



## BEYOND “EXCELLENT!”: UNCOVERING THE SYSTEMATICITY BEHIND POSITIVE FEEDBACK TURN CONSTRUCTION IN ESL CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** That oral teacher feedback influences learning opportunities in classroom settings is found across language learning research, though there remains a lack of empirical evidence concerning how *and* why teachers construct their feedback turns *in situ*. The current paper begins to address this by uncovering how one English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher systematically constructs the positive feedback turn when addressing what she orients to as correct learner responses to her initiations, and the factors found in the discourse to influence her real-time decisions. Utilizing the framework of conversation analysis (CA), three distinct teacher practices emerge from the data: *giving positive assessment*, *inviting peer assessment*, and *implying positive assessment*. Each practice is detailed with a focus on the sequential environments in which they occur and their varied constructions. As evident in the discourse, central to this teacher’s systematic use of these practices is maintaining interactional flow and ensuring information clarity with all learners in the class in relation to the goals of the immediate talk. The findings contribute to both the positive feedback and language learning literatures by illustrating the dexterity teachers possess in deciding how to address multiple factors simultaneously when providing feedback.

**Keywords:** Conversation analysis, ESL, classroom discourse, positive feedback, teacher talk

**Özet:** Sınıf ortamlarında sözlü öğretmen dönütünün öğrenme olanaklarını etkilediği dil öğrenme araştırmalarında belirtilmektedir, fakat, öğretmenlerin bu durumlarda dönütlerini nasıl ve neden yapılandıkları ile ilgili görgül kanıt eksikliği göze çarpmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bir İkinci Dil olarak İngilizce öğretmenin öğrenci cevaplarını düzeltirken olumlu dönütlerini sistematik olarak nasıl yapılandığını, ve gerçek zamanlı kararlarını etkileyen faktörleri açıklayarak bu konuyu ele almaktadır. Konuşma çözümlemesi çerçevesi ile, çalışmada üç belirgin öğretmen uygulaması ortaya çıkmaktadır: *olumlu değerlendirme yapmak*, *akran değerlendirmesine imkan sağlamak* ve *olumlu değerlendirme ima etmek*. Her bir uygulama meydana geldikleri dizimsel ortamlara ve onların değişiklik gösteren yapılarına odaklanarak detaylandırılmaktadır. Söylemde açık olduğu üzere, öğretmenin bu uygulamaları sistematik bir şekilde kullanmasının temelinde o anki konuşmanın hedeflerine uygun olarak sınıftaki tüm öğrencilerle etkileşimsel akışı devam ettirmek ve bilgi anlaşılabilirliğini korumak vardır. Bulgular, öğretmenin dönüt verirken birçok faktörle eşzamanlı olarak nasıl ilgileneceğine karar vermesindeki becerisini göstererek hem olumlu dönüt hem de dil öğrenme literatürlerine katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Konuşma çözümlemesi, İkinci Dil olarak İngilizce, sınıf söylemi, olumlu dönüt, öğretmen konuşması

### 1. Introduction

That oral teacher feedback influences learning opportunities in classroom settings is evident across language learning research, with a particular focus on how teachers address learners’ language errors vis-à-vis recasts, explicit corrections, clarification requests, confirmation checks, metalinguistic cues, elicitation, repetition of errors, and translation (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ranta & Lyster, 2007). At the forefront of this research is whether these different types of corrective

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feedback enable learners to notice their errors, negotiate with the language, and produce modified output with corrected language use (Gass & Mackey, 2006; Long, 2007; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). Concurrently, in following the tenants of sociocultural theory, which views learning as originating in social interaction (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), classroom discourse analysts have shown how the construction of teacher feedback turns can hinder or promote *opportunities* for language learning. This has been particularly evident in work on the third turn of the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, cf. IRE, Mehan, 1979), where teachers are encouraged to promote “dialogic interaction” regardless of the correctness of the learner’s second turn response (Hall & Walsh, 2002, p. 190). Such actions in that third turn have included, among others, incorporating learner talk in subsequent discourse, building upon what learners have said to further along the lesson, asking learners to elaborate on their responses, and encouraging peers to respond (e.g., Cullen, 2002; Gutiérrez, 2008; Hall, 2002; Liu, 2008).

Despite the girth of research on teacher feedback construction and connection to language learning, there remains a lack of empirical evidence concerning how *and* why teachers construct their feedback turns *in situ*. The minimal work that has begun to investigate this quandary focuses on the effects of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge on feedback choices (e.g., Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004; Borg, 1998; Jean & Simard, 2011; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Mori, 2011), all the while utilizing data that get at teachers’ reflections of their practices as opposed to their actual practices in naturally-occurring classroom interaction. Of the few studies based on such interactions (e.g., Yoshida, 2008), the data do not include a fine-grained analysis of the moment-by-moment construction of the discourse. The current study begins to address this by examining one English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher’s feedback turns in the IRF sequence when addressing what she orients to as correct learner responses to her initiations. This investigation into teacher positive feedback turns is particularly relevant given that it “...has received little attention, in part because discourse analytical studies of classroom interaction have shown that the teacher’s positive feedback [turn] is frequently ambiguous” (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). Countering this claim, this study uncovers the teacher’s systematic use of the positive feedback turn and the factors found in the discourse to influence her real-time decisions.

## 2. Background

While an abundant amount of research in the field of language learning focuses on teacher negative or corrective feedback practices, “work on positive feedback is difficult to find” (Wong & Waring, 2009, p. 195). This has not necessarily been the case in other educational disciplines where a focal point in the feedback literature is the examination of positive feedback as a potential catalyst in the learning process. To position the current study, here I present research from both language learning and non-language learning fields that have examined how teacher positive feedback turns are constructed and their potential effects on the learning process.

In reviewing the positive feedback literature, the majority of this work has examined its use for the purposes of praise. Contrary to early educational studies that equated positive feedback to positive reinforcement vis-à-vis behaviorism (cf. Brophy, 1981), much of the current work finds feedback-as-praise having a positive correlation with learner motivation and self-esteem (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Irving, Harris, & Petersen, 2011). This is particularly evident when praise relates to the specific needs or identities of the learner population as well as the instructional

goals of the lesson (Narciss & Huth, 2004). For example, in understanding the uses and effects of praise on learners in elementary school settings, Burnett and Mandel (2010) illustrated how the age of learners was the deciding factor in how teachers provided praise, where younger children were more often praised for their ability to successfully accomplish a task while older children received more praise for their efforts at doing a task and not necessarily successful completion. In examining English non-native-speaking identities during English as a lingua franca transnational interactions, Jenks (2013) found that non-native English speakers would receive specific praise that included direct references to what they had successfully done in their English use, e.g., good pronunciation or accent, rather than perfunctory positive praise, e.g., “good job”. Of the few studies looking at feedback-as-praise in the language classroom, Reigel (2008) showed a statistical significance in the increased use of teacher praise when learners were on the cusp of moving on to the next level in their English language program.

Although positive feedback has often been associated with praise, this is not always its purpose. In their investigations on fossilization, Vigil and Oller (1976) first sought to disambiguate positive feedback usage by differentiating between affective feedback (“I like that”) and affirmation (“I understand”). In this way, positive feedback, like its negative counterpart, is used not only for addressing the correctness of a response but also as a teacher management tool to guide learners towards understanding what is “correct” language use and, potentially, why that is the case (Allwright, 1980). In so doing, teachers also can employ positive feedback to ensure subsequent engagement in the lesson. Hattie and Timperley (2007) described how this can be accomplished if teachers considered three questions when giving feedback: (1) where am I going, i.e., what is the goal, (2) how am I going, i.e., how will it be accomplished, and (3) where to next, i.e., what is the next step in achieving the said goal. Key to this, they note, is ensuring that learners understand why the feedback has been given.

As shown, positive feedback generally can have multiple uses and varied potential effects on learning. Classroom discourse studies utilizing the framework of conversation analysis (henceforth CA) add to this literature by examining how positive feedback turns are constructed and potentially influence *opportunities* for learning in subsequent interactions. Using a microanalytic lens that allows for intricate details into the verbal cues and nonverbal conduct used by interlocutors, CA scholars investigate the construction of talk by examining how participants orient to others’ prior turns-at-talk (ten Have, 2007). Through this framework, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) found that in ordinary conversation there is systematic construction of turn-taking in talk-in-interaction in the form of adjacency pairs, where Participant A constructs a first turn, i.e., a first pair part, and Participant B responds with a sequentially relevant second turn, i.e., a second pair part. When the adjacency pair is set up in a preference structure, where Participant A has a preference for how Participant B should respond, there is an increased possibility for Participant A to provide some form of post-expansion (Pomerantz, 1984). In the case of a preferred second pair part, the post expansion is minimal, i.e., “oh”, “okay”, or some form of assessment, and marked as sequence-closing (Schegloff, 2007). Relating this to the classroom, teacher positive feedback turns act as minimal post-expansions, reacting to the correct second pair part learner response to the teacher’s first pair part initiation; in this respect, there would be few opportunities for sequence elaboration following a positive feedback turn given its sequence-closing nature. Waring (2008) and Wong and Waring (2009) confirmed this in their investigations into the teacher’s use of explicit positive assessments (e.g.,

“very good”) in the third turn of the IRF sequence; when used, both the teacher and the learners oriented to such assessment as closing the sequence regardless of whether there were further questions or comments on the topic. Waring (2008) further found evidence of the potential hindrance to learning opportunities that such feedback could cause when, many lines after an explicit positive assessment had been given and the topic closed, one learner had a question regarding the correctness of the response provided, leading to a series of questions from other learners.

One final note on positive feedback concerns the manner in which it is constructed. A common tenant across this literature has been the use of the feedback turn to explicitly mark the correctness of learner responses, e.g., “excellent”, “very good”, “good job”, “yes”. Such explicitness, however, need not always be utilized in the designated feedback turn for a teacher to mark a learner’s response as correct. As Seedhouse (2004) deduced in his CA examination of language classroom interactions, positive feedback can be implied by the absence of a signal for learner correction. In other words, by virtue of not using the feedback turn to mark correctness or incorrectness but rather using it to initiate a new sequence, the teacher implies that the response was satisfactorily given, thus allowing the class to move on with the lesson.

In sum, prior work done on positive feedback across educational disciplines have illustrated (1) how teachers can use such feedback for varied purposes, (2) how positive feedback can affect learning opportunities, and (3) how positive feedback can be given explicitly or implicitly. Yet to be examined is how teachers decide how to utilize the positive feedback turn *in situ*. In this conversation analytic study, I explore the practices utilized by one ESL teacher in positive feedback turns as they emerge from the discourse data and the factors affecting their use as evident in the classroom interaction.

### **3. Data and Method**

The data for this study come from an adult ESL course at a community language program in a major city in the United States. The common goal for this program’s learner population is to understand everyday interactions, whether oral or written. As such, it is expected that the teachers use “typical interactive practices” (Hall, 1995, p. 208) that will help the ESL learners in their daily lives in the United States. Over the course of the semester, teachers have 50 hours of classroom contact; during the intensive summer session in which the study took place, classes were offered for 120 minutes each day, four days a week over the course of five weeks.

Stemming from purposeful sampling (Bogden & Biklen, 2007) the teacher participant, Ann<sup>i</sup>, was a master teacher in the program and was chosen based on her 30+ years of experience teaching English and Spanish across the United States and Europe, her background working with adults in community settings, and her current work as a doctoral student in an applied linguistics program at a nearby university, thus providing her access to language learning and teaching research. In addition, Ann was chosen because she had already been a master teacher prior to this semester, making her knowledgeable of the intricacies of the program and its learners, and was familiar with being video-recorded while teaching, key to minimizing performance anxiety in front of a camera that would affect natural interaction (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). Due to the nature of the study, it was imperative to get consent for video-recording not only from Ann, who gave consent almost immediately after the project was described, but also from most of the learners in

the class, if not all. The course Ann taught during the summer session was the most advanced in the program and included learners from four language backgrounds: Japanese, Korean, German, and Portuguese. The characteristics of learners in this course were typical of such community programs, where ages, educational backgrounds, English learning experiences, careers, reasons for being in the program, and days in attendance were varied (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). To establish a rapport with the learners, I attended the first class, where I presented my research project as an intricate examination of Ann's teaching. The learner participants were informed that they would be video-recorded, which would not affect their grades for the class. All the learners agreed to participate and gave consent to being video-recorded. Throughout the remainder of the course, this information was repeated as new learners arrived; in the end, every learner in Ann's class provided written consent to participate.

The data consisted of 26 hours of video-recorded classroom interactions which were transcribed using a modified version of Gail Jefferson's system, allowing for intricate details of both verbal cues and non-verbal conduct utilized by the participants (see Appendix) (Waring, 2008). Upon completing the transcription, initial line-by-line analyses were done from which distinct sequences-of-talk began to emerge, including sequences where Ann addressed learner responses that she oriented to as correct. After separating these sequences into their own data set, reiterative line-by-line analyses were done, from which specific practices began to emerge and were separated from one another. One final stage of discursive analysis was conducted to distinguish (1) the different constructions with which the practices were formulated, and (2) the specific sequential environments in which they occurred. Throughout this examination, strict adherence was given to the transcript to ensure valid findings from an *emic* perspective (i.e., actual interaction construction by participants) as opposed to an *etic* one (i.e., researcher's external interpretation of interaction construction), a central factor to doing a CA investigation (ten Have, 2007).

#### 4. Analysis

When addressing what Ann orients to as a correct response to her initiation, three practices are used: *giving positive assessment*, *inviting peer assessment*, and *implying positive assessment*. Below is an analysis of each practice, including the specific sequential environments in which they occur, their varied constructions, and the factors influencing their use as evident in the discourse. For each excerpt, Ann's initiation turns are marked with →, the learners' correct responses with ➔ and Ann's feedback turns with ⇒.

##### 4. 1. Giving Positive Assessment

*Giving positive assessment* refers to the teacher explicitly indicating that the learner's response is correct through explicit positive assessment terms such as "excellent", "very good", or "perfect" (Waring, 2008), or matter-of-fact receipts (e.g., "good", "right", "okay") and nonverbal conduct (e.g., head nodding, smiling) overtly indicating that the provided response is indeed correct and oriented to by the learners as doing such<sup>ii</sup>. This practice typically occurs when addressing learners' correct responses concerning procedural matters, as exemplified in excerpt 1. Here, the learners prepare to start a daily fill-in-the-blank prepositions/particles activity<sup>iii</sup>. During the first four weeks of the course, the activity's instructions remained consistent; the fifth week, however, brought changes to the instructions. This excerpt is now taking place on the second day of the new instructions being used, and the teacher has just passed out the worksheets:

*Excerpt 1 Exactly*

01 Ann: and if you look, (1.2) the instructions (0.4) are the same,  
 02 (0.6) as yesterday.= unfortunately.  
 03 (0.8)  
 04 → beca- because,=what is the biggest difference (.)*{((holds up*  
 05 *paper))*- in the instructions?*}*  
 06 (0.4)- *((LL look around or at Ann))*  
 07 Tetsu: → u:h, (.) if we don't need to put the preposition, (.) keep it  
 08 blank.  
 09 Ann: ⇒ *{((nods to Tetsu))*- exactly.*}*= *{((looks to all other LL))*- you  
 10 ju- you just leave it blank.*}*  
 11 *((Ann looks at worksheet; LL start activity))*

After focusing the learners' attention toward the instructions, Ann explains why the instructions are different, as she had done the previous day (lines 1-2). In line 4, there is a sudden change in the direction of her talk, where she initiates a new sequence asking the learners to confirm that they remember the changes. After a 0.4-second gap, Tetsu provides the response that not all the blanks need a preposition, to which Ann replies with an explicit positive assessment, "exactly," before paraphrasing the response for the other learners, marking it for them as correct. As is commonplace with explicit positive assessment, Ann and the learners orient to this sequence as now closed (Waring, 2008), shown in line 11 as the learners proceed with the activity.

Giving positive assessment is also used when managing correct responses produced after some hesitation. Excerpt 2 is one such case; taking place halfway through the course, this excerpt occurs after Ann has given the learners their daily prepositions/particles activity. Immediately prior, the learners had been comparing their individual answers in small groups and verbalizing their struggles in doing this particular day's worksheet. Ann is now inviting learners to share their answers, starting with the sentence "I'm really excited \_\_ going to the opera next weekend":

*Excerpt 2 You're Right*

01 Ann: → does anyone feel *{((puts hand up))*- good about this?*}*  
 02 (2.8)- *((LL shake heads or laugh))*  
 03 *((looks around at all LL))*- <no one> feels good?  
 04 (3.0)- *((Ann looks at LL; LL look down))*  
 05 okay.= then we all do it together.  
 06 (0.2)- *((Ann quickly looks around class))*  
 07 >then we all do it together.< and i sa::y (.) the ↑thing,  
 08 (0.4)- *((Ann quickly looks around))*  
 09 number one.=i'm really excite:d, *{((to Miki))*- what do you  
 10 think.*}*  
 11 (1.0)- *((Miki looks at paper and then at Ann))*  
 12 Miki: → .hh <about?>  
 13 Ann: ⇒ *((smiles))* you're right. *{((to other LL))*- it's about.*}*  
 14 (1.2)- *((LL take notes; Bae shakes head))*  
 15 *((to Bae))*- it's good.= so you're going ↑oh ma::n. on the first

16                         one i got it [wrong.]  
 17     Bae:                         [yeah. ]  
 18                         (2.2)- ((Ann looks at LL: LL take notes))  
 19     Ann:                         {((to all LL))- okay?} {((to Miki))- miki. it's your day.  
 20                         keep going. number two.}

Although the excerpt begins with Ann using one of her common elicitation phrases (line 1), she is met with an extended period of silence<sup>iv</sup> (line 2); after altering her initiation turn (line 3), she is again met with a slightly longer period of silence (line 4). Following these overt instances of learner hesitancy, Ann changes the entire direction of the activity from inviting learners to respond to nominating a specific learner, Miki, to provide a response (lines 9-10). Following a 1.0-second gap, Miki provides the correct response “about.” (line 12), to which Ann gives positive assessment with both verbal (i.e., “You’re right.”) and nonverbal cues (i.e., smiling). Similar to what was found in excerpt 1, she not only addresses Miki in line 13 but also confirms with all the learners that this response is correct. After an aside with one of the other learners concerning the correctness of his individual answer (lines 14-18), Ann moves on to the next item by nominating Miki to continue with her answers (lines 19-20).

The practice of giving positive assessment is further found when managing correct responses connected to concepts that learners have displayed difficulty in understanding. To illustrate, the learners in excerpt 3 are seen struggling with one of the sentences in Day 3’s daily prepositions/particles activity: “We’ve been in Barcelona for a month; let’s go \_\_ this weekend.” After one learner provided the incorrect response of “on”, Ann is now eliciting responses from other learners:

*Excerpt 3 That One*

01     Ann:                         ((to other LL))- any other ideas?  
 02                         (1.0)- ((Ann looks around at LL))  
 03                         {((puts hands up))- we’ve been in this city (0.4) for over a  
 04                         month.  
 05                         (0.6)- ((Ann shakes head))  
 06                         i’m tired of the city. let’s go:?  
 07     LL:                         out.  
 08                         (0.4)- ((Ann tilts head))  
 09     Ann:                         uh- what’s the difference between (0.4) go out and go  
 10                         away.  
 11     Maria:                         <go away. when you don’t want to be around.  
 12                         (0.6)- ((Ann and Maria continue looking at each other))  
 13                         it’s like (0.2) {((signals go with hands))- leave.}  
 14                         (0.4)  
 15                         no?  
 16     Ann:                         ((look at paper))- yeah? like (0.8) {((signals go with hands))-  
 17                         leave?}  
 18                         (0.4)- ((nods to Maria))  
 19                         ((to all LL))- but this is the one that we need here. go away.  
 20                         (0.2)- ((LL look at Ann))

21                   there is a difference.  
 22                   (0.8)- ((LL either tilt head or look directly at Ann))  
 23                   →           if you go to the movies? or if you go to a restaurant, (0.2)  
 24                   uhm, {(1.6)- ((Ann looks up then to LL))} or even if you just go  
 25                   over to the park or you go over to a friend's house?=  
 26                   go over, (0.4) is that (0.2) go out? or is that go away  
 27                   (0.2)- ((Ann looks around the room))  
 28                   which one- what would you use with that one.  
 29    Ichiro: →           <go out.  
 30                   (0.2)- ((Ann gazes at Ichiro))  
 31    Ann:   ⇒           ((extends arm to Ichiro while smiling at all LL))—ye::s. THAT one's  
 32                   go out. and go away?

After eliciting responses from other learners (line 1), Ann is met with silence, to which she begins providing context clues in the form of stressing key words in the sentence (lines 3-4) and giving hints (line 6). In unison, a group of learners simultaneously respond with “out” (line 7). Rather than directly address the correctness of the response, Ann invites the learners to differentiate “go out” and “go away”. Taking up the invitation, Maria provides a potential definition of “go out” (line 11), though when met with Ann’s silence in lines 12 and 14, she questions her response, as illustrated in her use of a confirmation check in line 15. Although Ann acknowledges Maria’s response verbally and nonverbally (lines 16-18), she proceeds to provide the correct answer to the fill-in-the-blank in line 19 before spending the next six lines providing potential hypothetical situations in which one of the verb phrases is appropriate. After Ann initiates a new sequence inviting learners to respond with the appropriate verb phrases, Ichiro quickly self-selects with what the teacher perceives as being the correct response, “go out” (line 29). She then explicitly takes time to focus her attention on Ichiro before giving positive assessment and, in her usual fashion, making clear to the entire class that his answer is correct. Immediately after doing so, Ann initiates another sequence focusing on the phrasal verb “go away” (line 32).

In sum, the practice of giving positive assessment is used in very specific sequential environments: when addressing correct learner responses pertaining to procedural matters, given after some hesitation, or pertaining to concepts which the class has displayed difficulty in grasping. In doing this practice, Ann does not provide a perfunctory explicit positive assessment (e.g., “very good”) but rather utilizes verbal cues using the responder’s actual wording and nonverbal conduct to confirm with both responder *and* other learners that the answer is correct.

#### 4. 2. Inviting Peer Assessment

The practice of *inviting peer assessment* is commonly used when addressing learners’ correct responses that are not procedurally related and are offered without any hesitation or displayed difficulty. A prototypical instance of Ann inviting peer assessment is in excerpt 4. Here, the learners are currently reviewing the answers for the first day’s prepositions/particles activity. Arata, who had been nominated by Ann to share his answers, is preparing to give the answer for the sentence “Sorry, I took your book \_\_\_ accident”:



*Excerpt 4 Is That Good?*

- 01 Ann: → ((to Arata))- okay.  
 02 Arata: → sorry (.) i took your book by accident.  
 03 Ann: ⇒ ((to other LL))- o:h <is that good?>  
 04 (0.2)- ((LL focus on Ann or Arata))  
 05 LL: mmhmm?  
 06 Ann: {{{(to all LL))- that's a good one. right? = we want to say  
 07 ↑brilliant. ↑well done. you're a ↑genius. ↓etcetera.} {{{(to  
 08 Arata))- >number three.<}}

In response to Ann's initiation in line 1, Arata provides the full sentence with the correct preposition (line 2). Although it would be sequentially feasible for Ann to give positive assessment as found in the previous section, she instead invites peer assessment (line 3). Note that her turn is formatted as a yes/no interrogative (Raymond, 2003), making the learner's task easier by simply having to reply in the affirmative or the negative (Houtkoop-Steenstra & Antaki, 1997). After a brief gap in the talk (line 4), the learners as a group in line 5 appear to cautiously affirm the correctness of Arata's response. As with most cases of this occurrence, Ann confirms with the learners that Arata's response is "a good one" (line 6). Rather than moving on to the next sentence, though, she maintains speakership of the turn through latching and clarifies how the learners should be assessing one another for future reference before doing a topic shift and initiating the next sequence (line 8).

While excerpt 4 is prototypical of inviting peer assessment at the beginning of the summer session, there is an evident change in how Ann constructs this practice over the semester. Specifically, while she tends to verbally invite peer assessment during the first few days of class, she gradually changes to doing so nonverbally, as illustrated in excerpt 5. Occurring on the fourth day of class, the learners are more accustomed to the routine of the daily prepositions and particles activity. Tetsu has already stated the first three sentences correctly, and he is now on the fourth sentence, "I'm counting \_\_\_ you to come to my birthday party next week":

*Excerpt 5 Right. Good One. Yes.*

- 01 Ann: → ((looks at paper))- okay. next one.  
 02 Tetsu: → i'm counting on you to come  
 03 [to my birthday party next week.]  
 04 Ann: ⇒ [ ((extends arms out to other LL)) ]  
 05 (3.6)- ((Ann continue extending arm to LL))  
 06 L1: r[ ight. ]  
 07 L2: [good] one.  
 08 L3: [ yes. ]  
 09 (2.2)- ((Ann smiles and nods to all LL))  
 10 Ann: ((to Tetsu))- keep going.

As Ann nominates Tetsu to continue with his answers, he states the next sentence on the worksheet with the answer "on" (line 2). Shortly after this correct response is provided, Ann, in recognitional overlap (Jefferson, 1986), nonverbally invites peer assessment (line 3). After a long 3.6-second gap, during which she continues to nonverbally invite learners to assess Tetsu's

response, three learners do so in overlap over the course of lines 6-8. Similar to excerpt 4, Ann confirms the three learners' assessments, this time nonverbally vis-à-vis smiling and nodding (line 9), before she begins another sequence by nominating Tetsu to continue to the next sentence (line 10).

Further evidence suggests that peer assessment indeed becomes the default when addressing correct response as the semester progresses. In excerpt, 6, the learners are working on Day 12's prepositions/particles activity. Miki has been nominated to share her answers for the sentence, "What time did you arrive \_\_ the airport?":

*Excerpt 6 You Rock*

01	Ann:	→	what else.
02	Miki:	➔	<what time did you arrive at (.) the airport.
03	Ann:	⇒	[ <i>((to other LL))-you like that</i> ]=
04	Arata:		[ <i>((to Miki))- you rock. </i> ]
05	Ann:		=one? { <i>((nodding to Arata))- and you rock.</i> } { <i>((to Miki))- you</i>
06			<u>rock.</u> }

After Miki provides the correct response of "at" in line 2, Ann in line 3 proceeds to change her gaze from Miki to the other learners and begins to invite peer assessment. This is done in overlap with Arata in line 4 who has already taken it upon himself to provide Miki with positive assessment in the form of "You rock." After finishing her turn (line 5), Ann immediately orients her body and eye gaze towards Arata and provides her own positive assessment of his response, as seen with her nodding and repetition of his lexical choices and intonation contours (Hellermann, 2003). Following this, Ann, using Arata's wording, confirms with Miki that her original sentence is correct.

As illustrated in excerpts 4-6, the practice of inviting peer assessment is used when a non-procedurally related correct response is offered without any hesitation or displayed difficulty. The manner in which this is done varies with time, with Ann taking on less of a role by changing her cues from verbal to nonverbal elicitation, culminating with the learners self-selecting to assess their peers' responses. The next excerpt, however, appears to be a deviant case of the just proposed analysis, where the teacher does not invite peer assessment when addressing a correct learner response given without any hesitation or difficulty but rather gives positive assessment. In excerpt 7, the learners are going over Day 15's prepositions/particles activity. Bae has just given one correct answer and is now moving on to another sentence, "I need to get \_\_ for a few days":

*Excerpt 7 Nice*

01	Ann:	→	{ <i>((to Bae))- keep going.</i> }
02	Bae:	➔	<i need to get away for a few days.
03			(0.6)- ( <i>Ann looks up from paper with raised eyebrows</i> )
04	Ann:	⇒	<i>((nodding and smiling at Bae))- ni(hh)ce.</i>
05			(0.4)- ( <i>T looks around at all LL nodding; Maria tilts head</i> )
06			<i>((smiles at Maria)) – do you like that one?</i>

After Ann initiates a new sequence (line 1), Bae quickly takes the turn and states the entire sentence with the correct response of “away.” In this turn, there is no evidence of hesitation or difficulty in formulating the response. Utilizing the previously proposed analysis, it would be characteristic of Ann in line 3 to invite peer assessment. Instead, there is an uncharacteristic 0.6-second gap during which she looks up from her paper with her eyebrows raised, a nonverbal cue indicating that what has been given is different from what was expected, (Antón, 1999). As she maintains eye contact with Bae, signaling a continuation of the sequence with him as opposed to motioning towards other learners (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992), she gives positive assessment vis-à-vis “nice” with the incorporation of laughter tokens, indicative of recognizing a sudden shift in the direction of the interaction from what was expected, e.g., surprise (Glenn, 2003). The verbal cues and nonverbal conduct in lines 3-4 illustrate that Ann was not prepared for a correct response, potentially indicating that she had oriented to this particular sentence as difficult for the learners. In that respect, this excerpt not only deviates from the inviting peer assessment analysis but also strengthens the analysis presented on giving positive assessment, namely that Ann employs it when addressing a correct response evident *or* perceived as being difficult.

Overall, the practice of inviting peer assessment is used in most instances where a correct response not concerning procedural matters is given without any hesitation or difficulty. The inviting tends to be done verbally towards the beginning of the semester; as time progresses, this changes towards more nonverbal elicitations, culminating with learners taking it upon themselves to assess their classmates without overt invitations from the teacher. The deviant case shows that Ann might revert to giving positive assessment in cases where a correct response is unexpectedly given.

#### 4. 3. Implying Positive Assessment

The two practices presented so far have ultimately included explicit assessments, whether done by Ann or other learners. There are also cases where such overt positive assessments are not present but implied (cf. Seedhouse, 2004). Excerpt 8 is one such case showing the practice of *implying positive assessment*; here, Ann is introducing modals as the new grammar focus of the fourth week:

##### *Excerpt 8 You Know Them*

- |    |         |   |
|----|---------|---|
| 01 | Ann:    | <u>this</u> week (0.6) we are <u>dedicating</u> our week (0.4) to:: (0.8) |
| 02 |         | modals.   |
| 03 |         | (1.2)- ((Ann looks around at LL; some LL tilt heads))                     |
| 04 |         | ((counts off on her fingers))- can. (0.4) [ could. ]                      |
| 05 | Ichiro: | [ <u>modals</u> ?]  |
| 06 | Maria:  | <huh?   |
| 07 | Ann:    | <((to Ichiro)) - modals.  |
| 08 |         | (1.8)- ((Ann nods to Ichiro; Ichiro shows confusion on face))             |
| 09 |         | ((to all LL)) - do you know what i'm talking a[ <u>bout</u> ?]            |
| 10 | Maria:  | [ <u>no.</u> ]  |
| 11 |         | (1.2)- ((Ann walks to BB))  |
| 12 | Ann:    | {((writes modals on BB))- we're gonna dedicate our week to:               |
| 13 |         | (0.6)} {((turns to LL))- MODALS.  |
| 14 |         | (0.6)- ((Ann looks to LL))  |

15           →     can? for example? {((waves hand to LL))- tell me other  
 16                   modals. ca:n,}  
 17     Maria: →     may?  
 18     Ann:   ⇒     ((extends arm towards Maria))- ma:y,  
 19     Maria: →     might?  
 20     Ann:   ⇒     ((extends arm towards Maria))- mi:ght,  
 21     Miki:   →     sho[uld.]  
 22     Bae:    →     [sho]uld.  
 23     Ann:   ⇒     ((signals with finger))- should,  
 24     Ichiro:   °should.°  
 25     LL:    →     <could.  
 26     Ann:   ⇒     ((signals with second finger))- could,  
 27     Maria: →     must?  
 28     Ann:   ⇒     ((signals with third finger))- mu:st,  
 29                   (0.4)- ((Ann lowers arm and looks around room))  
 30                   ((nods)) \$okay.\$= you know them.

When Ann first introduces modals as the grammar topic (lines 1-2), there is a 1.2-second gap during which she scans the room while learners either tilt their heads or show no acknowledgement of her statement. After Ann provides modal examples (line 4), there are three occasions where learners verbalize their confusion about the metalinguistic term (lines 5, 6, 10). In response, she writes the word “modals” on the board (line 12), emphatically restates it as the week’s grammar focus (lines 12-13), provides one example of a modal, i.e., “can” (line 15), and explicitly invites learners to provide other examples of modals (lines 15-16). In addition, “can” in line 16 is constructed using sound elongation and non-final pitch at the end of the word, both of which are interactional resources commonly used to not only signal continuation (Couper-Kuhlen, 1996) but also to invite others to continue the current idea (Clark & Schaefer, 1989).

Maria is the first to respond to Ann’s initiation with “may” (line 17). Ann, in turn, extends her arm towards Maria and repeats the response, though she does not incorporate prosodic cues such as decreased volume or lowered pitch commonly used when giving positive assessment vis-à-vis repetition (Hellermann, 2003). Rather, she uses the same elongation and intonation cues from line 16 to signal list continuation. The same is done over the next ten lines as learners continue to provide four more acceptable examples of “modals.” In encouraging such listing, Ann also uses cohesive gestures (McNeill, 1992) to count each acceptable modal on her fingers (lines 23, 26, 28). Line 30 shows her satisfaction with the learners’ apparent knowledge of modals, thus ending the listing.

As can be seen, implying positive assessment can be utilized to keep the participation framework open as a list is being built to ensure learner understanding of a concept. This practice is also used when Ann treats a response as needing an account, as shown in excerpt 9. Here, the learners have been struggling with Day 3’s prepositions/particles activity, particularly with the sentence, “We’ve been in Barcelona for a month; let’s go \_\_\_ for the weekend.” Ann proceeds to spend 90 lines discussing “go out,” “go away,” and “go on,” some of which is described in excerpt 3, noting the importance of the larger context in determining the differences between these verbal

phrases. She now refocuses back to the original sentence and invites the learners to provide the answer:

*Excerpt 9 Go Away*

01 Ann: ((looks back at her worksheet))- okay.  
02 (0.6)- ((gradually looks up at LL))  
03 → let's go:,  
04 (1.2)- ((looks at LL))  
05 → what's the answer for that one?  
06 Ichiro: → go away.  
07 Ann: ⇒ ((to all LL)) - let's go away, (0.2) because (0.6) and the only  
08 reason you know (0.2) is because of the sentence that  
09 precedes it.  
10 (0.4)  
11 we've been in barcelona for over a month.  
12 (0.2)  
13 sounds like frustration. sounds like this person needs to  
14 escape.  
15 (0.8)- ((holds ear))  
16 that's why it makes sense.

Responding to Ann's invitation, Ichiro in line 6 provides the correct answer of "go away." Although Ann repeats Ichiro's response, this is not done with non-final pitch signaling continuation (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 1996; Selting, 2000). Instead, she proceeds to reemphasize what was said earlier in the 90-line discussion, thus offering an account for why Ichiro's response is correct (lines 7-14). In so doing, Ann marks the purpose of her turn not for providing an assessment of Ichiro's response but rather to make an explicit link between the learner response (line 7), the reasoning behind it (lines 7-9) and the specific example in which it is used (lines 10, 13-14). The excerpt concludes with Ann explicitly summarizing that these are the reasons why the correct response "makes sense."

Finally, implying positive assessment occurs when guiding learners to a more specific response. Excerpt 10 takes place on Day 14, where Ann is eliciting a list of professions from the learners to be used in a subsequent grammar activity. Prior to the elicitations, she asked the learners to be specific with the given professions so as to more easily do the subsequent activities. Hiro is now being nominated to respond:

*Excerpt 10 A Cabbie*

01 Ann: → hiro. i want to get one from you.  
02 Hiro: → driver.  
03 Ann: ⇒ what kind of driver. = what does he drive.  
04 Hiro: → a taxi.  
05 Ann: ⇒ a taxi:, {(5.0)- ((writes taxi driver on BB))} and what's a taxi  
06 called?  
07 Hiro: → cab.  
08 Ann: ⇒ {(2.0)- ((writes cab driver on BB))} {(to LL))- and there's a

09 special word for a cab driver. We have a special word that  
 10 we use.= i don't know if you've heard it.}  
 11 (1.0)- ((Ann looks at LL; LL look at Ann))  
 12 a guy who drives a cab {(0.4)- ((goes to BB))} is, {(1.6)-  
 13 ((writes cabbie on BB))} sometimes called a:., ((looks to LL))  
 14 LL: \$ca(hh)bie.\$  
 15 Ann: ((nods)) a cabbie. ((erases all but cabbie))

In response to the teacher's nomination, Hiro provides the answer "driver," which Ann first acknowledges and then, in latching, requests more specificity. After Hiro responds with "taxi" (line 4), Ann repeats it without intonational cues signaling overt assessment, writes the word on the board, and asks an uptake question (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991), one which incorporates the learner's response so as to move the learner towards some goal. Here, Ann asks Hiro for the synonym of taxi, which he gives in line 7. Without a verbal acknowledgement, Ann writes the word on the board, thus indicating its importance for her purposes. It is at this point where, using Hiro's wording, she proceeds to ask another uptake question aimed at getting a word used for a cab driver (lines 8-10). After instances of silence over the course of lines 11-12, Ann writes the word "cabbie" on the board. The excerpt concludes with Ann erasing everything from the board except "cabbie" on the already established list of professions.

Overall, implying positive assessment is used when gathering extensive evidence for learner understanding, such as building a list, offering an account for why the response is correct, and guiding the learners towards more specific responses. In all these cases, the correct response is treated as warranting expansion for meeting the purposes of the set activity objective.

## 5. Conclusion

This conversation-analytic study investigated one ESL teacher's, Ann's, practices in the feedback turn when addressing what she oriented to as learners' correct responses to her initiations, along with the reasoning behind those practices as evident in the discourse. In these instances, three practices emerged from the data: *giving positive assessment*, *inviting peer assessment*, and *implying positive assessment*. The first two practices were employed in activities where the central focus of the interaction was solely on the correctness of learners' individual responses. What distinguished their uses were learners' perceived access to knowledge; in other words, how readily it appeared to Ann that learners could accurately assess their peer's correct responses. In cases where there was evidence that the learners might not have such access, including correct responses related to classroom procedural matters or given after displays of hesitation or difficulty, Ann chose to give positive assessment herself. In contrast, when no such evidence was present, the default was to invite peer assessment. Separate from the first two practices, the third practice of implying positive assessment was utilized in cases where the purpose of the interaction was not on explicitly assessing the correctness of individual responses but rather linking those responses to a larger purpose, for example, gathering extensive evidence to ensure learner understanding, accounting for the response's correctness, or guiding learners towards a more specific response.

The findings in this study contribute to both research on positive feedback and language learning in classroom settings. First, they provide evidence that there is systematicity behind uses of the

positive feedback turn, thus beginning to counter the claim that the positive feedback turn is constructed ambiguously or perfunctorily (cf. Ellis, 2009). In the case of Ann, her overall decision-making was based on maintaining interactional flow and information clarity with *all* learners, not only the responder, in relation to the goals of the immediate talk. In cases where the correctness of each individual learner response was the focus of the talk, Ann invited peer assessment when there was no evidence of potentially disrupting the flow of interaction or providing misinformation. When evidence suggested otherwise, giving positive assessment enabled Ann to clearly and accurately mark correctness for all the learners as evident in her verbal cues and changes in body torque between the responder and other learners, thus reducing the possibility of interruption or misinformation and, potentially, praising the learners for their successful feat in providing a correct response to a perceived difficult teacher initiation. With the instances where individual responses were not the intended focus of the talk, implying positive assessment allowed Ann to succinctly accomplish two tasks simultaneously: address the learner response and move the interaction forward towards the intended goal. Such management, therefore, expands on the existing positive feedback by highlighting how the turn can be used to accomplish multiple feats simultaneously that go beyond just correctness affirmation.

Second, the findings begin to illustrate the complexity that goes behind constructing positive feedback turns. Currently, the discourse analytic literature emphasizes the importance for teachers to utilize feedback turns in ways that promote learner interaction (Hall & Walsh, 2002), thus noting the use of explicit positive feedback as potentially hindering opportunities for learning (cf. Waring, 2008; Wong & Waring, 2009). While it is the case that certain uses of this turn may hinder subsequent interaction from occurring, as shown here the use of the positive feedback turn in real-time is more complex, where the teacher attends not only to the individual contributor but also the entire class, not only for expanding learner interaction but also addressing the needs of the purpose of the talk. In short, this study highlights the importance for future researchers investigating the effects of teacher feedback on learning opportunities to take into account the multiples factors teachers attend to in real-time, for without this information such research would overlook other opportunities for learning that teachers have attended to elsewhere in the interaction.

Pedagogically, the findings in this study begin to overtly illustrate the varied factors teachers simultaneously take into consideration when providing feedback in real-time, i.e., the individual learner response, other learners' perceived access to knowledge, and the aim of the talk. For teachers, it is necessary to be aware of the learner's ability to take on more interactional responsibility in the discourse and make management decisions based on what they can do as opposed to what the teacher wants. This is particularly important when having learners address the correctness of their peers' responses. Teachers may need to consider promoting meaningful interaction, where there is evidence that learners will be able to successfully address their peers' contributions to the interaction without difficulty or potential misinformation. Depending on the nature of the talk, it may be more beneficial for the progression of the lesson and for learning opportunities to keep learner interaction at a minimum rather than having interaction for interaction's sake. Furthermore, for teacher educators, it is important to highlight the factors one needs to consider when making management decisions in real-time classroom interactions. This is particularly important for pre-service teachers who should be made aware in their language teacher education programs that research examining the effects of teacher feedback practices on

learner interaction may not be providing a complete picture of the actualities of classroom teaching. CA as an exploratory tool can therefore allow teachers and teacher educators to uncover what factors affect teachers' real-time decisions.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study is not to generalize teacher positive feedback turn practices but rather to address how *and* why teacher practices are constructed *in situ*. As shown, while the positive feedback turn may superficially appear to do no more than correctness affirmation and sequence-closing, in reality teachers can systematically utilize it to address the immediate needs of both the learners and the lesson, exemplifying the careful dexterity teachers must possess when conducting lessons and, potentially, playing a role in the learning process.

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## Appendix Transcription Conventions

.	(period) falling intonation.
?	(question mark) rising intonation.
,	(comma) continuing intonation.
-	(hyphen) abrupt cut-off.
::	(colon(s)) elongation of sound.
<u>word</u>	(underlining) stress.
<u><u>word</u></u>	The more underlining, the greater the stress.
WORD	(all caps) loud speech.
°word°	(degree symbols) quiet speech.
↑word	(upward arrow) raised pitch.
↓word	(downward arrow) lowered pitch.
>word<	(more than and less than) quicker speech.
<word>	(less than & more than) slowed speech.
<	(less than) jump start or rushed start.
hh	(series of h's) aspiration or laughter.
.hh	(h's preceded by dot) inhalation.
(hh)	(h's in parentheses) inside word boundaries.
[ ]	(brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.
=	(equal sign) latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker.
(2.4)	(number in parentheses) length of a silence in 10ths of a second.
(.)	(period in parentheses) micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
( )	(empty parentheses) non-transcribable segment of talk.
<i>((gazing toward the ceiling))</i>	(double parentheses, italics) non-speech activity.
{ }	Simultaneous verbal and nonverbal conduct
(try 1)/(try 2)	(two parentheses separated by a slash) alternative hearings.
\$word\$	(dollar or pound signs) smiley voice.
BB	Double Bs- Blackboard
LL	double Ls- more than one learner

<sup>i</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

<sup>ii</sup> Certain actions such as smiling, nodding, or disengaging eye contact (insinuating end of sequence- Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986) show that the learners have oriented to the teacher's turn as giving positive assessment.

<sup>iii</sup> For her advanced classes, the teacher provides daily preposition/particle activities since she views these grammar points as some of the most difficult in English.

<sup>iv</sup> Throughout this study, I define "long silence" utilize Jefferson's (1988) findings showing that the "standard maximum tolerance" for silence in conversation is one second, with anything longer marked as uncomfortable for the interlocutors.