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The Role of Prompts as Focus on Form on Uptake

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[Brian Bates Boisvert, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*](#)

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First Advisor
Luiz Amaral

Second Advisor
Carole Cloutier

Third Advisor
Zhijun Wang

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Abstract
Students are human beings; they, like all of us, make mistakes. In the language classroom, these mistakes may be written, spoken, and even thought. How, if, when, under what conditions and to what degree these errors are treated is of current concern in research regarding language acquisition. In their meta-analysis of interactional feedback, Mackey and Goo (2007) report that the utilization of feedback is beneficial and find evidence that feedback within the context of a focus on form environment is also facilitative of acquisition, echoing Norris and Ortega's (2000) positive findings regarding focus on form research. Thus, the role of feedback has found a somewhat limited, very informative and equally persuasive niche in current theory building and research. There is lack of research specifically addressing the role and effects of forms of feedback, other than recasts, namely prompts, in the second language classroom where the focus is on language use as a means of communication rather than the objectification of it. This context employs focus on form, a brief

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pedagogical intervention that momentarily shifts the focus of the class from meaning to linguistic form (See Long, 1991). Because prompts withhold correct forms (Lyster, 2004; Lyster & Saito, 2010), encourage students to simultaneously notice and self-correct (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), and push modified, student-generated output (de Bot, 1996; Lyster & Izquierdo, 2009; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), they may be theoretically more appropriate for a focus on form context. This study examines this role in its function and efficacy comparing an implicit prompt, the clarification request, with an explicit prompt, metalinguistic feedback on students' spoken errors in the use of a very complex target structure, the subjunctive in nominal clauses in Spanish. Efficacy of the feedback is measured through successful student uptake, that is, whether or not students are able to self-repair as a result of the intervention and then through development operationalized as mean gains in a pre-test/post-test design. Statistical significance is shown for uptake with metalinguistic feedback only, however no development is shown as a result of any feedback due to the target structure's acquisition complexity.

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