Using Uptake Sheets as a Supplementary Data Collection Tool in Classroom Research

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Uptake sheets are a kind of introspective data collection tool by which learners make a note of any language forms they notice or pay attention to. First described by Allwright (1984), they have mostly been employed as a supplementary instrument in classroom research investigating noticing and form-focused instruction. While they share some of the weaknesses of other introspective methods, such as the risk of respondents over-reporting forms which they feel to be the target of the lesson, uptake sheets are easy to create and administer to relatively large numbers of learners. This paper describes how uptake sheets were utilized by the author as part of a classroom investigation conducted into the impact of explicit instruction on learner orientation during communicative tasks. Uptake sheets were used as a triangulating data source to try to understand what language forms learners focused on during the lesson. This paper concludes by recommending the use of uptake sheets as an easily administered supplementary research tool for a variety of classroom studies.

「Uptake　sheets」は学習者が気づき、注意を払った言語形式を自身で書き留める一種の内省的データ収集ツールである。1984年にAllwrightが提唱し、主に気づきと言語形式を重視する指導を調査する教室研究において補足的道具として使用されてきた。授業のねらいであると思われる言語形式を学習者が過大報告するなど、他の内省的メソッドに見られる弱点もあるが、「Uptake　sheets」は作成が容易で比較的多数の学習者に適用できる。本論文では、明示的指導がコミュニケーションタスク実行中の学習者の態度に及ぼす影響を探る教室研究の一環として、筆者が「Uptake　sheets」をどのように活用したかを説明する。授業中に学習者が着目した言語形式を理解するために、「Uptake　sheets」は三角測量的なデータソースとして使用された。様々な教室研究に容易に適用できる補足研究ツールとして「Uptake sheets」の使用は推奨される。

What Are Uptake Sheets?

Uptake sheets are an introspective data collection tool which have been used in both classroom and experimental research. They have been purposed to find out what language forms learners notice or what they feel they have learned. The premise of uptake sheets is very simple: learners are asked to make a note of any new forms, or new aspects of partially acquired forms, that occur during a lesson. Although the use of uptake sheets is not especially widespread, several studies have utilized them over the years.

In this paper, I describe the use of *uptake sheets* by starting with a review of how they have been used in previous research. Next, I explain the advantages and limitations of their use as a classroom research tool before providing an example of how I have used them myself to add an element of triangulation for my own investigation into tasks and learner orientation. Finally, I offer some suggestions for those who wish to try using uptake sheets for classroom-based research.

Previous Studies Using Uptake Sheets

Allwright (1984) proposed the idea of *uptake*; that is, the linguistic items that learners consider themselves to have learned from the various stages of a language lesson. (Note that this is somewhat different to the more common construct of *uptake* proposed by Lyster and Ranta, 1997, in which it is considered to be the reactions and responses learners make following corrective feedback.) Allwright devised a simple procedure where, at the end of a lesson, learners would make written reports of what items (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) they noticed in the class. Report forms similar to Allwright's were later used in classroom research to investigate learners' perceptions of what they had learned in class and the source of this learning. For example, Jones (1992) and Palmeira (1995) both found that the most reported items were those that the teacher had supplied during the lesson. Conversely, Slimani (1992) found that learners tended to report items that their classmates, rather than the teacher, had supplied. In these early studies, this data collection tool was referred to as simply *reports* or *learner reports*, but the term *uptake sheets* has been used in more recent literature (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

Mackey, McDonough, Fujii, and Tatsumi (2001) looked at the relative effectiveness of different uptake sheet formats to elicit useful data. The most successful format was a *language-focused* report (Figure 1), which required learners to list items they noticed from four categories (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and case study/business) and note the input source for each item. Mackey et al. (2001) concluded that such language-focused uptake sheets are a convenient method of gathering information about what learners notice in second language classrooms, and the findings from this study have been influential in that most subsequent studies using uptake sheets have been based on the format that they recommended.

Over the past decade or so, uptake sheets seem to have been most commonly utilized as a supplementary data collection tool in classroom investigations of *noticing* (Schmidt, 1990) and form-focused instruction. For example, uptake sheets have been used to investigate noticing in response to interactional feedback from both teachers and fellow learners (Mackey, 2006; Fuji & Mackey, 2009); to show that teacher-initiated, rather than learner-initiated, form-focused episodes led to a higher incidence of uptake (Gholami & Bassirian, 2011); to assess the efficacy of different types of recasts during task interaction (Al-Surmi, 2012); and to investigate the effectiveness of focus-on-form interventions (Ghaedrahmat, Mohammadnia, & Gholami, 2019; Pouresmaeil & Gholami, 2019). In addition, uptake sheet data were used to reveal a disparity between a teacher's linguistic aims for a class and the learners' subsequent uptake (Nabei, 2013).

What are you noticing about…	Who said it? (check as many as you want)				Was it new to you? (check as many as you want)		
	Teacher	Class mate	Me	In the book	Yes, new	No, heard of it	No, knew it
Pronunciation • • • •							

Figure 1. The uptake sheet found to be most effective for gathering data (Mackey et al., 2001)

Researchers have several options available to them when using uptake sheets. They can be used by themselves to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (Mackey & Bryfonski, 2018), but most researchers have used them in a supplementary role together with other data sources such as recordings of classroom interaction and stimulated recall protocols. There has been divergence in previous studies when deciding whether to distribute uptake sheets at the beginning of the lesson and ask learners to record forms in real-time or to wait until the end of the class and ask learners to recall the significant language points they remember. Mackey (2017) suggested that uptake sheets be used in real-time during class activities and not left until the end of class, which Mackey claimed could impact validity as learners forget what they noticed. However, it could be argued that any forms reported at the *end* of class may reflect better the forms which were noticed and retained. Table 1 summarizes which options the recent empirical studies have taken.

Benefits and Limitations of Uptake Sheets

As previous studies have demonstrated, uptake sheets are a flexible data collection tool that can be utilized in a variety of classroom investigations, often in a supplementary role for triangulation, when the researcher wants to understand learners' perceptions of their own learning during different phases of a lesson. There is also the intriguing possibility that they could be used as a pedagogical tool to enhance noticing and augment learning. Using Mackey et al's (2001) model as a template, they are simple to create and adapt; they are also easy to administer, collect, and analyse, and are of little burden to participants compared to alternative methods such as simulated recall protocols or interviews.

Uptake sheets likely share the same problems as other introspective methods; namely, that of questionable reliability and internal validity (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). With any self-reported data, a threat to reliability exists because learners might recall different items if the same procedures are repeated. However, a problem with internal validity could be considered to be more serious than that of reliability, as it is difficult to know whether learners are telling the truth when they make reports (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

Table 1

A Summary of How Recent Studies Using Uptake Sheets Have Been Designed

Study	Other research methods	Real-time or end of class?
Al Surmi (2012)	• Grammatical judgement tests	real-time + end of class
Fujii and Mackey (2009)	• Stimulated recall	end of class
Ghaedrahmat et al. (2019)	• Audio recordings of interaction	real-time
Gholami and Bassirian (2011)	• Audio recordings of interaction • Observation field notes	real-time
Mackey (2006)	• Audio recordings of interaction • Stimulated recall • Focused L1 questions • Questionnaires	real-time
Nabei (2013)	• Audio recordings of interaction	end of class
Pouresmaeil and Gholami (2019)	• Audio recordings of interaction	real-time

In the empirical studies using uptake sheets described above, other weaknesses have been reported. One of these was that participants wrote items they considered to be the target forms for that lesson while ignoring others that they may indeed have noticed and processed on some level (Gholami & Bassirian, 2011; Palmeira, 1995). Another concern is that of over-reporting: Pouresmaeil and Gholami (2019) suggested that the very existence of the uptake sheets could make learners particularly sensitive to noticing (an archetypal manifestation of Labov's, 1972, *observer's paradox*), leading to a kind of *uptake inflation*, where an unexpectedly large number of items are reported. Although they felt this negatively impacted the validity of the instrument for their research purposes, Pouresmaeil and Gholami argued that this could bring benefits to

language classes that are trying to promote noticing and direct learner attention towards form. However, both these potential shortcomings can be alleviated by letting students become accustomed to using uptake sheets in lessons prior to data collection sessions, exactly the approach taken in Mackey (2006).

As with any research method, uptake sheets have their own specific drawbacks. It is perhaps for these reasons that introspective methods such as uptake sheets have often been considered more of a supplementary tool to support primary data collection methods (Harklau, 2011).

Using Uptake Sheets to Investigate Learner Orientation in TBLT

In this section, I will describe how uptake sheets helped me in my own investigation (Hawkes, 2018) looking at the impact of explicit instruction (EI) on task interaction. It has been strongly argued in the task-based language teaching (TBLT) literature that any teaching of forms before a task will direct the learners' orientation away from meaning and lead them to simply regurgitate the pre-taught structures (Willis & Willis, 2007). This would run counter to the kind of meaning-focused interaction that is a core principle of TBLT.

To investigate these claims, I qualitatively analysed audio recordings of interaction for two separate tasks from three groups of learners in intact classes (Figure 2). The Pre-task EI group received instruction of pre-determined target forms before the task and the Post-task EI group immediately after. The No-EI group did not receive instruction.

The qualitative analysis of the task interaction data showed that pre-teaching did indeed appear to impact learner orientation: most learners went to some effort to reproduce the target forms, often to the detriment of fluency and the flow of the task. However, these strongly form-focused episodes were transient, not seen in all learners' interactions, and there remained extensive periods of task interaction where learners appeared to orient towards the exchange of meaning and task completion.

These findings were based on the analysis of transcriptions of the task interaction. To look at the issue from a different angle, I had hoped to find some
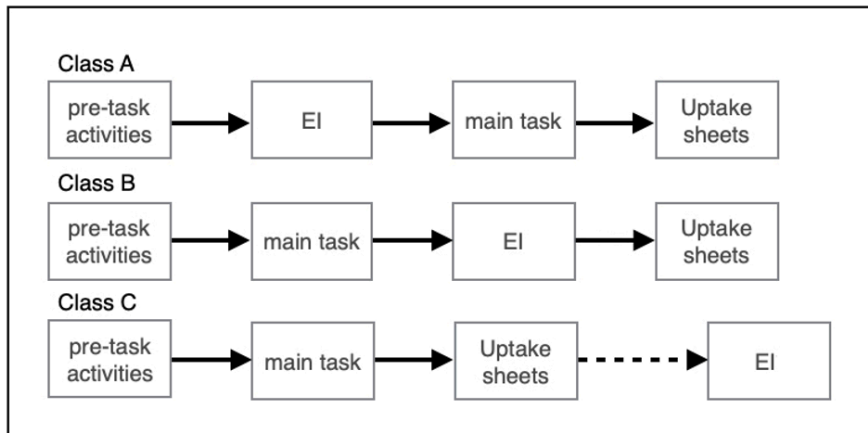
Figure 2. The research design.

learners to participate in stimulated recall protocols to gain their perspectives about the language choices they made. Unfortunately, although I scheduled some sessions, none of the participants were able to volunteer their time outside of class. This led me to look for an alternative supplementary research instrument to provide an element of triangulation that could easily be administered during class time. I realised that uptake sheets could be the tool to help me understand what language forms learners felt they had paid attention to during the lesson. I used an uptake sheet based on the one recommended by Mackey et al. (2001) (Figure 1) and asked learners to fill them out during the final ten minutes of the data collection sessions. I made the decision to have learners complete them at the end of class, as opposed to in real-time during the class activities, as I did not want the learners to be distracted from the task performance but instead later look back and reflect on the forms that had made a lasting impression on them.

I hypothesized that if pre-teaching really did direct learner attention towards form, this would be reflected in the items that the Pre-task EI group reported. I expected them to report items that were the target forms taught during the EI. The Post-task EI group's interaction data had painted a picture of meaning-oriented learners using whatever forms they had in their existing linguistic repertoire. However, I was curious about the way the post-task EI would influence the uptake sheet data. After all, the Post-task EI group received

instruction just before the uptake sheets were filled in. Surely, learners would write down those forms which had just been introduced by the teacher? And for the No-EI group, without being explicitly taught any target forms, what would they report noticing?

The uptake sheet data supported the main recorded interaction data in three main ways. First, the Pre-task EI group tended to report more EI-related forms than their peers in the Post-task EI group (and the No-EI group, but this was to be expected as they had not yet received the EI). This was despite the fact that the Post-task EI learners had finished the EI moments before filling out the uptake sheets, suggesting that the Post-task EI learners considered many of the forms they noticed during the task interaction to be of more importance.

Second, for the type of forms reported, there seemed to be more of a focus on grammar in the Pre-task EI group. These were invariably forms taken from the EI, again indicating an orientation to form. Conversely, the Post-task EI learners tended to focus more on the vocabulary items necessary for meaning exchange and task completion. Some of these were picked up during the pre-task activities and others from the main task interaction.

Third, regarding the source of noticed forms, the Pre-task EI group tended to report materials, meaning the EI handouts, as being the source of their noticing. They attributed far fewer forms to their peers than the Post-task EI group, who reported more forms from the pre-task stages or ones picked up from their interlocutors during the tasks. This was especially the case for the No-EI group, who overwhelmingly reported their peers as being the source of noticed forms. This noticing of mostly vocabulary items seemingly occurred naturally as part of the task interaction. As this brief summary shows, the uptake sheet data were able to provide support for some of the conclusions made from the interaction data, thereby strengthening the validity of the study.

Recommendations for Using Uptake Sheets

Uptake sheets can be a useful tool for teacher researchers in a wide variety of classroom investigations. Using Mackey et al.'s (2001) design, they are easily created, distributed, collected, and analysed, and can reveal what forms students

are really internalizing from EI, learning materials, corrective feedback, and their peers. They can help reveal learner orientations and determine if they are congruent with the teacher's goals and intentions. They could also be useful in studies of more implicit form-focused instruction, such as input enhancement (Loewen, 2015). Finally, in actual pedagogy, teachers may also find uptake sheets a useful way to direct learners' attention towards form by enhancing noticing. If, as Pouresmaeil and Gholami (2019) suggested, these sheets cause uptake inflation, they could be a means of boosting noticing and directing attention to form during largely meaning-focused instruction.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed uptake sheets to be a convenient tool for collecting supplementary data in classroom research. While their limitations need to be acknowledged, they are an alternative introspective method in situations where, as I experienced first-hand, stimulated recall protocols may be difficult to conduct due to time or volunteer number constraints. For studies with a relatively large number of students in intact classes, uptake sheets are easily created, administered, and collected, with relatively little inconvenience to the participants or interruption to the class flow (especially if done at the end of class). Several studies over the years have been able to look at data obtained from audio recordings from a different angle. This was also the approach I took in my study, and I found uptake sheets provided valuable data that corroborated the main findings, strengthened the validity of the study, and allowed me to draw conclusions regarding the impact of explicit instruction on learner orientation in tasks. It is hoped that the reader may wish to try out uptake sheets as an innovation in their classes for either pedagogical or research-oriented goals.

Acknowledgements

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