

## The Effects of Oral Incidental Focus on Form on Developing Vocabulary Knowledge

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### Abstract

Previous studies on lexical focus on form (FonF) have mostly centred on FonF in reading with a few pre-selected lexical items. This study investigated the contribution of oral incidental FonF to developing learners' lexical knowledge in a free discussion EFL class. Incidental FonF was provided to 15 upper-intermediate learners who participated in 10 sessions of a meaning-oriented class. To gauge the retention rate of the lexical focus on form episodes (FFE), two individualized multiple-choice achievement tests based on the lexical FFEs the learners reported to have no previous knowledge of in their uptake sheets were administered every five sessions, and two delayed posttests were given five weeks following each immediate posttest. Moreover, the participants were asked to compose two prompt-based writings on topics selected out of the covered themes in the posttests. Thematically relevant lexical FFEs extracted from each learner's uptake sheets made up the tailored prompts per learner. Results indicated rather high effectiveness of oral incidental FonF in developing learners' receptive and productive lexical knowledge in both short and long terms. The findings also revealed that learners fail to develop knowledge of the grammatical aspects of some lexical FFEs if their attention is merely drawn to their meaning aspects.

**Keywords:** Oral incidental focus on form, vocabulary learning, prompt-based writing, receptive knowledge, productive knowledge

It is generally accepted that in order to be a competent second language (L2) user, learners need to build a solid foundation of lexical knowledge in addition to other linguistic components

(Schmitt, 2008). Indeed, as pointed out by Scrivener (2011), vocabulary has a more contributing role to the act of communication than any other linguistic feature. This is mostly because vocabulary carries more of the meaning than other linguistic forms in a communicative act (Laufer & Goldstein, 2004). Thus, given the importance of lexical knowledge in developing communicative competence, researching different ways of boosting learners' lexical knowledge seems to be a worthwhile attempt. While it is generally accepted that some vocabulary is gained through input only, recent findings suggest that some sort of instruction could appear beneficial, if not essential, in developing L2 learners' lexical knowledge (see, for example, Laufer, 2005).

Generally, two rather contrastive approaches have been put forth for attending to linguistic forms, including vocabulary: focus on forms (FonFs) and focus on form (FonF). In FonFs, language is viewed as an object to be mastered (Ellis, 2001; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002). In this approach, linguistic features are practiced item by item in a linear, additive fashion while learners' primary attention is focused on form. FonFs, thus, constitutes a traditional teaching approach in which the thrust of instruction is on developing conscious knowledge of linguistic forms. In FonF, on the other hand, the view to language is that of a tool for communication (Ellis, 2001). In this approach, meaning and communication are primary, and any attention to form is implemented into communicative tasks. The term 'form' in both FonF and FonFs may invoke grammatical structures in mind. However, it should be noted that 'form' is not limited to only grammatical features. Rather, it "is intended to include phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmalinguistic aspects of language" (Ellis, 2001, p. 2). Indeed, as Laufer (2005) argues, FonF should be an essential component of vocabulary instruction.

Both FonF and FonFs have been largely investigated, although the majority of this investigation is with regard to morphosyntactic features. This is despite the fact that a large proportion of incidental FonF concerns vocabulary (e.g., Pouresmaeil & Gholami, 2019; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b). On the other hand, those investigating the effects of form-focused instruction (FFI) on learning vocabulary have mostly involved FFI through reading (e.g., File & Adams, 2010; Kang, 2015; Khezrlou, 2019; Laufer, 2006). Indeed, as stated by Nation (2018), this trend is observed in most research on learning vocabulary. Clearly, studies on learning vocabulary through reading, in general, and those on the effects of FFI in written form and its relation to learning vocabulary, in particular, have contributed to our understanding of developing lexical knowledge. However, assuming that all vocabulary is gained through reading is not realistic. While a good amount of vocabulary is acquired through reading when there is some attention to lexis, there is no doubt that learners also develop lexical knowledge through oral communication (Zahar, Cobb, & Spada, 2001). Thus, the question arises as how much vocabulary is gained when attention to lexical items occurs in the course of oral communication. The present study focuses on learning vocabulary through oral incidental FonF, in which attention to form arises naturally and extensively on a wide range of linguistic items (including lexis) when the learners' primary attention is on meaning and communication (Ellis, 2001).

## **Literature Review**

### **Focus on Form**

Closely associated with the interaction hypothesis, one of the early definitions of FonF was provided by Long (1991) as any attempt that "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45-46). Long's original definition of FonF required it to be both incidental

and reactive in the form of implicit corrective feedback provided at learners' errors causing a breakdown in comprehension in the course of communication. Since then, however, FonF has been expanded to also include planned attempts (planned FonF), in which linguistic features are selected in advance and are practiced through focused tasks (Ellis, 2001). It has also included any incidental attention to form during a communicative task, even when there is no communication breakdown. This is what is called 'incidental FonF' by Ellis (2001) and includes both reactive and preemptive attempts (i.e., when the teacher or the learner initiates attention to form before any errors have occurred). The study reported in this paper has operationalized incidental FonF based on this definition.

Regardless of the type of FonF, attention to form is always integrated into communicative tasks when learners' primary attention is on meaning. Thus, FonF instruction involves incidental learning, as opposed to intentional learning. This, however, is not to exclude the role of noticing in FonF. Indeed, as pointed out by Ellis (2012), FonF draws on interactionist-cognitive theories of learning which emphasize the role of interaction and noticing.

### **Studies on Oral Incidental Lexical FonF**

As stated before, the majority of the studies on lexical FonF have addressed FonF in reading with a few lexical items selected in advance. Of more interest to this study, however, are those which have investigated learning vocabulary through oral incidental FonF. A number of studies have explored the contribution of oral incidental FonF to learning vocabulary through either measuring the rate of uptake or running posttests (e.g., Alcón, 2007; Pouresmaeil & Gholami, 2019; Choi & Li, 2012; Gholami & Gholami, 2020; Williams, 2001). However, as this study focuses on learning vocabulary as gauged through posttests, only studies with similar testing measures will be reviewed here. Other studies (Loewen, 2005; Loewen & Philp, 2006; Nassaji, 2010, 2013) which have delved into the effects of incidental FonF without distinguishing between the effects on different linguistic categories will not be reviewed here.

To our knowledge, only two studies, namely Williams (2001) and Alcón (2007), explored the contribution of oral incidental FonF to learning vocabulary through running individualized posttests. Williams (2001) investigated the effectiveness of syntactic and lexical incidental FonF among learners with four levels of proficiency (she does not specify what exactly each level of proficiency was). The results of her study indicated that FonF was highly effective in developing learners' lexical knowledge in all four groups. Furthermore, it was found that FonF was more effective as the proficiency level increased. The accuracy rate in testing was found to be 50%, 68%, 78%, and 94% for levels 1-4, respectively. However, the rate of spontaneous use of the lexical items was found to be very low. In a correlational study, Alcón (2007) tested the effectiveness of teacher-initiated lexical incidental FonF. More specifically, she aimed at finding the relationship between noticing and learning vocabulary in incidental FonF. Test items, which were of translation type, were designed out of those lexical items learners reported they had noticed at the end of the class. She found a correlation of 0.75 and 0.65 between noticing and the use of lexical items in written translations in both immediate and delayed posttests, respectively.

Both studies have greatly contributed to our understanding of the effectiveness of oral incidental FonF in developing learners' lexical knowledge. However, a caveat of these studies, as admitted by the authors, is that they did not account for learners' a priori familiarity with the focused lexical items. In studies on FonF, it is important to make sure whether learners have previous knowledge of the focused items (Nassaji, 2013). In planned FonF, this could be checked through pretests.

However, in incidental FonF, in which there is no pre-selection of items, pretesting is not possible. This, however, does not obviate the need for ascertaining the learners' familiarity with the focused words. As Nassaji (2016) states, designing test items out of focus on form episodes (FFE; defined as instances of attention to form in the course of communication) about which learners already have good knowledge does not seem plausible. As explained later, in the present study, tests were designed out of lexical items the learners had little or no previous knowledge of. This study also tried to see whether oral incidental FonF would have any effects on learners' receptive and productive knowledge of the focused words. More specifically, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Does oral incidental FonF improve learners' receptive lexical knowledge in short and long terms?
2. Does oral incidental FonF improve learners' productive lexical knowledge in short and long terms?
3. Is there any significant difference between the effectiveness of oral lexical incidental FonF in short and long terms?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study was conducted with 15 homogenous EFL learners (male = 7 and female = 8) in a free discussion class, with an average age of 21. All participants were university students studying majors other than English. The participants spoke Turkish as their first language, and all were proficient speakers of Persian as their second language. The homogeneity of the participants was established through running a retired version of Academic Module IELTS Test, after running an orientation session on this test. All participants agreed to take part in the study voluntarily by signing a consent form.

After assigning scores to each examinee, we calculated the mean score and the standard deviation (SD). The mean score was 6.5 (which equals to B2 level of proficiency according to Common European Framework Reference (CEFR)), and the SD was found to be 0.62. To establish their homogeneity, only the individuals within 1 SD (0.62) above and below the mean (C1 and B2 categories of CEFR) were selected as the participants of this study. This equalled 15 participants from a pool of 22 examinees.

The instructor of the class was a 25-year-old male teacher. He held an MA in TEFL and had five years of teaching experience, three years of which took place in free discussion classes.

### **Instruments**

One mini-sized wireless MP3 voice-recorder was used to record class interactions. The voice-recorder was placed in the center of the classroom, where it could record the whole-class interactions with a good quality. In addition, uptake sheets were used to ascertain the learners' familiarity with lexical FFEs they noticed in class by ticking 'Yes' (denoting the form was new) or 'No' (indicating the form was not new) in the respective section (see Appendix A). These sheets were adopted from Gholami and Basirian (2011) and were in the form of an organized chart on which the learners were asked to keep writing down any linguistic points (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) they noticed momentarily throughout the session. In fact, this instrument acted

as organized note-taking worksheets for the learners similar to their default jot-downs in their notebooks, while it functioned as on-line (concurrent) think-aloud protocol means for us.

There were also some tailor-made tests in this study. These were individualized immediate and delayed posttests, which were designed to measure any learning of vocabulary as a result of oral incidental FonF. These tests were in the form of multiple-choice questions as well as prompt-based writings. Items of the tests were designed based on the lexical items the learners reported to be novel to them on their uptake sheets.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through careful observation and audio-recording of 10 sessions (three sessions a week and 15 hours in total) of meaning-oriented whole-class discussions on topics of common interest. As class procedure, the learners were informed about the topic of the following session in advance and were asked to have some reading or thinking on the topics in order to have some information to share in class.

In addition to the audio-recording of each session, the first author attended the class as an unobtrusive observer each session and took field notes of the FFEs (i.e., linguistic points focused on incidentally in the course of oral communication). These notes were then used along with the audio-recorded data to identify the FFEs with more precision.

To calculate any learning of vocabulary, four tests were administered to the learners. The first two tests, altogether, acted as the immediate posttest and took place after the fifth and tenth sessions, while the second two tests (delayed posttest altogether) were held after a lapse of five weeks after each immediate posttest.

### **Identification of FFEs**

Following the transcription of the audio-recordings, with the help of the field notes, we identified all instances of FFEs. An FFE was defined as “the discourse from the point where the attention to linguistic form starts to the point where it ends, due to a change in topic back to message or sometimes another focus on form” (Ellis et al., 2001a, p. 294). Once we identified the FFEs, we categorized them based on their linguistic foci (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation). For the purpose of this study, we were only interested in lexical FFEs. Extract 1 indicates a sample lexical FFE taken from the data of this study.

*Extract 1: A sample lexical FFE*

**S:** When the *baby* is 4 months, the soul comes. [Trigger]

**T:** You mean the ‘fetus’, right? Not baby! [Teacher’s feedback]

**S:** Fetus?! [Checking the feedback by the student]

**T:** Yes. When you’re in your mom’s womb (showing belly with hand), you’re a fetus (writing *fetus* on the board). [More explanation about the target word]

**S:** uh ha! Fetus! When the fetus is 4 months. [Uptake; end of FFE]

### **Testing Materials**

To measure any learning of vocabulary, individualized tests were designed for each learner out of the lexical FFEs the learners reported to be new to them on their uptake sheets. In addition, there

were some distractor items, which were designed to minimize the possibility of guessing the source of the questions (i.e., uptake sheets).

One of the aims of this study was to measure the effects of oral incidental FonF on vocabulary learning in the short term. To this end, for each learner, we randomly selected 50% of the total lexical FFEs the learner reported to be new to him/her every session and tailored test items based on them. Since administering the immediate posttest to measure the short-term effects after the last session (i.e., the tenth session) did not seem plausible due to a long interval between the beginning sessions and the immediate posttest, we administered two posttests three days after the fifth and tenth sessions. The questions of the first immediate posttest were designed out of sessions one to five, and the ones of the second immediate posttest were designed out of sessions six to ten. To measure the effects of incidental FonF in the long term, two delayed posttests were administered. The first delayed posttest was administered five weeks after the first immediate posttest, and the second one was administered five weeks after the second immediate posttest. Just like the immediate posttests, the questions of the first delayed posttest were designed out of the first five sessions, and the ones of the second delayed posttest were designed out of the second five sessions. Figure 1 illustrates the timeline of the procedures.



**Figure 1. Timeline of the procedure**

In order to measure the learners' receptive and productive knowledge, two different types of tests were developed: multiple-choice items (tapping receptive knowledge) and prompt-based writings (tapping productive knowledge). The multiple-choice items asked the learners to choose the correct choice among the provided four options. The learners were allowed to ask about the meaning of any words they did not know in the sentences (except for the multiple-choices options). As the tests were individualized, the number of items the learners were provided with differed and ranged from 17-23. A sample multiple-choice item is provided in Sample 1 below.

*Sample 1: A sample multiple-choice item*

The champion felt. when he lost the match to the amateur. It was such a shame for him.

- a) Humiliated      b) jubilant      c) prosperous      c) exalted

The answer to this item is choice 'a' (humiliated). This item was designed out of a teacher-initiated preemptive FFE. The FFE was as the following:

**T:** Do you know the meaning of 'humiliate'?

**Ss:** No.

**T:** (Writing *humiliate* on the board) It means to make someone feel ashamed usually by doing something that destroys the person's dignity and image in public or lowers his or her position in others' eyes. Got it?

**Ss:** *tahghir kardan* (Persian equivalent of the word, i.e., humiliate)?

**T:** Yes.

Based on the uptake sheet analysis, this word (*humiliate*) was found to be written as a lexical item and ticked as a novel word.

The writing section, on the other hand, was designed to measure the learners' ability to use the words in their output. This section asked the learners to write about the topic using the provided thematically relevant words. Each immediate posttest included two writing sections with different topics. The topics of the writing sections were randomly chosen out of the session topics discussed in class, and the words were the ones focused incidentally during the discussions. Here, again, only the words which the learners had ticked as novel on their uptake sheets were selected. It should be noted that the words selected for this section were not tested for receptive knowledge. It was assumed that presenting the same words in both testing sections would artificially assist the learners in getting the correct answer in multiple-choice questions. The number of the words the learners were provided with in each writing task ranged from six to ten. A sample of the writing task is provided in Appendix B.

Regarding the multiple-choice questions, the format and the number of the test items of the delayed posttests were the same as the immediate ones. However, their content was slightly different from the immediate ones in order to minimize the possible practice effect. Ten per cent of the questions were randomly substituted by 10% of new questions. Furthermore, to minimize memory effects, as in Dobao (2014), the order of the questions was changed. Regarding the writing section, the same topics of the immediate posttests with the same instructions were given to the learners. As File and Adams (2010) state, time interval of at least two weeks would minimize practice effect. Therefore, as the interval between the immediate and delayed posttests was five-week long, presumably the learners would not remember the topics; hence, there would be no or little practice effect.

### **Scoring and Analysis**

Multiple-choice questions were marked as correct only if the learners chose the correct response. Regarding the writing section, the learners' use of the words was considered as either correct, partially correct, or incorrect. The criteria for the "correct" category were to use the given words with correct meaning, correct grammar, and in a correct context. If these criteria were all violated or if the learners failed to use the vocabulary, they were given no correct scores for the use of that particular vocabulary. However, if the learners used the vocabulary with correct meaning but wrong grammar or context their use of the word was considered as partially correct. This was done in order to partially account for depth of vocabulary knowledge. As Schmitt (2008) states, while the form-meaning mapping is the first and most important aspect of a lexical item to be acquired, it is not sufficient, particularly if the word is to be used productively. Apart from the form-meaning link, learners need to know about aspects such as "word parts, grammatical functions, collocations, constraints on use," etc. if they want to use the lexical items productively (Nation, 2001, p. 27). The scoring of each individual participant's writings, thus, was based on the correct, appropriate, and contextualized incorporation of the prompt words in the writings, and other common assessment factors in writing were not taken into account in this study.

For reliability purposes in scoring the writings, we scored the writings separately. If the discrepancy between the scores given by the two raters was not bigger than 1 score, which was mostly the case, the scores were added up, and the mean score was regarded as the true score of each individual participant. In cases of over one score discrepancy, the raters discussed them with a third rater in light of the above-mentioned scoring criteria with an attempt to reach a consensus.

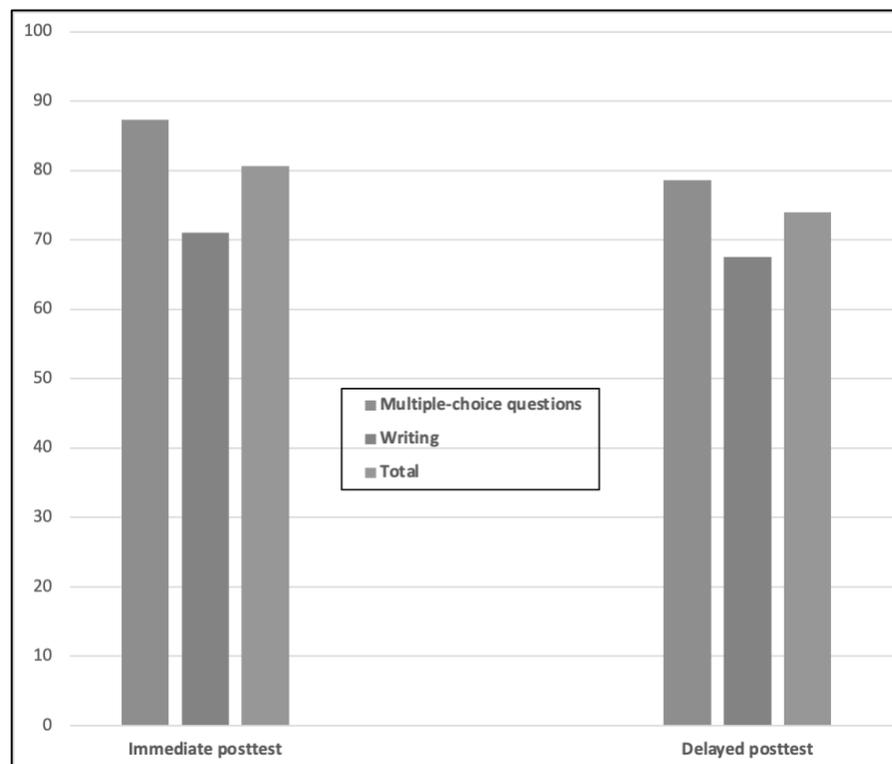
To account for the accuracy rate in both the immediate and delayed posttests, raw frequencies and percentages were calculated. However, to find if there was a significant difference between the results of the immediate posttest and the delayed one, Pearson's Chi Square analysis was performed on the raw frequencies since the data consisted of frequency counts of categorical data. The alpha level was set at  $p < .05$ .

## Results

This study was concerned with exploring any possible short-term and long-term learning of vocabulary through oral incidental FonF. Table 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the findings.

**Table 1. Retention rate of lexical FFEs**

	Number of items	Number of correctly answered/used items (%)
<b>Immediate posttest</b>		
Multiple-choice questions	322	281 (87.3)
Writing	220	156 (71)
Total	542	437 (80.6)
<b>Delayed posttest</b>		
Multiple choice questions	322	253 (78.6)
Writing	220	148 (67.3)
Total	542	401 (74)



**Figure 2.** Retention rate of lexical FFEs in percentages

A total of 542 lexical FFEs (53 reactive and 489 preemptive) were tested in the immediate posttest. Of this number, a great percentage of the FFEs were tested in the form of multiple-choice questions and to a lesser extent in the form of prompt-based writings. Regarding the multiple-choice questions, the learners were able to answer a vast majority of the items correctly. With regard to the writings, the learners could use around three fourths of the words correctly meeting all the criteria. Out of the tested words in the writing section, 18 (8.2%) were used partially correctly. Put another way, there were some learners who had used the exact vocabulary mentioned in class in the form of FFE, but the use of that vocabulary was not grammatically correct in the sentence used. Hence, they failed to meet the criterion of using the vocabulary with correct grammar. Altogether, the learners were able to answer over 80% of the items correctly in the immediate posttest.

Similar to the immediate posttest, a total of 542 lexical FFEs (53 reactive and 489 preemptive) were tested in the delayed posttest. Out of these FFEs, the number of the FFEs tested in the form of multiple-choice questions and prompt-based writings was the same as the ones in the immediate posttest. In total, the learners were able to answer 74% of the questions correctly. Regarding the multiple-choice questions, they could answer a considerable number of the questions correctly. Likewise, the learners were able to correctly incorporate a great number of the given words into their writings meeting all the criteria. Similar to the immediate posttest, 16 (7.3%) words were used with correct meaning but wrong grammar. Therefore, they were considered as partially correct.

The comparison of the overall contribution of oral incidental FonF to learning vocabulary in short and long terms through Chi Square analysis showed a significant difference,  $\chi^2(1, n = 1084) = 6.44, p = .01, \phi = .08$ . With regard to multiple-choice questions, the results were the same,  $\chi^2(1, n = 644) = 7.99, p = .005, \phi = .11$ . However, it was not the case as far as writing was concerned; Chi Square analysis showed no significant difference between the accuracy rates in short and long terms,  $\chi^2(1, n = 440) = .52, p = .47, \phi = .04$ . Table 2 summarizes the Chi Square results.

**Table 2: Chi Square results**

	<i>p</i>	Effect size
Multiple-choice questions	.005*	.11
Writing	.47	.04
Total	.01*	.08

**Note:** \* = significant difference

## Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of oral incidental FonF in developing EFL learners' lexical knowledge in a free discussion class. Based on the findings, the learners were able to get the questions right to a great extent in the short term and to a lesser extent in the long term in total. The difference between these rates was found to be significant. Although the retention rate in the long term decreased significantly, that the learners could answer 74% of the questions correctly after five weeks is encouraging. This becomes more promising when we consider the nature of incidental FonF, which is not designed to teach specific linguistic forms, and, hence, attention to form (lexis in this case) is incidental, extensive, and transient. Therefore, the results indicate rather high effectiveness of oral incidental FonF in developing learners' lexical knowledge. This finding is in line with that of Alcón (2007) and Williams (2001), which also found oral incidental FonF

highly effective in developing learners' lexical knowledge. As all questions in the tests were designed out of the lexical items the learners reported to have no previous knowledge of, the correct test scores in this study could be taken as some evidence in support of the incorporation of *new* lexical knowledge into the learners' developing L2 system. However, it should also be noted that the act of note-taking, although similar in nature to what is normally practiced in a typical class, might have increased the learners' consciousness and allowed them to further process the noticed forms (probably through engaging in metalinguistic reflection), thereby, boosting the depth of processing. This, in turn, might have led to a higher retention rate. However, to determine whether the act of note-taking was indeed a contributing factor, further research with and without the incorporation of note-taking activities is required.

The positive effects of incidental FonF in this study may also be partly due to the nature of the FFEs. The vast majority of the FFEs addressing vocabulary in this study were preemptive, and, as a result, the FFEs tested in this study were mostly of the preemptive type. Previous research (Nassaji, 2010, 2013) has indicated the retention rate of preemptive FFEs to be higher than reactive ones in general. However, as the number of preemptive FFEs were by far higher than the reactive ones in this study, comparing the retention rate of reactive and preemptive FFEs would not be statistically plausible. Thus, the results should be taken as the effectiveness of oral incidental lexical FonF as it occurs naturally in a meaning-oriented class, particularly that in communicative instructional contexts incidental attention to vocabulary occurs mostly through preemptive FFEs (Nassaji, 2010, 2013).

This study was also concerned with learners' ability to incorporate the lexical FFEs into their written production. The learners' ability to perform well in the writing section gives further support to the positive role of oral incidental FonF in learning vocabulary. The learners could use the words meeting all the scoring criteria to a great extent in the short term and to a slightly lesser degree in the long term. This may indicate that not only does oral incidental FonF develop learners' receptive knowledge, but it also fosters their productive knowledge. That the gains were higher in the recognition-type test than in the productive one is not surprising. As Schmitt (2008) and Laufer (2005) state, developing productive knowledge is more difficult than developing receptive knowledge. However, the fact that the accuracy rate in the delayed posttest did not decrease significantly in the productive test, whereas it did in the recognition-type test corroborates Schmitt's (1998) claim that once productive mastery is reached, forgetting is less probable to occur.

One further point to note here is that there were some learners who had used some of the lexical items with correct meaning but wrong grammar in their writings. Such instances were considered as partially correct. However, it should be noted that even these cases indicate the occurrence of some learning as they show that the learners have made a developmental transition from a stage of not knowing the meaning of a word toward that of using the word with the right meaning, which, according to Schmitt (2008), is the most crucial aspect of a word to be acquired.

The learners' use of some of the lexical items with their correct meaning but ill-formed grammar could be looked at from another perspective. This provides us with some accounts on depth of vocabulary knowledge. Almost all instances of the grammatical misuse of the words were related to their role in the sentence. That is, the learners had used them as pertaining to another part of speech, which was wrong based on the form they had used. What is apparent here is the learners' lack of knowledge of the correct forms of these words in their intended roles. For instance, there were some learners who had used the word *conscientious* as a noun, as in the sentence *I think*

*people that have more than 1 wife don't have conscientious*. This indicates that the learners have correctly gotten something about the meaning of the lexical item, but their knowledge of the lexical form is not comprehensive and does not cover its all aspects. It should be noted that all the tested lexical items were used more than once (3-6 times) in the course of communication. However, they were only used in the form addressed by the FFEs. Thus, it seems that learners, at least with a proficiency level of intermediate or upper-intermediate, may fail to learn all aspects of a lexical item when their attention is solely drawn to its meaning aspect. This may provide some support to what Read (2000) and Schmitt (2008) state about learning vocabulary. They argue that learners cannot acquire all aspects of a word in just one or only a few encounters (as was the case in this study). Therefore, Read states that expecting learners to develop some partial knowledge of the word is more realistic.

## **Implications**

This study has some important implications. The findings of the study revealed that providing lexical incidental FonF in the course of oral communication develops learners' lexical knowledge. Therefore, the general implication for teachers would be to occasionally take some time out to attend to vocabulary along with drawing attention to other language components during oral communication. Incidental FonF has the advantage of drawing attention to form while not interrupting the flow of communication to a great extent. Therefore, it could be easily incorporated into language programs which are communicative.

With regard to learners' performance in writing, the results showed the learners' inability to use some of the words with their correct grammatical forms. It seems that learners are not completely able, at least at intermediate or upper-intermediate levels of proficiency, to recognize the class of some words if they are not made aware of them explicitly. Therefore, the implication in this regard for teachers is to provide the learners with some information about the grammatical aspects of the lexical items, such as their word class, along with their meaning. Otherwise, as noted by Nation and Wang (1999), learners need to encounter the same new word at least 10 times (before it is forgotten) in order to develop knowledge of its different aspects. While we agree that additional exposures to a new word further consolidates it in the mind, the point is that developing knowledge of different aspects of a word merely through input is very time-consuming. It goes without saying that such an amount of exposure requires large quantities of input. According to Zahar et al. (2001), for L2 learners to acquire 2000 words from only input in an instructed context, it would take 29 years. It is obvious that L2 learners need to master the language in much less time. Thus, as noted by Laufer (2006), "there is no escape from supplementing oral and written input with form-focused instruction" (p. 161).

## **Conclusion and limitations**

Previous studies on written incidental FonF found it to be beneficial in developing learners' lexical knowledge (e.g., File & Adams, 2010; Laufer, 2006). This study provides further support in favour of incidental FonF as it reveals oral incidental FonF to be effective as well. This study, however, does not claim for a departure from separate explicit vocabulary teaching/learning programs (such as FonFs or an integration of explicit vocabulary teaching with meaning-based activities). Clearly, such programs are beneficial for learners as some research has shown (e.g., Laufer, 2006; Laufer & Rozovski-Roitblat, 2011). The present study dealt with the effectiveness of oral incidental FonF in fostering learners' lexical knowledge. As stated at the beginning of the paper, learners also acquire vocabulary through oral communication. This study shows that temporary shifting of

attention from meaning to form (lexis) in the course of oral communication could be beneficial in developing learners' both receptive and productive lexical knowledge. It goes, however, without saying that spontaneous use of the words (particularly orally) could be a better indication of learners' productive knowledge of the lexical items. This could be a suggestion for further research, although such kind of testing is not without its difficulties (Ellis, 2012; Williams, 2001).

This study has its limitations, which, however, may provide avenues for further research. The most obvious limitation of the study is the small size of the sample. This limitation was, however, inevitable due to methodological reasons. This study was conducted in a free discussion class, which required idea sharing of all learners. It is obvious that higher number of participants in such a class would limit the amount of time for each learner to take part in class discussions. Nevertheless, the recommendations and conclusions based on the findings of this study are supposed to be suggestive. Additional studies with larger sample sizes are required before we can safely generalize the results. One more limitation of this study is the fact that the writing task although providing some accounts on the learners' productive knowledge, could not capture whether the learners remembered all the words. As Williams (2001) and Loewen (2005) state, factors other than the learners' knowledge of a lexical item, such as not being at the right time and the right place, may be the reason for not using a lexical item in the output. Here, the learner might simply not have had any ideas to express through incorporating some of the given words. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from some learners at the examination sessions revealed that, at times, they failed to integrate some of the lexical items in their writings simply due to lack of ideas, although they knew their meanings. Future research may also account for the effects of note-taking on the retention rate of lexical FFEs. Another suggestion for future research could be to investigate the contribution of different types of oral incidental FonF (i.e., preemptive and reactive) to learning vocabulary. As some studies have shown, different types of incidental FonF are beneficial in language learning to different degrees (e.g., Nassaji, 2010, 2013). However, whether this differential effectiveness also holds true in learning vocabulary remains uninvestigated. Finally, it is recommended that future research also investigate the role of individual differences (IDs), such as language analytical ability, working memory, anxiety, etc., in oral incidental FonF effectiveness.

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## Appendix A

### Sample Uptake Sheet

(session 9) single life

	Who said it? (Check as many as you wish.)			Was it <b>NEW</b> to you?	
	Teacher	Classmate	Me	Yes	No
What are you noticing about <b>vocabulary</b> ?					
run the class = handle the class	✓			✓	
unmarried couples	✓			✓	
orphan = يتيم	✓				✓
pass the buck = avoid responsibility	✓			✓	
soulmate = نبتة	✓	✓		✓	
widow				✓	
spinster = unmarried woman who is not young	✓				
bigamy		✓			✓
What are you noticing about <b>grammar</b> ?					
depend (on)	✓				✓
has been <u>traveling</u>	✓			✓	
What are you noticing about <b>pronunciation</b> ?					
Abortion	✓				✓
occur ↓ ə	✓			✓	

## Appendix B

Sample prompt-based writing task

WRITING

Writing task 1

Write a paragraph of at least 75 words on “single life”. You can write about any aspects such as different beliefs about single life, your own point of view, the reasons, etc. However, you must use the following words in your writing:

*couple, soul mate, love failure, bigamy, polygamy, open marriage, conscientious, spinster, taboo*

I myself like to marry. I don't want to be spinster. but some people want to have a single life. they have some reasons for this single life. some people had love failure in past and because of this they don't want to marry. some people say we don't have soul mate. so they have single life. But do you know what is very very bad?!! bigamy or polygamy. I think people that have more than 1 wife don't have conscientious. ~~I think~~ I think single life is better than bigamy and polygamy. even open marriage is better than bigamy. of course open marriage is bad too but I think it is better than having 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100 wives. I hate people that are bigamy. it's very bad.

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