

The relationship between experience, education and teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques

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This paper reports the findings of an empirical study that explored whether ESL teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques was influenced by their level of experience. The results showed that experienced ESL teachers used more incidental focus-on-form techniques than inexperienced teachers. A follow-up study investigated whether inexperienced ESL teachers' awareness and use of incidental focus-on-form techniques could be influenced by education, specifically, their participation in a teacher education workshop. Overall, the studies demonstrate the importance of taking experience and education into account in research on teacher-initiated incidental focus on form.

I Introduction

This research explores how ESL teachers with different levels of experience use incidental focus-on-form techniques in meaning-based classes. Previous research has identified different types of focus-on-form techniques used by second language (L2) teachers, and has explored the effect of those techniques on L2 learning. (For a comprehensive review of form-focused instruction, see Ellis, 2001, and for information about its effectiveness, see Norris and Ortega, 2000.) Incidental focus on form is important pedagogically because it may facilitate the integration of attention to form and meaning (Long and Robinson, 1998) and encourage learners to notice linguistic forms (Schmidt, 2001). However, despite the fact

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that teachers clearly play a crucial role in focus-on-form and grammar instruction (Borg, 1999), there is little empirical research that explores L2 teachers' use of focus-on-form techniques. Because the term *focus on form* has not been used consistently in the literature, we begin this article with an explication of the terminology used in our research. This is followed by a discussion of the psycholinguistic basis for claims about focus on form, and a summary of the research that has examined variation in L2 teachers' use of focus-on-form techniques together with a discussion of the role of experience. The review of the literature ends with a brief summary of research that has investigated the effect of teacher education on classroom practices.

1 Defining 'focus on form'

Long (1991; 2000) 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. Focus on form is sometimes compared with form-focused instruction, which Spada (1997) defined as 'pedagogical events which occur within meaning-based approaches to L2 instruction but in which a focus on language is provided in either spontaneous or predetermined ways' (p. 73). Spada pointed out that both form-focused instruction and focus on form emphasize attention to form in the context of meaning. She explained that form-focused instruction can be either planned or incidental, which differentiated it from the exclusively incidental nature of focus on form as defined by Long. However, subsequent researchers (Doughty and Williams, 1998) have expanded the definition of focus on form to include pre-planned interventions, thereby blurring the distinction between form-focused instruction and focus on form.

The current study follows the model provided by Ellis (2001), who recently conceptualized form-focused instruction as 'any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form' (pp. 1–2). Similar to Spada, Ellis included both planned and incidental interventions, which is also consistent with an expanded definition of focus on form. However, Ellis's definition incorporates

form-oriented interventions that do not occur in the context of meaning or communication. In other words, Ellis included instructional activities that are associated with traditional grammar teaching following a synthetic syllabus, activities that Long (1991; 2000) defined as focus on forms.

Ellis divided the general category of form-focused instruction into three approaches, which are summarized in Table 1. These sub-categories within form-focused instruction differ in terms of the learners' primary focus of attention during the activity (on either meaning or form) and the distribution of their attention to form (either intensive, i.e., focusing on a small number of forms in detail, or extensive, i.e., touching briefly on several forms).

In focus on forms, the learners' primary focus is on forms, and there is distribution of attention to specific forms. In planned focus on form, the primary focus of attention is meaning, but there is an intensive distribution of attention to specific forms. Finally, in incidental focus on form, the topic of this research, the primary focus of attention is meaning, but there is an extensive distribution of attention to a variety of forms.

Within the category of incidental focus on form, Ellis further distinguished between pre-emptive and reactive techniques. In pre-emptive incidental focus on form, the teacher draws the learner's attention to a form before a problem arises. The teacher briefly treats language as an object and may or may not use metalin-

Table 1 Types of form-focused instruction

Type of form-focused instruction	Primary focus of attention	Distribution of attention to form	Examples
Focus on forms	Form	Intensive	Explicit and implicit grammar instruction, functional language practice
Planned focus on form	Meaning	Intensive	Input flood, input enhancement, focused communicative tasks
Incidental focus on form	Meaning	Extensive	Explicit and implicit negative feedback, pre-emptive language focus

guistic terminology. In Example 1, the teacher anticipated that the students might not understand the word ‘straitjacket’ and pre-emptively drew the learners’ attention to the meaning of the word (all data are from the current study).

Example 1

S2: He wore ah strait- straitjacket.

T: Straitjacket. Do you know what a straitjacket is?

SSS: [No.]

S2: [It’s a clothes for ((2 seconds))] fastening the body of a- of a violent prisoner.

T: Mhm. OK. Exactly. So **clothes** for **fastening** the body of a **violent** prisoner. Yeah. So it’s ah- ((gestures)) it usually is **white** and it wraps around like this ((gestures)) and locks behind so that you can’t **move**. **Magicians** like to use this to- to prove how miraculous they are because they can get out. OK? So was wearing a **straitjacket**. OK?

(1.2 E)^{1,2}

In reactive incidental focus on form, the teacher perceives the learner’s utterance as inaccurate or inappropriate and draws her attention to the problematic feature through negative feedback. Some types of negative feedback are implicit in that they do not include any explicit statements about grammaticality. In Example 2, the teacher provided a recast of the learners’ ungrammatical utterance, which is classified as reactive incidental focus on form. Recasts are generally considered to be implicit forms of negative feedback.

Example 2

S: He’s jumping through fire- fire ring.

T: He’s jumping through a fire ring.

(2.1 E)

Negotiation for meaning (Long, 1996) is also considered to be reactive incidental focus on form because learners’ attention can be drawn to a problem when a communication breakdown occurs. Reactive incidental focus on form can also occur in the form of more explicit negative feedback, such as when teachers respond to a problematic utterance by stating that the learner made an error, or providing metalinguistic information about the error. In Example 3, the teacher explicitly pointed out that the student made a phonological error.

Example 3

T: What- what else? What other vocabulary did you =

S1: = [Noncon]

S2: [Nonconformist.]

T: Nonconformist. You gotta get the stress right. Nonconformist.

(1.3 E)

In summary, the current study followed Ellis' (2001) definition of incidental focus on form as a type of form-focused instruction in which teachers draw learners' attention to a wide range of forms either pre-emptively or reactively, using either implicit or explicit techniques. Although the current study investigated teacher-generated incidental focus on form, learner-generated incidental focus on form has also been investigated in L2 classrooms (Ellis *et al.*, 2001; Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Williams, 1999). In fact, previous research has identified several individual differences that may affect learners' participation in student-generated incidental focus on form, such as proficiency level (Leeser, 2004; Williams, 1999; Yule and Macdonald, 1990), task roles (Yule and Macdonald, 1990) and pair and group dynamics (Morris and Tarone, 2003; Storch, 2002). The frequency and characteristics of incidental focus-on-form episodes have been found to vary significantly depending on learners as well as classes (Loewen, 2003). The current study expands upon this body of research by investigating the role of individual differences in teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques, specifically their level of experience. The following section discusses why focus on form is important pedagogically, describes studies that have investigated the occurrence of incidental focus on form in L2 classrooms, and examines why experience may affect teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques.

2 Incidental focus on form in L2 classrooms

As mentioned above, incidental focus on form is important pedagogically because it creates opportunities for learners to attend to linguistic elements in a meaningful context as they arise incidentally within a broader framework of communication or meaning (Long, 2000; Long and Robinson, 1998). When learners experience problems with comprehension or production, they may experience a shift in attention from meaning to form. This shift in

attention may promote noticing of linguistic forms, which Schmidt (2001) has argued is necessary for learning to occur. In addition, it may create opportunities for learners to notice gaps or holes in their target language knowledge, thereby leading them to search for the needed forms in the subsequent input (Swain, 1995; 1998). Several studies have argued, using both theoretical and empirical support, for the benefits of specific types of reactive focus on form, such as recasts (e.g., Doughty and Varela, 1998; Leeman, 2003; Han, 2002; Mackey and Philp, 1998), negotiation (e.g., Pica, 1994; Mackey, 1999) and pre-emptive focus on form (e.g., Ellis *et al.*, 2001; Loewen, 2003). The most comprehensive reviews that argue that some type of form-focused instruction is beneficial for L2 learning are Ellis (2001) and Norris and Ortega (2000). However, to date, relatively few studies have analysed the amount and type of incidental focus-on-form techniques used by L2 teachers. In a series of descriptive studies Lyster (1998a; 1998b; Lyster and Ranta, 1997) described the different techniques that teachers used when reacting to student errors, suggesting that some types of feedback facilitate more student response than others. Oliver's (2000) study showed that ESL teachers provided a substantial amount of feedback in response to the students' non-target-like (NTL) production, regardless of the age of their learners, and that the learners made use of the feedback in their subsequent production.

Ellis *et al.* (2001) examined both teacher-generated and learner-generated incidental focus on form in meaning-based ESL classrooms, finding that pre-emptive techniques occurred as frequently as reactive techniques (38% were learner-initiated, 10% were teacher-initiated, 52% were reactive). Some researchers, however, have argued that teachers may not provide incidental focus on form in all second language classroom contexts. For example, Pica (2002) found that teacher-dominated discussion was the prevalent mode of classroom discourse in content-based L2 classrooms. Pica noted that the content teachers rarely provided reactive incidental focus on form in response to students' non-target-like utterances. Instead, they reacted to the content of the students' utterances by either continuing or switching the topic. Oliver and Mackey (2003) suggested that teachers' provision of negative feedback in L2 class-

room may be influenced by different classroom discourse contexts. For example, whether or not teachers are focusing on language, content, or classroom management may impact their provision of feedback. Thus, existing research has shown that L2 teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques may be influenced by features of their instructional context. However, there is also a need for empirical work that identifies how individual and instructional context differences may influence teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques.

3 The importance of teachers' experience in their use of focus-on-form techniques

One individual difference that may play an important role in L2 teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques is teachers' level of experience. Unlike focus on formS and planned focus on form, both of which involve preplanned activities directed toward specific language forms, incidental focus on form occurs spontaneously when teachers make on-line decisions about whether to interrupt their instructional routine in order to direct learners' attention to form. Research in L2 teacher education suggests that less experienced teachers are concerned with classroom management and maintaining the flow of instructional routines (Brinton and Holten, 1989; Holten and Brinton, 1995; Johnson, 1992; Numrich, 1996). This suggests that less experienced teachers may be less likely to deviate from their planned lessons to exploit spontaneous learning opportunities.³ More experienced teachers may be more adept at implementing instructional routines, and may be more willing to deviate from their planned activities to provide incidental focus on form. However, an empirical study that examined the classroom discourse of L2 teachers with different levels of experience (Pica and Long, 1986) found no significant differences in the quantity of specific reactive focus-on-form techniques used by experienced and inexperienced teachers, although they did not include pre-emptive focus on form in the analysis.

Another individual difference that might affect L2 teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques is teacher education.

Research on the effects of L2 teacher education has mostly been carried out in a qualitative framework in which teacher education activities are evaluated by examining how the participants' ideas and attitudes developed during the course of the intervention. Recent studies adopting this framework have found favourable results for teacher education activities with regard to renaming experiences and reconstructing practices (Freeman, 1996), reflections on teaching (Kwo, 1996), personal practical knowledge (Golombek, 1998) and reflection on language learning processes (Flowerdew, 1998). These studies have provided a great deal of insight into the effect of teacher education activities on teachers' understanding and perceptions about teaching. A complementary next step, adopted in the research reported here, is to examine how insights gained through teacher education activities and reflection on those activities relate to teachers' classroom practices.

The purpose of the current study was to identify the incidental focus-on-form techniques used by L2 teachers with different levels of experience. The central research question was 'Do ESL teachers with contrasting levels of experience use different types and amounts of incidental focus on form?' Experienced teachers have generally been exposed to information about form-focused instruction during their initial training programmes, and have also had opportunities to gain additional knowledge through professional development activities and their own classroom experiences. In contrast, teachers with less experience may not have as much exposure to information about form-focused instruction, and have had few, if any, opportunities to apply the information they had obtained. Consequently, it was predicted that experienced teachers would use more incidental focus-on-form techniques than inexperienced teachers.

4 Method

a Participants: Eighteen teachers, nine experienced and nine inexperienced, participated in the study. The experienced teachers were four males and five females with MA degrees in TESOL. They had from 4.5 to 15 years (median 10 years) of full-time, supervised experience in teaching EFL/ESL. They were drawn

from a pool of faculty and staff members in an English language programme at a large North American university based on their availability.⁴ The inexperienced teachers, three males and six females, were university undergraduate students enrolled in an introduction to TESOL methods class (but not a TESOL certificate or degree programme of study) with little to no formal supervised teaching experience. One inexperienced teacher had served as a teacher's aide for two weeks in an EFL context, and another reported tutoring ESL learners informally on academic subjects and with computerized accent modification programmes. They all expressed interest in teaching ESL/EFL after graduation as their motivation for taking the TESOL methods class. Many EFL programmes employ native speakers with bachelor's degrees and no formal ESL training and most MA TESOL degree programmes accept such candidates. They were classified as unequivocally inexperienced. The inexperienced teachers participated in the study as a small part (10%) of the assessment for their TESOL methods class. The inexperienced teachers had received no instruction about focus-on-form techniques in their methods class prior to the study.

All the participants taught pre-academic international students enrolled in two sections of a high-intermediate speaking/listening course in an intensive English programme. Both sections met for 90 minutes on three days per week. One section had 18 learners and the other had 20 learners. The ESL learners were adults from a variety of L1 backgrounds including Japanese, Korean, Thai, Arabic and German. They were informed at the beginning of the semester that they would have a series of guest teachers during the course and that the guest teachers were the focus of a research study.

b Materials: Nine lesson plans based on a chapter of the course textbook, *Mosaic II: a listening/speaking skills book* (Ferrer-Hanreddy and Whalley, 1996), were created by the researchers. Each 30-minute lesson plan consisted of a teacher-fronted activity followed by pair or group work and ended with a teacher-fronted review or closing activity. The teacher-fronted

activities included eliciting vocabulary and building schema. Pair and group work activities consisted of discussions, role plays and information gap tasks. The lesson plans included the objectives, the materials and the procedure, but did not specify the amount of time that the teacher should spend on each step of the procedure. Enough materials were provided so that the teachers would not have any time remaining at the end of the lesson.

c Procedure: Each teacher taught one 30-minute lesson, as shown in Table 2. The teaching schedule was manipulated so that each lesson plan was taught by one experienced teacher and one inexperienced teacher. For example, in the first half-hour session, an experienced teacher was teaching lesson plan number 1.1 in class A, while an inexperienced teacher was teaching the same plan in class B.

The lesson plans and materials were made available to the teachers 48 hours prior to their scheduled teaching session. An information sheet was distributed in the packet of materials to explain that the lesson plan was a general outline of activities that the teachers could implement in any way that they wanted, but it was important that they follow the lesson plan and complete it within the 30-minute period. Several of the teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, asked the researchers about the extent to which they could modify the lesson plan. In response to these questions, all teachers were told that they could not disregard the lesson plan and present a different lesson, but that they could exer-

Table 2 Schedule of data collection

Day	Lesson plan	Section A	Section B
Monday	1.1	Experienced	Inexperienced
	1.2	Inexperienced	Experienced
	1.3	Experienced	Inexperienced
Wednesday	2.1	Inexperienced	Experienced
	2.2	Experienced	Inexperienced
	2.3	Inexperienced	Experienced
Friday	3.1	Experienced	Inexperienced
	3.2	Inexperienced	Experienced
	3.3	Experienced	Inexperienced

cise their own judgement as to how to implement the plan. Each class was taped using audio and video equipment to capture verbal and nonverbal interaction among students as well as between the students and the teachers.

d Data analysis: The data were transcribed using the audio recordings as the primary sources. The audio transcripts were cross-checked with the videotapes to identify any relevant nonverbal behaviour.

As explained in the introduction, Ellis (2001) distinguished between two types of incidental focus on form, pre-emptive and reactive, and pointed out that reactive incidental focus on form may be explicit or implicit. Motivated by his categories, the following coding system was used to identify the types of incidental focus on form used by the teachers. First, each instance of incidental focus on form was first classified as either pre-emptive or reactive. Next, reactive focus on form was classified as either implicit or explicit. Lastly, implicit reactive focus on form was coded as either negotiation or recasts because researchers have suggested that they differ in terms of their frequency in L2 classrooms as well as their impact on student uptake (Lyster, 1998b).

This coding system resulted in the following four categories: 1) pre-emptive incidental focus on form; 2) reactive implicit negative feedback in the form of recasts; 3) reactive implicit negative feedback in the form of negotiation; and 4) reactive explicit negative feedback. Each occurrence of one of the techniques will henceforth be referred to as *an episode*. Individual episodes were of varying length. Reactive implicit negative feedback episodes in the form of negotiation, for example, could be as short as one word ('huh?'), whereas reactive explicit negative feedback episodes could continue over several turns. Definitions and examples of the incidental focus-on-form coding categories follow.

Pre-emptive incidental focus on form. Pre-emptive incidental focus on form was operationalized as any effort to draw learners' attention to a linguistic feature and explain it before an error or breakdown in communication occurred, as shown earlier in Example 1. Preplanned form-focused instruction prescribed by the lesson plan was not included because it was not incidental. In

addition, any explicit information about language provided by the teacher in response to a direct question from a learner was not considered because it was learner-generated and the scope of the current study was limited to teacher-generated focus-on-form techniques. In addition, it was not possible to control and hold constant the amount and type of learner-generated focus on form across teachers and lesson plans, which further motivated the decision to focus narrowly on teacher-generated techniques.

Reactive implicit negative feedback. Reactive implicit negative feedback was operationalized as implicit negative feedback in the form of *recasts* or *negotiation* in response to learners' actual or perceived errors. Recasts were defined as reformulations of all or part of learners' NTL utterances and were illustrated earlier in Example 2. Negotiation included both open-ended clarification requests, such as 'what?' or 'again?', as well as repetition of learners' non-target-like forms. Learners' requests for clarification were not coded because they were student-generated and the current study examined learner-generated focus-on-form techniques only. Negotiation is illustrated in Example 4.

Example 4

T: But they will not give that to you.

S1: This no/lohik/, not/lohik/

T: Not what?

S1: This not /lohik/

(1.3 E)

Reactive explicit negative feedback. Reactive explicit negative feedback was operationalized as any kind of explicit negative feedback in response to learners' actual or perceived errors, as shown in Example 3. Explicit responses with or without metalinguistic terminology were included.

Coding categories were independent so that no episodes were double coded. Implicit negative feedback episodes occasionally occurred within multi-turn pre-emptive and explicit negative feedback episodes. In these cases, both episodes were coded because the teacher used two distinct focus-on-form techniques and each technique targeted a unique language form. Every transcript was coded by all three researchers. Inter-coder reliability was calculated by counting the greatest number of episodes coded by any one rater and then counting as disagreements episodes coded

differently by the other two raters. Unanimous agreement was reached by all three coders for 89% of the episodes. Disagreements arose in 11% of the episodes, and were resolved by discussion, often deferring to the person who transcribed the video and audio recordings of the lesson who could describe the context. Missed episodes (representing less than 10% of the data) were not counted as disagreements but as mistakes, and were subsequently coded.

5 Results

The number and type of incidental focus-on-form techniques used by the experienced and inexperienced teachers is shown in Table 1. The results for individual teachers can be found in Appendix A. The distribution of episodes across techniques was similar for both groups. Both experienced and inexperienced teachers used reactive implicit negative feedback techniques most often with 37 negotiation episodes and 52 recast episodes for experienced teachers, and 31 negotiation episodes and 11 recasts for inexperienced teachers. Both groups also used pre-emptive techniques with 50 episodes for the experienced teachers and 14 episodes for the inexperienced teachers. Reactive explicit negative feedback techniques were used less often, with only 15 episodes for the experienced teachers and 2 episodes for the inexperienced teachers.⁵ The difference in the number of techniques used by the experienced and inexperienced teachers was compared using individual Mann-Whitney tests, a non-parametric t-test that uses median scores instead of mean scores. Non-parametric tests were used because the distribution was not normal, so the median was the most appropriate measure of central tendency and the interquartile range (IQR) was the appropriate measure of variability. The results of the Mann-Whitney tests and the effect size r values, which quantify the size of the difference between the groups, are also shown in Table 3.

The data in Table 1 illustrate that experienced teachers used significantly more of three of the four incidental focus-on-form techniques – pre-emptive focus on form, recasts and explicit negative feedback – than the inexperienced teachers. The effect sizes were moderate with r values ranging from .54 to .56. For

Table 3 Incidental focus-on-form techniques used by experienced and inexperienced teachers

	Experienced teachers			Inexperienced teachers			<i>p</i> value	effect size <i>r</i>
	Sum	Mdn	IQR	Sum	Mdn	IQR		
Pre-emptive	50	5.00	5.50	14	2.00	3.00	.03	.54
INF: Recasts	52	5.00	5.50	11	0.00	2.00	.02	.54
INF: Negotiation	37	3.00	4.50	31	2.00	3.00	.75	.11
Explicit NF	15	1.00	2.00	2	0.00	.50	.02	.56
TOTAL	154	17.00	11.50	58	6.00	6.50		

negotiation of meaning, the difference was not statistically significant, and the effect size was small (.11). Thus, although the distribution of episodes across techniques was similar for the experienced and inexperienced teachers, experienced teachers used those techniques more often than inexperienced teachers.

6 Discussion

As predicted, individual differences related to the ESL teachers' level of experience affected their use of incidental focus-on-form techniques. The incidental focus-on-form techniques they used have all been hypothesized to be beneficial for L2 learning, and as mentioned in the introduction, research on focus on form and classroom interaction has documented positive developmental outcomes for such techniques. It was thus encouraging to observe their occurrence in the classroom discourse of both experienced and inexperienced teachers. However, the inexperienced teachers did not exploit opportunities to draw learners' attention to linguistic form as often as the experienced teachers. Instead they tended to react to the semantic content of the learners' utterances and ignore their NTL forms. As shown below in Example 5, the inexperienced teacher reinforced the correct content of the answer *sociopath*, but ignored the ungrammaticality of the answer.

Example 5

T: Uh, number three. Have you read in the newspaper about people who kill others without any apparent reason? These people a:re?

SSS: Sociopath.

T: Exactly. And have you um- has anybody- has anybody have any examples of um a sociopath? ((3 seconds))

S: McVeigh.

(1.2 I)

In contrast, an experienced teacher responded to the same error by drawing the learners' attention to the missing plural morpheme, eliciting and reinforcing the TL form, as illustrated in Example 6.

Example 6

T: OK, so uh, three. Have you read in the newspaper about people who kill others without any apparent reason? These people are?

SSS: Sociopath.

T: Here's sociopath. ((writes 3 in front of sociopath)). This is violent, aggressive, and something very wrong with you. OK, do we need to change the form? ((points to end of sociopath)) ((2 seconds))

T: Of this word?

S1: [Sociopathist.]

S2: [No.]

S1: Sociopathist.

T: Sociopathist? No. Yeah, sociopath by itself is a person. But if we look at the- these people are?

SSS: Sociopaths.

T: Sociopaths. ((writes s)) So we need to be plural.

(1.2 E)

Even though the experienced teachers used more incidental focus-on-form techniques than the inexperienced teachers, it was not possible to ascertain whether the teachers' contrasting level of experience was solely responsible for these quantitative differences. One possibility is that the teachers' contrasting level of education also contributed to the observed differences. To further investigate whether teacher education has the potential to impact teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques, we carried out a small-scale follow-up study. The follow-up study examined the impact of a professional development workshop about incidental focus-on-form techniques on inexperienced teachers' awareness and use of those techniques.

II Examining the role of teacher education on inexperienced teachers' awareness and use of incidental focus-on-form techniques

1 Introduction

The main goal of the teacher education workshop we created was to help inexperienced teachers develop greater awareness of

incidental focus-on-form techniques. We tested the effectiveness of this workshop with four inexperienced teachers who were from a different population than the first study, and as discussed below, were unequivocally inexperienced. The workshop was designed to provide teachers with information about incidental focus-on-form techniques and to encourage them to reflect on their experiences with such techniques in previous language learning or teaching contexts. The workshop consisted of individual teacher–researcher sessions during which the teachers (a) discussed incidental focus on form techniques with the researchers, (b) viewed videotapes showing examples of incidental focus on form, and (c) role-played the provision of incidental focus on form. The workshop also included post-session activities to be carried out by the teachers, including recording their classroom discourse and reflecting on their use of incidental focus-on-form techniques. A detailed explanation of the session and reflection assignment can be found in Appendix B.

2 Participants

The four inexperienced teachers invited to participate in a small-scale qualitative study of the workshop were two men, Jason and Ned, and two women, Lori and Carol.⁶ All were native speakers of American English. Jason, Lori and Carol had just completed their first semester of graduate study in an MA TESOL programme and Ned had just completed a BA degree and was to begin the same MA TESOL programme in the following semester. While they did not have any prior formal supervised teaching experience, they had all tutored non-native speakers in conversational English.

3 Materials and students

The inexperienced teachers were volunteers at a community centre where they were teaching low-intermediate oral skills courses to recently arrived immigrants. The oral skills courses met for two 90-minute classes per week over a one-month period. The courses focused on the oral skills that learners needed for successful com-

munication outside the classroom (e.g., banking, health care, job interviews). The inexperienced teachers created their own lesson plans and materials during group planning meetings supervised by an experienced teacher.⁷ The materials and techniques they used included both teacher-fronted and pair/small group activities.

4 Procedure

The inexperienced teachers met individually with two of the researchers to carry out the workshop activities. Each inexperienced teacher participated in the workshop at a different time, somewhere between the third and sixth classes, so that each teacher taught at least two classes before and after the workshop. The timing of the workshop for each teacher is illustrated in Table 4. Data on the teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques came from transcriptions of two classes that they taught before the workshop, and two classes that they taught after the workshop. The data were transcribed using the audio recordings. The classroom discourse was coded in the same way as for the main study, and each transcript was coded by two researchers, who reached an inter-coder reliability of 91%.

In order to facilitate reflection, the teachers transcribed all their classroom interaction for two classes, one before the workshop and one after. They then reviewed the transcripts and reflected, in writing, on their use of the different incidental focus-on-form techniques. These written reflections, as well as audiotapes of the workshop itself, provided data on the teachers' awareness of incidental focus-on-form techniques.

Table 4 Schedule of workshops for inexperienced teachers

Inexperienced teacher	Classes taught									
Ned	1	2	3	*	4	5	6	7	8	
Carol	1	2	3		4	*	5	6	7	8
Lori	1	2	3		4	5	*	6	7	8
Jason	1	2	3		4	5	6	*	7	8

Note: * Indicates timing of training workshop

5 Analysis

Quantitative counts of the inexperienced teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques before and after the training were made. The frequencies of incidental focus on form pre- and post-workshop are shown in Table 5. As can be seen from the data in Table 5, there was little change over time in the participants' provision of pre-emptive focus on form, negotiation, or explicit negative feedback. All of four participants used more recasts per lesson after the workshop, as shown in Figure 1. However, Revusky's R_n , a test of significance in time-series designs, showed that significance was not achieved. If there is reason to believe that the effects of the treatment will carry through to additional sessions, it is possible to sum and use the average of all post-treatment sessions. Even using this average, which is somewhat controversial (Mellow *et al.*, 1996; Kazdin, 1982), significance was not achieved, and the effect size r values were low. So, the workshop had little effect on the teachers' *use* of incidental focus on form. A next question, addressed through qualitative analysis, related to whether the workshop had any impact on the inexperienced teachers' *awareness* of incidental focus-on-form techniques.

The inexperienced teachers' written reflections were examined for evidence of heightened awareness about incidental focus-on-form techniques after the workshop. The major trends found in the data are described below.

Recognizing and using incidental focus on form. The teachers demonstrated increased recognition of incidental focus-on-form techniques and opportunities to use them in their classroom practices. For example, Lori commented that she had found it

Table 5 Inexperienced teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques before and after the workshop

	Pre-workshop				Post-workshop			
	Total	Median	Mean	SD	Total	Median	Mean	SD
Pre-emptive	94	5.00	6.71	5.31	128	9.00	9.14	4.28
INF: Recasts	180	12.50	12.86	6.51	263	17.50	18.79	8.89
INF: Negotiation	66	3.50	4.71	3.52	63	4.00	4.50	3.55
Explicit NF	10	1.00	.71	.73	20	1.50	1.43	.73

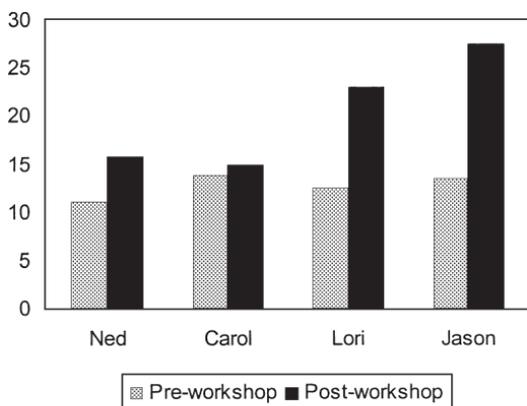


Figure 1 Number of recasts used per lesson before and after the workshop

more natural to provide the correct form for students (i.e., recast) hoping that they would hear the difference and understand the correction. However, the inexperienced teachers' reports also suggest problems immediately incorporating some incidental focus-on-form techniques into their classroom discourse, despite recognizing opportunities to do so. For example, when discussing explicit negative feedback, Jason wrote, 'although I was more conscious of using this in the lessons after the teaching session, it was still difficult to'. It appears that Jason was not able to immediately transfer his new knowledge into action. He continued by stating that after the workshop he 'recognized a few opportunities to use it but did not do so very successfully'. It appears that the workshop encouraged the inexperienced teachers to recognize opportunities when it would be appropriate to use incidental focus on form, but may not have provided them with the necessary skills to exploit those opportunities, at least in the short term. It is likely that increasing experience and familiarity with their classes might contribute to this goal, although it should be noted that teacher learning is in itself an extremely complex topic (Freeman and Richards, 1996).

Orientation toward meaning. The teachers' reflections also indicated that they oriented toward meaning and were less concerned about linguistic form. Carol's reflective essay included the following insights:

There were many places in both lessons four and five where I should have utilized all forms of feedback ... I simply overlooked or ignored the fact that they were using ungrammatical sentence structures. I think I was more concerned with whether or not the students *understood* what I was saying [emphasis in original].

Carol's comments illustrate a trend that has been noted in the SLA literature. An orientation toward meaning at the expense of opportunities to draw learners' attention to aspects of language may be particularly disadvantageous in some content-based or task-based approaches, where there may be little overt attention devoted to linguistic form (as Pica, 2002, has pointed out).

The following examples illustrate the potential impact that the teacher education workshop had on the inexperienced teachers' classroom practices. These examples illustrate how the teacher responded to similar errors in lessons she taught before and after the workshop. Example 7 occurred in the class period immediately before she participated in the workshop. In this example, she ignored the student's NTL pronunciation and seemed to respond primarily to the content.

Example 7

T: What would they- what would an employer want to know?
 S1: Worked about, /sumsin/ about
 T: Work, ok

In contrast, in a class period following the workshop, she provided reactive explicit negative feedback in response to the student's NTL pronunciation, as shown in Example 8.

Example 8

S: Right now, I uh fill out application
 T: Mhm
 S: I have /in/, /inbuw/
 T: You have an interview? Some people will- you will hear interview, but when someone is speaking very quickly they will sometimes say an *n*, innerview.
 S: Ahh, innerview.

As the preceding examples and extracts illustrate, the inexperienced teachers seemed to benefit from the teacher education workshop that was designed to encourage reflection on and awareness of incidental focus on form in the L2 classroom, although they did not all translate this awareness into consistent practice right away.

III Conclusion

In summary, these studies suggested that investigations into incidental focus on form should take into account individual differences in terms of L2 teachers' experience and education. We found that experienced ESL teachers used incidental focus-on-form techniques more frequently than inexperienced teachers, and our follow-up study found that a teacher education workshop raised inexperienced teachers' awareness of such techniques. Although inexperienced teachers may not have implemented the focus-on-form techniques immediately, their use of these techniques may change over time as their experience and familiarity with their classes increase.

These investigations have been small scale and exploratory. Future research might involve more teachers, take a longer term perspective, and employ alternative introspective data collection methodologies such as stimulated recalls (Gass and Mackey, 2000) to further explore teachers' awareness and use of incidental focus-on-form techniques in L2 classrooms. More specifically, we could examine *why* the experienced teachers used more incidental focus-on-form techniques. The experienced teachers were not asked if they had ever been instructed to use such techniques, but through stimulated recall, this is a topic that could be explored. Clearly, the linguistic targets of such techniques would also be interesting topic for enquiry, particularly in less controlled classroom settings than the one utilized in the current study, in which the linguistic targets and lesson content were standardized where possible. Obviously, our teacher education workshop was short and introductory, and more comprehensive workshops should address questions such as when, how and why experienced teachers focus on form, and when it is most linguistically appropriate and developmentally helpful to do so. We hope all of these questions can be addressed in future explorations of L2 teachers' use of incidental focus-on-form techniques.

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Notes

¹ The transcription conventions for the examples are as follows:

- a) Dash attached to a word: false start, e.g. I- I need your homework.
- b) Double parentheses: transcriber's comment, e.g. ((Students laugh.))
- c) Colon: vowel lengthening, e.g. And this a picture of a ta:ll building.
- d) Equal sign: linking of utterances, that is, no pause between them, e.g.

T: Who knows the answer? =

S: = B.

- e) Brackets: simultaneous speech, e.g.

T: [What's the answer?]

S: [What number are we on?]

- f) Bold type: stress, e.g. T: It should be pronounced **atomic**.

² The numbers after the examples refer to the lesson plan number, as shown in Table 2. The letter refers to either the experienced teacher (E) or the inexperienced teacher (I) who taught that lesson.

³ The findings of L2 teacher education studies are consistent with studies in the field of general education, which show that inexperienced teachers have more difficulty maintaining the direction of a lesson (Livingston and Borko, 1989), sequencing of events and actions (Carter *et al.*, 1988), integrating new subject knowledge with previous subjects and bringing off-task students back into the discussion (Westerman, 1991), implementing a large variety of instructional actions (Fogarty *et al.*, 1983) and maintaining classroom interaction (Griffey and Housner, 1991).

⁴ Although some of the experienced participants were teaching in the programme at the time of the research study, none was the regular class teacher for the two sections involved in data collection.

⁵ We also compared the number of words used by the experienced and inexperienced teachers, and the total number of words used by each group was not significantly different. Consequently, it was not necessary to convert the data into ratios, and the number of techniques used by each teacher was used in the Mann-Whitney tests.

⁶ All names have been changed.

⁷ The experienced teacher who supervised the lesson planning meetings had an MA TESOL degree and six years of experience in L2 instruction. She was not involved in the earlier research.

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Appendix A: Incidental focus-on-form techniques used by individual teachers

Lesson	Teacher	Incidental focus-on-form techniques				Total
		Pre-emptive	Reactive INF: Recasts	Reactive INF: Negotiation	Reactive ENF	
1.1	Inexperienced	2	1	2	0	5
	Experienced	7	16	9	5	37
1.2	Inexperienced	3	0	2	1	6
	Experienced	5	5	4	2	16
1.3	Inexperienced	0	7	6	0	13
	Experienced	7	7	4	1	19
2.1	Inexperienced	1	0	0	0	1
	Experienced	0	7	2	0	9
2.2	Inexperienced	0	0	9	1	10
	Experienced	4	1	3	1	9
2.3	Inexperienced	0	0	2	0	2
	Experienced	2	0	1	3	6
3.1	Inexperienced	3	0	2	0	5
	Experienced	8	5	2	2	17
3.2	Inexperienced	2	0	4	0	6
	Experienced	15	3	2	1	21
3.3	Inexperienced	3	3	4	0	10
	Experienced	2	8	10	0	20

Appendix B: Summary of workshop*Review and discussion of background information*

- Presentation of questions and findings from study one and outline of the purpose for the workshop.
- Detailed explanations about techniques for provision of opportunities to focus on L2 form, discussion of the teacher participants' opinions about the usefulness of such techniques, and their experiences in terms of opportunities for attention to L2 form as language learners.
- Reviewing examples of the opportunities for attention to L2 form from the previous study with discussion of the role of context in decisions about when it might be appropriate to provide opportunities for attention to L2 form.

Video viewing

- Reviewing one lesson plan taught by an experienced and an inexperienced teacher.

- Viewing segments of a video of an experienced teacher implementing that lesson plan (video viewing supplemented by a transcript).
- Identification and discussion of opportunities for attention to L2 form at relevant points in the video.
- Viewing segments of a video of the inexperienced teacher implementing the same lesson plan with transcript, and discussion of how opportunities for attention to L2 form could have been created.

Role play (teacher participant and researcher)

- Introduction to a typical pre-listening activity.
- Preparation for 5 minutes.
- Simulated implementation (role play) of the pre-listening activity with one researcher while a second researcher takes notes.
- Reviewing the teacher participant's provision of opportunities for attention to L2 form during the simulated implementation.

Further reflection by the teacher participant

- Listening to a tape of their teaching from the class immediately preceding the workshop for reflection on their provision of opportunities for attention to L2 form and comments about the factors that influenced their decisions.

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