TEACHING SPOKEN STANCE MARKERS: A COMPARISON OF RECEPTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE PRACTICE

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**ABSTRACT**

This article reports on the results of an experimental study designed to investigate the effects of receptive and productive practice on the acquisition of spoken stance markers such as ‘basically ‘ and ‘to be honest’. Two groups of participants were each given a different type of instruction for ninety minutes: one emphasised production of the target stance markers and the other receptive understanding of them. Prior to and following instruction, participants were given a receptive test, a controlled production test and a free production test to measure acquisition of the target forms. Results show that the instruction resulted in increased scores on almost all measures in the short term, but that this was not sustained over time and was only significant for the receptive practice group in terms of their production of the target language. When compared, no significant defences’ between the groups’ score were found.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In a recent review of research into spoken language, Timmis (2012) highlights some findings, areas of debate and potential ways forward for future research. He describes how recent research in corpus linguistics has helped to provide a clear picture of how spoken grammar and written grammar differ in at least some respects. Key findings of Biber Johansson, Leech and Finegan (1999), Carter and McCarthy (2006, 2015), McCarthy and Carter (1995) and Leech (2000), for instance, suggest that some major elements of spoken language are that it contains features such as ellipsis, tails, stance markers and discourse markers with greater frequency than we might intuitively guess.

However, as Timmis (2012) also acknowledges, there have been few empirical studies which have investigated the teaching and learning of such features of spoken language in classroom contexts. One way to remedy this is by examining the effect of different practice types on acquisition of particular aspects of spoken language. Practice can be defined as “specific activities in the second language engaged in systematically, deliberately, developing knowledge and skills in the second language” (DeKeyser, 2007, p. 8) and as such is an established aspect of most communicative methodologies. Despite this, there is to date only a limited amount of research into its effect upon acquisition (DeKeyser, 2007). This suggests that research investigating how to best practise forms which could help learners to speak more effectively is worthwhile, providing the forms chosen are appropriate for that context. Data from spoken corpora indicate that spoken stance markers are common in speech (Carter & McCarthy 2006) and the function of marking stance would also seem to be an important one for most learners, as it has been shown to be highly frequent in conversational discourse (Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002). This suggests that based on frequency, spoken stance markers are worthy of investigation. In addition, stance markers such as to be “honest”, “basically” and “no doubt” are not highly idiomatic in the way that slang or colloquial language can be and are therefore likely to be useful for learners in an English speaking context. Finally, we can suggest that stance markers are worthy of investigation because they have only occasionally been the subject of classroom research, particularly in spoken form. This study is therefore a small attempt to address the gap in empirical research which Timmis (2012) highlights by attempting to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent does receptive and productive practice aid the acquisition of spoken stance markers by intermediate (CEFR B2) level EAP learners studying in the UK?

RQ2. Which form of practice (receptive or productive) had more effect upon the acquisition of spoken stance markers?

**2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

**2.1 WHAT ARE STANCE MARKERS?**

Stance markers can be defined as a form of “pragmatic marker” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 208) because they do not indicate a propositional meaning but rather have a pragmatic function to “indicate the speaker’s stance or attitude vis-a-vis the message”. In other words, they serve to indicate how a speaker feels about the message they are trying to convey rather than the content of the message itself. As a category of pragmatic marker, they share some core similarities with discourse markers (such as “I mean” and “well”), which Jones and Carter (2014, p. 40) have suggested are optional in speech and can function in more than one way. Common spoken stance markers have been identified as items such as “to be honest”, “basically” and “obviously” (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 222). By examining a typical example in speech such as “*Clearly*, you should tell her the truth” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2015) we can see that the stance marker is optional here and in other contexts canfunction differently, as in the example “I can see *clearly*”where it acts as an adverb of manner and has a propositional meaning.

Many researchers have attempted to classify different forms of stance markers, often according to their function. In an early study, Biber and Finnegan (1988), who term these items “stance adverbials”, suggest that they can be categorised under one of six functions (1) *honestly* adverbials, (2) *generally* adverbials, (3) *surely* adverbials, (4) *actually* adverbials, (5) *maybe* adverbials and (6) *amazingly* adverbials (Biber & Finegan 1988, p. 1). Using a spoken and written corpus, Biber and Finegan studied large amounts of stance markers in context in order to distinguish between items with a literal meaning and those marking stance, such as the example “clearly” shown previously. Based on this analysis, they suggest the following exemplars for each functional category listed above: (1) Frankly, (2) Roughly, (3) Clearly, (4) In fact, (5) Possibly and (6) Amazingly (Biber & Finegan 1988, pp. 33–34). This initial analysis is illuminating and helps us to identify clear categories for stance markers by demonstrating how they function in context. The perspective has been developed further by Biber, Finegan, Leech, Conrad and Johansson (1999) and Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002), who categorise stance markers (again termed “stance adverbials”) within the broad areas of epistemic, attitude and style adverbials (Biber, Conrad, & Leech 2002, p. 383–385). Looking at large spoken and written corpora, they suggest that epistemic stance, the largest category, gives “the speaker’s judgments about the information in a proposition” (p. 382), allowing speakers to express aspects such as the certainty with which they view the proposition, while an attitude adverbial “tells the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition” (p. 384) and style adverbials “comment on the manner of conveying the message” (p. 385). Examples they give for each category include “probably” (epistemic), “hopefully” (attitude) and “to tell you the truth” (style) (pp. 383–385). Their analysis also suggests that overall, stance markers are most frequent in conversational discourse, with the most common category being markers which express epistemic stance. While this analysis is very useful, it is worth noting, as Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) acknowledge and as mentioned above, that stance markers may function in more than one way. To take the example of “honestly” it is perfectly possible to suggest that it can comment on the manner in which a speaker is creating a message (style adverbial, emphasising that I am being honest) whilst also conveying an attitude towards the message (attitude adverbial, meaning that is a surprising or even ridiculous idea). It is also the case that, as mentioned above**,** items which act as stance markers can also belong to other word classes. Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002, p. 386) give the example of “like” which can act as a discourse marker and to indicate epistemic stance, showing imprecision in the message, as in the example “It wasn’t till *like* 12:00 that I actually got to start on the project” (Carter, Mark, O’Keeffe, & McCarthy, 2011, p. 268). Despite these issues, it is this functional view of stance markers which would seem to be the most useful, particularly in terms of analysing items for teaching and research purposes and it is this one which has been employed in this study.

**2.2 INVESTIGATIONS OF STANCE MARKERS**

Studies investigating stance markers have often focused upon their usage by non-native speakers in comparison to native speakers and have tended to focus on such usage within written discourse. Hyland and Milton (1997), for example, constructed a corpus containing almost a million words of students writing. This contained essays by speakers of Cantonese as an L1 and of English as an L1 of equivalent age and educational level. Findings indicated that the non-native speakers used a more limited range of stance markers and were less able to express differing degrees of certainty with precision. Aijmer (2002) constructed a corpus to examine the writing of high level Swedish learners in comparison with native speakers and found that when expressing epistemic stance, the learners overused forms of modality in their writing when compared to native speakers. Precht (2003) examined the British and American conversation elements of the Longman Corpus of Spoken and Written English to explore differences in the usage of stance markers in these two varieties of English. Her findings suggest that American speakers tend to use more stance markers to express what she terms “affect markers”. For example, Americans tended to use more items such as “cool” and “wow”, while British speakers tended to use more “evidential markers” such as “a bit” to hedge propositions. Garielatos and McEnery (2005) used a corpus of MA dissertations to compare epistemic stance in native and non-native speakers. Their findings show that native speaker writers used considerably more modal auxiliaries, adjectives and adverbs than non-native speakers when expressing epistemic stance. Fordyce (2009) used a corpus of Japanese EFL students’ language to compare the means by which epistemic stance were expressed in spoken and written modes. His findings suggest that learners tended to rely on lexical ways to express stance, avoided modal verbs and placed a heavy reliance on the verb “think”. Taken together, these findings show, as we might expect, that there are clear differences in the stance markers employed by native and non-native speakers in different contexts and that native speakers in general use a wider range of markers to express stance. Finally, Gablasova, Brezina, McEnery and Boyd (2015) have investigated spoken epistemic stance in a corpus of advanced English as L2 speaker of mixed nationalities. The data, taken from standardised speaking tests, contained different tasks in which interaction patterns varied. For example, students were required to “present” a topic of their choice and later required to undertake an interactive discussion with the examiner on the same topic. Results showed that distribution of stance markers varied depending on whether the task was a monologue or dialogue, with far fewer stance markers used in the monologic tasks. This leads them to suggest that the interactional demand of the task impact has a significant impact upon usage of these items. In addition to this, results also show that they there was a lot of variation based on personal choice, meaning that speakers of the same level and nationality could use markedly different numbers of stance markers on the same task. This suggests that usage of pragmatic markers can also be influenced by how learners wish to present themselves in their L2. To take a simple example, learners might avoid items such as “maybe” if they do not wish to seem too hesitant or unsure.

While comparisons of usage have been fairly frequent, there have been noticeably fewer studies which have sought to investigate the teaching and learning of stance markers, particularly in regard to expressing stance in spoken discourse. One of the few studies which exists has been undertaken by Fordyce (2014), who has investigated epistemic stance in the written work of Japanese EFL learners. Comparing an explicit and implicit intervention when teaching items such as “probably”, “seems” and “believe”, the explicit group was given instruction which included input enhancement, deductive and inductive metalinguistic/metapragmatic instruction, while the implicit group focused on comprehension of class texts containing the target items. Both groups were given immediate and delayed post-test which involved two written tasks: a picture description and a short discursive essay. Results indicated significant gains for both groups in their use of stance, with the explicit group showing a stronger effect, particularly in the immediate post-test, but also sustained to a large extent over the five months between treatment and the delayed test (Fordyce, 2014, p. 21). These results suggest, alongside meta-analyses of instructed SLA in general (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010) that explicit instruction is likely to have a stronger effect upon acquisition of targeted forms.

A search for similar studies to Fordyce (2014) investigating forms of practice and acquisition of spoken stance markers yielded no results. However, within the field of instructed second language acquisition in general, there is some limited evidence regarding the effects of different type of practice. As mentioned in the introduction, we can define practice as “specific activities in the second language engaged in systematically, deliberately, developing knowledge and skills in the second language” (DeKeyser, 2007, p. 8) and under this broad definition, studies within the area of instructed SLA have been undertaken.

Investigations into processing instruction (e.g. VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten, 2002, 2015) seek to help with converting input to intake via a form of receptive practice. In this model, learners are not asked to produce the target forms but to recognise patterns and demonstrate understanding of form and content by, for example, listening and marking the picture which corresponds to the form given. This work is then followed with activities which require students to respond to the content of spoken samples of the form by agreeing or disagreeing. Students are also asked to read passages, including sentences with the target language highlighted and asked to explain them. In studies of this nature, input processing, has often been contrasted with a “traditional” approach to the target forms, where productive practice is given a prominent role. In many cases, results seem to favour input processing. For example VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) demonstrated that a processing instruction group outperformed the traditional group in both receptive awareness and production of the forms**,** in this case Spanish object pronouns.However, DeKeyser and Sokalski (1996, 2001) have questioned the findings of such studies as VanPatten and Cadierno (1993). When replicating this study, they found that, in general, processing input aided comprehension and output practice aided production. They also found that processing input seemed to aid both comprehension and production if the structure was difficult to comprehend and if the post-test was delayed. They found the opposite to be true if the structure was easier to produce and the post-test was immediate. In this case, output practice produced better results. Similarly, Muranoi (2007) reviews a number of different studies in this area and suggests, in contrast to VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) and VanPatten (2002, 2015) that studies which compare input processing with output practice (receptive vs productive practice) demonstrate that productive practice has a beneficial impact upon productive language use and input processing benefits receptive skills. More recently, Li (2012) investigated the effect of different forms of receptive practice types on the acquisition of Chinese L2 spoken requests by intermediate learners. This study compared the effect on more and less intensive practice in two experimental groups, when compared with a control group. Li found that the group which received a larger amount of practice made significant improvement in the speed of response times needed to make correct judgements on appropriate requests and in their accuracy of requests made in oral discourse completion tasks**,** when compared to the control group. There were, however, no significant differences observed between the results of the two experimental groups. Shintani, Li and Ellis (2013), in a meta-analysis of thirty recently published studies related to comprehension- and production-based instruction, found slightly more nuanced results than the studies described above. They suggest that both production-based instruction and comprehension-based instruction (emphasising productive practice and receptive practice respectively) had positive effects on understanding and ability to use the targeted forms. They also found that receptive practice benefited comprehension most in the short term and productive practice had a stronger benefit on production in the longer term. Both types of practice had a positive effect on production in the short term. This leads them to conclude that we cannot state categorically that either comprehension based or production based instruction is more beneficial than the other for either skill type.

**3. RESEARCH GAPS**

As mentioned in the introduction and subsequent literature review, there has been a shortage of experimental studies related to the acquisition of many spoken language features and of stance markers in particular. This study is an attempt to address this. At the same time, as has also been noted, the literature relating to the effects of receptive and productive practice is not always consistent. One would logically expect an emphasis upon receptive practice to have a positive impact upon receptive skills and an emphasis on productive practice to be more beneficial in developing productive skills but this has not always been shown to be true. There is also a question regarding the extent to which this holds true for forms which are pragmatic in nature, such as spoken stance markers. It could be argued that forms which are optional and carry a pragmatic meaning such as this may require a greater amount of receptive practice than those aspects of language where meaning is more transparent. Finally, much of the research in this area discussed above has focused upon grammatical forms, and therefore there is a need for studies which explore the effects of practice on lexical forms, particularly those which are highly frequent, such as spoken stance markers.

**4. METHODOLOGY**

Twenty nine learners (seven male, twenty two female) were randomly assigned to two treatment groups: experimental group 1 (productive practice, *n* = 15), experimental group 2 (receptive practice, *n* = 14). The nationality mix was Brazilian (3), Polish (1), Chinese (5), French (1), Japanese (16), Korean (2) and Spanish (1) and the mean age 23.All students were undertaking pre- or in-sessional English for Academic Purposes courses at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. As part of their English programmes, participants were given or had already undertaken a standardised placement test at the start of their course and only learners who had tested at CEFR B2 level were chosen to take part in the study. A learner’s competency at this level can be broadly defined as someone who “Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24). As only learners of B2 level undertaking pre- or in-sessional courses were chosen, this was therefore intended as a homogenous sample, as defined by Dörnyei (2007, p. 127). The intention was to investigate two groups with similar characteristics – studying EAP courses in the UK, at the same broad proficiency level. The study was conducted over a period of four weeks outside of normal class time and participants who met the criteria above volunteered to take part in the study.

This study employed an experimental design often used in this type of research (Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 275) because it compared two groups of learners at the same proficiency level, and used pre-, post- and delayed tests to measureimmediate gains and gains made over time.The design was intended to measure the effect of each form of practice and which type of practice was more effective in terms of acquiring the target stance markers. There was an assumption that practice of either type would have an impact upon the acquisition of the forms and as a result, there was no use of a control group. While this could be viewed as a weakness in the study design, there is also clear evidence that in form-focused instructed SLA studies, instructed treatment groups outperform control groups (e.g. Norris & Ortega, 2000). In addition, other studies in this area (e.g. Fordyce, 2014) have employed similar designs, as the intention is to measure the effects of a key variable in the instruction upon acquisition of forms (in this case the types of practice) and not whether instruction itself has any effect. Therefore, whilst the lack of a control group is a limitation of the study design, it does not invalidate the results.

The tests took place a week prior to the treatment, immediately after treatment and then after a delay of two weeks. Although there is no consensus about the length of delay employed in a study of this kind it has been suggested that a delay of more than a week is optimal and three weeks or longer ideal (Schmitt, 2010, p. 157). A longer delay than two weeks proved impossible in this study due to some students’ leaving courses or travelling back to their home countries but it was felt that two weeks’ delay was still of value. There were three tests used to elicit data, employed in the following order: (1) a free constructed response format, using a paired, interactive speaking task, (2) a controlled production task where learners were required to choose the most appropriate stance marker to fill in the gaps in sentences and (3) a receptive task where learners were required to simply circle the most appropriate stance marker to fit a set of sentences. Each test type was designed to measure ability to use the target items spontaneously in speech (test 1) and under controlled conditions (tests 2 and 3), and as such were intended to measure procedural knowledge (1) and declarative knowledge (2, 3). To avoid participants’ memorising answers, the order and wording of items and tasks was amended for each version of the tests, samples of which can be found in Appendix A. Although a free constructed response test gave participants the opportunity to use the targeted forms in focus they were not explicitly pushed to do so and there was naturally a danger that learners would simply avoid using the target forms. This is always a risk with this test type, as Fordyce (2014) acknowledges. However, it was felt that this was the most practical way of measuring the spontaneous usage of the target items under controlled conditions, and therefore it was considered a valid form of test.

The treatment itself consisted of one ninety minute class for each group. Each treatment targeted nine high frequency spoken stance markers: “admittedly”, “basically”, “fortunately”, “hopefully”, “in fact”, “no doubt”, “obviously”, “surprisingly” and “to be honest”, as identified by a corpus-informed grammar (Carter & McCarthy, 2006). The main criteria for choosing the items was their frequency but care was also taken to ensure different functions were covered. According to Biber, Conrad and Leech’s (2002) functional categories, as mentioned at the start of the literature review, of (1) epistemic stance adverbials, signalling “the speaker’s judgments about the information in a proposition” (p. 382); (2) attitude stance adverbials signalling “the speaker’s attitude towards the proposition” (p. 384) and (3) style adverbials, which comment “on the manner of conveying the message” (p. 385). We can categorise the items chosen as follows: “admittedly” (2), “basically” (1), “fortunately” (2), “hopefully” (2), “in fact” (1), “no doubt” (1), “obviously” (1), “surprisingly” (2) and “to be honest” (3).

For group one (the productive practice group) the target items were contextualised in a dialogue, which the group listened to, answered comprehension questions about and filled in the gaps with the missing stance markers. Meaning and form of the target items were checked and participants were then required to produce the items in controlled practice activities, as part of common lexical chunks such as “Basically it’s about...”. This procedure was designed to target the effect of productive practice on the acquisition of the target forms. For group two (the receptive practice group), participants first undertook a spoken task where there was no specific form focus, before comparing this to a dialogue of the same task, containing the target items. The dialogue was first listened to for meaning, and then again so that the target items could be noticed in comparison to the learner’s initial task. Following this, learners listened to the dialogue twice more whilst highlighting the target items as part of lexical chunks such as “Basically, I agree”. Finally, the target items were discussed in terms of meaning and use in comparison to participants’ first languages. At no stage were the learners asked to produce the target items themselves. This procedure was designed to target the effect of receptive practice on the acquisition of the target forms. See Appendix B for a more detailed description of both lesson procedures. Each treatment type was explicit, in the sense that “the learner is aware of what has been learned” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 250) because both form and meaning were clearly highlighted in each treatment. This was because, as highlighted above, it is explicit teaching which has in general been found to be more effective within instructed SLA studies (Norris & Ortega, 2000) and in classroom research related to stance markers (Fordyce, 2014).

Recordings of the free constructed response tests were made and a researcher and colleague listened and counted the target stance markers used correctly, with the right function and broadly correct pronunciation. These scores and the marks of the additional tests were then measured first via repeated measures to check the data were normally distributed. Once this was established, paired samples T-Tests were used to test the effect of the treatment on each group and independent samples T-tests to compare the gains made by each group on each test. Where significance was found, Cohen’s *d* was used to calculate effect sizes, where a positive effect was found.

**5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**RQ1. To what extent does receptive and productive practice aid the acquisition of spoken stance markers by intermediate (CEFR B2) level EAP learners studying in the UK?**

The descriptive statistics for both groups are shown in tables one to three below and are divided to indicate results for each test type, receptive, controlled production and free constructed response test. These results show that scores (out of a maximum of nine for the receptive and controlled production tests) at the pre-test stage were clearly stronger for both groups when assessing their receptive awareness and ability to use them under controlled conditions. Results also indicate a general improvement as a result of the treatment on all measures in the post-test only. This demonstrates the short term effect of the treatment, even if this was only slight in some cases and shows that, as we would expect, teaching these items has an immediate impact upon learners’ ability to understand and use them. As is the case in many studies of this kind (e.g. Halenko & Jones, 2011) results also indicate attrition over time, as delayed test scores were lower for each test type.

Table 1. Receptive test results

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Pre-test scores** | **Post-test scores** | **Delayed test scores** |
| ProductivePractice*N = 15* | *M* = 6.13*SD* = 1.885 | *M* = 6.93*SD* = 2.017 | *M* = 5.27*SD* = 1.438 |
| Receptive Practice*N = 14* | *M* = 6.21*SD* = 1.369 | *M* = 7.00*SD* = 1.519 | *M* = 5.00*SD* = 1.414 |

Note. Maximum score = 9.

Table 2. Controlled production test results

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Pre-test scores** | **Post-test scores** | **Delayed test scores** |
| ProductivePractice*N = 15* | *M* = 7.00*SD* = 1.309 | *M* = 7.13*SD* = 1.187 | *M* = 5.20*SD* = 2.007 |
| Receptive Practice*N = 14* | *M* = 7.07*SD* = 1.439 | *M* = 7.79*SD* = 1.528 | *M* = 6.14*SD* = 1.351 |

Note. Maximum score = 9.

Table 3. Free constructed response test results

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Pre-test scores** | **Post-test scores** | **Delayed test scores** |
| ProductivePractice*N = 15* | *M* = .33*SD* = .488 | *M* = .33*SD* = .617 | *M* = .40*SD* = .737 |
| Receptive Practice*N = 14* | *M* = .07*SD* = .267 | *M* = .43*SD* = .514 | *M* = .29*SD* = .469 |

Note. No maximum or minimum score.

A 2 (time) x 3 (group) repeated measures ANOVA on each test revealed no significance (calculated as *p. <.*05) on Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity (receptive test *p* =.781;controlled production test *p =*.100;speaking test *p* = .414). This meant that the data were considered to be normally distributed so parametric tests were selected. Therefore, within groups paired sample T-Tests sought to investigate the effect of the treatment on each individual group by comparing gains made at pre-post, pre-delayed and post-delayed stages for each test type. In terms of positive gains, significance was only found for the receptive practice group at the pre-post stage and in the free constructed response test only. The gain here was significant *M* = .36 *t* (13) = 2.69, *p = .*019, 95% confidence intervals (CI) = (.070, .644) with a large effect size (*d* = 0.79). This suggests that that the effect of the treatment was stronger on the receptive practice group in terms of their ability to use the items in the short term.

Significance was also found when attrition was examined. For the productive practice group, this occurred when comparing scores on the receptive tests at the post-delayed stage and post-delayed and pre-delayed controlled production tests. At the post-delayed stage the attrition for the receptive test was significant *M* = -1.667 *t* (14) = 3.30, *p* = .005, 95 % CI = (.586, 2.748), at the post-delayed stage of the controlled production test it was *M = -1.933 t* (14) = 4.276, *p* = .001, 95% CI = (.964, 2.903) and at the pre-delayed stage of the controlled production test it was *M = -1.800 t* (14) = 3.201, *p* = .006, 95% C1 = (.594, 3.006). For the receptive practice group, this occurred when comparing receptive test scores at post-delayed and pre-delayed stages and at the post-delayed stage of the controlled production test. At the post-delayed stage the attrition was significant *M*  = -2.000 *t* (13) = 3.453, *p* = .004, 95% CI (.780, 3.220), at the pre-delayed stage of the receptive test it was *M* = -1.214 *t* (13) = 2.517, *p =* .026, 95% CI = ( .172, 2.256) and at the post-delayed stage of the controlled production test the score was *M* = -1.643 *t* (13) = 3.452, *p* = .004, 95% CI = (.615, 2.671).

Overall, these results are worthy of note because they contradict the notion that in general each type of practice will benefit each skill type (DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996, 2001) so that a focus on receptive skills will most improve receptive awareness and a focus on productive skills will most improve production. In this study, this was not the case. Instead, the receptive practice group showed a significant increase in their production of the target items in the free constructed response tests at the post-test stage so we can suggest that receptive practice had a clear benefit in terms of their output. Also, the decreased scores show that the receptive practice group’s scores deteriorated most on the delayed receptive tests and the productive practice group on the delayed controlled production scores. This suggests that there was no clear link between type of practice and the skills that each type of practice benefited in this case.

There could be several reasons for these results. Firstly, the increase in the scores of the receptive practice group’s output may demonstrate that for these target items more receptive practice is beneficial due to their pragmatic nature. Learners may benefit from hearing the stance markers more times than language of a propositional nature, in order to develop a “feel” for when and how to use them prior to production. Secondly, the results may simply indicate that the treatment was too short and there is a need for more revision and practice to aid longer term acquisition, as there was some clear benefit shown by increased scores on all measures immediately following the treatment but this was not sustained into the delayed test. Finally, in terms of the attrition in learners’ scores, we could speculate teaching may have caused learners to overly analyse their responses in the controlled tests which in the pre-tests they did not. Due to the pragmatic nature of stance markers this could suggest that under controlled conditions, with time to consider their answers, such analysis may have distracted students from the “feel” they had for the correct answers. These areas will be discussed again in the conclusion.

**RQ2. Which form of practice (receptive or productive) had more effect upon the acquisition of spoken stance markers?**

In order to check which practice type was more effective, an independent samples T-test was conducted on each group for each test type. At all stages, no significant differences were found between the groups. Results can be summarised as follows: receptive tests – pre-test *p = .896*,post-test *p* = .921, delayed test *p = .619*;controlled production tests – pre-test *p* = .890, post-test *p* =.208, delayed test *p* = .152; speaking tests – pre-test *p* = .087, post-test *p* = .656, *p* = .625. This means that we cannot suggest that one type of practice was more beneficial than the other in this particular study.

Overall, both sets of results show that the treatment had an immediate effect, as shown in the post-test results. For the receptive practice group only, results were significant in relation to their spoken production of the target stance markers at the immediate post-test stage, even though the amount of stance markers they produced was still small. This indicates that in this study, a focus on receptive practice had a positive impact upon the students’ output immediately following the treatment. Such a result shares some similarity with studies and theories of input processing (e.g. VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993, VanPatten, 2015) which suggest that developing receptive awareness of forms alone can benefit ability to produce targeted language. Although the current study did not follow all the suggestions given by advocates of input processing, this result is worthy of further investigation. Despite this, it must be acknowledged that the relatively small sample size may have been a factor in the results and it would therefore be helpful replicate the same study with larger numbers to increase the reliability of the results. While there is no guarantee that this would produce clearer results, it is at least worth investigating. It may also be the case that the choice of a free constructed response test could have impacted upon the results. As acknowledged in the methodology section, students may simply chose not to use the target items in such a test, even though they are able to do so. Therefore, an alternative controlled production test, such as a modified discourse completion task, may elicit more of the target items and could be considered for future studies. This will be discussed further in the conclusion section.

**6. CONCLUSION**

Overall, although the results are not conclusive they are at least instructive for teaching and further research. The first implication for teaching is that the study shows that the impact of “one off” instruction on specific aspects of language (in this case spoken stance markers) is likely to be strongest in the short term. This finding is consistent with Selinker’s early work (Selinker, 1972) on the development of interlanguage, which suggests that it is something that develops over time and that acquisition does not occur in a straightforward fashion. Learners often seem to have acquired an aspect of language one week, only to make many errors with it the next. We cannot guarantee that teaching will change or speed up the process of acquisition but as this is ultimately the goal of teaching a second language, then this suggest that learners need to meet items across several lessons and texts with a good deal of revision. This may be especially so with pragmatic aspects of language such as stance markers as they are optional in spoken discourse and this increases the chances that learners will simply avoid them. Related to this, in terms of research, a limitation and possible future development of this study would be to increase the amount of time given to the treatment. Although Norris and Ortega (2000) found that length of intervention did not impact upon the effectiveness of instruction, the studies they examined were in general focused upon aspects of grammar with propositional meanings. The pragmatic nature of spoken stance markers may require a greater length of treatment to have a clearer effect and this is something which could be developed. In his study on written stance markers, Fordyce (2014) chose an intervention length of three hours and produced clearer results, so an increase of an extra ninety minutes or more, alongside a larger sample size, may yield clearer longer term results. As noted in the methodology section, the addition of a control group would also strengthen future studies by providing evidence that the treatment accelerates learning of the target items to a greater extent than no intervention.

Future studies could also examine the differential effects on the target stance markers of the same amount of practice delivered intensively (in a short space of time) and in a distributed form (spaced over more time). Intensive practice has been shown to be more beneficial for intermediate learners in terms of their general gains (e.g. Serrano, 2011) but has not, to the best of my knowledge, been researched in relation to pragmatic markers of this type. Such a study, coupled with an increase in the time given for treatment, would allow us to investigate the effects of both amount of practice and spacing of practice. In terms of instruction, teachers could usefully experiment with giving learners increased receptive practice (as the effects were slightly more beneficial in this study) intensively or over time, when focussing on pragmatic markers of this type. This is relatively simple to begin in class. Teachers can develop self-produced dialogues, listen to them in class, checking comprehension and clarifying form/meaning of targeted items. Learners can then be given copies of the recordings used and asked them to simply re-listen to them several times, either in short busts or spaced over time. They can then be asked to report back on what they can recall following practice.

Future studies could also benefit from the addition of a spoken test which attempts to capture controlled production of the target items. It is worth investigating the use of a modified discourse completion task (DCT) to elicit the target items. Such DCTs are often used in interlanguage pragmatics research and can take the form of written or spoken tests. Typically, a scenario is described and a participant writes or says what they would say in this situation. In the case of spoken stance markers, researchers could employ a computer animated production test (CAPT) of the type described by Halenko (2013), modified to fit the target items. These tests use an animated figure to provide learners with a spoken prompt to which they respond and record their answer and have been found to elicit language which is closer to what students would actually say in a given situation, rather than what they might say (Halenko, 2013). For example, one situation could be “You are talking to a friend and telling him/her about what you did last night. You went to see a film and are talking to him/her about it.” The prompt could then come from the computer animated friend “Oh, you went to see… What’s it about?” and could elicit stance markers such as “basically” when learners summarise the plot. Such tests could be used alongside the ones described in this study to form part of a test battery (Schmitt, 2010), to assess different aspects of productive and receptive knowledge.

The final implication is that, for teachers, it is worth asking learners if they use high frequency stance markers in their speech and if so which they use, which they tend to avoid and why. One way to begin this process is to record learners in situations designed to elicit stance makers and use such recordings for learners to listen back to and check which stance markers they use and do not use from a given list before discussing why they do and do not use certain items. An example might be a conversation based on the type of prompts described in the CAPT above, where students are asked to describe the plot of a recent film they have seen to elicit markers such as “basically”. Future research could take these aspects of learning into account through adding qualitative data collection techniques in the form of learner diaries, interviews or focus groups, which could attempt to track how learners use and encounter such high frequency spoken stance markers outside class. Data of this nature would allow us to demonstrate the extent to which avoidance or usage of particular items is also linked to the manner in which a learners wishes to be perceived in their L2, as Gablasova, Brezina, Mcenery and Boyd (2015) have suggested.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Samples of receptive, controlled production and free constructed response tests**

**Receptive test sample**

Look at the conversations below. **Circle the correct answer** from the choices given. There is an example given to help you.

1 a) So where exactly did you go during the summer holidays?

 b) Well, we went to an island and did lots of windsurfing. But *(no doubt, fortunately, to be honest)* I didn’t like it that much – I prefer winter holidays!

2 a) Did he pass his driving test?

 b) Yes, he did – (obviously, in fact, fortunately) he’s now taking an advanced driving test.

3 a) Are you doing anything at the weekend?

 b) I’m not really sure at the moment. *(Surprisingly, Fortunately, Hopefully)* I’ll think of something.

**Controlled production test sample**

Fill in the gaps. Choose **one answer** from the box for each gap. There are **more answers** than you need.

 *No doubt, Fortunately, Basically, Hopefully, To be honest.*

1. Did you get home ok from the UCLan ESN society party?

Well, we missed the last bus but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ we managed to get a lift in the end.

1. What’s the *Avatar* film about?

It’s really complex and difficult to explain but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ it’s an amazing story of how could people interact with an alien race.

1. How was your date on St Valentine’s Day?

 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I’d rather not say.

**Free constructed response test sample**

***Discuss the questions below together.***

* Do you think mobile phones can replace traditional education and entertainment media? Why/why not?
* If you had a week without your mobile phone what would you do instead?
* What do you like and dislike about the use of mobile phones?

**APPENDIX B**

**Summary of lesson procedures**

*Productive practice treatment*

1. Warm up – what do you do outside the class to improve your English? How have you used English in the last twenty four hours?
2. Listen to two speakers discussing what they feel are useful ways to help them learn second language, for example, writing words in their notebooks. From a list of 10, listen and tick five they choose.
3. Listen to the conversation and fill in the gaps containing the target stance markers.
4. Whole class check on gaps. Teacher checks – Why do speakers use them? When can we use them?
5. Students match the target stance markers to meanings. Teacher checks meaning with examples and concept questions.
6. Practice 1. The teacher drills the target stance markers in mini-conversations with typical chunks, for example, “What is the Hobbit about? – *Basically* it’s the story of a journey”. The whole class and then pairs repeats the drills.
7. Practice 2. Students work in pairs to have mini-conversations using prompts. Each pair has different prompts and must different stance markers in their reply, and then extend the prompts into short conversations. Example task:

*Student A*

*Ask your partner the questions below. Answer your partner’s questions using the words you are given.*

1. **Do you enjoy studying in the library?**

**Use the words below when you answer:**

*Hopefully, To be honest, Basically, In fact*

*Student B*

*Ask your partner the questions below. Answer your partner’s questions using the words you are given.*

**1. Do you like British food?**

 *Fortunately, In fact, To be honest, No doubt*

8. Teacher gets feedback and offers corrections.

*Receptive practice treatment*

1. Warmer – what do you do outside the class to improve your English? How have you used English in the last twenty four hours?
2. Set up task – students are given a list of ten things they can do to help them improve their English, for example, listening to the radio. They discuss and decide in groups which are the five most useful.
3. Feedback on decisions made.
4. Listening practice 1 – Listen to two speakers discussing what they feel are useful ways to help them to learn second language, for example, writing words in their notebooks. From a list of 10, listen and tick five they choose.
5. Listening practice 2 – students listen again and are asked to notice what is different if they compare the recording with their task. If needed they listen again with the tapescript.
6. Feedback – students will have noticed or been guided towards the speakers’ use of stance markers.
7. Listening practice 3 and 4 – students listen again with the tapescript, highlighting stance markers they have noticed.
8. Whole class feedback. Teacher checks – Why do speakers use them? When can we use them?
9. Students match the target stance markers to meanings. Teacher checks meaning with examples and concept questions.
10. Discussion in pairs and as a group – Do you have similar expressions in your L1? How are they similar or different? Have they heard English speakers using these expressions?