The Relative Impacts of Planned Preemptive vs. Delayed Reactive Focus on Form on Language Learners' Lexical Resource

Vahid Panahzade*, Javad Gholami**

Abstract

Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers contend that focus on form (FonF) instruction plays a pivotal role in the course of language acquisition. Focus on form (FonF) instruction is learner-centered and is consistent with the learner's internal syllabus. There has been an ongoing query in the literature as to whether focus on form should occur prior to error commitment or be reactive to the actual errors of the learners during the task. In this regard, this study tried to explore the effectiveness as well as the relative impacts of planned preemptive vs. delayed reactive focus on form on lexical resource of English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' oral production in meaning-oriented interviews. The study adopted a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design including two experimental groups, each receiving a distinct treatment during the whole semester. The participants of the study were a total of 19 upper-intermediate adult all-female students. Paired-samples *t*-test and independent-samples *t*-test were utilized to evaluate and compare the differing effects of the two treatments respectively. The findings of the study demonstrated that both types of form-focused instructions are conducive to learners' oral production lexical resource. One of the interesting findings of the present study was that preemptive focus on form can be planned in advance on the basis of teachers' experience, which can lead to a blurred dichotomy between planned and incidental focus on form.

Keywords: Focus on form; meaning-oriented lessons; planned preemptive FonF; delayed reactive FonF; lexical resource

1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) studies have long surveyed learning a second or foreign language and communicating successfully in that language. Most of these studies have been conducted inside the language classrooms, called instructed SLA, as opposed to naturalistic SLA which deals with learners' every day journey of second language (L2) contact and interaction. Instructed SLA has been defined as "any systematic attempt to enable or facilitate language learning by manipulating the mechanisms of

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* Urmia University, Iran, E-mail: panahzade.vahid@gmail.com
** Urmia University, Iran, E-mail: j.gholami@urmia.ac.ir

learning and/or the conditions under which these occur" (Housen & Pierrard, 2005, p. 3). Traditionally, course design started with the language components and was presented to the learners, one item at a time, in a sequence determined by notions of frequency and difficulty (Long, 1997). Such an approach was named as 'focus on forms' by Long (1988), since it consists of the teaching of discrete grammar points in accordance with a synthetic syllabus. It was learners' task to put those chunks together to use them in communication.

Focus on forms, however, was subjected to much criticism. It was called a one-size-fits-all approach. An alternative was proposed which is named as 'focus on meaning' with a focus on the learner and learning processes. Proponents of focus on meaning believed that first and second language learning are not intentional, but incidental and implicit. Consequently, learners are provided with great amounts of comprehensible input (Long, 1997). However, it suffered from many problems. As long as learners' erroneous language usage caused no communication breakdown, learners' errors were not attended to. Therefore, another approach was sought. Long (1991) put forward the third option, that is, 'focus on form'. He defined it as follows: 'Focus on form…overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication'(p. 45- 46). Hence, both teacher and learners are engaged in language use communicatively. However, occasions arise when the learners choose to focus on form.

Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2002) distinguished two types of focus on form: planned focus on form and incidental focus on form. The linguistic elements to be focused are pre-determined in planned focus on form. It is not unlike focus on forms instruction inasmuch as a specific form is pre-selected for treatment. However, in incidental focus on form no specific forms are pre-selected and learners or the teacher can opt to attend to various forms while performing the task. Incidental focus on form has been further divided into pre-emptive and reactive focus on form. In pre-emptive focus on form the teacher or learners draw attention to form even though no actual problem in production has arisen (Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2001). As stated by Loewen (2011), in teacher-initiated preemptive focus on form teacher draws learners' attention to a language item, even though no error in production has occurred. He further adds that teachers may not be highly accurate in predicting which forms learners will have difficulty with and that they may be relying on their intuitions in trying to predict problematic items for the learners. Nevertheless, the main advantage of student-initiated preemptive focus on form is that it attends to the gaps in the students' linguistic knowledge. Reactive focus on form, on the other hand, follows learners' produced utterances containing an actual or perceived error. Accordingly, it provides learners with negative evidence which is called corrective feedback (Ellis et al., 2002). Lyster and Ranta (1997) categorized feedback into the following six different types: (1) Explicit correction, (2) Recasts, (3) Clarification requests, (4) Metalinguistic feedback, (5) Elicitation, and (6) Repetition.

SLA researchers put forth two main reasons in support of the centrality focus on form approach for L2 acquisition. The first is related to the learners` limited working memory capacity and their difficulty in attending to meaning and form at the same time (VanPatten, 1990). The second reason is related to interlanguage development which can only take place if learners attend to form while they are engaged with meaning (Ellis, 2005). Further evidence for focus on form comes from Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Output Hypothesis. Long (1996) contends that input modified through interaction is important to make input comprehensible and contributes directly to acquisition. On the other hand, Swain (1995) believes that comprehensible input may not be sufficient for certain aspects of L2 acquisition and that comprehensible output may be needed. He asserts that learners must be given the opportunity to test out hypotheses about the target language, and to move the learner from a purely semantic analysis of the language to its syntactic analysis through contextualized and meaningful use of language. Also, Schmidt (1990) believes that since focus on form induces learners to notice linguistic forms in the input, this noticing facilitates the process of interlanguage development. He maintains that noticing is important because acquisition can only occur if learners attend to form consciously in the input.

Focus on form (FonF) is, therefore, a particularly effective teaching approach and should be introduced to the classroom syllabi. Most of the research on FonF instruction carried out so far centers mainly around reactive focus on form and only a few studies have addressed planned focus on form (e.g. Dabaghi Varnosfadrani & Basturkmen, 2009). Also, most of these studies have sought overall gains of the learners following form-focused treatment. The present study, however, tried to explore the effectiveness and the relative impacts of different form-focused instructions on lexical resource of EFL learners' oral production in meaning-oriented interviews. Furthermore, almost all of the studies in the literature have tried to verify the merits of various form-focused approaches adhering to Ellis et al.'s (2002) dichotomy of focus on form, i.e. planned vs. incidental focus on form. The present study, however, was aimed at obscuring this dichotomy. In other words, it was to reveal that pre-emptive focus on form can be planned in advance on the basis of teachers' experience. Thus, it can lead to a blurred dichotomy between planned and incidental focus on form by proposing that even preemptive focus on form can be planned beforehand by experienced teachers. In order to respond to above-mentioned query, the present study was aimed at exploring the most advantageous focus on form approach by addressing following research questions:

1. Does providing planned preemptive focus on form have any significant impact on upper-intermediate Iranian female learners' lexical resource in meaning-oriented interviews?
2. Does providing delayed reactive focus on form have any significant impact on upper-intermediate Iranian female learners' lexical resource in meaning-oriented interviews?
3. Is there any significant difference between planned preemptive focus on form and delayed reactive focus on form in terms of their relative impacts on upper-intermediate Iranian female learners' lexical resource in meaning-oriented interviews?

2. Review of the Related Literature

Planning which is conceptualized as the opportunity to work out task performance before the actual performance, has evolved into an area of inquiry in its own right and "has become a burgeoning area of investigation within task-based learning" (Ortega, 2005, p. 77). To date, there have been a few studies investigating learners' fluency, accuracy and complexity gains following planning. For instance, Foster and Skehan (1996) investigated pre-intermediate learners using personal information exchange, narrative, and decision-making tasks. They found that both complexity and fluency significantly increased but accuracy improved only in two of the tasks. They outlined that planners paused less frequently than non-planners in all three tasks they investigated. In another study, investigating advanced English learners of Spanish, Ortega (1999) asked them to plan what to say in their oral picture-based narrative task. She found that fluency and complexity of learners' oral productions improved significantly, but accuracy improved only in some measures. Similarly, Yuan and Ellis (2003) made learners plan for content, language, and organization for an oral picture-based narrative task and explored the effects of off-line vs. on-line planning. They concluded that the Chinese EFL learners improved significantly in terms of their oral production complexity and accuracy under both pre-task and on-line planning conditions compared to the no-planning condition. It was also found that pre-task planning group was more fluent and used a greater variety of vocabulary. That is, it improved learners' lexical resource.

In a study by Birjandi and Alipour (2010) which was conducted to compare the effect of individual and group pre-task planning on EFL learners' accuracy and complexity in speaking, 60 intermediate female learners at the first grade of high school were divided in two groups and given the same planning time (two, three, and five minutes depending on the task complexity). However, in one group, the participants carried out the task individually and in the other, they performed in groups of five. After the treatment, the two groups were given a posttest on a narrative task. After the planning time, all students were asked to discuss the task and the accuracy and complexity of their speech were measured. The

results indicated that whereas the individual planning group outperformed the group planning group in terms of speaking accuracy, the group planning learners performed significantly better than the individual planners in terms of complexity. Ahangari and Abdi (2011) also examined the effect of pre-task planning on the complexity and accuracy of task-based oral performance of 40 Iranian EFL learners. The results demonstrated the positive effect of pre-task planning on complexity whereas no positive effect was found regarding the accuracy of learners' oral performance. They concluded that providing learners with the opportunity to plan before task performance might help learners produce language which is more complex. Tavares (2011), investigating the effects of pre-task planning on fluency, accuracy and complexity of L2 speech performance, found significant differences in fluency and accuracy. However, differences in complexity were far from achieving significance.

Along the same vein, exploring the impact of three levels of task planning on the accuracy of task-based oral performance with narrative task types among sixty Iranian EFL learners, Seifoori and Birjandi (2008) found no significant effect on accuracy as a result of pre-task and on-line planning. However, meaningful gains were observed among pre/online planners. Thus, the authors underscored the benefits of mixed planning conditions in enhancing accurate oral performance. Along the same vein, investigating the effect of planned and unplanned focus on form on EFL learners' oral performance, Rahimpour, Salimi, and Farrokhi (2012) reported the mean of accuracy of planned group to be higher than the unplanned one. However, their results did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Altogether, pre-task planning seems to create a context for learners to have the opportunity to map form onto meaning through available linguistic knowledge that is not yet automatized. As Skehan (1996) stated, since pre-task planning reduces the cognitive demand of a task and enables learners to concentrate on the language during the task, it can be effective.

On the other hand, Long (1991) conceptualized that focus on form should be implemented as reactive responses to learners' communication problems. A multitude of studies have been conducted on reactive focus on form, mostly referred to as corrective feedback in the literature. In this regard, Lightbown and Spada (1990) explored the effects of form-focused instruction and corrective feedback in communicative language teaching. Their study comprised of 1000 students in nearly 40 intensive ESL classes. They found that "accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative skills are probably best developed through instruction that is primarily meaning-based but in which guidance is provided through timely form-focused activities and correction in context" (p. 443).

In a study by Dabbaghi (2006), the effects of immediate and delayed error correction on students' oral production with a focus on their pronunciation was investigated. Dabbaghi chose 70 learners for his study randomly and divided them into two groups, the immediate correction group and the delayed correction group. The treatment was done during some sessions and after that a posttest was used. Students' discussions were recorded and then transcribed. Dabbaghi concluded that if teachers are to select one of the two options, that is, immediate or delayed correction, it would be preferable to them to choose delayed correction.

In another study, Dabaghi Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2009) provided feedback for upper-intermediate adult learners' oral production. They found that explicit correction was significantly more effective than the implicit correction. They suggested a number of reasons for this: (1) explicit correction created more attention, (2) when learners were explicitly corrected on their errors, this created a contrast with the form in their interlanguage, (3) the provision of the correct form in implicit correction may not have been effective because it was less clear to learners what was wrong with their erroneous utterances and without such understanding, hypothesis revision was not possible, and (4) learners most likely perceived the explicit corrections as corrective feedback requiring them to correct their errors whereas this was not the case with the implicit feedback.

Rahimi and Dastjerdi (2012) investigated the effects of two types of error correction, i.e. delayed and immediate error correction, on complexity, accuracy, and fluency of intermediate EFL learners. It was found that delayed error correction had positive effect on fluency and accuracy but not on complexity. As for accuracy, just like fluency, delayed error correction was found to be effective. Unlike fluency and accuracy, complexity did not improve with delayed correction. The reason, the authors discussed, might be the proficiency level of participants in this study. They were all intermediate learners and could not use complex grammatical structures frequently.

Farrokhi and Chehrazad (2012) demonstrated that both experimental groups which received corrective feedback in the study, although a different type of feedback, performed significantly better than the control group in the session 6 which was the last session of oral production and treatment. That is to say, there were significant differences between the oral accuracy of the two experimental groups on the one hand, and the control group on the other hand, in the last session. In other words, there was a significant difference between the oral accuracy of the first experimental group which received recast on the simple past tense errors and that of the control group which received no feedback in the last session. Also, there was a significant difference between the oral accuracy of the second experimental group, which received delayed explicit feedback, and that of the control group in the last session. Farrokhi and Chehrazad concluded that recasts and delayed explicit and metalinguistic treatment both appear to be effective in the improvement of the EFL learners' oral accuracy. Further, the findings indicated that in spite of the differences between the two experimental groups' means during the six sessions of oral production and treatment, these means' differences were not statistically significant. That is, the two feedback types were equally effective in the development of the oral accuracy.

Having reviewed the literature on pre-task planning, it becomes clear that fluency, accuracy, and complexity are important dimensions of second language performance; however, they need to be supplemented by measures of lexical performance. That is, as Skehan (2009) argues, one needs to include lexical performance in measuring leaners' oral production. Therefore, in the present study it was tried to take leaners' lexical performance and resource into consideration.

3. Method

The present study aimed at finding out the effectiveness as well as relative impacts of advance planning and delayed reactive focus on form approaches on Iranian female learners' oral production lexical resource in meaning-oriented interviews. To meet the objectives of this study and to answer the research questions reviewed above, a pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design was adopted. The design of the study comprised two experimental groups with no random selection of participants; however, the classes were randomly assigned to one of the treatment groups.

3.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 19 EFL upper-intermediate female learners whose age range was 16 to 40 years. The main reason for selecting two all-female classes was that opting for one male and one female class would require taking the sex of the learners into account as another variable to be analyzed. As a result, the researcher decided to carry out the present research study in two single-sex all-female classrooms. The learners were of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, i.e. they spoke Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian as their mother tongues. They all paid tuition and attended the classes regularly. They were also more or less at the same level of language proficiency in terms of their oral proficiency as demonstrated in the oral interview administered at the beginning of the study.

3.2. Instrument

In order to assure the comparability of the groups in terms of their oral proficiency, all learners took part in an oral interview before the treatments. The interview was based on IELTS (the International English Language Testing System) speaking practice tests published by University of Cambridge (1996-2011). The content validity of the tests was approved by two experts holding PhD in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). The speaking section of the IELTS Test comprises three parts. Part 1 includes some simple warm-up questions. In this part, which lasts for 4-5 minutes, the examiner introduces him/herself and confirms candidate's identity. The examiner also interviews candidate using verbal questions selected from familiar topic frames. Individual long turn, which is descriptive in nature, appears in part 2. The examiner asks candidate to speak for 1-2 minutes on a particular topic based on written input in the form of a candidate task card and content-focused prompts. The examiner asks one or two questions to round off the long turn. Part 2 last about 3-4 minutes including one minute preparation time. Finally, two-way discussion questions follow in part 3 of the speaking test. The examiner invites the candidate to participate in discussion of a more abstract nature, based on verbal questions thematically linked to Part 2 topic. This part lasts about 4-5 minutes.

Both pre-test and post-test interviews were recorded using a mini-size wireless MP3 recorder. Later, they were scored based on IELTS *speaking band descriptors-* public version (n.d.) published by University of Cambridge. The scoring band ranged from 0 to 9. There were four main constituents of the speaking proficiency as described in IELTS *speaking band descriptors*, namely fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. IELTS Speaking Overview- teacher's notes (n.d.) defined lexical resource, which was the focus of the present study, as the range of vocabulary the candidate can use and how clearly meanings and attitudes could be expressed. This included the variety of words used and the ability to get round a vocabulary gap by expressing the idea in a different way.

3.3. Procedure

In order to assure the comparability of the groups in terms of their oral proficiency, each learner in two groups took part in an oral interview, which was based on IELTS speaking practice tests published by Cambridge University Press, at the beginning of the study. The interviews in each group were carried out by the teacher who was to give learners the treatments of the study. Each interview lasted about 10 minutes. The findings of the interviews acted as their pre-test of the study. The pre-test interviews were recorded and were subsequently scored based on IELTS *speaking band descriptors-* public version explained above.

After taking the pre-test, the participants in both groups received two differing treatments, i.e. *planned pre-emptive focus on form* and *delayed reactive focus on form.* The treatments were given for 10 sessions during the regular 18-session semester of the institute, which lasted for about two and half months. The treatments took about 20-30 minutes during each session.

In the group receiving planned pre-emptive focus on form, the teacher distributed a hand-out to the class each session. Each hand-out contained an IELTS Test Speaking section along with an accompanying page comprising some useful vocabulary, idioms, pronunciation and grammatical hints, and illustrated examples corresponding to each part of the Speaking test. The following is a sample hand-out. As a pre-interview language scaffolding activity, learners got the chance to review the hand-out, get their meaning and practice using them in context. Following that, they took turns interviewing each other in pairs while teacher was monitoring their interviews. Afterwards, the teacher interviewed some of the learners randomly.

PART 2

Describe a teacher who influenced you in your education

You should say:
Where you met him/her
What subject he/she taught
What was special about him/her
And explain why this person influenced you so much.

PART 2 **Useful Vocabulary & Collocation**	**Teacher**	➢ **Adjective :** *School, university , college, English , history, biology, mathematics, physics, chemistry* ➢ **Adjective :** *competent / `kɑmpɪtənt /, experienced, sympathetic /,sɪmpə`θetɪk / , qualified, skilled* ➢ **Noun** *: self-confidence , tolerance, creativity, courtesy /`kɜrtəsi /, concern for others, patience* ➢ **Verb***: teach , work with somebody* ➢ ***Example****: She loved **working with** students./ He was really competent in teaching history. / She **had loving concern** for all students.*

In the group receiving delayed reactive focus on form, there was no planned preemptive language-oriented scaffolding activity. The students were given the same IELTS speaking tests; however, there were no lexical or grammatical hints accompanying them. The learners engaged in dyadic interactions based on the speaking questions and practiced offering corrective feedback to one another at the end of one complete interview which lasted between 6-8 minutes. Following their dyadic interview practice, the teacher interviewed some learners randomly and noted down non-target-like utterances in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in his notebook. The teacher was also asked by the researcher not to interrupt the interviewees on the spot and the corrective feedback was just limited to post-interview phase. He, therefore, provided delayed reactive focus on form at the end of each interview based on his notes.

Following the completion of the aforementioned treatment, a post-test was administered at the end of the semester to both groups to evaluate the effectiveness as well as the impacts of the different interview practices, i.e. planned preemptive vs. delayed reactive focus on form, in terms of learners' oral production lexical resource. The post-test questions were parallel with the pre-test ones utilizing IELTS speaking practice tests. Both pre-test and post-test interviews were carried out by the two teachers giving learners the treatments of the study. Each interview lasted about 10 minutes. They were recorded and were subsequently scored based on IELTS *speaking band descriptors-* public version explained above.

3.4. Data Analysis

In order to find out the effectiveness of the planned preemptive focus on form and delayed reactive focus on form, both groups were interviewed at the end of the semester using IELTS speaking practice tests which were closely analogous to the pre-test ones. Paired-samples *t*-test was used to find significant effects of both treatments. Also, to obtain the relative impacts of planned preemptive focus on form and delayed reactive focus on form, independent-samples *t*-test was utilized to compare the differing effects

of two treatments on learners' lexical resource. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for the data analysis.

Furthermore, to make sure whether scoring procedure was reliable enough to be coded just by a single researcher, another MA candidate, who was already briefed on the study, its objectives, and data analysis procedure, scored 10 percent of the data to establish inter-rater reliability. A correlation coefficient of .97 was found between the two raters, which indicated the reliability of the scoring procedure.

4. Results

The three research questions are addressed in this section, and the findings of the study are reported. However, before proceeding with the research questions, the findings of the pre-test interviews are presented.

4.1. Pre-test Interview

In order to assure the homogeneity of groups in terms of their oral proficiency, the learners were given an interview each as the pre-test of the study. The descriptive results of the pre-test are given below.

Table 1. Descriptive results of the pre-test

Group Statistics					
	FonF Treatment		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	Planned Preemptive		9	3.9722	.80472
	Delayed Reactive		10	3.8000	.82327

As can be seen in Table 1, the means of both groups are very close. It seems that there was not any significant difference between the means of the two groups. To ascertain that there was no significant difference between the means and to assure the comparability of the groups, an independent-samples *t*-test was run in SPSS 18. As it is demonstrated in Table 2, the result of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed a non-significant value of (.906). That is, the assumption of equal variances has not been violated, and the first line of Table should be used in reporting the results. The Sig. (2-tailed) value of (.651) denotes that the difference between the groups was not significant. In other words, there was no significant difference between the groups with regards to their oral proficiency at the beginning of the study, *t* (17) = .460, *p*= .651 (two-tailed).

The results of the pre-test interview demonstrated that the two intact classes used in the present study were homogeneous in terms of their oral proficiency. That is to say, there were no significant differences between the groups at the beginning of the study. Thus, it would be possible to attribute any differences at the end of the study to the effects of the treatments. The following sections are presenting the descriptive as well as inferential results on the effectiveness of the two treatments in improving learners' oral proficiency fluency and coherence.

Table 2. Results of the independent-samples t-test

Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t*-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.014	.906	.460	17	.651
	Equal variances not assumed			.461	16.867	.651

4.2. Effectiveness of Planned Preemptive FonF on Lexical Resource

The objective of the first research question was to explore the effectiveness of providing upper-intermediate female learners with planned preemptive focus on form on their lexical resource. As can be shown in Table 3, there is a substantial difference between the means of pre-test and post-test. In other words, the mean of the post-test was greater than the pre-test one. It seems that learners' lexical resource in their oral production improved greatly following planned preemptive focus on form instruction. The descriptive results are given below.

Table 3. Descriptive results of the planned preemptive on lexical resource

Paired Samples Statistics			
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Lexical Resource Pretest	3.778	9	.8333
Lexical Resource Posttest	5.833	9	.6124

In order to find a statistical difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test, a paired-samples *t*-test was run. The results of the *t*-test (Table 4) revealed a significant difference between the means of pre-test and post-test, $t(8) = -9.717$, $p = .000$ (two-tailed).

Table 4. Results of paired-samples t-test of planned preemptive on lexical resource

Paired Samples Test

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Lexical Resource Pretest - Lexical Resource Posttest	-2.0556	.6346	-9.717	8	.000

As Table 4 shows, providing upper-intermediate female learners with planned preemptive focus on form proved to be beneficial in terms of their oral production lexical resource.

4.3. Effectiveness of Delayed Reactive FonF on Lexical Resource

The second research question of the present study sought to explore the effectiveness of providing upper-intermediate female learners with delayed reactive focus on form on their lexical resource. Table 5 reveals that there is a considerable difference between the means of pre-test and post-test. In other words, the mean of post-test exceeds that of pre-test. Thus, it could be inferred that providing delayed reactive focus on form can improve learners' lexical resource. The descriptive results are given below.

Table 5. Descriptive results of delayed reactive on lexical resource

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Lexical Resource Pretest	3.700	10	.8233
Lexical Resource Posttest	5.750	10	.6346

To answer the question in statistical terms, a paired-samples *t*-test was run. As can be seen in Table 6, there is a significant difference between the means of pre-test and post-test, *t* (9) = -9.462, *p* = .000 (two-tailed).

Table 6. Results of paired-samples t-test of delayed reactive on lexical resource

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Lexical Resource Pretest - Lexical Resource Posttest	-2.0500	.6852	-9.462	9	.000

As it was demonstrated, the results of the posttest outweighed those of pre-test in terms of learners' oral production lexical resource. Thus, providing upper-intermediate female learners with delayed reactive focus on form proved to be effective on their lexical resource.

4.4. Planned Preemptive vs. Delayed Reactive FonF on Lexical Resource

The final research question of the present study aimed at exploring the relative impacts of planned preemptive focus on form and delayed reactive focus on form on upper-intermediate female learners' lexical resource. Table 7 demonstrates that there is not much difference between the means of two groups. That is, both planned preemptive and delayed reactive focus on form practices yielded similar results. Thus, it seems that both types of treatment contribute to improvement in oral production lexical resource on the part of learners. The descriptive results are given below:

Table 7. Descriptive results of planned preemptive vs. delayed reactive on lexical resource

Group Statistics

	FonF Treatment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lexical Resource Posttest	Planned Preemptive	9	5.833	.6124
	Delayed Reactive	10	5.750	.6346

To answer the question statistically, an independent-samples *t*-test was run. As it is shown in Table 8, the result of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed a non-significant value of (.749). That is, the assumption of equal variances has not been violated, and the first line of Table should be used in reporting the results. The Sig. (2-tailed) value of .775 denotes that the difference between the groups was not significant, t (17) = .291, p = .775 (two-tailed).

Table 8. Results of independent-samples t-test of planned preemptive vs. delayed reactive on lexical resource

Independent Samples Test						
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	*t*	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Lexical Resource Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.106	.749	.291	17	.775
	Equal variances not assumed			.291	16.903	.775

As can be seen in the table above, both planned preemptive and delayed reactive focus on form treatment were effective in improving upper-intermediate learners' oral production lexical resource.

5. Discussion

The objective of the first research question was to explore the effectiveness of providing upper-intermediate female learners with planned preemptive focus on form on their lexical resource. The results revealed a significant difference between the means of pre-test and post-test. That is to say, providing upper-intermediate female learners with planned preemptive focus on form proved to be beneficial in terms of their oral production lexical resource. The effectiveness of planned preemptive focus on form on improving upper-intermediate female learners' lexical resource was also found in the study by Sangarun (2005). Sangarun found that form-focused instructions, namely focus on vocabulary, transitional words or phrases, and grammar, led to significantly more lexical form planning than the other types of pre-task instruction.

This finding of the present study, however, runs counter to the finding of Nakakubo (2011). In a study of Japanese intermediate and high-intermediate university learners, Nakakubo demonstrated that the participants without a pre-task planning opportunity produced narrative stories with a greater variety of vocabulary than those who planned before the task. One explanation for such discrepancy can be the tradeoff effect between lexical complexity and accuracy. That is, finding statistically significant negative correlation between lexical complexity and global accuracy regarding pre-task planning, Nakakubo suggested that L2 learners tend to pay attention to either lexical complexity or accuracy. The tradeoff effect between lexical complexity and accuracy was also claimed by Yuan and Ellis (2003). They found that the while pre-task planners had high lexical complexity, their grammatical accuracy was lower. On the other hand, on-line planners showed more accurate production, but less lexical complexity.

Giving learners the opportunity to rehearse their oral performance in dyadic interactions with their pairs prior to the main task seems to be beneficial to their oral production. In other words, 'linguistic scaffolding' prior to engaging in the main task, which triggers a range of strategic, metalinguistic, and metacognitive behaviors (Ortega, 2005), may be advantageous for EFL learners. In the researcher's view, preemptive focus on form planning is, in fact, beneficial to language teachers as well. Teachers are often at pains to help their students speak at length without undue hesitation and interruption. That is, due to

their limited working memory capacity (VanPatten, 1990), learners experience difficulty in attending to meaning and form at the same time during meaning-focused activities. Planned preemptive focus on form, however, by offering the opportunity to practice the forms beforehand, provides learners with appropriate linguistic support to speak interminably and focus on communicating meaning. Thus, as discussed above, by equipping their learners with necessary linguistic support planned prior to task based on their experience, teachers can grasp the chance to become involved in the interaction with the learners.

Overall, as mentioned earlier, most of the studies in the literature have tried to verify the merits of various form-focused approaches adhering to Ellis et al.'s (2002) dichotomy of focus on form, namely planned vs. incidental focus on form. The findings of the present study, however, demonstrated that even preemptive focus on form can be planned in advance on the basis of teachers' experience. That is to say, Ellis et al.'s dichotomy can get blurred by preemptive focus on form planning prior to task performance by experienced teachers.

The objective of the second research question was to explore the effectiveness of providing upper-intermediate female learners with delayed reactive focus on form on their lexical resource. A significant improvement was found in learners' lexical resource. In other words, providing upper-intermediate female learners with delayed reactive focus on form proved to be beneficial on their lexical resource.

It is implied that language teachers need to be aware of the suitable timing for the provision of feedback in the classroom. That is to say, during meaning-oriented activities, it is of paramount importance to take care of the timing of the error correction, so that learners would remain motivated to interact. Some language teachers subscribe to the immediate correction position. That is, they believe that learners' errors should be corrected immediately. Still, others believe that learners should not be interrupted during meaning-oriented activities when the aim of learning a language is to promote learners to speak at length. Delayed correction seems to be an appropriate technique in this regard.

With regards to the final research question of the present study, which aimed at exploring the relative impacts of planned preemptive focus on form and delayed reactive focus on form on upper-intermediate female learners' lexical resource, the difference between the groups was found to be non-significant. In other words, both planned preemptive and delayed reactive focus on form treatment were effective in improving upper-intermediate learners' oral production lexical resource.

In researcher's view, lack of significant difference between planned preemptive and delayed reactive focus on form practices was a surprising finding. In other words, it was expected that by incorporating more lexical items in pre-task stage, learners in planned preemptive FonF group would outperform their counterparts in delayed reactive FonF group. That is, by activating "preexisting knowledge structures stored in the mind" (Nassaji, 2002, p. 444), planned preemptive FonF was deemed to be more advantageous to EFL learners. Further, with regards to learners' oral production lexical resource, planned preemptive FonF was expected to lead learners to incorporate new forms in their speech and speak without undue hesitation. However, similar effectiveness of both treatments implied that both kinds of 'linguistic scaffolding', whether prior to task performance or following it, have equally favorable effects on upper-intermediate EFL learners' oral production.

6. Conclusion

The present study sought to explore the overall as well as the relative effectiveness of planned preemptive vs. delayed reactive focus on form practices in two EFL upper-intermediate female classes. It was found that both types of focus on form practices are conducive to learners' oral production lexical resource. The findings of the present research study may contribute to the line of research on negative evidence and particularly the incidental focus on form as a major type of negative evidence that can be provided to the learners especially in the EFL context. As mentioned earlier, most of the studies in the

literature have tried to verify the merits of various form-focused approaches adhering to Ellis et al.'s (2002) dichotomy of focus on form, namely planned vs. incidental focus on form. The findings of the present study, however, demonstrated that even preemptive focus on form can be planned in advance on the basis of teachers' experience. That is to say, Ellis et al.'s dichotomy can get blurred by preemptive focus on form planning prior to task performance by experienced teachers.

In spite of the conclusions drawn here regarding the potential value of planned preemptive and delayed reactive focus on form, there were several factors posing limitations on the generalizability of the present study. Firstly, the data for the present study was derived from a sample of 19 EFL upper-intermediate language learners in two distinct intact classes. It is obvious that more transparent results on the effectiveness of both types of focus on form implementations would have been obtained with more intact classes. In addition, another limitation of the study was the amount and duration of the treatments. Both kinds of treatments were implemented for 10 sessions each. However, it would refine the findings of the study if there were more sessions of treatments. Still, another limitation of this study concerns the learners' level of proficiency and age. The participants of this study were all-female EFL learners with different L1 backgrounds, in upper-intermediate proficiency level, and with an age range of 16 and 40 years. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously in generalizing the results to other proficiency levels (elementary or advanced), other age groups (adolescents or children), or other contexts and language settings (ESL settings). Therefore, the current study calls for further investigations in this field to examine the effectiveness of planned preemptive and delayed reactive focus on form practices in different proficiency levels, with different age ranges, or in other contexts which might result in different findings from the ones reported in this study.

Biodata

Vahid Panahzade is doing his M.A. in TEFL/TESOL at Urmia University, Iran. He has been teaching English for more than four years in language schools in Urmia. His main research interests include: Focus on form (FonF), Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Pragmatics.

Javad Gholami holds a PhD in TEFL/TESOL from Tabriz University, Iran. Since 2008, he has been lecturing and researching at Urmia University, Iran. His main research interests include: Focus on form (FonF) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

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