

Mattson, C. Focus-on-Form in Elementary ESL: Experimenting with the Error Correction Techniques of Repetition and Metalinguistic Clue (2010)

Error correction in communicative language lessons has gained adherents among ESL teachers. This study explores how form-focused instruction helps elementary English language learners acquire the irregular past tense and investigates which of two error feedback techniques – repetition or metalinguistic clue – best promotes communication and learner self-correction.

The study was conducted in two small ESL classes with five third grade students, varying in language background and demonstrating at least an intermediate English proficiency. Students took a pre-test, test, and post-test to assess gains in mastery of the form during the unit. Class sessions were audiotaped and a journal was kept.

Assessment results show that four students showed improvement during the unit. Repetition was judged, by analysis of taped discussions, as less obtrusive and easier to interject in the flow of communication. However, it is hypothesized that a number of factors may determine which feedback move is best in a given situation.

FOCUS-ON-FORM IN ELEMENTARY ESL: EXPERIMENTING WITH THE ERROR
CORRECTION TECHNIQUES OF REPETITION AND METALINGUISTIC CLUE

by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the current study is to examine and reflect upon my teaching practices of English language learners (ELLs) as they occur in small group English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at an elementary school in the Midwest United States. With five years experience in ESL, at the middle school and now the elementary school level, I have experience designing units of study that promote students being engaged in meaningful communication and which have some attention directed toward grammatical form. One of my most pressing professional issues, often the subject of conversation among colleagues, is the question of how to best address grammar issues in communicative and content-based units. This concern is now even more germane in my new position teaching elementary level ELLs, who in general acquire grammar more rapidly but still could benefit from form-focused instruction.

In the research field that informs the teaching of second languages, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies, there have been two important theoretical advances in the past four decades in how to teach ELLs. First, rather than have ELLs wait until they have sufficient mastery of the language before learning academic content, it has been shown that it is most beneficial for them to learn English through the medium of academic content. Content-based language learning helps ELLs catch up academically to their native-speaking peers, and furthermore, puts the focus on meaningful

communication in the classroom (Kasper, 1997). Secondly, theorists and practitioners alike put great importance upon communicative language teaching (CLT), a set of methods whereby learners communicate in the classroom to solve tasks or problems associated with the content of the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Skehan, 1998; Williams, 1995). These two advances, content-based units and promoting meaningful communication in the classroom, form a solid foundation for SLA.

More recently, a new trend within SLA has emerged challenging, but not overturning, the new orthodoxy. This new idea has called for a renewed focus on grammatical form, this time in the context of communicative activities. Many educators in the field have begun to recognize that meaningful communication alone is not enough and that learners must be engaged with improving their grammatical accuracy in the target language (L2). Researchers noticed that language learners in immersion schools, particularly French immersion schools in Quebec, were not acquiring native-like L2 fluency in regard to grammatical form (Swain, 2001). Hence, the research arena of Focus-on-Form (FonF) was generated. For our purposes, FonF is “any pedagogical effort to draw learners’ attention to language either implicitly or explicitly” (Spada, 1997, p. 73).

Error correction FonF can be implicit, where the focus on grammatical form is not separate from meaningful communication and does not involve the presentation or teaching of rules, such as highlighting of targeted forms in instructional text (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Long, 1991). Or conversely, FonF instruction can involve explicit teaching whereby rules are presented, grammar errors are

addressed on the spot, and learners have the opportunity to practice grammatical form both embedded and separate from meaningful communication (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005).

The issue of how to teach language, and grammar in particular, is central to SLA. But, now that a focus on grammar is again paramount in SLA, what are the best methods for assisting learners in grammar acquisition? Among the many methods to draw attention to grammatical form, error correction on the part of the teacher, so as to promote student self-correction of an error – or ‘learner uptake,’ has been one of the most studied (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Loewen, 2005). This focus is perhaps due to the difficulties in effectively practicing error correction in the classroom. Like many novice ELL teachers, I feel that I could benefit from an examination and evaluation of my teaching of form-focused instruction in communicative contexts. By conducting research in the classroom central to FonF teaching practice, I will explore pressing issues related to FonF and, more specifically, examine which error correction techniques are better suited for grammar acquisition at the elementary school level. My primary purpose is to reflect upon FonF practices in my classroom, as I experiment with different explicit form-focused techniques in instruction. Researchers in SLA have called for precisely this type of experimentation in using implicit and explicit techniques (Sheen & O'Neill, 2005; Williams, 1995; Zephir, 2000).

For this examination of my teaching practices, I focused on five students in two different small group classes, evaluating the grammar acquisition needs of each student and comparing how each fared during instruction. To analyze error correction in the class

sessions, I audio-recorded sessions of class discussion wherein it was expected students would produce the targeted grammatical form, in this case the past tense, and analyzed the teacher/student interactions during and after error correction. My analysis of the interactions between student and teacher, hereafter described as form-focused interactions (FFIs), took place as a result of daily reflection in a journal during the unit of study and later when reflecting upon the recorded sessions. Through the audio-recordings of the sessions, I considered how my use of error-correction techniques impacted communication and learning in the classroom, positively and negatively, and whether or not my techniques promoted learner uptake, or learner repair of errors. I compared two error correction techniques by experimenting with one in each class. In the first class, I experimented with the repetition technique, as labeled by Lyster (2001). Repetition involves the teacher repeating the grammatical error of the student with an uprising intonation to indicate that an error was made and is in need of correction. For example, if the student were to produce the incorrect form “runned,” the teacher can indicate an error was made by saying “runned?” In the second class, I used an error correction cue called metalinguistic clue (Lyster, 2001). By this technique, the teacher identifies the error by name. In the above example of “runned,” the teacher would respond, “You need the irregular there.” As part of those reflections, I assessed students’ acquisition of a particular grammar form, the past tense irregular, with the administration of a pre-test, test, and post-test.

The overarching goal of the study is to determine which FonF techniques are most suitable for promoting communication in the elementary ESL small-group classroom and

the learning of target forms. In order to achieve this goal, the following questions were developed to guide the study:

- 1) What success does my FonF unit design have in promoting learner acquisition of the targeted form, as shown by the pre-test, test, and post-test? Do students demonstrate mastery of the form at the end of the unit, with at least 80% accuracy in a written and oral test?
- 2) Which of two explicit form-focused techniques compared in the study – the relatively less explicit repetition technique or the relatively more explicit metalinguistic clue – better promotes learner self-correction in the context of communicative activities in the classroom?

Both questions revolve around an examination of what form-focused techniques are most effective in working with English language learners in the elementary school.

In this chapter, I introduced my research study by establishing the purpose, significance and need for the study of how to improve instruction in addressing grammatical form in the classroom. In Chapter Two I provide a review of the literature relevant to form-focused instruction in the SLA field. Some issues I address in this chapter include the debate in SLA regarding the effectiveness of implicit and explicit techniques in designing FonF lessons, leading to the question of which FonF techniques are available to promote communication in general and the production of targeted grammatical forms in particular. Chapter Three includes a description of the research design and methodology that guides this study. Chapter Four presents the results of the study, both the test results administered during the unit and the transcriptions of the form-

focused interactions between teacher and students. In Chapter Five I reflect on the data collected, and I also discuss the limitations of the study, implications for further research and recommendations for how to incorporate FonF activities and techniques in the context of a communicative content-based English language classroom.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

My aim in this study is to experiment with FonF techniques to further learner acquisition of grammatical form. The guiding questions are:

- 1) What success does my FonF unit design have in promoting learner acquisition of the targeted form, as shown by the pre-test, test, and post-test? Do students demonstrate mastery of the form at the end of the unit, with at least 80% accuracy in a written and oral test?
- 2) Which of two different explicit form-focused techniques compared in the study – the less explicit repetition technique or the more explicit metalinguistic clue – better promotes learner self-correction in the context of communicative activities in the classroom?

In investigating how to improve student acquisition of grammatical form, the most useful research centers on the long-standing debate of form-focused instruction within second language acquisition (SLA) studies. Form-focused instruction is “any pedagogical effort to draw learners’ attention to language either implicitly or explicitly” (Spada, 1997, p. 73). In SLA, this new concern on grammatical form crystallized into what came to be known as Focus on Form (FonF).

FonF emerged as a central research area in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the importance of communicative models of language teaching, or communicative

language teaching (CLT) were already widespread. CLT has been defined as language learning through the exchange of meaning, centered on the use of communicative tasks. Communicative tasks are learning activities where 1) meaning is the focus, 2) there is a goal for students to work toward, 3) there is an outcome that is evaluated, and 4) the activity is authentic in that it is connected to the real world (Skehan, 1998). CLT held that L2 fluency was best promoted by a focus on meaning as it was expressed and comprehended through language in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Williams, 1995). Moreover, the communicative models emphasized, as a condition for language learning, a focus upon meaning to the exclusion of traditional deductive grammar instruction (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Grove, 1999). The communicative model maintained an emphasis upon the similarity between L1 and L2 language acquisition and de-emphasized, or in most cases outright rejected, pedagogical interventions to aid the acquisition of grammatical form (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Grove, 1999; Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

However, despite the improved fluency evidenced by language learners in CLT classrooms, SLA researchers in the field noticed that language learners taught using a communicative approach tended not to acquire native-like accuracy in the production of L2 grammatical forms (Swain, 2001). Consequently, SLA researchers began to look at how grammatical form could be addressed in the communicative classroom, where meaningful communication as the mode of language instruction is retained (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Lightbown, 1990; Williams 1995). Long (1991) first proposed the ways that grammar attention should be included in CLT. Long made a distinction between

Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on Forms (FonFs), comparing favorably the former to the latter. At first, to delineate what was meant by FonF, Long (1991) and his followers conceived of FonFs to involve the use of linguistic items in the structuring of curriculum, not task-based items, which according to them violated the prescription that learning be focused on communication. Their preferred method, FonF, addressed grammatical form not in order according to a syllabus, but incidentally when errors occurred without breaking the flow of communication. However, since the debate first opened, researchers' use of the labels FonF and FonFs involved inconsistencies and vagaries. Quickly thereafter, FonF and FonFs became a debate between implicit and explicit form-focused instruction (Sheen, 2002).

In the present study, so as to avoid the reproduction of these ambiguities, the distinction used here is between implicit and explicit FonF. Traditionally, proponents of *implicit* FonF, starting with Long (1991), insisted upon the requirement that all grammar instruction be implicit in the instruction. In this approach, attention to grammatical form would be embedded in communicative activities so that the learner's attention to meaning would proceed uninterrupted. For example, in the case of highlighting of salient grammar forms in text, students direct their attention to the meaning of the reading, but they might incidentally notice, perhaps subconsciously, the grammar forms highlighted (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Grove, 1999; Long, 1991; Williams 1995). In contrast, and against Long's (1991) prescription, the hallmark of *explicit* FonF was to accept attention to form that broke the flow of meaningful communication, with the teaching of discrete points of grammar in separate lessons, oftentimes with the explicit provision of a grammatical rule

(Dekeyser, 1998; Sheen, 2002; 2003). As we shall see, the trend today is to accept both explicit and implicit techniques as long as meaningful communication remains the priority (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006). However, the early emphasis was on implicit FonF to the exclusion of explicit FonF (Sheen 2002; 2003; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005).

Today, implicit and explicit FonF has been described nicely by Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) as a continuum, not as a dichotomous opposition. Their continuum includes all techniques as possibly beneficial to learners and maintains that there are degrees of implicitness and explicitness in the techniques employed in teaching grammar. Implicit techniques, in addition to their embedded nature as described previously, are defined as those form-focused techniques that eschew rule explanations and overt instructions to attend to particular language forms during instruction. Pure examples of implicit instruction are oral input flood and highlighting targeted forms in text (Williams, 1995). Explicit techniques include rule explanations, the direction of learner attention to particular grammatical forms, and learner derivation of metalinguistic explanations (DeKeyser, 1998; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Cited by Erlam, personal communication, December 1, 2007). The following section discusses the various implicit and explicit FonF techniques in further depth.

Implicit Focus on Form

One type of implicit form-focused instruction is *incidental FonF*, which addresses grammar errors as they arise spontaneously during meaning-focused activities (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Loewen, 2005). In developing incidental FonF, theorists identified

negative feedback techniques, including 1) teacher-supplied *recasts* after student errors, or the provision of the correct grammar form or word, encouraging the practice of self-correction, or “learner uptake,” of correct forms, but without the provision of a rule, and 2) *negotiation of meaning*, conducted between the teacher and student, when the student’s grammar error negatively impacts the intended meaning and the teacher attempts to elicit the correct form by focusing entirely on the meaning of what was said (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Loewen, 2005; Williams, 1995). These FonF techniques are more implicit in the sense that they attempt to embed form-focused instruction in communicative activities without attending to rules and grammar activities separate from the communicative tasks (Williams, 1995). Despite early emphasis on recasts as the most unobtrusive error correction technique, numerous studies indicate that recast has a poor record for encouraging learner recognition that he or she made an error and for the learner to make subsequent self-corrections (Lyster, 2001).

Besides the incidental FonF techniques, there are implicit techniques that involve prior planning on the part of the teacher to select targeted structures. Implicit FonF tended at first to disallow a focus on particular grammatical forms in the classroom, planned in advance by the instructor. According to Implicit FonF, grammatical form would attain relevancy only when the exigencies of meaningful communication demanded it; grammar instruction would arise spontaneously as students made errors and instructors would respond to them through embedded practices such as recast and negotiation (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Sheen, 2002; 2003). With further development in the field, implicit FonF came to embrace both unplanned and planned attention to

grammatical structures. In planning for a particular attention to form, the teacher would prepare communicative contexts and tasks that would elicit one particular form (Ellis, 2005).

For an example of a pre-planned implicit technique, input flood is a practice whereby the teacher uses, either in speech or in writing, the pre-selected targeted form numerous times in a context that is meaningful for the learner and by which the learner is exposed naturally and abundantly to the form (Ellis, 2005; Fotos, 1998; Loewen, 2005). A very similar implicit technique is the highlighting of targeted forms in the text (Fotos, 1998). While these forms are the most implicit on an implicit-explicit continuum, theorists argued that input flood and such practices worked only to provide instances of the form, resulting in the form's appearance in learners' language, but nevertheless failed to instruct learners on what is ungrammatical or impermissible in its production (Williams, 1995).

The incidental techniques reviewed previously, including recasts and negotiation of meaning wherein attention to meaning is broken briefly to attend to grammatical form, were accepted by many FonF theorists as necessary as long as the overall focus was meaningful communication (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Williams, 1995). But some theorists advocating for more explicit approaches to FonF, such as the stating of a rule and grammar practice *separate from communication*, pointed out that some of these newly accepted "implicit" techniques also involved some degree of explicitness. When stopping the flow of meaning in the classroom, no matter how briefly, the attention paid to form interrupts the flow of communication and is separate from meaning (Ellis,

Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Moreover, the instances when a teacher would want to attend to form do not always result from breakdowns in communication. Attention to form is sought for its own sake, not always for the sake of meaning breakdown since these occurrences are rather rare.

Moving Toward Explicit Focus on Form: A New Approach

As briefly mentioned, many FonF theorists contrasted these “implicit” form-focused instructional techniques with explicit rule-focused instruction, favoring the more “communicative” implicit techniques over the perceived traditional grammar approach of explicit techniques (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Sheen, 2002; 2003; Sheen & O’Neill, 2005; Williams, 1995). If the communication of the content-based lesson was interrupted by an explanation of a form or any type of attention to a form whatsoever, the teacher would be violating the prescription of the communicative approach that all instruction take place in a communicative setting (Sheen, 2002; 2003; Sheen & O’Neill, 2005). As already mentioned, the implicit approaches could violate the communicative prescription, which in itself might have led researchers to consider opening the door to more explicit approaches to teaching grammar rules.

In the 1990s, the FonF approach that advocated embedded and implicitly-taught grammar lessons became the prominent trend within second language acquisition studies (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Fotos, 1998; Williams, 1995). However, by the late 1990s, a number of theorists began to question the prescription that all attention to form must be implicit in order to facilitate or not impede communication in the classroom. Sheen

(2002; 2003; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005), argued that FonF was becoming a developing myth within the field of SLA. He argued that researchers had not shown that implicit FonF instruction was superior to the explicit approaches. In analyzing the FonF studies, Sheen (2003) demonstrated that theorists made claims regarding the superiority of implicit FonF that were unjustified on the basis of their findings. Sheen and O'Neill (2005) further argued that both implicit and explicit instruction would be beneficial to learners in that individuals differ according to their learning styles and multiple intelligences.

At the time of Sheen's critique, research in the field began to show the superiority of explicit instruction in some cases. Sheen (2003) found that elementary school learners of English taught with an explicit approach outperformed those who had been taught with an implicit approach alone. In a similar vein, Laufer (2006) compared implicit and explicit approaches to teaching vocabulary and found that the learners who received explicit teaching of vocabulary words, through the provision of definitions and exercises such as matching word to definition, outperformed their peers taught by the more implicit method of determining meanings from context without explicit definitions. These are just two examples of the forays into evaluating explicit FonF instruction that opened the door to research on the question. In 2006 and 2007, a number of researchers from New Zealand (Ellis, 2005; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Erlam, 2006) began studying a host of questions regarding explicit/implicit approaches, deductive (rule stating) versus inductive (rule discovering) methods, and the effectiveness of input versus output FonF. Their review of the literature, and their own work, shows superiority for the combined

use of explicit and implicit techniques, over the use of implicit techniques alone, contributing to the growing sense in SLA that a combination of different approaches is called for and could be effective depending on circumstances. At the very least, the research suggests the efficacy of using both implicit and explicit techniques, while retaining the overall communicative nature of the instruction. At the most, this research provides yet more evidence that explicit form-focused instruction, as well as deductive rule provision, is superior to implicit approaches. Explicit and deductive FonF techniques seem to be gaining ground and overpowering the previous emphasis upon implicit instruction of form (Dekeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2005; Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Erlam, 2006; Laufer, 2006; Sheen 2002; 2003; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005).

The research from the New Zealand researchers is invaluable for framing the implicit versus explicit debate in FonF (Ellis, 2005; Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Erlam, 2006). Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) present form-focused activities on a double continuum. In the first continuum, there are degrees of implicitness and explicitness in the techniques employed in teaching grammar, as reviewed earlier. Implicit techniques eschew rule explanations and overt instructions to attend to particular language forms during instruction. Explicit techniques can involve a rule explanation and use other means to direct learners to pay attention to particular forms or derive metalinguistic explanations on their own (DeKeyser, 1995; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Parallel to the implicit/explicit continuum of instructional activities is that of the inductive/deductive continuum. Deductive FonF amounts to rule provision in a presentation, and inductive FonF involves students in figuring out the grammatical rule(s)

without their provision (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). All of the deductive and inductive practices are more or less explicit, given that both attend to rules.

Comparing the effectiveness of explicit and implicit techniques, Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) conducted an experiment to compare error correction techniques in a classroom that focused on teaching articles. The experimental group received explicit instruction over a two-day period, and the control group received implicit instruction of the form solely. Results from their study showed that the experimental group not only outperformed the control group, but that explicit instruction led to gains in both implicit and explicit knowledge. This study suggests the importance of using both implicit and explicit form-focused activities in lesson delivery, and demonstrates the importance of explicit instruction (Ellis, Loewen and Erlam, 2006).

In another important complementary study, they investigated lower intermediate English language learners in their use of the past tense as the targeted structure (Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam, 2006). They tested the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback – implicit or explicit – in the classroom. First, the researchers defined explicit corrective feedback as overt indication of an error, and implicit corrective feedback as the absence of any indication of an error being committed. For example, the study counted the following as an example of implicit recast:

S: yesterday, two boys, Joe and Bill visit their rich uncle.

R: visited [implicit recast]

S: visited their rich uncle (Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam, 2006, p. 353)

It should be noted that this definition of implicit is more explicit than previous definitions by FonF theorists, allowing for a recast break in the communication to attend to form. In contrast to implicit recast, explicit recast attends to metalinguistic considerations of what is uttered in communicative contexts:

S: Yesterday Joe and Bill ah went to ah Bill's grandmother and visit their grandmother

R: and visit – you need past tense

S: visited – yes (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006, p. 353)

In comparing the two types of attention to form, along with a control group, the explicit technique of providing metalinguistic feedback resulted in significantly higher scores, both in learners' ability to use the targeted structure in practice and in their explicit knowledge of the form. The research of Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) points to the greater effectiveness of metalinguistic corrective feedback over recast.

Roy Lyster (2001) classified the explicit FonF techniques as: metalinguistic clue, elicitation, clarification request, and repetition. First, metalinguistic clue is a type of error correction wherein the teacher uses a comment or a question to refer directly to the type of grammar mistake and to indicate that the error should be fixed. For example, asking that a student use the past tense, since the action took place in the past, is a metalinguistic clue feedback response. Next, elicitation is when the teacher directly asks for a reformulation of the utterance without metalinguistic attention to form, by asking questions such as "How do we say that in English?" by pausing to permit the student to repeat the teacher's utterance, or by asking outright for a reformulation. Third, a

clarification request is the most ambiguous of the explicit techniques. Clarification requests can be as simple as asking for the utterance again to indicate that meaning was not fully achieved, or they can involve a full negotiation of meaning when the grammatical error itself led to a breakdown of meaning which then needs to be resolved by attending directly to form. The enormous benefit of clarification requests is their potential to attend to meaning and grammatical form simultaneously. Lastly, repetition refers to repeating the learner's error while using marked intonation to indicate that an error was made that needs to be corrected. This technique is similar to recast, except that the correct form is not provided for the learner; instead, the incorrect form is repeated, but with an uprising intonation to indicate an error was made, and the expectation is that the learner supply the correct form.

Making Focus on Form Eclectic

Many SLA researchers (Lyster, 2001; Sheen, 2003; Williams, 1995) argue that form-focused should be eclectic, employing different techniques to meet the needs of learners. However, making Focus on Form eclectic, including both implicit and explicit form-focused instruction, must not lead the educator back to outdated approaches of teaching grammar (Williams, 1995). Language learning should still occur within communicative settings and in the context of content-based classes. But, as discussed in this chapter, recent research in the field suggests that explicit form-focused instruction may produce better results, at least with older learners, than implicit instruction alone (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005). Perhaps some of these methods,

if tailored for the elementary learning experience, can benefit elementary ELLs who come to the classroom with differing learning styles and intelligences (Erlam, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005). For these reasons, educators should incorporate a variety of form-focused activities in the classroom, experimenting with what works for students. Students with diverse ways of learning may benefit, depending upon the individual, from L1 explanations, contrastive analysis between an L1 and L2, written and oral activities done in communication and non-communicative settings, and the opportunity for the practice of deductively learned grammar rules in communicative settings (Borg, 1998; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005).

In this literature review on the focus-on-form approach, I have outlined the SLA research that pertains to the emergence of form-focused grammar instruction in communicative language teaching, first in its initial promotion of implicit techniques and then in its shift to more explicit approaches. Subsequently, I covered research that bears on the question of which approaches are more effective, in particular the question of whether implicit or explicit techniques are better, and point out that there is a current trend toward the inclusion of explicit form-focused techniques.

In the following chapter (Chapter 3), I will discuss the methodology of the current study, which seeks to incorporate two explicit techniques of focus-on-form in a thematic unit and experiment with them in a natural classroom setting. The aim of this investigation is to discover whether my form-focused unit improves student mastery of the form in general, and furthermore, if the use of one particular explicit technique lends itself to learner uptake and promotes continuity of communication, resulting in more

successful learner acquisition. In Chapter 4, I present my results concerning these questions and then discuss their meaning and implications in Chapter 5 and 6, the discussion section and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For this classroom research on focus-on-form instruction, I designed a social studies unit on the biography genre and how to research an historical figure using biographies. The unit included the language objective of improving accuracy in the use of the irregular past tense form. This research will investigate how to improve form-focused grammar instruction with these questions guiding the inquiry:

- 1) What success does my FonF unit design have in promoting learner acquisition of the targeted form, as shown by the pre-test, test, and post-test? Do students demonstrate mastery of the form at the end of the unit, with at least 80% accuracy in a written and oral test?
- 2) Which of two different explicit form-focused techniques compared in the study – the less explicit elicitation technique or the more explicit metalinguistic clue – better promotes learner self-correction in the context of communicative activities in the classroom?

Participants

The participants of the study, apart from myself as the teacher/researcher participant, were five intermediate and advanced English language learners, in two different small-group ESL classes in a public elementary school in the Midwest United

States. The students were classified as intermediate and advanced ELLs according to teacher observation and assessment and their score on Illinois' state test for assessing ELLs, the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs). Two of the Indian students were judged by me to have an intermediate level of English proficiency, and three were judged to be at an advanced level. All participants were in the third grade at the time of the study and were either eight or nine years old. Two of the students were Spanish-speaking, and the three students from India spoke three different languages: Telegu, Hindi, and Tamil. For the purpose of clarification, I have included information in Table 1 that highlights important student information. The students are referred to by pseudonyms: Edwin and Sameer were in one class, and Adit, Alicia and Nishok were in the other class.

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of Participants

| Name | Home Language | Language Level |
|--------|---------------|----------------|
| Edwin | Spanish | Advanced |
| Sameer | Telegu | Intermediate |
| Adit | Hindi | Intermediate |
| Alicia | Spanish | Advanced |
| Nishok | Tamil | Advanced |

Information obtained from school background questionnaires indicated that three students – referred by their pseudonyms Sameer, Adit, and Nishok – were of Indian origin and were born in India. The other two students – Edwin and Alicia– had parents who were born in Mexico or Central America, but they themselves were born here in the United States. Concerning their language background and prior instruction, the Indian students learned English as a second language in schools of their home country and exhibited language features of an Indian English dialect. At the time of the classroom unit under investigation, Sameer and Adit, were newcomers in the United States but could be classified as intermediate English learners. Sameer started near the beginning of the traditional school year in August, and Adit started half-way through the year. Nishok had been at the present school longer, starting in kindergarten, and was an advanced speaker of English. The two students of Latin American background, Edwin and Alicia, were raised in the English-speaking setting of the Midwest school in which the study took place. The Latin American students had learned Spanish first in the home, and were advanced English learners according to teacher judgment and state testing results. These students were chosen to participate in this study because all of the learners were past the beginning stages of language acquisition and thus ready to learn a greater variety of grammatical forms (Pienemann, 1985; Pienemann, Johnston, & Brindley, 1988) and to engage in task-based communicative activities (Ellis, 2006).

Target Structure

In this study, the target structure of the unit was determined after I received information from a grade-level teacher that a number of my students in the third grade struggled during a language unit covering the irregular past tense form. To confirm that students needed help in this area, I administered an informal pre-assessment, and based upon its results, suspected that there was incomplete mastery of the irregular past. (Seedhouse, 1997). I was relatively certain that the students were ready for the form for a number of reasons. First, the intermediate-level students who were singled out as in need of help had already mastered use of the past tense and seemed to be overgeneralizing the “-ed” endings to produce the past. Also, they had acquired the more common irregular forms, such as “said,” “got,” and “became,” and my hypothesis was that they lacked mastery on those forms that were not as frequent and for which they received less input in their classrooms. Thirdly, some of the more advanced ELLs in the same grade-level classes, had entirely mastered the form. For these reasons, and given that it was identified as a learning objective in the third grade, I chose the irregular form of the past as the targeted structure for our class unit.

Two methods for identifying target language forms include: 1) an analysis of student need, as determined by student errors in grammatical form, and 2) an analysis of the forms required in the academic task undertaken by the students (Seedhouse, 1997). To determine student need, teachers may analyze student writing, take note of speech errors in class, and administer specific assessments of features that are appropriate for their level of language development. Furthermore, the language form to be taught in any

specific unit may be selected by the language requirements of the summative activity; for instance, the past tense would be appropriate in a unit wherein students read biographies and then reported on an historical figure. Boiled down to its fundamentals, the target form should be relevant to the unit of study, in that its use is necessary for the unit, and students should show a need to further master the form (Seedhouse, 1997).

Along these lines, Pienemann's (1985) work highlights the importance of choosing grammatical forms that students are ready to learn in their language development trajectory. Just as with learners of a first language, Pienemann postulates that there is an order to learning forms, and students on their learning trajectory might not be ready to learn forms that are further along on the trajectory. In my view, the above methods for determining student need take into account Pienemann's insights. When assessing student writing and speech, the teacher should take into account the forms learners are able to learn at particular language levels and ages. The above methods of assessment, including analysis of learner spoken and written language, looks for acquired but not yet mastered forms as one indication that students are ready to learn a form. This practice of determining the targeted form from student error helps to avoid teaching a form the students are not ready for (Pienemann, 1985). This method also conforms to the acceptable FonF prescription that form-focused activity, and the targeted structure, can be pre-planned (Ellis, 2001; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002).

To assess progress in learning some of the irregular forms, I chose the following 25 to learn first, which formed the focus of my unit: bite/bit, blow/blew, break/broke, build/built, buy/bought, catch/caught, draw/drew, drink/drank, drive/drove, eat/ate,

fall/fell, feel/felt, fly/flew, go/went, hide/hid, know/knew, make/made, ride/rode, sing/sang, swim/swam, take/took, teach/taught, think/thought, throw/threw, and understand/understood. These verbs were chosen by the researcher because they formed a good introduction to the targeted form, as a representative list of irregular verbs found commonly in conversation, for the students who it was suspected were now ready to learn them. Many of these basic irregular verbs were represented in the unit from their grade-level class, with which it was noted by their grade-level teacher that they had some difficulty. It was also thought that many of these basic irregular verbs would be needed to discuss their historical figure in the biography unit and to complete their poster project of their historical figure.

Overview of Unit

After identifying the irregular past as the form that deserved focus, I designed a content-based social studies unit on the biography genre, characterized by meaningful communication in the classroom that would use the past tense in the production of the summative activity (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 1994). The general outline of the unit takes the form of what is considered an explicit delivery design, the PPP (Presentation-Practice-Perform) unit design (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). The PPP design includes 1) the *presentation* of the targeted structure in textual material, 2) *practice* of the structure in controlled activities using appropriate two divergent explicit FonF techniques, and 3) the *performance* of the structure in a summative activity (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). In the *presentation* stage, students were implicitly presented

the targeted form in a series of Powerpoint slides, through input flood and the highlighting of irregular verbs in the text, which as their primary purpose introduced historical figures the students could select to read for their biography project. Then, in the second week, students were explicitly presented the twenty-five targeted irregular verbs. The *practice* stage then took place in the second week of instruction with a series of activities where attention was directed to grammatical form, sometimes entirely independent of meaningful communication. One such explicit activity was the classroom discussion, wherein students discussed their historical figure and the teacher experimented with two different explicit error correction techniques. The last stage, the *performance* stage, involved students gathering information on their historical figures from their chosen biographies, using the targeted form in this summative activity. The experimental component of the unit is twofold: measure overall student growth during the unit and assess the classroom use of the two error correction techniques in the second week of instruction.

Assessment

To track student growth in acquiring the targeted twenty-five verbs, students were administered a test four times during the unit: a pre-assessment to establish a baseline (Test 1), a similar test after the implicit exposure in the Powerpoint slides (Test 2), a summative test after the second week of explicit practice and error correction (Test 3), and a post-test to determine which gains were maintained (Test 4). I was initially going to assess only three times in a pre-test, test, post-test design, but after my first week of

presenting the irregular verbs implicitly in the Powerpoint slides through highlighting and input flood, I decided to gauge additionally what acquisition had taken place through the implicit highlighting and input flood alone.

In the first week of the biography unit in both classes, all students were administered a pre-assessment (Test 1) that would establish a baseline to measure student accuracy of the irregular past form (see Appendix A). The aforementioned twenty-five common verbs with irregular past forms were chosen as the focus of the unit, as a starting point, and students were assessed in three parts:

1. an oral elicitation exercise,
2. a fill-in-the-blank exercise with multiple-choice options, and
3. a fill-in-the-blank exercise requiring the irregular past

For Test 2, students were administered after the first week the same assessment as in the pre-assessment, minus the oral elicitation exercise, to see if there were noticeable gains attributable to the highlighting of forms and input flood. The oral elicitation exercise was not administered in Test 2 so as not to take too much time away from instruction.

At the end of the second week of explicit activities, all students took the summative assessment (Test 3), unchanged from the pre-assessment (Appendix A), to gauge gains attributable to the explicit techniques. One and a half weeks after the conclusion of the unit, some of the students, those who did not have perfect scores previously and thus showed they would benefit from FonF on the irregular past, took a post-test (Test 4) as a means to record longer-term gains. (I did not administer Test 4 to the students who had perfect, or near perfect scores, in previous assessments to avoid

unnecessarily forcing them to lose instructional time.) The post-test included the same written content and verb forms as the pre-assessment and the assessment, but the questions modified and rearranged and like Test 2 it did not include the oral elicitation exercise in the interest of time (Appendix C).

Instructional Sequence: Presentation

After completing the pre-assessment on the first day, in what began the *Presentation* component of the unit, I read a short biography about an historical figure out loud to the students in both classes. While I read, the students used an organizer to gather information from the text, an exercise that they would later use themselves when researching an historical figure in a biography on their own. It took the whole first week to read and gather information from the biography. Also as part of the *Presentation* component, another activity that occurred every day over the course of the first week was a PowerPoint presentation that included twenty short biographical summaries of historical figures that students could choose for their biographical research. I presented approximately five slides from the PowerPoint presentation per day. In my presentations, I used two implicit form-focused techniques in both classes: 1) the highlighting in yellow of the irregular past tense forms in the biographical summaries and 2) input flood, the repetition of the targeted form by reading aloud the summaries and asking questions that required students to use the targeted form in their answers. In using the implicit FonF techniques, the focus in both classes was on communication and uninterrupted noticing

and practice of targeted forms (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Also on Friday of the first week, students chose a biography and were assigned to read it over the weekend.

Instructional Sequence: Practice and Performance

In the second week of the unit, students practiced the targeted irregular past form in controlled activities, one of them being the class discussions during which I experimented with the two explicit error correction techniques. At first, the classes were identical in that attention was drawn to the twenty-five selected past tense verbs with irregular forms, what is equivalent to provision of a rule in the literature (Dekeyser, 1998; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Seedouse 1997). We took some time on the first day to work in groups supplying the past tense to the twenty-five selected verbs, plus some more difficult verbs for students who finished early, after which time we corrected the group work together. When we were finished, we chanted in song-form the 20 target past tense verbs, along with their present tense forms. The work done by the students on this day provided them with a “cheat sheet” handout to consult on the irregular past of these verbs. Later in the week, as a review for the unit test, students also practiced using the past tense irregular verbs in sentences, completing a worksheet that required choosing the correct target forms in sentences. All these activities were the same in both classes and not part of the experiment. These activities of the unit affected student growth in acquiring the targeted form, and so are considered confounding variables because the error correction techniques employed could not be isolated in their effect on student growth.

Most importantly, in relation to my second research question, I experimented with error correction in the second week of instruction. The students practiced using the past tense in the natural context of classroom discussion, and each class received different techniques of explicit error correction as part of the experimental design of the study. For three days during the second week – Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, students gave oral reports on the historical figures that they read about in their biographies over the weekend, answering the following questions: 1) What did your historical figure do in his or her early life? 2) How did your historical figure become famous? 3) Why is your historical figure a role model? During those reports, I experimented with two different error correction techniques, each one used in a particular class. The feedback technique, used in class one, was repetition, where I indicated that an error needed self-correction by repeating the learner's mistake with a raising intonation. For instance, if a student said "runned" instead of "ran," I would attempt to elicit the correct form by repeating the error with a rising intonation – "runned?" In class two, I provided brief metalinguistic interventions. For example, when students made a mistake using the targeted form, the form of my corrective feedback was to state what form the student needed ("you need past tense") and then to allow for the student to correct his or her mistake (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006).

Other means by which we practiced the targeted form, which as said earlier affected the results and amount to confounding variables, were identical in both classes. On Wednesday of the second week, an activity that I created to explicitly target the past tense verb forms in week two was a simple chute game where a present tense card was

drawn from a chute and teams of two students had to supply a sentence using the past tense of the verb. In addition, on Thursday, students practiced the verb forms with a simple fill-in-the-blank worksheet modified from an activity in their grade-level classroom. In sum, prior to the gathering of information that constituted their biography research project, students at times practiced during the second week using with the irregular past form *independent of communication* (Littlewood, 2004).

In the third and final week of the unit, students worked on gathering information from their biographies to eventually make in week three a poster presentation highlighting important elements of their historical figure's life.

The instructional delivery was identical in the two ESL classes except in regard to the technique of error correction employed during the classroom discussion of the second week. In class 1, I used the repetition error correction technique, which of the two explicit approaches used was more implicit on the continuum between explicit and implicit. When students made an error, I repeated the error with an uprising intonation; for example, if a student used the incorrect form "runned," I repeated after him "runned?" to indicate that an error is in need of correction. In class 2, I used a quick metalinguistic clue to signal that an error should be corrected. In the same example above, I would have said "You need the irregular there." The purpose of using two different feedback moves, in two separate classes, was to get a feel for how they work in the class, both in promoting learner self-correction and in maintaining the communicative flow of the discussion.

Data Collection

The following data collection methods were used in the study: 1) assessments administered prior to, during, and after the unit of instruction, 2) audio-recordings of classes, and 3) a teaching diary. Each method will be described in greater detail below.

With the assessments, I measured students' knowledge of the target structure during the unit in a pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test design. A pre-test (Test 1) was administered prior the start of the unit. The assessment contained an oral elicitation exercise, a fill-in-the-blank exercise with multiple-choice options, and a fill-in-the-blank exercise requiring the irregular past (see Appendix A). That same test, minus the oral elicitation exercise, was administered unannounced after the first week of implicit instruction as a means to assess the gains achieved from exposure to highlighted forms in text and input flood alone, without error correction (Test 2). The same assessment – with all components including the oral elicitation exercise – was administered again after the explicit instruction of the form, announced previously to students as the summative test of the unit (Test 3). Lastly, a post-test – unannounced, changed in item ordering and the wording of items, and minus the oral elicitation exercise – was administered a week and a half after the unit only to some of the students (Test 4).

Regarding how the tests differ, I administered the oral elicitation component only for Tests 1 and Test 3 in the interest of not taking too much instructional time from students; therefore, Tests 1 and 3 – the pre-assessment and summative assessment – can be compared since both contain all three components of the test. To make a comparison between all four assessments, however, the oral elicitation exercise must be excluded

from the results. Therefore, in reporting the results, two different comparisons must be made: one comparing the comprehensive Tests 1 and 3, and the other comparing all four written components.

Digital audio-recordings were made on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday of the second week of the instructional unit. On these days, in classroom discussions wherein students reported on the historical figure they were researching, I experimented with the two explicit error correction techniques, and the recordings of these sessions provided data to analyze my use of error correction and students' response to that corrective feedback. During class discussion, students knew that the device was recording, but I purposefully placed it away from the table in a location that would not remind students of its presence. When I could, I started recording before students entered the room, further diminishing its importance. Later, in reflecting upon each day's lesson, I listened to the recording to help me remember what worked and did not work with the form-focused interactions. Later, in analyzing the effect of my form-focused error correction, I returned to the audiotapes. My method of analyzing the data of the tapes is reviewed in the next subsection, *Data Analysis*.

The final source of data was a teaching diary. I wrote notes in my diary reflecting on my teaching immediately after teaching classes each day. With my diary, the goal was to record my professional subjective viewpoint on the effect that the two error correction techniques had upon student self-correction of errors and overall communication. By getting ideas on paper right away, before and after class sessions, I would not forget them

when later writing my analysis. Apart from diary reflections, I used a number of data analysis procedures, which are described in detail in the following section.

Data Analysis

To examine student progress with the assessments, I simply counted the number of correct responses for each student on the four assessments. I first compared Tests 1 and 3, the pre-assessment and the summative test, because this interval measures growth factoring in the effect of explicit error correction and both tests include the oral component. I provide a graph of those results in the next chapter. Next, I compared the progress of the students with all four assessments, not including the oral component in Tests 1 and 3. In graphing this data, one sees a fuller picture of progress throughout and after the unit.

In analyzing the audio-recordings of class sessions, I looked at the flow of classroom communication in general, and the use of the targeted forms in particular. I used audio-recordings of the sessions to count and record

1. all the verbs, irregular and regular, uttered during discussions, and
2. all form-focused interactions (FFIs) in the discussion sessions, when communication of meaning was temporarily interrupted by the teacher for error repair on the part of the learner. FFIs occur whenever there is attention to form in the communicative process (Loewen, 2005). All form-focused interaction were then transcribed.

In recording FFIs, I noted

1. instances of error correction, or “learner uptake,” after FFI, and
2. failure to uptake, or correct, in the process of negotiation.

My method in recording the verbs, irregular or regular, was to write down for each session all the verbs produced and who produced them. The point of recording the verb utterances was to determine the frequency of irregular verb forms in conversations, and thus the frequency whereby error correction was even possible. I counted the total number of verbs produced in each class, who produced them, and classified the verbs produced as regular or irregular. After looking at overall verb production, I turned to collect data on the instances of error correction. Once I had a list of all the verbs produced in the classes, I counted the FFIs in each class and transcribed the interactions in full. I then noted with each FFI the type of error correction I used and whether the student successfully self-corrected (uptake).

Human Consent Information

In the study as outlined, participants were protected by the process of securing permission for research from Hamline University and the local public school district. All participants signed a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study and the means by which their identity would be kept anonymous. In the reporting of results, pseudonyms were used. Audio-recorded sessions of the classroom were used only by the teacher in reflecting upon classroom practice, and would never be made available to anyone else. In designing the research, it is important to state that instructional delivery

was not negatively affected by my research project. By reflecting upon practice, student learning was only enhanced by the focused attention to pedagogical practice.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

During the course of the three-week unit, data was collected to answer the two research questions of the study. The two research questions are:

- 1) What success does my FonF unit design have in promoting learner acquisition of the targeted form, as shown by the pre-test, test, and post-test? Do students demonstrate mastery of the form at the end of the unit, with at least 80% accuracy in a written and oral test?
- 2) Which of two different explicit form-focused techniques compared in the study – the less explicit repetition technique or the more explicit metalinguistic clue – better promotes learner self-correction in the context of communicative activities in the classroom?

These two research questions are helpful in designing a FonF unit. To address the first question, I relied upon quantitative data in the form of a pre-test, test, post-test format. Students were administered a test at important points of the unit and their progress was mapped during its progression. For the second question, I used two different FonF elicitation techniques for the different classes in the second week of instruction – repetition of the error and metalinguistic clue – and audio-recorded the classes for later analysis of how the techniques compared in terms of maintaining classroom

communication and promoting uptake of the targeted form. I also took notes after class sessions on my own views of how the different techniques contributed to these goals.

Research Question #1: Did Students Improve in their Mastery of the Form?

The first question seeks to measure the progress of students during the unit, forming a background analysis for the second question as to the effect of the explicit error correction. To help answer the first question, I administered a test on the irregular past tense/aspect system four times during the unit. A pre-test (Test 1) was administered prior the start of the unit, labeled Test 1 in the tables. That same test, minus the oral elicitation exercise, was administered unannounced after the first week of implicit instruction as a means to assess the gains achieved from implicit exposure (Test 2). After the explicit instruction of the form in week two, the same test was again administered, including all components, and announced previously to students as the summative test of the unit (Test 3). Lastly, a post-test – unannounced, changed in item ordering and the wording of items, and minus the oral elicitation exercise- was administered a week and a half after the unit to some of the students (Test 4). Due to time constraints, I administered the oral response part of the test only for test 1 and test 3, which together offer a comprehensive comparison between a baseline and a summative test. In Table 2, the raw point scores of all five students are compared for Test 1 and Test 3, both including the written and oral components. Immediately following Table 2, Figure 1 shows the same information in a bar graph.

Table 2

Raw Score Results for Pre-test (Test 1) and Summative Test (Test 3) by Student

| | Adit | Edwin | Sameer | Nishok | Alicia |
|-------------------------------|------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Pre-test (Test 1) | 14 | 17 | 29 | 35 | 38 |
| Summative Test (Test 3) | 21 | 31 | 34 | 38 | 38 |

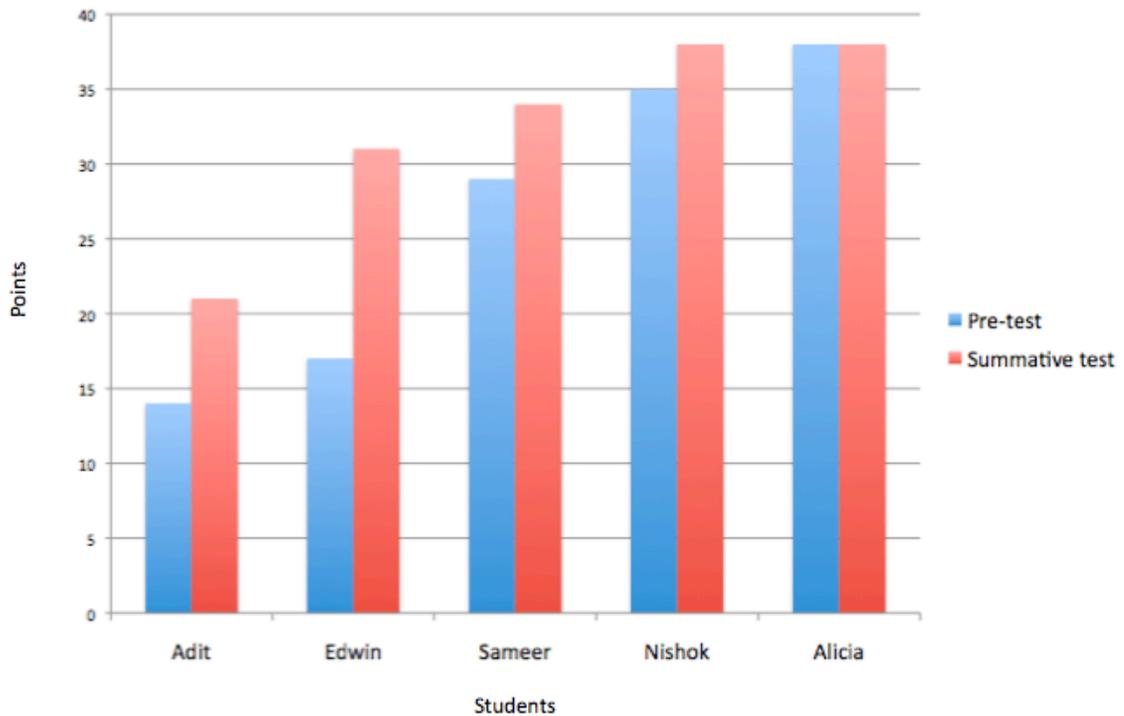


Figure 1

Graphed Results for Pre-test (Test 1) and Summative Test (Test 3) by Student

According to the pre-test (Test 1) and summative test (Test 3) results, all students improved in the combined written and oral test, except Alicia who received a perfect score both times. As to be expected from the pre-test results, Nishok improved little; his pre-test scores were already high, well above the goal of 80% final mastery, demonstrating an initial high acquisition of the irregular form. His two pre-assessment errors were in the oral elicitation exercise and they were corrected in Test 3. However, the remainder of the students all showed marked growth toward the 80% goal. Adit started out without any knowledge of the irregular form, over-generalizing the ‘-ed’ ending in the pre-assessment, but he made subsequent improvement. While he did not achieve the 80% goal, improving from a raw score of 14 to 21 (37% correct in the pre-test to 55% in the post-test), this still amounted to a 50% improvement over the baseline score. Edwin and Sameer made the 80% goal. Edwin improved from an initial score of 17 points to 31 in the summative, which in percentage terms was an improvement from 45% to 82%, This improvement was an 82% increase over the pre-test score. Sameer improved from an initial score of 29 to 34 in the summative (76% to 90% in percentage terms), a 21% increase. Important variables undoubtedly contribute to the differences between these students’ performance. For now, it is important to note that all the students who could benefit from explicit FonF grammar instruction, because they had not yet mastered the imperfect tense aspectual form, did in fact benefit.

As noted earlier, the writing portion of the assessment was administered two other times, besides the two times shown in Table 2 and Figure 1. It was administered a week after the pre-test (after the exposure of the form through highlighted text and input flood,

labeled Test 2 in accompanying tables), and as a post-test a week after the summative test, as a means to assess the permanence of acquisition. Table 3 compares the raw scores of the students for all four written-response tests, including the implicit instruction test (Test 2) and the post-test (Test 4), and Figure 2 shows that same information in useful graphical form.

Table 3

Results from All Four Tests (Written Portion Only)

| | Adit | Edwin | Sameer | Nishok | Alicia |
|-------------------------------|------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Pre-test (Test 1) | 10 | 10 | 22 | 27 | 28 |
| Test 2 | 8 | 15 | 23 | 27 | 27 |
| Summative Test (Test 3) | 14 | 24 | 26 | 28 | 28 |
| Post-test (Test 4) | 17 | 18 | 26 | | |

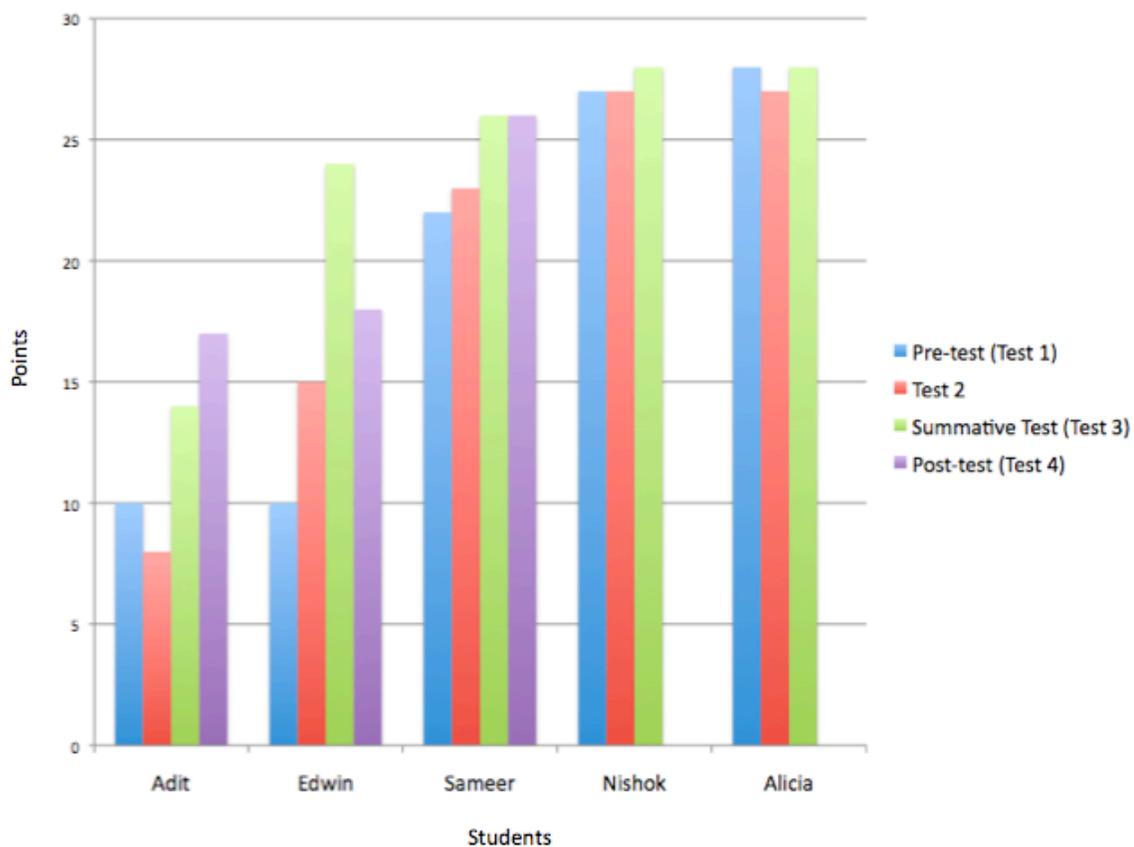


Figure 2

Results from All Four Tests (Written Portion Only)

By comparing all four written-response test scores, a fuller picture of student progress is revealed. As shown in Table 3, Adit improved his scores markedly, even if he failed to reach the 80% goal, and the progression of his scores suggests that most of the improvement derived from explicit instruction. In fact, his test score actually declined in Test 2, after receiving implicit instruction alone. After receiving explicit instruction, however, Adit improved his score by 40% in Test 3 (from 10 in the pre-test to 14 in the

summative), and by 60% over the pre-test baseline in the post-test (from 10 to 17 points). In the post-test, Adit not only maintained gains, he improved. It is significant that gains were registered on a post-test that tested for the same items but minimized practice effects by changing the order of test items and their exact wording.

The test results for Edwin were both surprising and very interesting. Edwin is an English language learner born in the U.S, an advanced ELL, who demonstrates a high level of conversational and academic English. However, from his low pre-test score, it is evident that there are at least some elements of the English language that he has yet to master, including the irregular past form. Edwin showed immense gains, both after implicit and explicit instruction. After implicit instruction, he registered a 50% score increase over the pre-test baseline (from 10 to 15 raw score points), and after explicit instruction, a 140% increase over the baseline (from 10 to 24 raw score points). The decline in the post-test demonstrates that some of the learning was lost, or shows that there was a test-taking practice effect in the first three tests, since the post-test contained new items and in a different order, a feature not present in the other three tests. Nonetheless, considering just the pre-test and the final post-test, where he scored 10 and 18 points respectively, Edwin registered an 80% gain. This statistic suggests that, of all the students, Edwin benefited the most from the instruction. Edwin's rapid gains were matched by his greater participation in class discussions and greater rate of FonF episodes and uptake, discussed now in the next section.

Sameer improved from an already high level, showing more improvement from the explicit instruction than the implicit instruction, and then maintaining those gains in

the post-test. Comparing Sameer's pre-test score with Tests 3 and 4, Sameer improved by 18% (from 22 in the pre-test to 26 in the post-test).

Nishok and Alicia demonstrated high mastery of the form in all three assessments, consistent with the initial assessment that they would not necessarily need FonF instruction on this particular tense aspectual system. Nonetheless, Nishok did improve by one written response between the pre-test and summative test, whereas Alicia could not improve from her already perfect written test score.

Research Question #2: Which types of FonF techniques were most useful?

The second question centers on which explicit types of FonF error correction would be more beneficial to students learning a particular grammatical form. To gather data to answer this question, I taped teacher-mediated conversations in my classroom that were designed as FonF error correction interventions. Students spoke about the person that they were researching for a biography project, and as their teacher I used a FonF technique to address their errors in the imperfect past tense form. In class 1, I used the FonF technique of repetition that was less explicit in that it was quick and thus less likely to break the flow of communication, but unlike a recast, strongly suggested to the student that an error was made that was in need of correction. Using this technique, when a student would make an error, the teacher would repeat the error with an uprising question intonation, questioning the correctness of the utterance. For example, if a student said "I putted the vase on the desk," the teacher would indicate the error in need of correction by replying "putted?" In class 2, I used metalinguistic clue, more explicit approach to FonF

error correction that involves a direct explanation of the kind of error and that it needs correction. For example, in the aforementioned form-focused episode, the teacher would say “You need an irregular past verb there.” This technique, while breaking the communication a little more, explains the problem to the student and indicates directly that an error needs to be corrected.

Altogether, I used 41 minutes and 53 seconds of recorded classroom conversation. The recorded conversations came from the second week of the unit, when explicit error correction of the form took place. Every day, prior to instruction that involved games and other explicit approaches, I led a discussion on a question involving their historical personage. During these discussions I applied the FonF techniques. Of the total time recorded, class 1 amounted to 27 minutes, 26 seconds; class 2 amounted to 14 minutes, 27 seconds. The difference in class communication has more than one factor explaining it; however, one important factor was Edwin’s high participation level. Table 1 shows the number of verb utterances (regular and irregular), the number of focus-on-form interactions in each class, and the number of successful learner uptakes in each class session.

Table 4

Verb Production, Form-Focused Interactions, and Uptake by Class

| | Length of Time Measured | Total Number of Verbs Produced | Irregular Verbs Produced | Regular Verbs Produced | Number of form-focused interactions | Number of successful uptakes |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Class 1 “Repetition” Group | 27:26 | 166 | 131 (47) ^a | 35 | 6 | 3 |
| Class 2 “Metalinguistic Clue” Group | 14:27 | 79 | 56 (20) ^a | 23 | 2 | 1 |

^a Number of irregular verbs produced after subtracting the following high frequency verbs: ‘be,’ ‘do,’ ‘get,’ ‘have,’ and ‘say’.

Table 4 presents the most pertinent quantifiable information collected on the classroom discussion, specifically information on verb production and form-focused interactions. As shown in the first column, students in class 1, Edwin and Sameer, discussed just under twice as many minutes as did the students in class 2, Alicia, Adit, and Nishok. A comparison between the two classes on the number of overall verbs produced yielded similar results with class 1 producing 166 verbs and class 2 producing 79. This result is due primarily to the greater amount of discussion produced by Edwin in class 1, who was interested in his biographical report. Class 2 was larger by one, including two advanced speakers, and yet produced less conversation.

Next, the ratio between irregular verbs to regular verbs, produced by students during classroom discussion, reveals the opportunities for error correction in the classroom. With the targeted focus on the accurate use of the irregular form, more verb

production will present more opportunities for focus-on-form error correction. Overall, the available opportunities for irregular verb production were low in number. The first irregular figure for each class, 131 and 56, suggests a high number of irregular verbs produced, in comparison with the production of regular verbs at 35 and 23. However, a few high frequency irregular verbs skewed these results, that of ‘to be,’ ‘to do,’ ‘to get,’ ‘to have,’ and ‘to say,’ all of which have been learned to the point of automaticity by the intermediate and advanced students in these classes. To get a better picture of the number of possible instances of error correction during class discussions, when the irregular verb produced were not of these four verbs already acquired, the irregular to regular ratio in parentheses subtracts these common verbs from the results. Accordingly, in class 1, there were 47 possible opportunities of error correction; of those 47, there were six instances of form-focused error correction. Of those six, only three resulted in successful student self-correction, or uptake. In class 2, there were only 20 opportunities for error correction, when students uttered irregular verbs; of those 20, there were only two focus-on-form episodes and one instance of successful uptake.

In attempting to evaluate the success of the focus-on-form interactions (FFIs) between teacher and student, I analyzed the transcriptions of the ten episodes in Figures 3 and Figure 4. Given the low number of FFIs produced, I knew that no conclusions could be reached through a quantifiable comparison between the classes. However, the interactions themselves might reveal some insights. Figure 3 contains the FFIs from May 18, 2009, and Figure 4 contains the FFIs from May 19, 2009. Our last day of discussion, May 21, 2009, produced no FFIs. In each figure, the date and class discussion is

prominently displayed in the shaded area. Subsequently, class 1 transcriptions are found on the left of the divide and class 2 transcriptions on the right. For each transcribed episode, the FFI is given a label, along with the type of teacher feedback technique and whether uptake was successful or unsuccessful.

| May 18, 2009 | |
|---|--|
| Class Discussion: Students addressed in a small-group discussion the question: What did your historical character do to become famous? | |
| Class 1 Repetition Group | Class 2 Metalinguistic Clue Group |
| <p>Form-focused Episode (FFI): 1A Teacher Intervention: Repetition Learner Uptake: Unsuccessful</p> <p>Edwin: His Africa family member knowed* about basketball... He played soccer, and...</p> <p>Teacher: Knowed about basketball?</p> <p>Edwin: He didn't know about basketball, no....</p> <p>Teacher: OK</p> <p>Edwin: And he played basketball...</p> | <p>Form-focused Episode (FFI): 1B Teacher Intervention: Metalinguistic Clue (Bungled by Teacher) Learner Uptake: Successful</p> <p>Adit: I think she putted a flag.</p> <p>Teacher: You need the irregular there, put?</p> <p>Adit: put a flag, and that's all I can think of.</p> <p>Teacher: Ok.</p> <p>Adit: because I have different stories in my mind.</p> <p>Teacher: Ok...(pause) Is there anything else you remember that she did as a child, when she was young?</p> <p>Adit: Uhm...</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Form-focused Intervention (FFI): 2A Teacher Intervention: Repetition, with Student Recast Learner Uptake: Unsuccessful</p> <p>Edwin: And then when they were good enough, they passed the college team, in second place, and they...they...they were so good that they NBC make them to be in the ...</p> <p>Teacher: Make them?</p> <p>Edwin: No, uhm...</p> <p>Another student: Made (with emphasis)</p> <p>Edwin: wanted them to be in the NBC channel.</p> | |
|---|--|

Figure 3

Transcriptions of Focus-on-Form Interactions on May 18, 2009

| May 19, 2009 | |
|---|---|
| Class Discussion: Students addressed in a small group discussion: What did your historical character do to become famous? | |
| Class 1 Repetition Group | Class 2 Metalinguistic Clue Group |
| Form-focused Intervention (FFI): 3A Teacher Intervention: Repetition Learner Uptake: Successful Sameer: It had a big swing.... The ground was too low, so I can't get up there. So, finally, someone picked me up and putted it up there.... Teacher: putted? (Continues on next page) | Form-focused Intervention (FFI): 2B Teacher Intervention: Metalinguistic Clue, Recast (Bungled by Teacher) Learner Uptake: Unsuccessful Adit; The people gather up and... they... the lots of people know about Gandhi. Teacher: know? Or, you need the irregular there. (Continues on next page) |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Sameer: put me on the swing.</p> <p>Sameer: And it was like a tire or something?</p> | <p>Adit: Um.....um.....</p> <p>Teacher: What is the irregular for know?</p> <p>Adit: (mumbling)</p> <p>Teacher: Knew.</p> <p>Adit: Oh, knew</p> <p>Teacher: What were you saying? Sorry...</p> <p>Adit: I don't get it now.</p> <p>Teacher: Ok. So there were people gathering up, right? Were they meeting up somewhere?</p> <p>Adit: They just gathered up because I don't know.</p> <p>(Conversation continues)</p> |
| <p>Form-focused Intervention (FFI): 4A Teacher Intervention: Recast, Bungled Repetition Learner Uptake: Unsuccessful</p> <p>Edwin: And then the egg hatch-ted and it was a little roly.</p> <p>Teacher: hatched?</p> <p>Edwin: Yeah.</p> <p>Teacher: OK.</p> <p>Edwin: It was a little roly. It was cute. It was a little dog.</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Form-focused Intervention (FFI): 5A Teacher Intervention: Repetition, Recast Learner Uptake: Successful</p> <p>Edwin: Well, finally they got... they beated...</p> <p>Teacher: beated?</p> <p>Edwin: They beated the Boston Clicks.</p> <p>Teacher: Beated, Elder?</p> <p>Edwin: Beated...uhm...won the Boston Clicks. And they.... won... finally they... for three years they Title 1 the [inaudible] ... oh yea, they went to the MVP. (searching in book) Uhm, I'm looking for a thingy. I forgot.... One of the names is the Knicks but I forgot the country.</p> <p>Teacher: OK</p> <p>Edwin: Oh yea, they won California State.</p> <p>Teacher: Or, they beat California State?</p> <p>Edwin: Yea, they beat California State and beat Patrick [inaudible]. He beat someone. (Searching in book). Oh, here we go, the New York Knicks.</p> <p>Teacher: The New York Knicks, they beat them too?</p> <p>Edwin: Yeah.</p> | |
|---|--|

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Form-focused Intervention (FFI): 6A Teacher Intervention: Repetition, with student recast Learner Uptake: Successful</p> <p>Sameer: and then these womens break the laws.</p> <p>Teacher: OK, break the laws?</p> <p>Another student: broke</p> <p>Sameer: broke the laws.</p> <p>Sameer: And then sometimes they made the salt and Gandhi and some people marched lots of miles to get salt.</p> | |
|--|--|

Figure 4

Transcriptions of Focus-on-Form Interactions on May 19, 2009

As the transcripts of Figure 3 and Figure 4 reveal, students made three types of errors with the irregular past form: overgeneralization of the –ed ending, use of the present to indicate the past, and mispronunciation. For examples of overgeneralization of the –ed ending, in FFIs 1A and IB (See Figure 3), the students incorrectly supplied “knowed” and “putted.” There were four such overgeneralizations in all. Almost as frequent, in three instances, students supplied the present tense in utterances that required the past tense. Students said “make” and “know,” when “made” and “knew” were obligatory. Lastly, as the one example of mispronunciation, “hatched” was mispronounced as “hatch-ted”.

In responding to these errors, I used the two different error correction techniques, which had varying degrees of success in producing student uptake of the correct form. I also had varied success in performing the error correction without error. In class 1 where repetition was used, I mistakenly used recast one time in FFI 4A (Figure 4), and in class 2 I also erred by supplying the correct form in FFI 1B (Figure 3) and by using repetition in FFI 2B (Figure 4). In the next chapter, I will further analyze the transcribed FFIs of Figure 3 and Figure 4.

In sum, the results indicate that the students in the present study made improvements over time in their use of the irregular past tense as evidenced by the four tests administered during the unit. Of all of the verbs that students used over the course of the class discussions, few were irregular verbs and thus, I had relatively minimal opportunities to engage in error correction of the targeted form. Of the error correction instances, there were some successes, a few of which prove interesting.

In the next two chapters, the Discussion and Conclusion, I use the results of Chapter 4 to evaluate the overall success of my content-based unit and pinpoint how my error correction feedback moves were successful or unsuccessful in class discussions. The test scores demonstrate the growth of student knowledge of the targeted form during the course of the unit, and more importantly, provide background information when discussing the learning of particular students. The transcriptions of the form-focused interventions are used in Chapter 5 to evaluate my teacher feedback techniques and discuss what can be learned from the resulting interactions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Due to the complex interplay of factors that influence student learning, it is difficult for the classroom teacher to determine cause and effect when evaluating pedagogical methods and techniques. In the thematic unit serving as a focus of this study, the pedagogical practice under investigation – teacher error correction in class discussion – was just one of the focus-on-form practices used to improve student mastery of the imperfect tense aspectual system. Other activities that explicitly directed student attention to grammatical form were a drill, whereby students provided the correct imperfect form in isolated sentences, and a game in which teammates alternated asking questions that required the correct use of the imperfect and answering them. All of the activities together impacted the improvement shown by the students during the course of the unit.

In evaluating the results of the assessments, first, the pre-test nicely shows the high value of assessing students for what they know or do not know. It was expected, prior to the pre-test, that the advanced students, Alicia and Nishok, would do well and that the intermediate students, Sameer and Adit, would need to practice the form. However, in the case of Edwin, an advanced English learner, it was entirely unexpected that this student would lack knowledge of the irregular past form. The results of the daily classroom discussions point to an answer why a teacher may fail to notice student needs through informal observation of classroom discussion. During the taped classroom

discussions, students produced a total of 245 verbs in 41 minutes and 53 seconds, and of those verbs in that time, they produced only 67 irregular verbs, discounting highly frequent verbs most intermediate/advanced students can produce automatically such as 'was/were,' 'got,' 'did,' 'had,' and 'said.' Of those 67, students made only eight errors that would be subject to error correction. When the overall focus is on meaning in the classroom, by the teacher and the students, it is not surprising that the teacher would miss noticing those 10 errors spread out over 40 minutes and shrouded further by other grammatical errors made by students.

One possible reason why errors show up less frequently in spoken language of the students is the common practice of avoiding verbs that could pose a problem for students. Error avoidance was noticed during the oral portion of the pre-test, when students would doubt themselves concerning the irregular form and then search for a past verb form already known well, either a regular past form or an irregular verb known with more confidence. For example, when a student was asked during the oral component of the picture "What did the boy do yesterday?" in reference to a picture of a boy swimming, he replied, "The boy practiced swimming last Saturday." At the time, I hypothesized that the student participant wavered between using 'swam' or 'swimmed' and decided to use a regular form with which he was familiar. In addition, students copiously produced the 'to be' verb in the past, sometime as the simple past 'was' and 'were,' and sometimes as the past progressive 'was running' and 'was walking.' Students sometimes used the past progressive, I suspect, as a strategy to avoid unfamiliar simple past forms. These results provide evidence of a particular stage in language acquisition, a learning stage of the past

progressive wherein overgeneralization is to be expected. Lightbown & Spada (1990) describes such acquisition stages but in reference to other grammatical structures.

In the course of the unit, students were exposed to a set number of twenty-five irregular forms, in addition to some others, and practiced those forms in the second half of the unit in activities that included more explicit attention to the form. In the first half, during the first week, the exposure was entirely implicit in both classes, as students read short biographical sketches on the historical characters they could choose for their report. In those sketches, irregular forms were highlighted. Although conclusions are unwarranted from this limited study, it appears that the highlighting of forms might be beneficial for more advanced students who may have had previous exposure to the form but need just a reminder of its use. Edwin, an advanced student, showed appreciable gains after the assessment was administered after the implicit exposure (Test 2). Sameer showed a gain but it was minimal. Interestingly, however, Adit, who was lowest in English ability, showed a significant decline after exposure to the implicit highlighting. One possible explanation for this lower performance is that he had not recognized the irregular form in input flood and textual highlighting; another is that he had developed a newfound awareness that the past tense involves both regular and irregular forms, but without guided, explicit practice, he lacked the ability to discriminate which verbs were regular or irregular. Adit's Test 2 demonstrates that he continued to overgeneralize the -ed ending for all past tense verbs, but by Test 3 he was using the irregular form at least some of the time.

Students demonstrated the most growth on the summative assessment (Test 3). In the context of the unit, this counted as “the test” for the unit, which could have had some impact on scores. But, at this level, students treated each assessment with the same seriousness, so such impact was probably minimal. Most likely, the significant growth came as a result of the explicit attention brought to the irregular past tense in the classroom, specifically the presentation of common irregular forms, the classroom game whereby the students practiced the irregular forms, and the teacher-initiated error correction during class discussion. Given the low number of error corrections in class discussion, as discussed previously, I speculate that the other explicit activities had more of an impact on demonstrated growth than did error correction. Nonetheless, the overall attention to form did produce results, which then were maintained in a post-test (Test 4) given over a week later. Sameer maintained his gain and Adit even improved upon the previous score. Edwin, however, lost some of the gain achieved earlier, suggesting that this student is still in the process of mastering the form.

Turning now to the second question of which error correction techniques work the best, it should be repeated that previous research has tended to compare implicit and explicit techniques to determine their relative effectiveness. Most often, recast has been the implicit technique compared to other explicit techniques, assuming that recast is the least intrusive style. In this study, since I took the results of other studies showing that recast did not result in student self-correction, or uptake (Lyster, 2001), I chose to compare two explicit approaches – the less explicit move of repetition and the more explicit metalinguistic clue. Due to the small number of error correction episodes,

amounting in total to six in class 1 and two in class 2, it is impossible to demonstrate with quantifiable analysis which technique worked better. This is especially true given that, in directing student attention to grammatical form in both class 2 episodes (1B and 2B), I bungled the error correction. In episode 1B, I supplied the form to be used by the student, perhaps in anticipation that the student did not know what I was asking of him. He did successfully self-correct, but the break in the flow of communication was too great and resulted in an end to the conversation. In episode 2B, I accidentally used the error correction technique of repetition to be used exclusively in the other class, and then realized my mistake and used metalinguistic clue.

I believe that my errors in using metalinguistic clue, based upon my daily reflections, were a result of feeling uncomfortable using this technique as a form of error correction. The break caused by this technique seemed unnaturally enlarged by referring to a grammar point “You need the irregular there,” whereas the technique of repetition made the student aware that a mistake was made but did so by simply repeating the mistake and indicating with a questioning tone that it should be repaired. Even though I was prepared to use the metalinguistic clue, it didn’t feel as natural as repetition. Even so, researchers might want to investigate the possibility that metalinguistic clue works better with other grammatical forms.

Overall, Adit of the metalinguistic clue group, a student who could benefit from error correction, did not perform well in response to the two error corrections. When interrupted by the teacher for error correction, even though in one instance he self-corrected, his flow of communication was stopped (See FFI 1B in Figure 3 and FFI 2B in

Figure 4). Given the learner's apparent inability to self-correct in both instances, I frequently wondered and reflected on the possibility that students who are of lower ability and have not learned the form well in question, might benefit from less obtrusive feedback moves. For example, in this case, recast might have been a better solution. In practice, recast is faster, less obtrusive, and the student is given the correct form to make the correction. One possible consideration for future study is to see if recast has more effect to generate successful uptake if accompanied with the expectation that students self-correct during form-focused episodes.

In considering past research and the results of my exploratory investigation, my hypothesis to the question of which type of error correction is best is that it depends on many factors. A teacher may choose one, or a set of, error correction techniques depending on the grammatical form of the unit, the age and English ability of the students, and even the type of error committed in the moment. Precisely because there are so many factors to consider when choosing error correction types, I believe language teachers should avoid dogmatism and be eclectic in their pedagogical decisions. In some situations, as in previously cited studies (Ellis, 2005; Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Erlam, 2006; Laufer, 2006; Sheen, 2003), metalinguistic clue was more successful as an intervention. In this particular study, in the context of this unit and with these particular students, I found that the more implicit technique was more naturally used in communication and more successful in maintaining the flow of meaningful communication. However, for other situations, the technique that worked well for this unit and group of English language learners might not work well for another unit and

other groups of students. More investigations could demonstrate in which situations particular techniques are more likely to be more effective.

While the suitability of the more implicit repetition technique for this group of primary school students cannot be established by the data, the quality of the interactions does point to this technique's less obtrusive nature. Form-focused episodes 2A, 3A, 5A, and 6A (see Figure 3 and Figure 4), whether uptake in them was successful or not, contained communicative exchanges that were, by and large, less unencumbered by the error correction. Episode 3A (See Figure 4) contributed to communication by the fact that the student corrected two errors in his speech, supplying the correct irregular form of the verb and the appropriate pronoun 'me,' thus resulting in better communication. In episode 5A (See Figure 4), the student maintained a very long discourse on a basketball player, despite continued attempts at error correction by the teacher. Knowing a mistake had been made by saying "beated," the student experimented with "won," still incorrectly, until I supplied the correct form, "beat," an instance of recast. I believe that this one long passage suggests that repetition, besides suggesting that it does not intrude terribly upon the conversation, also hints at the advisability of using diverse techniques. In this instance, the student did not successfully uptake right away based upon the repetition error correction. However, he did attempt at correction, experimenting with the form. Once the form was supplied to him by recast, the student used it three times in a row, almost as if he were practicing the form. This episode, propelled by a repetition plus recast type of error correction, was likely the most effective of the different types of techniques.

Furthermore, according to my own diary reflections, I felt much more comfortable using the repetition technique among these particular students; the repetitions of the student's error, with rising intonation, was able to indicate simultaneously that an error was made and that it should be corrected. In contrast, the phrase "you need the irregular there," did not seem natural and appeared to suggest more that I was not paying attention to what they were saying but how they said it. All of these observations are simply reflections and should not be taken as definitive indictments of the metalinguistic clue technique. And as I said previously, more research might suggest that this technique works better with particular grammatical forms and with a certain type of English language learner.

The only instance when repetition did not work well, in FFI 1A (See Figure 3), I suspect that the problem was the phrase that I repeated indicating an error had to be corrected, "knowed about basketball?" In this case, it seemed that I had to say the whole phrase, and the student mistook my intervention as one attending to meaning and not to the form of the utterance. From that interaction alone, I hypothesize that repetition works best when the error is repeated alone and not as part of a longer phrase.

Lastly, in reflecting later on the overall success of the discussions in which the form-focused episodes took place, I – as the teacher – could change the design and planning in such a way that perhaps would lead to more effective communication for longer periods of time and consequently more apt to produce errors that could be addressed. First, I could improve the design of the discussion sessions. As it was designed in this unit, each day revolved around a question that students answered from

their biographical readings. However, to get students talking even more, I could have designed such discussion to be focused on a set of questions that would have involved students probing deeper into the lives of their historical characters. Rather than one simple report, met with my error corrections, students would be expounding on their character in greater complexity. By focusing on progressively more complex communicative meaning, the fact that I was also attending to their errors could have been diminished. Secondly, in line with the eclecticism of technique I mentioned before, I will in the future focus on one technique I feel is most apt for a particular group of students at a certain ability level. But in the discussions themselves, the choice of technique should be left open so that the one most able to maintain the flow of communication is chosen. It is also important to continually practice the most effective techniques, since it is through their continual use as one primarily pays attention to meaning in communication that one improves in employing them.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This classroom research project focused on how to best assist English language learners acquire the irregular past form. The participants in the study, all in the third grade, demonstrated through a pre-assessment that they needed practice with the form, which was further confirmed by the observations of their grade-level teacher. Given the current research on Focus-on-Form – which now advises the instructional use of more explicit approaches to form-focused instruction, including error correction in the context of meaningful communication – I decided that students would benefit from explicit instruction, in addition to implicit techniques such as text highlighting of the targeted form in the context of lesson delivery. The repertoire of explicit approaches included an introduction to twenty-five common imperfect verbs, a supply-the-form activity, a game, and form-focused error correction during classroom discussion.

Of the students who demonstrated through the pre-assessment the need for improvement in their mastery of the form, all of them demonstrated growth. In comparison with the improvement registered after the implicit approach, there was a marked improvement after the explicit form-focused instruction. However, it is impossible to say given the design of the study which explicit technique had the most effect. One can conclude, however, that explicit approaches are valuable and do lead to acquisition gains in the classroom. It is my hypothesis that, in this particular unit, most of

the improvement is attributable to the explicit introduction of the forms and the subsequent practice of the game. There simply was not enough form-focused interaction during classroom discussions to have that great of an impact. At the very least, though, the few form-focused interactions amounted to one more consciousness-raising activity during the course of the unit.

Also, through this study, I also wanted to investigate which form-focused techniques worked best in maintaining the flow of meaningful conversation and resulted in a greater frequency of student self-correction, or successful uptake. Of course, given the few instances of form-focused interactions, it is impossible to determine quantitatively which technique had greater success. However, it should be noted that the difficulties Adit experienced in maintaining his train of thought during the metalinguistic clue error correction suggests that this technique is not effective with low intermediate and beginners learning the irregular past. Furthermore, based upon my own reflections, the repetition technique was much simpler, making it less intrusive in the conversation. The very nature of the technique, I hypothesize, made possible longer and more valuable form-focused interaction in the first class. Nevertheless, using the repetition might not have garnered better results in the second class. Perhaps with beginning and lower intermediate students, structured games and even recast would serve better.

In the final analysis, my study into my FonF technique gave me a greater awareness of the importance of structured research in the classroom. By systematizing my thought in this area, a number of significant hypotheses presented themselves for consideration in future studies. First, the study suggests that no single FonF technique,

nor even class of technique (i.e. implicit vs. explicit), should be given a stamp of approval for all learners and situations. While it is true that prior research has provided evidence of the superiority of the inclusion of explicit FonF, compared to implicit FonF alone, which particular technique to choose in a given situation is dependent on a number of factors. Further study could illuminate which factors are relevant in choosing a particular FonF technique. For instance, what techniques are better suited for beginners, if any? Which are better for low intermediate students vs. advanced students? Which are better suited for students in the elementary school? Are there other personal characteristics of individual learners that should influence our error correction, such as attention-span and behavior? All of these individual questions, compiled together to form an overall guide to error correction in the classroom, would be of great assistance to the field of ESL.

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APPENDIX A

Assessment

The assessment used in the pre-assessment, assessment, and post-test is provided below in detail. The assessment consisted of three parts: an oral elicitation exercise, a fill-in-the-blank exercise with multiple-choice options, and a fill-in-the-blank exercise requiring the irregular past. Only the pre-assessment (Test 1) and the summative test (Test 3) of the unit had all three parts, including the oral component. The assessment given after the first week, to measure any gains resulting from the implicit treatment of highlighting the forms, and the post-test did not include the oral component.

Oral Component

Students were shown ten pictures and asked ten questions that would elicit the use of the past tense, eliciting nine irregular past forms and one regular past distracter placed toward the beginning. The questions were, in order:

What did the boy do yesterday in class?

Where did the man travel last year?

What did the boy do yesterday at the pool?

What did the baseball do here?

What did the boy drink yesterday?

What did the man sing on stage?

What did the boys find during recess?

How did the baby feel?

What did the boy throw?

What did the girls build on the beach?

Fill-in-the-blank with Multiple-Choice Options

1. My friend _____ all the way to school last Friday morning.
 - a. walked
 - b. walken
 - c. walk

2. The mean dog _____ the boy on the playground.
 - a. bited
 - b. bit
 - c. bitten

3. Carla _____ every afternoon last summer.
 - a. swimmmed
 - b. swam
 - c. swimming

4. The little boy _____ his toy and his mom helped him fix it.
 - a. breaked
 - b. break
 - c. broke

5. I _____ chicken for lunch.
 - a. eated
 - b. eaten
 - c. ate

6. Yesterday his mother _____ him up after school.
 - a. poked
 - b. picks
 - c. picked

7. The art teacher _____ an example on the board.
 - a. drawed
 - b. drawn
 - c. drew

8. The businessman _____ home in an airplane last Friday.
 - a. flied
 - b. flew
 - c. flown

9. Yesterday in class, the 3rd grader _____ hard about the math problem.
a. thought
b. thinked
c. thinks
10. My mother _____ me a card for my birthday last year.
a. buyed
b. buy
c. bought
11. Last Tuesday the students _____ a bird's nest on the playground.
a. find
b. finded
c. found
12. After the concert all the students _____ loudly.
a. clapped
b. clapping
c. cloap

Fill-in-the-Blank Requiring the Irregular Past

13. In the morning, the girl _____ behind a tree. (hide, past)
14. Last week I finally _____ the math homework! (understand, past)
15. Billy _____ down in gym class two days ago! (fall, past)
16. All the students _____ very hard for the test. (study, past)
17. My family and I _____ in the car all day Saturday! (ride, past)
18. At the basketball game, Michael Jordan _____ the ball high in the air!
(catch, past)
19. I _____ 5 miles last night. (walk, past)
20. The teacher already _____ that stuff! (teach, past)
21. At his birthday party, the little boy _____ out all his candles (blow, past)
22. We _____ all the answers on the test. (know, past)

23. The kids _____ all day in the park. (play, past)
24. The girl _____ to go get her backpack. (need, past)
25. Carla _____ around to see her friend. (turn, past)
26. Bill _____ his milk before recess. (drink, past)
27. The man _____ his car to Indiana. (drive, past)
28. In music class, the students _____ beautifully. (sing, past)

APPENDIX B

Implicit Highlighting of Form: Powerpoint Presentation of Historical Figures

Below is one example taken from the slides used to introduce historical figures students could choose for their biography project. Each slide contained highlighted text to draw attention to irregular forms of the past tense.

Pocahontas



Pocahontas was a Native American woman born in America in 1595. She **kept** the Native Americans and British from fighting. Later she **felt** tricked by the British and did not want to go back to America.

APPENDIX C

Post-Test Assessment (Test 4)

The post-test was very similar to the other administrations of the assessment (Appendix A). However, it did not include the oral component, and written items were modified and their order changed. All of the items are included here.

Fill-in-the-blank with Multiple-Choice Options

1. The teacher _____ every afternoon last summer.
 - a. swimmmed
 - b. swam
 - c. swimming

2. The little girl _____ her toy and her mom helped her fix it.
 - a. breaked
 - b. break
 - c. broke

3. My sister _____ to school last Friday morning.
 - a. walked
 - b. walken
 - c. walking

4. I _____ green beans for lunch.
 - a. eated
 - b. eaten
 - c. ate

5. Yesterday his mother _____ him up after school.
 - a. poked
 - b. picks
 - c. picked

6. The man _____ home in an airplane last Friday.
 - a. flied
 - b. flew
 - c. flown

7. The art teacher _____ an example on the board.
 - a. drawed
 - b. drawn
 - c. drew
8. The mean cat _____ the boy.
 - a. bited
 - b. bit
 - c. bitten
9. My mother _____ me a card for my birthday last year.
 - a. buyed
 - b. buy
 - c. bought
10. Yesterday in class, the new student _____ hard about the math problem.
 - a. thought
 - b. thinked
 - c. thinks
11. Last Tuesday the students _____ a snake in the bushes.
 - a. find
 - b. finded
 - c. found
12. After the concert all the students _____ loudly.
 - a. clapped
 - b. clapping
 - c. cloap

Fill-in-the-Blank Requiring the Irregular Past

13. Last night, the boy finally _____ his math homework! (understand, past)
14. I _____ down in gym class two days ago! (fall, past)
15. My family and I _____ in the car all day Saturday! (ride, past)
16. At recess, the girl _____ behind a tree. (hide, past)

17. At the basketball game, Michael Jordan _____ the ball high in the air!
(catch, past)
18. All the students _____ very hard for the test. (study, past)
19. I _____ to school last year, but this year I take the bus. (walk, past)
20. The teacher _____ about economics last month! (teach, past)
21. At his birthday party, the little boy _____ out all his candles. (blow, past)
22. We _____ all the answers on the test. (know, past)
23. The kids _____ all day in the park. (play, past)
24. The airplane _____ over the buildings. (fly, past)
25. The girl _____ to go get her backpack. (need, past)
26. Carla _____ around to see her friend. (turn, past)
27. Jill _____ her milk during lunchtime. (drink, past)
28. The woman _____ her car to Iowa. (drive, past)
29. In music class, the students _____ beautifully. (sing, past)