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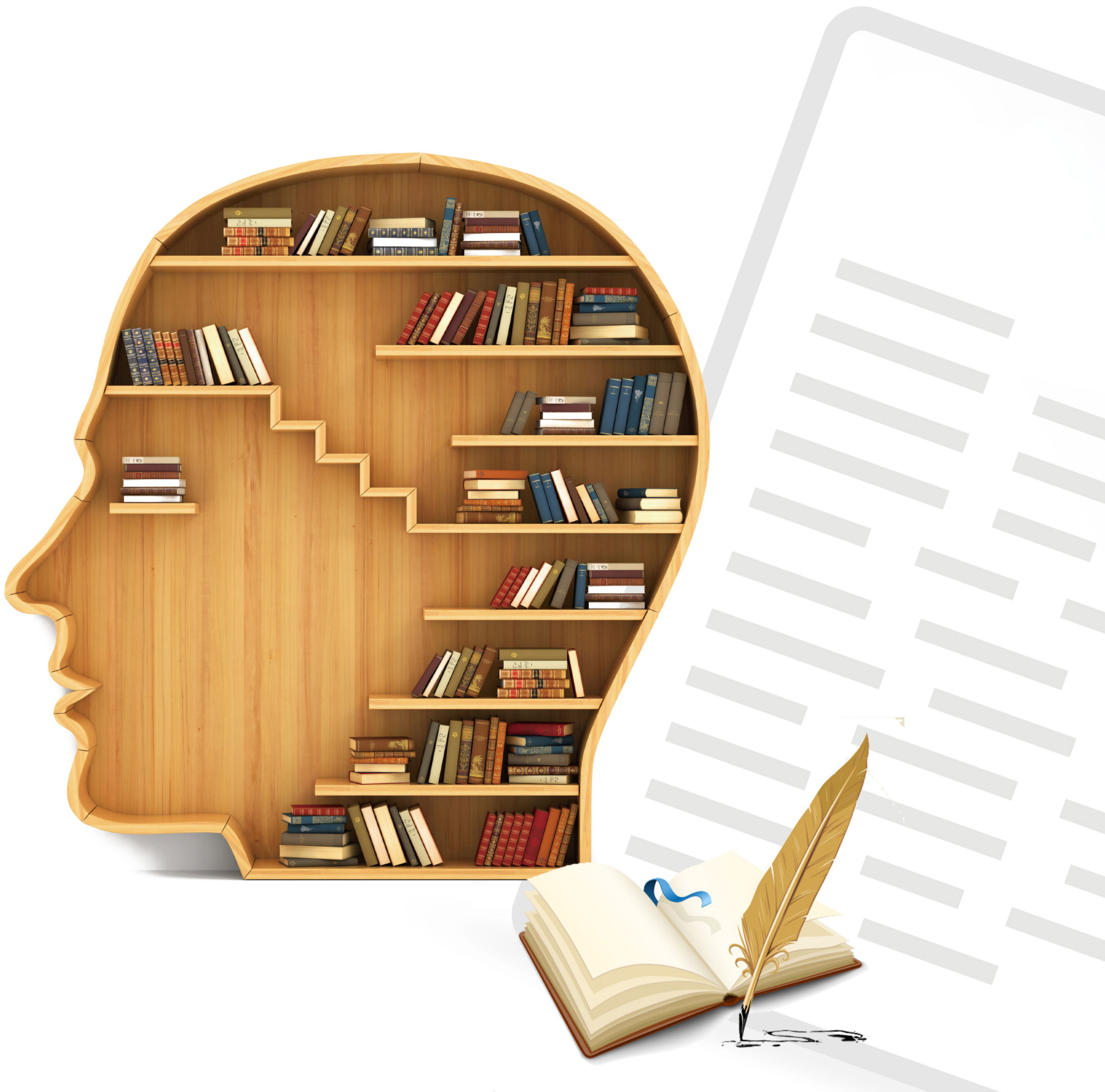

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ARTICLE

Camouflaged Uptake Following Incidental Focus-on-Form Episodes

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ABSTRACT

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

1. Introduction

Hatch (1978)[10] underscored the significant role of interaction in second language (L2) learning. Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1983, 1996)[14][16] and Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985, 1995)[30][31] argue that L2 learners benefit from attending to linguistic forms as they arise incidentally in the context of meaning-oriented interactions. Such incidental and brief attention to linguistic features in communicatively-oriented activities is termed as "focus on form" (FonF) (Long, 1991).[15] Long and Robinson (1998)[17] conceptualize incidental FonF as "an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and one or more of the learners-triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23). On the other hand, the efficacy of corrective feedback is usually determined by uptake rate. According to Chaudron (1977),[1] the primary immediate gauge of the efficacy of any corrective feedback would be a frequency count of the learners' correct responses

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

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Incidental FonF*

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

Extract 1: Reactive FFE with uptake

S: so he is at the university for 9 years

T: *he has*

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

T: yes.

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

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

Extract 2: Teacher-initiated preemptive FFE

T: ...Look at the diagram on page 37. There are 7 cities. It is about population,

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

Ss: *atmosphere, environment*

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

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

Extract 3: Learner-initiated preemptive FFEs

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

S: *What does Rush hour?*

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

S: Yes

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

2.2. *Effectiveness of FonF Instruction*

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

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

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

Uptake is successful when it shows that a learner could use a linguistic feature correctly or has understood the linguistic forms. It is noteworthy that such success does not reveal that the feature has been acquired (Ellis, 2005;[4] Mackey, Oliver, & Leeman, 2003).[23] To gain and indication of acquisition, it is necessary to show that the learners possess the autonomous linguistic ability to employ the feature, for instance, by examining whether learners could generate the form correctly on subsequent occasions without prompting. Nevertheless, there are theoretical grounds for indicating that uptake may contribute to acquisition. First, as Lyster and Ranta (1997)[22] pointed out, uptake helps learners to "practice" using linguistic forms, and thus may help them to retrieve linguistic forms automatically. Second, Swain (1985, 1995)[30][31] has argued that "comprehensible input" is inadequate to achieve a considerable level of linguistic competence, and that "pushed output" fosters acquisition as it makes learners process language syntactically rather than semantically. It also enables learners to modify their erroneous hypotheses on the target language. Learners' attempts to employ linguistic features that they have either previously used incorrectly or received explicit information could be seen as one type of pushed output. Uptake, then, may create the opportunities needed for language acquisition to occur, and it is for this reason that it has attracted the attention of researchers to measure the efficacy of FonF instruction (Ellis et al., 2001a).[5] Therefore, this study is informed by the following research question:

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

3. Method

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

3.1. Context

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

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

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

3.2. *Participants*

3.2.1 *Teachers*

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

3.2.2 *Learners*

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

3.3. *Procedure*

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

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

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

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

3. 4. *Data analysis*

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

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

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

Extract 4: An example of FFE

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

T: what?

S: =spoil

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

S: mhm

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

T: so

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

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

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

4. Results

Figure one illustrates the frequency and percentage of all incidental FFEs observed in 20 hours of meaning-centered teacher-learner interactions in an IELTS class during two semesters. The frequency of FFEs indicate the number of timed learners' attention was shifted to linguistic forms during communicative activities.

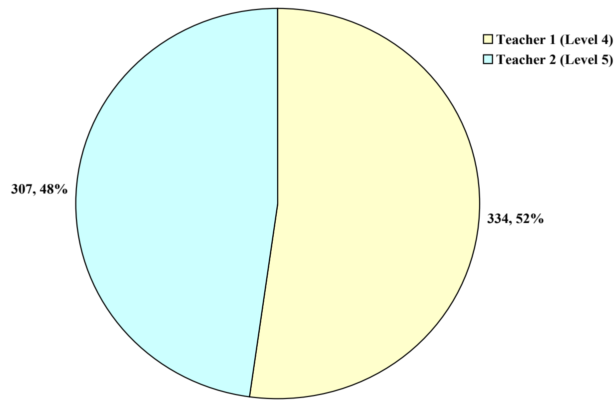

Figure 1. Total FFEs distribution in two classes

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

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

Table 1. FFEs and Uptake

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

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

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

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

Table 2. Uptake in Preemptive and Reactive FFEs

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

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

5. Discussion

5.1. *The Current Definition of Uptake*

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

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

The markedly low occurrence of uptake found in this study differs from the findings of Ellis et al. (2001a).[5] Ellis et al. (2001a)[5] found that uptake occurred in 74% of the FFEs in12 hours of meaning-focused lessons in two English as a second language (ESL) classes. In addition, the findings of this study found no significant association between reactive and preemptive types of FFEs and uptake rate. In contrast, Ellis et al. (2001a)[5] found that uptake was more frequent in reactive FFEs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.2. *A modified definition of uptake*

Although the explanation in the section mentioned above may explain the low frequency of uptake moves found in this study, the researchers relied on the qualitative analysis of the audio and video recordings and field notes to provide a more comprehensive picture of the occurrence of uptake. The qualitative analysis of FFEs revealed that many uptake moves are not included in the current definition of uptake in the literature.

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

Extract 5:

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

Here HOUSED means?

Ss: (*silent*)

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

House is used as a verb here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extract 6:

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

T: very interesting idea, these tourists are called eco-tourists. Eco-tourism (*Writing 'eco-tourism on the board*). Eco-tourism is a growing industry in the world.

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

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

Extract 7:

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

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

T: Good idea, this is already happening in Africa ……

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

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

Extract 8:

S: so it's not convenient than city life

T: it isn't as (.) convenient

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S: it isn't as convenient as city life

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

Extract 9:

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

T: There aren't enough ..? ….. number

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

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

The government should create these facilities in the schools.

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

6. Conclusion

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

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ARTICLE

A New Perspective on an Old Subject: Mobile-assisted Language Learning in English Academic Writing in Hong Kong Universities

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this short paper is to bring English academic writing (EAW) and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) together to examine to what degree the latter can be effectively employed to support the former in the Hong Kong higher education context. It utilizes the perspectives generated from the literature, together with professional interpretation, to illustrate the affordances of MALL in EAW in the community. It is suggested that MALL can be employed to integrate academic English into the students' daily lives, through which they can implicitly build the knowledge of academic register outside of the classroom and ultimately use it in the classroom.

1. Introduction

This short paper aims at exploring the potential of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) in teaching and learning English academic writing (EAW) in Hong Kong. Since the late 2000s, applied research on MALL has gathered increasing momentum[1]. Research of this kind tends to use an experimental design mixed with qualitative methods to examine the perceptions of MALL[2] or the intended outcomes of MALL [3]. Alongside this discipline are studies on EAW, which traditionally focus on pedagogy[4] or error analysis[5]. In a well-developed society like Hong Kong, almost all university freshmen have a smartphone, and in normal circumstances, they have to learn to write an academic essay in their first academic year in university. Nonetheless, scarce discussions have touched on the potential roles of MALL in this particular subject, which is often a compulsory course in the general education (GE) curriculum. Probably, what has caught the attention of frontline practitioners is only the phenomenon of phubbing in EAW classes, which may be more boring and less appealing than other GE courses from the perspectives of students, especially struggling students whose general English proficiency is low.

In view of the abovementioned situation, this short paper is intended to draw insights from specific articles to illustrate how MALL may play a role in EAW in out-of-class contexts in Hong Kong. It will not go into details about development of the academic discourse of MALL or EAW. Instead, the discussion will go with references to the scholarly literature and from perspectives as an academic professional, in order to support the conceptualization of using MALL in an EAW course.

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2. Learning English Academic Writing in Hong Kong

Hong Kong, a metropolis on the east of South China, used to be a colony of the British Empire during the period from August 29, 1842 and June 30, 1997. Owing to this historical reality, English has become an important language in every official domain in the city[6]. Nevertheless, the actual linguistic situation of English in Hong Kong is more complicated than imagined or expected.

2.1 The Linguistic Situation of English in Hong Kong

While Hong Kong people meet with English every day, only the upper middle class of them (or above) will often speak the language in daily conversation. Simply put, English is rarely used as a lingua franca among Hong Kong locals themselves, who prefer their mother tongue, Cantonese, in different oral settings[7]. This phenomenon makes English distinct from a typical second language to Hong Kong people[8]. As they lack a favorable environment to master English, their English standards (especially in terms of grammar and pronunciation) are continuously criticized by commentators or purists in the mass media[9]. On the other hand, English enjoys official prestige in governmental, administrative, commercial, and educational domains[10]. It is always the language by default in critical documents; it is the desirable medium of instruction (MoI) in the eyes of parents[11]. All these render English similar to a second language to Hong Kong people. It should be learnt and mastered, though it may not be used frequently in their life worlds. Although their English is non-native or non-standard, none of them can run away from the international language. So to speak, most Hong Kong locals suffer from this situation in their studies or career development.

It is still not easy to determine whether English is a second language or not in Hong Kong, but it is not difficult to notice its paramount importance in tertiary education. Nowadays, a "level 3" in the English subject of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) is one of the minimum entrance requirements for all government-funded bachelor degree programs in Hong Kong universities, whose MoI is normally English (i.e. English as the medium of instruction; EMI)[12]. Even after HKDSE graduates enter a university, they still need to take several English courses to increase their abilities to use English for academic purposes (EAP). These courses, however, can be nightmares for a large number of freshmen who have only marginally passed the subject in the public examination[13].

2.2 English Academic Writing as General Education in Hong Kong

In theory, senior secondary school leavers in Hong Kong who are offered a place in a local university are supposed to have gained a certain degree of proficiency in English. Yet, proficiency of this kind does not include the academic register. In other words, they have possessed little knowledge of how to write and speak English in academic settings. Therefore, the GE curriculum requires all year one students (regardless of their majors) to take several courses about academic writing, reading, and speaking. These courses will cover topics like plagiarism and referencing, academic vocabulary and sentence structure, the annotated bibliography and literature review, as well as analytical reasoning and academic argument. Students need to pass these courses before they are allowed to continue their studies.

Before the transfer of sovereignty in 1997, bachelor degree programs offered by the universities in Hong Kong were mostly reserved for a very small number of secondary seven graduates with a good result in the high-stakes examination: Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE), which was far more challenging than HKDSE. These high achievers, whose English was already up to standard, could learn actively and effectively in the stressful full English environment. Otherwise, they would not have passed the English examination, Use of English, in HKALE. Nevertheless, mass higher education in the city since the early 2000s has enabled a large number of "mediocre" students to enter a bachelor degree program (or at least an associate degree program) with an "ordinary" HKDSE result[14]. These students, who have more or less lost interest and confidence in mastering the language, tend to be unmotivated or struggling in those GE English courses. The fundamental problems are their low proficiency, low confidence, and low motivation. They may even find it difficult to use an appropriate verb to write a grammatically correct sentence, let alone using the academic register to argue properly. This often results in a lamentable state in which they fail to acquire or apply the basic skills at EAP – but are still allowed to be promoted to year two upon a marginal pass in these courses. With the prosperity of mobile information technology, however, it seems that MALL is a possible gateway to help these students to rebuild the knowledge of academic English.

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3. Mobile-assisted Language Learning for English Academic Writing

Except those from the upper middle class (or above) who have everyday access to English since childhood, Hong Kong university freshmen nowadays usually have a hard time in the EAP courses. The one on EAW appears to be particularly challenging in that writing has limited tolerance to grammatical and stylistic flaws. On top of that, just like other youngsters across the globe, these year-one students tend to "phub" their teachers (i.e. snub their teachers by playing with the smartphone) when they find that the contents are so boring or that the learning goals look unachievable. From an alternative viewpoint, the smartphone, which has caught their attention for long, can be turned to a tool for learning EAP out of the classroom.

3.1 The Functions of Mobile-assisted Language Learning in English Education

Generally speaking, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) refers to "the use of various mobile devices for people to engage in human developments in various areas and disciplines in educational settings and beyond, with or without teacher/peer supports."[15] Thanks to the flexibility and portability of the smartphone, learners need not sit at a desktop or notebook computer to access digitalized learning materials[16]. The scholarly literature has demonstrated various potential benefits of MALL in teaching and learning English, including allowing students to discuss contents freely[17], incorporating games in learning[18], extending learning activities outside the classroom[19], and promoting self-regulated learning[20]. Most importantly, many studies have indicated a generally positive attitude to MALL among language teachers and students who learn English as a second or foreign language[21][22]. Such a positive perception suggests the possible use of MALL in EAW courses in the Hong Kong higher education setting.

3.2 Possible Methods of MALL for Learning EAW

This paper puts forward the idea that MALL can be applied in EAW courses. In the Hong Kong context, EAW courses in universities are designed for non-native English speaking students, and EAW teachers are expected to apply their knowledge of teaching English as a second / foreign language in the courses. If a Hong Kong university decides to include MALL in the EAW courses, they should take into consideration second language learning approaches before outlining the teaching and learning plan. Among the mainstream approaches, it seems that digital devices favor the direct, audiolingual, and humanistic approaches[23]. Below are descriptions of an example of how MALL can be used in consideration of these three approaches.

The direct approach concentrates on spoken language, but it addresses grammar as well. For the grammar domain, it does not encourage the use of grammar-translation, which supports memorization of rules and the application of them in translating sentences between the native and target languages. Instead, it proposes the learning of grammar implicitly through exposure to naturally occurring input. EAW course designers can call for external funding to develop an app which can be installed on multiple mobile operating systems, so that it can be run in cross-platform environments (e.g., on Android and iOS). This app affords academic vocabulary to pop up (as a push notification at the top of their smartphones) every morning (e.g., at 8:00am). Each word or phrase comes with an explanation of its meaning and an example of use on sentential level in EAW in a particular referencing style (e.g., APA). As the target users are weak in English, the explanation should be brief and written in simple English; as the goal is to draw their attention to the use of vocabulary in academic writing, the example should be adapted from scholarly articles. After the example will be a multiple-choice question to test whether the student has learnt the use of the word or phrase. Through daily exposure to academic vocabulary and the examples on sentential level, together with the close-ended question, it is hoped that students will learn the academic language gradually and use them in their college assignments correctly.

The audiolingual approach, simply speaking, emphasizes the need for repetitive drills and hands-on practices, especially in the acquisition of grammar rules. Limited by the small screen and small keyboard of smartphones[24], the app may not create a user-friendly environment for practices of EAW, but it is a good platform for stylistic drills. Other than academic vocabulary, rules or hints for academic referencing can also pop up on their smartphone every day. To avoid overlapping with the vocabulary, these push notifications can come in the afternoon (e.g., at 2:00pm) or at night (e.g., at 8:00pm). They can be written in the form of frequently-asked questions (FAQs), and they should be comprehensible for weaker students. It is important that the tips should exclude unimportant details to increase the user friendliness[25]. Just like the vocabulary part, there will be a multiple-choice question at the end to test whether the student has understood the referencing

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knowledge, such as use of citation in different ways. Through daily exposure to such information repetitively, it is hoped that students will remember what to do when they cite or discuss external sources in their college assignments.

The humanistic approach concentrates on the learner's individual needs. To address this end, the app can include a function through which the user can be directed to a mobile messaging device (e.g., WhatsApp) where students can ask questions or discuss their problems with the teacher or peers on the contact list. An icon to start the operation can be included in the push notification which shows the academic vocabulary or referencing tips. When the icon is clicked, a screenshot can be taken and sent through the messenger, through which they can visualize the thing(s) to be asked or discussed[26]. Whether to ask questions or discuss problems through the apps depends on the user' s motivation, but this function recognizes with the nature of MALL, which is contextual and personal[27]. Such convenience will also facilitate teacher-student and peer interactions, timely to the user and specific about a word, a phrase, or a stylistic issue.

There have been many educational apps with the similar affordances in the market. Hence, the app should be appealing enough to attach students to use it continuously and pay attention to the pop-up messages or push notifications intrinsically. First, the contents of the pop-up messages should be related to some formal assessment activities in the EAW course. For instance, use of the vocabulary will be tested in a mid-term quiz, or knowledge of referencing style will be asked in the final examination. This serves a formal incentive to motivate students to be serious about the app[28]. Additionally, this prevents students from removing the app by any uninstall process.

Second, all the information about EAW should be readable, so that students can take the initiative to learn or refer to the content whenever in need (even when there is no push notification at a time). It is suggested that when users click the app icon on the home screen manually, they can choose to read the information about academic vocabulary and referencing tips systematically. The database is saved on the Internet servers, but users can install everything for offline reading. This makes the app a database for revision or learning in their own pace[29], further improving learner autonomy in terms of the choice of materials[30].

Third, to prevent students from closing the push notification without reading through the contents, the app could afford users to create an avatar to represent their "status" in terms of EAW knowledge. When they finish reading a page *and* answer a question correctly, they will earn a point through which they can use to "nurture" the avatar; when they earn a certain number of points, they can use them to unlock new settings (e.g., dressing, accessories). The image of the character can be shared with other users through the messaging function, and it can be considered a token of participation (which is part of the formal assessment) in the EAW course. This creates some entertainment and an ongoing informal incentive to invite students to spend more time on the app, which can indirectly increase the degree of achievement[31] at least in the semester.

In general, the app should be professional, comfortable, and comprised of mainly text, except icons, background images, and the avatar page. It is quite important to stress that the app should be down-to-earth from the low achiever's perspective. Instead of including many details about the academic register, it should provide the most basic but important information only; otherwise it will just scare the target students away and fail to achieve the primary goal, which is to assist students with low English proficiency in catching up with English learning in university. Thus, contents of the academic vocabulary and referencing tips should be written by experienced local English teachers who have thorough understanding of the main difficulties facing the students. In practice, the app can be piloted in a section of EAW to see whether it can significantly improve the students' performance in EAW. Further studies are needed to confirm the possibilities and limitations of such an app. As successful MALL depends on how it is utilized in the existing syllabus[32], EAW teachers are supposed to design classroom activities in consideration of the app.

4. Conclusion

This short paper, albeit without an empirical study, has tried to manifest the potential of MALL in EAW courses in Hong Kong universities. English is an atypical but essential second language in Hong Kong. Because of this situation, university students are often faced with a challenge. On the one hand, most of them have to admit that their English is non-native and ungrammatical on some level. On the other hand, English is vital for success in university, partly due to the EMI environment, partly due to its functional roles in future job hunting, and partly due to its symbolic roles on a societal level. This general phenomenon makes many of them struggle in the GE English courses they have to pass in their first year of study.

In order to assist the majority of students in learning how to write academically, MALL can be incorporated

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into the EAW courses. Key persons in these courses can apply for funding to develop an app to increase students' exposure to the academic register out of the classroom. This app can afford push notifications to provide learning materials for academic vocabulary and referencing style. It also enables students to ask questions about the notification contents through a mobile messaging device. Apart from learning via the push notifications, students can read the notes according to their own needs. To attract them to take a serious attitude towards the app, they will earn points upon completion of reading each pop-up notification and a correct answer to the question, through which they can use the points to build an avatar to show their achievements for fun.

Effective learning in EAW or EAP depends on how MALL is employed in practice. The conceptual paper has reflectively discussed the affordances of MALL in EAW courses in Hong Kong, but the outcomes are determined by individual teachers' use of it and students' motivation to play with the app. In the EAW classroom, a considerable number of low achievers need strategies for building the knowledge of academic register. Otherwise, they may just retreat to give up or produce unqualified academic essays, both of which indicate a failure of English education in the university GE curriculum. It is hoped that researchers and practitioners can try to develop and use an app of this kind and investigate its help in EAW students, so that they can use English confidently and accurately for academic or professional purposes in the future.

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ARTICLE

Peer and Teacher Feedback in A Foreign Language Research Writing Course: A Case Study of Doctoral Students' Perspectives in Finland

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ABSTRACT

The provision of feedback on student work has been a common and even recommended practice across levels of education throughout the years. In the field of academic writing pedagogy, giving feedback has become a crucial part of the teaching/learning process given that composition skills are quite intricate and difficult to master, requiring a cycle of continual drafting, feedback and re-drafting until a final version is produced. Teacher feedback appears to be the most utilized in current classrooms, with peer feedback beginning to be applied in many disciplines as well in recent times. Nevertheless, it appears that most research studies on the uses and the benefits of teacher and peer feedback focus on undergraduate students with graduate students' voices less contemplated in this regard. Considering this potential research gap as well as the fact that doctoral students are often more skilled and competent writers, this study analyses these students' attitudes and views toward the need of teacher and peer feedback in a research writing in English course delivered in a Finnish university with a mix of international and local students. The results seem to indicate that both types of feedback, but specifically a combination of both, were well-accepted and highly-regarded by these students, particularly as far as reader-friendliness is concerned.

1. Introduction

Feedback can be defined as the information provided to someone on their performance and competency on a certain task (Martinez & Vargas, 2014;[15] Luna, 2009).[14] In academic settings, it is said to enable students to learn from the mistakes pointed out and, therefore, improve their learning process (Burke & Pieterick, 2010).[1] In other words, "it helps learners become aware of any gaps that exist between their desired goal and their current knowledge, understanding or skill and guides them through actions necessary to obtain the goal" (Burke & Pieterick, 2010, p.18).[1]

In composition classes, feedback has become an integral part of teaching given the complexity of this skill (Gonca & Eksi, 2012).[3] It is common for teachers to provide feedback at several stages of student writing until the final version is reached across different education levels. This process of revising several drafts taking into account teacher feedback appears to advance student writing abilities and 'writability' self-awareness. Peer feedback has also started to be applied ever more often as a way to promote the importance of revising and editing.

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Yet, its long-term impact still remains understudied (Lou et al., 2016).[13]

Considering the applications of teacher and peer feedback mentioned above, the benefits of both types of feedback have attracted the attention of several researchers (Lee, 2017),[8] particularly in undergraduate studies and in contexts where the language of writing is not the students' home language. However, it appears that little attention has been given to how the level of language proficiency of student-writers may affect their perspectives on their preferences for feedback (Liu & Wu, 2019)[12] as well as on the usefulness of teacher and peer feedback in their writing. Graduate students, and in particular doctoral candidates, are often more experienced and knowledgeable writers given that they will most probably have engaged in writing activities for their master's degrees or even article publications before they reach their doctoral programs. This raises the question on whether teacher and peer feedback are as needed and effective for doctoral students as they are for writers at a novice level of academic writing as undergraduate students usually are.

With this in mind, this study collected insights on a group of doctoral students' perspectives on the value of teacher and peer feedback for their research writing abilities. Therefore, this paper first presents a theoretical framework on teacher and peer feedback in writing followed by a description of the research context and design which leads to a discussion emerging from the answers to a questionnaire circulated among the doctoral students involved in this study.

2. Writing Feedback in Undergraduate and Graduate Studies

Even though some researchers have claimed that error correction is ineffective (Gonca & Eksi, 2012 referring to a study developed by Truscott in 2007),[3] its impact has been described by others as almost as profound as the effect of regular instruction (Hattie & Timperley, 2007);[4] therefore, feedback practices are applied in a variety of disciplines and education contexts. Regarding feedback and writing in specific, due to the complex nature of writing, it involves several stages and steps (Gonca & Eksi, 2012),[3] and it can only be mastered after extensive drafting and re-drafting; therefore, writing feedback has become particularly important for the development of this skill. In addition, universities across the world are offering more and more programs for international students (Iqbal, 2012)[6] and, since a great amount of the assignments and projects submitted by students have to be written in the language of instruction, which might not be a language mastered by international students, a variety of writing courses are offered to enhance academic writing skills. Lillis (2001)[10] highlights that writing is, in fact, a 'key assessment tool' in many educational settings, namely in higher education ones. Also, in the specific case of graduate students around the world, the tendency is to choose to write in English in the hope that their research will become more accessible worldwide. Therefore, many students require training on the mechanics of academic and research writing in English with writing feedback being a crucial part of their training. This feedback is said to not only have a fundamental role in the teaching-learning relationship (Li & Barnard, 2011),[9] but also to "encourage students to assume responsibility and control over their writing" (Burke & Pieterick, 2010, p. 23)[1] with the teacher's main role becoming more of a feedback provider, guide and facilitator than an instructor (Gonca & Eksi, 2012).[3]

Two main types of feedback have been used in present day teaching-learning contexts, especially in the writing classroom: teacher feedback and peer feedback. Teacher feedback has always been present one way or another even if in an indirect way; however, peer feedback can be considered a relatively recent approach. It can be defined as "the quantitative evaluation and qualitative feedback of a learner's performance by another learner among students." (Patchan & Schunn, 2016, p. 228).[17] According to Lee (2017),[8] teacher feedback tends to focus predominantly on language form and less on content and organization, while peer feedback has come into the picture to either encourage students to become more aware of the importance of reviewing and editing or even occasionally to relieve the teacher from the heavy workload related to providing feedback to several drafts from many students (Gonca & Eksi, 2012;[3] Ho & Duong, 2014; [5]Patchan & Schunn, 2016).[17]

Whichever the reasons, and despite reports that some students prefer teacher feedback over peer (Liu & Wu, 2019)[12] and resist taking this kind of feedback seriously as described by Lee (2017)[8] when citing a study carried out by Nelson & Carson in 1995, peer feedback has been described as having a myriad of advantages by several authors. Enhancing students' understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, fostering critical thinking and promoting learner autonomy are some of the benefits mentioned by Lee (2017)[8] (based on studies developed by Tuzi in 2004, Hu in 2005 and Yang et al. in 2006 respectively). McCarthy (2017)[16] mentioned an increased knowledge of subject matter as well as improved quality of work and a development in constructive reflection

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skills. Li, Liu & Steckelberg (2010)[11] accounted for benefits on the level of greater sense of accountability and responsibility of those who provide peer feedback resulting in better quality of their own writing which corroborates with Patchan & Schunn's (2016)[17] idea that students who propose revisions in their peers' work practice and improve their own revision strategies. Another aspect that became clear, however, is that, despite the benefits reported, "it is increasingly recognized that training has a pivotal role to play to facilitate effective peer feedback" (Min, 2005, 2006, 2008 in Lee, 2017).[8] Philippakos (2017)[18] stated that appropriate training could be the key for the decrease in the reluctance to accept feedback provided by peers because students become more aware of, certain of and engaged in their role as reviewers.

Gonca & Eksi (2012)[3] affirmed that there is a need for more research regarding the efficacy of feedback in addition to Weaver's (2006)[20] concern some years earlier that there are few research studies that focus on student perspectives. Similarly, Poulos & Mahony (2008)[19] reported that "few studies have been identified in which the research focus is specifically on students' views of feedback" (p.144). Even though several studies on the topic have, since then, been developed (e.g. Martinez & Vargas, 2014;[15] McCarthy, 2017;[16] Philippakos, 2017)[18] and a book with an extensive meta-analysis of the benefits of both types of feedback has been released (Lee, 2017),[8] we came across very few studies that focused on the perceptions of graduate students in specific on the topic (e.g. Landry, Jacobs & Newton, 2015;[7] Ho & Duong, 2014)[5] and among these, only one concerned doctoral students. Landry, Jacobs & Newton (2015)[7] focused on peer assessment in specific, i.e., awarding a specific grade based on the analysis of the peer's work which is not exactly as peer feedback because this one may not necessarily require a grade but simply comments on the peer's performance. The same authors also state that "particularly at the graduate level, wherein most students are required to publicly disseminate their research findings as part of their academic program" (Landry, Jacobs & Newton, 2015, p.39),[7] peer assessment can be definitely relevant. Ho & Duong's (2014)[5] research study concerned only master students, and Liu & Wu (2019)[12] focused on preferences of students and teachers based on language proficiency, but not on graduate level.

Doctoral students have a different writing "baggage" than undergraduate students. Usually doctoral students already have extensive experience in writing and many have written in a foreign language in their master thesis or pre-dissertation articles; therefore, as a teacher who was teaching research writing to PhD candidates for the first time after years lecturing academic writing to undergraduate students only, it became compelling to understand the significance of feedback, peer or teacher, in experienced writers. Was there a real need for such feedback at this level? If so, what are the main benefits of such feedback? Are peer feedback and teacher feedback equally important at this level? Do teachers need to adjust the way writing feedback is given to PhD candidates?

Considering this and given the afore-mentioned advantages and constraints of peer feedback, our research aimed at understanding the affordances of teacher and peer feedback in a research writing in English course for doctoral students in a Finnish university. Thus, our research questions are as follows:

How do doctoral students perceive the usefulness of teacher and peer feedback?

What effects do doctoral students believe preparing peer feedback will have/might have had on their own writing?

3. The Research Writing Course Context

Our research study was carried out with a group of doctoral students taking an elective course called *Research Writing* in a Finnish university which, at the time, focused on technological and applied sciences programs. The *Research Writing* course was taught on a blended learning mode with most of the coursework being accomplished independently. The language of instruction was English. Several educational resources, ranging from videos, Power Point presentations, handouts and interactive practice exercises were produced specifically for this course by a former instructor with the aim to provide extensive, meaningful independent practice on how to better write academically in English for doctoral purposes. The course was organized in 10 modules that covered topics, such as, formal style, reader-friendliness, punctuation and structural features of abstracts, introductions and conclusions. In addition to the online independent coursework, students could also complete offline work, i.e., attending events related to research writing or reading a specific book on the topic could count as independent coursework.

Furthermore, these students were also required to meet their lecturer three times per semester in assigned groups of three. In these meetings, students brought their own English written texts, usually excerpts of their doctoral dissertations, which they should share online three weeks prior to the meeting so that both peers and teacher could read. The meetings were open discussions on each other's texts. A short training on how to provide peer feedback was delivered before the course started and a feedback form was distributed so as to work as the basis for peer feedback provision. The form included the following items: overall structure, coherence, paragraphing, relevance, originality, argumentation, style, cohesion, grammar, paraphrasing, quotations and referencing.

According to Liu & Wu's (2019)[12] six-dimension analytical framework of feedback in second language writing, feedback can address source, mode, tone, focus, scope and explicitness (see Figure 1). In our discussion and feedback meetings, the source of feedback came from teacher and peers, and it was delivered mainly in spoken form though sometimes the teacher would provide the written feedback prepared before the meetings to the student after the meetings were finished. As for the tone, the training we provided to students before the feedback sessions aimed to convey the message that positive feedback should be the starting point and a good balance between positive and corrective comments should be in place; therefore, it is reliable to say that the tone of feedback from both teacher and peers was balanced as students followed instructions given in the training session. The focus was global with special attention given to content, organization, structure, style, and particularly reader-friendliness which was a large portion of the online course as well. Nevertheless, the teacher would sometimes focus on one or two grammar points when a recurring error persisted throughout the same text. The scope was comprehensive and the explicitness was direct.

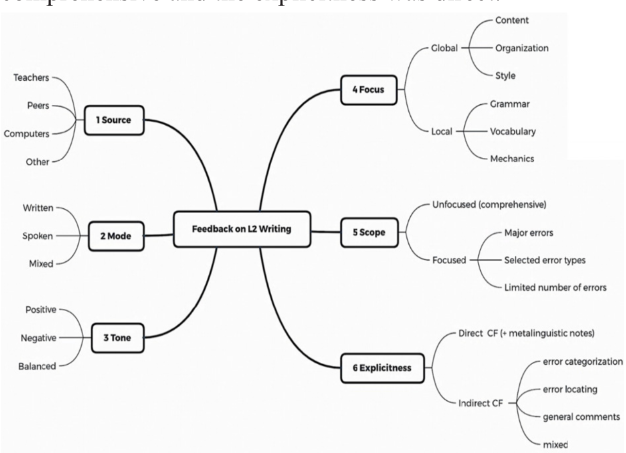

Figure 1. Liu & Wu's (2019)[12] six-dimension analytical framework of feedback in L2 writing (p. 302).

Regarding the course credits, students could choose to earn between 3 to 5 credits for the course, depending on their own personal academic requirements. This meant that each online and/or offline activity coupled with the face-to-face meetings corresponded to a certain amount of points earned which were then converted into credits. Therefore, students were free to choose the number of course activities they would like to complete according to the credits they would like to achieve. The course would usually accept up to 36 students per semester which would be distributed between two to three instructors.

4. Methodology and Participants

In order to probe the level of usefulness of peer and teacher feedback on doctoral/research composition in this Finnish higher education institution in particular, a qualitative/ quantitative research methodology was applied with focus on survey design to identify and categorize opinions (Creswell, 2012).[2] Out of the 36 students that were accepted in the course that semester, only 12 were assigned to the author of the article and, out of those 12, only 10 completed the survey distributed. Answering the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and an official request to collect information from these students was issued and signed by the students. The questions revolved around the value of peer and teacher feedback and their perspectives on how the provision of peer feedback might have impacted their own writing. From the 7 questions included in the survey, only the answers to 4 were considered for the purpose of this article (see list of questions in Annex 1). The entire group of students taking the course at the time of the research had a ratio of exactly 50%/50% for national and international students; however, the group of 12 students the author welcomed that semester had 8 international students and 4 national.

5. Data analysis and Discussion

As mentioned previously, the two main questions asked were *How useful was teacher feedback for your writing?* and *How useful was peer feedback for your writing?* On a Likert scale from 1 to 5, one meaning "not useful at all" and five meaning "extremely useful", 80% of the respondents (n=8) claimed that teacher feedback was extremely useful in the writing process while 70% (n=7) considered peer feedback equally extremely useful for their writing. When requested to provide a reason for their choices in the two previous questions, the doctoral students highlighted mainly the fact that teacher feedback provides expert input on language and academic style so required in research writing, and there was one mention to the identification of strengths, not only weaknesses, by expert teachers which could help students focus on what they do well writing-wise (see table 1). As for peer feedback, the high level of answers pointing to its usefulness for research writing seems to be associated to the fact that it mainly helped improve reader-friendliness,

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i.e., it provided input on how to make their texts more understandable and easy to follow for all readers (see table 2). Nevertheless, in the student answers, there were at least three mentions to how any feedback is welcome regardless of who it comes from, revealing a potential indifference regarding receiving expert or non-expert feedback. Also mentioned in these students' answers is the importance of acknowledging other people's points of view on their writing in order to grow as writers, especially when it comes to content, with a mention to the importance of having their texts read my people in the same field to help detect content inconsistencies. Only one mention was made as to how peer feedback may help improve general foreign language (English) abilities. From these answers, it becomes clear that, as Lee (2017)[8] stated, usually the teacher is regarded as the language expert and peers as reader-friendliness resource individuals.

Table 1. Answers to the question on why teacher feedback was useful

Q2.1 - Why? *Teacher feedback was useful because…*	Number of times mentioned in answers
It helped spot grammatical inconsistencies.	5
It provided expert input on academic style.	5
It helped me understand my own weaknesses and strengths as a writer.	1

Table 2. Answers to the question on why peer feedback was useful

Q1.1 - Why? *Peer feedback was useful because...*	Number of times mentioned in answers
It improved my text's reader-friendliness	6
Any feedback is useful	3
I became more open to others' perspectives	2
Other students in my field detected inconsistencies	1
It helped with general English skills	1

After the two questions related to the usefulness of both feedbacks, we enquired the doctoral students on which one they considered the most important for the improvement of their general research writing skills. Challenging Liu & Wu's (2019)[12] overview of results with undergraduate students, 50% of our doctoral students believed teacher feedback was the most useful and the remaining 50% claimed both types of feedback were beneficial. No student selected peer feedback as the most helpful.

As for the reasons revealed for the preference, those who preferred teacher feedback mentioned two main reasons. The first one was related to a point mentioned before which is that the teacher is the expert in language and writing; therefore, it is preferable to obtain input that will actually have a substantial impact on their writing abilities rather than receiving superficial feedback that may not advance the composition process (see table 3). Along with these opinions, there was also one mention to how teacher feedback is more professional and constructive. One student said his/her preference for teacher feedback comes from his/her feeling that "[the teacher] really knows what he/she is talking about", and another one wrote "the teacher has expertise in writing academic texts". These two student remarks substantiate the idea that the teacher is still viewed as the expert and the one who will contribute the most for advancing writing skills even for doctoral students.

Table 3. Answers to the question on why teacher feedback was the most useful of both

Q3.1 - Why? *Teacher feedback was the most useful for my writing because...*	Number of times mentioned in answers
The teacher is an expert in language and writing	4
This feedback is more professional and constructive	1

Regarding the students who preferred a combination of both feedbacks, two main points were made in relation to this. The first one has to do with the possibility of having "the best of both worlds", i.e., according to the students, peers and teachers usually targeted different writing aspects in their feedback, so the more input the better (see table 4). Three out of the five doctoral students went into more detail, mentioning that they would receive the most helpful feedback from peers when it came to technical language while they could be better guided on language by the teachers, as mentioned several times before.

Table 4. Answers to the question on why teacher feedback and peer feedback combined were the most useful

Q3.1 - Why? *Both feedbacks combined were the most useful for my writing because...*	Number of times mentioned in answers
Teacher and peers focused on different things	2
Teacher focused on English; peers focused on technical language	3

Finally, it was our goal to grasp whether the preparation of peer feedback could have had an impact on doctoral students' own writing. Ninety percent (n=9) of the students confirmed some sort of effect on their writing with only one student stating that no influence was

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noticed. As expressed in Patchan & Schunn (2016),[17] the effects described by these students seem to validate the idea that preparing revisions improves your own revision skills. While peer reviewing, some students claimed that they enjoyed the opportunity to practice what they had learned about academic writing and apply the knowledge (see table 5). Also, some students saw peer feedback as a chance to gather a bank of errors that they, themselves, should avoid in their own writing. A few students also accounted for the possibility of experiencing different writing styles that could develop their own writing approach. A few doctoral students voiced that peer reviewing their colleagues' texts fostered their ability to identify their weaknesses and learn from others' strengths.

Table 5. Answers to the question on whether preparing peer feedback had an impact on their own writing

Q4.1 - Why? *Preparing peer feedback helped with my own writing because...*	Number of times mentioned in answers
It helped me practice what I learned.	3
It gave me a chance to learn from other writing styles.	2
It helped me work on my weaknesses by learning about other students' strengths.	2
It gave me an idea of what errors to avoid myself.	3

6. Conclusion

The goal of this research study was to gather opinions from doctoral students on the usefulness of peer and teacher feedback for their writing as well as to understand the specific effects of engaging in peer feedback on their own writing abilities. Based on the answers to the survey questions presented, we can draw some main conclusions that will help us answer our research questions.

To begin with, an analysis of the student perceptions on the usefulness of teacher feedback in graduate writing indicates that teacher feedback was regarded by the majority of these students as extremely useful, especially as it represented expert input with focus on language and academic writing skills. This was also stated by Lee (2017)[8] which seems to imply that doctoral students, as undergraduate ones, also recognize teacher feedback as favorable to their writing despite their, supposedly, broader writing background. Regarding peer feedback, the greatest part of the students also considered this type of feedback extremely helpful and the reasons presented pointed to the possibility to receive feedback on reader-friendliness and text flow. This seems to indicate that students draw a clear distinguishment between the purposes and impacts of peer and teacher feedback which is comparable to undergraduate students' perspectives described in this article. However, unlike other students in general (Liu & Wu, 2019),[12] these doctoral students seemed much more open to peer feedback stating very clear and well-informed reasons on its usefulness.

When requested to focus on only one of the feedbacks as the most useful for their writing, the students were divided, choosing either only teacher feedback or a combination of both. Since 50% of the students preferred a combination of both kinds of feedback, this seems to indicate that peer feedback is respected and valued which could be liaised to Landry, Jacobs & Newton's (2015)[7] perspective that at graduate level, peer input can be considered more relevant given the public nature of most of the work produced by graduate students. Indeed, the students involved in this study were mostly focused on producing written output that would become their PhD dissertation or pre-dissertation articles, both of which would most probably be published in a public platform. It was also mentioned by these doctoral students that peer feedback usually puts emphasis on field-related technical language which can be crucial for a well-laid out research article or quality doctoral dissertation, public or not.

The afore-mentioned results seem to answer our first research question related to the usefulness of both types of feedback, indicating that the doctoral students involved in this study, despite being more experienced writers than undergraduate students, acknowledged the usefulness of both types of feedback even though they considered that each one had its very specific applicabilities and practicalities as mentioned above. It is also understood from these doctoral candidates' answers that their openness to peer feedback is evident and does not create discomfort.

The other research question we proposed when carrying out this research study had to do with the impact of peer feedback on these doctoral students' own writing. The great majority confirmed some sort of effect on their composition abilities, which corroborates with previous studies (e.g. Patchan & Schunn, 2016).[17] The main benefits reported are learning to avoid the same mistakes detected in their peers' writing and practising academic writing skills that can be applicable in their own writing.

The assumption that doctoral students are usually more experienced and knowledgeable writers set the tone for this research. It was presumed that these students would potentially not require as much assistance and feedback in their writing as undergraduate students do. However, at least for the students surveyed in this study, that does not seem to be the case. They considered both feedbacks advantageous either for linguistic and writing skills

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development or for field-related language correctness and reader-friendliness advancement. It becomes clear that research writing for doctoral candidates in this particular setting, writing in a foreign language, will benefit from a balanced combination of teacher and peer feedback that fosters opportunities for open discussions on mainly language use and reader-friendliness. Furthermore, it seems safe to state that the peer feedback practice described in this article was positive and constructive because training was provided and students became more aware of the appropriate approach to apply in the process of giving feedback. This agrees with Philippakos's (2017) [18] idea that training can reduce the reluctance to receive peer feedback. It is also possible that, given the maturity of these students and the open discussion setup of peer feedback provision in this study, giving and receiving feedback became a much more pleasant and satisfying experience for the students involved.

In brief, it can be said that in general teacher and peer feedback were well-accepted and deemed fruitful for these doctoral students.

7. Limitations

This research study was carried out with only 10 students in a Finnish university, meaning that it had a very limited sample; therefore, its results are quite context-specific and could not be extrapolated to other educational settings. Also, once the questionnaire answers were gathered for analysis, it became obvious that interviews with these students could have brought deeper insights into the reasons presented for the level of acceptability of both types of feedback for doctoral students.

Given the above-mentioned limitations, it would be advisable to design a similar study that would include a larger student sample and would be complemented with interviews for a better understanding of the usefulness of both types of feedback in graduate studies and, in specific, "the long-term impact of peer feedback" (Lou et al., 2016, p. 93)[13] in foreign language writing.

Annex 1

1- How useful was TEACHER feedback for your writing?

Not useful at all 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely useful

1.1 Why?

2- How useful was PEER feedback for your writing?

Not useful at all 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely useful

2.1 Why?

3- Which feedback do you consider most useful for your writing?

Teacher Feedback

Peer Feedback

Both

None

3.1 Why?

4- Did the preparation of feedback on your colleagues' texts help with your own writing?

Yes

No

4.1- If so, how did the preparation of feedback on your colleagues' texts help with your own writing?

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ARTICLE

God is the Ultimate Jokester --Barthes's Dead Author and the Authorless Joke

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ABSTRACT

This study starts from Žižek Slavoj's question about the attribution of the joke text, by borrowing Roland Barthes's theory of "the Death of the Author" in the structuralist discussion, the author's absence and the origin of the "joke" as a literary genre are analyzed. At the same time, the discussion employed the "joke" as a special genre, explained Barthes's way of dethroning the author, as well as the way in which the reader is crowed authority to interpret the text. And through the author, the reader and the function of language, Barthes's theory of author was enlightened, with a new perspective to re-interpret the basic concept of the author in literary criticism.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's Joke collection, instead of an introduction, he poses a question rarely asked: 'Who is the author of these jokes?'① (Žižek 2014, p.3),[16] which points to the seldom considered truth — that jokes told in daily life never seem to have an author. They are always introduced with the common phrase, 'Did you hear that joke about...?'. Žižek indicates that jokes are 'idiosyncratic' from the perspective of language's creativity② (p.3). It is commonly acknowledged that jokes are 'collective', anonymous, authorless, and all of a sudden appear out of nowhere. From this logic, this is why God himself may be the ultimate jokester. However, after Nietzsche announced God's death, the authorless joke, in a way, shows an evident example in the context of postmodernism theory: authorship itself has been deposed.

Roland Barthes's 1967 essay 'The Death of the Author'③ brought a brand new idea that has become widely accepted by scholarly evaluation of the author: that people who write a text are no longer the centre of it with an absolute authority over their interpretation, as indicated in T.S Eliot's argument in 'Traditional and the Individual Talent': 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone'④ (Eliot 1995, p.75).[12] Nevertheless, despite the shift away from the biographical method

①Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's Jokes (*Did you hear the one about Hegel and negation?*).

②Žižek. Žižek's Jokes. p.3.

③Roland Barthes. 'Death of the Author', in Image-Music-Text, Transl. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977)

④Thomas Stearns Eliot. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in Seán Burke, ed., *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.75

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of reading to a greater emphasis on the text itself, the ghostly figure, the dead author still haunts, as Michel

Foucault's seeking of 'the space left empty by the author's disappearance', which has triggered further discussions① (Foucault 2002, p.12).[13] Apart from Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacque Derrida, T.S Eliot and other later critics, despite the heterogeneity of their critical systems, in a way they construct a very essential concept of contemporary philosophy, which is commonly involved with authorship: the notion of the author being both depersonalized and decentralized. The concept of the 'text' is a significant notion in anti-authorial pronouncements, as Roland Barthes in 'From Work to Text' points out that the text is a 'methodological field' and 'a process of demonstration'② (Barthes 1996, p.170).[4] Therefore, it is possibile to discuss this "authorless" theory through a specific type of text. The Joke, as a special text among other genres of literary works, naturally situates the role of the author in a very delicate position: the author for a joke is an 'anonymous symbolic order'③ (Žižek p.3).

To analyze the basic idea of Barthes's "dead author" from a simultaneous perspective of lightness and profundity, the paper employs the joke as an example to demonstrate two concepts in anti-authorial discussion: to examine where is Barthes's dead author and crowned reader, as well as uncover how language works in text after losing the origin voice. The following part will firstly discuss the authorless nature of the joke and the process of its spread, and will then be followed by introducing the idea of the meta-joke to discuss its reflectivity and functions of language.

2. The Joke and the Deferred Origins

Žižek, with clear influences of the Lacanian reading, describes the author of the joke as an 'Other of the Other' because jokes are told from one to another④ (Žižek, p.3). The *Other* (*Autre*) figure, as one of the most complex concepts of Jacque Lacan, defines radical alterity, an otherness which transcends the imagined otherness of the illusory because it cannot be assimilated through identification⑤ (Lacan 1988, p.19).[14] In that sense, the author as Lacan's *Other* figure is somehow close to the basic tenet of modern author literary: the author is an eternal figure of 'Other', which is lacking in the chain of signification. With the joke's lack of origin, the authorial role would never be defined as Barthes's argument that 'the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins' ⑥(Barthes, 1977, p.146).[7] For jokes, with their natural absence of an author, the very unfathomable contingent generative power of language is unable to be personalized or situated into an agent who secretly controls it and pulls the strings; conversely, instead of the author, it is language itself which constitutes the texts. Therefore, the joke could be regarded as a self-evident text of Barthes's author theory. When trying to trace back the origin of a joke, the process is infinite and endless because it always refers back to an *Other*. In the process of spreading jokes, the author figure forever appears as a past with no beginning within language. Thus, the joke as a type of text is one of the potential textual embodiment of Barthes' argument of the text as 'a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and crash'⑦ (Barthes 1988, p.146).[5] However, when Barthes regards the 'Death of the Author', he does not mention jokes or folktales, but uses Mallarmé as example. Nevertheless, the history and characteristics of the joke shadows the same trail as the 'Death of the Author', as well as Derrida's disapproval of the centrality of speech and 'Différance', which in the context of the Saussurean tradition, indicates the endless deferring of language and the forever processing of the chain of signification⑧ (Derrida 1973, p.50).[11]

Furthermore, the joke as a type of text not only evidences the death of the author figure, but also explains Barthes's idea of the reader. During the 19th century, the joke as a part of folktales is seen as authentic in its oral form of being passed down. Jokes are usually spread among ordinary people, and are far from the scholarly world. Alan Dundes defines folklore with concept of 'multiple existence' to indicate the existence of various versions, none of them being authoritative or primary⑨(Alan Dundes 1965, p.3).[1] It seems that during the spread of the joke, the author is never truly comprehended. That is to say, there is no authoritative text for a joke because the addressees themselves become addressors over and over. The roles change of addressees

①Michel Foucault. 'What is an Author', in William Irwin, ed. *The Death and Resurrection of the Author* (Westport, Ct, and London: Greenwood Press, 2002) p.12.

②Roland Barthes. 'From Work to Text' in *Modern Literary Theory.* ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. (New York: Arnold, 1996) p.170.

③Žižek. *Žižek's Jokes.* p.3.

④Žižek. *Žižek's Jokes.* p.3.

⑤Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis.* Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Nortion, and Cambridge: Cambridge Unviersity Press, 1988) p.19.

⑥Barthes, 'Death', p.146.

⑦Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text,* edited and translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang 1988), p.146.

⑧Jacques Derrida. *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserel's Theory of Signs,* translated by David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 50.

⑨Alan Dundes. *The Study of Folklore* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 2.

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and addressors of the joke, in a way, connects with Barthes's idea of the reader. After crowning the reader by removing the author, the situation requires another authority to interpretations. For Barthes, as the absence of origin denies the authority of the author, the destination is better to remain absent too:

A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted① (Barthes 1988, p.148).[5]

During the spread and retelling of the joke, Barthes's 'reader' exists in every interpretation of the text, and their comprehension influences the text in a manner that remains ambiguous. That explains an obscure concept of Barthes's dead author: after deposing the author, the authority does not transfer to the reader completely. The reader remains abstract in the destination while reshaping the story during his or her interpretation. Even though the existence of the multiple versions of a joke reduces the recognizable author, the reader is not the father figure of the joke. They tell it by replicating the story they have heard, and at the same time become a deposed author for the next reader. The joke-teller is not creating, but is instead interpreting or performing, since he is repeating a presented story that has been told in the past. The joke is a multiple-text: influenced by numerous authors during its spread, and transfers though lots of different texts or versions with multiple meanings.

Furthermore, there is a further meaning that the spread of the joke may inspire: the return of the author. In his preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* four years after writing 'The Death of the Author', Barthes indicates an 'amicable return of the author', which is not a 'resurrection of the Author-God' but is the author practiced by the reader, and the author who 'leaves his text and comes into our life'②(Barthes 1977, p.2).[3] To interpret Barthes's 'friendly return of the author' from the aspect of the joke, we may examine the existence of numerous versions of the joke. Even though the multiple-text element removes the single author, instead of reducing the actuality of authority, it changes it. A relevant example is Roman Jakobson and Peter Bugatyrev's explanation of the folktale's characteristic: the listeners of those stories have a 'half of censorship' because if the listeners do not restate the story, its destination is vanishing③ (Bugatyrev and Jakobson 1982, pp.3-31).[8] Differing with Barthes' crowning reader whose interpretation composes the text but remains ambiguous during the production of meaning, Jakobson and Bugatyrev's listeners complete the tales in an authentic way: the reader brings life to the stories and protects them from bein forgotten, the process of which is the 'friendly return of the author' mentioned later by Barthes. Defining the joke-telling with the idea of 'multiple existence' allows one to perceive the suggestions of Barthes's 'The Death of the Author" in its all its vividness.

By explaining the joke's natural absence of an author and the process of ots spread, this part tends to echo the basic idea of Barthes' dead author as well as his unstable, changing reader. Next, to discuss the language in Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' and to shadow its post-modern meaning, a type of text called the 'meta-joke' and its reflectivity will be examined.

3. The Meta Joke and Reflectivity

A priest, a rabbi, and a minister walk into a bar. The bartender looks up and says, "Hey, what is this—some kind of joke?④

The meta joke is self-referential; it is a joke about jokes. In the example mentioned above, the readers do not expect that particular observation to come from an imagined character within the text. As a common idiom in everyday parlance, the question 'What is this, some kind of joke?' is an expression of incredulity, with the referent having nothing to do with verbal jokes per se, but with actual lived situations. It makes a plausible appearance as part of the fictive frame: the readers might well imagine a real-life bartender saying something similar, if a real-life priest, rabbi, and minister were to walk together into his bar. But the idiom has a multivalent sense, which is why it works so effectively in the joke. As a comic device the meaning is only denotative, and the bartender refers to the fiction in which he as a character exists. So he is literally — self-consciously — aware of himself and the others as participants in the joke. The notable difference here is the fact that the joke itself comprises the unexpected secondary script upon which the humor hangs.

This kind of reflexivity in jokes is is certainly compelling in analytical terms, and suggestive of a larger body of meta-jokes. It is the meta-joke's self-awareness as a communicative form, and its circulation across folk and popular culture that locate it in the realm of the

①Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p.148.

②Roland Barthes. *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Translated by Richard Miller (London: Cape, 1977) p.2.

③Roman Jakobson and Peter Bugatyrev. 'Folklore as a Special Form of Creativity', in *The Prague School: Selectad Writings 1929-1946,* edited by Peter Steiner (Austin:University of Texas Press,1982), pp. 3-31

④Salvatore Attardo. 'Limericks' in Encyclopedia of Humor Studies (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014) p.23.[2]

folkloresque. It is an intriguing

concept — fictional characters drifting along in the universe of jokes searching for their most appropriate role, and empowered to recast familiar texts along the way. It is an enactment of postmodernism: authorship is removed.

Self-reference is not new to human expressions. For example, *Hamlet* is a play which contains another play in its storyline; *Don Quixote* is Cervantes' novel about Cervantes's novel; Dutch graphic artist M.C Escher draws a hand which is holding a reflective sphere of himself, in which we notice the disappearance of the painter (author) who is supposed to hold the paintbrush, from which we can conclude that the author is killed.

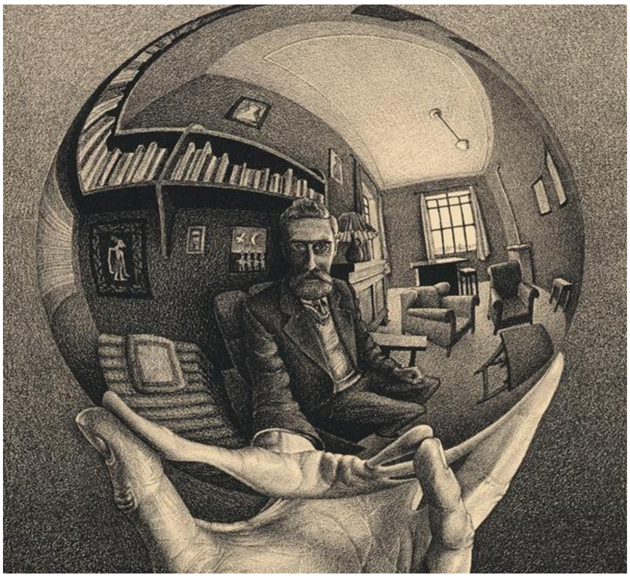

Figure 1: Self-Portrait in Spherical Mirror①, 1935.

Even Barthes entitles his biography with a direct implication of self-reference:

*Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*②, a self-conscious allusion to the artificiality or literariness of such a work, as well as its heterogeneous realities—after Proust, the biographer must regard the life of the author and his work as two detached objects.

The reflectivity mentioned here is an attempt to find out how language works once the voice loses its origin. Barthes deposes the author and substitutes the epic creation of the text with a complicated procedure of writing. The philosophical drive of the movement is liberalness. The dethroning of the author brings a structuralist worldview that the function of language charges the meaning. Then, Derrida involves the notion of dead author by separating the definitions of speech and writing (écriture)③. Derrida indicates that writing is a fundamentally distinctive textuality compared with speech. He explains that the text produced by writing has never relied on the existence of origin, but in contrast, on its nonexistence. If we conventionally regard the origin superior to the copy (the author outside the text is the definable, authoritative one while the author inside a meta-fiction is a fictional, fake, and powerless one), Derrida confronts this situation by regarding representation, copying and repeating as crucial constitutions to the linguistic sign. Derrida indicates that writing is exemplification for significance of its originality; conversely, it is just the writing's *not-being-the-origin* which makes it become the exemplification for sign, demonstration, and signification: 'each signifying behavior is a replacement in term of the ideal form of signified and the signifier)'④ (Derrida 1982, p.316).[10] In that sense, the characteristics of 'meta', the joke about jokes, is on the same dimension with Derrida's speech and writing: the joke as the first script is the author's speech while the joke-in-the-joke as the second script is the writing and significance of the text in which characters are able to speak for themselves. With the presence of the secondary layer in the author's speech, the writing begins. The reflectivity, or the forms of art with 'meta' as the prefix (meta-fiction, meta-cinema, meta-painting), referring back to Barthes's dead author, are trying to imply that the authority of the author in the first script is somehow fake, and the text itself produces meaning during interacting.

Thus, abolishing the author not only attempts to liberate the single meaning from its limitations, but also attempts to comprehend the nature of the text because the sign has never been itself but a substitution for something else missed, as Derrida points out: 'A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game'⑤ (Derrida 1981, p.63).[9] The meta-joke (or any other reflective text) creates an open-ended field, where the focus is not on the meaning of the origin resource, or a particular work itself, but on the process of the text and the way it produces meanings, conceptual ideas, and interactive forms. Postmodern writing becomes the catalyst, rather than authors or creators, and is centered on the idea of performativity. Postmodernism is self-reflexive, analyzing the novel's actual purpose and effect. That is also the

①J.L.Locher. *The Magic of M. C. Escher* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2000) p.12.[15]

②Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010)

③Jacques Derrida. *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

④Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p.316

⑤Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press. 1981), p. 63.

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purpose of the death of the author.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, to understand Barthes's way of dethroning the author, as well as the way in which the reader is crowed authority to interpret the text, this paper chose a special text -- the joke -- in which the God-like author is naturally absent. To evaluate the process of the joke's telling and retelling, Barthes's dead author and ambiguous reader are echoed. Also, with introducing the linguistic feature of the meta-joke, the post-modern narrative can be regarded as a shadow and literary expression of the death of the author. Involving with three crucial elements of Barthes's author theory -- the author, the reader, and the function of language -- this paper represents them from a light perspective to reread the basic notion of the author in literary criticism.

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