

LINGUISTIC COVERAGE AND UPTAKE RATE OF FOCUS ON FORM EPISODES IN EFL TALK-SHOW CLASSES

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ABSTRACT: *Talk-show classes require both teachers and learners to get engaged in meaningful interactions while drawing attention to language on a temporary and needs-driven basis incidentally. The current study sought to explore the rate of reactive and preemptive focus on form (FonF) and their linguistic coverage in a talk-show class. It also explored the relationship between the linguistic coverage of reactive and preemptive focus on form episodes (FFEs) and the rate of uptake as an indicator of the effectiveness of focus on form episodes. To this end, 8 hours of classroom interactions between a teacher and his 16 male students in an intermediate talk-show class, with the primary attention on negotiation of ideas, were observed and audio-recorded to identify the linguistic coverage of both preemptive and reactive FFEs in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation along with their subsequent uptake instances. The findings revealed that reactive FFEs were the most frequent type of incidental FonF and linguistic focus of reactive and preemptive FFEs were primarily oriented toward grammar and vocabulary respectively. Regarding uptake, this study found that uptake happened in all linguistic categories in more than 50 percent of all FFEs and its occurrence took place more in the case of the reactive FFEs than the preemptive ones.*

KEYWORDS: *focus on form episodes, reactive FonF, preemptive FonF, linguistic coverage, uptake*

INTRODUCTION

A glance through the last decades of language-teaching practices in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) reveals a shift of attention from purely linguistic to more communicative approaches. There has been a plethora of opinions about the place of teaching language forms, depending on the method, era and its theoretical foundation. In the pre-scientific era formal aspects of language received central attention. By the advent of audiolingualism in the middle of the 20th century and its incorporation with the latest insights from the science of structural linguistics and behavioral psychology, overt focus on form was almost forbidden while grammar was still the building block and foundation of language learning and teaching. The CLT proponents, on the other hand, advocated the fundamentality of meaning and communicative competence through formulating some hypotheses one of which is Stephan Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982, 1989). Krashen proposed that learners acquire language by understanding the message that is intelligible to them and by being exposed to sufficient comprehensible input and believed that the sole exposure to such input would be for acquisition to happen (Basturkmen, 2006, Brown, 2000).

Upon the theoretical foundation and principles of CLT and input hypothesis, which argued that learners develop their linguistic abilities in the absence of explicit instruction, an instructional program called Immersion program initiated in Canada which taught French to English speaking students. Swain's (1985) evaluation of this program ended up with criticism of

effectiveness of its underlying theoretical framework and revealed that although learners received huge amounts of comprehensible input. Their grammatical knowledge was not well improved compared with their communicative ability. Long (1996) developed Krashen's Input Hypothesis, explaining that learning occurs not because of input alone but through the interactions learners have with it. Long's Interaction hypothesis stated that "through negotiation of meaning, the input becomes increasingly useful because it is targeted to the specific developmental level of the individual learner; thus input negotiated to fit the needs of the individual learner can become intake" (Basturkmen 2006, p.91).

Long's hypothesis directed the focus toward some other hypotheses proposed by Swain (1985, 1995) and Schmidt (1990, 1995) called Pushed Output Hypothesis and Noticing Hypothesis respectively. Swain argues that in being pushed to produce, learners notice holes in their linguistic repertoire and this stimulates learning of language to fill in the holes. In other words, output pushes learners to process language (Basturkmen, 2006, Adams, 2003). On the other hand, Schmidt's Noticing hypothesis states that conscious process of focus on form is necessary for learning to take place and more noticing leads to more learning. The collection of these hypotheses paved the way and formed the underlying framework to attend to linguistic form within communicative meaning-focused activities called "Focus on Form".

Long (1991, 1997) defined focus on form as an incidental attempt to draw learners attention to any linguistic element in context while maintaining a primary focus on meaning. Likewise, Ellis (2001), in the paper entitled "Investigating form-focused instruction", defined and conceptualized "form-focused instruction" by distinguishing it from "meaning-focused instruction". According to Ellis, FFI describes instruction where there is some attempt to draw learners' attention to linguistic form while meaning-focused refers to instruction that requires learners to attend only to the content of what they want to communicate. The author describes three types of form-focused instruction (Focus-on-Forms, Planned Focus-on-Form and Incidental Focus-on-Form) in terms of whether the primary focus is on form or meaning and whether the instructional attention to target forms is intensive or extensive.

There have been various measures to evaluate the effectiveness of form-focused instruction such as uptake. Lyster and Ranta (1997) define uptake as a learner's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback. Ellis et al. (2001) emphasizes that uptake cannot be viewed as evidence that acquisition has certainly taken place, it facilitates the acquisition. According to Ellis et al. (2001b) most of the studies in this respect focus on reactive rather than preemptive focus on form while the concept of uptake is an under researched area in EFL. Yet, no study has been carried out in the literature to examine the linguistic coverage of focus on form episodes (FFE) and its relation to the rate of their following uptake moves. Thus, the main concern of the present study is to investigate FFEs of a meaning-oriented talk-show class where meaningful interactional patterns are of primary concern in terms of their frequency, type, linguistic coverage and the rate of uptake. The present study involved the observation of meaning-centered classroom activities and then identification and analysis of all reactive and preemptive language related episodes (LRE) in teacher-learner interactions. In the field of focus on form, a great deal of research has investigated reactive rather than preemptive FFEs, yet a great number have been carried out in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Researchers have raised concern over the lack of empirical studies on preemptive and reactive language related episodes regarding their linguistic coverage. The prime objective of this research was to determine the frequency of reactive and preemptive focus on form episodes in terms of their linguistic coverage of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in an Iranian EFL class.

This study was original in that it investigated incidental focus on form in terms of their linguistic coverage of reactive or preemptive focus on form episodes. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, the investigation of the association between FFE type and linguistic focus of Focus on Form Episodes (FFE) has not been dealt with in the literature. Hence, the present study aimed at exploring the types of linguistic overages of focus on form episodes as well as their uptake rates in one talk-show class through the following research questions.

Q1: How frequently do reactive and preemptive focus on form practices take place at an intermediate talk-show class in an Iranian EFL setting?

Q2: Is there any significant difference between incidental (reactive and/ or preemptive) focus on form episodes in terms of their linguistic coverage in EFL classes?

Q3: Is there any significant relationship between the linguistic coverage of focus on form episodes (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) and the rate of uptake in EFL classes?

REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE

In their study entitled "Doing Focus on Form" Ellis et al. (2002) have considered the rationale for focus on form approach, described some of the main methodological options for attending to form in communication, and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of various options in this regard. The authors have also provided us with a comprehensive classification of focus on form instruction and also their definitions and examples. Ellis et al. (2002) distinguished two types of focus on form (FonF) instruction: planned and incidental. They explained that planned FonF, which is intensive, involves the use of focused tasks while incidental FonF involves the use of unfocused tasks and is extensive. The authors defined focused tasks as communicative tasks that have been designed to elicit the use of a specific linguistic form in the context of meaning-centered language use and unfocused tasks as communicative tasks designed to elicit general samples of the language rather than specific forms.

Ellis et al. also divided focus on form into reactive and preemptive FonF. Reactive FonF involves the treatment of learner errors while pre-emptive FonF consists of attempts by the students or the teacher to make a particular form the topic of the conversation even though no error in the use of that form has occurred. Preemptive FonF can either be student-initiated or teacher-initiated. The advantage of student-initiated preemptive FonF, the authors believed, is that it addresses gaps in the students' linguistic knowledge which can be presumed to be significant to them. A disadvantage of student-initiated attention to form, however, is that it can detract from the communicative activity. Ellis et al. explained that teacher-initiated FonF is initiated either by a query directed at the learner or by an advisory statement. One problem with teacher-initiated FonF is that the teachers cannot know for sure whether the gaps they assume to exist in the students' knowledge are actual gaps or not.

In recent years focus on form (FonF) has gained considerable ground in second language (L2) literature and a great deal of studies regarding incidental FonF have been conducted to shed more light on different concerns of this movement which attempts to inject well-considered explicit instruction back into meaning-oriented language lessons without abandoning the positive features and results of communicative approach. For instance, Loewen (2002), focusing on incidental focus on form, investigated focus on form in some intact classes with different teachers in Auckland, New Zealand. The study's aim was to investigate whether

incidental focus on form episodes were beneficial for the learners. Loewen's study suggested that learners can benefit from incidental focus-on-form. Loewen reported that while in tests administered between one and three days after the lessons, the students were able to recognize or supply the correct form either completely or partially 62.4% of the time, in tests administered two weeks later they scored 55.6% for correct or partially correct responses. Likewise, Analyzing whether focus on form (FonF) has a facilitative role in language learning, Saeidi and Chong (2004) conducted a study on explicit focus on form, input-oriented tasks, and output-oriented tasks. In fact, their research aimed at comparing FonF and FonFS in relation to the learners' use of grammatical knowledge. In their study, the performance of 167 Iranian freshmen, studying English at the university, on grammar knowledge and performance tests was analyzed. The findings of their study suggested that FonF in comparison with FonFS provides an excellent means for developing the ability to use the grammatical knowledge of the target structure in context.

Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001b) focused on incidental focus on form as it arose naturally in the course of meaning-focused ESL lessons involving adult students in two intermediate and pre-intermediate intact classes in a private English school in Auckland, New Zealand. From all over 448 FFEs, which were identified in the 12 hours of meaning focused teaching, 223 were reactive and 225 preemptive. From among this equivalent Focus on Form Episodes, in the case of preemptive FFEs, the majority were student-initiated rather than teacher-initiated. Regarding linguistic coverage of FFEs over 60% of both the teacher-initiated and learner-initiated FFEs addressed vocabulary. Similarly, Loewen (2003) investigated 12 ESL classes at a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand to compare the frequency and characteristics of incidental focus on form episodes. A total of 32 hours of meaning-focused classroom interaction was observed and recorded. The results indicated that the occurrence of incidental focus on form was frequent in all classes; however, the frequency of FFEs as well as the characteristics varied significantly among the classes. For instance, regarding linguistic coverage, vocabulary received the most attention (42.7%). Considering the source, which meant the reason for the FFE occurring, Loewen reported that most of the FFEs were Code-related (75.6%) rather than Message-related (24.4%). Furthermore, the number of FFEs that each student participated in varied considerably.

The purpose of a study by Poole (2005) was to describe the content of the forms that learners attend to, and by doing so, help ESL/EFL teachers better determine whether or not focus on form instruction is likely to address their students' form-based needs. The participants of this study were 19 international students (7 females, 12 males) studying in an advanced ESL writing class in a large university in Midwestern United States. The results of the analysis of 9 hours of data from twelve 45-minute sessions indicated that the majority of forms the learners attended to were lexical in nature, out of 108 individual forms, 97 (89.8%) involved vocabulary, while 11 (10.2%) involved grammar. Poole in his discussion of the efficacy of focus on form instruction concluded that focus on form instruction may not be valuable for L2 grammatical growth, yet offers opportunities for lexical growth, especially with advanced learners.

Zhao and Bitchener (2007) in their study specifically looked at the effect of interactional pattern (teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions) on several features of incidental focus on form. In fact, they investigated the effect of this variable on the quantity (frequency of occurrence) and quality (types of focus on form; types of feedback; linguistic forms focused on and types of immediate uptake) of incidental focus on form. The authors conducted the study with 16 participants in a university in Auckland, New Zealand. The data from over 10

hours of task-based interaction revealed a significant difference in the types (reactive and preemptive) of form-focused episode (FFE) that occurred between the two interactional patterns i.e. the percentage of reactive FFEs was much higher than that of preemptive FFEs. Generally, there were more reactive FFEs in teacher-learner interaction than in learner-learner interactions; while learner initiated preemptive FFEs were more frequent in learner-learner interactions than in teacher-learner interactions. In the case of linguistic coverage of FFEs, in both interactional patterns, vocabulary was the linguistic feature most attended to and generally no significant difference was found in the two interactional patterns. In terms of the type of feedback provided, no difference was found between the teacher and learner interactional patterns, but a difference in uptake responses between the two interactional patterns was revealed. Regarding the last question of their study, uptake types in FFEs, Zhao and Bitchener stated that successful uptake was the most frequent uptake in both teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions.

Regarding the importance of uptake, Loewen (2004a) believes that the recent interest in uptake is due to its potential as an indication of and a contribution to SLA. One important aspect of uptake, he believes, is that it constitutes one type of “pushed output”. This pushed output, then, may be an indication of noticing, which is necessary for L2 acquisition. The level of cognitive processing students must engage in, based on the nature of the feedback provided (recast, elicitation ...) is also a prominent issue and needs attention. In a study entitled “Uptake in Incidental Focus on Form in Meaning-Focused ESL Lessons”, Loewen (2004a) investigated the occurrence of uptake in incidental FFEs in meaning-focused L2 lessons as well as the characteristics of incidental focus on form that predict uptake in 32 hours of meaning focused lessons in 12 English as a second language classes in Auckland, New Zealand. In total, 1373 FFEs were found in the observed classes. Loewen reported that, overall, uptake occurred in 73% of the FFEs and it was successful 66.1% of the time. Also, results indicated that characteristics such as complexity, timing, and type of feedback influenced both the production of uptake and the successfulness of it. Altogether the study findings suggest that incidental focus on form can result in the noticing of linguistic items and in the production of successful uptake during meaning focused interaction.

Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001a) examined the nature and extent of incidental and transitory focus on form in communicative ESL lessons. They also investigated the features of focus on form that influenced uptake and the success of uptake. Two classes of intermediate and pre-intermediate levels were selected as the site for data collection. Their data were 12 hours of audio-recorded classroom talk from 10 ESL lessons. Ellis et al. (2001a) reported that, generally, there were 448 FFEs in the 12 hours of communicative teaching (almost one FFE every 1.6 minutes) and 317 FFEs had uptake. In other words, uptake took place in 73.9% of the FFEs and of the FFEs containing uptake, 235 (74.1%) resulted in successful uptake and only 25.9% were unsuccessful. Concerning uptake and the types of FFEs, Ellis et al. reported that uptake was significantly higher and more successful in student-initiated and responding (reactive). Findings revealed that uptake was more likely to occur in episodes involving negotiation of meaning, while many of these episodes involved vocabulary. Regarding the linguistic focus of episodes, the great majority of reported FFEs addressed lexical and grammatical problems. Uptake occurred at the same level irrespective of linguistic focus, but there was an indication that it was more likely to be successful in episodes involving pronunciation rather than vocabulary. Overall, Ellis et al.’s study represented that focus on form can occur without violating the communicative flow of a classroom and that the classroom context can affect the amount of uptake.

In this respect another study which dealt with student-initiated focus on form was carried out by Loewen (2004b). The overall design of the study involved the observation of meaning-focused classroom activities in 12 meaning-focused L2 lessons, the identification and analysis of incidental focus on form episodes, and examining the characteristics (linguistic focus, complexity, response and uptake) of student-initiated focus on form episodes (FFE) in teacher-student interaction. A total of 1373 FFEs were identified in the data, of which 365 (26.6%) were student-initiated FFEs. The findings of the study indicated that students did initiate attention to form during meaning-focused activities, and 88 of 118 students initiated at least one student-initiated FFE. The average number of student-initiated FFEs per student was 3 with average from 0 to 23. Additional analysis revealed that 7 students asked 10 or more questions and that these 7 students (or 6% of the students in the observation) accounted for the 28% of the total student-initiated FFEs. Regarding the characteristics of student-initiated FFEs, Loewen reported that the most frequent linguistic focus of student queries, over 75% of the FFEs, was vocabulary. Students generally produced uptake (74%) and more often that uptake was successful (58%).

A recent study by Farrokhi and Gholami (2007) investigated how frequently reactive and preemptive Language Related Episodes (LREs) were used in Iranian EFL communicative classes, and examined the potential of these two types of focus on form in leading to uptake. They were concerned with the analysis of preemptive LREs and its comparison with reactive ones as well as categorizing and comparing both teacher- and learner-initiated preemptive LREs quantitatively and qualitatively. Farrokhi and Gholami, in their study, also examined the occurrence of uptake following focus on form instruction in one intact class in Tabriz, Iran. They reported a significant difference in the frequency of reactive and preemptive LREs and between two types of preemptive episodes. According to their report, a total of 641 LREs were identified in the 20 hours of meaning-focused lessons, 334 and 307 LREs in IELTS level 4 and 5 respectively (an average of one instance of LRE every 1.9 minutes). In general, 168 (26.2%) instances of reactive episodes occurred while there were 473 instances (73.8%) of preemptive LREs. Thus, the frequency of preemptive LREs was remarkably more than that of reactive LREs. In the case of teacher- and learner-initiated LREs, the researchers found far more instances of teacher-initiated preemptive LREs than learner-initiated ones in general, namely 398 (84.1%) and 75 (15.9%). Generally a very low amount of uptake moves was reported. Of 334 LREs in level 4, 71 (17.5%) resulted in uptake while in level 5 there were 44 (12.5%) uptake moves. According to the findings reactive episodes resulted in uptake more frequently than preemptive ones at both levels. Based on the low occurrence of uptake found in this study, Farrokhi and Gholami proposed a new definition of uptake which encapsulates 'camouflaged' uptakes as well as learners' immediate responses to focus on form. They highlighted the necessity of raising EFL teachers' awareness to make informed decisions in using different types of focus on form. Their research provided further support for the incorporation of focus on form as the incidental attention that teachers and L2 learners pay to form in the context of meaning-focused instruction without disturbing the flow of communication in EFL classes. Since preemptive FonF occurred more frequently than reactive FonF in their observed lessons, the authors suggested that researchers and teachers need to pay more attention to preemptive focus on form than has been the case to date.

In another recent study by Farrokhi, Ansarin and Mohammadnia (2008), the frequency and type of FFEs, i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation used by five teachers in ten intact communicatively-oriented EFL classes were investigated. A total of 1780 FFEs were identified in the 70 hours of communicatively-oriented lessons, 796 and 984 FFEs in the elementary and

advanced levels respectively. Overall, this means that an average of one instance of FFE took place every 2.3 minutes. In the case of linguistic coverage of FFEs, Farrokhi et al. (2008) found that the overall distribution of the linguistic focus of FFEs varied across proficiencies. According to their results, within each proficiency level, vocabulary had the highest percentage and following vocabulary, grammar was the second most highlighted feature in preemptive FFEs. The authors reported that the linguistic focus of reactive FFEs in the elementary and advanced levels was largely on grammar. Finally, the importance of taking teacher-initiated preemptive focus on form into account in EFL studies was highlighted.

METHODOLOGY

The present study investigated the integration of incidental focus on form into a primarily meaning-oriented EFL class and its effectiveness as well. To meet the objectives of this study and answer the three research questions reviewed above, a descriptive case study design was adopted. A descriptive design was adopted for two reasons. First, an intact class was observed in the present study. Second, quantitative data collection procedures were employed. This kind of study is called hybrid research by Ellis (2001) who categorizes it as “exploratory-qualitative-statistical” research in which “the design involves an exploratory study of a real classroom, the data consists of samples of classroom interaction, and statistical methods of analyzing the data are employed” (p. 32).

Participants

This study took place in a communicatively-oriented talk-show class which was held in Urmia University, Iran. The students consisted of 16 intermediate male learners who were freshmen students of physics. Their age range was 18 and 26 years. They were of different linguistic and cultural background, i.e. they spoke Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian as their mother tongues. Most of the students attended the talk-show class with a view of improving their speaking proficiency and being able to communicate in English language.

Instrument

The verbal interaction between the teacher and the students in this meaning-oriented intact class was audio recorded during 8 sessions of instruction in one semester. One mini-size wireless MP3 recorder was utilized to record the whole conversations and interactions of the class between the teacher and the students.

Procedure and Data Analysis

To collect data and analyze them, the present study employed quantitative approach. The data were collected entirely from the meaning-focused discussions of the talk-show class. The verbal interactions between the students and the teacher of this communicatively-oriented class were recorded during 8 sessions using a mini-sized wireless MP3 recorder which provided the researcher with 8 hours of classroom interaction. One of the major limitations of this study is that all the analyzed data and quantifications are solely based on recorded interactions between the teacher and the learners which were audible to all of the learners and thus recoverable for the researchers. That is, the interactions between learners in pairs and between teacher and individual learners in pairs were not recorded and analyzed.

Having collected the data, they were coded and the frequency of each incidental focus on form episode, their linguistic coverage, and the rate of uptake were calculated, as are explained in the following section. It is noteworthy that the frequency or characteristics of incidental focus on form were not manipulated by the researchers. Also, the instructor was not aware of the focus of this study, i.e. investigation of reactive and preemptive FFEs or their linguistic coverage. He was simply informed that the present study sought to analyze classroom interactional discourse during meaning-focused lessons. Therefore, the data can be representative of what takes place in this EFL class in general.

After data collection from classroom interactions, the researchers first listened meticulously to the audio-recordings and identified all incidental focus on form episodes. Focus on form episodes (FFE) were the classroom interactions in which participants made a departure from meaning-focused activities to deal with issues of a linguistic nature. In other words, the appearance of an FFE denotes that a linguistic form- grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary- has been focused on within the stream of the classroom meaning-focused interactions. Hence, every focus on form unit of analysis starts from the moment that the teacher or the learners interrupt a communicatively-oriented interaction reactively or preemptively and temporarily shift their attention to formal (phonological, lexical or syntactical) aspects of language.

Having identified all incidental focus on form episodes in the entire recorded utterances, the researchers transcribed focus on form episodes (FFE) within the classroom interactions. After transcription of all the FFEs, different types of FFEs were coded as reactive or preemptive. These reactive and preemptive FFEs were also coded and categorized in terms of their linguistic coverage, i.e. vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation. Finally, the occurrence of uptake for every FFE was marked. After data collection and coding, the frequency of each focus on form episode with regards to their linguistic coverage as well as the rate of their following uptake was calculated. Thus, the frequency of reactive and preemptive FFEs in general, the linguistic coverage of each incidental FFE, and the uptake rate of each FFE were gained. According to the definition of uptake, it can be defined as all instances of learner acknowledgments and subsequent use of the word, either immediately or delayed, within the same session. The raw frequencies as well as percentage of FFE types, their linguistic coverage and uptake occurrences were calculated subsequent to the focus on form episodes' (FFE) identification, transcription, and coding. The quantitative data were analyzed using Pearson's Chi-square analysis in order to determine the significance of the distribution of the categorical data. To find out whether the similarities and differences in the frequency of FFE types were statistically significant, Chi-square analysis was used.

In order to make sure whether data categorization system is reliable enough to be coded just by a single researcher, another MA graduate, who was already explained about the study, its objectives, and data analysis procedure, categorized 10 percent of the coded data to establish inter-coder reliability. He also categorized them into reactive and preemptive FFEs. Analysis of the coding indicated that there was agreement for 85 percent of the episodes.

RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the learner-teacher interactions in a meaning-oriented EFL classroom to identify focus on form episodes (FFE), which are episodes when participants took time out to deal with issues of linguistic form.

Focus on Form Episodes (FFE) refers to the incidental shift of attention from communicative activities to any linguistic element in context, while maintaining a primary focus on meaning. To answer the first research question, all episodes in which either the teacher or the learner incidentally raised attention to form during the meaning-oriented activities were tallied in the analyzed interactions. A total of 642 FFEs were identified in 8 hours of a meaning-centered lesson, 566 (88.2%) reactive and 76 (11.8%) preemptive FFE. Accordingly, there is a considerable difference between FFE distribution in reactive and preemptive categories, and a major portion of the FFEs belonged to the reactive category. The findings indicate that an average of one instance of FFE took place every 0.74 minutes.

The second research question in this study was concerned with the linguistic coverage of reactive and/or preemptive FFEs. In his definition of form, Ellis et al. (2001b) assert that focus on form can be directed at phonology, vocabulary and grammar. Table 4.1 demonstrates the frequency of each of the three linguistic areas of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in reactive FFEs and the total number of reactive FFEs. The analysis reveals a large difference in the frequency of different linguistic coverage of reactive FFEs.

Table 4.1. Frequency of linguistic coverage in reactive FFEs

		Frequency
Reactive FFEs	Vocabulary	139
	Grammar	360
	Pronunciation	67
	Total	566

The frequency of reactive FFEs addressing grammar (360) was found to be much more than that of both vocabulary (139) and pronunciation (67). It was revealed that the grammar received the majority of reactive FFEs as compared to the vocabulary and pronunciation. Accordingly, grammar, having received 63.6% of FFEs, was the linguistic coverage most attended to. On the other hand, the number of FFEs with vocabulary and pronunciation focus was quite small, with the percentage of 24.6% and 11.8%, respectively.

Generally, there were 371 (57.8%) FFEs with grammatical focus, 204 (31.8%) FFEs with lexical focus, and 67 (10.4%) FFEs with phonological focus. Based on the findings, the frequency of FFEs distributed differently among the three forms.

In order to provide a clearer vision of the second research question, the linguistic coverage of FFEs was considered and compared separately within reactive and preemptive categories. In general, 204 instances of lexically-oriented FFEs occurred in this meaning-oriented talk-show class, from which 139 (68.1%) FFEs were reactive and 65 (31.9%) were preemptive.

Regarding the second research question of the study, which addressed the linguistic coverage of reactive versus preemptive FFEs, Table 4.2 provides us with the frequency of the linguistic coverage of reactive and preemptive FFEs in a clear way. There is a significant difference between the total number of reactive and preemptive FFEs, 566 and 76, respectively. The linguistic coverage distributions within these two types of FFEs are not very much close to each other as well.

Table 4.2. Linguistic coverage of reactive and preemptive FFEs

	Linguistic Coverage of Incidental FFEs			Total
	Vocabulary	Grammar	Pronunciation	
Reactive	139	360	67	566
Preemptive	65	11	0	76
Total	204	371	67	642

There were far more reactive FFEs dealing with grammar than the preemptive ones on grammar, 360 versus 11. In addition, the frequency of reactive FFEs dealing with vocabulary and pronunciation, i.e. 139 and 67 respectively, were quite more than preemptive FFEs which were 65 and 0 respectively.

Having made all the descriptive data available, the Chi-square analysis was run in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to see whether there were any significant difference between reactive and preemptive incidental focus on form episodes in terms of their linguistic coverage in this EFL talk-show class. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in the frequency of reactive and preemptive FFEs regarding their linguistic coverage ($X^2(2, 642) = 115.36, p=.00$). Consequently, it can be contended that there is a significant difference between reactive and preemptive incidental focus on form episodes with regards to their linguistic coverage in this EFL class.

Finally, the third and the last research question in this study dealt with examining uptake moves, which is used as a measure of effectiveness of focus on form. As a result, the researchers examined how often learners used or understood a linguistic form (vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation) correctly following an FFE.

Table 4.3 represents the frequency and percentage of uptake moves, as well as the total number of FFEs and uptakes following each one of the three sub-categories of linguistic coverage. According to the following table, a total of 413 out of 642 FFEs were found to lead to uptake. This reveals that learners verbally acknowledged and expressed their understanding of the FFEs in more than half of the cases (64.3%). The hierarchy of FFEs resulting in higher uptake in terms of the linguistic coverage found to be FFEs dealing with vocabulary, followed by those of grammar, then pronunciation.

Table 4.3. Frequency and percentage of uptake moves in relation to linguistic coverage

	FFE	Uptake	
	Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Vocabulary	204	139	68.1%
Grammar	371	235	63.6%
Pronunciation	67	39	58.2%
Total	642	413	64.3%

Table 4.3 shows that uptake took place more frequently in FFEs addressing vocabulary (68.1%). The second more frequent uptake moves occurred in FFEs dealing with grammar (63.3%). And finally, the uptake moves of FFEs dealing with pronunciation were found to be 39 out of 67 (58.2%). Based on the findings, reactive FFEs resulted in uptake moves more frequently than preemptive ones. In reactive episodes 63.6% of grammatically-oriented FFEs

resulted in uptake. The rate of uptake moves following FFEs addressing vocabulary was found to be very high (73.3%). In addition, uptake rate of FFEs addressing pronunciation was (58.2%). On the other hand, the rate of uptake moves following preemptive FFEs were found to be lower than reactive one. Out of 65 FFEs addressing vocabulary, 37 (56.9%) FFEs resulted in uptake. Also, the uptake rate of FFEs following grammar, i.e. (54.5%), was very similar to that of vocabulary.

Chi-square analysis was used to see whether there is any significant difference in the frequency of uptake moves regarding the linguistic coverage of the reactive and preemptive FFEs in this EFL talk-show class. The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in the frequency of uptake moves based on the linguistic focus of the reactive and preemptive FFEs ($X^2(2, 642) = 2.54, p=.28$). That is, there is no significant correspondence between the linguistic coverage of reactive and preemptive FFEs (in terms of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) and the rate of uptake in this intact talk-show class.

DISCUSSION

The major aim of the present study was to investigate the frequency of incidental focus on form episodes as it arose naturally in the course of a meaning-oriented talk-show class involving adult learners in an EFL context, namely Urmia, Iran. The findings of the present study found a total of 642 instances of FFEs taking place in 8 hours of communicatively-oriented activities, a rate of one FFE every 0.74 minutes. The overall numbers of reactive and preemptive FFEs were 566 and 76, respectively. The overall number and rate found in the present study seem more or less in contrast with the majority of the studies on FFE in literature. For instance, Ellis et al. (2001b) reported 448 instances of FFEs in 12 hours, one FFE every 1.6 minutes, with 223 reactive and 225 preemptive episodes. Similarly, Lyster (1998) identified 558 FFEs in 18.5 hours, with a rate of one FFE every 1.97 minutes. Further, in a study by Farrokhi and Gholami (2007) a total of 641 FFEs were reported in 20 hours of meaning-focused lessons, an average of one instance of FFE every 1.9 minutes.

The findings of the present study have also reported that incidental focus on form is more reactive than preemptive in this communicative EFL class. However, it is at variance with Ellis et al.'s (2001b) study in which FFEs were evenly divided between reactive and preemptive. Also, it is in sharp contrast with the findings of Farrokhi and Gholami (2007). Just contrary to the proportion of reactive and preemptive FFEs found in this study, the frequency of preemptive FFE reported by Farrokhi and Gholami was remarkably more than that of reactive ones, 168 (26.2%) instances of reactive episodes versus 473 instances (73.8%) of preemptive FFEs.

On the whole, the findings of this study regarding the rate of occurrence of reactive and preemptive FFEs are dissimilar to the results of Farrokhi, Ansarin and Mohammadnia (2008). They identified a total of 1780 FFEs in the 70 hours of communicatively-oriented lessons, an average of one instance of FFE every 2.3 minutes. Loewen (2004a) also reported 1373 in 32 hours, an average of one FFE per 1.40 minutes. Basirian and Gholami (2010), investigating only preemptive FFEs, found 229 instances in 18 hours, one FFE every 2.35 minutes. In a similar study, Gholami and Safdari (2012) examined the linguistic coverage of focus on form episodes and the effectiveness of focus on form instruction within reactive and preemptive categories in an EFL setting with intermediate proficiency learners of a talk-show class. The

findings demonstrated a high prevalence of FFEs addressing vocabulary in this class with an overall rate of one instance of FFE every 2.2 minutes.

This discrepancy implies that the linguistic forms rather than meaning received prime attention in the observed talk-show class and that the teacher of this class or learners opted more frequently to interrupt an ongoing meaning-oriented activity. The overall rate of this study is also in contrast with that of Lyster (1998), Farrokhi and Gholami (2007), Farrokhi, Ansarin and Mohammadnia (2008), Basirian and Gholami (2010), and Gholami and Safdari (2012), most of which have been conducted in an identical EFL context.

The variation in the extent of FFE occurrences signifies that the EFL teacher in this context did try to integrate focus on form more frequently within meaning-oriented activities. A post-study interview with the teacher revealed that he had done his entire graduate and post-graduate studies in the same context, namely Iran, with a heavy reliance on Focus on Forms instruction. Therefore, it can be contended that he was not well aware of procedures to run a talk-show class and tried to integrate more focus on form episodes (FFE) and interrupt the flow of communication.

Having identified different categories of FFEs and counting their frequencies, the present study sought to explore the linguistic coverage of FFE instances. Additionally, the study aimed at discovering whether reactive and preemptive FFEs varied in terms of the linguistic forms that they focused on. The findings of the present study demonstrated that, totally, 57.7% of all FFEs, regardless of their type, focused on grammar, 31.7% focused on vocabulary and only 10.4% had pronunciation as their focus. The distribution of linguistic coverage in reactive FFEs is dissimilar to preemptive FFEs. Within reactive FFEs, findings revealed that 63.6% had grammatical focus, 24.6% had lexical focus, and 11.8% of them focused on pronunciation. However, regarding preemptive FFEs, 85.5% of the FFEs focused on vocabulary and 14.5% were grammatically-oriented. No preemptive FFEs had pronunciation as their focus.

Very similar to the results of this study were those of Farrokhi, Ansarin and Mohammadnia (2008) regarding reactive FFEs. They reported that the frequency of reactive FFEs addressing grammar in elementary level was higher than that of both vocabulary and pronunciation by two folds and pronunciation was the linguistic feature most attended to (78.9%) in advanced level. Similarly, Leeser (2004) found that 60.14% of the total FFEs were grammatically-oriented and 39.86% of them has a lexical focus. Mackey et al. (2000) and Sheen (2006) also revealed that reactive FFEs on grammar occurred much more frequently than reactive FFEs directed at vocabulary and pronunciation. Considering the preemptive FFEs, the results of this study are in line with the findings of Farrokhi et al. (2008). They found that vocabulary was the predominant linguistic feature preemptively addressed in both elementary and advanced level classes, 91.2% and 86.5% respectively.

However, the findings of the present study are in disagreement with most of the studies in the literature (Basirian and Gholami, 2010; Ellis et al., 2001b; Loewen, 2003; Zhao and Bitchener, 2007). For instance, Basirian and Gholami (2010) found that 62.3% of all learner-initiated preemptive FFEs focused on vocabulary, 23.2% focused on grammar and only 14.5% focused on pronunciation. Regarding the teacher-initiated FFEs, their findings revealed that 79.4% focused on vocabulary, 18.1% focused on grammar and only 2.5% had pronunciation as their focus.

Contrary to the majority of the FonF studies, this study found grammar to be the most predominant linguistic feature reactively addressed and vocabulary received the most preemptive attention in the observed class. The fact that grammar was more frequently focused on in reactive FFEs than in preemptive ones, as it was in Farrokhi et al. (2008), Leeser (2004), Mackey et al. (2000) and Sheen (2006), implies that teachers show more tendency to reactively focus on grammar than preemptively. There are a few possible explanations for the high proportion of linguistic focus of reactive FFEs on grammar. Since the nature of reactive FFEs is error correction, it is possible to assume that the teacher was more concerned with grammatical errors than lexical errors. Also, it is possible to think that the teacher was not familiar with the learners and knew very little about their linguistic background. Therefore, he resorted mainly to the actual errors made by the learners and provided reactive focus on form.

Furthermore, the low rate of preemptive FFEs focusing on grammar compared with reactive ones can also be related to many factors such as classroom atmosphere, cultural background, as well as personality of the teacher and the learners. The EFL teacher of this talk-show class, for instance, was not willing to draw attention to linguistic forms preemptively, specifically grammar, unless he felt obliged to. Nevertheless, it might be the case that the teacher gave primacy to the need to correct the grammatical errors more than to focus on syntactic gaps before an error is made. It could be concluded that the teacher believed it was appropriate to reactively focus on grammatical items to correct a misunderstanding.

The final concept probed in this study was the frequency of occurrences of uptake moves as a measure of the effectiveness of focus on form practices as well as an investigation of uptake in terms of the three linguistic areas of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The results of this study revealed that out of a total number of 642 FFEs identified, 413 FFEs were followed by an uptake move. That is, students of this class incorporated into their immediate production or otherwise acknowledged understanding of the linguistic forms that were highlighted reactively and preemptively in the class in 64.3% of the FFE cases. In short, more than half of the FFEs were followed by an uptake move. With regards to the linguistic areas of FFEs and uptake, the findings revealed that uptake took place quite frequently in FFEs addressing all the three forms. However, the findings showed that uptake move was lower in preemptive FFEs, 43 out of 76 (56.5%), than the ones in reactive ones, 370 out of 566 (65.3%). Concerning reactive FFEs, uptake moves were more common in FFEs dealing with vocabulary (73.3%). Likewise, 63.6% of reactive FFEs with a focus on grammar and 58.2% of those focusing on pronunciation led to uptake. With regards to the preemptive FFEs, 56.9% of FFEs addressing vocabulary resulted in uptake and 54.5% of FFEs addressing grammar followed by uptake.

Although only a few studies have directly addressed the relationships between uptake and focus on form instruction, or uptake and the linguistic coverage of FFEs, uptake has been used by the majority of these studies as an indication of the effectiveness of incidental FonF and a manifestation of understanding of a linguistic feature (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Ellis et al. 2001a, 2001b; Loewen, 2004a; Farrokhi and Gholami, 2007; Basirian and Gholami, 2010; Gholami and Safdari, 2012, to name but a few). Studies of learner uptake have shown varying levels of uptake production. For instance, Ellis et al. (2001a) reported a higher level of uptake in their study of 12 hours of meaning-focused lessons in two communicative ESL classes. They found that uptake occurred in 317 of the 429 FFEs instances (73.9%) in these classes and that successful uptake occurred most frequently in reactive FFEs (78.6%) whereas preemptive student-initiated and teacher-initiated FFEs had significantly lower levels of successful uptake. In another study of learner uptake, out of a total of 1373 FFEs observed by Loewen (2004a) in

the 32 hours of meaning-focused lessons, 1003 FFEs led to uptake. That is, uptake occurred in 73% of the FFEs in Loewen's study.

Gholami and Safdari (2012), in a very similar study in a talk-show class, found that out of a total number of 472 FFEs identified, 245 FFEs (51.9%) were followed by an uptake move. However, the rate of the occurrence of the uptake in the Farrokhi and Gholami's (2007) study was low. They demonstrated that out of 168 reactive episodes, 72 (44%) resulted in uptake whereas only 43 (9%) of 473 preemptive episodes led to learner uptake. Likewise, the results of Basirian and Gholami's (2010) study showed that of a total number of 229 preemptive FFEs, only 78 FFEs (34%) were followed by an oral uptake move.

Although the above-mentioned studies yielded somehow differing results, most of the studies show that learner uptake is usually present at least in half of the FFE situations. That is to say, students were able to produce a target form correctly or manifest understanding of a feature in more than half of the total FFEs in most of the previous studies, as well as the present research. The higher rate of uptake observed in reactive FFEs implies that reactive FFEs lend themselves easily to uptake because of the nature of error correction. Regarding the linguistic form it seems that FFEs dealing with vocabulary lend themselves easily to uptake. One likely reason for the high rate of uptake in reactive FFEs is that students attend more closely to form because the problems reflect clear and real gaps in the learners' linguistic competence. On the other hand, in preemptive FFEs the linguistic form may not reflect an actual gap in the students' knowledge of the second language and, therefore, may not attract a learner to acknowledge the linguistic form.

However, Ellis et al. (2001a) propose that the differences between reactive and preemptive FFEs and the varying rates of uptake observed above may be due to the differing contexts of the research. Dissimilar language backgrounds of the participants, varying language skill levels, differences in age, gender, motivation and cognitive abilities of the students, different task types, and dissimilar language settings, such as ESL, EFL, private or immersion contexts, may account for these diversities. Furthermore, uptake is an optional move (Ellis et al., 2001a), and the rate of its occurrence in a class depends largely on the learners' willingness and/ or the opportunity provided by the teacher.

CONCLUSION

The present research study along with so many other empirical findings is heavily loaded with empirical and pedagogical implications most of which can be used directly or indirectly in L2 classes. The findings of this study lend more support to the previous studies in literature that show that teachers and learners take time out to attend to linguistic forms within meaning-focused lessons. The findings of the study, derived from 8 hours of audio-recording of a communicatively-oriented EFL class, confirmed that incidental focus on form episodes do occur in the process of meaning-focused communications in this class. Moreover, the results of this study demonstrated a differing proportion of reactive and preemptive FFEs of a total of 642 FFEs. Recently, interaction research has come to play a more important role in the studies of the second language learning and teaching. The aim of the present study was to further contribute to the body of research on different aspects of interaction and its characteristics in exploration of how second language is learned. This study supports the theoretical perspective that considers that input as a positive evidence may not be sufficient for certain aspects of L2

acquisition and that negative evidence- focus on form- is necessary for the learners for language acquisition to occur.

This study is a new contribution to the line of research on focus on form which attempts to inject explicit instruction into purely meaning-oriented language lessons without interrupting the flow of the communication. Therefore, one implication of this study is for the teachers to think about activities they can incorporate into their lessons that provide learners with opportunities to attend to incidental FFEs. Another implication of this study was to demonstrate the frequency and the characteristics of the reactive and preemptive focus on form in terms of the linguistic area they focus on. It was found that the majority of the FFEs focus on grammar in a purely meaning-focused talk-show class. As a result, the implication of this study is for the teachers to make informed decisions concerning the use of reactive and preemptive focus on form instruction to help their learners improve their linguistic competence regarding different linguistic areas.

Moreover, this study has implications for language teachers in EFL setting to think about the characteristics and the usefulness of the incidental focus on form, particularly the reactive and preemptive focus on form with different linguistic coverage, and to make informed decisions regarding integrating focus on form with meaning-focused activities in their classes to help their learners enhance their linguistic knowledge. Therefore, this study calls for further investigations in this field to examine the characteristics of reactive and preemptive focus on form techniques in different proficiency levels, with different age groups, or in other contexts which might result in different findings from the ones reported in this study. This variability can also be examined regarding the instructor of the class. Thus, a possible field to tackle with, in this regard, could be the study of teacher's experience, attitudes and beliefs, teacher's sex and background knowledge, and teacher's awareness on the use of incidental focus on form practices.

The present study was not without limitations. One of the limitations of this study was that all the analyzed data and quantifications are solely based on recorded interactions between the teacher and the learners which were audible to all of the learners and thus recoverable for the researchers. So, the interactions between learners in pairs were not recorded and analyzed. This is a worthwhile note which can be dealt with in following studies. Another limitation of this study, like many other studies on focus on form instruction in the literature, was that it did not examine the related links between effectiveness of FFEs (uptake) and language acquisition in long-term. What the researchers have examined in this book is the extent to which incidental focus on form instruction is effective in the short-run. This calls for further investigation which would examine the effectiveness of reactive and preemptive focus on form in the long-term, that is to explore uptake and its contribution to language acquisition.

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