

SAMPLE THESIS

Form-Focused and Meaning-Focused Instruction on ESL Learners

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Language learning and acquisition is not an abstract process of memorizing vocabulary and the application of grammatical rules. On the contrary, a complex process involves an intricate interaction between the distinct personalities of the learners, the teacher and his or her actions and intentions and the overall leaning process. The language learning process is also interplay of learners' background, culture, experience beliefs, perceptions and learning environment. In this case, instruction methodology plays a crucial role in how a second language is acquired, and whether the language learner acquires adequate skills to communicate effectively in the second language, both orally and in writing.

SLA studies recognizes word, task, learner and learning conditions as factors that either promote or discourage word learning. Scheffler (2008) observes that task based instruction (TBI) is founded on the hypothesis that interaction in communication enhances language acquisition and pushes the process forward. This usually integrates meaning-based activities and with form-focused activities that occur incidentally. Those who support tasked-based instruction method are opposed to structural syllabus model as a way of developing proficiency in L2 because in their view, the conventional methods do not adhere to the process of natural language learning, (Long & Robinson, 1998). For adult language learners, the natural language learning process implies acquiring L2 similar to the acquisition process of other cognitive abilities. This is beginning from an explicit declarative representation and the accumulation of a sufficient number of entities to perform the skill (Scheffler, 2008, p. 300).

One main difference between the cognitive abilities of adults and children is that adults have a mechanism for resolving problems, which in turn enables them to handle formal systems

that are abstract in nature, and make apt judgment in grammaticality. According to Paribakht and Wesche (1997), words that are less problematic comprehensible referents such as verbs, nouns and adjectives. Function words, such as prepositions and articles have been identified as problematic. Focus on such forms is believed to facilitate a learning process that is more efficient, and one that enables adult language learners to acquire the targeted linguistic features, which cannot be attained from interactive instruction or comprehensible input.

Adult learners also have the capacity to use various models of instruction. Adult language is therefore more likely to be affected by factors such as individual motivation and personality. These factors are responsible for the overall success of language acquisition of L2 adult learners. However, these aspects are not particularly common in L1 acquisition since all speakers of L1 attain perfect success and therefore do not require explicit formal instruction. Attempting vocabulary instruction to adult L2 learners within ESLs settings requires the consideration of these factors in order to understand the vocabulary ability of adult L2 learners and the effectiveness of the instructional approach.

A major concern in vocabulary research is the inability of L2 learners to increase and enhance their knowledge of vocabulary in L2 classrooms because of the absence of adequate meaningful input, which subsequently makes learners have marked difficulties in their overall academic performance (Swan, 2005). Schmitt, (2000) agrees that L2 learners find academic vocabulary particularly difficult in preparing for academic writing in their first year. Though technical vocabulary is of great importance to students and their specialized areas, content teachers are less likely to be emphatic on general academic vocabulary, which is of great significance importance to the specialized areas of the students' academics.

In this context, classroom based instruction may not be efficient in providing suitable conditions that facilitate natural learning. It is therefore imperative to meticulously select and prioritize a proactive syllabus instruction model and focus on language elements that are of high priority in acquisition of academic vocabulary of L2 learners. The language classroom should provide the opportunities for both academic and technical vocabulary learning.

Academic writing skills are considered a fundamental element of language literacy. In academic writing, academic vocabulary makes up about 80% of words that are most likely to be encountered by students when reading in English at university level. The academic word list is therefore regarded critical for students at higher education levels regardless of the field of pursuit and specialization, (Coxhead, 2000). The academic word list (AWL) has 570 word families with which higher education students should be thoroughly familiar. The academic word list distinguishes academic English from English vocabulary for general purpose, and is essential in academic writing classes.

Additionally, the AWL provides essential characterization of vocabulary choices at register level, which enables learners with the foundation needed for examining and testing practices within their fields of specialization. Moreover, by having learners to learn directly the initial 3000 words of the TL and instructing them on the AWL, higher education students gain the ability to master about 96% of words found in academic writing. This is critical as it enables learners to engage in superior thinking skills and in the understanding of academic texts.

Hyland (2006) observes that words chosen to introduce vocabulary in a language classroom should not only include the frequency with which they occur in academic texts, but also how frequently the various meanings of the words occur as well. This is especially because words do not happen accidentally in language use. Word choice is largely governed by rule-

based and community based practices, which may not necessarily operate within the tenets of academic writing. Coxhead (2000) adds that it is likely that L2 learners will acquire words as they come to need them and it is also very probable that L2 adult learners will encounter most of the academic words before they have gained full control of the initial 2000 words. In this context, word instruction in a sequential process may not be the most effective approach.

However, from a wider context, it is acceptable within L2 studies, that vocabulary surpasses the separate acting of individual words in communication. Each word should be learnt within its contextual usage and efforts aimed at direct instruction of vocabulary should incorporate information regarding the frequency, with which the specific word forms occur, as well as their meanings and usage (Coxhead & Nation, 2001). L2 learners should therefore be encouraged to observe words and multi-word units that occur more frequently. This should be achieved through constant exposure and provisional decontextualization like item identification and word matching.

1.2 Background of the Study

Form-focused instruction is a method that emphasizes the value of communicative teaching standards, which include student-centered instruction and authentic communication. This methodology also values the study in grammatical forms of L2 that is more suggestive of non-communicative form of instruction. In this case, the responsibility to assist L2 learners in understanding problematic grammatical forms of L2 lies with both teachers as well as peers (Long & Robinson, 1991). The emphasis is giving L2 learners sufficient exposure to spoken and written discourses, which reflect real-life communication, like letter writing, engaging in debates or doing an interview.

In form-focused instruction, both teachers and peers will assist learners who are perceived to have difficulties in production or comprehension of some grammatical forms in L2. This is accomplished through providing explanation of the forms as well as supplying their models. This way, the teacher and peers will enable the L2 learner identify forms that they are deficient in, but which are critical in their overall acquisition and development of L2. Form-focused instruction can therefore be understood as an approach that is not focused on the instruction of specific grammatical items, but a method whose aim is to enable L2 learners to acquire L2 and its use in manner that reflects realistic communicative situations.

Interaction between students, and students with their teachers is at the forefront, both in spoken and written form. Consequently, evaluation is focused on learner's ability to engage in real communication, by integrating forms learnt through the interaction process. A distinct feature of form-focused instruction is that it presents language as a communicative mechanism. This is contrary to other instructional methodologies that are either non-communicative or teacher centered. In these other approaches, teaching continues as learners demonstrate mastery of grammatical structures that are presented sequentially. They are non-communicative in the essence that they do not provide opportunities for L2 learners to engage in realistic communicative situations. Moreover, the instruction appears to be teacher-centered as the grammatical forms are essentially transmitted by the teacher to the learners. Form-focused instruction is therefore student-centered as it provides opportunities to respond to the needs of learners in a realistic and spontaneous way (Long & Robinson, 1998).

Focus on form instruction is essentially different from meaning based instruction as though it focuses on teaching L2 in real life communicative scenarios. there is the occasional attention given to discrete forms through correction, direct explanation, negative feedback and

recast (Long & Robinson, 1998). Meaning-based instruction does not pay attention to the discrete parts of language but lays emphasis on communicative language in real life. This is illustrated by the natural approach theory that does not permit direct grammar instruction (Terrell & Krashen, 1984).

When used together, these approaches can complement each other and enhance the language acquisition process for learners. Focus on form instruction is valuable because it provides a balanced model as it engages both learners and teachers to pay attention to form when needed, but within the tenets of the language classroom. Focus on form instruction may however be ineffective in developing vocabulary particularly for adult L2 learners in advanced education levels.

To evaluate the effectiveness of focus on form instruction in comparison with meaning based instruction, a study was undertaken using college students taking advanced Spanish classes (Fridman & Doughty, 1995). The students were divided into two groups with one receiving form focused instruction and the other getting meaning based instruction. The results indicated that students who received form-focused instruction had a more accurate production of verbs compared to the group that received focus on meaning instruction.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Present methods in language instruction recognize that ESL learners require explicit assistance to better their grammatical accuracy especially in writing. Although some ESL learners have gone through years of elementary and high school grammar instruction, the writing of L2 learners is often seen with quite a number of lexical and grammatical errors. To some extent, the problem is because of L1 interference and or a missing grammatical awareness. This

becomes a major issue in institutions of higher learning, where a student's ability and knowledge is demonstrated through their ability to present this knowledge in written form, with clarity, organization and use of academic writing skills. The least amount of grammatical and lexical errors and sufficient use of vocabulary is required to demonstrate competence in academic writing. Instruction methods that are almost exclusively centered on the writing process fail to take note that L2 learners may not possess the needed language skills such as grammar and vocabulary that would ensure that they benefit from writing process instruction (Henkel, 2004).

Process writing approach is used in current ESL curriculum, and is a method that stresses on creation of meaning through text revision, invention and peer editing (Reid, 1993). Process writing heavily borrows from L1 writing pedagogy and is centered on overall communicative success and accuracy. In the case of ESL writers, the accuracy of their work is seen as a important factor, which influences how readers assess their ability in writing (Read, 2000). The disparity that exist between what is taught and what can be achieved by middle or advanced-level ESL writers requires much more intensive individualized assistance particularly with sentence level syntax and vocabulary (Hinkel, 2004). Individualized assistance in syntax is not likely to occur in peer editing sessions. As much as the experience provided by peer-editing classroom sessions is helpful, they are not sufficient in improving error recognition and error awareness in L2 learners. This implies that L2 learners may not be adequately prepared to benefit from the process writing methodology because they do not have sufficient grammar skills and vocabulary, (Hyland, 2002).

Grammatical awareness and error recognition is critical in the development of L2 and in developing competency in academic writing. L2 grammatical and reading skills are significant, and may determine the performance of students in subjects such as business courses, social

sciences and humanities (Hinkel, 2004, p. 37). Professors take lexical errors very seriously when evaluating students' ability. This means that L2 learners need personalized assistance to augment the explicit grammar instruction that the learners may have received.

This is particularly so for adult L2 learners, where it is absolutely necessary to establish optimal conditions for grammar and vocabulary teaching. Research has shown that classroom interaction and form-focused instruction is not sufficient in developing vocabulary and lexical accuracy in adult L2 learners (Ellis, 2001). Although teachers play a critical role in this endeavor, learners require more interaction and time intensive methods to engage in suitably formulated grammar instruction. In this context, instead of using the same teaching methods on L2 adult learners, it is necessary to use other innovative approaches (Henkel, 2004).

1.4. Summary

This chapter has covered the various forms of instruction in L2 classrooms, such as explicit vocabulary instruction, which is based on the notion that communicative interaction enhances language interaction and pushes L2 learners to engage in the use of the language in real life settings, thereby drawing constructive criticism that enables them to identify key weaknesses in their use of L2 and thereby make necessary changes. This method integrates both meaning focused and form-focused tasks.

The chapter has also addressed vocabulary instruction in first year college students and the specific difficulties they encounter when attempting to increase their vocabulary knowledge. One of these challenges is the lack of input that is meaningful and that enables them to gain effective skills in academic writing. Such a predicament necessitates the integration of meaning-focused tasks that will enable learners to engage the skills they gain in language classrooms, in their academic courses.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study, as proposed in the first chapter, aims to explore the effect of form and meaning focused input on ESL writing. After defining form focused and meaning focused input, this chapter will initially examine critically the past literature of these two forms of input. However, since form and meaning focused input have referred to the significance of Inter-language theory, input hypothesis (Krashen, 1982;1985;1998), interaction hypothesis (Long, 1981;1983a;1983b;1985;1993), and output hypothesis (Swain, 1985;1993; 1995) on second language acquisition (SLA) these theories and hypotheses will also be revisited in this chapter. Finally, after critical exploration of the previous literature on form and meaning focused input the gaps will be identified and discussed. The chapter will conclude with the research questions.

2.2 Theoretical Background

Form focused instruction is defined as “Any pedagogical effort to draw the learners’ attention to form either implicitly or explicitly” (Spada, 1997; p.73). Meaning focused instruction is where a language is used “as a tool for achieving some non-linguistic goal rather than as an object to be studied for the purpose of learning the language....it requires the participants to function as users rather than learners”. (Ellis et.al, 2001; p.412-413)

As the current study aims to elicit the effect of form and meaning focused input on SLA it would be pertinent to discuss initially theories/hypotheses which are referred to in these two types of input.

2.2.1 A brief Overview

Many theories and hypotheses have been developed as to how a person acquires his/her first (L1) and second (L2) languages. L1 is a person's mother tongue whilst L2 is the language a person learns *after* acquiring L1. Noam Chomsky (1965, 1980, 1981) first described and explained how humans acquired language. The Universal Grammar theory (UG) which he propounded claims that all human beings inherit a universal set of principles which do not vary and apply to all natural languages and parameters which possess a limited number of values which characterize differences between languages.

Although the prime concern of UG is on first language acquisition, it is nonetheless directly relevant to the study of second language acquisition (SLA) which according to researchers is assumed to be a natural language. In addition to the descriptive frame-work on language acquisition, UG has been extremely influential in helping researchers to conduct studies and develop hypotheses which are basic to our understanding of SLA, such as the true nature of language systems (the learner system and the first and the second language systems), the interplay between the first and second language learners and the linguistic knowledge learners bring to the acquisition of the second language. These studies (e.g. error analysis, contrastive analysis hypothesis, morpheme studies) revealed that the language the second language learner uses is neither his/her mother tongue (MT) nor the target language (TL). The search for salient features of the utterances of second language learners paved way to the

introduction of the Inter-language theory in the 1970's which describes the manner in which learners attempted to reach the TL using rules which are similar across all languages.

Inter-language Theory

Inter-language Theory draws attention to the fact that the learners' language system is neither that of his/her mother tongue nor that of the second language, but contains elements of both. The rules used by the learner are neither seen as his/her MT nor the TL but as those which are systematic and predictable. Therefore the errors are not seen as signs of failure but as evidence of the learners' developing system. It in fact has been considered as a third language, which has its own lexicon, grammar and other features of a language.

Interlanguage (IL), coined by Selinker (1972) is a mentalist theoretical construct which manifests the attempts made by SLA researchers to identify the stages of development through which learners move from L1 to L2 (or near L2) proficiency. Research on SLA revealed that there were significant similarities of the development path followed by L2 learners all over the world and it was uninfluenced by the learner's age and background and the context in which learning took place. Corder(1971), Nemser (1971) and Selinker who have conducted numerous studies on IL argue that learners' language should be understood as a system in its own right where they go through a series of IL's sometimes systematic and in other times in free/unsystematic variation.

IL theory has typically followed the principles of mentalist theories of language acquisition with the emphasis on hypothesis- testing and internal processes. It also mentions about the notion of an IL continuum of learning which involves continuous restructuring of an internal system which is also similar to the L1 acquisition theory. The learners move along the IL

continuum towards the mastery of the target language (TL). Selinker states that those adults who successfully achieve native speaker competency in the TL do so because they continue to use the ‘acquisition device’, or “latent language structure” (term used by Lennerberg, 1967) Thus, according to Selinker, similar to a child in L1 acquisition, the successful adult learner is able to transform the UG into the structure of the grammar of the target language by reactivating the “latent language structure”. However, Selinker posits that almost 95% of the L2 learners failed to reach target language competence. That is, they do not move to the end of the IL continuum. They in fact stop learning when their IL contains at least some rules different from those of the target language system. He referred to this as “fossilization”: And according to him, Fossilization occurs in most L2 learners and it cannot be remedied by further instruction.

Accounting for features of second language performance is not simple. One possibility is that there are universal orders of acquisition that cannot be changed by pedagogical interventions. That is, a learner will not acquire something until he or she is ready to, regardless of instruction. For example when using the negative forms the learners will move from * “I no can” to * “I don’t can” for sometime until the target form emerges. Even when it does there is still a likelihood of backsliding where the learner goes back to the original form until the rule is internalized. IL therefore is likely to be in continuous change, with hypotheses being constantly tested, sometimes dissolved, sometimes consolidated, recasted, removed or revised depending on who the learner is interacting with, where and also when.

Selinker posits that SLA can proceed in two different ways. It can utilize the same mechanisms as L1 acquisition with the use of the “acquisition device” or it can make use of alternative ways (such as general cognitive mechanisms) which are presumably responsible for other types of learning apart from language. (See Felix, 1982; 1985).

IL theory focuses on three principal features in SLA. They are that;

- 1) Learner language is permeable; which means that the rules that constitute the learner's knowledge at any one stage is not permanent, but are open to changes.
- 2) Learner language is dynamic; which means that the learner's language is constantly changing. However, he/she does not jump from one stage to another but slowly revises the interim systems to accommodate new hypotheses about the target language.
- 3) Learner language is systematic; which means, despite the variability of interlanguage, it is possible to detect a rule based nature of the learner's use of the L2. He/she selects rules in a predictable way.

(Ellis, 1985)

IL is a system which explains the manner in which learners internalize the rules of the TL. IL therefore is a dynamic system where learners move along the continuum systematically with the help of the input they receive, interaction, output and according to learner differences and the strategies they use.

2.3 Input Hypothesis

The input hypothesis claims that exposure to input that is comprehensible is both necessary and sufficient for second language learning to take place.

The hypothesis states that :

Humans acquire language in only one way-by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input' ...We move from i , our current level, to $i+1$, the next level along the

natural order, by understanding input containing $i+1$ (Krashen, 1985; Cited in Mitchell & Miles, 2004, p. 165)

In adult acquisition of the second language implicit acquisition (I.e. with input from the environment) is limited especially in non native contexts and adult attainment of L2 accuracy usually requires additional input in the form of explicit learning in classroom situations where students are given input in various forms. In applied linguistics the defining distinction between implicit acquisition and explicit learning of L2 was made by Krashen (1982). (Cited in Ellis, 2008).

Krashen has argued that implicit and explicit knowledge are entirely distinct, involving separate mental processes and storage. He claims that explicit knowledge (knowledge of language) does not convert to implicit knowledge (knowledge about language) which he termed the Interface position. Krashen states that instruction should be directed primarily at implicit knowledge by ensuring learners have access to “comprehensible input”, which he talks about in detail in his Monitor model.

Krashen claims that people acquire language best by understanding the input that is a little beyond their present level of competence; which means, if the learners current competence is i then comprehensible input is $i + 1$, the next step in the developmental sequence. Krashen believes that students should be given an opportunity to access $i+1$ structures to understand and express meaning and that it ultimately leads to language acquisition. He claims that input which is comprehensible is the key to acquisition of L2.

The importance of input for SLA formed the basis of Krashen's Monitor model (1985) and the Comprehensible Input hypothesis (1982, 1985, 1998). His basic premise is that learning does not become acquisition. Krashen takes language acquisition and language learning as separate processes. In his acquisition- learning hypothesis, Krashen suggests that adults have two different methods of developing ability in the second language; acquisition, which is a subconscious process, almost identical to the process children use in acquiring first language and learning, which is the conscious process that results in knowing about the rules of the language. In the monitor hypothesis Krashen claims that the learner uses the learned language as a "monitor" to edit, alter or correct the language and that it is consciously perceived as opposed to acquisition which is subconscious and intuitive. He believes that the fluency in the second language performance is due to what we have acquired and not what we have learned.

In the Affective Filter hypothesis which is an extension of the input hypothesis, Krashen says that the learner's self-confidence, motivation and anxiety state can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition even if there is a suitable environment for acquisition. He is of the opinion that a person with a high affective filter will receive less comprehensible input which will hinder acquisition of language whereas a learner with a low affective filter would be able to acquire the language more successfully. He believes that the learned language cannot be acquired. Stevick (1976) notes that many second language learners are on the defensive in the language class because they consider the class to be a place where their weaknesses will be revealed not a place where they grow in competence. According to Krashen it develops a high affective filter in students. On the other hand, in bilingual education, students are tested on the subject matter and not the language and the consistent focus is on the message and not the form. Studies show that

this gives confidence to the students, which in turn pave way to unconscious linguistic acquisition.

In the input hypothesis Krashen believes that learners move along the development continuum by receiving comprehensible input. According to him;

- (a) Speaking is a result of acquisition and not its cause. Speaking cannot be taught directly but “emerges” on its own as a result of building competence via comprehensible input.
- (b) If input is understood and there is enough of it the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The language teacher need not attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order. It will be provided in just right quantities and automatically reviewed if the structure receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input.

(Krashen 1985; Cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004. p.165)

Krashen’s input hypothesis has been criticized by many researchers for being vague and imprecise and devoid of independently testable definitions given about what comprehensible input consist of. Krashen’s main overall weakness according to Mitchell and Myles (2004) was “the presentation of what were just hypotheses that remained to be tested as a comprehensive model that had empirical validity. He then used his hypothesis prematurely as a basis for drawing pedagogical implications”. (p. 49)

Despite various criticisms many research traditions have taken their inspiration from Krashen's hypothesis. The Interaction hypothesis and the Output hypothesis developed as additional empirical studies to offer solutions to some of the limitations in the Input hypothesis.

2.4 **Interaction Hypothesis**

In the early 1980's Michael Long extended Krashen's original input hypothesis by stating that in order to understand more fully the nature and usefulness of input for second language learning, greater attention should be paid to interaction in which learners are engaged. (Long, 1981, 1983a, 1983b. Cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Long believes that the more the input is queried, recycled and paraphrased, the greater its potential usefulness as input, because it should become increasingly well-targeted to the particular developmental needs of the individual learner. Long called this the Interaction hypothesis.

Long (1985) proposed a more systematic approach to linking features of language input and learner's second language development. He proposed that it could be done in the following manner.

Step 1 – Show that a) Linguistic/conversational adjustment promote b) comprehension of input.

Step 2 – Show that b) Comprehensible input promotes c) acquisition

Step 3 – Deduce that a) Linguistic/conversational adjustments promote c) acquisition

(Long,1985;Cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004. p.166)

In the same paper in 1985 Long reported two studies where he showed that 'lecturettes' pre-scripted and delivered in a modified, foreigner talk discourse style were comprehensible to adult second language learners than were versions of the same talks delivered in an unmodified style. This supported the argument that linguistic modifications could promote comprehension of input, which refers to Long's step 1 above.

Further, in his Doctoral research (Long, 1980,1981, 1983a) Long analyzed the speech interaction of 16 native speaker/native speaker and 16 non-native speaker /native speaker dyads carrying out the same set of face-to-face oral tasks. (informal conversation, giving instructions for games, playing games etc.) He showed that there was little linguistic difference between the talk produced by both groups as shown on measures of grammatical complexity. However, the differences were seen in the two groups when analyzed from the point of view of conversational management and language functions performed. In order to solve ongoing communication difficulties the native speaker /non-native speaker dyads were much more likely to make use of conversational tactics such as repetitions, confirmation checks, comprehension checks and clarification requests. Long argues that this was done in order to solve comprehension problems when speaking to the non-native speakers and not any conscious motive to teach grammar (1983b) which refers to Long's step 1 again. However, from the perspective of the interaction hypothesis such collaborative efforts should aid language learning. That is in terms of Krashen's terms, they receive $i+1$.

Other studies, Pica et.al (1987), Loschky (1994), Gass & Veronis (1994), Mackey (1999) provide evidence that taking part in interaction can facilitate second language development, which supports Long's steps 2 and 3. With regard to the effect of interaction, Larson –Freeman and Long (1991) state that:

“Modifications of interactional structure of conversationis a better candidate for a necessary (not sufficient) condition for acquisition. The role it plays in negotiation for meaning helps to make input comprehensible while still containing unknown linguistic elements, and hence, potential intake for acquisition”. (Cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004. p.168)

Based on research, both input and interaction have been considered as prerequisites for SLA. However, although they promote intake, (i.e. to process the language sufficiently to become incorporated into the learner's second language system) it does not result in successful production of the language according to some researchers. (Eg. Swain; 1985).

Output Hypothesis

The output hypothesis was first proposed by Swain (1985, 1993, 1995) as an addition (rather than an alternative) to Krashen's input hypothesis and Long's interaction hypothesis.

According to Swain, in addition to input and interaction, output too may play a significant role in SLA. Swain claims that the concept of comprehensible input per se, is not sufficient to account for second language acquisition: comprehensible output should be included in any second language acquisition theory to account for the acquisition process. According to Swain, language acquisition takes place when learners realize how meaning is expressed accurately using their output as a means of hypothesis testing. Swain (1985), in her output hypothesis states that speaking or writing can help students move from semantic to syntactic processing. (e.g. Adjectival agreements, subject-verb agreements)

Swain (1985,1995) noted that the Canadian Anglophone students she and her colleagues studied were exposed to French-medium instruction for extended periods of time, achieved comprehension abilities in French as a second language that were close to native speaker level. However, their productive ability lagged behind, something Swain attributed to the fact that the classroom input in French mostly involved reading and listening and there were no corresponding expectations to speak or write at a higher level. Swain argued that students could often succeed in comprehending second language texts, while only partly processing them while

concentrating only on semantics. In her view only second language production (I.e. Output) really forces the learners to undertake complete grammatical processing, and thus drives forward the effective development of second language syntax and morphology. She argues that one possible way to account for the lack of grammatical accuracy was that learners were not “pushed” to produce language output. Input as she believes, involves comprehension and that requires little syntactic organization. Whereas Krashen claims that comprehensible input in and of itself leads to language learning, Swain suggests that when learners are engaged in output (negotiation of meaning and talking about language) they are learning the language.

Considering learner production in isolation from input, Swain (1985) initially points to three basic roles of comprehensible output:

Output provides the opportunity for meaningful (contextualized) use of one's linguistic resources in the process of negotiating meaning. Especially valuable is the "pushed language use" resulting from negative input arising in situations of communication breakdown. (Pushed language use requires the learner to find alternative means of expressing the desired message.) 2) *Output is useful in that it provides the learner with opportunities to test out linguistic hypotheses to see if they work.* 3) *Production "may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing."*

Learners can comprehend L2 messages without any syntactic analysis of the input they contain. Production acts as a trigger that forces attention to the linguistic means of expression. (Cited in Grove, 1999. pp. 819)

Swain (1993) discusses the pedagogical implications of her output hypothesis and cites first the obvious "necessity of providing learners with considerable in-class opportunities for speaking and writing." She adds, however, that "just speaking and writing are not enough.

Learners must be pushed to make use of their resources; they need to have their linguistic abilities stretched to their fullest; they need to reflect on their output and consider ways of modifying it to enhance comprehensibility, appropriateness and accuracy" (Cited in Grove,1999. pp.819)

Swain (1995) proposes three further functions of learner output. She states that;

- a) The activity of producing the target language may push learners to become aware of gaps and problems in their current second language system
- b) It provides them opportunities to reflect on, discuss and analyze there problems explicitly
- c) It provides them with opportunities to experiment with new structures and forms

Swain & Lapkin (1995), state that these functions lead the learner from semantic to syntactic processing, i.e., to the point of making a consideration of the grammatical form of their output.

However, a study by Izumi, et.al.(1999) and Izumi and Biglow (2000) explored the potential of pushed output to promote counterfactual conditional in English (e.g. If Anne had traveled to Spain in 1992, she would have seen the Olympics). The experimental group were given different kinds of texts and had to generate similar texts. (In an essay writing task and a text reconstruction task) Control groups received the same textual input but answered comprehension questions. The writers of the experimental group showed significant improvement during the experimental treatments, but on post tests focusing of the target grammar structure the control group performed just as well. Thus it seems that giving a rich input combined with noticing activities may have been sufficient for grammar learning without any added benefits from the output requirement. This study and others (E.g. de la Fuente, 2002; Nobuyoshi and Ellis, 1993) have not

been able to demonstrate the benefits of “pushed output” up to now. The significance of input and output on SLA therefore needs more investigation and evidence to develop as theories in the future. Input, interaction and output can be used in teaching L2 in different situations. SLA can take place through focus on form (in classroom situations) as well as focus on meaning (in natural interactional situations).

2.5. Focus on Form

Focus on form was initially distinguished by Long (1991) where he made a distinction between the different types of focus on form. (I.e. Focus on form/focus on forms) According to Long, *focus on forms (FonFS)* refers to the lessons in which language features are taught or practiced according to a structural syllabus that specifies which features are taught and in which sequence. It may involve teaching approaches such as mimicry and memorization or grammar translation and they are all based on the assumption that language features should be taught systematically, one at a time.

Focus on form (FonF) on the other hand refers to instruction in which the main emphasis remains on communicative activities or tasks but in which a teacher intervenes to help the students use the language more accurately when the need arises. Originally Long defined focus on form as “reactive and incidental “. (Spada and Lightbown 2006). For instance, when students engaged in communicative activities or tasks the teacher may respond to a difficulty that arose. Therefore the language feature that required focus was not determined in advance as in focus on forms. However, more recent interpretations of focus on form have expanded the definition to include instruction in which teachers anticipate that students will have difficulty with a particular feature as they engage in a communicative task and plan in advance to target that feature through feedback and other pedagogical interventions, all the while maintaining a primary focus on

meaning. (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Long and Robinson 1998; cited in Spada and Lightbown 2006)

Ellis (2001), in his overview of research investigating form-focused instruction builds on Long's initial distinction between FonF and FonFs as follows:

- 1) FonFs, where primary focus is to learn and engage in intensive practice of pre-selected language structures which may or may not be contextualized
- 2) Planned FonF, where learners are invited to focus primarily on meaning, but input has been contrived and adapted in such a way to present learners with plenty of examples of target structures embedded within a communicative context
- 3) Incidental FonF, where specific issues of form arise naturally within the meaning-focused activity and are handled at a time or raised by the teacher afterwards.

(Cited in Murphy 2005)

Ellis concludes, as many other researchers before, that the studies demonstrate that form focused input can be effective, but it does not alter the natural order of acquisition. Krashen (1982) argues that grammar teaching should be limited to a few simple rules such as the third person singular ('s) and past tense (ed) that can be used to monitor output from the acquired system. His argument is based on the premise that most learners are only capable of learning such simple rules and the more complex rules should be *acquired* in a naturalistic environment outside the classroom. There have been many studies on the effect of focus of form and the naturalistic environment. E.g. Klapper and Rees (2003, p.310) conclude that both focus on forms and planned or incidental focus on form can be equally effective "when linked to extensive exposure to naturalistic use of the target language" (cited in Murphy 2005)

In a subsequent research paper Ellis (2002) too suggests that Form focused input is particularly effective where simple structures are concerned, and that limited instruction aimed at complex structures could also be effective provided that the learners have access to the target structures in the form of input outside the course of instruction.

Several studies on form focused instruction has reported that L2 learners benefit most from form focused input when they are at a developmental level in their language acquisition that enables them to compare their use of particular forms with that of native or more proficient speakers. (Mackay & Philip, 1998; Spada & Lightbown, 1999). Related to this finding is the observation that learners' receptive and productive abilities do not develop in the same way or at the same rate. However, recent research investigating the effects of both input (i.e. comprehension) and output (i.e. production) based practice on L2 development indicate that both comprehension and production improve as long as the practice is meaningful and learners are encouraged to make form-meaning connections. (Morgan-Short & Wood Bowden, 2006; DeKeyser, 1998; cited in Spada & Lightbown 2008)

Foster and Skehan (1999, pp. 216) point out that learners have limited attention capacities and that different aspects of comprehension and language production (i.e. accuracy, complexity and fluency) compete for these capacities. Van Patten (1990; 1996, cited in Murphy 2005) suggests that learners have difficulty in attending to form and meaning at the same time and often prioritize one at the expense of the other. Robinson's work on task complexity (2001) supports the same view. His study explores the relationship between the cognitive complexity of tasks, learner ratings of task difficulty and task production. He (2001, pp.35) concludes that in certain task types (such as discussions or information transfer) learners prioritize fluency and

others compel them to prioritize accuracy of production or complexity. (I.e monologic, non-interactive tasks as narratives).

Activity outside the classroom has been shown to be important by a number of researchers, particularly functional practice. This was defined by Rowsell and Libben (1994, pp.673) as where learners engage in ‘real’ communication through the TL, create some form of meaningful interaction or provide their own meaningful context or background to assist in learning the target language. Naiman,et.al. (1996) emphasized the importance of active engagement with the language as a characteristic of a ‘good language learner’. Yang (1999) notes that increasing the learners’ exposure to the TL outside the formal program leads to enhanced self-perception of language proficiency and, in turn increased motivation. She discovered in her studies that students who believed that learning of the grammar, vocabulary and translation were the most important part of learning a foreign language and who felt that language learning involved a lot of memorization (I.e. those who primarily focus on form) were unlikely to seek or create functional practice opportunities for using the TL with a focus on meaning. Furthermore, Schmidt (2001) hypothesized that ‘noticing’ defined as ‘paying attention to...details and differences’ is a necessary condition to facilitate intake and that it constitutes a first step in the process of language building. Apart from the studies conducted he supports this view using his own experience of learning Portuguese in Brazil. During his stay in Brazil he realized that elements of the input that had gone unnoticed (although not impeded comprehension in the past) became noticeable and analyzable in the out-of-class input only after they were taught in the class.

Spada & Lightbown (2006) makes a distinction between 'isolated' Form-focused input (FFI) and 'integrated' FFI. Isolated FFI is defined as the focus of language form separated from the communicative or content-based activity and the latter refers to the FFI which draws the learners' attention to language form during communicative or content-based instruction. They claim that learners who begin learning when they are beyond early childhood, especially those whose exposure to TL occurs primarily and exclusively in classrooms where other students share the same L1 appear to benefit from FFI because it helps them make more efficient use of their limited exposure to sounds, words and sentences of the language they are learning.

In their research in intensive ESL classes that were almost exclusively meaning-focused, Lightbown & Spada noted that young students were successful in acquiring certain language features when their teachers provided ongoing integrated FFI on a limited number of these features. (Lightbown, 1991; Lightbown & Spada 1990). According to them those receiving integrated FFI were substantially more likely to acquire these features than students in classes where there was never any attention to form. Research in French immersion programs (Day & Shapson, 1991; Harley 1989, 1998; Lyster, 1994a, 1994b, 2004. cited in Spada & Lightbown 2008) and in other content-based and communicative classrooms with child and adult ESL learners (Doughty & Varela, 1998; R.Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Williams & Evans 1998) also supports the hypothesis that attention to language form within the context of communicative practice can lead to progress in learners' language development. (Spada & Lightbown 2008) Although this progress has been observed for short term in most studies Spada and Lightbown (1993) have reported long term progress in their study. However, none of these studies compared the outcomes of L2 learners receiving isolated FFI with learner receiving integrated FFI. More research therefore is warranted in this area.

2.6. Focus on Meaning

The meaning-focused approach grew out of the dissatisfaction with form-focused approaches such as grammar translation and cognitive code methods. It has been argued that there was a mismatch between what was learned in the classroom and the communicative skills needed outside the classroom. (Celce-Murcia, et.al., 1997). Research in grammar revealed that most adult second language learners who were successful in controlling grammatical rules and structures in the classroom could not apply these rules effectively in real communication. (d'Anglejan 1978; Johnson, 1981; Long, Adams, McLean and Castarios, 1976; cited in Kim Park 2000)

Early supporters of meaning-focused instruction believed that the goal of language teaching should be developing the learners' communicative competence which included not only grammar but also sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. (Canale and Swain 1980). Methodologists such as Johnson (1982) and Littlewood (1981) addressed the conditions needed to *promote* language acquisition (as opposed to the *process* of language acquisition) (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, pp.72. cited in Kim Park, 2000)

1. Activities that involve real communication promote learning
2. Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning
3. Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process

In the 1970's and 1980's the emphasis therefore shifted to the importance of language development that takes place while the learners are engaged in meaning-focused activities. It gave birth to a new theoretical view of SLA which was termed communicative language teaching

(CLT). This method included using tasks as a stimulus for generating interaction among students. (Swain and Lapkin, 1998)

In a meaning focused approach, “learners are usually not specifically taught the strategies, maxims and organizational principles that govern communicative language use but are expected to work these out for themselves through extensive task engagement” (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1997, pp. 141. cited in Park, 2000)

One of the main rationales offered in the literature for using communicative tasks for language teaching is that it enhances the second language acquisition through negotiation of meaning. “...language learning is assisted through the social interaction of learners and their interlocutors, particularly when they negotiate toward mutual comprehension of each other’s message meaning” (Pica et.al., 1993, pp. 11). Communicative tasks generally emphasized the importance of a focus on meaning. Nunan (1989) defines the communicative task as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. However, there are also studies (Kowal,1997; Kowal and Swain, 1997; Swain, 1998) with several different types of classroom activity which suggested that , when completed collaboratively, they led to a focus on form as students engaged in construction meaning required by the tasks.

There are different types of meaning focused instruction .They can be listed as Communicative language teaching (CLT), which include task based learning and Content-based instruction (CBI) which includes immersion courses. CBI which is the integration of language and content instruction has been a growing phenomenon in the field of language studies since the early 1980’s. CBI is found in many forms depending on the needs of the students as well as the

curricular. According to Met (1999) all programs, models and approaches that integrate language and content share a common phenomenon: students engage in some way with content using non-native language.

According to Met CBI is a continuum of content and language integration. She illustrates it as follows:

Content-Driven

Content is taught in L2

Content learning is priority

Language learning is secondary

Content objectives determined by course

Goals or curriculum

Teachers must select language objectives

Students evaluated on content mastery

Language-Driven

Content is used to learn L2

Language learning is priority

Content learning is incidental

Language objectives determined by

L2 course goals or curriculum

Students evaluated on content to be integrated

Students evaluated on language skills/proficiency

Met 1999; pp.2

The continuum provides for a range of programs and approaches that may be primarily content –driven or language-driven. In language driven programs, language has primacy, and content facilitates language growth. Content learning may be considered a welcome by-product, but neither students nor the teachers are held accountable for ensuring that students learn it.

In content-driven courses the target language is the vehicle of learning subject matter that is of interest and value to the learner. However, the language aims are not contemplated as part of the curriculum of the given courses; in fact classes normally proceed without specific instructional emphasis on language analysis and practice, and without making adjustments in the discourse to the level of proficiency of students. The context, however, provides valuable opportunities for language learning as it involves intensive exposure to highly contextualized language of particular relevance to the academic interest of students. They therefore manage to advance their language competence by developing receptive and productive skills though in an unplanned and unsystematic way.

Some examples for content-driven courses are partial and total immersion courses. Immersion education gained popularity after the immense success in the Canadian immersion courses during the mid sixties. In these courses L2 was the medium of instruction to maximize the quantity of comprehensible input and for the purposeful use of the TL in the classroom. Research conducted on the immersion programs conducted in the University of Ottawa by Burger, et. al. (1984) revealed that at the end of the immersion program in which English students were taught certain courses in French and French students were taught the same courses in English that the students, apart from learning the subject matter, also progressed in their second language equal to that made by similar students in the regular second language classes.

However, studies also revealed that although students' attainment in content was deemed effective, the level of language proficiency attained by students was not native-like. (Swain & Johnson,1997; Genesee,1994)

Other researchers such as Prabhu (1987) developed a communicational teaching project, which was designed to develop linguistic competence through task-based approach to language teaching. This program was conducted in many secondary schools in Bangalore and Madras with beginner learners of English as L2. In evaluating this program Beretta and Davis (1985) stated that although some project schools did not show an advantage over control schools task-based leaning has been an effective mode of instruction.

Researchers have also investigated to what extent learners in meaning focused classes can acquire language forms naturally. Hammond (1988) compared groups of students in Spanish programs in two universities. Eight experimental groups were instructed through meaning-focused Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and fifty two control groups were instructed through forms-focused grammar translation method. In general the experimental group outperformed the control group in both mid-term and final examinations. However, no significant differences were found.

It is fairly difficult to find any studies that show significant improvement in adult linguistic competence when meaning-focused input is the method of instruction. According to Harley & Swain (1984) it may be attributed to the fact that linguistic features only appeared sporadically in the input, and therefore learners are unable acquire them satisfactorily.

CBI has been recommended by researchers to develop students' academic language ability and increase student motivation and interest on content which would ultimately facilitate L2 learning.

2.7. Form and Meaning Focused Input

More recent proponents of CLT believe that instruction should include both form and meaning focused instruction. Those who are opposed to form-focused or meaning-focused

instruction claim that the two approaches used separately are insufficient. Their views are based on past studies and theoretical claims about language acquisition. For instance, many students in form-focused classrooms may be competent in forms during controlled situations but may not be so in real life communication. Further, despite various opportunities to receive comprehensible input and to communicate, many learners who are in a natural environment and in meaning-focused classrooms make various morphological, syntactical and phonological errors. (R.Ellis.1994).

It has been posited that unless learners are given ample opportunities to engage in communicative tasks to supplement form-focused instruction they will not retain control of linguistic forms and meaningful interaction. Further, Spada & Lightbown (2008) explains that various studies on CLT and CBI reveal that meaning based- exposure to the language allows L2 learners to develop comprehension skills, oral fluency, self-confidence and communicative abilities but they continue to have difficulties with pronunciation as well as with morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features of L2. (e.g. Harley & Swain, 1984; Lyster 1987. Cited in Spada & Lightbown, 2008)

It has been claimed that for the learners to develop control over linguistic forms in meaningful interaction form-focused instruction, negative/positive feedback and controlled practice should be supplemented with regular opportunities to engage in communicative tasks. This has called for an integration of form-focused and meaning-focused instruction for effective SLA. It is believed to be a more successful method especially in 'acquisition poor environments where the students have limited knowledge in L2.

There have been many studies on the effect of form and meaning focused instruction on SLA. Montgomery and Einstein (1985) compared the improvement of L2 proficiency of an experimental ESL course for adults. The experimental group, who, in addition to regular form focused classes were also enrolled in a special oral communicative program (involving field trips to sites where they routinely needed to communicate in English) and the control group, who were taking only the required grammar classes were compared to explore the gains in L2 proficiency. The results of the learners' pre and post test performance in an oral interview indicated that both groups improved in grammar, vocabulary, comprehension and pronunciation. Ellis (1994) commenting on the results of the study states that the study received more overall instruction and therefore it might have been the total amount of instruction than the type that accounted for their advantage.

Spada (1987) investigated the L2 development of 48 intermediate level adults in three classes which varied in terms of the proportion of time spent on explicit grammar instruction. Class A received basically form focused instruction in their speaking activities (e.g. grammar exercises), class B received both form-focused and meaning focused instruction and class C received meaning-focused instruction in their speaking activities (e.g. role play). Spada noted that learners who received more form-focused instruction performed as well or better on grammatical structures and on conversational skills (including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency) as those who received less form focused instruction.

To explore the effect of form and meaning focused input the production of learners will have to be evaluated. Writing is a form of production from which the performance of learners could be elicited.

¹according to Long (1983) refer to where learners have little or no access to comprehensive input.

Writing

Most theories on SLA have used language data as their basis. Rod Ellis explains why language data is basic to SLA research as follows:

“A better approach might be to find out what learners actually do, as opposed to what they think they do, when they try to learn a second language. One way of doing this is by collecting samples of learner language- the language that learners produce when they are called on to use L2 in speech and writing and analyze them carefully. The samples provide evidence of what the learners know about the language they are trying to learn. (the TL) If samples are collected at different points in time it may also be possible to find out how learners’ knowledge gradually develop. Therefore one of the goals of SLA, then, is the description of language acquisition. Another is explanation: identifying the external and internal factors that account for why learners acquire L2 in the way they do. (Ellis 1997, pp4)

The ability to write is generally not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or transmitted culturally as a set of practices in either formal or informal settings. The ability to write effectively is becoming increasingly important in our global community and the instruction in writing is therefore assuming an increased role in both second and foreign language education. Writing has also become more important as a system of communication rather than a subject of study.

Writing involves composing which implies the ability to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or descriptions, or to transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. It is very often the act of composing which can create problems for students, especially for those writing in L2 in academic contexts. For instance, formulating new ideas can be difficult for the learner because it involves transforming or reworking information which is much more complex in writing than telling. By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in “a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing texts” (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987, pp.12- cited in Myles, 2002).

The value of being able to write effectively increases as students progress through compulsory secondary education on to higher education. At university level writing is seen not just as a standardized system of communication but also as an essential tool for learning. In the first language the main functions of writing at higher levels of education is to expand one’s own knowledge through reflection rather than simply to communicate information. (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Purves et. Al, 1984- cited in Weigle, 2002) In contrast, the same cannot be said of second language writing because of the wide variety of situations in which people learn to use L2, both as children and as adults, in schools and in other settings.

There are three distinct groups of adult second language learners:

- a) Immigrants – writing essential for survival at work
- b) Those who seek advanced university degrees – sophisticated writing needs
- c) Those who learn for personal interest/ and or career or educational enhancement

(Weigle, 2002. pp.11)

Much of the current literature on academic writing in a second language (specifically in English) emphasizes the social aspects of writing, referring to the process of learning to write in academic contexts as one of “initiating ESL students into an academic discourse community” (Spack 1988; cited in Weigle 2002). Weigle also mentions about the social factors that can influence the quality of contact the learners will experience. She states that we cannot assume that more contact with the TL will result in acquisition of the L2. This needs to be investigated through studies.

Apart from social factors cognitive factors too affect the writing ability of learners. One such factor which is of significance is the writer’s first language. Although L1 transfer is no longer considered as the only cause for error at structural level (as it cannot be empirically tested) a writer’s first language plays a complex and a significant role in L2 acquisition. E.g. when learners write under pressure, they may call upon systematic resources from their native language for the achievement and synthesis of meaning. (Widdowson, 1990; cited in Myles, 2002).

Students writing in their L2 (unlike writing in L1) have to acquire proficiency in the use of language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills. Limited knowledge in vocabulary, language structure and content can inhibit the L2 writer’s performance. If the writers need lengthy searches for appropriate lexical and syntactic choices it would disrupt process of putting their ideas into written texts. Consequently, the written product may not match the writer’s original intention. It would be either because of the limited linguistic knowledge or because of the effort required for text generation may tax the writer’s resources so completely that the idea is lost from the working memory before it can be put down on paper. Writing in L2

therefore is a complex process involving the ability to communicate in L2 (learner output) and the ability to construct a text in order to express one's ideas effectively in writing.

Since the process of writing in L2 is a complex process learners often find it difficult to develop all aspects of the stages of writing simultaneously. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) learners selectively use only those aspects that are automatic or have already been proceduralized. They argue that learners develop many strategies like meta-cognitive, cognitive, social/affective strategies; however, they can be effective only if they are internalized so that they can be utilized in adverse language situations.

E.g. performing under timed test conditions

Taking the UG theory, input hypothesis, interaction hypothesis and the output hypothesis as the base the current study aims to elicit the effect of form- focused form and meaning focused input on ESL writing of adult second language learners.

Studies on form focused instruction...../meaning focused instruction.....

2.7 Research Question

Based on the theories, hypotheses, studies and observations in the literature review the broad research question for this study, "The effect of meaning focused input on ESL writing" was posited to investigate the efficacy of different types of input on second language acquisition. The main research question is: What is the effect of meaning–focused input in addition to form-focused input on ESL writing?

In addition to the broad research question, the following questions were also explored.

- Does an integrated approach (meaning-focuses and form-focused) instruction have better outcomes in enhancing the acquisition of academic writing skills?

- What are the specific challenges related to instructional methodology that learners encounter in L2 acquisition?
- Can meaning-focused instruction be combined with form-focused instruction to increase efficacy?

2.8 Summary

This chapter presented a broad overview of the theories, hypotheses and studies, which are significant to the current study. It was evident in the literature review that hypotheses and studies on the effect of input, output and interaction on second language acquisition have been inconclusive. Krashen has been criticized for not been able to provide empirical evidence to support his claims in the Monitor hypothesis and as a consequence more studies followed either extending or disputing it. The interaction hypothesis propounded by Long has been extended further by researchers such as Ellis. The studies based on Swain's output hypothesis (pushed output) have not been conclusive either and is evident in the studies conducted by Izumi et al. and others More research is warranted in the future to determine the 'wh' (how, why, when, where) of language acquisition. There is also no conclusive evidence to show which type of input (form/meaning focused) has been more successful in SLA. Further, most of the given studies on second language acquisition have been conducted in countries which have a majority of native speakers of English. The generalizability of such studies in the Sri Lankan context remains a question as English is the second language for the majority of Sri Lankans and their interaction with native speakers is limited. In addition to that, according to the researcher's knowledge, no studies on the effect of input on ESL writing at tertiary level have been conducted to date. Hence, it would be pertinent to study this area in L2 acquisition in Sri Lanka as it has important pedagogical implications with respect to the medium of instruction in universities.

The research questions presented in 2.7 therefore attempts to investigate some of the identified gaps evident in the literature of second language acquisition. The next chapter attempts to discuss the methodology utilized for the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the nature of the research, a description of the methods used in carrying out the study, the research design as well as their suitability for the topic. The chapter presents the population used, as well as the sampling technique that was engaged, data collection procedures, analysis and the instruments used in the study. The purpose for conducting this research was to establish whether there is a significant change in the writing/marks of students when they had both form and meaning focused instruction as opposed to only form focused instruction. The main research question for this study was

- What is the effect of meaning focused input on ESL writing?

Other questions that guided this study were

- Does an integrated approach (meaning-focuses and form-focused) instruction have better outcomes in enhancing the acquisition of academic writing skills?
- What are the specific challenges related to instructional methodology that learners encounter in L2 acquisition?
- Can meaning-focused instruction be combined with form-focused instruction to increase efficacy?

This study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methodology was used as part of the study involved selecting a sample population that would represent a defined population. In this case, one class, comprising of 20 students were selected to represent a population of 200 students. Results from the quantitative research were largely

descriptive and they entailed the reporting of the sample population. The descriptive research methodology involved 20 first year medical students who had from focused input in the form of intensive English course for two and a half months. After this period, they started their academic course which is conducted exclusively in English. During the first two years of the academic course, they had meaning focused instruction through an ongoing English program, which largely involves writing and oral communication during the first two years.

Majority of educators recommend more focus on academic writing skills, not taking into account the importance of a public that is adequately literate (Schmitt, 2000). Acquiring adequate writing skills for academic purposes, that transcends basic level literacy is difficult in L1, and more so in L2 Hyland (2006). Hyland further observes that in order to tackle this difficulty, most institutions of higher learning mandate all students, including L2 students to take writing courses in their freshman year. The focus of this study is observations made on the writing experiences of a class of L2 medical school students. The study was conducted through a carefully designed methodology, which entailed a ten week intensive English course that was exclusively form focused, at the end of which the students were given an achievement test. The test was in the form of an essay, which required the students to give their perception

A subsequent three month period followed, during which English was taught using both form focused instruction and meaning focused instruction in medicine. A subsequent test was administered, based on the same topic as was given in achievement test one. The marks were scored and a mean calculated from the two achievement tests. The overall score was used to assess the student's progress in English language acquisition, and the efficacy of the two methods of instruction, the first one being exclusive form-focused and the second one combined

method using form-focused and meaning focused instruction. This is in line with the observation made by Henkel (2004), that when students are enrolled in L2 classes, the institution has the obligation to ensure that the course and method of instruction is as useful and meaningful as possible. This notion was used to answer the research question, Does an integrated approach (meaning-focuses and form-focused) instruction have better outcomes in enhancing the acquisition of academic writing skills?. To answer this question, it was necessary to first establish students performance and acquisition of academic writing skills using form-focused instruction as the only teaching method. This was done during the initial intensive ten-week course and progress was assessed through achievement test one administered in essay form. Another period would follow, that combined both teaching methods, the same essay as that in achievement test one given and comparisons made that would provide insight on the efficacy of each method.

Moreover, as Scheffler (2008) observes, L2 and writing courses in particular and more useful and effective to the students when their goals and those of the curriculum correspond. L2 learners often join writing courses with their own goals and ideas as to what would be most helpful to them. In this case, when there is no correspondence between the learners goals and the course goals, then the overall course will not be effective, and learners will have more difficult time in acquiring useful academic writing skills. Even for learners who are highly motivated, acquiring a second language, and being able to effectively write in the second language is often a long-term process (Henkel, 2004). It is therefore fundamental that institutions establish the most effective methods of instructions that reflect the goals of learners and those of the course.

This notion informed the inclusion of meaning focused instruction in the second phase, as Scheffler (2008) adds, when students feel that the L2 class does not serve their specific purposes and needs, a view that is reinforced when the learners have no task (writing) to do outside the L2 class, then the difficulties in acquiring adequate L2 academic writing skills are made worse. Meaning focused instruction in such a case is aimed at providing the learners a platform through which they can put into practice what they have learnt, based on their specific goals and needs. In most cases, the goals of L2 learners in an academic program is to gain the ability to use better vocabulary in their writing and with minimal grammatical errors. Long and Robinson (1991), advocate for a negotiation between L2 learners and their instructors in order to agree on fundamental goals and the best way through which such goals are to be achieved. By evaluating the learners using achievement tests in the form of essays, it will be easy for both the learners and teachers identify key weaknesses in the writing skills and subsequently negotiate for goals that must be achieved within a specified period, and the most meaningful instruction methodology that would ensure better outcomes.

The first achievement test, which was administered after the intensive course was completed, produced the first set of data. These were the scores from the essay test and they were tabulated in percentage form.. The second set of data came from the second achievement test, which was given after three months of the ongoing English course. This second phased involved form focused as well as meaning focused instruction in medicine. The results of this test were compared to those of the achievement test and subsequently, conclusions drawn on the effectiveness of form focused instruction and meaning focused instruction.

The following is an adaptation of Jacob's et. al ESL composition profile (1981) that was used to for test scoring

3.2. Adaptation ESL Composition Profile – Jacobs et al (1981)

Mechanics

- 0 No competence
- 1 Not enough to evaluate/handwriting illegible.
- 2 Very poor: No mastery of Convention dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing
- 3 Poor to fair, Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, poor hand writing. Meaning confused or obscured.
- 4 Average to good: occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, paragraphing. But meaning not obscured.
- 5 Very good to excellent: Demonstrate mastery of conventions. Few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing.

Language use

- 0.4 V. poor Does not communicate / not enough evaluate virtually no mastery of a constructing rules dominated by errors:
 - Poor : Major problems with simple/complex sentences, meaning confused or obscured.
- 11-17 Fair to average: Frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order, articles, pronouns, prepositions, an/or fragments, deletions.
- 18-21 Good : effective but simple construction, minor problems in complex constructions, several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions. But meaning seldom obscured.
- 22-25 Very good to excellent: Effective complete construction. Few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions

Vocabulary

- 0- Not enough to evaluate.
- 1-5 Very poor: Essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary idioms and word form.

- 6-10 Poor to fair: Limited range, frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage. Meaning confused or obscured.
- 11-17 Average to good : Adequate range, occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning is not obscured.
- 18-20 Very good to excellent: Sophisticated range effective word/idiom choice and usage, word form mastery. Appropriate register.

Organization

- 0- Not enough to evaluate
- 1-5 Very poor: Does not communicate, no organization
- 6-10 Poor to fair : Non-fluent, ideas confused or disconnected, lacks logical sequential development.
- 11-17 Average to good : Some what choppy, loosely organized but main ideas stand out, limited supporting ideas, logical but incomplete sequencing .
- 18-20 Very good to excellent: Fluent expression ideas clearly stated/ supported, succinct, well organized, logical sequencing, cohesive.

Content

- 0- Not enough to evaluate
- 1-10 Very poor: does not show knowledge of subject, non substantive, not pertinent.
- 11-16 Poor to fair: Little knowledge of subject, little substance, inadequate development of topic.
- 17-25 Average to good : Some knowledge of subject adequate range, limited development of the topic. Mostly relevant but lacks details.
- 26-30 Very good to excellent : Knowledgeable, substantive, thorough development of the subject, relevant.

3.3 Population and sampling

An important element that gives authority of a research study involves the validity of the population and selecting the sample. Target populations include all the participants that are of theoretical interest to the study, and which the researcher would like to generalize. In such a

case, the target population for this study was all ESL learners in the university who were also taking medicine as their academic course. The selected sample involves a class of mix ability students. Participant criterion was that the student is

- i. An English second language learner
- ii. First year medical student

The students take English classes at the university with an intensive course lasting for ten weeks that includes five hours of face-to-face instruction where they learn the four language skills. The next phase is the continuing English course that lasts for three months, consisting of 2 hours of face-to-face interaction on a weekly basis. The students are grouped according to mix ability. During the intensive ten-week course, the students receive only form-focused instruction for two hours in a week. During the ongoing course, they received form-focused instruction in English and meaning focused instruction on medicine. Meaning-based Instruction in medicine includes 15-20 one-hour lectures on a weekly basis, with one or two discussion classes and 4-5 two-hour practical classes.

3.4. Limitations of the study

The fact that both approaches and forms of instruction, i.e. (exclusive and combined) were given to the same group of students means that the study did not have a control group. It would therefore be a convoluted task to draw inferences as to what was the cause of improvement or poor performance. Improvement could be construed to mean that:

- i. Combined methods had better outcomes
- ii. The period of exposure to the language and language instruction

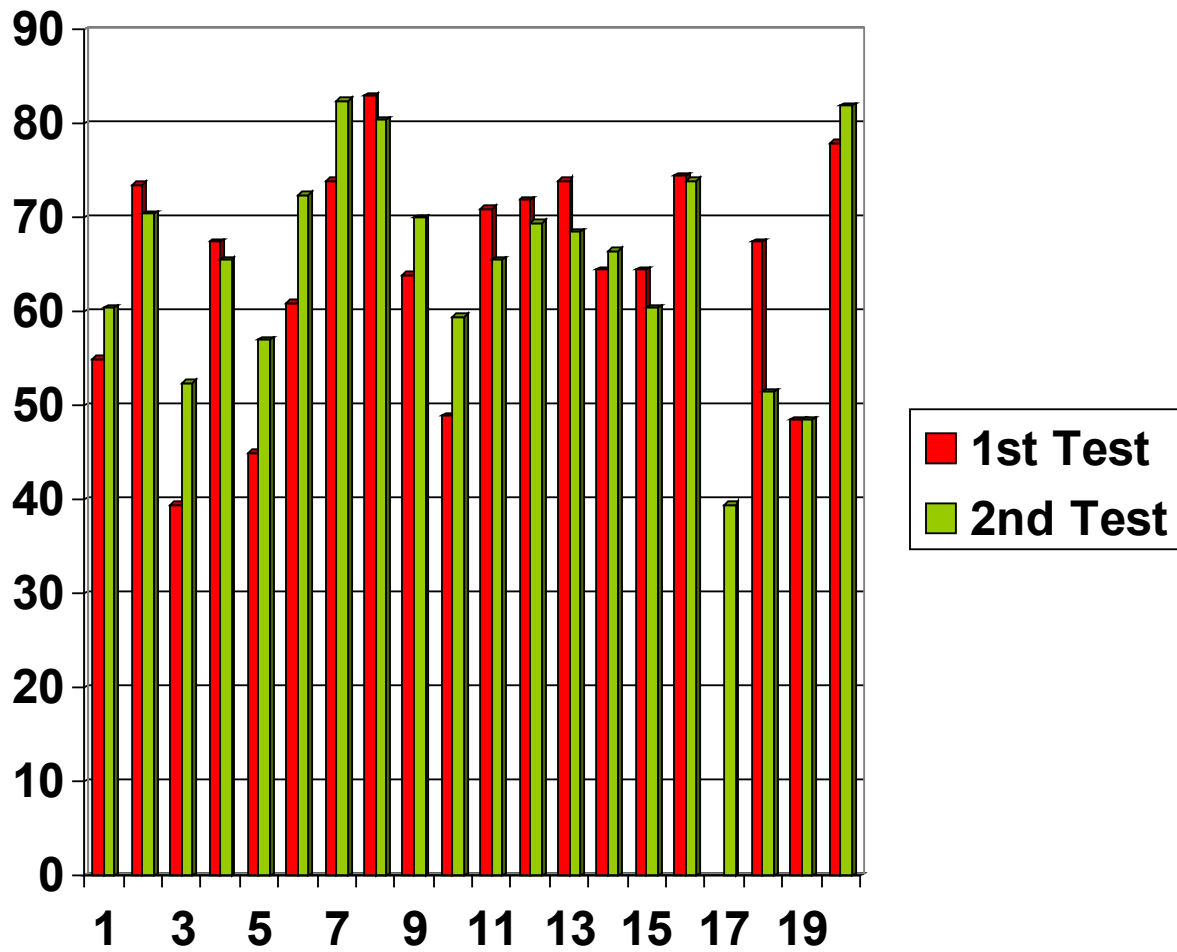
- iii. The introduction of meaning focused instruction was responsible for marked improvement.

Either way, none of the above inferences are conclusive enough and more research need to be done on the topic, using control groups to establish the specific impact of a particular method of instruction. However, the study provides insight on how to make language and writing classes of undergraduate students more meaningful. In particular, the achievement tests given in the form of essays provided the researcher with insight of language and writing skills weakness that the L2 learners, and subsequently able to make recommendations on possible curriculum improvement that would address these specific issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This graph compares test scores in both achievement tests from each of the 20 participants in the study.



| Achievement test 1 | | Achievement test 2 | |
|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|--|
| Script no. | marks % | Marks % | |
| 1 | 55 | 60 | |
| 2 | 73 | 70 | |
| 3 | 39 | 52 | |
| 4 | 67 | 65 | |
| 5 | 45 | 57 | |
| 6 | 61 | 72 | |
| 7 | 74 | 82 | |
| 8 | 83 | 80 | |
| 9 | 64 | 70 | |
| 10 | 49 | 59 | |
| 11 | 71 | 65 | |
| 12 | 72 | 69 | |
| 13 | 74 | 68 | |
| 14 | 64 | 66 | |
| 15 | 64 | 60 | |
| 16 | 74 | 74 | |
| 17 | Not attempted. | 39 | |
| 18 | 67 | 51 | |
| 19 | 48 | 48 | |
| 20 | 78 | 82 | |

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| | Improved scores |
| | Declined scores |
| | Stable Scores |
| | No comparison |

The above Table shows scores from the two achievement tests. When comparisons are made of the scores from the first and second tests, 10 of the 20 participants showed significant improvement in the second achievement tests, while 8 the 20 students had a reduction of marks while one participant had the same score in both the first and second test. One participant did not attempt the first test so a comparison was not possible. From the above results, it is difficult to make a concrete conclusion regarding the type of instruction that is more effective for adult ESL learners. High scores from the first test and a subsequent drop may be as a result of time factor and the intensity of the first course. The first achievement test was given after an intense course

that included two hours per week of exclusive form focused instruction over a ten week period , while the second test was given after using both form and meaning focused instruction in an ongoing course that took three months of two hours a week of face to face teaching of the four skills. On the other hand, the drop may be due to the type of instruction used. Since individuals have different learning styles and preferences, it is possible that the drop in second test scores was because meaning focused instruction was combined with form-focused instruction as opposed to the first test where instruction had been form focuses.

Improvement of test scores may be as a result of the length of exposure, where student show significant improvement after considerable exposure to the language and instruction. It is also possible that the improvement in scores was because of the learning preferences and styles of the participants who demonstrated marked improvement.

Average score of both scores for each student

| Achievement test 1 | | Achievement test 2 | |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Script no. | marks % | Marks % | Mean % |
| 1 | 55 | 60 | 57.5 |
| 2 | 73 | 70 | 71.5 |
| 3 | 39 | 52 | 45.5 |
| 4 | 67 | 65 | 66 |
| 5 | 45 | 57 | 51 |
| 6 | 61 | 72 | 66 |
| 7 | 74 | 82 | 78 |
| 8 | 83 | 80 | 81.5 |
| 9 | 64 | 70 | 67 |
| 10 | 49 | 59 | 54 |
| 11 | 71 | 65 | 68 |
| 12 | 72 | 69 | 70.5 |
| 13 | 74 | 68 | 71 |
| 14 | 64 | 66 | 65 |
| 15 | 64 | 60 | 62 |
| 16 | 74 | 74 | 74 |
| 17 | Not attempted. | 39 | 39 |
| 18 | 67 | 51 | 59 |
| 19 | 43 | 48 | 45.5 |
| 20 | 78 | 82 | 80 |
| Mean | | | 60.3 |
| Mode | | | 66 |
| Median | | | 66 |
| Range | | | 36 |
| Standard Deviation | | | 11 |

The table provides the means score of each student for the two achievement tests as well as the average score for the whole class. Using the mean scores, the highest scorer had 81.5%. The lowest scorer based on the mean obtained 45.5%. The overall lowest scoring student obtained 39.5% but the mean could not be obtained as the first achievement test was not attempted. The mean score for the whole class was 60.3% with a range of 36%. This implies that the difference between the highest scorer with the lowest scorer was 36%. The mode was 67% and median 67%

The following table gives a detailed review of scores from the two achievement tests. The tests were evaluated using the adopted version of Jacobs et. al., (1981) where, mechanics, language use, vocabulary, organization and content were assessed. From the data, the students had consistently.

| Achievement Test 1 | | | | | | | Achievement Test 2 | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|----|----|----|----|-------|--------------------|----|----|---|---|-------|--|
| No. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total | |
| 1 | 3 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 17 | 55 | 4 | 16 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 60 | |
| 2 | 4 | 18 | 17 | 16 | 18 | 73 | 4 | 18 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 70 | |
| 3 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 14 | 39 | 3 | 11 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 52 | |
| 4 | 4 | 18 | 13 | 14 | 18 | 67 | 4 | 18 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 65 | |
| 5 | 3 | 18 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 45 | 3 | 14 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 57 | |
| 6 | 4 | 19 | 14 | 11 | 13 | 61 | 4 | 18 | 15 | 1 | 1 | 72 | |
| 7 | 4 | 19 | 16 | 16 | 19 | 74 | 4 | 21 | 16 | 1 | 2 | 82 | |
| 8 | 4 | 21 | 16 | 19 | 23 | 83 | 4 | 20 | 16 | 1 | 2 | 80 | |
| 9 | 4 | 18 | 12 | 14 | 16 | 64 | 4 | 18 | 15 | 1 | 1 | 70 | |
| 10 | 2 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 49 | 4 | 15 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 59 | |
| 11 | 4 | 19 | 15 | 14 | 19 | 71 | 4 | 16 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 65 | |
| 12 | 4 | 18 | 16 | 16 | 18 | 72 | 4 | 18 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 69 | |
| 13 | 4 | 19 | 16 | 16 | 19 | 74 | 4 | 18 | 15 | 1 | 1 | 68 | |
| 14 | 4 | 16 | 13 | 14 | 17 | 64 | 4 | 18 | 13 | 1 | 1 | 66 | |
| 15 | 4 | 18 | 13 | 13 | 16 | 64 | 3 | 17 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 60 | |
| 16 | 4 | 18 | 14 | 16 | 22 | 74 | 4 | 19 | 14 | 1 | 2 | 74 | |
| 17 | * | * | * | * | * | * | 2 | 10 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 39 | |
| 18 | 4 | 18 | 12 | 15 | 18 | 67 | 3 | 10 | 10 | 1 | 7 | 51 | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|---|----|----|---|---|----|
| 19 | 3 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 11 | 43 | 3 | 13 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 48 |
| 20 | 4 | 19 | 17 | 18 | 20 | 78 | 4 | 21 | 17 | 7 | 3 | 82 |

Index

- 1 Mechanics
- 2 Lang. use
- 3 Vocab.
- 4 organization
- 5 Content
- * Not attempted

This study has raised questions about the effectiveness of both forms of instruction. Although there was marked improvement in test scores of half of the participants, these results do not provide concrete evidence whether meaning focused instruction is more effective in ESL learning than form-focused instruction or whether a combination of both is better. The improvement in test scores for half of the participants makes it difficult to explain the decline of scores in the other half of the participants. In addition, serious questions arise regarding to integrating both forms of instruction for ESL learners. This is because, even after experiencing the both types of instruction, the test scores of half of the participants did not improve or remain constant, but rather declined.

However, this results may be interpreted to imply that as much as the test scores of one half of the participants improved while the other half declined, it is quite possible that both groups could benefit from both forms of instruction. The decline may be explained by various factors such as

- i. Reduced intensity in the second meaning focused instruction course
- ii. Reduced face to face time
- iii. Burden caused by the beginning of the academic course (medicine) and the concurrent meaning focused English instruction
- iv. Different learning style and preference, i.e. the participants whose marks reduced may have been caused by the change from meaning to form focused instruction.

Improved results may be construed to imply

- i. The combination of meaning focused instruction with form focused instruction was responsible for the improved results
- ii. Meaning focused instruction was the preferred learning method for the participants who showed improvement.

From the results, it is evident that though key factors emerge regarding the effectiveness of meaning focused and form focused instruction more research need to be carried out. Further research should be more specific, focuses where one group of participants will exclusively receive meaning focused instruction, one group receive form-focused instruction while the third group receives only meaning focused instruction. However, with the results obtained there is as strong indication that both forms of instruction should be used as they will cater for both types of learners who either prefer meaning focuses of form focused instruction. Subsequently, as trends begin to emerge during assessments, the instructor should be able to identify learners who seem to benefit from one type of instruction and concentrate on that to ensure that they do not lag behind in English language acquisition. The following is a synthesis of the findings in comparison with existing literature on the topic.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5. 1. Introduction

Current practice in learning English, including academic writing has extensively focused on the significance of interaction. Krashen (1985) stresses on the significance of comprehensible input, which draws attention to the integral role of discourse in second language acquisition. There is also the need to analyze the nature and role of input that is given to L2 learners, its role in the process of SLA and within interactive scenarios and discursive features of conversations between non-native English speakers. In this context, the interaction hypothesis proposes that negotiated communication enhances language acquisition. The hypothesis also integrates the importance of comprehension of input and discursive conversation elements of L2 instruction.

Negotiation in this case means restructuring and modification of information by learners in their written output. Negotiation takes place when learners have difficulties in comprehending written messages. During negotiation, learners and their peers communicate and discuss, finally arriving at input comprehension, engaging resources such as hypothesis modification, confirmation, clarification and confirmation request (Long, 1983). Clarification and modification processes enable learners to comprehend input, which is integral in the overall L2 acquisition. Negotiation is therefore critical as it enables L2 learners to comprehend words and sentence structures that may be beyond their current linguistic and communicative proficiency.

There is sufficient evidence that support negotiated interaction in the acquisition of some grammatical elements of L2 (Mackey, 1999). The role of input appears to have significant bearing in L2 acquisition. This is because spoken input is believed to fade fast as the performance of the learner is paced. This simply means that the learner is not able to momentarily halt the input so that it can be written in a more effective manner. Within this context, it cannot be assumed the L2 learner will be quick enough to grasp speech input produced by another person and comprehend the intended communication. There are therefore critical gaps in presupposing that authentic input can be adequately analyzed and comprehended by the L2 learner during the comprehension process. In this case, comprehensible input is not adequate for some elements in L2 acquisition, which calls for the integration of comprehensible output in L2 teaching.

5.2. Developing writing competence

Output and input modules of the writing system are learned in both explicit and implicit ways. These are the factors responsible for perception and combination of words, sentences, paragraphs and clauses to come up with competent academic writing. Studies indicate that ordinary negotiation for meaning is not focused on elements, which are not necessary for comprehension, but instead pay attention to significant aspects, which if misinterpreted, could hinder communicative writing. There is also an indication that expansive focus on the semantic and formal features of writing is conducive for retention of meaning (Ellis, 1995).

Long (1996) further asserts that negotiated interaction enhances lexical learning and that the feedback that is gained from the process facilitates development in L2, especially in morphology, vocabulary and academic writing. Additionally, lexical and phonological feedback

is possible in negotiated interaction, which means that learners will be able to perceive it with accuracy. Negotiation also facilitates acquisition of vocabulary by stimulating learners to recognize segments in the input that are unknown, which are linguistic elements that they require in order to comprehend and come with academic writing output.

In second language acquisition, there is a clear distinction between active and passive tasks that are performed by L2 learners. Active tasks is considered more complex than passive tasks. In addition, language acquisition studies reveal that the absence of some specific tasks and exercises aimed at pushing output L2 learners and enable them to bring out new language skills that have been taught will prevent the learners from integrating passive linguistic elements into free production, as cohesive academic writing.

When L2 learners are not pushed out to engage the new system of discourse, the elements may never be activated. They will exist only in passivity at the bottom-up level (Laufer, 1998). There some distinct factors regarding the push out approach that should be observed. The first one is that during the speech production process, conceptualizing the intended message and its meaning goes before message articulation. Secondly, before speech production, the L2 learner needs to create the message using suitable linguistic form. Thirdly, the system for speech comprehension is a significant factor in the production model. Lastly, the system for comprehension is not restricted to taking fully communicative but may include internal speech as input. The not-yet communicated phonetic plan that is the output of creation and input to communication an writing is regarded as the internal speech.

5.3. Tasked-based methodology

Task based approach is considered a critical approach in both second language acquisition and in communicative language teaching. Second language acquisition present the theoretical framework based on the notion that interaction is the best way to learn and teach language. Studies have proven that interaction is adjusted through signals, triggers and responses that occur within a negotiated context. This way the needs of learners to access input as well as produce output are developed significantly. Negotiation is therefore an integral element in creating suitable settings for L2 learning.

These conditions include input where L2 learners have access to positive and comprehensible input that provides lexical as well as morphology syntax feedback that is critical in meaningful L2 learning (Pica, 1991). Negative input enables the L2 learner to focus on form-meaning association and an draws their attention to identifying the gaps that exist between their output and the targeted input that they should to access. Negotiation also facilitates the output opportunities, which learners can use to produce L2 output and make necessary modifications, geared towards increasing comprehension.

Task-based instruction in SLA is advocated for, as it allows L2 learners to engage in activities that facilitate language fluency and use of language resources creatively (DiPietro, 1987). Conversely, some studies call for an approach that addresses the needs of learners to focus on on form based on its ability to facilitated L2 leaning. Currently, there is a marked absence of clarity in procedures geared towards the implementation of focus form.

5.4. The role of feedback in focus on form instruction

In EFL, exclusive engagement of conventional approaches in grammar translation have been viewed as problematic as it results in students who score highly in discrete point tests in grammar, but are not able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in communicative discourses. On the contrary, studies in immersion approaches, and other communicative methods demonstrate that though learners score highly in communicative ability, mere exposure to authentic L2 input fails to develop an ability to communicate with a high degree of accuracy and production that has no errors (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

Form-focused instruction has been proven efficient in increasing accuracy in grammar and error free production. This integrative pedagogy allows L2 learners to practice and engage language forms within realistic communicative settings. Form-focused instruction is distinctly different from conventional grammar translation methods as target forms are generally presented within communicative contexts. Conversely, grammar points that are presented in the conventional decontextualized method can be recalled within similar contexts like discrete point grammar tests. Retrieving them in the communicative context may prove to be difficult for the L2 learner (Lightbown, 2008).

Corrective feedback

Corrective feedback (CF) is a type of reactive form-focused instruction, which is regarded as valuable in the promoting attention, therefore beneficial to the process of L2 learning (Sheen, 2007). A number of studies have been carried out both in classroom and laboratory settings to assess the form of evidence that is produced by CF in addition to the effectiveness of

the various forms of CF (Philp, 2003; Leeman, 2003; Lyster, 2004). Many of the studies that evaluate the various forms of CF methods have focused on the rule-based grammatical features (Lyster, 2004; Sheen, 2007).

5.5. Prompts and recasts

Researchers in SLA distinguish feedback and response in terms of the degree to which it is either implicit or explicit. Implicit forms of feedback generally appear as recasts although the classification of forms of feedback can become compounded (Egi, 2007). Studies indicated that recasts can also appear as explicit depending on context and the distinct attributes of the recasts, such as linguistic targets, number of changers and general length (Carroll, 2001).

Correspondingly, explicit forms of feedback can appear in various forms. Explicit feedback, to some researchers, entails the signal that that an error has been made while to others it also involves metalinguistic information, the correct form or both (Ellis, 2006).

Considering the complexities involved in attempting comparisons of various feedback types and techniques based on their implicitness or explicitness, it is more appropriate and efficient draw the comparisons in by distinguishing between output pushing CF and input providing CF (Ellis, 2006). CF that provides input presents the proper reformulation using explicit correction and recasts while output pushing CF holds back the proper reformulation and pushes learners to self-correct through prompts. Such prompts include metalinguistic clues, clarification requests and elicitation (Ranta & Lyster, 2007). The two types of CF engage learners to different degrees of cognitive processing, which entails cognitive evaluation in working memory in input providing CF and long-term memory retrieval in output pushing CF.

Recasts provide learners with positive verification but it is obscure whether negative feedback is provided in the same case. According to Egi, (2007), whether recasts give negative or positive evidence, or both, depends on the perception of the learner which ultimately decides the efficiency of recasts. However, there is contention, whether the provision of positive output within classroom input enable learners to gain new knowledge in L2. On the contrary, prompts seek to give negative evidence since they indicate errors in learners' output.

The self-correction process allows learners to reevaluate what they have already learnt and restructure the inter-language (Lyster, 2002). In this case, learners benefit immensely when they are pushed to make the appropriate connections on their own rather than from listening to the right structures in the input. Additionally, prompts allow learners acquire better control over the forms. Classroom studies pertaining evidence provided by CF present more advantages for prompts as opposed to recasts.

This study has demonstrated that compared to the control group, both CF groups demonstrated better performance. However, the group that was given prompts performed much better than the group receiving recasts. The better performance was demonstrated in both written and oral tests. The study has further observed that prompts CF was particularly effective with L2 learners who had low scores in previous tests. Another observation is that learners who obtained over 50% in pretest scores gained from both prompts and recasts.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Meaning focused input

From the findings of this study, as well as present research on the topic, there is strong indication that vocabulary, and academic writing skills are best acquired in a meaning focused setting. This approach is deeply rooted in Krashen's position on natural learning. This is where vocabulary is acquired incidentally and through meaningful comprehensible input (Doughty & Williams, 1998). The approach is based on the belief that comprehensible input of L2 activates a learning process, which is natural, and leads to the development of subconscious competence of linguistic prowess, which forms the basis of all natural production of L2. In this case, subconscious learning is perceived as having a negligible role since there is no implicit and explicit interface knowledge within the system.

Nonetheless, several researchers view speakers and learners interaction as fundamental, as it facilitates and contributes towards meaningful and comprehensible input. This has been proven by this study with the decline in scores when face to face instruction was reduced in the ongoing English classes. This kind of interaction also enables learners to draw out negative evidence, and pushes them to modify their language output, (Ellis, 1999). Researchers who support meaning-focused instruction contend that pushing learners to produce output enables them to attain advanced word levels because they have greater interaction in dialogue. This implies that the organization of L2 must be in ways that allow more opportunities to learners to interact liberally with both speakers and learners in task-based activities and in the classroom setting.

6.2. Implicit and explicit learning

L2 learners develop inter-language at different rates, though they may be exposed to similar lessons, and interaction levels. Schmitt (2000) adds that challenges in learning L2 emerge when learners do not understand the diverse meanings of the target words. Additionally, problems will arise when L2 learners are incapable of finding the meaning of the word because they lack adequate knowledge to deduce meaning for contextual use of the word. It has also been observed that L2 learners will opt to use easy phrases and word structures to avoid making errors in their academic writing. In this case, some learners are left lagging behind while others are able to catch on. For their part, instructors have difficulties in providing instruction in line with ESL because second language acquisition is influenced by knowledge in L1 and L2. Instructors often fail to identify gaps that exist in learner ability.

Formal instruction permits L2 learners to leave out some stages on the sequential development. With the knowledge that adult L2 learners are able to learn from several instructional approaches, and are bound to be influenced by affective and motivation factors, it is critical to address vocabulary issues that L2 learners have, using explicit instruction rather than sole dependence on implicit instruction (Zimmerman, 2005). According to Lee (2003) explicit instruction practices in teaching vocabulary words that are related to a specific topic facilitates a higher number of words in academic writing, suggesting that systematic instruction enables L2 learners to focus attention to specific words and their usage.

6.3. Form-focused instruction

Present research agrees that meaning-focused input is highly effective in L2 learning, particularly in the instruction of adult L2 learners than form-focused instruction. Nevertheless, a model L2 lesson should integrate some focus on forms that are rooted in meaningful and

comprehensible language. This acquires meaning since, through focusing on some specific forms L2 learners observe and take note of words which would have been overlooked in the rush for overall comprehension of meaning (Adamson, 2005). Form-focused input involves a wide variety of instruction, which agrees with proponent theories of the role played by attention and consciousness in L2 learning.

Within this framework, form-focused instruction is centered on bringing in the attention of learners to specific forms, within meaningful context. This is often achieved using a pre-established syllabus. Proponents of form-focused input challenge the concept behind structural form syllabus, because materials that are designed along structural basis present the process of language acquisition as an accumulation of independent entities. Task-input perceive form-focused instruction as capable of allowing adult L2 learners to attain linguistic features that cannot be acquired through comprehensible input or pragmatic learning.

Form-focused input (fonf) was started as an implicit activity, has been modified over time to integrate planned form-focused activity, which involves focused tasks. These tasks are planned to draw out specific linguistic forms. Conversely, form-focused activities (fonfs) are rooted in structural syllabus. Fonfs activities involves working with isolated words not related to meaning-based tasks. They are founded in the belief that language acquisition for adult L2 learners is similar to attaining cognitive skills. In this context, underlying grammatical structures should be expounded upon in order to facilitate learning, and many opportunities be availed for practicing the structures. Practice should be in the form of communicative and non-communicative activities, which include matching synonyms, word associations and completion exercises. Vocabulary instruction in fonfs involves activities, which are essential for word exposure, practice and comprehensive processing of meaning.

Before deciding on the effectiveness of the preferred approach, it is essential to note that teaching language involves integration of meaningful, form-focused and form-free inputs. Effective teaching approaches combine, to some extent, structured input, output, practice and correction. In present practice, there is consensus that more broader processing will result in enhanced learning. However, there is still contention of which aspects essentially impact comprehensive teaching practices and meaningful learning. Integration of form-focused and form-free learning activities will be advantageous to learners, by pushing them to take note and engage in practicing using words in a variety of ways.

This kind of integration would involve taking some aspects of task-based instruction and structural approach. Another point to note before deciding on the most suitable and effective approach, is to consider that the approach picked is in line with the needs of learners given the distinct differences that exist between L1 and adult L2 acquisition process. Needs of learners to be considered are based on the three-stage of skills acquisition theory. The first stage is the declarative or cognitive stage, the second one is the procedural or associative, and the third one is the autonomous stage

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