

*In the
Name of
Allah The
Most Trustful*



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ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)

The Comparative Impact of Prompts and Recasts in Processing Instruction
versus Meaningful Output-Based Instruction on EFL
Learners' Writing Accuracy

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to see which one of the two instruction-processing instruction (PI) and meaningful output based instruction (MOBI) accompanied with prompt and recast- is more effective on EFL learners' writing accuracy. In order to homogenize the participants in term of language proficiency a Preliminary English Test (PET) was administrated between 74 intermediate students at Takhtejamshid language schools of Karaj. Sixty participants whose score fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected and randomly divided into two equal groups. One group was taught and practiced processing instruction (PI) and the other group received meaningful output-based instruction (MOBI) and did not practice processing strategies. Before starting any treatment a free-writing was administrated at the first phase of instruction as a pretest. Moreover, at the final phase a free writing posttest was administered among the participants in both groups in order to see if there was any significant difference between their writing accuracy. The pretest and posttest required the participants to use three English tenses (simple present, simple past, future) in their writing. The mean scores of both groups on the pretest and posttest were compared through a t-test. The results of the post test revealed that the participants receiving PI had significantly outperformed the MOBI group regarding their writing accuracy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	I
Abstract.....	II
Table of contents.....	III
Lists of Figures.....	IV
CHAPTER I	
Background and Purpose.....	1
Introduction	1
1.1. Statement of the Problem.....	5
1.2. Research Questions.....	6
1.3. Statement of Hypotheses	6
1.4. Definition of Key Terms.....	7
1.4.1. Processing Instruction (PI).....	7
1.4.2. Meaningful Output-Based Instruction.....	7
1.4.3. Prompt.....	8
1.4.4. Recast.....	8
1.4.5. Writing Accuracy.....	9
1.5. Limitations and Delimitations.....	9
1.6. Significance of the study.....	11
CHAPTER II	
Review of the Related Literature.....	13
Introduction	13
2.1. Form-Focused Instruction.....	14
2.2. Meaning-Focused Negotiation versus Form-Focused Negotiation.....	16
2.3. Explicit Feedback and other Types of Feedback.....	18

2.3.1. Recast.....	22
2.3. 2.Are Recasts Implicit?.....	24
2.3.3. Do Recasts and Prompts Provide Positive or Negative Evidence?.....	26
2.3.4. Recast and Prompt in Communicative Oriented Classroom.....	29
2.4. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis and Swain’s Output Hypothesis.....	36
2.5. Input Processing in Second Language Acquisition.....	39
2.5.1. The Nature of Processing Instruction.....	44
2.5.2. Three Characteristics of Processing Instruction (PI).....	46
2.5.3. Developing SI Activities.....	47
2.5.4. Two Types of Structured Input Activities.....	49
2.6. Meaning-Based Output Instruction.....	49
2.7. Processing Instruction versus Other Types of Instruction.....	53

CHAPTER III

Methodology.....	64
Introduction.....	64
3.1. Participants.....	64
3.2. Instrumentation.....	64
3.2.1 PET Test (2006) as Homogeneity Test.....	65
3.2.2 Pre Test Writing	66
3.2.3. Post Test Writing	66
3.3.Procedure.....	66
3.4. Design.....	74
3.4.1. Independent Variables.....	75
3.4.2. Dependent Variables.....	75
3.4.3. Control Variables.....	75
3.4.4. Intervening Variable.....	75

3.5. Data Analysis.....	75
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CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion.....	77
Introduction.....	77
4.1. Restatement of the Research Questions.....	77
4.2. PET (2006) on Piloting study.....	78
4.3. PET on homogenizing phase.....	79
4.4. Data Analysis for the PET.....	80
4.5. Data Analysis of the Pre Test Phase.....	84
4.6. Data Analysis of the Post Test Phase.....	88
Discussion.....	94

CHAPTER V

Conclusion, Pedagogical Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research.....	98
Introduction.....	98
5.1. Conclusion.....	98
5.2. Implications of the Study.....	99
5.3. Suggestions for Further Research.....	100
References.....	102
Appendixes.....	112

List of Figures

Figure 2.1.....	45
Three Sets of Processes in Second Language Acquisition	
Figure 4.1.....	80
PET on Homogenizing Phase	
Figure 4.2.....	82
PI Group on Homogenizing Phase of PET	
Figure 4.3	82
MOBI Group on Homogenizing Phase of PET	
Figure 4.4	85
PI Group on the Pre Test Phase	
Figure 4.5.....	85
MOBI Group on the Pres test Phase	
Figure 4.6.....	88
PI group on Post test Phase	
Figure 4.7.....	89
MOBI on post test phase	

CHAPTER I

Background and Purpose

Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is complex because acquisition cannot be reduced to one simple theory or one simple mechanism. SLA is best conceived as involving multiple processes or theories. So attention to linguistic form in language teaching can be accomplished by using a variety of processes and procedures. In regard to this complexity in SLA, VanPatten (1993) asserted a simple question that has proven difficult to answer: “what kind of grammar instruction fits with newer context and input-rich communicative classrooms?”(p. 437).

VanPatten (1993) suggested an instruction that changes the behavior of the learners’ cognitive mechanisms to extract meaning from input. Only one of the processes involved in SLA, the initial process, by which learners connect grammatical forms with their meanings, is termed input processing (Chaudron, 1985). VanPatten (2008) pointed out input processing refers to making a connection between form and meaning; that is, learner notes a form and at the same time determines its meaning or function. VanPatten demonstrated that learners’ input-processing mechanisms often interpret input incorrectly or they process it in ways that make it impossible to extract linguistic elements from surface structure. Therefore, VanPatten (1996, 2008) proposed processing instruction (PI) which is a type of focus on form instruction. He pointed learners’

grammatical development would be advanced with comprehensible input if they were trained to process input in a different way.

Van Patten (2008) asserted that PI is a proven beneficial strategy for promoting grammatical development in an input-rich environment. So PI is unique solution to the conundrum that VanPatten raised in 1993 in absolutely input-rich environment.

There are some principles in input processing (VanPatten called input processing strategies) which are universal and context neutral. Learners use these strategies to notice things in the input for acquisition to happen. VanPatten (2008) pointed that the goal of PI is to help learners move away from inefficient processing strategies so that they adopt more optimal ones.

It is worth to mention that according to Morgan-Short and Bowden (2006) PI has three characteristics to engage learners in effective input processing: (1) Explicit information (EI) about intended target structure. (2) Structured input (SI) practice composed of meaningful activities which have these characteristics (a) both oral and written input (b) presenting one grammatical form at the time (c) keeping meaning in focus (d) moving from sentence to connected discourse (e) keeping the learner's processing strategies in mind (f) using both referential and affective activities. (3) Feedback (explicit as recast, implicit as prompt). The function of the feedback is to enable learners to adjust whenever they are not processing appropriately.

Sanz (2008) has shown that feedbacks are a necessary component of PI because, without any kind of feedback, learners would not know if they were processing incorrectly, and thus needed to change their approach to the input processing. So the third feature of PI can be made more salient in the input during lessons as teacher provide feedback to learners; that is, teacher can provide feedback to learners to have them pay attention to language form. Lyster and Ranta

(1997) proposed that if teachers do not correct errors, learners do not find ample opportunities to make links between form and function and, so be more accurate in their output.

There are a lot of classifications for feedbacks. Correctives feedback can be considered as negotiation of form versus negotiation of meaning or as implicit versus explicit feedback. One type of implicit reformulation move that has received increasing attention in both first and second language context is recast--a well-formed reformulation of a learners' non-target utterance with the original meaning intact. Lyster (2004a) presented an analysis of immersion classroom discourse and suggested that recasts are, for the most part, embedded in meaning focused negotiation and thus are ideal for facilitating the delivery of complex subject matter because recasts provide supportive scaffolded help to move the lesson ahead when the target form in question is beyond the learners' current production ability

However, Lyster (1998a) described an immersion teacher, who provided feedback to learners without breaking the follow of communication, could effectively push them to be more accurate and precise in their output. A type of implicit feedback in which teacher provides students with signal to fascinate self correction than immediately correcting the non-target like form is defined as prompt. Prompts are open-ended signals which enable L2 learners to respond with modified version of their prior utterances. Lyster and Ranta (1997) classified prompts as negotiation of form because they serve a pedagogical function to draw attention to form and aim for both accuracy and mutual comprehension.

Moreover, Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified prompts as four interactional moves that teachers used to improve the accuracy of students' non-target output as (a) clarification request : used to indicate that the students' message has either been misunderstood or ill formed, (b) repetition: replicate the students' error verbatim,

usually with rising intonation and stress to highlight the error, (c) meta-linguistic clues : provide comments, information , or questions related to the well-formedness of the student 's utterance, and (d) elicitation: entails direct question or pause that allow students to complete the teacher 's utterance.

In the same way, the role of output is an important issue in SLA; VanPatten (2008) mentioned that the crucial debate among SLA theorist and practitioner is about output based instruction as Swain (1985) and Harley (1993) claimed that comprehensible input alone was not sufficient for successful SLA. They believed that comprehensible output was also required; on the other hand, ample opportunities for learners' output and provision of useful and consistent feedback were necessary.

There are at least two perspectives about fundamental role of output in SLA. One perspective has suggested both input and output develop comprehension and production skills (Dekeyser, 2001; Dekeyser & Sokalski, 1996). From second perspective the output hypothesis (Swain, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) holds that although input is essential to SLA, output might bring about mental processes that both directly and indirectly affect acquisition. This hypothesis has supported a positive role for output practice in conjunction with input.

Writing like the other skills, is a communicational skill and an asset in learning a language. Through writing learners can improve their grammatical accuracy. Many studies (Alexander& Currie, 1998; Valian, 2006) have given an indication to the fact that language accuracy could be acquired through writing however; it is not very easy job to tackle. Because according to Harris (1965) writing accuracy, as commonly convinced, is a matter of using accurate form, grammar, the choice of structure and lexical items and mechanics. From this point of view writing is a highly sophisticated skill combining a number of divert elements, when only some of which are strictly linguistic, but the base for accuracy

is structure items and grammatical forms of language.

Most teachers hope their feedback improve students' writing accuracy. According to Harris (1965) to help students to be more accurate and organized in writing, the teacher should correct their language errors. So students' ability to use the language elements accurately is supported by the teachers' feedback to the students' linguistic and grammatical errors.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

There were at least three points that motivated the researcher to conduct this vein of research. First, Farley's (2001) study has shown further research is needed to determine what differential and complementary effects PI and MOBI have on L2 acquisition of variety of linguistic forms and structures. In addition, he has shown that research is needed to fully understand what factors may have caused MOBI groups perform as well as the PI groups in pervious researches (Farley, 2001b; Allen, 2000). Identification of these factors could lead to the foreign language teaching curricula that include beneficial components of both PI and MOBI.

Second, the researcher tried to narrow down the scope of the study to writing accuracy. In fact, According to the researcher's experience in TEFL, written accuracy is a problematic point for most of the Iranian EFL learners.

Third, Morgan-short and Bowden (2006) pointed elements of feedback were not always carefully reported in many of the studies. As many of them were classroom based feedback which naturally was provided to the class as whole rather than to the individual, and it was not always stated whether this feedback included providing the target form (recasts) or only push the students toward target

form (prompts) so, in this study both prompts and recasts were provided by the teacher to every participants in each group to investigate the comparative impact of prompt and recast in PI and MOBI context on the written accuracy of male and female EFL learners.

1.2. Statement of the Research Questions

1. Do recasts and prompts in processing instruction have any significant impact on writing accuracy of EFL learners?
2. DO recasts and prompts in meaningful output-based instruction have any significant impact on writing accuracy of EFL learners?
3. Is there any significant difference between writing accuracy of EFL learners who are exposed to prompts and recasts in processing instruction compared to meaningful output-based instruction?

1.3. Statement of the Hypotheses

1. Prompts and recasts in processing instruction do not have any significant impact on EFL learners' writing accuracy.
2. Prompts and recasts in meaningful output- based instruction do not have any significant impact on EFL learners' writing accuracy.
3. There is not any significant difference between writing accuracy of EFL learners who are exposed to prompts and recasts in processing instruction compared to meaningful output-based instruction.

1.4. Definition of Key Terms

1.4.1. Processing Instruction (PI): “PI is a type of focus on form instruction that is predicted on a model of input processing. Learners are given explicit information (EI) about how linguistic form or structure works, focusing on one form or use at a time. PI informs learners about particular input processing (IP) strategy that may lead them to push away from the less optimal strategies .So the goal of PI is to help L2 learners drive richer intake from input by having them engage in structured input (SI) which pushes them away from the strategies that they normally use to make form-meaning connection” (Van Patten, 2008, P.35).

In this study processing instruction refers to the strategies and mechanism that learners use to link grammatical forms with its meaning and/or function. The description of these strategies and mechanism are considered to be context natural. Processing instruction is predicted on VanPatten’s model of input processing.

1.4.2. Meaningful Output-Based Instruction (MOBI): “MOBI is a type of instruction in which all activities are meaningful and require using both form and meaning at the same level during production. There is no mechanical component or traditional practice of form or movement from more mechanical to more meaningful drills. Tasks typically involve communicating one’s opinion, belief, or feeling about designed topics.MOBI provides explicit information to learners” (VanPatten, 2008, p.150).

In this study MOBI refers to the type of instruction that provide explicit information (EI) about specific grammatical forms and there are ample opportunities for learners to produce meaningful output. Most of the activities and tasks are production orientated and communicative.

1.4.3. Prompt: It refers to “a type of negotiated feedback that teacher provides the subjects with signal to facilitate self correction, rather than immediately correcting the non-target like form (s) in their utterances. So the teacher provides the subjects with at least one chance to self correction. Prompt consists of the following constituents: (a) subject makes linguistic error, (b) teacher prompts the subject to self correction, (c) if the subject supplies the correct form, prompt is complete. But if subjects’ response to teacher’s prompt is not correct the teacher provides further clues or prompts and waiting for subject’s correct response”(Farrokhi, 2006, p.113).

In this study prompt refers to four interactional moves (clarification requests, elicitation, meta-linguistic clues, and repetitions), that are use separately or in combination. They have one crucial thing in common: they withhold correct forms and other signs of approval and instead offer an opportunity to learners to self-repair by generating their own modified response. In this study the researcher provides prompts to subjects’ writing in regard to three tenses (simple present, simple past, future).

1.4.4. Recast: It refers to “a well-formed reformulation of learner’s non-target utterance with the original meaning intact. Teacher reformulates or expands an ill-formed or incomplete utterance in an unobtrusive way by changing one or more sentence components (e.g. subject, verb, or object) while still referring to its central meaning. Recasts have the following characteristics: (a) there are reformulations of ill-formed utterance, (b) they expand the utterance in some way, (c) the central meaning of utterance is retained, (d) the recasts follow the ill-formed utterance”(Lyster, 2004a, p.403).

In this study recast is defined as teacher’s implicit reformulation of the

students' non-target like production of tenses, while preserving meaning of utterance. For example, by highlighting the non-target like tense forms in the students' writing scripts and reformulate them. However there is no negotiation about the reformulation through using examples, definitions, or explanations about the student's non-target like forms.

1.4.5. Writing Accuracy: “Writing accuracy is regarded as making sure that a piece of writing is well-organized in view of paragraph development, spelling, punctuation, grammar or sentence structure during stages. Accuracy will generally be used as variable to reinforce the learning of specific grammatical points or lexical items. So accuracy in writing is matter of (a) form (the organization of the context), (b) grammar (the employment of grammatical forms and syntactic pattern), (c) the choice of structures and lexical items to give a particular tone or flavor to the writing, (d) mechanics (the use of graphic conventions of language). Mostly, the base for accuracy is structure items and grammatical pattern of language” (Hedge, 2006, p.301).

In the present research writing accuracy is defined as students' tense knowledge in their writing scripts. In other words, subjects' mastering in use of English present tense, past tense, and future tense. Their writing is regarded to be accurate in view of tenses if they follow the rules and structures which have been taught during treatment.

1.5. Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the nature of this study there were some limitations such as:

- More focus on written accuracy might have hindered the students to pay attention to fluency and communicative value of message in their writing

scripts.

- Subjects reacted differently to prompts and recasts. In some cases the researcher provided clues or prompts to students' writing scripts and waited for their use of correct tense in their revised scripts. But due to some unknown reasons, some of the subjects were reluctant to revise their scripts for second or third times.
- In order to increase the reliability of the obtained data, the researcher herself had to teach to both experimental groups which was really demanding job.

In order to enhance validity of findings and narrow down the scope of the study the researcher sets numbers of delimitations such as:

- The researcher selected intermediate L2 learners, because not only elementary learners are not proficient enough to focus on writing accuracy (Collentine, 1993), but also they seem not to be cognitively ready to acquire processing strategies to produce complex sentences. On the other hand, advanced L2 learners may have already acquired optimal processing strategies and knowledge of tense structure. But intermediate L2 learners are able to process syntactic structures and also they might have already posed certain inappropriate input processing strategies that hinder them to process input accurately. These features make them more apt to learn and follow the processing instruction strategies suggested in the present research.
- Van Patten's (1996) model of input processing proposed some principles of input processing. According to Principle 1 learners process input for meaning before they process it for form. At the same time he asserted that grammatical form is important to the learner's input processor as well. So, the researcher intentionally selected three grammatical tenses (simple

present, simple past, future) as target forms which are difficult enough for intermediate L2 learners to rely on grammatical form to get meaning.

- According to the theoretical framework of PI, it was necessary to provide feedback to PI and MOBI groups. So, in order to narrow down the scope of feedback provision, the researcher provided feedback in the form of prompts and recasts in both instructional contexts. In fact, since providing feedback in written form seemed to be more feasible the researcher focused the study in written accuracy of the participants.

1.6. Significance of the study

The motivation for this study was (a) to investigate whether meaningful output-based instruction (MOBI) and practice mode could in conjunction with input, lead to written accuracy, (b) to compare this written accuracy, if any, to that of PI. More broadly, such a study allows for exploration of the role of output in SLA in a meaningful context and under PI framework, (c) In this study the researcher attempted to see whether results of Morgan-short and Bowden (2006) could be generalizable to a different population and another target structure, so if the results from the current study was not the same in the replication as those in the Morgan-short and Bowden (2006), it is essential to determine why.

On the other hand, studies were conducted in more qualitative work by Swain (1995) and his colleagues (Swain &Lapkin, 1995) motivated further research in to the role f output in SLA. An interpretation of this line of research might be that output could affect acquisition, not just learned linguistic knowledge. However as in case of PI research, a conclusion regarding this distinction was yet unwarranted.

Consequently, Cheng (2002) found that the performance of the students,

who received traditional instruction (TI) , was improved only on sentence level production and guided composition, because TI included mechanical drills then moved to more communicative exercises, while that of PI group was improved on both interpretation and production tasks. So this study aims to reveal whether participants' production in the MOBI context would improve in writing accuracy at the discourse level. And, also whether feedback's provision in form of prompts and recasts in the present study might encourage the development of writing accuracy in PI or MOBI contexts.