



## **Incidental Focus on Form, Noticing and Vocabulary Learning in the EFL Classroom**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the effectiveness of teachers' incidental focus on form on vocabulary learning. Seventeen 45-minute audio-recorded teacher-led conversation, 204 learners' diaries (17 sessions x 12 learners) reporting what the participants had learned after each conversational class, 204 post-test translations, and 204 delayed post-test translations, which were created on the basis of the items reported in learners' diaries were used to trace teacher involvement in pre-emptive and reactive lexically-oriented focus on form episodes (FFE) to vocabulary learning. The results revealed that teachers' pre-emptive FFEs are effective for learners' noticing and subsequent use of vocabulary items. On the other hand, teacher reactive FFEs do not seem to facilitate noticing, as measured by learners' reporting of vocabulary items, but they do facilitate vocabulary learning, as measured by subsequent use of vocabulary items in the post-test and delayed post-tests. These results suggest that incidental focus on form might be beneficial for learners, and further research issues on incidental focus on form are suggested.

**KEYWORDS:** incidental focus on form, vocabulary learning, classroom interaction, teacher's feedback, foreign language setting.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Long's interactional hypothesis (Long, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1996) claims that second language learning is facilitated through the role played by interaction in connecting input, internal learner capacities and output in productive ways. In particular, negotiated interaction is claimed to be useful to direct the learner's attention towards a mismatch between the target input and the learner's own interlanguage form. From this perspective, current research places great emphasis on the study of attention and awareness and L2 development through interaction (Alegria de Colina and García Mayo, 2007; García Mayo, 2005; Long, 1996; Robinson, 1995, 2001, 2003). Drawing on cognitive psychology and cognitive science attention is claimed to be a necessary condition for learning (Robinson 1995; Schmidt 2001, among others). However, there is less agreement on the role that awareness plays in language learning. For instance, while Tomlin and Villa's (1994) functions of attention (i.e. alertness, orientation, and detection) do not require awareness to operate, Schmidt's (1993, 1995, 2001) Noticing Hypothesis argues that learners must consciously notice features in the input in order for it to become intake. The author suggests that since many features of the L2 input are likely to be non-salient, intentionally focusing attention on them is essential for successful language learning. Taking into account the potential role of awareness on second language learning, in this paper I focus on the manner in which focus on form is accomplished in an EFL classroom, and on its effectiveness in vocabulary learning.

Descriptive research on focus on form instruction has been undertaken to conceptualise and describe the procedures for teaching form in the context of a communicative activity. Ellis (2001) and Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002) distinguish between *planned* versus *incidental* focus on form. The former involves the use of communicative tasks designed to elicit forms which have been pre-selected by the teacher, while in the latter tasks are designed to elicit language use on the part of the learner without any specific attention to form, although the role of participants in performing the task will determine the implementation of a reactive or pre-emptive focus on form.

The effectiveness of both planned and incidental focus on form has stimulated recent research in the field of second language acquisition. Planned focus on form instruction has been tested empirically by measuring gains in learners' ability to use the targeted structures. For instance, Mackey and Oliver (2002) report that, in immediate and delayed post-tests, learners who received recasts after non-target-like question forms outperformed learners who did not. Similar results are reported by Mackey and Silver (2005) in a study conducted in the

multilingual context of Singapore. On the contrary, although studies on incidental focus on form illustrate its occurrence in language learning contexts (Williams, 1999, 2001; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b; Loewen, 2004), few studies have analysed the effectiveness of incidental focus on form. One explanation is suggested by Mackey (2006), who claims that measuring the effect of incidental focus on form seems problematic since pre-testing is not feasible due to the unpredictability of the linguistic items that arise during a meaning-focused activity. To our knowledge, two investigations have tested the effectiveness of incidental focus on form. In a second language context, Loewen (2005) used incidental focus on form episodes as a basis for individualised test items. Results of this study showed that learners were able to recall the targeted linguistic information correctly or partially correctly nearly 60% of the time 1 day after the focus on form episode, and 50% of the time 2 weeks later. In addition, the results suggest that incidental focus on form might be particularly beneficial if learners incorporate the linguistic items into their production. In a foreign language context, Alcón and García Mayo (forthcoming) measured the effectiveness of learners' incidental focus on vocabulary items on subsequent written production. The authors used individualised, tailor-made sentences for translation based on the vocabulary items that arose in incidental focus on form episodes. The authors report that focus on form in the foreign language context seems to be possible and effective in raising learners' awareness of lexical items and to facilitate immediate language use. Moreover, the authors point out that there is a need to study the effect of teachers' incidental focus on form on learning outcomes, an issue that will be the focus on the present study, this time with respect to vocabulary learning. As reported by Mackey *et al.* (2000) and Laufer (2005), although most interactional feedback is triggered by lexical problems, the area of vocabulary learning has received less attention in focus on form studies. So far, the few empirical studies that deal with vocabulary acquisition from an interactionist perspective have reported contradictory findings. For instance, Loschky (1994) did not find positive effects of negotiated interaction on vocabulary retention. In the same vein, Ellis and Heimbach (1997) cast doubts on the value of negotiation for the acquisition of vocabulary. These authors reported that learners' behaviour in interaction varies from actively asking questions to passively attending the negotiations. However, in terms of long-term acquisition, there was no significant relationship between the amount of meaning negotiation individual children engaged in and the acquisition of word meanings, nor was there a strong relationship between comprehension of utterances and subsequent acquisition. Ellis and He (1999), on the other hand, report the benefits of output production on acquisition of such vocabulary, and de la Fuente (2002) provides empirical

evidence for the role of negotiation in facilitating the comprehension and acquisition of L2 vocabulary. More recently, Smith (2005) and Alcón and García Mayo (forthcoming) explore the relationship between negotiated interaction, learner uptake, and lexical acquisition. Smith's (2005) study explores this relationship in a synchronous computer-mediated communication task, reporting that there is no relationship between degree of uptake (none, unsuccessful, and successful) and the acquisition of target lexical items. Similarly, Alcón and García Mayo's (forthcoming) report on data of a study conducted in an intact foreign language classroom, pointing out that the relationship between noticing, uptake and vocabulary learning is too subtle to claim that uptake is an indication of vocabulary acquisition.

Despite these attempts at studying the sequence of focus on form, noticing, and vocabulary learning, it is relevant to consider the way uptake is defined in these studies, since this may be crucial for the claims made about this sequence. While Smith (2005), following Lyster's (1998), defines uptake as learners' responses to teacher feedback, two meanings of uptake are considered in Alcón and García Mayo (forthcoming). On the one hand, Lyster's (1998) definition of uptake as learners' responses to feedback is used to examine if different types of focus on form benefit learners' responses to feedback. On the other hand, Ellis' (1995) meaning of uptake (what learners report learning at the end of a lesson) is adopted to study whether lexical items used after provision of feedback result in reported vocabulary items. The two uses of uptake in this investigation are defined and justified taking into account the research questions of the study, i.e. whether students' focus on form influence both learners' responses to feedback and reported lexical items. In the present study we focus on the occurrence of teacher incidental focus on form in an EFL classroom, and on its effectiveness on noticing and vocabulary learning. Thus, reported lexical items have been used as a measure of noticing, being the starting point to trace vocabulary learning within teacher incidental focus on form episodes and its effect on learners' subsequent production. From this perspective, the study aims to provide evidence on the role of incidental focus on form generated by a teacher and its impact on vocabulary learning in an EFL setting. The following research questions are addressed:

1. To what extent does teacher incidental focus on form occur in meaning-focused foreign language classrooms?
2. Is there a relationship between teachers' incidental focus on lexical episodes, learners' noticing, and their performance on written translation post-testing?

## **II. THE STUDY**

### **II.1. Participants**

The participants included 12 Spanish speakers (7 female and 5 male) who were learning English as a compulsory subject. All participants had Spanish or Catalan as their mother tongue (although some of them were bilingual), they had been studying English as a compulsory school subject for six years, and their ages ranged from 14 to 15. As far as language proficiency was concerned, no significant differences were observed in the in-home test administered at the beginning of the academic year. In addition, a female English language teacher who had 8 years of teaching experience and an MA in Applied Linguistics took part in the study. The teacher was informed that the aim of the study was describing classroom interaction in a foreign language classroom, but no information was provided about the research questions. The instructional context in which the research was conducted is an EFL context, providing a research context that has received scant attention in the focus on form literature.

### **II.2. Data collection**

The data for this study were obtained from one intact EFL classroom during a whole academic year. Although the corpus included interaction collected during the three-one hour periods held each week, two of them following a mixture of meaning-focused and form-focused instruction, and the third session using communicative activities linked to meaning-focused instruction, the present study focuses exclusively on the interaction generated during the meaning-focused activities carried out in the third session. The data for the study consisted in 17 45-minute audio-recorded teacher-led conversations, 204 learners' diaries (17 sessions x 12 learners) reporting what they had learned after each conversational class, 204 post-test translations, and 204 delayed post-test translations, which were created on the basis of the items reported in learners' diaries after each lesson. Whole class interaction was recorded using a wireless microphone and transcribed by two researchers.

### **II.3. Data analysis**

Instances of focus on meaning and focus on form episodes were identified and coded by two independent researchers and rates of agreement were established following Cohen's (1960) procedure for two characteristics found in FFEs: linguistic focus and type of FFE. The linguistic focus in each episode could be on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation or spelling.

Coding between the two researchers resulted in 96% agreement with respect to the identification of FFEs and 94% when determining their linguistic focus. In relation to the type of FFE, we focused our analysis on incidental focus on form, since no attention to particular linguistic forms was previously planned. Besides, for the present study the analysis was carried out on incidental lexically-oriented FFEs, which following Ellis *et al.* (2001a) could be defined as unplanned discourse from the point where the attention to vocabulary items starts to the point where it ends. We then considered whether incidental focus on vocabulary was reactive or pre-emptive, and if it was initiated by teacher or students. The following types of lexically-oriented FFEs were found in our data:

- (i) Reactive FFE: correct form supplied by the teacher, as in (1), or by the learners with the help of the teacher, as in (2):

[1] S4. They do not have the car for the space  
 T. *Right. They do not have any spaceship*  
 S4. And without spaceship they can not go to the moon

[2] S1. Yesterday the chief of the school  
 T. *what?*  
 S1. *Yes the most important in the school*  
 T. *what?*  
 S1. *Yes the most important in the school*  
 T. *what?*  
 S2. *The headmaster*  
 S1: *Yes the headmaster was angry with us*

- (ii) Pre-emptive FFE, which could be teacher-initiated, as in (3), or learner-initiated, as in (4):
- [3] T. Today we are going to examine different brochures. *Do you know what a brochure is?*  
 S1. folleto?  
 T. Yes, that is a brochure.

[4] T. So, all of us want a new way of testing, so let's create it. We are going to find the characteristics of a good way of testing. So you start saying things and Marta will write them on the blackboard. Finally we will present

an alternative to the headmaster

S12. *Headmaster?*

T. The person in charge of the school is the headmaster

S1. *Eliminar?* How do you say *eliminar*?

T. Any?

S6. Abolish

S1. Abolish the exams

S12. OK, we can tell the *headmaster* to abolish exams

The following rates of agreement were established for each type of FFE: teacher supplier in reactive FFEs, 91%; student supplier in reactive FFEs, 84%; pre-emptive teacher initiated, 97%; and pre-emptive student initiated, 96%. However, since our aim was to examine the impact of the teachers' incidental focus on lexically-oriented FFEs on vocabulary learning, we excluded learners' reactive and pre-emptive focus on lexical episodes and paid attention to the teacher's reactive and pre-emptive lexically-oriented FFEs. Within reactive episodes we included negotiation sequences in which there seems to be some language problem and the teacher either provides the information by means of a recast or forces learners to establish the correct form by means of elicitation techniques (repetition of the word, pausing, using clarification questions, or asking students to reformulate the utterance). We eliminated reactive FFEs where an explicit correction was provided because they were very few (just 8%). Within pre-emptive FFEs we considered negotiation sequences in which there seems to be no communication problem, but they are teacher-initiated with a clear focus on vocabulary. Negotiation sequences often appear in embedded sequences. Besides, as illustrated in extract [4], different FFEs might merge into one. If so, we took into account every instance of lexically FFEs within a negotiation sequence.

In order to answer our second research question (the impact of teachers' focusing on lexically-oriented FFEs on learners' noticing), we operationalized learners' noticing by tracing words learners reported having learnt after each lesson with topicalised words in FFEs. This enabled us to match lexical items students reported as learned items with the teacher's involvement in pre-emptive and reactive lexically-oriented FFEs. Finally, taking into account the lexical words reported as learned items and their occurrence in teachers' lexically-oriented FFEs, we created tailor-made written sentences. For instance, taking into account that the words "headmaster" and "abolish" occurred in a FFE (see extract [4]), and they were reported as learnt items, learners were asked to translate "El nuevo director del

colegio ha dicho que suprimirá los exámenes de Septiembre (The new headmaster has told that he will abolish the exams in September)". A week later the same lexical words were used to ask learners to translate this similar sentence "El director del colegio está muy enfadado. Ha decidido suprimir los exámenes (The headmaster is very angry. He has decided to abolish the exams)". This allowed us to match teachers' involvement in lexically oriented FFEs with learners' recall of lexical items and accurate use in the translation post-tests and delayed post-tests.

In relation to statistical analyses, we applied a Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-sample test to measure whether our data differ from a normal distribution to any significant extent. Results from this test in all the analyses show that we can assume normality in 99% of our data. Therefore, we decided to resort to parametric tests in order to perform the statistical analyses.

The sequence of the research process could be summarized as follows:

1. Identifying incidental lexically oriented FFEs
2. Coding types of FFEs: Reactive, pre-emptive, teacher initiated, student initiated.
3. Measuring the impact of teacher initiated focus on form by comparing the words learners reported having learnt after each lesson (noticing) with their occurrence in teacher reactive and pre-emptive FFEs
4. Measuring learning outcomes by comparing learners' noticing with their performance in written translation post-testing.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 provides a general picture of the occurrence of incidental focus on form in the foreign language classroom we observed. It shows that out of the 459 FFEs, 24.2% addressed grammar, 66.9% vocabulary, 1.3% spelling and 7.6% pronunciation. Likewise, in both pre-emptive and reactive focus on form, the aspects that received more attention were vocabulary (27.9% in pre-emptive and 39.0% in reactive FFE) and grammar (9.4% in pre-emptive and 14.8% in reactive). In addition, although Figure 1 shows that both reactive and pre-emptive focus on form occurred, the difference between the two types is not statistically significant (Fisher' test resulted in  $p = .335$ ; 1 df,  $n = 459$ ).

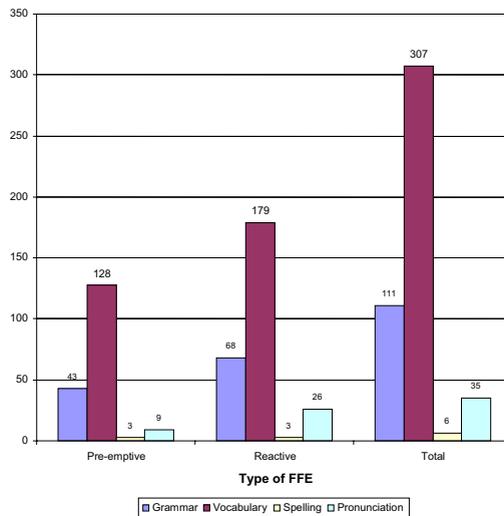


Figure 1. Linguistic Focus and Type of FFEs.

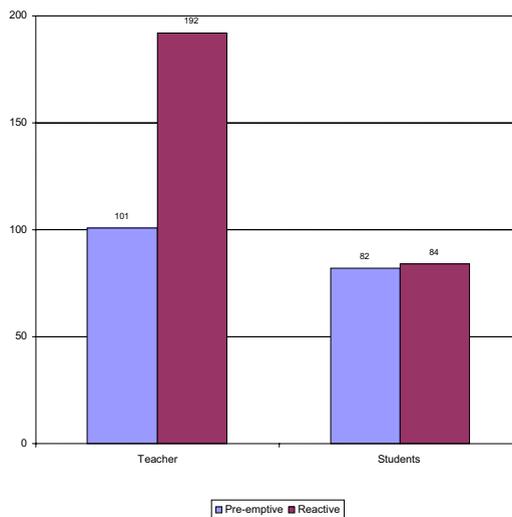


Figure 2. Type of FFEs and participants' involvement.

Focussing on our first research question, our aim was to explore the extent to which teachers' incidental focus on form occurs in the meaning-focused foreign language classroom. Figure 2 shows teachers' and students' initiation (pre-emptive FFEs) and provision of the correct form

(reactive FFEs) in the 17 45 minute-lessons that make up the database. The data also show that, although the teacher triggers more lexically-oriented FFEs, the difference between teachers' and students' incidental focus on form episodes is not statistically significant (Fisher test resulted in  $p = .294$ ; 1df,  $n = 459$ ).

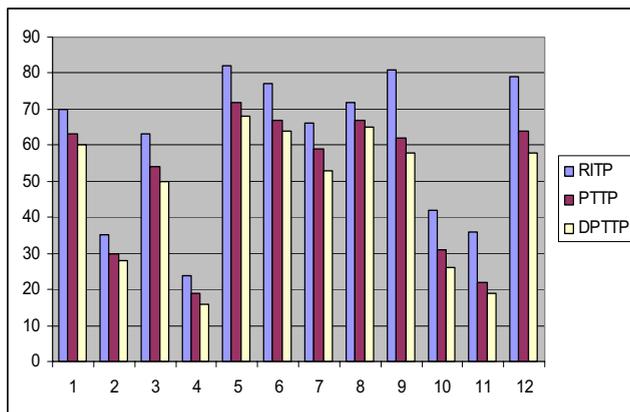
These results are in line with those reported by Ellis *et al.* (2001a, 2001b). It seems that in instructed settings both teachers and learners perceive the need to focus on language. Following this perception, students participate in classroom interaction by asking questions about linguistic problems, and the teacher attempts to guide learners towards language. In addition, teachers' participation in reactive lexically-oriented FFEs is higher than in the other types of FFEs. However, does teachers' focus on lexically-oriented FFEs provide the theoretical conditions for language learning through interaction? In an attempt to validate the interaction-driven learning hypothesis, our second research question examined whether teacher pre-emptive and reactive focus on lexically-oriented episodes had an effect on learning outcomes. As mentioned in the section of data analysis, we traced the reported lexical items (82% of the reported items were lexical words) to the total number of teacher pre-emptive lexically-oriented FFEs, and created tailor-made written sentences to measure any difference in the post-test and delayed post-tests. In relation to the effect of teacher pre-emptive lexically oriented FFEs, as illustrated in Table 1, the  $t$  values and the probability level ( $p = 0.000$ ) denote statistical differences in the following matched pairs: reported learned lexical items and use of these items in the post-test, reported lexical items and use of these items in the delayed post-tests, and use of lexical items that had previously been topicalised in discourse in two moments: immediately after the lesson where the interaction had taken place and one week later.

	MEAN	STANDARD DESVIATION	T	Df	Sg
Matched Pair 1 Reported lexical items written production in post-test	9,750	4,434	7,618	11	0,000

Matched Pair 3 Reported lexical items Written production in delayed-post test	13.500	5,161	9,061	11	0,000
Matched Pair 2 Written production in post test Written production in delayed-post test	3.750	1,357	9,574	11	0,000

Table 1. Gain Scores on vocabulary learning in teacher's pre-emptive lexically oriented focus on form episodes.

In addition, the Pearson product-moment correlation shows a positive correlation between noticing, measured as the number of reported lexical items, and learners' subsequent written production of these items in the post-tests ( $r = 0.75$ ) and delayed post-tests ( $r = 0.65$ ). Figure 3 illustrates this correlation in qualitative terms.



RITP = Reported items in teacher pre-emptive FFEs

PTPP = Post test in teacher pre-emptive FFEs

DPTTP = Delayed post-test in teacher pre-emptive FFEs

Figure 3. Learning outcomes in teacher pre-emptive FFEs.

First, the number of reported lexical items in FFEs is higher than those used in subsequent elicited production. Secondly, learners' reported lexical items (and thus noticing) seem to influence subsequent language use in the post-test and delayed post-test. Consequently, we can claim that in this exploratory study the teacher's involvement in pre-emptive lexically-oriented FFEs occurs and this seems to raise learners' noticing, as measured by the number of learned lexical items that are reported. It also appears to facilitate immediate and delayed written production. However, the statistically significant difference in the matched pairs shows that learners' noticing is higher than their subsequent vocabulary use at two points in time: one immediately after the interaction took place and then one week later. In addition, the rate of accurate use of lexical items is higher in the post-tests than in the delayed post-tests. In our study, learners' reporting of noticing was measured by counting reported lexical items and tracing them to the actual classroom interaction in which they occurred. We are aware that different measures such as recall protocols could have been used to examine the role of FFEs in the cognitive process of noticing (see Gass & MacKey, 2000). Similarly, the use of spontaneous oral production might have yielded different results to further understand the relationship between noticing and learning. However, using intact classes forces the researcher to design research instruments which can be administered under conditions closer to those found in particular educational contexts. As reported by Mackey (2006), this results

in research which informs more ecologically about the interaction-learning relationship, but future research on this relationship needs to be conducted with a larger population and combining descriptive and experimental research methods in a range of settings.

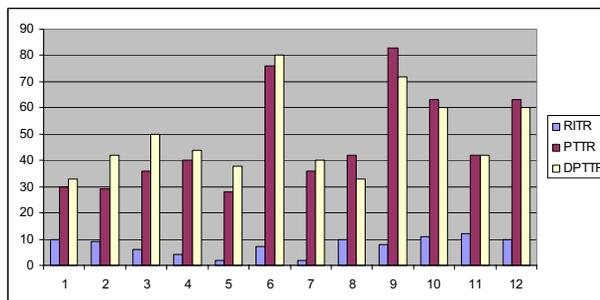
In relation to the effect of teacher reactive lexically-oriented FFEs on vocabulary learning, we can claim that only 20% of the items occurring in lexically-oriented FFEs were reported as learned items, and 70% of teachers' reactive feedback was performed by means of recasts. These results are in line with the study conducted by Lyster (1998), who claims that recasts are frequently found in classroom interaction, but they may not be noticed by learners. However, is teachers' reactive feedback an effective learning device, even if it does not influence noticing? In our study, although learners do not report vocabulary outcomes after teachers' use of recasts, Table 2 shows statistical difference in the following two matched pairs: reported learned lexical items and their written production in both the post-tests and the delayed post-tests. However, the  $t$  value ( $t = -9,51$ ) and the probability level ( $p = 0.362$ ) do not denote significant differences for the post-test and delayed post-test. It seems that teacher reactive FFEs do not contribute to noticing, but they do have a positive effect on vocabulary learning, as measured by comparing vocabulary learning in learners' reported items, and subsequent use of the items in the post-test and delayed post- tests. Thus, from our data, the impact of teachers' reactive feedback seems to influence both short- term (measured in the post-test) and long-term vocabulary learning (measured in the delayed post-test), since the difference in scores in learners' post-tests and delayed post-tests is not statistically significant.

Our results on teachers' reactive feedback by means of recasts partially contradict previous research on this topic. On the one hand, Lyster (1998, 2001, 2002, 2004), Lyster and Ranta (1997), Lyster and Mori (2006), Havranek (2002), Tsang (2004) and Ellis *et al.* (2006) report that interactional feedback that elicits learner responses may have a more positive impact than recasts, which normally elicit repetition of the recast. However, in line with the study by Loewen (2005), which reports a correlation between reactive feedback by means of recasts and second language development, teachers' reactive feedback seems to have an impact on vocabulary learning. Carpenter *et al.* (2006) observed that learners are able to make comparisons between the original utterance and their interlocutors' response. Similarly, in our data we observed that in lexically-oriented FFEs the use of recasts neither triggers immediate repetition of lexical words nor does it have a great impact on noticing (measured in terms of the number of items reported as learned items), but it does have an effect on short-term learning (as measured in the post-test), and, albeit to a lesser extent on long term vocabulary learning, as measured in the post-test.

Due to the small sample these results must be taken with caution. As illustrated in Figure 4, while the scores of 7 learners in the delayed post-test outperformed those of the post-test, 4 of them obtained better results in the post-test and one learner did not show any difference in scores.

	MEAN	STANDARD DESVIATION	T	Df	Sg
Matched Pair 1 Reported lexical items written production in post- test	-39,750	18,316	-7,518	11	0,000
Matched Pair 3 Reported lexical items Written production in delayed-post test	-41,917	15,270	-9,061	11	0,000
Matched Pair 2 Written production in post test Written production in delayed-post test	-2,167	7,895	-9,51	11	0,362

Table 2. Gain Scores on vocabulary learning in teacher's reactive lexically oriented focus on form episodes.



RITR = Reported items in teacher reactive FFEs

PTTR = Post test in teacher reactive FFEs

DPTTR = Delayed post-test in teacher reactive FFEs

Figure 4: Learning outcomes in teacher reactive FFEs.

To sum up, the results of this study suggest that teachers' incidental focus on vocabulary helps learners improve their knowledge and subsequent use of vocabulary. However, that the interpretation of these results must take into account the manner in which we have measured noticing (by means of post activity recall) and learning outcomes (by means of translation post tests). It is possible that alternative measures of noticing may trigger different results. Similarly, in this study we have made use of translation post-tests, but whether learners incorporate their vocabulary gains in subsequent oral production is an issue that remains to be tested. Additionally, whether learners' familiarity with lexical words may influence the effectiveness of teacher lexically oriented FFEs or whether, as suggested by Laufer (2005), word knowledge requires focus on forms are aspects in need of further study.

Similarly, in relation to teachers' feedback in incidental focus on form, although in this study teachers' use of recasts seems to play a role in vocabulary learning, we agree with McDonough and Mackey (2006) that there is a need to investigate the impact of recasts on L2 development by isolating learners' responses to different linguistic items after recasts. Thus, the results of our study reveal insights about the recasts formulated after lexical items and their effect on vocabulary learning, but, as suggested by Loewen and Philp (2006), different results may be obtained from the gains of recasts after different linguistic items. Similarly, as

pointed out by Salazar (2003), the characteristics of teachers' reactive feedback that may potentially affect learning outcomes is an issue which is also worthy of empirical research.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The present exploratory study on incidental focus on form illustrates its occurrence in a foreign language context, thus providing further evidence for the studies conducted in ESL contexts (cf. Williams, 1999, 2001; and Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b). In line with the results reported by Mackey *et al.* (2000), in our study most interaction feedback was triggered by lexical problems. Unlike research conducted in ESL classrooms, however, it is the teacher who triggers more lexically-oriented FFEs, although the difference between teachers' and students' FFEs was not significant. Neither is the difference between teacher pre-emptive and reactive lexically-oriented FFEs significantly different, teacher reactive FFEs by means of recasts being the most frequent.

In terms of learning outcomes, taking into account previous research which shows that negotiation could play an important role in L2 vocabulary learning (Pica, 1994), our data shows that teachers' involvement in pre-emptive lexically-oriented FFEs seems to direct learners' selective attention to vocabulary items, which results in learners' noticing. It seems that teacher' pre-emptive FFEs are as effective for vocabulary learning as students' pre-emptive FFEs, an issue that is further analysed by Alcón and García Mayo (forthcoming), using the same data as those described in the present study. On the other hand, teacher reactive FFEs do not seem to raise explicit learning, as measured by learners' reporting of vocabulary items, but a positive effect is observed on vocabulary learning, as measured by subsequent use of vocabulary items in the post-test and delayed post-tests.

In any event, this study has been exploratory and descriptive in nature and, therefore, it should not be assumed that results can be generalised beyond the context investigated. More descriptive and experimental research is necessary in order to provide a wider picture of teachers' incidental focus on form in communicative language classrooms and in different learning environments. As reported by Mackey and Silver (2005: 254), this research should contribute to increasing our knowledge on the effect of interaction on language learning.

**Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the editors for their invitation to contribute to this volume and for their useful suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. Thanks also go to the reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions for improvement. Financial support from research grants co-funded by FEDER, and the Spanish Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (HUM2004-04435/ FILO) and from Fundació Caixa Castelló-Bancaixa (P1.1B2004-34) are gratefully acknowledged.

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