

1 Output as Input: Facilitating Noticing in Tertiary EFL Learners

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5 **Abstract**

6 In order to develop, learners need to notice either new language forms or gaps in their current
7 knowledge. This noticing of gaps can be especially problematic for language learners when the
8 skill of speaking is involved due to the cognitive load involved in producing utterances and
9 also a lack of useful feedback. Too often in English courses, especially in the Middle East,
10 there is an overreliance on decontextualized, uninteresting or irrelevant native speaker input
11 presented in course books, and not enough time is given to opportunities for students to
12 develop an understanding of their spoken interlanguage development. The following paper
13 examines a learning activity in which a pair of Omani university students are recorded
14 performing a routine split information task; this is used as the basis for a reflective noticing
15 task whereby the learners transcribe and edit their own interaction. Aspects of these tasks
16 such as quality of engagement, the extent to which they meet relevant conditions for learning,
17 and the opportunities for and evidence of learning are assessed. Weaknesses found in certain
18 aspects of the tasks are discussed, and suggestions are given to address these shortcomings.

20

21 **Index terms**— noticing, collaborative dialogue, output, transcribing.
22 Introduction ynch (2001) found students transcribing their own interactions to be an effective way of
23 encouraging learners to reflect on an activity and a means to promote noticing, which is defined as "the intake
24 of grammar as a result of learners paying conscious attention to input" (Batstone 1996). It is generally agreed
25 that noticing is an essential factor in acquisition, and as Schmidt (1990) succinctly states "people learn about the
26 things they attend to and do not learn the things they do not attend to". Having learners attend to their own
27 output, in the form of a transcription of their interaction, so that it essentially acts as input, forms the basis of
28 the learning activity critiqued in this paper.

29 **1 II.**

30 **2 Background a) Output and Noticing**

31 In many universities in the Middle East, commercial listening text books with native speaker dia-
32 logues/monologues are the norm; many teachers and students alike adhere to the native speaker input ideal
33 and generally do not feel they have time and/or do Author: e-mail: kerrinburnell@gmail.com not see any benefits
34 arising from cooperative feedback sessions involving peers, despite ample evidence to the contrary (for a review
35 see ??wain, 2002). For example, Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, and Linnell ??1996) found that NNS-NNS
36 interactions provide learners beneficial feedback as well as comparable levels of input to NS-NNS interactions.
37 Swain suggests that learners should be instructed on how and why to collaborate in order to help encourage what
38 she calls collaborative dialogue, which acts to mediate the acquisition of language by 1. generating new knowledge
39 and/or consolidating existing knowledge ??Swain & Lapkin 1994; ??wain, 2002), 2. enabling hypothesis testing
40 (Long & Porter, 1985), 3. raising metalinguistic awareness (Selinker, 1972; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991;
41 ??order, 1981 ??in Swain 1995), and 4. providing comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982).

42 The activity presented in this paper combines both Swain's collaborative dialogue and a transcribing task
43 ??ynch (2007) refers to as reprocessing output to produce a uniquely rich learning opportunity. There is

7 A) HOW MUCH NOTICING?

44 substantial evidence that having learners transcribe input can lead to language acquisition. For example, both
45 dictogloss (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) and recorded interviews with native speakers (Clennel, 1999) are established
46 activities in language classrooms. However, ??ynch (2007) argues that having learners' transcribe their own
47 output (the aforementioned reprocessing output) is of similar if not greater value in terms of noticing, and that
48 it is a much richer source of relevant material, especially with two learners of roughly similar levels.

49 3 b) Feedback

50 Swain (1995) states that output promotes noticing, but that many of these errors, which have the potential to
51 become fossilized if not attended to, are missed. Speaking in particular is a skill for which learners fail to notice
52 errors as there is simply so much to process in real time language use (Skehan & Fortster, 1997). This is true
53 particularly with lower proficiency learners due to their attentional resources being extremely limited, and hence
54 they do not have time to attend to errors as they concentrate on meaning rather than forms. This situation
55 highlights the need for effective feedback. However, this raises the question of whether teachers are capable of
56 noticing these errors and providing feedback in classroom situations?

57 Studies have shown that real-time feedback on speaking can be ineffective and even demotivating, especially
58 for weaker students; this can be due to teacher inconsistency in giving feedback, time constraints, face saving,
59 and finally teachers simply aren't aware of the feedback options available to them ??Van Den Brandon 1995
60 ??n Kim 2009). This paper addresses some of these issues with teacher feedback, but perhaps more importantly
61 examines the degree to which learners can notice their own gaps. c) Benefits of transcribing ??ynch (1997)
62 found that learners were capable of noticing a substantial number of their own errors in speaking and argues
63 that more responsibility needs to be given to learners to do the noticing and hence develop autonomy. He
64 states that the three main benefits built in to noticing exercises involving transcription are: paying attention to
65 normally unnoticed detail, negotiating meaning, and the spoken collaboration between learners (2001). At least
66 in part, another advantage from this type of activity can be ascribed to the repetition that comes with multiple
67 examinations of the transcription (Derakhshesh & Baleghizadeh, 2012). And one final feature to add to the list
68 of ways learning is facilitated is the combination of language focused and meaning focused learning, which has
69 been shown to lead to better results than either kind of learning alone (Ellis 2006).

70 4 d) The study

71 This trial is an adaptation of a study by Lynch (2001). In his study, adult learners were recorded performing a role-
72 play and then asked to transcribe two minutes of the recording and correct any errors. After this was completed,
73 the teacher went over the corrected transcript with the learners and cleared up any remaining problems. The
74 volunteers involved in this lesson are two personable and motivated 18 year old female English foundation students
75 from Oman. Their English is of a lower intermediate level (overall IELTS 4.5) and they have both received six
76 years of English instruction at public school.

77 In the following paper the whole trial will be referred to as the 'lesson' which is broken up into tasks (split
78 information and transcribing) and individual stages.

79 The stages involved in the lesson are listed below:

80 Stage 1 -The initial stage was a split information find the differences task involving two drawings of a house
81 with supplied vocabulary (see appendix A). The learners were recorded performing this task with a phone.

82 Stage 2 -The learners transcribed a randomly selected two minute selection of their recording from stage 1
83 (Transcript 1, see Appendix C). The interaction during the transcription process was recorded but yielded very
84 little usable speech.

85 Stage 3 -They were then instructed to check their transcript, discuss and correct any errors, and change any
86 parts of it until satisfied with the English. (Transcript 2, Appendix D) This process was recorded and the
87 transcript can be found in Appendix E.

88 Stage 4 -Once the learners were satisfied with their transcript the teacher checked it with them, changing parts
89 that were linguistically incorrect or expressed in a non-target like way. (Transcript Appendix F)

90 Stage 5 -The learners were asked their views on the task, this interview was recorded and relevant segments
91 transcribed (Appendix G) While the learners were engaged in the above stages the teacher made general
92 observation notes (Appendix B).

93 5 III.

94 6 Results and Discussion

95 7 a) How much noticing?

96 The two minutes of transcription revealed numerous incidences of noticing on behalf of the learners, 12 changes
97 were made (shown below in table ??) and the majority of these changes were for the better (9/12).

98 8 Table 1 : Changes made to the transcription

99 The learners in the present study did not make a great deal of changes compared to Lynch's study where the
100 learners made on average 28 changes for the two minute transcription. This could be due to the different levels,
101 (he dealt with more proficient adults), the type of activity (he used role-play), the amount of unknown vocabulary
102 (in this study most of it was known) or the amount of time allowed for proof reading (his learners were able to
103 take the transcripts home overnight to type them on computer).

104 9 b) Who noticed what?

105 The more advanced (fluent) of the two learners (learner S1), was responsible for initiating more changes

106 10 Changes for the better

107 11 Changes of correct form to equally correct alternative

108 12 Change of incorrect form

109 to equally incorrect form. Output as Input: Facilitating Noticing in Tertiary EFL Learners below in table 2)
110 but of these changes, 25% were unnecessary. On two occasions learner S2 drew attention to an erroneous form
111 but was unable (or simply too slow) to correct it and S1 suggested the change. These results (bearing in mind
112 the small sample size) show that the learners shared the initiative and were able to collaborate to make changes.
113 If a larger sample was taken and the pattern of one sided correction by S1 was found to be significant, then
114 this could have classroom implications for deciding on pairings. Matching learners of the same ability could help
115 avoid more advanced students dominating but even if this is not possible, studies have shown that merely being
116 a participant without actually initiating the changes can result in learning. (Ohta 2000)

117 13 Changes for the worse

118 Total

119 14 c) Type of correction by learners and teacher

120 The types of correction (table 3 below) show that most changes made by the teacher were in the form of lexical
121 corrections whereas the learner's changes involved either grammar or reformulation (changes to achieve a more
122 precise expression). Editing (the removal of the typical features of natural speech including repetition, false starts
123 etc) did not receive much attention due to the learners ignoring a lot of these features during the transcription
124 phase (stage 1). The fact that the teacher still had a reasonable amount of changes to make (45%) indicates that
125 the learners were stretched to the limit of their linguistic ability during the tasks.

126 15 d) Quality of engagement

127 The results from above and observations noted in Appendix B show that during each stage of the lesson the
128 learners seemed to be positively engaged -defined by Lee and Anderson (1993) as a psychological process
129 involving attention, investment, interest, and effort expended in learning. According to Walsh (2002) maximizing
130 engagement is conducive to language acquisition and is therefore an important part of any learning activity. For
131 this transcribing lesson, engagement is due in some degree to the learner generated material which generates
132 positive attitudes towards the lesson, as comments (from appendix G) show below: It is worth noting that after
133 the first transcription when the teacher left the room for a few minutes, the learners started listening to the
134 recording again (without being asked) to make sure it was correctly transcribed. While this level of diligence
135 may not transfer to the classroom, it is a promising sign. e) Do the tasks meet the relevant conditions for
136 learning?

137 i. Conditions for learning from meaning focused listening

138 The following five conditions are from Krashen (1982):

139 1. The input for listening is meaningful For both the find the differences and correcting tasks (stages 1 & 3)
140 the input is meaningful because each learner is supplying the other with input to negotiate and collaboratively
141 complete the tasks. For stages 2 & 4 the focus is not on meaning.

142 16 The input and activities associated with the input are 143 interesting

144 The input for the transcribing was interesting for the most part because it was learner generated and partly due
145 to the novelty value of recording and hearing their own voices.

146 17 There are new items to learn

147 As shown in table 3, several grammatical feature errors were brought to the attention of the learners but only
148 two unknown words were presented (leash and chimney)

149 **18 The learner is assisted with understanding**

150 The assist themselves through engaging in interactional modifications to make the input more comprehensible
151 and hence, better suited to their interlocutors IL developmental stage. (Long & Porter, 1985). Other assistance
152 included pictorial and vocabulary support for the find a difference task, and the fact that the ideas and much of
153 the language involved were within the learner's experience.

154 **19 Stress is controlled**

155 The input for transcription is learner generated so it is familiar and, as Lynch (2001) states, because the
156 transcription is based on a communicative performance that was already successful it may be less inhibiting
157 for learners to review and improve their output. Long & Porter (1985) mention that group work provides a more
158 supportive and hence less stressful setting than with whole class work. Also the lesson is split up into manageable
159 chunks (stages) so as not to overwhelm the learners. It was thought that the use of voice recorders could be a
160 source of stress but the learners stated they were comfortable with this.

161 ii. Conditions for learning from meaning focused speaking The following conditions are taken from Nation
162 (1995):

163 1. The learners have the chance to draw on explicit knowledge in meaning focused use. The presence of
164 the picture and vocabulary for the 'find the difference' activity combined with having a patient and supportive
165 listener (stages 1 & 3) Result in learners learning and using new task vocabulary -an example of drawing on
166 explicit knowledge. 2. The learners have the chance to draw on implicit knowledge in meaning focused use
167 Because the tasks and topic are familiar to the learner they are retrieving implicit knowledge. This allows fluency
168 to develop through the use of features already well known to the learners.

169 **20 Learners perform under real operating conditions**

170 These real operating conditions include time constraints, focusing on the message, competing for the floor and
171 interacting. According to Nation (1995) these conditions are encouraged when learners are deeply involved in
172 a task, as they were in this lesson (see "Quality of engagement" section). Nation sums up the contribution of
173 interaction to these real operating conditions by saying "interaction is an ideal way of developing skill in use as
174 well as learning the conventions of interaction" i.e. the best way to learn to interact is by interacting. 4. The
175 learners are involved in demanding tasks that stretch their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge This task
176 certainly tested the learners communicative ability; as shown in the number of corrected and uncorrected errors
177 produced. (see the 'How much noticing' section) The editing task and the pushed output involved in the split
178 information task both helped make learners aware of gaps in their knowledge. 5. The learners receive feedback
179 about errors.

180 During their interaction, the learners supplied each other with feedback about the acceptability of their
181 utterances (Long & Porter 1985) as shown below in examples 2-6. This combined with the teacher correction
182 meant learners were receiving immediate and accurate post-task feedback.

183 **21 f) Are the conditions met?**

184 From the above conditions we can see stages 1 and 3 meet the conditions for learning from meaning focused
185 speaking and listening and in stages 2, 3 and 4 the conditions are met for language focused learning (this analysis
186 is beyond the scope of this paper)

187 **22 g) Opportunities for learning through interaction**

188 According to Nation (2007) interaction helps learning by providing plenty of comprehensible input, encouraging
189 pushed output, making learners aware of what they don't know and by helping learners develop the language and
190 strategies needed for interaction. in the transcripts (see appendix) which include clarification requests, repetitions,
191 confirmation checks and comprehension checks. According to Long (1985) these negotiations "allow modification
192 of the interactional structure of conversation? a necessary condition for acquisition". The following examples
193 (3-10) from the learners interaction during the lesson, reveal the many and varied opportunities made available
194 for learning. Confirmation checks-eliciting confirmation that the speaker has correctly heard or understood an
195 utterance. Example 3 S1: yes I have a truck S2: a truck? S1: a truck in the garage (1) the truck is /in the right
196 side\

197 In the following example the learners fail to clear up a misunderstanding regarding the word 'roof' and S2
198 accepts S1's mispronunciation, perhaps illustrating a worst case scenario involving an interactional exchange.

199 **23 Example 6**

200 S2: okay I have two trucks and there is a two dogs one dog is with a man and the other dog is in front of the
201 house. Do you have them?

202 S1: I have two dogs one dog is with a lady and the other dog is going to get into the house with a man is
203 it same? Recasts -offer the learner negative implicit feedback, a model and an opportunity to notice a gap in
204 their knowledge. These are rarely used during the interaction but are used by both learners. Example 7 S1:

205 where is your entrance door? S2: middle S1: in the middle (ahhh) S2: yes Mackay, Gass and McDonough (2000)
206 have argued that recasts without interlocutor response might be the least effective form of feedback. And so
207 whether learning is occurring here is debatable. As can be seen from the above example S2 may not realize
208 that S1's recast is in fact a more correct utterance as she doesn't repeat the phrase, although it is thought to
209 be a speculative assumption that improved performance in immediately succeeding utterances can be taken as
210 evidence of learning. (Mitchell & Myles, 2004) It is possible however that learners benefit from negative feedback
211 even if they do not perceive the problem ??McDonough, 2005). Language related episodes (LRE's) -talking
212 about or correcting the language produced. These do not occur in the split information task (the focus is almost
213 entirely on meaning) but feature often in the editing phase with several utterances directed at questioning the
214 acceptability of their language.

215 In the following two examples two alternatives are generated and assessed. LRE's allow the learners to use
216 the language while focusing on form and receive explicit feedback about their utterances, and there is evidence
217 that they can be occasions for language learning (Swain & Lapkin, 1998) Negotiating vocabulary -Of the three
218 words negotiated for meaning (leash, chimney and root) none were successfully negotiated (although root was
219 most likely just a pronunciation error)

220 **24 h) Have the students interact more during the transcription 221 stage**

222 More interaction (and hence negotiation) could be included in the lesson by telling the learners not to look at each
223 others paper during the transcription stage (stage 2) and encouraging them to discuss what they hear in order
224 to transcribe correctly. Also, making sure they copy out all the redundant parts of speech from the transcription
225 will promote conscious noticing of such things as discourse markers, hesitation devices etc (Schmidt 1990, in
226 Thornbury & Slade 2006). Learners could then perhaps compare their transcript to one obtained from native
227 speakers doing the same task.

228 **25 i) Vocabulary learning**

229 The vocabulary used in this task (see appendix A) was mostly already known to these learners and because
230 of this very few words were negotiated. This is an excellent task for enabling learners to negotiate and gain
231 repetitive and generative exposure to unknown or partly known vocabulary (Nation 2001) and so a significant
232 learning opportunity was not fully utilized.

233 Because of the difficulty encountered with some of the words (chimney and leash) perhaps simple definitions
234 or example sentences could be supplied to help the learners (this is also generative use of the words). However
235 this would negatively impact on negotiation. Additionally, to enable retrieval after the task, Nation suggests
236 learners could be made to reflect on what vocabulary they learned.

237 **26 j) Extend the task**

238 In Lynch's (2001) study, learners were able to take their corrected transcript home over night, word process
239 it (make any wanted changes) and bring it back for teacher feedback/correction. By letting the learners take
240 the transcript home this would encourage revisiting the material and would allow the learners to compare any
241 additional changes they made individually at home. This would also permit them to retain and compare clear
242 examples of their unedited and edited transcripts which they can compare with each other and previous work in
243 order to gauge progress and see if the same problems are occurring.

244 **27 k) Topic selection**

245 Although the learners involved in this trial were engaged in the task, the topic selection for the split information
246 activity (a scene of a house) could perhaps be changed to a more interesting picture, perhaps more relevant to
247 these learners. 1) Record fluent speakers performing the same task Willis (1996) recommends having students
248 listen to recordings of fluent speakers engaged in the same communicative task they have just performed, and
249 then ask them to point out any similarities and differences they notice. This aids learning in the same ways
250 that recasts do (i.e. provides a target-like model plus the opportunity to notice gaps in their knowledge) and
251 according to Willis, gives learners exposure to "accessible samples of real time talk that is immediately relevant
252 to their learning situation".

253 **28 m) Allow for repeated production**

254 A good deal of the benefit from this activity can likely be ascribed to repeated focus on the transcription. In
255 a study with Iranian students Derakhshesh & Baleghizadeh (2012) found that requiring students to repeatedly
256 examine transcriptions and then give an oral presentation incorporating error correction was highly beneficial.

258 **29 Conclusion**

259 The transcribing lesson outlined here allowed learners at different stages of development (and thus with different
260 needs) to notice different language features, while developing the same skills. Its modular design and learner
261 generated material make for a well supported engaging experience that successfully combined meaningful
262 communication and a focus on form while keeping the learners engaged and on task for a considerable time.
263 Although it is not easy to enable lower level learners to use L2 to discuss form, this trial has shown that it is
264 not beyond the reach of my students. Raising awareness in teachers and students regarding the benefits of using
265 learner output in lessons is needed in the Omani context. Adapting this lesson to a larger classroom will be a
challenge, but judging by this trial, it will be a rewarding one.



Figure 1: Example 4 S1:

2

	Self corrections	Partner corrections	Unnecessary partner corrections (correct form to equally correct from)	Total
Learner S1	3	3	2	8
Learner S2	3	1	0	4
Total	6	4	2	12

Figure 2: Table 2 :

3

	Students	Teacher
Grammatical correction	5	3
Lexical correction	0	4
Editing	1	1
Reformulation	6	1
Total	12 (55%)	10 (45%)

Figure 3: Table 3 :

Example 2

S1: yes very useful because I do this in school but they always listening me foreigner dialogue so I don't have a chance talk each other write my own (2)

Teacher: to write down what you say?

S1: yes

So even though the learners had taken part in transcribing tasks before, this is the first time their own voices have been recorded. Signs of engagement in the lesson included the following:

1. There were no noticeable signs of boredom (e.g. fidgeting, attention wandering) despite it taking a considerable length of time (45 minutes).
2. Learners questioning the teacher during stages one, three and four.
3. They were interacting with each other throughout the lesson. (except during stage 2)

[Note: Output as Input: Facilitating Noticing in Tertiary EFL Learners 4. They were noticing and correcting their own errors as well as their partners (see table2) which shows a degree of interest in each others production.5. Positive responses to post task questioning. (see example 1)]

Figure 4:

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