, this research integrates attention to meaning and attention to form, and second, FonF continues beyond a short treatment period. In our opinion, the study we undertook shares those two characteristics, as, on the one hand, the use of FonF tasks combined attention to meaning and form, and on the other, our students received an intensive treatment over an extended period of time.

The first findings of our first research question (Table 2), i.e., combination of feedback A made learners achieve higher accuracy rates, might be subject to criticism. First, Lyster (1998) claims that the repetition of the error with rising intonation is a type of explicit procedure which is combined with a more implicit clue (recast). Therefore, if recasts were isolated as the only type of feedback provided, we could further understand their contribution to SLA. Although we agree with Lyster's proposal, we considered that repetitions of errors would be a type of attentional device designed to draw learners' attention to the targeted forms. A qualitative analysis of the transcription shows that after Combination of feedback A our students tended to repeat the recast (Example 5), to incorporate it in their output (Example 6), or to acknowledge their mistake (Example 7):

Example 5: Dictogloss, Dyad 1
S1: *I visit*
T: *I visit? I would visit*
S1: *I would visit… a conditional… would visit*

Example 6: Dictogloss, 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*

Example 7: Text reconstruction, Dyad 16
S2: *I was, no?*
T: *I was? If I were*
S2: *sí, porque…*

As can be seen from the above examples, the teacher's repetition of the mistake can be considered as an additional clue that tells the learners where the error is. Moreover, on providing the recast the mistake can be easily identified and, hopefully, noticed. As we cannot be sure about what specific element of the combination of feedback A resulted in better accuracy, the only claim we may make is that the union of both elements made learners in Group 1 outperform those in Group 2.

A second criticism of our results might address the issue that attention to form is not the single predictor of accurate L2 production. Salaberry and López-Ortega

(1998) argue that factors such as communicative pressure may affect accuracy in L2 production. In our study, the students did not have to face communicative pressure as there was no time limit to complete the tasks, the GJTs or the test after treatment. We may thus argue that, in our case, accuracy was determined by how and to what forms learners directed their attention. By looking again at Table 2, we see that feedback A is beneficial for learners' accuracy in the tasks and in the test after treatment. Our findings support the claim that when recasts have a specific target, they make a stronger impact on accuracy (Muranoi 2000).

Despite the fact that our findings find support in previous research (e.g. Doughty and Varela 1998; Mackey and Philp 1998), they differ considerably from the results of other studies (e.g. Carroll and Swain 1993; Havranek 1999; Norris and Ortega 2000) which point to the outperformance of groups which received explicit metalinguistic feedback over groups which were offered implicit feedback. A possible explanation may lie in the difficulty for learners to identify where the problem is if the feedback is of the implicit type. Chaudron (1988) observed that implicit negative feedback in the form of recasts and repetitions was likely to be ambiguous for learners in the sense that the modification of the teacher's utterance might be imperceptible, or treated as a mere alternative to the learner's output. The disparity of results of implicit and explicit feedback evidences the need to explore the effects of different combinations of feedback on classroom SLA.

5. Conclusions

The present study was inspired by the lack of data concerning the effect of corrective feedback on the acquisition of English in the foreign language classroom and the felt need to supply such evidence. Recent research (e.g. Lyster 1998) notes the need to explore the effect of combinations of corrective feedback, as opposed to isolated techniques.

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of two different combinations of feedback (one more implicit and the other more explicit) on learners' accuracy, we analysed the learners' correct answers. We found that combination of feedback A (repetition of error and recast) provided better accuracy rates, with significant differences in the text reconstruction task and in the test after treatment for conditional in Group 1. These results concerned the effects of feedback in the short term perspective; moreover we were also interesting in shedding light on the perdurability of feedback in the long term. In this connection, on examining the correct answers in the delayed test we found that a combination of feedback B provided sustained gains for the past, but this was not the case for the rest of grammatical items in Group 2 (articles and conditional) or for a combination of feedback A. Therefore,

there is still a need to explore the exact conditions under which these —and other— types of feedback are likely to be effective for acquisition.

A number of pedagogical implications may be inferred from our findings. The first one concerns the implementation of implicit and explicit feedback in the classroom. In fact, this implementation is a desirable feature, since both types of feedback may, on the one hand, foster learners' awareness of gaps in their knowledge, and on the other, bring forcefully to their notice the correct version. As the concept of noticing has been claimed to be a necessary component towards language learning (Schmidt 1990), teachers should try to enhance maximal noticing on the part of the learners. The second pedagogical implication we suggest is closely related to the first: by briefly drawing the learner's attention to formal aspects in the context of communication, it has been claimed, not only does the learner who has made the mistake benefit from the feedback, but so do the rest of the class. This is particularly important in the EFL context, where teachers face large classes and feedback is usually available to a limited number of students.

Notes

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