Feedback provision through WhatsApp for L2 grammar learning: Participants' views

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Grammar learning

Mixed results regarding perception of grammar learning / teaching:

- One of the most **difficult areas** to acquire (DeKeyser, 2005)

- Seen as **tedious** by FL learners (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratman, 2011; Andrews, 2003; Jean & Simard, 2011)

- Can even be the cause of withdrawal from FL classes (Vakili & Mohammed, 2020)

However:

- Better grammar learning if **contextualised** (Morelli, 2003)

- More **innovative** ways of teaching grammar should be considered (Pawlak, 2021)

- Use of **instant messaging applications** (Tragant et al., 2022) have been shown to promote grammar development (Murphy et al., 2023)

WhatsApp

- Mobile instant messaging (MIM) app widely used nowadays.

- Easily accessible through mobile phone or computer-based app.

- According to a recent report (IAB, 2023)

  - 88% of Spanish citizens use WhatsApp.

  - Most popular social media app in Spain, especially among youngsters (93% use it).

  - The Spaniards spend almost 90 minutes a day using WhatsApp.

WhatsApp for language learning purposes

- WhatsApp used as a platform for (Syairofi et al., 2023):

  - Doing learning tasks and activities mediated by teacher

  - Exchanging didactic materials

  - Q&A

  - Discussion and collaborative learning among students

  - Peer assessment

- Reported benefits of WhatsApp for language learning include (Alamer & Al Khateeb, 2023; Kartal, 2019; Syairofi et al., 2023):

  - Increased levels of learners' motivation

  - Reduced learning anxiety

  - Increased engagement in the learning process

  - More extramural practice and higher flexibility

  - Increased interaction among / between students and teacher

Learners' views of WhatsApp

Learners' views gathered through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews or focus groups' discussions:

- Overall, **positive attitudes** towards the use of WhatsApp for language learning purposes (Abubakar, 2021; Mistar & Embi, 2016; Rambe & Bere, 2013)

- WhatsApp valued very positively for learning **vocabulary,** practicing **speaking** and **extramural practice opportunities** (Khan, 2021)

- Increased opportunities to practice **reading** and **writing** as well as labelled as an **innovative approach** (Alqahtani et al., 2018; Tümen Akyıldız & Çelik, 2021)

BUT:

- **Grammar** found to be one of the most **challenging** skills to learn through WhatsApp and participants generally preferred **classroom learning** to WhatsApp learning (Ali & Bin-Hady, 2019)

- Feeling of being **constantly observed** and **assessed** by the teacher or more proficient peers (García-Gómez, 2022)

- Some see it as a mere **extension of the classroom** context, possibly due to the presence of the teacher (Lamy & Zourou, 2013)

WhatsApp as a tool to provide feedback

- Useful tool to give feedback to **primary school students.** Preference for visual feedback at lower primary levels and written text at upper levels (Soria et al., 2020)

- Seen as an effective and timely tool to provide feedback among university students, but **little sense of belonging** to the WhatsApp group and preference for **video-based synchronous feedback** (Sugianto et al., 2021)

- **Grammar-based feedback** through WhatsApp beneficial for L2 oral production (Weissheimer et al., 2018)

- Seen as an effective platform to give **written and oral corrective feedback** in longitudinal studies (Andujar, 2020 & Green, 2021):

    - Preference for more **explicit feedback** through MIM applications, in line with previous research (see next slide)

- **During-task** feedback through WhatsApp more beneficial than post-task feedback, due to its immediacy and better recall by learners (Murphy et al., 2023)

Feedback preferences

- Feedback plays a crucial role when learning **grammar** (Valezy & Spada, 2006)

- Learners prefer **metalinguistic explanations** (Nagata,1993; Kim & Mathes, 2001)

- **Explicit written corrective feedback** more valued than other types of feedback (Karim & Nassaji, 2015; Tasdemir et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021)

  - **Easier for learners to identify the mistake and understand why it is not totally accurate.**

- More **explicit feedback** tends to be the most highly rated: Explicit correction > Reformulation > Elicitation > Repetition > Clarification request (Lee, 2013)

- Written explicit corrective feedback also leads to higher indices of **grammar learning** (Ellis et al., 2006)

- Similar results also applicable to **oral corrective feedback** (Fitriana et al., 2016; Yang, 2016)

Research questions

Lack of research analysing learners' **perceptions** on the use of **WhatsApp** as a means of receiving **feedback** for **grammar learning.**

1.1 What are university EFL learners' **satisfaction levels** with receiving **feedback** for grammar practice through WhatsApp?

1.2 What are university EFL learners' **satisfaction levels** with using **WhatsApp** for English grammar practice?

2 To what extent do these satisfaction levels **differ depending on the type of feedback received:** metalinguistic explanations, reformulations or repetition prompts?

Participants
(*N* = 78)

- Mean age: 19.58 years old (SD=1.85)
- Catalan / Spanish bilinguals (96.2%)
- Pre-intermediate learners of English (B1 level on average)
- Three groups (intact classes):
  - Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)
  - Reformulations (*n* = 29)
  - Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)
- 96.2% use WhatsApp daily
  - 26.9% use it 30-60 minutes / day
  - 38.5% use it 1-2 hours / day
  - 23.1% use it 3-4 hours / day
- 89.7% had never used WhatsApp for learning foreign languages
  - To practice speaking (2.6%), class diary (2.6%), reading club (1.3%), grammar learning (2.6%)
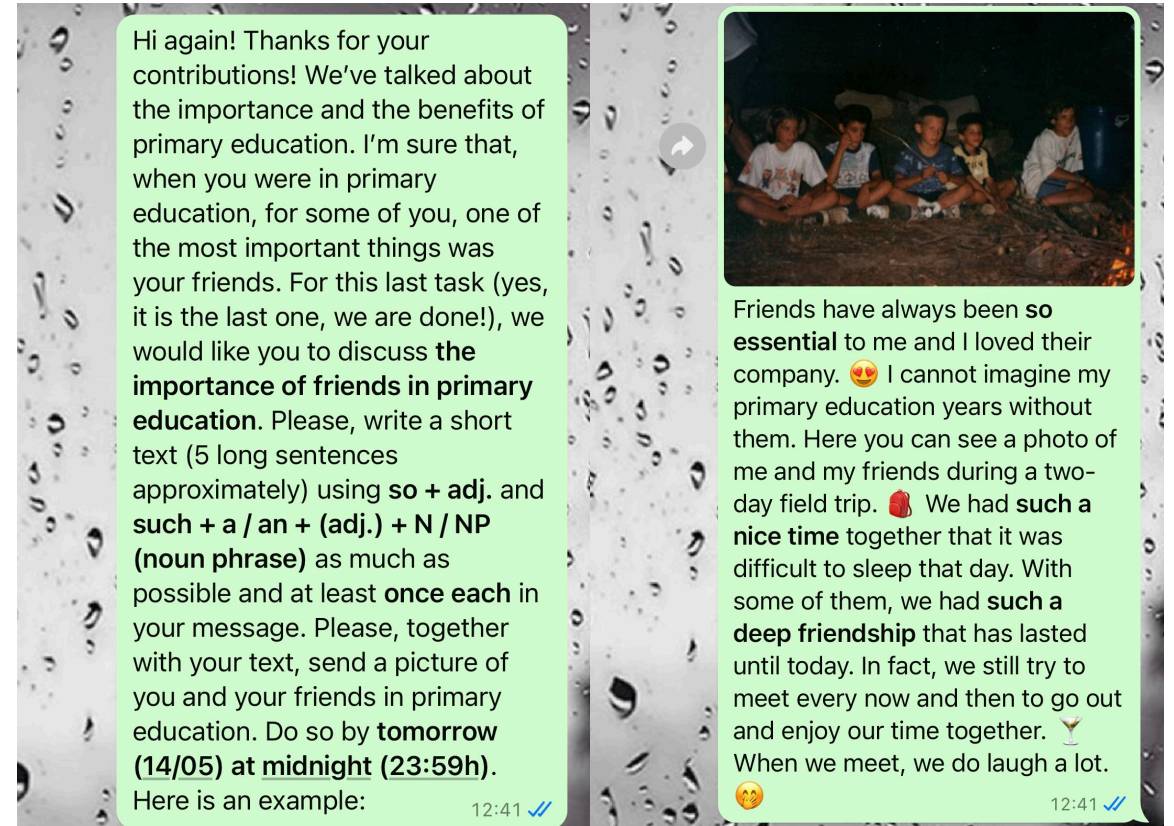
Instruments

Coursebook (Norris, 2021)

- *be / get used to*; *less / the least + adj.*; *so / such*

- Presentation – Practice – Production (PPP) (Larsen-Freeman, 2003) or JiTT approach (Novak, 2011)

Grammaticality Judgement Test (Nassaji, 2000)

- 4 practice items + 72 test items:

    48 target items (16 / structure; half correct, half incorrect)

    24 distractors (half correct, half incorrect)

- Implicit (6 seconds / item; no possibility to go back)

- Explicit (25 minutes for all 72 items; possibility to revise the answers)

    "Please indicate if the following sentences (practice and test items) are grammatically accurate or not" + Error correction (explicit only)

Instruments

- Seven **WhatsApp tasks** (one ice-breaker + two / structure)
  - Short text using the target structures and photo sharing on some occasions
  - Tasks X.2 asked participants to respond to some of their classmates' previous contributions
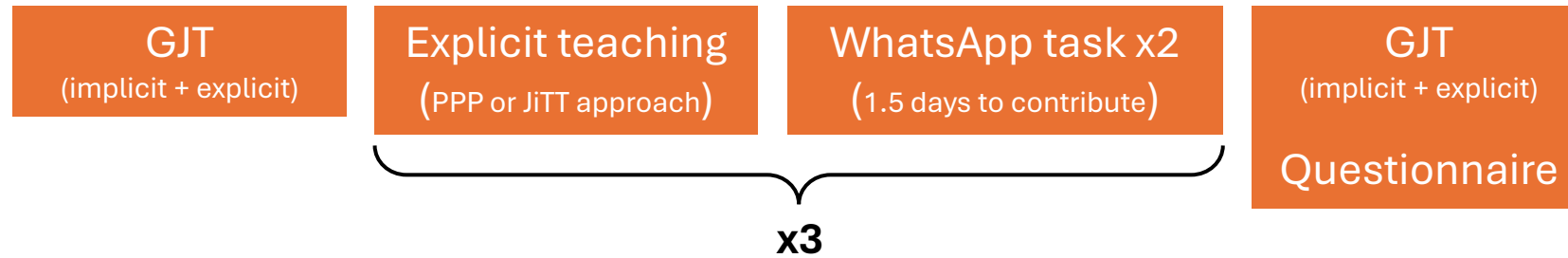 - Examples always provided by the teacher

Hi again! Thanks for your contributions! We've talked about the importance and the benefits of primary education. I'm sure that, when you were in primary education, for some of you, one of the most important things was your friends. For this last task (yes, it is the last one, we are done!), we would like you to discuss **the importance of friends in primary education**. Please, write a short text (5 long sentences approximately) using **so + adj.** and **such + a / an + (adj.) + N / NP (noun phrase)** as much as possible and at least **once each** in your message. Please, together with your text, send a picture of you and your friends in primary education. Do so by **tomorrow (14/05) at midnight (23:59h)**. Here is an example: 12:41 ✓✓

Friends have always been **so essential** to me and I loved their company. 😍 I cannot imagine my primary education years without them. Here you can see a photo of me and my friends during a two-day field trip. 🎒 We had **such a nice time** together that it was difficult to sleep that day. With some of them, we had **such a deep friendship** that has lasted until today. In fact, we still try to meet every now and then to go out and enjoy our time together. 🍸 When we meet, we do laugh a lot. 🤭 12:41 ✓✓

Instruments

- Final **questionnaire** administered online during class time

- Questions inquiring about:

  ▪ Background information

  ▪ Satisfaction with feedback

  ▪ Feedback preferences

  ▪ Feeling of learning

  ▪ Engagement with feedback

  ▪ Error correction

  ▪ Satisfaction with WhatsApp as a language learning tool

  ▪ Satisfaction with the intervention *per se*

  ▪ Recommendation and future participation

  ▪ Use of AI or external help during the intervention

FEEDBACK
Let's have a discussion
Register

Procedure

GJT (implicit + explicit)	Explicit teaching (PPP or JiTT approach)	WhatsApp task x2 (1.5 days to contribute)	GJT (implicit + explicit) Questionnaire

x3 (bracket spanning Explicit teaching and WhatsApp task)

- GJT implicit version → at the beginning of the class

- Questionnaire administered in between (only at post-test time; regular class at pre-test time)

- GJT explicit version → at the end of the class

- WhatsApp groups of 10-12 students each (classes were divided into 2-3 groups for logistic reasons)

- Feedback given on the target structures only (unless very basic serious mistakes spotted)

- Positive reinforcement when error-free contributions were made

- Feedback given almost immediately (hours or even minutes after the contribution)

Procedure

Metalinguistic explanations

Procedure

Reformulations

Procedure

Repetition prompts

Results

1.1 What are university EFL learners' **satisfaction levels** with receiving **feedback** for grammar practice through WhatsApp?

1.2 What are university EFL learners' **satisfaction levels** with using **WhatsApp** for English grammar practice?

2 To what extent do these satisfaction levels **differ depending on the type of feedback received**: metalinguistic explanations, reformulations

Perceptions of feedback

		Metalinguistic explanations (*n*=29)	Reformulations (*n*=29)	Repetition prompts (*n*=20)	Total (*N*=78)
Satisfaction with type of feedback	*M*	**5.86**	4.90	5.60	5.44
	SD	.351	.817	.598	.749
	95% CI	[5.73, 6]	[4.59, 5.21]	[5.32, 5.88]	[5.27, 5.60]
Feedback timing	*M*	**5.79**	5.55	5.75	5.69
	SD	.491	.632	.550	.565
	95% CI	[5.61, 5.98]	[5.31, 5.79]	[5.49, 6.01]	[5.56, 5.82]
Feedback helpfulness	*M*	**5.69**	4.83	5	5.19
	SD	.471	.928	.858	.854
	95% CI	[5.51, 5.87]	[4.47, 5.18]	[4.60, 5.40]	[5, 5.38]

1 = Extremely dissatisfied / unhelpful
6 = Extremely satisfied / helpful

Perceptions of WhatsApp

What aspects of using WhatsApp for English grammar learning did you like?	Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)		Reformulations (*n* = 29)		Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)		Total (*N* = 78)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Further English practice	**75.9**	22	44.8	13	75	15	**64.1**	50
Use of MIM tool	**72.4**	21	62.1	18	50	10	**62.8**	49
Interaction with classmates / teacher	**72.4**	21	62.1	13	60	12	**59**	46
Informal way of learning	72.4	21	79.3	23	**80**	16	**76.9**	60
Discussion of education-related topics	27.6	8	3.4	1	**30**	6	**19.2**	15
It counted for class participation	24.1	7	17.2	5	**35**	7	**24.4**	19
None	3.4	1	**6.9**	2	5	1	5.1	4

Perceptions of WhatsApp

What aspects of using WhatsApp for English grammar learning did you dislike?	Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)		Reformulations (*n* = 29)		Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)		Total (*N* = 78)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
The fact that it was in English	10.3	3	10.3	3	0	0	7.7	6
Technical difficulties	10.3	3	13.8	4	20	4	14.1	11
Tight deadlines (1.5 days)	31	9	24.1	7	45	9	32.1	25
Childhood photo sharing	6.7	2	17.2	5	5	1	10.3	8
Public contributions	6.7	2	37.9	11	0	0	16.7	13
It counted for class participation	10.3	3	0	0	5	1	5.1	4
Repetitive tasks	3.4	1	3.4	1	0	0	2.6	2
None	44.8	13	27.6	8	50	10	39.7	31

Intervention descriptors (+)

		Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)	Reformulations (*n* = 29)	Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)	Total (*N* = 78)
Engaging	*M*	**4.79**	4.38	4.25	4.50
	SD	.98	.86	1.12	.99
	95% CI	[4.42, 5.16]	[4.05, 4.71]	[3.73, 4.77]	[4.28, 4.72[
Fun	*M*	**4.79**	4.10	4.45	4.45
	SD	1.08	1.15	.99	1.11
	95% CI	[4.38, 5.20]	[3.67, 4.54]	[3.98, 4.92]	[4.20, 4.70]
Innovative	*M*	**5.79**	5.72	5.55	**5.71**
	SD	.41	.53	.69	.54
	95% CI	[5.64, 5.95]	[5.52, 5.92]	[5.23, 5.87]	[5.58, 5.83]
Meaningful	*M*	**5.10**	4.55	4.65	4.78
	SD	.82	.69	.99	.85
	95% CI	[4.79, 5.41]	[4.29, 4.81]	[4.19, 5.11]	[4.59, 4.97]
Motivating	*M*	**4.79**	4.24	4.40	4.49
	SD	1.01	.99	.99	1.02
	95% CI	[4.41, 5.18]	[3.87, 4.62]	[3.93, 4.87]	[4.26, 4.72]

Intervention descriptors (-)

1 = Extremely disagree / 6 = Extremely agree

		Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)	Reformulations (*n* = 29)	Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)	Total (*N* = 78)
Boring	*M*	2.38	2.93	2.75	2.68
	SD	1.21	1.22	1.37	1.26
	95% CI	[1.92, 2.84]	[2.47, 3.40]	[2.11, 3.39]	[2.39, 2.96]
Inefficient	*M*	2.07	2.17	2.35	2.18
	SD	1.51	1	1.42	1.31
	95% CI	[1.49, 2.64]	[1.79, 2.55]	[1.68, 3.02]	[1.88, 2.47]
Pointless	*M*	1.72	2.24	1.80	1.94
	SD	1.31	1.33	1	1.25
	95% CI	[1.23, 2.22]	[1.74, 2.75]	[1.33, 2.27]	[1.65, 2.22]
Repetitive	*M*	3.14	3.79	3.30	3.42
	SD	1.43	1.11	1.45	1.34
	95% CI	[2.59, 3.68]	[3.37, 4.22]	[2.62, 3.98]	[3.21, 3.73]
Unnatural	*M*	2.10	2.66	2.55	2.42
	SD	1.45	1.47	1.70	1.52
	95% CI	[1.55, 2.65]	[2.10, 3.21]	[1.75, 3.35]	[2.08, 2.77]

Recommendation and future participation

Would you recommend using WhatsApp for English grammar learning?	Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)		Reformulations (*n* = 29)		Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)		Total (*N* = 78)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Yes	**96.6**	28	93.1	27	80	16	**91**	71
No	**3.4**	1	6.9	2	20	4	9	7

Would you participate in the WhatsApp project again?	Metalinguistic explanations (*n* = 29)		Reformulations (*n* = 29)		Repetition prompts (*n* = 20)		Total (*N* = 78)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Yes, and I wouldn't change anything	**82.8**	24	69	20	45	9	**67.9**	53
Yes, but I would change something	10.3	3	10.3	5	**15**	3	11.5	9
No, participating once has been enough	**6.9**	2	17.2	3	35	7	17.9	14
No, participating once has been enough	**0**	0	3.4	1	5	1	2.6	2

Results

1.1 What are university EFL learners' **satisfaction levels** with receiving **feedback** for grammar practice through WhatsApp?

1.2 What are university EFL learners' **satisfaction levels** with using **WhatsApp** for English grammar practice?

2 To what extent do these satisfaction levels **differ depending on the type of feedback received:** metalinguistic explanations, reformulations or repetition prompts?

Perceptions of feedback

Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed that:

- Satisfaction with type of feedback
    $X^2(2) = 27.464$, **$p < .001$**
    - Metalinguistic explanations > Reformulations ($p=.000$)
    - Repetition prompts > Reformulations ($p=.004$)

- Feedback timing
    $X^2(2) = 3.513$, $p = .173$
    - No significant pairwise comparisons

- Feedback helpfulness
    $X^2(2) = 17.256$, **$p < .001$**
    - Metalinguistic explanations > Reformulations ($p=.000$)
    - Metalinguistic explanations > Repetition prompts ($p=.010$)

Perceptions of feedback

Chi-square tests revealed that:

- Satisfaction with type of feedback

  $X^2(6) = 28.160$, **p <.001** / Phi = .601; Cramer's V = .425

  'Extremely satisfied' response → Reformulations ≠ Metalinguistic explanations & Repetition prompts

- Feedback timing

  $X2(4) = 3.787$, p = .436 / Phi =.220; Cramer's V = .156

  No significant pairwise comparisons

- Feedback helpfulness

  $X^2(8) = 21.701$, **p = .006** / Phi =.527; Cramer's V = .373

  'Extremely helpful' response → Reformulations & Repetition prompts ≠ Metalinguistic explanations

! The results of these chi-square tests may not be totally reliable as there were fewer than five responses in some of the options

Perceptions of WhatsApp

Most chi-square tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the three groups in the aspects they liked or **disliked** (ps between .102 and .837), except for:

Further English practice

$X^2(2) = 7.457$, **p = .024** / Phi and Cramer's V = .309

Reformulations ≠ Metalinguistic explanations

Discussion of education-related topics

$X^2(2) = 7.447$, **p = .024** / Phi and Cramer's V = .309

Reformulations ≠ Metalinguistic explanations & Repetition prompts

Public contributions

$X^2(2) = 15.434$, **p < .001** / Phi and Cramer's V = .445

Reformulations ≠ Metalinguistic explanations & Repetition prompts

The results of these chi-square tests may not be totally reliable as there were fewer than five responses in some of the options

Intervention descriptors and recommendation

Most Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed that there were no significant differences between the three groups in most descriptors (ps between .062 and .487), except for:

Fun

$X^2(2) = 6.834$, **$p = .033$**

Metalinguistic explanations > Reformulations (p=.028)

Meaningful

$X^2(2) = 7.338$, **$p = .026$**

Metalinguistic explanations > Reformulations (p=.025)

Chi-square tests also showed that there were no significant differences in:

Recommending WhatsApp for grammar learning

$X^2(2) = 4.214$, **$p = .122$**; Phi and Cramer's V=.232

Participating again in the project without any change

$X^2(6) = 9.286$, **$p = .158$**; Phi = .345, Cramer's V=.244

The results of these chi-square tests may not be totally reliable as there were fewer than five responses in some of the options

Discussion

Overall, **high satisfaction levels** across all three groups:

- WhatsApp proved to be a good tool to provide feedback (Andujar, 2020; Green, 2021; Soria et al., 2020)
- Informal way of learning grammar while bridging the gap between classroom practice and extramural exposure (Dressman & Sadler, 2020)
- Such satisfaction levels could have increased engagement with the task and motivation (Syairofi et al., 2023)
- WhatsApp helpful for grammar practice, contradicting Ali and Bin-Hady (2019)
- WhatsApp seen as an innovative way to further practice FL (Alqahtani et al., 2018; Pawlak, 2021; Tümen Akyıldız & Çelik, 2021)
- Easy access to others' contributions as good models of language use
    - MIM shown to promote grammar development (Murphy et al., 2023)

The **most valued aspect** was **feedback timing** (almost instantaneous):

- Online feedback consistently found to be more advantageous than offline feedback (e.g., Fu & Li, 2022; Li et al., 2016), also through WhatsApp (Murphy et al., 2023)
- Learners are still aware of their thoughts; easier to amend mistakes (further corroborated by teachers' positive reinforcement when error-free contributions were later made)
- Aligned with Generation Z need for immediate feedback (Isaacs et al., 2020)

Discussion

In line with Nagata (1993) and Kim and Mathes (2001), the **metalinguistic explanations** group consistently expressed better views than the other two groups:

- Straightforward explanation as to why they had made a mistake
- Easier to grasp the nature of the mistakes and, hence, easier to correct, also corroborated by the highest perception of the intervention being meaningful and fun
- In line with previous research on written corrective feedback (Karim & Nassaji, 2015; Tasdemir et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021); now also applicable to MIM contexts

Higher satisfaction of **repetition prompts** vs. reformulations, contradicting Lee (2013):

- Different participants and groups, not taught by the same teacher
- Although procedure was identical, slightly different approach to the project may have explained this difference
- Although reformulations already provide the answer, learners may not have noticed it due to their pre-intermediate level

Limitations and further research

Limitations

- No triangulation of data with GJT scores
    - Innovative and meaningful approach, but more research on actual learning needed
- Only three types of feedback analysed
- Feedback only given about the target structures
- Compulsory class activity; perceptions may have been biased?
- Impossible to isolate effects of WhatsApp feedback (PPP and JiTT approaches also used)

Future lines of enquiry

- Exploring other types of feedback (e.g., clarification requests or explicit corrections)
- Analysing feedback preferences and engagement with feedback
- Adding a control group not exposed to WhatsApp feedback to compare grammar learning and views
- Extending WhatsApp to other areas of foreign language learning (e.g., speaking)
- Analysing the use of AI or external help during the intervention.

Thank you!

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Feedback preferences

		Metalinguistic explanations (*n=29*)		Reformulations (*n=29*)		Repetition prompts (*n=20*)		Total (*N=78*)	
		%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Would you have preferred a different type of feedback?	Yes	3.4	1	**31**	**20**	20	4	17.9	14
	No	**96.6**	**28**	69	9	80	16	82.1	64

$X^2(2)=7.569$, ***p=.023*** / Phi and Cramer's *V* = .312
'Yes' response → Reformulations ≠ Metalinguistic explanations

What type of feedback would you have preferred?	Metalinguistic explanations (*n=29*)		Reformulations (*n=29*)		Repetition prompts (*n=20*)		Total (*N=78*)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Clarification request	10.3	3	10.3	3	10	2	10.3	8
Elicitation	34.5	10	17.2	5	40	8	29.5	23
Explicit correction	44.8	13	55.2	16	25	5	43.6	34
Metalinguistic explanation	**72.4**	**21**	**62.1**	**18**	**80**	**16**	70.5	55
Reformulation	27.6	8	44.8	13	45	9	38.5	30
Repetition prompt	17.2	5	17.2	5	60	12	28.2	22
No feedback	17.2	5	10.3	3	0	0	10.3	8
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0