DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCHING THE EFFECTS OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK ON THE ACQUISITION OF THE PAST TENSE: A PILOT STUDY

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This article describes a methodology for researching the effects of corrective feedback in language learning. A pilot study was designed to investigate the effects of two corrective feedback-types (CF-types), recasts and metalinguistic feedback (MF), on the acquisition of the regular and irregular past simple tense in English. The article reports on the methodological design of the pilot study and discusses the practical and theoretical issues which need to be taken into account before carrying out a larger-scale study on this topic.

Four intermediate students of English at a private language school in Spain each received one of the two CF-types while telling part of a fairy tale. They then told another part of the same story without receiving feedback. They could use keywords, including the infinitives of all verbs and most nouns.

The sessions were recorded and the transcripts were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitative analysis of the data revealed the importance of deciding how to calculate rates of accurate use

and what to do with certain types of errors, such as self-correction and hypercorrection, and unclear forms.

Some limitations of the study design were identified. One problem with the task proved to be that half of the students were consciously monitoring their past tense use. Another problem that arose was the difficulty of separating students' knowledge of the past tense from their pronunciation. We therefore suggest pre-testing students' pronunciation of past tense endings.

Key words: Corrective feedback, recasts, metalinguistic feedback, second language acquisition, past tense

Este artículo describe una metodología para investigar los efectos del feedback correctivo ("corrective feedback") en el aprendizaje de idiomas. Un estudio piloto ha sido diseñado con el fin de analizar los efectos de dos tipos de feedback correctivo, reformulaciones ("recasts") y retroalimentación metalingüística ("metalinguistic feedback·"), sobre la adquisición del pasado simple regular e irregular en inglés. El artículo trata del diseño metodológico y de los asuntos prácticos y teóricos que pueden influir en el desarrollo de un estudio a gran escala sobre este tema.

Cuatro estudiantes de inglés de nivel intermedio de una academia privada en España recibieron uno de los dos tipos de retroalimentación mientras contaban parte de un cuento de hadas. A continuación contaron otra parte de la misma historia sin recibir retroalimentación alguna. Pudieron utilizar palabras clave, que incluían los infinitivos de todos los verbos y la mayoría de los substantivos.

Las sesiones fueron grabadas y las transcripciones analizadas cualitativamente y cuantitativamente. El análisis cuantitativo reveló la importancia de decidir la manera de calcular los porcentajes de uso correcto y también qué hacer con algunos tipos de errores como la autocorrección y la hipercorrección y las formas indistinguibles.

También se identificaron ciertas limitaciones del estudio. Un problema que surgió durante el ejercicio fue que la mitad de los estudiantes estaban prestando demasiada atención al uso del pasado simple. Otro problema que se detectó fue la dificultad de separar el conocimiento del pasado simple de la pronunciación de los estudiantes. Por eso sugerimos que en el futuro se haga una prueba preliminar de la pronunciación de las terminaciones del pasado simple.

Palabras clave: *Feedback correctivo, reformulaciones, retroalimentación metalingüística, adquisición de L2, pretérito*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the intention of conducting a larger study on the differential effects of corrective feedback-types (CF-types) on the acquisition of the past tense, the following pilot study was carried out to explore practical and theoretical issues that could be important for the design of the main study. The aim of this pilot study was to try out and perfect the research design and the method of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

First of all, we wanted to determine how well a story-telling task could elicit the target structure and if this task was at the right level of difficulty for the intermediate students taking part in our study. We also needed to make sure we could obtain clear recordings of the stories and decide on the appropriate method of transcription. Regarding the teachers' corrections, we needed to check if the teacher could consistently provide the students with the right type of feedback.

Finally, we needed to design a method for analysing our data qualitatively and quantitatively. While doing this, we discovered that we had to make a number of choices that could influence our results. We believe this could have important implications for future research on the impact of corrective feedback on the acquisition of the past tense.

1.1 The acquisition of the past tense

The past tense was chosen because it is a structure which is introduced very early in the curriculum, usually at elementary level, but it is not acquired without problems.

According to Doughty & Varela (1998), the past tense is a problematic area for learners. Morpheme studies such as Dulay & Burt (1974) show that the regular past tense *-ed* is acquired after such morphemes as articles, progressive *–ing*, and plural *–s* but before such morphemes as long plural *–es* and third person *–s*. In Dulay & Burt (1974) and Larsen-Freeman (1975) the irregular past comes after the regular past in order of acquisition, although other studies (Hakuta 1976, Rosansky 1976) place the irregular past before the regular past. Either way, both irregular and regular past forms seem to be acquired quite late compared to other morphemes. In Dulay & Burt (1974) the regular and irregular past are ranked 6th and 7th out of 10 morphemes.

Moreover, learners do not seem to acquire the past tense form for all verbs at the same time. Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds (1995) have shown that verbs referring to past events (e.g. arrive) are marked first, before activity verbs (e.g. sleep) and state verbs (e.g. want).

We can thus expect learners to make errors against this structure. As stated by Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006: 251), "the typical error made by learners is the use of the simple or present form of the verb in place of V-*ed*: *Yesterday I *visit* my sister." In case of the irregular past tense, learners often overgeneralize the *–ed* ending, e.g. *I falled. (Takashima & Ellis 1999: 176).

1.2 Different types of feedback

What we want to find out is whether corrective feedback can have a positive effect on the acquisition of this grammatical structure. The term *corrective feedback (CF)* can be defined as "any feedback provided to a

learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form" (Russell & Spada, 2006: 134).

An influential study on the use of different types of CF provided by teachers in a French immersion school in Canada by Lyster and Ranta (1997: 46-48) has shown that teachers generally use six different feedback types when correcting learners' errors:

1. *explicit correction*: "the explicit provision of the correct form" where the teacher "clearly indicates that what the student ha[s] said [is] incorrect (e.g. "Oh you mean", "You should say").*"

2. *recasts*: "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of the student's utterance, minus the error"

3. *clarification requests*: "indicate to students either that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way"

4. *metalinguistic feedback*: "comments, information or questions related to the well-formedness of the students' utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form"

5. *elicitation*: "teachers elicit completion of their own utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to *fill in the blank*"

6. *repetition*: "the teacher's repetition, in isolation, of the student's erroneous utterance" (usually with adjusted intonation).

In studies comparing different CF-types, researchers tend to contrast implicit and explicit feedback with each other. In the case of the latter, the teacher clearly rejects the learner's utterance as incorrect. *Recasts* are generally classified as implicit, although research shows that they can take a more explicit form (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Sheen, 2006), depending on the context, the length or other characteristics. Opinions also differ about which CF-types belong to the explicit category. In Lyster & Ranta's (1997) classification, as can be seen above, explicit correction only oc-

curs when the teacher rejects the incorrect form and provides the correct one. However, according to Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006), implicit correction occurs through *recasts*, whereas explicit CF can take two forms: explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback.

Because of the problems which arise with this classification, Yang and Lyster (2010) propose a different distinction, which opposes *input-providing CF* to *output-pushing CF*. In this case *recasts* and e*xplicit correction* are grouped together because they both provide the correct form. The other four CF-types *(clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation* and *repetition)* all withhold the correct form and push the learner to self-repair. These *output-pushing* CF-types all fall under the meta-category of *prompts*.

Table 1 below summarizes the two different ways of categorizing CF-types which we have just discussed.

Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006)	
Implicit CF	Explicit CF
- recasts	- explicit correction - metalinguistic feedback
Yang & Lyster (2010)	
Input-providing CF	Output-pushing CF
- recasts - explicit correction	prompts: - clarification requests - metalinguistic feedback - elicitation - repetition

Table 1: Two different ways of categorizing CF-types

1.3. CF in general

Although some researchers, such as Truscott (1999), believe CF on grammar does not help learners to speak grammatically, a vast number of studies have shown positive and durable effects on L2 grammar acquisition, as stated in Russell and Spada's (2006) meta-analysis of 31 CF-studies. Lyster and Saito's (2010) meta-analysis of 15 oral feedback studies confirmed these findings.

Both Russell & Spada (2006) and Lyster & Saito (2010) suggest that further research is needed into the effects of different feedback types. In our current study we propose to compare two of these feedback types, namely *recasts* and *metalinguistic feedback (MF)*.

Following the terminology of Lyster and Ranta (1997: 46-47), we defined *recasts* as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error" and *MF* as "comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form"(see 1.2). These two feedback-types were contrasted because the former is an example of implicit feedback, as the teacher does not explicitly state there has been an error, whereas *MF* is an example of explicit feedback. Several studies have investigated the difference between implicit and explicit feedback (e.g. Carroll, 2001), Muranoi (2000), Lyster (2004)), usually showing greater benefits for more explicit forms.

1.4. Specific CF on the past tense

Another reason for choosing *recasts* and *MF* for our pilot study is that the effects of these two CF-types on the acquisition of the regular past tense have already been investigated by Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006). The authors found that *MF* was more effective than *recasts*.

Whereas Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006) only looked at the regular past tense, Yang & Lyster (2010) compared the effects of *recasts* and

prompts (of which *MF* is a sub-type, see table 1) on the acquisition of both regular and irregular past tense forms. They were interested in possible differential effects of feedback-types on different types of grammatical structures. While the regular past tense is based on a rule (infinitive + *-ed*), the irregular past tense is exemplar based, which means each form is stored as a vocabulary item in our memories and can be retrieved as such, without having to apply any rule to it. As Housen (2002) puts it, irregular verbs are "stored as one specific form-meaning unit in lexical memory".

Rather than classifying feedback types into implicit and explicit feedback, Yang and Lyster (2010) oppose *recasts* to *prompts*, which comprise feedback types such as *MF* and clarification requests. *Prompts* differ from *recasts* because they withhold the correct form. The authors found that both types of CF had positive effects on the acquisition of the past tense. They also found that *prompts* had a greater effect for the regular past tense, whereas they did not find any difference for the irregular one. They indicate that further research is needed into the difference between various kinds of *prompts* on the one hand, and *recasts* on the other hand.

1.5. Aims of the pilot study

We therefore propose to compare two types of *prompts* and compare them to *recasts*. I have chosen to compare *metalinguistic feedback*, because its effects on past tense acquisition have also been investigated by Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006), and *elicitation*, because this type of feedback was found to be the most successful at generating students' uptake by Lyster & Ranta (1997) ("uptake" is the learners' response to feedback).

Having only one group of four students at our disposal for a pilot study, we have decided to compare only two types of feedback to begin with. The aims of the pilot study are as follows:

- to design and try out appropriate materials for the study of the acquisition of the past tense

- to make sure the study is technically feasible (to identify any problems recording the students, transcribing the recording, …)

- to find out whether the teacher-researcher is able to correct the students consistently using the chosen type of CF

- to identify any other problems or questions that might affect our research

- to develop a method for the quantitative study of the effects of the two types of CF and to compare the results to previous CF-studies.

For the last aim, we have formulated the following research questions:

- Does the students' accuracy of past tense forms improve after having received CF aimed at those forms?

- Is there a difference between the students receiving *recasts* and those receiving *MF*?

- Are there differential effects between *recasts* and *MF* on the acquisition of the regular and the irregular past?

As our study is a pilot study and there are only 4 students taking part, any quantitative results extracted from it will of course be limited and we do not intend to draw conclusions based on these results.

2. METHOD

2.1. Materials

For our pilot study, we have taken elements from previous studies by Takashima & Ellis (1999), Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006) and Yang

& Lyster (2010). The use of stories to elicit the past tense is common in all these studies, and we have chosen to do the same. To elicit the stories, researchers have used pictures and/or keywords (nouns and verbs in the infinitive form). The use of keywords was considered necessary because the students might lack some of the vocabulary as their level was not very high.

For our study, we used a lesser known fairytale, the story of Rumpelstiltskin, so that the task would be of communicative interest for the students. They were first given a series of pictures (see appendix 1), representing the main events of the story and they were asked to discuss the pictures in pairs. The teacher asked them if they recognized the story or if they had any idea what the story could be about. Then they were told that each of them would have to tell one part of the story, and they would have to listen carefully because they would be asked to tell the story a second time, but this time a different part of it.

As they didn't know the story, and not to make it too difficult for the students, they were first given a written version of their part. This was then taken away and replaced by a number of keywords, with the verbs in the infinitive. (see appendix 2) For example:

> *A long time ago – miller – poor, arrogant*
> *one day – HAVE TO go – king*
> *WANT to impress – TELL – daughter – CAN spin straw into gold*

Note that an obligatory context for the past tense was created by time adverbials such as "a long time ago" and "one day".

There were four students and four parts to be told. Feedback type was randomly assigned to each student. Student 1 and 2 received *recasts*, in the form of repetitions or partial repetitions of the learner's utterance without the error (1), whereas students 3 and 4 received MF, in the form of questions, e.g. "what's the past of *tell*?" or affirmations, e.g. "in the past, eh"(2).

(1) S1: And the King want to know if that was true
     T: uhuh, he wanted to know
(2) S3: and the queen start to cry.
     T: uhuh, what's the past of start?
     S3: started. started to cry.

Both versions of the story were recorded and transcribed in normal spelling, unless we judged it necessary to provide a phonetic transcription. The transcription conventions used are those proposed by Allwright and Baily (1991) in their introduction to classroom research. The aim was to keep it as simple and readable as possible, while at the same time trying to record the students' utterances faithfully.

2.2. Participants

The participants were four adult students of English at a private language academy in Spain. They had been taught as a group by the teacher-researcher for a year at their company, where they had classes of 1 hour and a half twice a week, based on the textbook *New English File Intermediate*. They had been assigned to an intermediate group by the academy, but their history of learning English varied. They all had Spanish as their first language and only one of them indicated knowing another foreign language apart from English (French). As can be seen in table 2, their ages ranged from ± 25 to 41 and the number of years they had studied English ranged from 3 to 8 years. They had only spent short periods of time in English-speaking countries. Unfortunately we could not get detailed information about student 1. We only know that he was in his mid-twenties and that it was his second year as a student at the academy.

	Age	**Learning history**	**Time spent in English-speaking country**
Student 1	±25	*unknown*	*unknown*
Student 2	33	8 years, secondary school and academies	6 months, studying
Student 3	51	3 years, academies	1 week, on holiday
Student 4	41	8 years, secondary school and academies	3 months, working

TABLE 2: AGE AND LEARNING HISTORY OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Their contact with English outside class was similar, as table 3 shows. Only 2 students indicated speaking English outside class, for work-related purposes and for only 1 or 2 hours a week.

How many hours a week do you spend using English outside class to…	**0**	**1-2**	**3-4**
Do homework		S2,S3, S4	
Read for fun	S2	S3, S4	
Watch TV, films, series, …	S2, S3, S4		
Listen to the radio	S2,S4	S3	
Talk to friends	S2, S3, S4		
Talk to colleagues, customers, people at work	S4	S2, S3	
Read work-related documents (e-mails, reports, …)		S3	S2,S4
Write e-mails, reports, …	S2	S3, S4	
Speak on the phone for your job	S4	S2, S3	
Participate in meetings	S2, S4	S3	
Give presentations	S2, S3, S4		

TABLE 3: STUDENTS'(S2-4) CONTACT WITH ENGLISH OUTSIDE CLASS

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Discussion of the pilot project and its shortcomings

The task

Our first aim is to discuss the appropriateness of the task. When we look at the first part of the transcription, where students tell the story for the first time, we see that they all tried to tell the story in the past tense. This means using a story is a good way to elicit past tense use. However, it is to be questioned whether the format of the exercise, with the key-words and infinitives in capital letters, did not focus students' attention too much on the grammar. As our aim is to investigate students' accuracy in oral communication, we did not want them to perceive the exercise as a grammar exercise. Two out of four students had a tendency to self-correct their use of the past tense, which means they were consciously moni-toring their production. By self-correction we mean the students' own immediate reformulation without the teachers' intervention. For example:

(3) S1: and he give… he gave a spinning wheel.

Student 1 corrected himself in this way two times during the first telling and student 3 did so three times. However, the other two students did not self-correct at all, so it might be a personal characteristic of the students in question to pay particular attention to accuracy. A solution to this question could be not to give the students the keywords, and to sim-ply let them retell the story based on the pictures.

Another problem with the task was that one of the four students did not manage to carry out the second part, where students had to tell another part of the story, based on what they had heard the other students tell and on the keywords. Therefore we can only compare three students with each other for the effects of CF. However, as student 4 could not tell the story the second time, student 1 retold his part of the story. As

this seemed to go well, we may also consider letting the students repeat exactly the same task.

Practical issues

Secondly, this study was a test to find out if we can get clear enough data from recording students in this way. We used a simple recorder that was downloaded for free on a notebook computer. It turned out that the recording was quite clear, but some students were harder to understand than others. The main problem was that we needed to listen for the endings of verbs, as the difference between regular verbs in the present and the past only depend on the *–ed* ending. If students do not pronounce the final sounds clearly, it gets difficult to assess whether they can accurately produce the past tense.

Pronunciation

This leads us to the problem of pronunciation. In the learners' first language, Spanish, there are no words ending in final /t/ and final /d/ is either realized as a voiced or voiceless fricative, or simply not pronounced. Also, some consonant clusters might cause problems for Spanish speakers and speakers with other first languages, as Ellis (2006) points out: "The /t/ or /d/ allomorph in *kissed* and *raised* creates a phonologically challenging consonant cluster that invites reduction, especially when the next word begins with yet another consonant (compare *kissed Pam* with *kissed it*)."

Another problem is the pronunciation of the /id/ allomorph in verbs ending in a *t* or *d*, e.g. *start – started*. If learners fail to pronounce the ending, how can we be sure it is a problem of grammar or simply of pronunciation? In the case of student 4, we can clearly see that this student does not realize he should pronounce the *–ed* ending as /id/, because he does know he needs past tense and he needs to add *–ed* to the infinitive, as he explicitly states:

(4) T: What's the past of shout ?
    M4: shout [emphasizes the final T]
    T: no
    M4: no? What's the past of shout?
    T: regular verb
    M4: shout [same as before], ED?
    T: yes, so you have to pronounce it

Again, this does not only appear to be a problem for Spanish learners, as Rohde (2002: 201) notes that none of the four German-speaking children in his study ever used the /id/ allomorph.

A final observation regarding pronunciation concerns one student's pronunciation of the regular –*ed* ending. This is pronounced as /id/ in two cases where it is not necessary by student 3, a student who also self-corrects several times. One example:

(5) S3: She offer, /ofərəd/ all the gold uh but the little man only wanted the baby.

It could be because the student is thinking about the –*ed* ending and therefore emphasizes it. Another question we can ask ourselves is whether we should consider this a correct use of the past tense, even though the pronunciation is inaccurate. Given the importance of pronunciation to distinguish past tense forms from present tense or base forms, it is surprising that previous research into the effects of corrective feedback on the past tense has not focused on this aspect.

In order to deal with this problem, we suggest pre-testing students' pronunciation of past tense endings, by letting them read aloud a number of sentences containing past tense forms. That way we can establish if students are aware of the pronunciation rules for –*ed* and if they have problems with certain consonant clusters. We would of course include a number of distracter sentences, so that students' attention is not focused on the past tense.

The teacher's corrections

Another point that we wanted to ascertain was the teacher-researcher's appropriate correction of the students in phase 1 of the study. When we look at the whole study, we can see that the teacher corrected the students' past tense errors in all cases but one. She also consistently used *recasts* with half of the class and *MF* with the other half. We have to note here, however, a problem associated with the use of *recasts*. As Truscott (1999) mentions, teachers often use *recasts* for other purposes than correction, for example to paraphrase the student's ideas or to make these ideas clearer for other students. Indeed, when we look at our study, we find some examples of *recasts* which are not aimed at correcting the students' grammar. In the following example the teacher wanted to make sure all students understood the word "spinning wheel" by showing it to them on the series of pictures.

(6) S1: and he give… he gave a spinning wheel.
     T: uhuh spinning wheel [shows the picture again]
     S1: Yeah

This is one of the reasons Truscott (1999) argues against oral grammar correction, as this ambiguous use of *recasts* might make it difficult for students to notice their corrective intention.

3.2. Quantitative analysis of the data

As stated before, we performed a quantitative analysis of our data, not with the intention of generalizing our results, but in order to develop a methodology for quantitative analysis that can be used in larger-scale studies.

Phase 1: uptake and repair

First of all we will look at the students' performance on the first task and their immediate reaction to the teacher's CF, which Lyster & Ranta (1997) call *uptake*. In Lyster & Ranta's (1997) study of uptake and

repair in a French immersion classroom, they noted that *recasts* were the least likely CF-type to lead to uptake, whereas *MF* and *elicitation* are quite successful at eliciting uptake from students and *MF* is the most successful at eliciting *repair* (i.e. the students manage to correct their error).

In our study, Students 1 and 2 received CF in the form of *recasts*. As we can see in table 4, Student 1 made 4 past-tense errors, each of which was recast by the teacher. None of the *recasts* led to uptake, although 3 of them were followed by a reaction from the student, such as "yeah" or "okay", as in example (7):

(7) S1: so he decide … he decide to tell the … to tell to the … to ask to the mi- to the … to ask to the miller to bring her daughter to the palace
T: Uhuh yes, he decided to find out, hmm uhuh
S1: okay [laughs]

However, we cannot ascertain whether these reactions acknowledge the *recast* of the erroneous form, or if they are simply reactions to the content of the utterance.

	a	b	c	d	e	f
S1	14	4	1	4	0	0
S2	25	7	3	6	1	1
S3	14	3	0	2	2	2
S4	17	5	1	5	5	3

TABLE 4: UPTAKE AND REPAIR IMMEDIATELY AFTER CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK
a= TOTAL NUMBER OF PAST TENSE TOKENS
b= total number of errors
c= number of unclear/indistinguishable forms
d= number of times CF was provided
e= number of times uptake occurred
f= number of times repair occurred

In the case of student 2, table 4 shows that there were 7 past-tense errors that were clearly distinguishable, 6 of which were followed by *recasts*. As we explained in 3.1, the teacher failed to provide CF on

only one of the students' errors. We also noted that at times it was hard to tell from the recording whether or not the student pronounced the final /d/ or /t/. Student 2 was the hardest to understand (3 of the verb-forms were difficult to distinguish, see table 4). We did not count these uncertain forms as errors and we assume that the teacher did not recognize them as errors at the time, because she did not recast any of them. In the transcript, brackets indicate an uncertain transcription, as in (8).

(8) S2: Then a … small man uh little man uh came into the room, open(ed) the door and came into the room and ask(ed) the girl why she was uh crying (about)

Of these 6 recasts, 1 was followed by uptake from the student, who repeated the teacher's utterance, as can be seen in (9).

(9) S2: The girl explain(ed) to him and he told her that it wasn't a problem, that uh, because he can help her.
T: Yes, he could help her.
S2: he could help her.

This shows that the student was aware of the teacher's corrective intent, although we cannot know for certain if it aids acquisition of the target-structure. Lyster (2009: 460) contrasts a number of studies on this issue, some of which show positive effects for the repetition of *recasts* (e.g. Havranek & Cesnik, 2001) whereas others do not show any (e.g. Leeman, 2003; Mackey & Philp, 1998). Lyster (2009) concludes that a lot may depend on the type of learner. Some learners may focus more on form than others and be more likely to notice *recasts* of morphosyntactic errors. s

Turning to student 3, we can see in table 4 that 2 out of 3 errors were provided with *MF* by the teacher and these were both successfully repaired. The third error was not remarked on by the teacher as it was of a different nature than the others. In example (10) we see that the student used a past tense after a past auxiliary verb, instead of the infinitive. The student was clearly concentrating on using the past tense correctly and

therefore made an error of hypercorrection. You can see in the example that his initial utterance was correct, but then he self-corrected it, causing the error to occur.

> (10) S3: She <u>couldn't uh say the, said</u> the name. And … she … started to feel desperate… because uh … <u>he didn't knew, he didn't know</u> the name.

In the same turn the student actually made another error of hyper-correction, but he immediately self-corrected it and therefore we did not include it as an error in our numbers.

It is possible to connect these hypercorrection-errors to the phe-nomenon of self-correction we discussed in 3.1. As we stated there, stu-dent 3 self-corrected 3 of his errors and we believe that students who self-corrected were very focused on the past tense forms and might have been consciously monitoring their use of the past tense. This shows not only in self-correction but in these errors of hypercorrection. In fact, stu-dent 1, who also tended to self-correct, made two similar errors in the second phase of the study, which are not included in table 4. An example follows:

> (11) S1: on the mountains yeah, and he also <u>could saw</u> uh the fire bur-ning in front of the house

In the quantitative analysis which follows, we will compare the rate of accurate use before and after CF. However, in the first phase of the project (before CF), student 3 already showed signs of improvement after CF. He first provided the incorrect form "start" (example 12), which he then managed to repair after MF.

> (12) S3: and the queen start to cry.
> T: uhuh, what's the past of start?
> S3: started. started to cry.

A bit later, during the same turn, he used the same verb, this time providing the correct form "started" (example 13). We can thus already note a positive effect for *MF* within the first part of the task.

(13) S3: (…) And … she … started to feel desperate…

The last line in table 4 corresponds to the performance of student 4 in phase 1 of the task. It shows that this student made 5 errors out of 17 past tense tokens, with 1 form being difficult to distinguish. These 5 errors were all followed by MF, but only 3 of them were repaired by the student. One of the errors he was unable to repair was mentioned earlier when we discussed the problem of pronunciation and the /Id/ allophone (see example 4). The other one is given here:

(14) The queen uh heard this and thanks to heaven about this uh
  T: In the past, eh. She
  S4: She thanks, tho- the past of think of d- /dank/
  T: Thank
  S4: Thank, thank with ED no?
  T: yes.thanked
  S4: thanked hmm, thanked heaven.

Although the teacher was only meant to elicit the right form by giving MF, she finally provided the correct form, which was then repeated by the student.

We can conclude from table 4 that *recasts* did not tend to lead to uptake or repair, whereas *MF* led to uptake in all cases and to repair in 5 out of 7 (i.e. 71.4%) cases. These results seem to be in line with Lyster & Ranta's (1997) findings about feedback-types in relation to uptake and repair.

Phase 2: the effects of CF on the acquisition of the past tense

The second part of our quantitative analysis focuses on the difference in accurate use before the students received feedback and afterwards, when they told the story for the second time.

In order to calculate the rate of accuracy for the use of the past tense, we decided to use the same approach as Bardovi-Harlig (2000: 51). In a study in which she wanted to look at the rate of accurate use of the past tense, she decided to count each verb only once. If not, very common verb forms such as *was* or *went* might have given a distorted image of students' ability to accurately produce past tense forms. However, as we noted in our study, students' accurate production of the same past tense form varies considerably. Student 2, for instance, correctly produced the form "wanted" two times during the first part of the study, but he also produced the erroneous form "want". To solve this problem, Bardovi-Harlig (2000: 51) proposes to count each different form of the same verb as one type. This means that in the case of student 2, we should count "wanted" as one type and "want" as another. Taking only these 3 examples into account, we can conclude that the rate of accurate use for the simple past is 50%, as 1 out of 2 types is correct.

In table 5 the number of types is given for each student, and the rate of accurate use is calculated in the way explained above. Because we also set out to compare regular to irregular verbs, percentages for these two categories are included in the table as well.

A problem we already pointed out in section 3.1. of our analysis, is that we have no data for student 4 after CF. We therefore only have a population of 3 students in total, of which only one student received MF. Clearly this small amount of data does not suffice to draw any lasting conclusions about the effects of CF on L2-acquisition. However, this is only a pilot study and it should be kept in mind that the main study will involve a lot more data from a larger group of students.

Nevertheless these numbers can give us some indication of what we want to find out and might provide us with suggestions for further research.

	Before CF		After CF	
Student 1 Total	8/12	66.67%	14/19	73.68%
S1 regular	1/3	33.33%	3/6	50%
S1 irregular	7/9	77.78%	11/13	84.62%
Student 2 total	9/15	60%	8/11	63.64%
S2 regular	1/6	16.67%	1/4	25%
S2 irregular	8/9	88.89%	7/7	100%
Student 3 total	10/13	76.92%	17/17	100%
S3 regular	3/4	75%	6/6	100%
S3 irregular	7/9	77.78%	11/11	100%
Student 4 total	8/13	61.54%		
S4 regular	2/4	50%		
S4 irregular	6/9	66.67%		

TABLE 5: RATE OF ACCURATE USE OF THE PAST TENSE (REGULAR AND IRREGULAR) BEFORE AND AFTER CF

When we just look at the percentages of accurate use before and after CF occurred, we can see that students' use of past tense forms has improved both for regular and irregular verbs. For student 3 it even went up to 100% of accurate use. However, we need to explain how we arrived at these numbers, before we discuss them further.

In certain cases, we decided not to include every type of verb into the analysis. As explained earlier, when students self-corrected immediately after producing an error, we did not count the error. Also, when we were not able to distinguish the word ending clearly, we did not include the form. In one case we thought it necessary to leave out a form because the student tried to use a modal verb, namely "must", in the past. We decided this was not a normal past tense error, as "must" does not have a past tense form. As example (15) shows, the teacher did correct it, but it was not included into the final analysis.

(15) S2: (…) she must uh give him his uh her first uh child. xx
     T: yeah she had to give him her child. Hmm hmm

Finally, we decided not to count a verb-form as erroneous when it occurred in indirect speech. Our story contained a few sentences written in direct speech, not to overcomplicate the exercise for students. However, some students tried to put these sentences into indirect speech, and as expected they made mistakes while doing this.

The keywords were given as follows, with the direct speech between quotation marks:

TELL him, SAY: "I will do it for you, if you give me your first child,"

Student 3 said the following, in which the error "will" occurs:

(16) S3: uh he said he will do it if she gave uh to him her first child.

Had we counted this as an error, the rate of accurate use would not have been so high for this student, but we decided not to include indirect speech errors.

Looking at the overall performance of our three students, we can state an improvement for all of them after having received CF targeted on the use of the past tense. This improvement is clearly the biggest in the case of student 3, whose rate of accurate use went up by 23.08%, compared to an improvement of 7.01% for student 1 and only 3.64% for student 2. It seems our data confirm previous research which found *MF* (or prompts including MF) to be of greater benefit to students than *recasts*.

If we try to look at any differential effects of the feedback types for regular and irregular verbs, we cannot draw any clear conclusions from our data. When looking at recasts, we see that student 1 improved more on regular verbs than on the irregular ones (by 16.67% versus 6.84%), whereas for student 2 it is the other way around, although the difference is very small (gains of 8.33% for regular verbs versus 11.11% for irregular verbs). Finally, student 3, who received MF, improved a little bit more on regular verbs than on the irregular ones, but again the difference is very small (25% versus 22.22%).

It is important to remember that we had to make a number of choices while analyzing the data, and the way the analysis is performed can strongly influence the results. For instance, we decided to count verb types instead of tokens, and we did not include errors against indirect speech or modal verbs. It is striking that previous studies on the effects of corrective feedback on the past tense do not provide a detailed explanation of how they calculated their results. For instance, Yang & Lyster (2010: 248) mention calculating means and standard deviations of accuracy scores, without explaining how they arrived at these scores. It is also apparent that previous studies did not seem to have the same problem as us regarding indistinguishable or unclear forms.

4. CONCLUSION

Our pilot study on the effects of two CF-types on the acquisition of the past tense has revealed a number of problems that cannot be overlooked in the methodological design of a larger scale study on this topic.

First of all, individual differences between students are difficult to ignore. Half of the students in the pilot study were obviously focused on the form of the past tense, which showed itself in self-corrections and hypercorrection. If we want to investigate students' implicit knowledge and natural use of the past tense, we might have to adapt the task by for instance leaving out the keywords or only providing the most difficult nouns and verbs.

Secondly, it is difficult to separate students' knowledge and correct use of the past tense while speaking from possible pronunciation problems. We suggested testing students' pronunciation of past tense forms as a separate task before carrying out the main task.

Another important issue is the need for consistent corrections by the teacher, but we found that this was not a problem in the pilot study.

Turning to the quantitative analysis of our data, we noted that our findings appear to confirm earlier findings on feedback types in relation to uptake and repair. *recasts* did not normally lead to either uptake or repair in our study, whereas *MF* always led to uptake and in the majority of the cases also to repair. Moreover, our data seemed to be consistent with earlier CF studies that accounted for beneficial effects for CF, and there was some indication of a higher effect for *MF* over *recasts*. As we are dealing with a pilot study, these results are based on a very small set of data and the evidence is not conclusive.

The quantitative analysis did, however, reveal a series of problems related to the calculation of accuracy scores, such as unclear forms, self-correction and hypercorrection. These problems did either not occur or were simply not mentioned in previous research on the same topic, but we believe they should be taken into account in future studies.

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Appendix 1: Pictures for the story of Rumpelstiltskin

Appendix 2: Text and keywords for the story of Rumpelstiltskin

Part 1

A long time ago there was a miller who was poor but very arrogant. One day he had to go to the king and he wanted to impress him, so he told him that his daughter could spin straw into gold. The king decided to find out if this was true, and he asked the miller to bring his daughter to the palace. The next day, the miller brought the girl to the king. He took her to a room full of straw and gave her a spinning wheel. He said: "If you can't spin this straw into gold, I will kill you."Then he locked the door and left her alone. The girl started to cry, because she didn't know how to do it.

> Part 1 keywords
> A long time ago – miller – poor, arrogant
> one day – HAVE TO go – king
> WANT to impress – TELL – daughter – CAN spin straw into gold
> king DECIDE to find out if BE true- ASK miller – bring daughter
> the next day – miller BRING girl
> king TAKE to room full of straw – GIVE spinning wheel
> SAY: "if you can't spin this straw into gold, I will kill you"
> LOCK door, LEAVE
> girl START to cry, NOT KNOW how

Part 2

Suddenly the door opened and a little man came in. He asked her why she was crying. When she told him, he said: "I will do it for you, if you give me your first child." The girl accepted his offer and in the morning the room was full of gold.

When the King saw this, he wanted her to be his wife. So they got married and she became queen. A year later, their first baby was born. The queen was so happy she forgot all about the little man. But one day, he came into her room and said: "give me what you promised." The queen

felt terrible and offered him all the gold in the kingdom, but he only wanted the baby.

> Part 2 keywords
> Suddenly door OPEN
> little man COME IN
> ASK why BE crying
> TELL him, SAY: "I will do it for you, if you give me your first child,"
> ACCEPT offer, in the morning, room full of gold
> King SEE, WANT her to be his wife
> GET married, BECOME queen
> a year later, baby BE BORN
> queen happy, FORGET little man
> but one day, COME and SAY : give me what you PROMISE
> queen FEEL terrible, OFFER gold, but only WANT baby

Part 3

Then she started to cry so much that the little man felt sorry for her. So he gave her three days to find out his name. If she could do that, she could keep the child. The queen thought the whole night about all the names she knew and she sent messengers everywhere to look for all possible names. The next day, she told the little man all the names she could think of. But he always answered: "That is not my name."On the second day she tried again, but the answer was the same. She started to feel desperate.

> Part 3 Keywords
> START to cry, little man FEEL sorry for her
> GIVE three days to find out name
> if CAN , CAN keep child
> queen THINK the whole night, SEND messengers
> the next day TELL names, but always ANSWER "That is not my name."
> on the second day, TRY again, answer the same
> START to feel desperate.

Part 4

On the third day, one of her messengers came back and told her he had not found any new names. But he told her a strange story. When he came to a high mountain, he saw a little house, and there was a fire burning in front of it. There was a funny little man dancing around the fire. He sang a song: "No one knows my little game, Rumpelstiltskin is my name!"

When the queen heard this, she thanked heaven. A little later, the little man arrived and asked her again: "What is my name?".

At first she said: "Is your name Conrad?" But he answered "no". Then she asked: "Is your name Henry?" But he said "no" again. Finally the queen said: "Perhaps your name is Rumpelstiltskin."

He shouted: "The devil has told you that!" and he got so angry he ran away and never came back.

Part 4 keywords
On the third day, messenger COME BACK
TELL story
COME to mountain, SEE little house, fire burning in front of it
little man dancing, SING a song: "No one knows my little game. Rumpelstiltskin is my name!"
queen HEAR, THANK heaven
man ARRIVE, ASK "What is my name?"
At first SAY "Conrad?", ANSWER "no"
then ASK "Henry?", ANSWER "no"
finally SAY "Perhaps your name is Rumpelstiltskin."
SHOUT: "the devil has told you that!"
GET angry, RUN away, never COME back