

Short- vs. Long-Term Effects of Reactive Incidental Focus on Form in Free Discussion EFL Classes¹

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of reactive incidental focus on form (FonF) for each learner with regard to different linguistic categories in meaning-oriented EFL classes. To this end, 30 hr of meaningful interactions of upper-intermediate EFL learners were audio-recorded in 2 free discussion classes. Instances of reactive incidental focus-on-form episodes (FFEs), where teachers offer on-the-spot corrective feedback to their learners' linguistic mistakes, were extracted from the data. Furthermore, individualized tailor-made posttests were designed out of self-reported novel FFEs per learner. Results of learner-customized immediate and delayed posttests indicated that this type of instruction led to a substantial improvement in learning the focused language points. Achievement rates were found to be high in both test administrations. This efficacy was, however, more noticeable with regard to grammatical and phonological FFEs. Results reveal that reactive incidental FonF could enhance explicit knowledge of L2 learners both in the immediate context based on uptake rate and in the long run, as the findings from the immediate and delayed posttests demonstrated.

Keywords: Reactive Incidental Focus on Form (FonF); Long-Term Effectiveness; Short-Term Effectiveness

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1. Introduction

The field of language teaching is abundant with approaches and methods to teaching language. Each one of these approaches and methods has been researched extensively, and, upon witnessing their failure to meet their goals (i.e., producing proficient learners), or, in some cases, as a result of the change in attitudes toward what a proficient learner should be able to do, they have lost their popularity (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Among these approaches to teaching language, focus on form (FonF) has received great attention in the past two decades, particularly in the last 10 years.

FonF was first introduced to the field by Long (1991). In his definition of FonF, Long (1991) states that “focus on form . . . overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (pp. 45-46). To avoid confusion, Long refers to the previous purely form-focused approach to teaching language, such as the grammar-translation method (GTM) or the audiolingual method (ALM), as focus on forms (FonFs).

Since the introduction of FonF to the field, a good number of studies have been carried out in this area. However, most of these studies have been descriptive in their nature and have mainly sufficed to investigating the features of FonF in class. This study took one step further in investigating FonF (i.e., reactive incidental FonF in this case), as it measured the effectiveness of this approach to teaching in developing EFL learners’ knowledge of grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of the English language through immediate and delayed posttests tailored out of noticed FonF instances by each learner in a free discussion class.

2. Focus on Form (FonF)

Around two decades ago, some studies explored the effectiveness of an approach that tapped both meaning and form (e.g., Doughty, 1991; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; van Patten & Cadierno, 1993). The findings of these studies showed the positive effect of this approach. However, it was Long (1991) who first gave a definition to this approach as FonF. He defines FonF as an approach that overtly draws L2 learners’ attention to form when their primary focus is on meaning and transferring message. Further, he states that this shift of attention from meaning to linguistic elements should be incidental. That is to say, L2 learners should be provided with linguistic information (through corrective feedback) only when they come up with errors in the course of meaningful communication.

Later, Ellis (2001) and Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002) proposed the term form-focused instruction (FFI) as an umbrella term encompassing three options to tap the linguistic features of language in class: FonFs, incidental FonF, and planned FonF. The definition Ellis (2001) and Ellis et al. (2002) give to FonFs is the same as the one Long gave in 1991. Incidental FonF is, according to Ellis (2001) and Ellis et al. (2002), divided into two categories: reactive and preemptive. In reactive incidental FonF, L2 learners are provided with corrective feedback when they make an error in the course of meaningful communication. Therefore, it is the same as Long's (1991) definition of FonF. Preemptive incidental FonF is, on the other hand, different from what Long defines as FonF as in this approach: Attention to form is made before any errors occur on the part of L2 learners. This attention to form can be initiated either by the teacher (i.e., teacher-initiated) or by the learner (i.e., student-initiated). In the case of teacher-initiated preemptive FonF, the teacher feels a gap in L2 learners' interlanguage and, hence, raises a linguistic point before any errors occur. However, in the case of student-initiated preemptive FonF, it is the learner who raises a query regarding a linguistic point before he or she makes an error. They are both preventive measures to avoid or minimize committing possible mistakes in the course of meaningful communication. Moreover, in planned FonF, according to Ellis et al. (2002), the teacher chooses some linguistic items in advance and tries to teach them through some meaningful focused tasks intensively either reactively or preemptively, as demonstrated and investigated empirically by Gholami and Aliyari (2015). Some other dichotomies on FonF such as integrated vs. isolated FonF have emerged in recent years (Spada, Jessop, Tomita, Suzuki, & Valeo, 2014; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Gholami (2017) provides a full picture of key FonF options with extracts from classroom interactions and disentangles the existing confusion surrounding these alternative ways of drawing attention to form.

2.1. Rationale for the Study

There have been a good number of studies on FonF. However, the majority of these studies have been on planned FonF (Alcón-Soler, 2007; Bell, 2012; Kamia, 2012; Nassaji, 2010). The effectiveness of incidental FonF measured through posttests has already been investigated by Pouresmaeil and Gholami (2017), Alcón-Soler (2007), Loewen (2005), and Nassaji (2010, 2013). Pouresmaeil and Gholami (2017) explored how useful incidental FonF is in learning linguistic categories through uptake sheets and found that vocabulary oriented FonF enjoyed the highest rate of uptake and grammar the lowest. Loewen (2005) investigated the relationship between incidental FonF and L2 learning. The results of his study indicated that incidental FonF can be beneficial in developing L2 learners' interlanguage. The learners could get 62% of the test items right in the immediate posttest and 50% in the delayed posttest. Alcón-Soler (2007) probed into the efficacy of L2 teacher's

lexical incidental FonF (both reactive and preemptive), the results of which showed that the teacher's lexical incidental FonF positively affected the learners' noticing and their subsequent use of these items in both the short- and long-terms.

While researching the fruitfulness of incidental FonF in an ESL context, Nassaji (2010) found that the learners could get 58% of the tests items right in the posttest, and items based on preemptive focus-on-form episodes (FFEs) were answered more correctly than the reactive ones. Later, Nassaji (2013) examined the efficiency of incidental FonF based on the type of student-teacher participation structure. The findings indicated that the learners gave correct answers to 61%, 57%, and 42% of the test items designed out of the FFEs occurred in small group, one on one, and whole-class interactions, respectively.

Based on the reviewed literature, three points grabbed our attention: First, studies conducted on the usefulness of incidental FonF have designed tests out of FFEs without paying attention to the fact that not all FFEs are novel to L2 learners. That is to say, the learner might have had good knowledge of the L2 linguistic point in the case of preemptive FFEs or, in the case of reactive FFEs, the learner's wrong utterance may simply be a mistake, not an error. In such cases, the correct answers given to such FFEs cannot reflect the strength of such instruction. To alleviate this defect, in the present study, the learners were asked to write down the linguistic points (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) they had learned in class and indicate if they had previously had any knowledge of those points at the end of each session. The test items were, then, designed out of the FFEs the learners had stated they had learned in class and had no previous knowledge of them at the end of each session. Second, the aforementioned studies have reported the effectiveness of FFEs regardless of their types, whereas the present study delved into the efficacy of reactive FFEs *per se*. Third, with the exception of Alcón-Soler (2007), who limited her study to only lexis, the reported studies in this area have not made a distinction on the effectiveness of FFEs in relation to their linguistic foci. This study expanded on this by investigating the effectiveness of reactive incidental FonF with regard to three different linguistic categories (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) through the following research questions:

1. What is the retention rate of reactive incidental FFEs with regard to different linguistic categories (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) in the short- and long-terms in an upper-intermediate free discussion EFL class?

2. Is there a significant difference between the retention rate of reactive incidental FFEs with regard to different linguistic categories (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) in the short- and long-terms in an upper-intermediate free discussion EFL class?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

This study was carried out with 28 homogenous EFL learners (males = 13; females = 15). Their age ranged from 19 to 26 with an average age of 22. All were university students studying majors other than English, 20 of whom spoke Turkish, 6 spoke Kurdish, and 2 spoke Persian as their L1. Their homogeneity was checked through running an Academic Module IELTS Exam. The mean score was found to be 6.5, which equals B2 level of proficiency according to Common European Framework Reference (CEFR), as noted in IELTS and the CEFR (IELTS Official website), and the *SD* was 0.51. For homogeneity purposes, only the learners with 1 *SD* above and below the mean were selected as the participants. This provided us with 28 individuals out of 42 examinees. The selected learners were assigned to two classes based on their convenience as far as class timing was concerned. There were 15 learners (i.e., 8 males and 7 females) in one class and 13 (5 males and 8 females) in the other. The instructor of both classes was a 27-year-old male teacher. He held an M.A. in ELT and had 6 years of teaching experience, 3 years of which were in holding free discussion classes.

3.2. Instruments

One minisized wireless MP3 voice recorder was used to record the interactions occurring in each free discussion session. The sessions centered on holding rotatory debates and discussions turn-taking among the participants, with the teacher most often acting as the session moderator and feedback provider and at times as a contributor to the ongoing debate. The covered topics for discussions centered on issues of common interest, such as global warming and carbon footprint, discrimination in terms of gender, language, and ethnicity, pros and cons of coeducation, abortion, early vs. late marriage, and so on. Furthermore, some sheets were distributed among the participants at the end of each session to write down the linguistic points they learned in class and to indicate whether they already had any knowledge of those linguistic points. A sample of these sheets is given in Appendix A. In addition, a number of tests were used in this study. These tests were tailor-made posttests per each learner and designed to measure the effectiveness of incidental grammatical, lexical, and phonological FFEs (see Appendix B).

3.3. Data Collection and Categorization

The data were collected through audio-recording of 30 hr of whole-class interactions in two free discussion classes. In addition to the audio-recording of each session, one of the researchers attended each class as an unobtrusive observer for three sessions and took field notes on the nature of the ongoing classroom interactions

in order to provide a vivid picture of the context of the study and possible qualitative data on the context of the study and the interactions. To identify the FFEs that the learners had noticed in class and had no prior knowledge of them, they were asked to write down the linguistic points they learned in class and to indicate whether they already had any knowledge of them at the end of each session. In order to make the classes run naturally, the instructor of the classes was not informed about the aim of the study. He was merely told that the study was to investigate the whole-class interactions.

Afterwards, we transcribed the audio-recorded data and coded the data gained from the audio-recordings in order to identify the instances of FonF (i.e., FFEs), defined as “the discourse from the point where the attention to linguistic form starts to the point where it ends, due to a change in topic back to message or sometimes another focus on form” (Ellis, et al., 2001a, p. 294). Therefore, the beginning of FFEs was marked by what triggered attention to form, such as an erroneous utterance made by a student in the case of reactive FFEs or a question asked by a student or a point made by the teacher about a linguistic form before any errors occurred in the case of student- and teacher-initiated preemptive FFEs. The end of an FFE was marked by an oral learner uptake, continuation or a change in topic or another FFE. Below is an example of FFE adopted from the data:

➤ **Sample # 1: A Sample of Reactive FFE**

S: *Yes. I am agree with this.*

T: *So, you agree with this.*

S: *I am agree.*

T: *You agree.*

S: *Oh! Yes. I agree.*

Once we identified the FFEs, we distinguished the reactive FFEs from the preemptive ones. As the final stage of categorization of the reactive FFEs, we categorized them into different linguistic categories (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). Below are examples of each linguistic category adopted from the data:

➤ **Sample # 2: A Sample of Syntactic FFE**

S: *My dad always say we should wake up early.*

T: *Your dad says.*

S: *He says.*

➤ **Sample # 3: A Sample of Lexical FFE**

S: *I can do a balance.*

T: *I can make a balance.*

S: *Make a balance.*

➤ **Sample # 4: A Sample of Phonological FFE**

S: *And Azrael said* (pronounced as /seɪd/)

T: *Said* (pronounced as /seɪd/)

S: *Said* (pronounced as /seɪd/) *to him that he will die today.*

To establish intercoder reliability for data categorization, two of the researchers independently coded the whole data, and the agreement rates were found to be 98% in identifying the FFEs, 97% in categorizing them into reactive and preemptive FFEs, and 97% in identifying the linguistic categories of the FFEs. The cases where there were discrepancies between the two coders were, further, examined until a consensus was reached.

3.4. Measuring Retention Rate of Reactive Incidental FFEs

After identifying the instances of FFEs, individualized tests were designed out of the FFEs the learners had stated they had learned in class and had previously no knowledge of them in the uptake sheets. As the aim of this study was to measure the effectiveness of reactive FonF, only the reactive FFEs were selected to design tests. Through matching the linguistic points written by the learners on the sheets with the transcripts, the linguistic categories of the written FFEs were identified.

The tests consisted of lexical, grammatical, and phonological items. The lexical and grammatical items were of multiple-choice type so that we could gauge the learners' explicit knowledge. These items asked the learners to choose the correct choice among the provided three options. In order to gain more accurate results, the learners were asked not to answer the questions whose answers they did not know. That is, they were told not to answer the questions by chance. A sample multiple-choice item is provided in sample # 5:

➤ **Sample # 5: A Sample of Multiple-Choice Grammatical Item**

A: *I think there should be no speed limitation on the roads.*

B: *But I speed limitation decreases the rate of accidents.*

a) *am not agree* b) *don't agree* c) *am not agreeing*

The answer to this item is choice b (i.e., *don't agree*). This item was designed out of a reactive FFE that was noticed and noted down as new by one learner in his sheet for one of the sessions.

For phonological FFEs, however, two types of tests were developed: word- and sentence-levels. In the former, the learners were provided with a list of items (i.e., the reactive phonological FFEs the learners had indicated they had learned in class and had previously no knowledge of them) and were asked to read them aloud. In the latter, the learners were provided with a set of sentences with the same words in the word-level type inside. They were asked to read the sentences aloud.

To conduct the tests on phonological FFEs, the learners were invited to a quiet room one by one and were asked to read the words and the sentences. To reduce the stress factor, their reading the words and sentences was recorded and scored following the examination. We made sure that the learners did not know what words they were going to read in advance.

One of the questions of this study was aimed at measuring the effectiveness of reactive FonF in the short-term. To this end, out of total lexical, grammatical, and phonological FFEs jotted down and marked by each learner as new in the postsession uptake sheets, 40% of each linguistic category tailored out per learner out of uptake sheets was selected randomly. Then, we developed the test items based on them. This cut-off point was agreed upon to realize content validity of the course coverage and is felt to be sufficient for including a reasonable number of test items representative of the novel reactive FFEs for each linguistic category per learner. Because administering an immediate posttest to measure the short-term effects after the last session (i.e., the 10th session) did not seem logical and because there would be a long interval between the beginning sessions and the immediate posttest, we administered two posttests three days after the fifth and tenth sessions. The questions of the first immediate posttest were designed out of sessions 1 to 5, and the ones of the second immediate posttest were designed out of sessions 6 to 10.

Also, we investigated the productivity of reactive FonF in the long-term. Because there were two immediate posttests, we administered two delayed posttests with a 5-week interval between the immediate and delayed posttests. Just like the immediate posttests, the questions of the first delayed posttest were designed out of the first 5 sessions, and the ones of the second delayed posttest were designed out of the second 5 sessions. The second and third researchers checked both tests in light of the identified FFEs and respective uptake sheets of the learners for content validation purposes.

The format and number of the test items of the delayed posttests were the same as the immediate ones. However, their contents were slightly different from the

immediate ones in order to minimize the possible practice effect. Twenty percent of the questions were randomly substituted by 20% of new questions. The selection of the FFEs to design these new questions was done in the same way as the selection of the ones for the immediate posttests. Furthermore, to minimize memory effects, as in Chan and Li (2002), the order of the questions was changed. Furthermore, Hatch and Farhady (1982) state that time interval of, at least, 2 weeks would minimize practice effect. Therefore, as the interval between the immediate and delayed posttests was 5-week long, it was supposed that the learners would not remember the test items from immediate posttests; hence, there would be no or little practice effect.

One important point to be mentioned here is that unlike the majority of the studies in the literature, both the immediate posttests and the delayed ones were conducted under time limitation. Learners are believed to use their implicit knowledge more in timed tests than in tests with no time limitation (Nassaji, 2013).

Regarding the multiple-choice questions tapping the lexical and grammatical FFEs, if the learners chose the correct response, they were given one correct score. However, if they chose the wrong response or if they left an item unanswered, no correct scores were given to them. To score the tests measuring the phonological FFEs—whether in the word- or sentence-levels—the learners gained a correct score for each target word they pronounced correctly. In cases they failed to pronounce the L2 words correctly, they did not receive any correct scores.

For reliability purposes in scoring pronunciation tests, we listened to the audio-recordings and gave scores separately. The two raters had the same opinion in scoring 98% of the items. In the remaining 2%, we discussed and reached a consensus. In the case of the multiple-choice questions, because of their nature, there was no need to check for the interrater reliability.

To account for the accuracy rates in both the immediate and delayed posttests, raw frequencies and percentages were calculated. However, to find if there were significant differences between the results of the immediate posttest and the delayed one, Pearson's chi-square analysis was performed on the raw frequencies. The alpha level was set at $p < .05$. All the statistical analyses were done using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 18).

4. Results

4.1. Short-Term Retention Rate of Reactive Incidental FFEs

One of the key objectives of this study was to analyze the short-term retention rates of grammatical, lexical, and phonological reactive FFEs. In this respect, altogether, a total of 2,690 grammatical, lexical, and phonological reactive FFEs were tested in the immediate posttests. It is noteworthy that the phonological

FFEs tested in the word- and sentence-levels were the same, and, therefore, their number in each test type was not added up with the other in calculating the total number of tested FFEs. However, for statistical reasons, these numbers were added up in calculating the total number of test items. Therefore, the total number of tested FFEs was 2,690, whereas the total number of test items was 3,138.

Having analyzed the data, we found that the learners were able to answer 2,090 (66.6%) items correctly in total. Detailed results relating to the retention rate of each category of the FFEs in the short-term are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Retention Rate of FFEs With Regard to Linguistic Categories in the Short-Term

Linguistic Category	Number of Test Items	Number of Correctly Answered Items	Percentage of Correctly Answered Items
Grammatical	618	440	71.2
Lexical	1624	1000	61.6
Phonological (Word-Level)	448	336	75
Phonological (Sentence-Level)	448	314	70.1
Total	3138	2090	66.6

Regarding the phonological FFEs, although the learners could pronounce fewer phonological FFEs correctly in the sentence-level test than in the word-level one, the difference between them was not significant, $\chi^2(1, n = 896) = 2.47, p = .11, \phi = .05$.

4.2. Long-Term Retention Rate of Reactive Incidental FFEs

We also investigated the retention rate of grammatical, lexical, and phonological reactive FFEs in the long-term. To this end, just like the immediate posttests, a total of 26,90 grammatical, lexical, and phonological reactive FFEs were tested in the delayed posttests. It should be noted that just like the immediate posttests, the phonological FFEs tested in the word- and sentence-levels were the same and, therefore, the number of them in each test type was not added up with the other in calculating the total number of the FFEs tested. However, for statistical reasons, these numbers were added up in calculating the total number of test items. Therefore, the total number of the FFEs tested was 2,690, whereas the total number of test items was 3,138.

Based on the analyses, we found that the learners were able to get 1,886 (60.1%) items right in total. Detailed results relating to the retention rate of each category of the FFEs in the long-term are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. *Retention Rate of FFEs With Regard to Linguistic Categories in the Long-Term*

Linguistic Category	Number of Test Items	Number of Test Items Answered Correctly	Percentage of Test Items Answered Correctly
Grammatical	618	417	67.5
Lexical	1624	833	51.3
Phonological (Word-Level)	448	327	73
Phonological (Sentence-Level)	448	309	69
Total	3138	1886	60.1

Regarding the phonological FFEs, although the learners could pronounce fewer phonological FFEs correctly in the sentence-level test than in the word-level one, the difference between them was not significant, $\chi^2(1, n = 896) = 1.56, p = 0.21, \phi = 0.04$.

4.3. Short- vs. Long-Term Retention of Reactive FFEs

The retention rates of grammatical, lexical, and phonological reactive FFEs as measured by the tests were also compared in the short- and long-terms. The chi-square analysis showed a significant difference between these two, $\chi^2(1, n = 6,276) = 28.28, p = 0.000, \phi = 0.06$.

With regard to the lexical reactive FFEs, the results were the same. That is, a significant difference was found between the accuracy rate of the responses given to the items designed out of the lexical FFEs in the short- and long-terms, $\chi^2(1, n = 3,248) = 34.50, p = 0.000, \phi = 0.10$.

With regard to the grammatical reactive FFEs, the results were not the same, however. The chi-square analysis indicated no significant difference between the accuracy rate of the responses given to the items designed out of the grammatical FFEs in the short- and long-terms, $\chi^2(1, n = 1,236) = 1.84, p = 0.17, \phi = 0.04$.

The results were the same as far as the phonological reactive FFEs (i.e., both word- and sentence-levels) were concerned. The chi-square analysis showed no significant difference between the accuracy rate in pronouncing the phonological FFEs (i.e., both word- and sentence-levels) in both test administrations, $\chi^2(1, n = 896) = .37, p = 0.54, \phi = 0.02$ for the word-level items and $\chi^2(1, n = 896) = .08, p = 0.77, \phi = 0.01$ for the sentence-level items.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at measuring the retention rates of grammatical, lexical, and phonological reactive incidental FFEs as measured by the posttests, the results of which indicated that the learners were able to get the questions right 66.6% of the time in the short-term and 60.1% in the long-term in total and the difference between these rates was significant. Although the retention rate in the long-term decreased

significantly, that the learners could answer over 60% of the questions correctly after five weeks is encouraging. This becomes more promising when we consider the nature of incidental FonF, particularly the reactive one, which is not designed to teach specific linguistic points and, hence, the treatment of errors is incidental, extensive, and brief. Therefore, the results point to a rather high effectiveness of reactive incidental FonF.

Although the overall effectiveness of reactive incidental FonF is worth noting, a more important point is its effectiveness with regard to linguistic categories. The results indicated that the learners were able to get over 70% of the grammatical items correctly in the short-term and slightly over 67% in the long-term. The comparison of the gains in the short run with those in the long run provided no significant difference. The results were the same as far as the phonological FFEs were concerned. That is, the learners could get the majority of the phonological items (i.e., both word- and sentence-levels) right in the short- and long-terms, and the difference between the short-term gains and the long-term gains was not significant. However, it was not the case as far as the lexical FFEs are concerned. Although the learners could get the majority of lexical items right in both the short- and long-terms, the difference between these two was significant.

At the first glance, that the learners could perform better with regard to the grammatical and phonological FFEs may seem to indicate the higher effectiveness of reactive incidental FonF in developing their grammatical and phonological knowledge than the lexical ones. However, two points should be made here: First, that the learners' ability to get the lexical FFEs right in the long-term decreased significantly does not necessarily indicate the inefficiency of reactive incidental FonF in developing their lexical knowledge. Second, the reason the learners performed better in answering the grammatical and phonological items may be due to the number of the tested FFEs. That is, the results might have been different if the number of the FFEs (not the percentage) tested in each section had been the same. Although an equal percentage of FFEs was tested in each section of the tests, their number in each section was not the same.

One more interesting point was the learners' ability to pronounce the phonological FFEs as isolated words and as words in sentences. This finding indicated that the learners' performance was better in the word-level tests than in the sentence-level test in both the short and long runs. However, the difference between these two tests was not statistically significant. Therefore, it could be concluded that reactive incidental FonF can be a suitable option in tapping L2 learners' phonological errors.

The results of this study in consonance with similar results in the literature are strikingly different in some aspects. In terms of the fruitfulness of FFEs, the results loom more promising than those reported in Loewen (2005) and Nassaji (2010). This difference could be attributed to the type of the tested FFEs. The FFEs measured in this study were all reactive ones, whereas those in the abovementioned studies included both reactive and preemptive ones. This study did not account for preemptive FFEs, and retention rates following such FFEs may not necessarily resemble reactive FFEs.

Another reason might be the type of testing. The majority of the questions given to the learners were of multiple-choice type, with each item having three options. It is possible that the learners were able to notice the correct response when they saw it among the options. That is to say, the learners might have not been able to remember the correct word in order to provide the correct answer if the questions had been of another type, say fill-in-the-blanks, and using only multiple-choice items could have led to some extent of inflation and confounding in scores. The test items in Nassaji (2010) and Loewen (2005) included other types of questions, such as fill-in-the-blanks, besides multiple-choice items. This could be considered as a limitation of the study, while offering a suggestion for further inquiry.

Another plausible explanation for the discrepancy in the findings could be the test item sources and whether they were noticed or not. Nassaji (2010) and Loewen (2005) designed tests out of all the FFEs, whether noticed by the learners or not. Therefore, their tests included some items designed out of FFEs the learners had not noticed. In a case the learner has not noticed the linguistic information, the possibility of giving a correct answer to the question designed out of that FFE would be very low. However, in the present study, all the questions were out of the FFEs which were novel to the learners and followed by uptake. Therefore, as there was no single item out of the FFEs with no uptake, the scores of the students were expected to be higher. Furthermore, in the case of uptake occurrence, the abovementioned researchers considered any single repetition of the feedback as an instance of real noticing and designed test items out of those FFEs, as well. However, it is possible that L2 learners not notice the point behind the corrective feedback the teacher gives in some FFEs, but still repeat them for any reasons other than noticing. This particularly holds true in the case of implicit types of feedback such as recasts (Kamia, 2012; Nabei & Swain, 2002; Nassaji, 2013), and recasts are used as the most frequent type of corrective feedback by teachers (Saito & Lyster, 2012). Therefore, many of the questions designed in the literature might have been out of the FFEs, which were the results of recasts. This means that some of the questions might have been out of the FFEs whose linguistic points the learners had indeed not noticed, even when they had apparently noticed the points by repeating them. As a result, the

learners might not have been able to get these questions correct. However, in this study, as we asked the learners to write down the linguistic points they had learned in class at the end of each session, there was more certainty and evidence on the learners' awareness of the linguistic points of the FFEs, even when the FFEs were the results of recasts. That is, all the questions designed were out of the FFEs that the learners had noticed. Therefore, the learners performed better in this study.

Regarding the efficacy of the reactive incidental FonF in this study, one important issue needs further elaboration. It should be born in mind that the effectiveness in this study is more appropriate with regard to developing the explicit knowledge of the learners. This is due to the nature of the tests that included decontextualized items. Moreover, in such tests, L2 learners' attention is mostly on form rather than both form and meaning. However, if we take the view that declarative knowledge has the potential to convert to procedural knowledge through frequent meaningful practice (i.e., interface position), as skill acquisition theorists hypothesize (Spada & Lightbown, 2008), then the fact that reactive incidental FonF has effects on developing the learners' explicit knowledge could be a sign that this type of instruction could potentially lead to language acquisition in future. However, to see to what extent this stands true requires conducting further research. This research should include procedures in its testing to measure the learners' ability to use FFEs in free spontaneous speech—although this type of method is not without its difficulties as pointed out by Williams (2001).

Although it was not the primary aim of this study to delve into testing issues, the results indicated that the learners performed pretty well in the tests that were decontextualized. This finding partly challenges the transfer appropriate processing (TAP) theory proposed by Segalowitz and Gatbonton (1995) and Segalowitz and Lightbown (1999), which states that knowledge is retrieved more easily when the learning situation is similar to the retrieval situation. The learning situation, in this study, was communicative and meaningful. However, the testing was pretty decontextualized and devoid of any communicative features. The results indicated that the learners could, however, perform well in such tests. This runs counter to what the TAP theory states. Of course, as there was no communicative test in this study to compare the learners' performance in decontextualized tests with it, this interpretation remains speculative and warrants further research. However, the fact that the learners did perform well in the decontextualized tests—though the learning situation was communicative—holds true and indicates that L2 learners have the ability to perform well in decontextualized tests when their learning is communicative, although they might have performed better in communicative tests, which needs further research.

7. Conclusion

In general, the findings of this study give further support to the findings of previous studies about the effectiveness of incidental FonF, particularly the reactive type. Besides, they broaden our knowledge of the usefulness of reactive incidental FonF with regard to different linguistic categories. However, as stated before, this efficiency is more appropriate with regard to L2 learners' explicit knowledge. Therefore, further research is warranted to investigate the effects of this type of instruction on L2 learners' implicit knowledge. It is possible that explicit knowledge convert to implicit knowledge through repeated meaningful practice, as stated by skill acquisition theorists (Spada & Lightbown, 2008). However, to test if this also holds true in the case of reactive incidental FonF, there is a need to administer more research making use of testing procedures to measure L2 learners' ability to produce FFEs in spontaneous speech.

As for the implications of this study, Nassaji (2016) rightly states that previous research on FonF has mainly dealt with planned FonF. In such studies, the effectiveness of corrective feedback may be partly due to its intensity. This, as Nassaji (2016) puts, may not have robust implications for the classroom context where corrective feedback is provided extensively on a rather large number of linguistic errors. In this regard, studies on extensive corrective feedback, such as the present one, may have more practical implications for teachers. Previous research has mostly indicated the positive effects of incidental FonF. However, these studies have been mostly with regard to morphosyntactic areas of language. This study corroborates and complements the findings of previous research in that it deals with different linguistic categories and indicates the positive effects of incidental corrective feedback on learning these language forms. The general implication for L2 teachers would be not to feel discouraged from implementing extensive corrective feedback and occasionally take some time out to attend to the linguistic problems of L2 learners as they arise incidentally in the course of communication.

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Appendix A

Sample of Sheets for L2 Learners' Notes About FFEs

لطفاً، مطالبی را که این جلسه در کلاس آموختید (لغت، گرامر، تلفظ) در این برگه ذکر کنید. مطالبی را که قبل از این کلاس نمی دانستید در ستون سمت راست و مطالبی را که قبلاً به طور کامل یا جزئی میدانستید در ستون سمت چپ بنویسید.

Please write down the points (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) you learned this session. Please write down the points you already knew completely or in part in the **left column** and the ones you did not know in the **right column**.

I already knew قبلاً می دانستم	I did not know before دانستم قبلاً نمی دانستم
Height تی	colonize
cosmetics	lust
vulnerable	unity
shore	abortion
shrimp	bigamy
portable	skinny clipping
sensitive	Not only <u>did</u> I get <u>said</u>
she wear <u>a</u> scarf.	↔
Although (not but)	Don't talk loudly, will you?
	It's the <u>21st</u> century.
	pleasant e
	won T

Appendix B

Sample of Posttest Items Developed Out of Grammatical, Lexical, and Phonological FFEs

Directions: Choose the correct answer.

Vocabulary

- He went to church and to the priest before he died.
 - a) fainted
 - b) repented
 - c) consented
- Some people have superiority They always want to be the master in any place, although they don't deserve it.
 - a) upheaval
 - b) riot
 - c) complex
- When having a big grief, some people use alcohol to achieve They think, they can't bear the situation if they don't drink.
 - a) anxiousness
 - b) solace
 - c) maturity
- In any country, if you the rules, you will be penalized.
 - a) consider
 - b) violate
 - c) uphold

- The for passing a course in Iran is to get, at least, 10 out of 20.
 a) assessment b) trait c) criteria
- They broke up last month. They said they were They couldn't stand seeing each other.
 a) mad at each other b) sick at the sight of each other c) in favor of each other
- I can't trust him for this job. He is He doesn't have enough experience.
 a) red b) blue c) green
- I can't understand how some people can for someone they didn't like at all when he or she dies.
 a) mourn b) consent c) anticipate
- Some people say there is a place called where we go before we go to heaven or hell.
 a) limbo b) paradise c) after life
- You always look the same. Why don't you your hair. Give it a new color.
 a) strengthen b) style c) dye
- Our students are very talented. If we give them the opportunity, they will
 a) itinerate b) blossom c) rebel
- The flavors to produce a very unusual taste. You must mix different ingredients together to produce such food.
 a) intermingle b) interchange c) intermediate
- I'm I can speak three languages.
 a) monolingual b) multilingual c) bilingual
- Don't drink it all at once. You must only take a
 a) nap b) break c) sip
- I can't understand how some people agree with the idea of for their dearest person.
 a) euthanasia b) theosophy c) intimidation
- In many countries is considered as a crime. If you use your power to obtain good jobs for members of your own family in an unfair way, you'll be penalized.
 a) bribery b) nepotism c) white washing
- Let's fight. Take your off.
 a) shirt b) gloves c) hat
- Jane and I agree. We are on the same
 a) boat b) ship c) plane
- If I want to my friends, I'll rank Cathy as 1. She's my closest friend. So, I'll definitely help her first.
 a) prioritize b) discriminate c) eliminate
- Some people don't believe in They say nothing is predetermined.
 a) coincidence b) elaboration c) fate
- A person knows everything but only can't walk.
 a) passed away b) faint c) paralyzed
- If a boy acts like a girl, he is often called by many people.
 a) mysterious b) sissy c) coward
- Some people say everything finishes when we die. In fact, they don't believe in
 a) after life b) mortality c) science

- I never when I play poker because if I lose, I'll lose a lot of money.
a) cheat b) bet c) wage
- I'm going to be late. I have a with my dentist at her office just after 30 minutes.
a) appointment b) date c) cancellation
- It's not a norm in Iran that girls give the to boys for marriage.
a) expectation b) proposal c) instinct
- It is generally believed that women are more than men. They are influenced by emotional feelings more easily than men.
a) rational b) sentimental c) cruel
- **A:** What's up? Are you fine?
B: Not really. I've caught a cold. I have a bad sore throat.
- **A:** Have you gone to the doctor?
B: Yes. I should rest for a while.
- **A:** Yeah. You'd better rest. Sorry. I've got to go. !
B: Thanks!
- a) Enjoy yourself b) Get well soon c) Have fun
- **A:** What a nice shirt! It really looks good on you.
B: Thanks for the
- a) criticism b) explanation c) complement
- After 30 years of working, finally, I'm going to get It's time to rest now and enjoy the monthly salary.
a) retired b) fired c) hired
- Finally, the police arrested the He was arrested for taking part in the bank robbery last year.
a) murderer b) kidnaper c) thief
- Smoking is in public places. You cannot smoke in such places.
a) allowed b) banned c) compulsory
- I don't believe in love at first For me, it's not love; it's lust. You can't fall in love with someone the first time you see him or her.
a) thought b) sight c) look
- We must not anyone to do something he or she doesn't want. Everyone must be free to decide whether to do something or not.
a) lead b) help c) force

Grammar

- If I were more organized, I that much luggage. Now, I don't know where to put my luggage.
a) wouldn't bring b) wouldn't have brought c) wouldn't had brought
- I like my husband to be independent. I don't want him to be dependent his parents.
a) on b) to c) for
- Everyone to be successful in life.
a) want b) is wanting c) wants

- **A:** I think there should be no speed limitation on the roads.

B: But I Speed limitation decreases the rate of accidents.

a) am not agree b) don't agree c) am not agreeing

- Why did you leave the home? I asked you leave the baby alone at home.

a) to not b) not to c) to don't

- Last summer, I to the beach almost every day.

a) went b) had gone c) was going

- Give me minutes, and I'll be ready.

a) few b) a few c) a little

- Actually, I a cup of tea first thing every morning, but then I switch to coffee.

a) do drink b) am drinking c) have drunk

- I had a bad headache that I went to lie down for a while.

a) so b) too c) such

- I can't get a car yet because I'm not to drive.

a) so old b) enough old c) old enough

- I hope we find the cinema easily.

a) could b) may c) can

Phonological FFEs (Word-Level)

Development Society Occur Naïve Horizon

Obligatory Doubt Guilty Probably

Phonological FFEs (Sentence-Level)

There have been significant computer developments during the last decade.

The biggest problem of our society is terrorism.

A third of accidental deaths occur in the home.

It would be naïve to think that this problem can be solved easily.

We could see a ship on the horizon.

It is obligatory to attend the class on time.

There is no doubt that he is a murderer.

I feel really guilty at forgetting her birthday again.

Repairing the car will probably take about a week.