

# *In the Name of God*



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**The Effects of Processing Instruction and Meaning-Based  
Output Instruction**

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<p><b>Abstract:</b></p> <p>There is by now large evidence to show that Processing Instruction (PI) as an input-based instruction has a positive effect on learners' acquisition of linguistic structures. Some researchers in addition to offering evidence to the effectiveness of PI have claimed that acquisition doesn't appear to be dependent on output. Thus, the present study aimed at investigating the effects of Processing Instruction (PI) versus Meaning Based Output Instruction (MBOI) on the acquisition of English relative clauses and reported speech by Iranian L2 learners. There were three groups of participants involved in the study: processing instruction, meaning based output instruction, and control groups. Experimental groups received the same treatment followed by meaningful practice which was input or output based. The results of posttests revealed that both experimental groups outperformed control group, and MOBI outperformed PI on sentence level production tasks. The results of the present study imply that MBOI as well as PI can lead to linguistic development. Pedagogically, the results suggest that engaging students in meaningful output-based practice as well as input-based practice might be useful for learning grammatical aspects of L2.</p>	

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## List of Abbreviations

EFL.....	English as Foreign Language
ESL.....	English as a Second Language
FonF.....	Focus on Form
FonFs.....	Focus on Forms
IE.....	Input Enhancement
IP.....	Input Processing
MBOI.....	Meaning-Based Output Instruction
SI.....	Structured Input
SO.....	Structured Output
SLA.....	Second Language Acquisition
TI.....	Traditional Instruction

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## **1.0. Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief introduction. It aims at clarifying the relationship of the study's topic to the general area of second language acquisition. The first section introduces the two instructional types underlying the research. The second section states the purpose of the study. The third section discusses the significance of the study. The fourth section presents the objectives of the study and the final section outlines the organization of the thesis.

### **1.1. Background of the study**

All theories of language learning acknowledge the important role of input. Even the early language learning studies relied heavily on the input provided to the learner. It was particularly the case within behaviorist period of language learning when it was claimed that learning occurs as the learners produce correctly the language they are exposed to in the input (Skinner, 1957).

A decade later, Krashen (1980, 1982a, 1982b) developed his *Monitor Model* which comprised five different hypotheses, namely the *acquisition/learning hypothesis*, *the comprehensible input hypothesis*, *the monitor hypothesis*, *the affective filter hypothesis*, and *natural order*. Based on his first hypothesis, Krashen distinguishes learning from acquisition, in that learning is conscious both in process and product whereas acquisition is a subconscious process of picking up a language through exposure to input. Moreover, in his comprehensible input hypothesis he articulates that learners' exposure to the target language is not enough and they must be exposed to comprehensible input which contains language structures that are one stage beyond the

learners' current stage of interlanguage development. Overall, by emphasizing on the meaning and the notion of comprehensibility, Krashen (1980) challenged the earlier approaches to input. However, he argues against the need for attention to form and favors subconscious learning. He points out that drawing learners' attention to form interrupts the natural flow of second language acquisition. Besides he claims that once L2 input has been comprehended, it has also automatically acquired, which, is not the case. The evidence for this comes from the research on the interlanguage development and natural L2 learning. The results of these studies all revealed that comprehensibility is not enough and without focusing learners' attention on the linguistic forms their accuracy lacks behind their fluency.

In response to Krashen's model, many cognitive hypotheses have been advanced in which attention to form plays a critical role in SLA. One of the effective hypotheses which pointed out the limited scope of Krashen's model was *noticing hypothesis* by Schmidt (1990, 1993, and 1994). According to Schmidt (1990), learning a second language must entail awareness. He distinguishes three levels of awareness: ranging from perception to noticing and finally to understanding of the language features. As Schmidt (1993) clarifies the existing distinction between these levels is scalar and the most critical level of awareness needed for language learning is noticing. He (1995) defines noticing as "the conscious registration of a new form in the input" (p.29). He further explains that once a new form is noticed, it is then ready for processing, practice and modification in long term memory. He believes that noticing is needed for humans in learning of anything.

It follows from Schmid's (1994) position that instructed second language learning should promote noticing of the formal properties of the target language in the input. Thus, large body of research investigated different techniques and approaches which can make this happen (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Lightbown, 1998; Long & Robinson, 1998). The pedagogical implications of such studies come under the headings of *input enhancement* and *focus on form*.

Defined by Smith (1981, 1991), input enhancement (IE) includes interventions applied on the linguistic forms to make them more salient so that they can be noticed and processed by learners. A similar term, 'focus on form' (FonF) has also been used by Long (1991) to refer to the attempt made by instructors to draw learners' attention to the linguistic forms as they arise incidentally in lesson (p.45-46). Both IE and FonF rely on the formal properties of language and demand learners' simultaneous attention on the form and meaning. However, humans have limited processing capacities. In the context of L2 learning, Van Patten (1989) has suggested that learners may have difficulty in attending simultaneously to both form and meaning and attending to one may negatively affect the other. Van Patten (1996) uses the term *input processing* (IP) for the cognitive process by which learners make the initial connection between a grammatical form and its meaning. He argues that learners need to be taught how to process input in order to better acquire the underlying grammar. He has termed this form of teaching "*Processing Instruction*" (PI) in which learners are engaged in structured input (SI) activities which are manipulated to make some language forms salient so that learners move from input to intake and then to output.

Along with input, output might also bring about mental processes that both directly and indirectly affect acquisition (Swain, 1995; Izumi, 2002). As Swain (1995) suggests, output stimulates learners to move from the semantic to syntactic processing needed for production. Moreover, output raises learner's attention as they try to find what is problematic in their production. Thus, in Izumi's (2002) term "output acts as an internal attention-drawing device" (p. 543). Researchers, working from an output-based perspective, take meaningful output as the core element in interpretation and production of linguistic properties of language and engage learners in structured output activities which require learners to produce a particular form or structure in order to express meaning. This type of intervention is called Meaning-based Output Instruction (MBOI).

## **1.2. Purpose of the Study**

There is by now large evidence to show that formal instruction has a positive effect on second language acquisition. However, there is a great controversy over which types of instruction are most effective (Ellis, 1999). As discussed before, input has an undeniable role in SLA and in many instruction types. Processing instruction (PI) is one particular type of input-based instruction whose effect has been recently examined by large amount of studies (Benati, 2001; Cardierno, 1995; Farley, 2001; Van Patten & Sanz, 1995). Some researchers in addition to offering evidence as to the effectiveness of PI have claimed that acquisition doesn't appear to be dependent on output (Van Patten, 2004).

Therefore, recent studies addressed whether output-based instruction can be as effective as PI (Farley, 2000; Benati, 2001; Morgan Short & Bowden, 2006). However,



different results of previous studies and their limited scope call for further research. Moreover, no research has examined the effects of these two different instructions (PI and MBOI) in the Iran's EFL context.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

The present study aimed at investigating the effects of Processing Instruction (PI) versus (MBOI) in the acquisition of English relative clauses and reported speech by Iranian L2 learners.

The results of this study will enable researchers to see whether or not PI and MBOI have beneficial effects on the interpretation and production of linguistic forms. This study is also significant in that it seems to be the first study that has been undertaken in the Iran's EFL context where the two instructional types have not been studied before.

### **1.4. Research Questions and Research Hypotheses**

This study attempted to examine the following research questions:

RQ1: Do PI and MBOI bring about improved performance on sentence and discourse-level tasks involving the interpretation and production of English relative clauses?

RQ2: Do PI and MBOI bring about improved performance on sentence and discourse level tasks involving the interpretation and production of English reported speech?

Following these research questions, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

Null Hypothesis 1: PI and MBOI don't bring about improved performance on sentence and discourse level tasks involving the interpretation and production of English reported speech.

Alternative Hypothesis 1: PI and MBOI bring about improved performance on sentence and discourse level tasks involving the interpretation and production of English reported speech.

Null Hypothesis 2: PI and MBOI don't bring about improved performance on sentence and discourse level tasks involving the interpretation and production of English reported speech.

Alternative Hypothesis 2: PI and MBOI bring about improved performance on sentence and discourse level tasks involving the interpretation and production of English reported speech.

### **1.5. Definition of Key Terms**

- Processing Instruction

Processing instruction is a type of grammar instruction that is predicated on a model of Input Processing (VanPatten, 1996). The goal of PI is to help learners to derive richer intake and make better form-meaning connections by altering the processing strategies that learners use. Processing Instruction is also an input-based approach to grammar instruction since the main focus of this

approach to grammar instruction is to intervene when learners process the language at input level. Processing Instruction has three main components: an explanation of a form-meaning relationship, information about processing strategies, and structured input activities.

- Meaning-Based Output Instruction

Meaning-Based Output Instruction is a type of grammar instruction that involves the use of meaningful structured output activities. As opposed to traditional instruction types, this approach to grammar instruction provides a meaningful context for learners to produce target grammar structures not with the sole intention of practicing the target item, but rather to communicate opinions, beliefs, or other information related to designated topic (Lee and Benati, 2009).

- English relative clauses and Reported Speech

As it is known, a relative clause is a subordinate clause that modifies a noun or a pronoun and can take the role of a subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition, or a possessive determiner. Sentences including the relative clauses are complex since learners need to consider the function of the head noun.

Reported speech, traditionally called indirect speech, refers to the use of a noun clause to report a person's words, thoughts, beliefs, etc. As it is known, one of the requirements of changing direct utterances to indirect ones is the back shifting of the pronouns, possessive determiners, deictic adverbs and verb tenses. As confirmed by EFL teachers, English relative clauses and reported speech are two

problematic and challenging structure areas for Iranian students (Celce-Murcia & Larsen Freeman, 1999).

## **1.6. The Outline of the Study**

This study is an attempt to investigate the impacts of an input-based instruction (PI) and an output-based instruction (MBOI) on the acquisition of two English structures. In the present chapter the scope of the study has been briefly defined, followed by the definitions of the two instructional types. In chapter two, we examine the roles specified by theoretical frameworks to input and output. Later, an overview of the previous comparative studies is given. Chapter three presents the research design and methodology. The descriptive statistics and results are presented in chapter four and chapter five includes a discussion of results along with study's implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.