

## Topic Familiarity and Interlanguage Variation: A Study of the Impact of Interactional Feedback

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper presents the results of a study investigating the impact of interactional feedback on interlanguage variation in terms of accuracy, complexity, and fluency of learners' discourse in performing tasks with familiar vs. unfamiliar topics. The participants of the study who were randomly assigned into an experimental and a control group were required to perform a task with a familiar topic and one with an unfamiliar topic. The experimental group received interactional feedback while performing both tasks. The results revealed that the participants exposed to interactional feedback while performing both tasks achieved greater accuracy and complexity, but lower fluency. Greatest fluency was achieved by the participants who benefited from topic familiarity and were not interrupted with feedback moves. The findings highlight the need to consider interactional feedback as a task implementation condition in task grading and sequencing in syllabus design and materials development.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers, from the early seventies onwards, have attributed a greater role to interactive features of classroom behaviors such as feedback. Recent reviews of the role of input and interaction in second language acquisition (Mackey 1999, 2006; Gass, Mackey & Pica 1998; Long 1996; Pica 1994; Wesche 1994) argue that interaction can provide the input and output conditions conducive to L2 development. Feedback as a type of input has been investigated in L2 negotiation in and out of classroom (e.g. Lyster 1998a, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta 1997; Mackey 1999, 2006; Mackey, Gass & McDonough 2000; Mackey & Philip 1998; Oliver 1995, 2000; Ortega & Long, 1997), yet the usability and use of interactional feedback in second language development is far from clear.