AN ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURED INPUT METHODOLOGY WITHIN SECONDARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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AN ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURED INPUT METHODOLOGY WITHIN SECONDARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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In:

Spanish Language and Literature

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Abstract

Foreign language teaching methods are both diverse and innovative. With this in mind, this thesis begins with a brief overview of many prominent methodologies and several key figures related to the world of foreign language education. While discussing various successes and failures of past methodologies, the concept of processing instruction is mentioned and defined. Processing instruction, first explored by Bill VanPatten, plays a crucial role in this thesis, as it guides three distinct research questions along with two different experiments. The purpose of this thesis is to provide some qualitative as well as quantitative data and insight into the effects of Processing Instruction. This paper will analyze an experiment done in two secondary Spanish level one classrooms by means of a control group, a treatment group, and two different lesson plans. Results of this experiment reveal processing instruction to produce subtle differences in scoring on a final assessment, yet all students that were taught using input processing methods proved to be more successful upon final testing.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 5  
  Literature Review and Research Questions ................................................................. 7  
  Pre-20th Century Grammar Translation .................................................................... 7  
  Early 1900s Audio-Lingual Method .......................................................................... 9  
  1960s/70s Universal Grammar .................................................................................... 12  
  1980s/90s Information Processing Models ................................................................ 16  
  1990s-present Social Interactionism .......................................................................... 17  
  Processing Instruction ................................................................................................. 21  

**Methodology** .................................................................................................................. 26  
  Expectations ................................................................................................................. 54  
  Experiment Gone Wrong ............................................................................................. 54  

**Results** .......................................................................................................................... 64  

**Discussion** ..................................................................................................................... 70  

**Conclusions** ................................................................................................................ 77  

**Works Cited** ................................................................................................................ 81
Introduction

To understand the educational importance of learning a second language, this paper must first explore the frequency of teaching a foreign language. In general, it has been reported that only 18 percent of United States citizens speak another language; this compares to other places such as Europe, where 53 percent of the citizens are said to speak a language other than their own (Skorton and Altschuler). While this may seem detrimental to the American public, it is justifiable to wonder why these numbers remain so low. Foreign language education in the United States, especially within secondary schooling systems, is declining dramatically. With only 30% of middle schools throughout the country reporting having a staff that consists of “qualified” language instructors, it is no surprise that the percentage of public school districts that offer foreign language courses has decreased from 75 percent to only 58 percent (Skorton and Altschuler).

It is very useful to have access to learning a foreign language, especially at a young age. Acquiring a second language is a 21st century skill that is necessary for learners to become productive global citizens in modern society. According to the 21st Century Skills Map, provided by the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages, learning a second language provides everyone with the opportunity to communicate effectively in a growing multi-lingual world. Furthermore, this map states that it additionally ensures better problem solving and critical thinking skills, which can lead people to exercise more sound reasoning and understanding (“21st Century Skills Map” 8-9). Additionally, there are many cognitive benefits to learning a second language. For example, students who are involved in second language programs in school typically
attain higher academic scores on standardized tests. Furthermore, knowing another language may help citizens be more creative in nature and better at problem solving or coping (“What the Research Shows”). With all of these facts in mind, it is almost incomprehensible that the question of involving foreign language teaching into standard school curriculum is even a debate.

While examining the United States, the percentage of students that are enrolled, or have the option to be enrolled, in a foreign language class in secondary schools is astonishingly low amongst educational institutions, yet perhaps what is more disturbing is the percentage that continue to pursue a language within higher education. Many two and four year universities have reported a 6.7 percent decline in foreign language class enrollment within recent years (Char). Moreover, only about 20 percent of students within high schools opt to take an advanced placement exam in a foreign language, and only 25 percent of these students will score a three, on a scale of one to five, or higher (“2012 AP Exam Score Distributions”).

This paper aims to take a step forward and ask an even more essential question: What is it that we, as educators, are doing wrong? The thesis intends to discuss the difficulties behind not only teaching a second language but also language acquisition in general. The hope behind this paper is to offer language educators a small look at a way to encourage interest in the study of a second language and also to improve students’ language acquisition within the classroom. Additionally, the purpose of this paper is to provide myself with a better understanding of a particular type of instruction. Second Language teaching and acquisition, specifically in secondary education classrooms, have both experienced a multitude of transformations throughout time. Therefore this paper
Literature Review and Research Questions

Pre-20th Century Grammar Translation

Just as languages themselves have evolved, second language teaching has also modified its style throughout time. Literature suggests that perhaps one of the earliest forms of teaching a second language is known as the Grammar Translation method. Grammar Translation, within western society, derived from the idea that “the primary purpose for learning a language in school was to read the classical literature of that language” (Malone 4). Richards and Rogers indicate that this process of teaching a second language arose from the study of classical Latin in which translation of grammar rules was a primary focus (4). To understand the exact methods of Grammar Translation, one must first understand the differences between what is known as the learner’s first language (L1) and the learner’s second language (L2.) (“Glossary of TEFL Acronyms”). Both of these terms may be used for reference throughout this research.

The primary technique of the Grammar Translation method dwelled heavily on the premise of the student’s L1 as a means for understanding. Susan Malone describes this method as concentrating on the teaching of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and classical texts from the L2 or the target language (4). However these items of concentration were emphasized and memorized from the point of view of student’s L1. Richards and Rogers discuss the importance of establishing what is known as a “grammar base” within this method. They state that students were taught basic grammar syntactic
rules, which involved the study of conjugations, and would practice writing bilingual sentences that often was nothing more than a direct translation of the students’ L1 to the students’ L2. Once the learners understood the basic rules of specific grammatical structures, the so-called grammar base, they could move directly to the advanced stages of the language (Richards and Rogers 5). Coady and Huckin propose that a typical lesson with a basis of Grammar Translation included a reading section with several columns of vocabulary, which contained both the L1 along with the translation of the word into the L2, and a test to measure knowledge after reading the selection (5). Based upon this information one may generate an archetypal lesson plan that is representative of this structure as such:

- Student receives a “practical” textbook (e.g. *The Practical Guide to learning Spanish Language*). Note that the use of the word “practical” in this sense correlates more closely with the term “practice” than with the term “useful” (Richards and Rogers 5).
- Student is given several words from this “practical” book in the L1 in one column and the L2 in another column.
- Student is told to practice writing these words in the L2 and to write the grammatical rule representative of the L2 in the L1.

While this method of teaching a second language was utilized for numerous years in various schools, and perhaps some remnants of its ideals remain today, many scholars would direct attention towards its faults. Some, such as Susan Malone, find difficulties with understanding its necessity, as the lesson plans implemented from Grammar Translation are reported as neither interesting nor meaningful to the students as they
contained repetitive information and absolutely no tiered instruction, or instruction intended to fit the needs of each individual student (4). Furthermore Richards and Rogers articulate that the error of this technique manifests within the student’s inability to produce the L2 in all types of output necessary to learn a language, as “[s]peaking the foreign language was not the goal, and the oral practice was limited to students speaking aloud the sentences that they had translated” (5). The focus of these lessons depended highly upon various verb conjugations as well as the syntactic structure of a particular word or sentence (Coady and Huckin 5). Furthermore these lessons condoned the use of obsolete vocabulary, as the prestigious teachings of Latin influenced the methodology behind Grammar Translation teaching. Within this vocabulary there was only implicit instruction when a word represented a grammatical rule and all of the explanations from said rules derived essentially from etymology (Coady and Huckin 5). This method is not widely used within modern-day curriculum, and various scholars write explicitly of grammar translation’s liabilities. If grammar-based instruction through translation hinders the ability of a student to accurately learn the L2, then it would be logical to conclude that we should move away from grammar-explicit instruction. Interestingly, the transition into the Audio-Lingual approach, otherwise known as the Army Approach, of instructing a second language provided a new means of learning that influenced the student’s oral capacity.

**20th Century Audio-Lingual Method**

Closely following the Grammar Translation method of teaching was the Audio-Lingual approach to second language education. Whereas the Grammar Translation
method of teaching focused exclusively on the written language, the Audio-Lingual approach emphasized the separation of different skills, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This method was originally known as the Army Method due to its emphasis upon all of these skills that began with the war effort, as the United States needed army intelligence that could understand the L2 when it was heard. The Audio-Lingual method continued to advance after the war effort, as novelty was embraced and the audio side of language learning began to eclipse the writing side.

In general the Audio-Linguistic advance was accepted to have derived from a combination of both linguistics and psychology. Scholars such as Lui and Shi report that this method reflects the psychological basis of behaviorism, therefore constructing language learning through stimuli and response, with an emphasis on oral conditioning (70). This technique emphasized oral production even though it still utilized a grammar-based structure. It has been hypothesized that this arose from the oral cultures of the Native Americans; since native-tongue speakers within these communities often lacked the capabilities to analyze the language in a linguistic manner, an outside linguist was required to develop a method to document and examine these languages (Malone 5). The psychological aspect of behaviorism as a component of the Audio-Lingual method derives from this speculative research. It is here that the rise of prominent figures, such as B.F. Skinner, are seen in the world of second language learning. B.F. Skinner proposed what was known as the S.R.R. or the stimulus, response, reinforcement model; Malone emphasizes that the S.R.R. method dictates that the L2 is learned as a process of “stimuli, response, and reinforcement” in which the L1 was considered to be interference upon the learning of the L2 (5).
The basis of this approach dwelled intensely on the students mastering the building blocks of the language. It is here that the linguistic component of this method reveals itself, as learners were required to learn the language from the basis of a phoneme or morpheme building up to the word or sentence itself (Lui and Shi 70). Lesson plans often included practicing specific techniques, which included mimicking several utterances or phrases. Lesson plans were further divided into three essential parts: presentation, practice, and application, all of which centered upon the central theme of production (“The Audiolingual Method”). A representative example of each of these three parts may be emphasized as such:

- **Presentation**: A teacher shows the students a pencil. The teacher states the word for a pencil in the L2 (Here we will use Spanish as an example): *Lápiz*.

- **Practice**: The students must repeat this utterance aloud in the L2 several times after the teacher:
  - Teacher: “Lápiz”
  - Students: “Lápiz”

- **Application**: The students must now write a new sentence in the L2 using this word, applying past skills and sentence structures that they already know (e.g. “*Esto es un lápiz.*” “This is a pencil.”) Learners will then speak this sentence aloud in the L2 several times.

  Note that the student’s L1 never plays a part in the exchange of this lesson. In addition to these basic drills, learners may also have been exposed to several tape recordings and laboratory drills within lessons (Lui and Shi 70). This presentation, practice, and application sequence correlates with B.F. Skinners S.R.R. model. Assume
that the presentation relates directly with the stimuli, as the student is receiving a word; the practice corresponds directly with the response while the student is responding directly and orally to the teacher. Finally the application maintains the characteristics of the reinforcement, as the students are applying their newfound skills and reinforcing the words within their memory.

This method, however, maintained its own faults as well (Lui and Shi 70). Many questions have arisen in terms of the use of repetition while employing this technique. Researchers such as Susan Malone inquire if such repetition limits the learner’s ability to acquire the totality of the language, as this method focuses on the repetition of the basics and leaves no room for the advancement of the student (5). However others, such as Lui and Shi emphasize that this method is quite possibly one of the most effective methods to exist in the advancement of second language learning, as it allowed for a break from only grammar and morphology and focused on syntactical progression. They do argue, however, that although this technique may create an enriching experience within the classroom, it was impossible for students to apply such practice to universal situations, therefore unable to provide communicative competence, a basis of language learning, in the real world (Lui and Shi 71). Additionally, the Audio-Lingual method did not focus explicitly on content but rather the phonological and grammatical accuracy of the language at the expense of meaning. Upon further investigation, it will be clear that each technique in some way influenced the next. Now we will examine theories from the 1960s and 1970s, which place a strong emphasis on the ideas of Universal Grammar.

**1960s/70s Universal Grammar**
Before examining the theory of Universal Grammar as a whole, it is important to understand the term in and of itself. Universal Grammar, also referred to more simply as “UG,” is a linguistic theory developed by the pioneering linguist, Noam Chomsky, who implied that the “ability to learn language is innate, distinctly human, and distinct from all other species of cognition” (“What Does the Concept of Universal Grammar Mean?”). Chomsky believes that every human learns to speak at a very early age through innate ability, which he referred to as a Language Acquisition Device (Malone 3). The dominant question in regards to second language acquisition within this time period asks if this concept of UG could be applied within the classroom and maintain the same merit. Scholars such as Lydia White state that language learners learn systematically and their errors are not random mistakes, but potentially behavior that is governed by a set of rules (19). White also relays the idea that, although the concept of UG was invented to portray a theory of learning of the L1, perhaps all humans retain a set of internalized language rules that are naturally accessed while learning the L2.

The application of these various notions was observed and applied by a professor named Steven Krashen. Krashen developed a model known as the Monitor Model of SLA based on the principals of UG presented by Chomsky. According to Susan Malone, Krashen’s model centered on five central hypotheses:

1. The Input Hypothesis: Learners progress when they comprehend language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level. Krashen himself focuses on the idea of “i + 1” where “i” represents the linguistic knowledge already known and “+1” refers to new knowledge that the student must acquire; this concept of “i + 1” refers to what is transformed into comprehensible input.
2. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis: Language acquisition and language learning are two distinct and separate concepts. Acquisition occurs subconsciously and is the process used in the native language. Learning, on the other hand, occurs consciously and is used to acquire information about a language. The best way to acquire a second language is through the use of natural communication.

3. The Monitor Hypothesis: In regards to language acquisition, a learner acquires speech in a fluent and natural way that they then apply unconsciously to the L2. When a grammar or spelling rule is consciously learned, what is known as a “monitor” will appear and correct errors in speech. This further explains the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis; the monitor occurs while learning after input in acquisition. The monitor may sometimes become a problem, as it causes learners to focus heavily on accuracy as oppose to fluency.

4. The Natural Order Hypothesis: The cause of second language acquisition is what is known as “comprehensible input.” This comprehensible input derives from a natural order of grammatical structures that are predictable independent of a learner’s background or emotions. This natural order is independent of deliberate teaching, and teachers therefore cannot manipulate their structure of teaching to fit the natural order.

5. The Affective Filter Hypothesis: What is known as the “affective filter” determines how quickly the L2 is learned. The “affective filter” refers to the emotions of the student (5). If the affective filter is low, the student will feel more comfortable and be able to learn more easily. If the affective filter is high, the
student’s level of anxiety may impede his or her learning (Krashen “Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition” 88).

As with all other theories of second language learning, the ideas of both Chomsky and Krashen also presented various issues behind their actions. Judith R. Strozer states that humans learn by sequence, not by rules (10). If this idea holds true, it is curious to question the availability of the L2. In regards to Krashen, it would be difficult to apply the “i+1” theory in the L2 as the input is meant to be comprehensible and not necessarily implicated for deliberate language teaching. It has also been suggested that there may be certain cross-cultural variances that dictate what type of input is comprehensible, the source of comprehensible input, and how it is perceived (Krashen “The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications” 8). It has been stated that each of Krashen’s hypotheses may not directly apply to direct immersion of the L2. Many children have been known to maintain a silent period, as they enter into an environment with a new language that they do not know. These children may not speak at all in the L2 aside from various memorized phrases that they have heard repeatedly. In this case, the child is building input through listening in the form of comprehensible input. Therefore the first words that the child utters are not the beginning of second language acquisition, but rather the result of comprehensible input that has been stored in his or her memory (Krashen 9). If Krashen’s hypothesis does not apply to a real-world situation, it would be difficult to judge if his methods are applicable to the artificial environment that is the second language classroom. However, Krashen has discussed the idea of an artificial classroom environment with the L2. Another factor that Krashen does not mention through his hypothesis is age differences. While children may be more successful in learning the totality of a second
language, adults, at least at first, are able to acquire a second language at a faster rate (Krashen 12). The quicker acquisition of a foreign language may be due to conversational skills, as adults have more experience in the world. This in turn raises questions about the input hypothesis in terms of what makes input comprehensible.

It would be interesting to assume that there may already be access to the sequence of learning a second language within one’s mind. This idea is directly correlated with UG grammar. Many researchers wonder if the access of the L2 in terms of UG availability is more limited than that of the L1. It is here that a central problem arises, as the L2 learners may not be able to attain such unconscious knowledge or representation as they could in the L1. Lydia White notes that even if this knowledge could be realized, it is quite possible that its attainment would not originate from the concept of UG but rather from an unknown source (22). Furthermore, the relationship between the L1 and the L2 along with the statement that their acquisition is not achieved in the same way is questioned. Jacquelyn Schachter offers the idea that the biggest component that differs between the L1 and the L2 acquisition regards previous knowledge (222). As students enter the process of learning the L2, their minds maintain previous knowledge of another language and of other circumstances that were not previously known while learning the L1; this may make it impossible to learn a second language in the same way (Schachter 222). Although the idea of UG is intriguing, it appears almost impossible to duplicate while teaching the L2 in a traditional classroom setting. However, there are many scholars who still hold that UG may be the best model for explaining language acquisition, while it has very little to do with explicit grammar learning. Even though there may be no alternative in explaining how the mental representation of a language is inserted in the mind of a
learner, it is from this discovery that second language education researchers turn to studies of the mind in order to improve teaching methods.

**1980s/90s Information Processing Models**

While many methods of teaching a second language were proven to have certain strengths, there had not been much research done on memory correlated with learning until the end of the 1980s. Many researchers disagreed with Chomsky’s hypothesis of UG and Krashen’s interpretation of UG in relation to the L2, however other scholars, such as John Robert Anderson produced his theory of the Information Processing Model, which held UG at its core. Anderson believed that learning was a product of high functioning cognitive capability as oppose to innate abilities. This model, often used by cognitive psychologists for social experiments, provided a framework of a human’s thinking process in relation to that of a computer. Anderson stressed that the human mind processes input through sensory register, such as the eyes and the ears, whereas a computer interprets input through a keyboard (30). Additionally a computer will store this input in a short-term memory space, equivalent to that of the human mind, where this information is used temporarily, stored permanently, or discarded. Finally information processing allows a computer to display its information while it allows humans to transfer information into output in terms of behaviors and actions (Anderson 31-32).

Although this theory was discovered and employed for psychological reasons, there was much speculation in regards to its effects on education. Slate and Charlesworth discuss the implications of the Information Processing Model in regards to education. Both scholars relay the information that this model may be interpreted in the classroom in several ways with the most important being attention, active learning, meaningfulness,
and memory aids. In short, these teaching aids are essential in order to apply input into a learner’s long-term memory (Slate and Charlesworth 8). Slate and Charlesworth depict the explanations of these concepts as follows:

- **Attention**: A teacher must maintain student’s attention during a class period in order to keep students engaged and willing to learn. This attention may derive from the teacher moving around the classroom or actively calling on students to answer questions.

- **Active Learning**: Students must consistently be involved in the lesson. A teacher should make sure to use hands-on learning tasks where the student is able to move around the classroom and consistently talk or share an opinion throughout a lesson.

- **Meaningfulness**: Learners must understand the purpose of the lesson that they are studying. They must know why it is important and how it can create connections within their everyday lives.

- **Memory Aids**: Teachers should aid students in creating mnemonic devices or provide images within lessons so that students will remember important vocabulary words and grammatical rules (8-10).

Furthering the implication of the Information Processing Model, Anderson divides the processing of information into two types: declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. Whereas declarative knowledge is stored in long-term memory through schemas and images through rapid learning, procedural knowledge is how one may learn to do a certain procedure correctly over a longer period of time (Malone 3).
As with all models of teaching a second language, the Information Processing Model also contains flaws. Perhaps one of the most prominent issues of this model is in regards to differentiation. Many researchers have failed to consider that not every student learns in the same way (Slate and Charlesworth 10). While this model is devised to represent the human thinking process, it fails to consider that not all students process information in the same way. It also fails to consider that language learning is not at all similar to the learning of other subjects that learners encounter within a conventional education. A big problem with Anderson’s model is that it rejects the idea that the process of language learning is exceedingly complex and non-linear.

1990s-present Social Interactionism

Social Interactionism is derived from the field of social psychology. In order to understand exactly how the theories of Social Interactionism unfold within the classroom, it is important to first examine the different criteria that are set as standards within today’s language classrooms. These standards may be discussed in terms of what is known as the “5 C’s of Foreign Language Education.” The “5 C’s” are defined as follows:

- Communication: Communication may take place through face-to-face conversation, within writing, or through reading. There are three modes of communication: interpretive (students may intake or produce information through reading, listening, or viewing), interpersonal (students may intake or produce information by interacting with others), and presentational (students may produce information by means of oral or written presentations). Communication is applied through four skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking.
• Cultures: Students must first master specific cultural contexts that relate to their target language before they become proficient in the language.

• Connections: Students will form connections through the L2 that may not have been available with only the knowledge of the L1.

• Comparisons: Learners may compare the L2 with the L1 or even other languages being studied, gaining new insight and worldviews.

• Communities: The previous mentioned standards allow students to immerse themselves in multilingual communities in various contexts in ways that are culturally appropriate and defined (“Standards for Foreign Language Learning,” 3).

It is from these so-called “5 C’s” that theories of Social Interactionism have arisen. Social Interactionism takes a communicative approach to foreign language education, which “views the learners’ use of the L2 as the best source for learning the L2” (Malone 7). Susan Malone additionally emphasizes that this communicative approach features the prominence of learning to communicate within the L2, using authentic texts as resources, and attempting to link classroom practices with real-world situations (7). These methods of teaching aim to prepare second language learners for real-life, communicative situations. Lead figures of this movement include prominent figures such as Lev Vygotsky, who stated that students learn through collaboration with one another. Vygotsky further employed that effective L2 instruction requires that instructors choose meaningful tasks for students to collaborate with (Neff). Others, such as Merrill Swain, further stress that successful L2 learning is acquired by means of communication through the L2. Swain suggests that while students speak in the L2, they will notice a “gap”
between what they want to say and their available knowledge of the L2; this will then cause the learners to note the grammatical structure or rules of their modifications in their speech in order to communicate effectively (Malone 3). However, this idea has been criticized as controversial and misunderstood.

There are, however, some inconsistencies with the work of the Social Interactionists’ techniques. It would be imperative to note that interaction does not equal acquisition, but rather correlates with the necessary tools that a learner may need in order to acquire a second language (Gass et. Al. 305). From this methodology arise interesting questions in regards to what tools really are necessary for second language acquisition. Here we move forward to the central focus of this paper:

**Processing Instruction**

While much research has been done in regards to how students learn a second language, whether it is through cognitive ability or innate grammatical tendencies, some scholars would tend to argue that input processing lies at the core of second language acquisition. Scholars such as Bill VanPatten have done much research in regards to input processing and how it affects a learners’ ability to intake the grammatical forms of a second language. Input Processing, as defined by Bill VanPatten, signifies “how learners initially perceive and process linguistic data in the language they hear” (Lee and VanPatten 137). However it seems that VanPatten essentially discusses the idea that much of language instruction is focused on the outcome, or the product, of acquisition and ignores the fundamental understanding of processing information. A fundamental claim of VanPatten’s work is such: during comprehension, learners will perform any necessary means to grasp any sort of information that is available from the input.
However this information is limited by the students’ knowledge in the L2, which has an effect of the processing of certain grammatical forms. It is from this information that VanPatten invented his principles of Input Processing:

**Principle 1 (P1). The primacy of Meaning Principle.** Learners process input for meaning before they process it for form.

- **P1a. The Primacy of Content Words Principle.** Learners process content words in the input before anything else.

- **P1b. The Lexical Preference Principle.** Learners will tend to rely on lexical items as opposed to grammatical form to get meaning when both encode the same semantic information.

- **P1c. The Preference for Nonredundancy Principle.** Learners are more likely to process nonredundant meaningful grammatical form before they process redundant meaningful forms.

- **P1d. The Meaning-before-Nonmeaning Principle.** Learners are more likely to process meaningful grammatical forms before nonmeaningful forms irrespective of redundancy.

- **P1e. The Availability of Resources Principle.** For learners to process either redundant meaningful grammatical forms or nonmeaningful forms, the processing of overall sentential meaning must not drain available processing resources.

- **P1f. The Sentence Location Principle.** Learners tend to process items in sentence initial position before those in final position and those in medial position.
Principle 2 (P2). The First Noun Principle. Learners tend to process the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence as the subject or agent.

P2a. The Lexical Semantics Principle. Learners may rely on lexical semantics where possible, instead of word order to interpret sentences.

P2b. The Event Probabilities Principle. Learners may rely on event probabilities where possible, instead of word order to interpret sentences.

P2c. The Contextual Constraint Principle. Learners may rely less on the First Noun Principle if preceding context constrains the possible interpretation of a clause or sentence (Lee and Vanpatten139).

Prior studies have been performed in order to better understand the effects of language instruction focused on input processing. VanPatten mentions one of his experiments previously performed with Keating and Leeser in which they tested a group of native Spanish speakers against a group of level three intermediate Spanish learners on three different structures in the Spanish language. These structures included question words, adverb placement, and present tense verb endings. Participants were tested on their reading comprehension along with their speed of reading; they were presented with correct and incorrect grammatical words and sentences of the three different types of structures and asked to answer questions about each structure. The expectation of the study was that students would slow down with the words and sentences that were not grammatically correct in some regard. Results proved tendencies with native speakers to slow down on all of the grammatical forms that were incorrect; however the intermediate-level students only slowed their reading abilities in regards to question words and adverbial clauses. These results prove to be interesting, as students are taught
verb endings in regular language instruction, however the formation of these particular question words and adverbial placements are never discussed even though the students knew that there were errors with these phrases (Vanpatten 117). Results such as these bring about interesting questions in regards to how input is transformed and how acquisition is achieved in the minds of learners.

Another similar study performed by VanPatten was performed in 1993 with Cadierno. VanPatten and Cadierno compared three different groups of learners: a processing instruction group, a traditional instruction group, and a control group. The age and level of the participants is unknown. The study focused on word order along with object pronouns in the Spanish language. The focus of the study was word order along with object pronouns. This study was based on the premise that many learners of Spanish confuse object-verb-subject and object-verb sentences with subject-verb-object and verb-object sentences. With the processing treatment group, the learners received activities that contained both right and wrong answers involving object pronouns and word order; the group was offered a set of sentences where they had to choose the sentences that were correctly written. This was accompanied with activities in which they gave opinions about the language activity, stating if they liked it or found it difficult, while never offering insight to structure and form. The traditional instruction group received activities based from a Spanish college-level text and participated in no processing activities. Both groups were given a pre-test and an interpretational post-test, which included information from the production activities performed by the processing instruction group. Through the results, it was clear that the processing instruction group achieved higher scores on the post-test than the traditional group or the control group (Lee and Vanpatten 147).
The research conducted throughout this paper desires to demonstrate the results from previous experiments performed in order to prove that the considering of input processing is a necessary contribution to second language acquisition. Thus this paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ 1: Does instruction that emphasizes input processing (IP) help students in a secondary Spanish language classroom to recall more information in the L2?

RQ 2: What types of grammar activities achieve the highest results in a classroom?

RQ 3: Are the effects of input processing (IP), or a lesson that utilizes structured input methodology, different from the effects of a teacher’s preferred way of teaching?

This paper intends to contribute to theories of input processing, providing educators with a better means of second language instruction. The purpose of this study is to determine if manipulating input processing will improve student’s intake, better defined as what the learner actually processes and holds in working memory, within a secondary language classroom. While this study focuses solely on the Spanish language, it is assumed that the results may be applied to other classroom settings with different languages. Furthermore, although this thesis intends to provide some evidence that input processing is a pioneering method that should be utilized within language classrooms, it is important to note that the interpretations of input processing put forth within this paper are neither definitive nor completely conclusive, as the study of input processing is still ongoing and may have several controversial definitions at its core. Additionally, this study intends to answer several research questions based on the ideas that students
learning Spanish are learning Spanish as a second language. While the principal question behind this study relies on more recent theories pertaining to second language education, it is important to first examine the various methods of teaching a second language that have been used, and are potentially still in use, from the past. Although these past theories, as well as the theory that this paper implicates, are methods that may be used to teach any age group, this study will emphasize the learning of a second language, Spanish, in a secondary classroom.

**Methodology**

Foreign Language Education is something that I find to be both innovative and underrated. I first found a desire to learn Spanish when I was only five years old and was taught how to count to ten in Spanish. This small occurrence soon bloomed into a passion as I reached adulthood. Education, on the other hand, has also always been an infatuation of mine. While several relatives in my close family have pursued teaching careers, it seemed only natural that I form an involvement with teaching. After learning more about my future career choice, however, I have discovered that no matter how much I personally value education and the Spanish language, Foreign Language Education is undervalued as a whole. It is obviously very important to attain an education within the modern world. However this education, specifically in secondary institutions within the United States, appears to be focused primarily on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) education, while insisting that other subjects, such as foreign language, are neither fundamental nor essential. Yet what this system of schooling does not consider is how principal it is to speak another language, especially in a world where English is not the first but rather the third most spoken language following Chinese and
Spanish (“See The World’s Most Spoken Languages In One Eye-Opening Infographic”). Additionally, many educational systems refuse to acknowledge how to utilize foreign language skills in any sort of core standards within schooling. The P21 World Languages 21st Century Skills Map dictates that foreign language may help the development of a variety of important skills, such as communication or problem solving. According to this source, these key skill sets allow learners to actually utilize a foreign language with personalized real-world tasks that will in turn integrate the use of these skills in a real-world environment (“21st Century Skills Map”). Upon researching different methods of teaching a foreign language, I began to wonder if the lack of employment of second language programs within secondary schools in the United States derives from a deficit of not only interest but also methodology. In other words, I wondered if we, as educators, have the potential to manipulate our teaching style in such a way that causes students to learn at a faster rate and become more motivated to learn the subject matter.

Input Processing (IP), as referred to by VanPatten, is a recent technique that aids skillfully in the answer to my question. According to my research, Input Processing has had tremendous academic success among students in terms of retention and recall. IP is perceived by some to be effective in terms of second language acquisition, which leads learners to produce efficient grammatical utterances in the target language. Research done by scholars, such as Bill VanPatten, dictates that foreign language teachers should utilize IP within their lessons. The experiment, which I propose below, intends not only to discuss the successful efforts of input processing methodology but also to better define my personal perception of the concept of input processing.
It is important to mention the assumptions that may be derived from my hypothesis. First, although the method of IP could be applied to any language, I assume a focus in the Spanish language. This is due in part to my knowledge and background of this language. Additionally, although there are many parts of the Spanish language that all learners are introduced to while studying the language, this study emphasizes the use of grammar and grammatical syntax. The effects of IP on vocabulary will not be explicitly stated.

Secondly, I assume that this methodology is occurring within a secondary educational institute. More specifically I presume the effects of IP within a high school. Additionally, it is assumed that the students within this high school have little to no previous background relating to the Spanish language and that native speakers are excluded from this experiment. The classrooms discussed within these experiments contain students from all grade levels in the high school (9-12). These classrooms also contain students that are different genders and different races and ethnicities as well as students from several different grade levels. The experiment will not account for any differences between these categories, and it assumes that the results are virtually the same for every student. With this in mind, this experiment will also not account for individual differences in learning, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Furthermore this experiment demonstrates the effects of IP only within two Spanish level one classes. While the students in these two classrooms do not have a prior background to the Spanish language in a general sense, it is presumed that they have learned other Spanish grammatical rules and vocabulary words throughout the year prior to this experiment. It is additionally important to state that the classes’ actual teacher will not be involved in
the teaching process, as I will personally be teaching both lesson plans to both classrooms. It is also presumed that I will be teaching these lessons in Spanish, only speaking in English for clarification purposes and that the students will complete the final assessment activity on their own. Additionally, I assume that the aim of foreign language educators is to increase the retention of certain rules or usages in the target language, Spanish, in the minds of their students. This assumption implies that educators are more clearly focused on their students’ ability to encode basic grammatical tendencies within their long-term memory without the explicit memorization of concepts, words, and rules. Furthermore, this assumption dictates that the goal of the educator is to increase the language level of the learner overall.

Finally, I assume that the conclusions of this experiment will provide me with a better understanding of the concept of IP. As previously stated, the concept of IP is both recent as well as intricate, and there may be different interpretations of this type of methodology. Although my results will be accompanied by interpretations of scholars who have studied the effects of IP, it is important to state that my results will contribute to my interpretation of IP only and should not be deemed absolute knowledge.

The research conducted through this experiment is both qualitative and quantitative. Its qualitative value derives from the observation of two different classrooms of students within a high school from Spanish level one classroom. This qualitative method of research aims to reveal the effects of various methods of teaching the Spanish language. It will offer answers towards my hypothesis that my interpretation of input processing is effective in a secondary language classroom and necessary for better retention and recall in the target language. It will also aid in answering my three research questions by means
of observation. This research is additionally quantitative as it will provide an analysis of student’s scores on an assessment as well as examine the number of students within each classroom. These students will be observed by means of performance throughout a class period as well as performance scores from a final assessment after being taught one of two lesson plans. Each lesson plan has the same objectives:

1. Students will be able to conjugate three stem-changing verbs, jugar, dormir, poder, in any form (first, second, or third person, singular or plural) in the present tense.

2. Students will understand which forms of the stem-changing verbs incorporate a stem change and which do not.

Lesson plan one will be taught to the control group, which will be referred to as class #1 for the duration of this paper. Class #1 will receive a lesson plan that does not deviate from the teacher’s typical style of teaching and does not directly contain any form of input processing. In other words, although the teacher’s style of teaching is not indicative of one particular style, this lesson was developed with elements that this teacher has used in the past in order to teach the same concepts. This lesson will utilize a power point in order to assist the students in learning. Within each class, students will be expected to work on their own, although they may utilize their notes on the activities included in the power point. The power point will begin as follows:
Students will then be introduced to the concept of stem-changing verbs and asked to take notes. Students will see the following slide as I provide vocal commentary about the definition of a stem-changing verb. When translated into English, this slide reads: “verbs with ‘stem-changers’ are called boot verbs.

Cuaderno: **Apuntes**

- **Verbos con “cambio en la raíz” se llaman** [VERBOS DE BOTA]
After seeing the above slide, students will be exposed to a typical verb chart for the conjugations of a particular verb. A typical verb chart in Spanish contains two columns. In the first column, from top to bottom, are the conjugations of the first person singular (“yo”), second person singular (“tú”), and third person singular (“él/ella/usted”). In the second column, from top to bottom, are the conjugations of the first person plural (“nosotros”), the second person plural (“vosotros”), and the third person plural (“ellos/ellas/ustedes”). It should additionally be noted that the second person plural form will not be emphasized within this lesson. I will explain to the students the concept of a “verbo de bota,” or a “boot verb” by showing the following slide:

![Image of a boot with conjugations](image)

A “verbo de bota” is a pneumonic device to help students remember a form of a verb that utilizes a stem-change rule; these forms include first person singular (“yo”), second person singular (“tú”), third person singular (“él/ella/usted”), and third person plural (“ellos/ellas/ustedes”). I will explain to the students that the stem-changing verbs are called “verbos de bota” as they only employ the stem-change in certain boxes on the
verb conjugation chart, and these boxes form the shape of a boot. After the students understand this concept, they will be given the following example of a stem-changing verb:

I will first have the class guess what the verb means, and we will discuss the definition. At this point, I will emphasize the difference in the verb forms and make the students repeat each form after I say it. I will then utilize a slide in English about the verb in order to clear up any confusion.
Students will then begin to do one of three different activities. All instructions will be in English, as this is a Spanish level one class, and clarification of the actual activities and requirements may be necessary. Activity number one requires the students to write their answers; they will be allowed to reference their notes. I will read the instructions and ask students to pull out a white board, a marker, and an eraser. After providing an example, I will have the students write the answers one by one on their white boards.
I will ask the students to hold up their answers, and I will check for accuracy. As soon as I believe that the majority of the class has answered, I will reveal the answer.
The next activity also requires the students to write their answers. I will ask the students to write these answers on their white boards as well. I will review one at a time, and I will write the correct answers on the chalkboard.

### Practicamos

- Write the correct form of **Jugar** in the following sentences:
- **Ejemplo:** Eduardo y María **juegan** al fútbol hoy.
  1. Yo ______ al tenis este fin de semana.
  2. Ellos ______ al básquetbol esta noche.
  3. Nosotros ______ videojuegos mañana.
  4. Ustedes _____ al golf hoy.
  5. Tú ______ al fútbol americano este fin de semana.
  6. María _____ al béisbol esta tarde.
  7. Jorge y yo ______ al voleibol hoy.

The final activity that the students will receive requires them to write questions that use the stem-changing verb. After reading the instructions aloud and providing an example, the students will again write the answers to the questions one by one, and I will review the answers one at a time.
The students will next receive more information about stem-changing verbs for their notes. It will be explained that there are three different types of stem-changing verbs.
At this point I will introduce the second stem-changing verb that I want the class to know. Just as before, I will first have the class guess what the verb means, we will discuss the definition, and I will have the students repeat each form after me.
I will introduce the final stem-changing verb that I would like the class to learn in the same fashion.

Otros verbos con cambio en la raíz

- **Poder (O→UE) = To be able to**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Puedo</th>
<th>Podemos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puedes</td>
<td>Podéis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puede</td>
<td>Pueden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally the class will see the following slide as I pass out the final assessment.
Lesson plan two will be taught to the treatment group, which will be referred to as class #2 for the duration of this paper. Class #2 will receive a lesson plan that utilizes various forms of my interpretation of input processing. Like class #1, class #2 will view the same introduction slide to their power point and be asked to take notes.

However, class #2 will next view a different slide. This slide will not mention “verbos de bota,” as the students will not being seeing a typical verb conjugation table during the lesson. I will have students guess the meaning of the verb “jugar,” and then I will state that “jugar” has a “cambio de raiz,” or a stem-change.
I will then show the students each of the following slides. I will have the class repeat the words after me.
¿Qué es un cambio de raíz?

Tú

Juegas

¿Qué es un cambio de raíz?

Él/Ella/Usted

Juega
By eliminating the use of a typical verb table, students are forced to focus solely on the words themselves. This will allow students to aim attention towards the actual conjugation of the verb as oppose to only the concept. Like class #1, class #2 will receive a more detailed explanation of the verb “jugar” in English in order to clarify.
Class #2 will also have three different activities. Each of these activities utilizes strategies stated by Bill VanPatten in regards to his concept of input processing.

According to VanPatten, there are six different types of structured input activities: supplying information, binary options, ordering/ranking, selecting alternatives, matching, and surveys (160). The first activity that class #2 will do employs the use of matching. In this activity, students will be required to match a pronoun with the correct conjugated form of the verb “jugar.” I will ask students to pull out white boards, markers, and an eraser and write their answers. I will be walking around the classroom to answer any questions and note the answers of the students. I will then review the answers one by one with the students, requiring them to say the correct answer aloud before it is revealed.
The second activity will involve the students selecting alternatives where the students are given a stimulus, a sentence, required to select from four alternatives, or four verb conjugations. The alternatives contain the targeted grammatical item, the stem-
changing verb. This activity is divided into two slides with three questions on the first slide and four on the second. I will require the students to write answers on their whiteboards, and I will review the first three answers before moving on to the second slide in order to clear up any confusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practicamos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Select the correct answer to complete the sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Yo ______ al tenis este fin de semana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. juegos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. juego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ustedes ______ al golf hoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. juego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. juega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nosotros ______ videojuegos mañana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. jugamos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. juegan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Practicamos

- Select the correct answer to complete the sentence.

1. Yo ______ al tenis este fin de semana.
   - a. juegos
   - b. juego
   - c. jugamos
   - d. juega
   **B**

2. Ustedes ______ al golf hoy.
   - a. juego
   - b. juega
   - c. juegan
   - d. juegos
   **C**

3. Nosotros ______ videojuegos mañana.
   - a. jugamos
   - b. juegan
   - c. juegos
   - d. juego
   **A**

---

### Practicamos

4. Ellos ______ al básquetbol esta noche.
   - a. juegan
   - b. juegos
   - c. juego
   - d. jugamos

5. Tú ______ al fútbol americano este fin de semana.
   - a. juego
   - b. juegan
   - c. juegos
   - d. jugamos

6. María ______ al béisbol esta tarde.
   - a. juego
   - b. juega
   - c. juegos
   - d. juegan

7. Jorge y yo ______ al voleibol hoy.
   - a. jugamos
   - b. juegan
   - c. juego
   - d. juegos
The final activity that the students will be doing involves binary options. This activity will present the students with a sentence that is either written correctly or incorrectly. The students must decide if the sentence is right or wrong and select either “cierto,” true, or “falso,” false. I will read the sentences aloud and have the students write their answers on their whiteboards. We will review the answers one at a time.
After the final activity, class #2, similar to class #1, will receive a little more verbal explanation regarding stem-changing verbs. They will be taught that there are three types of stem-changing verbs in the present tense.
The class will then see the following slides to introduce the other stem-changing verbs that they are required to learn. After guessing the definition of the word, I will go through each form of the conjugated verb, having the class repeat after me.
Finally the class will see the following slide while the assessment is handed out.

Otros verbos con *cambio en la raíz*

- Poder (O \(\rightarrow\) UE) = *To be able to*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Present Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yo</td>
<td>puedo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tú</td>
<td>puedes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Él/Ella/Usted</td>
<td>puede</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nosotros</td>
<td>podemos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellos/Ellas/Ustedes</td>
<td>pueden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The assessment will be the same for both classes. Students will be required to shut their notebooks for the assessment. The goal of the final assessment is to gain insight towards my research questions. The assessment contains two different activities. Activity number one does not utilize any form of structured input activities and simply requires the students to produce a specific form of the stem-changing verb, “jugar.” This activity is based upon the teaching style of the lesson plan structured for class #1.

Write sentences to say what people are playing:

_Ejemplo:_

**Eduardo**

____ [Image of a person playing soccer] ___________ (fútbol)

1. **Miguel**

________________________________________________ (voleibol)

2. **Ellos**

________________________________________________ (béisbol)

3. **Yo**

________________________________________________ (tenis)

4. **Tú**

________________________________________________ (básquetbol)

5. **Ustedes**

________________________________________________ (fútbol americano)

The second assessment uses matching, as mentioned as a form of a structured input activity by VanPatten. It will require students to draw lines to connect a conjugated
form of the verb “jugar” with the correct pronoun. This activity is based upon the teaching style utilized in the lesson plan for class #2.

**Match the following pictures and pronouns with the corresponding form of jugar.**

1. **él/ella/usted**  
   **juego**

2. **tú**  
   **jugamos**

3. **ellos/ella/ustedes**  
   **juegas**

4. **yo**  
   **juegan**

5. **nosotros**  
   **juega**

The students must hand in both activities upon completion. I will analyze the assessments separately for class #1 and class #2. I will be analyzing the assessments for accuracy with correct answers. As previously mentioned, the ultimate goal of this assessment is to aid in answering my research questions. All analysis, results, or conclusions from this experiment will be discussed in a separate part of this paper.

In addition to my field research, I will also ask the following set of questions to the regular teacher of these Spanish classes. I believe that the answers to these questions may help aid in analyzing and results of my experiment.

1. How many years have you taught Spanish?

2. What levels/ grades do you typically teach?

3. How would you describe your teaching style? Are there any particular methods that you believe you use more than others?
4. How do you typically measure your students’ success? Or what does a student’s success look like to you?

5. Can you describe the two different classes that are being used for the purpose of this experiment?

6. Have you ever heard of input processing?

7. If yes, what do you think about it?

8. Do you believe that you utilize input processing at all within your classrooms?

Expectations

Before my experiment took place, I had several expectations in mind. As I was hypothesizing that the effects of lessons structured with my interpretation of input processing produce higher achievement, I expected that the students from class #2 would achieve higher scores on the final assessment than the students from class #1. I believed that the structured input activities that I had designed for class #2 would allow them to better understand the final assessment. I additionally expected that any errors made by either of the classes would be virtually the same for every student. I did, however, believe that the errors made would differ between classes. I expected that the students from class #2 would not only be able to remember more information about stem-changing verbs in the present tense but also produce fewer mistakes on the assessment. Additionally, I believed that class #2 would perform better on the second part of the final assessment while class #1 would perform better on the first part of the final assessment.

Experiment Gone Wrong

Before discussing any results from my experiment, I believe that it is important to note that the above experiment followed a failed first attempt. I believe that a failed
experiment can be equally as valuable as the successful experiment in discussing results and is also a learning opportunity. Before I describe exactly what went wrong with the first experiment, I will explain the plan and projected outcome.

This experiment took place in the same classrooms mentioned above, both of which are Spanish level one classrooms. The same assumptions were made about this experiment. However this experiment did not have a separate control group from a treatment group. Instead, both classes were taught the same exact lesson. Their own instructor also taught this lesson to the students as I observed quietly in the background. Before the lesson began, the students had already been exposed to the following list of vocabulary words:

**Vocabulario 4A**

1. **Ir de compras** – to go shopping
2. **Ver una película** – to see a movie
3. **La lección de piano** – the piano lesson
4. **Me quedo en casa** – to remain in the house (I remain in the house)
5. **La biblioteca** – the library
6. **El café** – the coffee
7. **El campo** – the campsite
8. **La casa** – the house
9. **En casa** in the house
10. **El centro comercial** – the mall
11. **El cine** – the movies
12. **El gimnasio** – te gym
13. **La iglesia** – the church
14. **La mezquita** the mosque
15. **Las montañas** – the mountains
16. **El parque** – the park
17. **La piscina** – the pool
18. **La playa** – the beach
19. **El restaurante** - the restaurant
20. **La sinagoga** – the sinagouge
21. **El templo** – the temple
22. **El trabajo** – the job
23. **A** - to
24. **A la, al** – to (femenine/ masculine)
25. **¿Adónde?** – where?
26. **A casa** – to the house
27. **¿Con quién?** – with who?
28. **Con mis/tus amigos** – with my/your friends
29. **Solo, -a** – alone (masculine/ femenine)
30. **¿Cuándo?** - when
31. **Después** - after
32. **Después de** –after
33. **Los fines de semana** – the weekends
34. **Los lunes, los martes**... mondays, tuesdays....
35. **Tiempo libre** – free time
36. ¿de dónde eres? – where are you from?
37. de - from
38. generalmente generally
39. para + infinitive – for + infinitive
40. ir – to go
The lesson plan for this experiment was written in the following form to plan.

**Lesson Topic:** Spanish Interrogative Words

**Level:** Spanish Level One

**Lesson Goals:**
- Students will be able to form various sentences using Spanish interrogative words
- Students will be able to discuss three ways to ask questions in Spanish
- Students will understand the meaning of the order of syntax required to form a question in Spanish

**Summary of Tasks**
- Students will view the following slide and be responsible for writing down the definitions of the interrogative words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asking questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You use interrogative words (who, what, where, and so on) to ask questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Quién?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Con quién?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Dónde?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuántos, -as?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Adónde?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿De dónde?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuál?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Por qué?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuándo?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Spanish, when you ask a question with an interrogative word you put the verb before the subject.

| ¿Qué come Elena en el restaurante? | What does Elena eat at the restaurant? |
| ¿Adónde van Uds. después de las clases? | Where do you go after classes? |
| ¿Por qué va Ignacio a la playa todos los días? | Why does Ignacio go to the beach every day? |

You have already used several interrogative words. Notice that all interrogative words have a written accent mark.

(Realidades, p. ___)
- Students will see the following song on the board:
The teacher will sing the song and ask the students to sing along after.

- Students will watch a video provided from the textbook which will explain the three different ways to ask question words in Spanish.
  - Note students will learn here that the typical way to ask a question in Spanish is interrogative + verb + subject, however questions may be asked in the form of subject + interrogative + verb or by adding a tag at the end such as the word *verdad* similar to the English tag, *right*.
- Students will receive white boards as well as pieces of interrogative phrases, which they must then place in order, such as the following:
Students will next do a matching activity. Within this activity students will be required to use whiteboards and write down the answers. The teacher will walk around the classroom and check answers for accuracy, making note to the students of their errors.
Finally students will receive the final assessment to work on in class and finish as homework:
La pregunta perfecta

A. Complete the following questions with the correct question words.

1. ¿__________ es el chico más alto de la clase?

2. ¿__________ vas al cine? ¿Hoy?

3. ¿__________ es tu número de teléfono?

4. ¿__________ te llamas?

5. ¿__________ vas después de las clases hoy?

6. ¿__________ está mi libro de español?

7. ¿__________ es esto?

8. ¿__________ años tienes?

B. Now, form your own questions using some of the question words above.

1. ¡_____________

2. ¡_____________

3. ¡_____________

4. ¡_____________

5. ¡_____________

6. ¡_____________

7. ¡_____________
After completing this experiment, I found myself wondering if it even measured anything at all. I had originally expected that I could measure the classes’ performance through observation and my own notes. I had also originally believed that I better understood the concept of input processing and that it was more applicable to this lesson. My original understanding of the concept of IP led me to believe that structured input activities could be applied to vocabulary concepts. I believe that my first error was not changing the lesson plans to form a control group or a treatment group. It is hard to
account for any differences when both Spanish level one classes are being taught in the exact same way. I also believe that my fault lies in not teaching the lesson myself.

Although observing the lesson I was able to inquire about the teacher’s personal teaching style, I think that it would have made a huge difference had I had more involvement with the experiment.

Next I must address the topic of the lesson plan used in this experiment. Input processing is a fairly recent pedagogy of grammar instruction that I now understand to indicate what we know about how both grammatical forms and structures are acquired while learning a language (VanPatten 137). I had originally considered interrogative words to be a form of grammar. In a sense they are, as all words within a syntactical statement are correctly formed based on the use of proper grammar. However I now understand that the acquisition of interrogative words is more vocabulary based than grammatically based. Therefore it would be almost impossible to relate any effects about the implementation of input processing while teaching this concept.

Additionally I find fault with the activities that were planned for this lesson. VanPatten himself states “traditional instruction consisting of drills in which learner output is manipulated and the instruction is divorced from meaning or communication is not an effective method for enhancing language acquisition” (137). I believe that many of the activities planned for this lesson focus solely on drills and this is exactly the opposite of what my understanding of IP as well as my research questions propose. As mentioned in the previous section of this paper, there are six major types of structured input activities that have been defined by VanPatten. The only true activity in this experiment that utilizes one of these types of structured input activities is the matching activity in
which the students must match the correct interrogative word to the correct sentence.

There is therefore not much data to collect in terms of students’ personal performances. Furthermore, with no variation between lessons within the two different classes, I had no areas of comparison. Finally, I believe that the lack of a clear final assessment was detrimental to my experiment overall. Although the class did receive an assessment of sorts as both in class and at home work, I do not believe that this assessment measured anything at all in terms of performance.

Although this experiment did not go as planned, I believe that it was a fantastic learning opportunity for me. I was able to better interpret my own meaning of input processing through my errors. I also believe that it helped me to form a better, more structured experiment that will actually answer my research questions.

Results

Performing this experiment was extremely insightful, and I believe that the results are conducive to my thesis as well as my personal understanding of IP. I will first be discussing the answers to the questions that I proposed to the teacher of these two classrooms; these answers will be discussed and analyzed later within this paper. I sent an email to the teacher of the classes from the experiment with the questions that were projected in the methods section of this thesis. These questions, along with the response:

1. How many years have you taught Spanish?
   “This is my 19th year.”

2. What levels/ grades do you typically teach?
   “I have taught levels from middle school exploratory to Spanish 5 (Conversation and Composition). The last few years I have been mainly teaching levels 1-4.”
3. How would you describe your teaching style? Are there any particular methods that you believe you use more than others?

“I am not sure how to describe my teaching style. Although I have typically followed the scope and sequence of our textbooks, I am in the process of moving over to more thematic units (though the transition is taking a while). I am working on incorporating more comprehensible input activities in class. My focus has become much more on conversation during the last few years though I haven't gotten rid of grammar lessons. I am slowly going away from the grammar focus but can't get rid of it completely.”

4. How do you typically measure your students’ success? Or what does a student’s success look like to you?

“I still use quizzes throughout units to check for understanding on vocabulary and grammar though they have changed in the last few years. I am trying to make vocabulary quizzes more comprehension based (using listening or readings) and have also moved to more performance-based assessments in the last few years. I am trying to measure student success in the ability to communicate an idea in the target language though I am still struggling with a great way to make this convert into the necessary grades for transcripts.”

5. Can you describe the two different classes that are being used for the purpose of this experiment?

“Both classes are Spanish 1 classes. They are about equal as far as the number of kids that are in Special Ed versus the number of Gifted and Talented. Each class has a number of kids that have had some Spanish instruction in the past but most are students
that are taking a World Language for the first time. Last semester I would have said that period 2 was much more focused and able to learn things more quickly and easily, though that has shifted somewhat since winter break. Both classes now have a few kids that are really good at taking the rest off track. Overall, I think that there is a good balance between both classes in that there are amazing kids that pick up everything quickly in each class and each class also has students that really struggle with language (probably a few more of these in the 4th period.)”

6. Have you ever heard of input processing?
   “No, but I have heard of input...”

7. If yes, what do you think about it?

8. Do you believe that you utilize input processing at all within your classrooms?
   “Not sure what it is.”
   (Melissa Duplechin Personal interview March 7, 2016).

Next I would like to address the general observations about the lesson that I had while teaching these two Spanish level one classrooms. As stated above, this experiment did not account for age, gender, or learning ability. However I still believe that it is important to mention these observations, if nothing more for future research. In class #1, there were a variety of students from all grades; there were also more boys than girls in this classroom. Without specific evidence of students with learning disabilities, it would be difficult to assess if any students were struggling with the formatting of the first lesson plan. However I did notice that there were some students who appeared to be struggling more than others, as these individuals would ask more questions about the lesson. The environment of the classroom was chaotic, and the students had a difficult time focusing
on the lesson. Many of the students would simply chat in side groups if they were not asked to pay attention to the lesson material. In class #2, there were an equal variety of students from all grade levels, however the amount of girls versus boys in the classroom was almost completely equal. Once again barring evidence of any specific learning disabilities, there were fewer questions presented in this class as a whole, and I did not notice any particular students that appeared to be struggling more than others. The environment of this classroom was much calmer than class #1. The students were prepared to participate more in the lesson, and there was less side conversations going on in the classroom. My general interpretation of these classrooms pairs fairly well with the teacher, as she believes both of the classes have several students who tend to keep the rest off track.

I also believe that it is equally important to discuss the students’ performance in regards to the three different activities presented in both class #1 and class #2. In class #1, students received information on how to conjugate verbs based on a generic verb chart layout. Students were asked to physically write the answers on a white board and hold them up for me to see. I allowed the students to use their notes for these practices. With the use of notes as well as talking with peers, I do not see any official way to produce results from these activities. However it was notable that students did struggle with the idea of producing their own written responses. It was also noticeable that students often confused the “nosotros” form of the verb “jugar” with the “usted” form of the verb. Students in class #1 also struggled with the activity that involved forming questions; they often confused the conjugation of the verb within this activity. From my observations, it seemed apparent that students in both class #1 and class #2 had questions about each task
at hand, and I thought it was very interesting that one class did not seem more clarifying than the other. This again fits with the observations discussed above by the actual teacher, as she states that there are about equal amounts of students in both classrooms that struggle with the language; however she believes there may be more struggling students within class #2. In class #2, students were also asked to write answers on their white boards. These students, however, were not given examples along with the verbal instructions given for the activity while class #1 was. I also noticed that learners in this class did not utilize the assistance of each other quite as much as class #1. Students in class #2 received information about the conjugations of the verbs based on pictures with pronouns. This did not appear to negatively affect their understanding. They were also allowed to use their notes and their peers for answers. I found that students were generally more successful with achieving the right answers on the structured input activities that I had created and presented in the second lesson. There was, however, some confusion between the “yo” form of the verb “jugar” and the “usted” form of the verb.

Finally I will discuss the tangible results, or the quantitative elements, of the experiment. The results for class #1 may be seen in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students in Attendance</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who received perfect score on both parts of the assessment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who received perfect score on first part of assessment only</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who received perfect score on second part of assessment only</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students without a perfect score in either part of assessment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown above, in class #1, twenty-eight students were in attendance on the day of the experiment. Regarding the final assessment, thirteen of the twenty-eight students received a perfect score on both sections of the assessment. Among the remaining fifteen students, there was only one student who scored a perfect score on only the first section of the assessment. There were eight students of the remaining fifteen students that scored a perfect score on only the second part of the assessment. Finally, there were six remaining students who did not receive a perfect score on either part of the assessment. Among the students who did not receive a perfect score on the first part of the assessment, the most common error made was with the “nosotros” form of the verb “jugar.” Students typically paired this form of the verb “jugar” with the pronoun “ellos.” Another common error within the first part of the assessment came about with the “yo” form of the verb “jugar.” Students incorrectly wrote the verb “jugo” versus the verb “juego.” Within the second part of the assessment, the most common error appeared to be confusion between the pairing of the “tú” form of the verb with the “él/ella/usted” form of the verb.

In class #2, the results are discussed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students in Attendance</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students who received perfect score on both parts of the assessment</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who received perfect score on first part of assessment only</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who received perfect score on second part of assessment only</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students without a perfect score in either part of assessment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, twenty-eight students were in attendance on the day of the experiment. Regarding the final assessment, seventeen of the twenty-eight students
received a perfect score on both sections of the assessment. Among the eleven remaining students, there was only one student who received a perfect score on only the first part of the assessment. There were four students out of the remaining eleven that received a perfect score on only the second part of the assessment. Finally, there were six students of the remaining eleven students who did not receive a perfect score on either part of the assessment. Among the students who did not receive a perfect score on the first part of the assessment, the most common error made was with the “ellos” and “ustedes” form of the verb “jugar.” Students wrote the word “jugan” in place of the word “juegan.” Among the second part of the assessment, the most common error was made between the “tú” form of the verb “jugar” and the “él/ella/usted” form of the verb “jugar,” matching “tú” with the answer “juega” and “él/ella/usted” with the form “juegas.”

All results from this experiment ultimately serve to answer my research questions as well as aid in my personal definition of IP and will be further discussed and analyzed below.

**Discussion**

In order to discuss any specific conclusions about the data that was collected through this experiment, my three research questions must be addressed individually. Once again, it is imperative to note that the results discussed below involve solely my interpretation of the concept of IP utilized within my experiment.

**RQ 1: Does instruction that emphasizes input processing (IP) help students in a secondary Spanish language classroom to recall more information in the L2?**

As discussed in the results section of this paper, it was noted that the students in class #1 generally had more questions about the lesson and appeared to struggle more
than class #2. This may be apparent through the final assessment, as more students in class #2 received a perfect score on the entire assessment than students in class #1. Information such as this might suggest the conclusion that activities focused on structured input are more effective in general. However, results of the experiment reveal that students in both classrooms performed almost the same in terms of 100% accuracy on only one part of the final assessment. As a result, it is not possible to say that students in class #2 who received a lesson based on my input processing activities were able to recall more information in the L2.

Another important conclusion drawn in regards to answering this research question is presented among the most common errors made by both of the classes. Again, students in class #1 who learned by means of a typical verb conjugation chart often did not correctly conjugate the “yo” form of the verb “jugar,” not understanding that this form applies to the stem-change rule. These students also did not grasp the concept that the “nosotros” form of the verb “jugar” did not apply the stem-change rule. Similar results may be reported with students in class #2. These students did not understand that the stem-change form of the verb “jugar” applies to the “ellos” and “ustedes” form of the verb. It is clear that both classes struggled to recall information about the correct stem-changing forms of the verb “jugar.” Therefore it is also possible to conclude that the IP activities that I created may have a small effect in the amount of information that students can recall in the L2.

On the contrary, performance on the specific activities within the two different lessons could also provide insight pertaining to this research question. Once again referencing Bill VanPatten, the idea that students will grasp any necessary form of
information that is available from input is evident here. Performance within the activities in the lesson plans demonstrates this concept. As previously mentioned, students in class #1 struggled with the activity involving the question “A qué juega,” even though they were given an example of the activity. When asked to write the questions with the correct form of the verb, students would often confuse the conjugations. However students always had the correct order and form of the question. This represents “the Primacy of Content Words Principle” mentioned by VanPatten. Lee and VanPatten state “[l]earners process content words in the input before anything else” (139). Here, I believe that the students were processing the question form as content before they were able to process the grammatical form of the verb. This could have led to less successful results. However, a big difference that I see in that class #1 focused on output whereas class #2 activities were based on input. In class #2, students did not struggle with the activities and were generally producing correct answers, even though they were not provided with any example to the activity. I believe that these results correlate directly with “The Availability of Resources Principle” stated by VanPatten. Within this principle, “[f]or learners to process either redundant meaningful grammatical forms or nonmeaningful forms, the processing of overall sentential meaning must not drain available processing resources.” (Lee and VanPatten 139). Students in class #1 were perhaps not able to process the correct conjugations of the verb, as the students were focused on the overarching goal of the activity: producing the correct answers. This could have drained the available processing resources to focus on the form of the question words as oppose to the actual conjugation of the verb. Once again, both classes were required to do activities based on output versus input. This proves that the activities regarding input are
far more successful at allowing learners to recall information, as the students in class #2 did not struggle with the structured input activities that I created for the final assessment.

Through this research it is not possible to state that my interpretation of input processing or a structured input method of teaching may provide students with a precise way to recall more information in the L2. However, it is notable that, in general, students who received instruction involved with input processing performed at a slightly higher academic level at both the input and output based activities on the final assessment.

**RQ 2: What types of grammar activities achieve the highest results in a classroom?**

To provide any conclusions pertaining to this research question, it is important to analyze not only the activities performed by both classes but also the final assessment. Beginning with the activities for class #1, I noted that several students were struggling to understand the concept of a stem-changing verb. In each activity, students were provided with an example, and they had to produce their own answers on a white board. The types of activities performed in the lesson for class #1 were very repetitive and, in my opinion, could be considered grammar drills. Again, students had many difficulties with the activity involving the formation of questions, as they were focusing more on the formation of syntax as opposed to the conjugation of the verb. I believe this directly mimics what Lee and VanPatten refer to as “The Lexical Preference Principle” in which “[l]earners will tend to rely on lexical items as opposed to grammatical form to get meaning when both encode the same semantic information” (139). Students in class #1 also asked more questions about the instructions and lesson in general.

Learners in class #2 were not given an example to their activities. In general, there were fewer errors in the responses given to all of the activity. The fact that students did
not seem to utilize each other for help as much in class #2 leads me to the general conclusion that their activities were easier to understand and process. Although students in class #2 occasionally confused the “yo” form of the verb “jugar” with the “usted” form, their mistakes were focused only on the grammatical elements of the lesson, while class #1 made mistakes with syntax as well as grammar.

It is therefore simple for me to conclude that the structured input activities I formed for class #2 were more successful than the activities presented to class #1. The evidence shows that the addition of lexical semantics added confusion and distraction to class number one, while driving the focus away from the grammatical aspect that constituted the lesson. Students in class #2 were given structured input activities in which they could focus solely on the grammar within the lesson, and their reactions seem to prove that this type of lesson in much less confusing in a classroom setting. In turn, it is easy for me to understand that all of the input processing activities that I created were more successful in this experiment, involving the conjugation of three verbs, than the activities types that are typically employed with this classroom setting.

While analyzing the final assessment and revisiting the results in the tables on pages 67 and 68, it is notable that both classes performed almost exactly the same in terms of students who only got a perfect score on one part of the assessment or students who did not achieve a perfect score on either part of the assessment. However, there were more learners in class #2 who had a perfect score on the total assessment than there were learners in class number one. This leads to the conclusion that activities based in input processing lead to higher performance levels.
On the other hand, an additional result revealed that students in class #1 performed better on the second part of the assessment, which involved a structured input activity. This is interesting, as class #2 was exposed to this methodology. Yet the fact that students who were not exposed to my style of processing instruction before the assessment still did well implies the success of my structured input activities. If more students in class #1 could achieve a perfect score on the second part of the assessment than the first, this leads me to the conclusion that students will perform well with the use of a structured input activity even without prior instruction based in input processing.

**RQ 3: Are the effects of input processing (IP), or a lesson that utilizes structured input methodology, different from the effects of a teacher’s preferred way of teaching?**

In order to provide any conclusions to this research question, I believe it is important to first address the responses that I received from the teacher of the classes from my experiment. When asked how to describe her teaching style, she did not have a specific response. She simply stated that she is trying to focus her students more on conversation within the classroom and slowly move away from traditional grammar instruction. Additionally, the teacher had never before heard of a specific mention of input processing, even though she has been teaching for nineteen years, and she would have no idea how to implement it within her classroom. From these answers it is possible to first conclude that input processing is not the most widely known form of methodology, as this teacher had never before heard of the concept. This furthers my assumption that my interpretations of IP are not conclusive. It is important to inquire if this could have a potential effect upon the results of this experiment, as the students in this classroom have
never before been exposed to this type of instruction. Furthermore, this teacher mentioned that she typically teaches levels one through four within middle school and high school. From this discussion, it is also possible to wonder if the effects of processing input are as beneficial to all ages and grade levels or not. Finally, this teacher mentioned the various differences between her two classrooms, stating that there are several students who either have learning disabilities or are part of a Gifted and Talented program. She also stated that there are several disruptive students in each class that tend to keep the class off track as well as several students who have struggled with language learning. From this I wonder if the results of this experiment could have been affected by any one of these various factors.

Next I aim to analyze the results of the final assessment. Students in class #1 had more students who received a perfect score on the second part of the final assessment, even though this assessment was made to mimic the structured input activities of the second lesson for class #2. However, there were more students in class #2 who received a perfect score on the overall assessment than students in class #1. The number of students who received a perfect score on only the first part of the assessment was equal as well as the amount of students who did not receive a perfect score on either part of the assessment. In this case, these can be no specific conclusions drawn to state that my interpretation of input processing is better than the teacher’s traditional instruction. However, the effects are obviously different. It is curious to note that class #1 had more students achieve higher score on the second part of the assessment, which utilized structured input matching, while class #2 had more students that achieved higher scores in general, even though the first part of the assessment was structured based on the
teacher’s typical approach to instruction. Perhaps these conclusions point to the notion that students who are familiar with a specific type of instruction may achieve high scores regardless of a new type of activity or instruction. However, these results may also conclude that students who were taught by using IP are more likely to achieve higher scores in general, regardless of the assessment.

Another important result that may be employed to answer this research question regards the difference in verb charts that was used within the experiment. As previously discussed, students in class #1 were exposed to a traditional verb chart that is typically used by their teacher while students in class #2 saw nothing more than pictures matched with pronouns. This appeared to have no effect in regards to the activities presented in class. From this stance I have concluded that my understanding of input processing may not differ entirely from traditional instruction. However there are several notable differences are in regards to the final assessment. The second part of the final assessment used the same pictures that were matched with the pronouns in the lesson provided to class #2. Including the students who received a perfect score on the entire assessment in addition to the students who only scored a perfect score on the second part of the assessment, more students in class #2 achieved a perfect score. This leads me to conclude that the input processing techniques I have put forth within this experiment allowed students to achieve higher scores on assessments.

**Conclusion**

Foreign language teaching has evolved since its origin, utilizing various methodologies with numerous successes as well as an abundance of shortcomings. Although there are many pioneering methods and structures of teaching a foreign
language that are currently advancing foreign language education, I believe that input processing is an important part of a structured input-based method of teaching that has appeared to be very successful in secondary classrooms. According to my research, input processing is underutilized yet very effective. I interpret IP to be successful due to the simplicity of its style in addition to its focus in grammar instruction. This focus of the importance of input processing with grammar instruction is, in my opinion, apparent and noted with the failed attempt of my first experiment. The importance of vocabulary in the first experiment could not correctly utilize any sort of input processing activities.

I developed an experiment that utilized the results of both a control group, who received a more traditionally based instruction, and a treatment group, who learned by means of various structured input activities that I created based on the definition of IP put forth by Bill VanPatten. Both groups were instructed by means of two different lesson plans yet given the exact same final assessment. I developed this quantitative as well as qualitative method of research in order to reveal what I believe are the beneficial assets of input processing when implemented in a secondary Spanish classroom. I attempted to analyze the differences between a classroom’s normal style of teaching in comparison to a lesson created based on structured input activities.

Through this analysis I have concluded that my understanding of input processing does indeed have a beneficial effect on students ability to retain and recall information. I judge that it also does allow students to achieve higher scores on assessments. However there were also some aspects of my experiment in which students did not perform as well as desired. From my research, it seems to me that input processing serves as an aid in
student progress, and I think that its implementation in various grammar lessons would be beneficial to both the teacher and the student.

However, as with any experiment, there are areas of further exploration related to this topic that should be investigated for further conclusions regarding input processing. For example, it would be appealing to understand if there is any way to apply input processing to activities involving vocabulary within the classroom. Additionally, it would be interesting to see the outcome of this experiment in a classroom that had not been taught in a variety of styles all year. I would predict that structured input activities would allow these students to perform even better, as they would not be accustomed to a specific style of instruction. It would also be curious to discover if the results seen in this experiment would hold true over time. There is a precise limitation with a shortened experiment, like my own, as it is impossible to prove if input processing would indeed improve the overall achievement of this classroom after only one visit. Furthermore, there were various limitations placed on this experiment regarding my assumptions. For example, I assumed that, for this experiment, the effects of input processing would be the same for every student in the class. It would be interesting to test if structured input activities would yield the same results for students with learning disabilities. Also, a specific level of Spanish restricted my experiment. Perhaps the effects of input processing only hold true for lower level Spanish classrooms and would not function the same for a higher level. Or maybe the effects of input processing only work for students at the secondary level and would not accurately assist younger children or adults. Although my experiment did yield interesting results, these areas of exploration could further strengthen my research.
While foreign language education is innovative, there will always be new and creative ways to teach. It is also apparent that every teacher has a style of instruction in which they feel comfortable, and changing this style can be difficult. However it is exceedingly important that all teachers do whatever they can in order to help their students succeed. Adapting the concept of input processing along with structured input activities could potentially be the answer to assist some teachers with achieving better results with students. Yet even if this is not the answer for every teacher, it is imperative that teachers do anything that they can to keep their students interested and successful in learning a second language. This may not only lead to a rise in students who want to learn a second language, but will also assist in creating citizens who are more knowledgeable about foreign languages.
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