Towards A German Grammar Programme For Post-Leaving Certificate Students at Dublin City University

An Action Research Approach.

by

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Statement

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Table of contents

Annette Simon - Towards a German Grammar Programme for Post-Leaving Certificate students at Dublin City University

Abstract

With the introduction of the communicative method of language learning, overall standards of grammatical competence and performance among Irish second level students would appear to have been significantly reduced. As a consequence, learners who continue to study a given language at third level apparently no longer possess the knowledge which, under the grammar-translation methodology, further education institutions were able to build upon.

This thesis examines the basis for the above perceptions, investigates the role of formal grammar instruction in the second language acquisition process and reports on a programme which was developed at Dublin City University (DCU) in order to ease, for Irish university students of German, the transition from a primarily memory-based approach to language acquisition to the analytical approach which is still being considered crucial to a university student's linguistic education. While the research was undertaken in response to locally existing difficulties, it may also be considered as a case study of more general interest, and as such serve as an exemplar to German departments in other universities as well as to other foreign language departments both within DCU or outside. The aim of the programme under investigation was to ease the transition on a socio-affective, cognitive and metacognitive level without lowering overall proficiency expectations and standards. Primary research was conducted among secondary school teachers, post-Leaving Certificate students on entry into DCU and among third level lecturers. The purpose of this research was to identify and define the programme's content and progression. To this effect, the German junior and senior cycle syllabi at second level were also taken into consideration.

The subsequent German grammar programme was implemented at DCU in the academic year 1996/7. While the programme would appear to have been judged favourably regarding some affective and cognitive-motivational aspects, results show mixed success rates for the other two factors under investigation, cognitive-analytical and metacognitive skills. Thus, some degree courses and some language combinations clearly benefited more from the programme than others. One of the conclusions drawn from this research suggests that unless certain changes are introduced prior to students' entry into third level, university graduates are likely to remain well below the standards of accuracy and overall proficiency which were previously achieved.

Introduction

The Rationale behind the Current Research

Impressionistic evidence gathered in the course of the 1990s suggests that, with the arrival of the communicative approach in modern language instruction in Ireland and Britain, a change has taken place with regard to many secondary school leavers' level of structural knowledge and appreciation of linguistic accuracy (cf. Townson and Musolff, 1993; Ridley et al., 1993; Alderson et al., 1996; Rogers, 1996; Hawkins and Towell, 1996). Durrell (1993) outlines reasons for the change in educational policy which saw a move away from the grammar-translation method of language acquisition to a radically different approach towards learning. The former method, while equipping a relatively small number of linguistically gifted learners with a thorough knowledge of the grammatical properties of the target language, effectively excluded the broader public which, according to Durrell, considered the acquisition of foreign languages as an extremely difficult and, ultimately, boring activity. Since foreign language learning under grammar-translation was modelled on Latin, it produced learners who had a sound morphosyntactic knowledge of the language system but, as a rule, lacked even the most basic oral communication skills. The introduction of the communicative method corresponded to the manifest need for increased oral and aural linguistic skills in a Europe of changed socio-political circumstances. In the case of the U.K. and Ireland, their 1973 entry into the EEC opened up much greater job mobility and travel opportunities which in turn introduced a growing desire to communicate with citizens of other European countries. In essence, the communicative approach sought to make the learning of foreign languages accessible to a much larger group of people, allowing them to develop what Townson and Musolff call "skills and knowledge with an intrinsic and applicable value" (1993: 31).

One of the most crucial (and also most controversial) issues for those teaching at both second and third level under the new methodology was to be that of the status of grammar. In their 1988 study, Canale and Swain examine a range of theories of communicative approaches, from those promoting *basic communication skills* presented in functional-notional form (e.g. Van Ek, 1976 or Savignon, 1972) through *sociolinguistic theories* of communicative competence (e.g. Hymes, 1972; Halliday,

i

1973) to what are known as *integrative theories* (Munby, 1978 and Widdowson, 1978).

Canale and Swain state that one of the underlying principles of theories of basic

communicative skills is "the view that more effective second language learning takes

place if emphasis is placed immediately on getting one's meaning across rather than on

the grammaticalness and appropriateness of one's utterances" (1988: 63). According to

the authors, an *integrative* theory of communicative competence is characterised by "a

synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, knowledge of how language is

used in social contexts to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how

utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of

discourse" (1988: 73, my italics). Canale and Swain conclude that, even with regard to

the latter type of theory, "there is an overemphasis in many integrative theories on the

role of communicative functions and social behavior options in the selection of

grammatical forms and a lack of emphasis on the role of factors such as grammatical

complexity and transparency" (ibid: 76). And the authors warn that "there is little

theoretical motivation" for this interpretation (ibid: 78)[1]. Similarly, Jung (1979) states

"[a]uch wenn man [...] Kommunikationsbefähigung als langfristiges Leitziel des

Fremdsprachenunterrichts (FU) akzeptiert, so muß man dennoch feststellen, daß die

Detailarbeit auf dem Weg zum erklärten Lernziel von Lernproblemen wie z.B. *dem*

Erwerb der fremdsprachenspezifischen Syntax bestimmt wird. Hinterfragt man etwa

den Vorschlag, den FU nach Redeabsichten zu organisieren, so stößt die

Unterrichtsplanung bald auf das Problem einer Vielzahl von Redemitteln (z.B.

grammatische Strukturen) für ein und dieselbe Redeabsicht" (ibid: 45, my italics).

Götze (1991) insists that "[e]in kommunikativer Fremdsprachenunterricht kann nicht

ohne Grammatik auskommen. Grammatik und Kommunikation sind kein Widerspruch,

sondern Teile eines einheitlichen Konzeptes einer Lehr- und Lernstrategie von

sprachimmanenten Regeln und Regeln des Sprachgebrauchs" (ibid: 162). Müller-

Küppers (1991, with reference to Götze, 1985) states that true communicative

competence cannot be achieved without both semantic-pragmatic and morphosyntactic

competence and that the two types of competence are anything but mutually exclusive.

Helbig (1994) adds to the criticism of the misconceived dichotomy of a 'rigid

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[1] According to Rogers (1996), the communicative approach suffers from a fundamental weakness: because it is based on sociolinguistics and philosophy of language and not on second language acquisition, it focuses exclusively on the *use* of language and fails to address the issue of how that language is *learnt* in the first place.

application of rules' versus 'communicatively oriented foreign language teaching', stating that "[m]it Recht ist [...] die Tendenz eines einseitigen "Kommunikativismus" kritisiert worden, der die Systemlinguistik (vor allem die Morphosyntax) verdrängt hat, die Kategorie der Kommunikation als Erklärungsprinzip bisweilen überbewertet und damit auch entleert und manchmal auch zur Kommunikationsirrelevanz eines derart betriebenen Unterrichts geführt hat" (ibid: 92). The author adds "[e]s ist nicht zu verkennen, daß in Zeiten der Verabsolutierung des Kommunikationsgedankens die kognitive Funktion der Sprache stark ausgeblendet wurde" (ibid: 93; cf. also Helbig, 1991).

Regardless of these theoretical aspirations, anecdotal evidence would suggest that, with the introduction of the communicative approach, grammar matters were severely curtailed in most, if not all, second level classrooms. As a consequence, the average school-leaver, while demonstrating basic aural and oral skills, and, most importantly, great motivation, at the same time appeared to lack the grammatical competence and appreciation for matters of accuracy which third level institutions could expect as a given under grammar-translation. Although some learners displayed quite an impressive structural, lexical and pragmatic command of German[2], there was now an increasing number of learners who seemed to lack even the most basic knowledge of structural target language properties or, equally problematic, had misconceptions about them.

The new approach to language learning at second level was thus arguably going to have a knock-on effect on third level education. Under grammar-translation, the primary task of third level institutions had been to extend the sound structural knowledge previously acquired by all school-leavers. Apart from this grammar-based objective, the development of oral fluency, aural skills as well as advanced reading and writing skills would have been considered as the other principal challenges. The change in methodology would appear to have brought about a reversal of the situation. Apart from the purported decrease in emphasis on grammatical knowledge and accuracy, second level institutions were also to put less emphasis on the two skills which had been at the centre of the grammar-translation method, i.e. reading and writing. As a consequence of making modern languages more accessible to a wider group of people,

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[2] However, even these learners lacked the breadth or width of knowledge acquired by most learners under the grammar-translation method.

languages were now to be studied, at both second and third level, by students who, because of their lack of linguistic talent, up until then would have been unlikely candidates for taking up that option. As Ruane (1990), in her comprehensive review of the development of modern languages in the Irish education system, points out the new approach shifted the emphasis onto skills which "are assumed to be within the reach of *every pupil, regardless of ability*" (ibid: 14, my italics). In Ireland, the rapid increase in the number of students opting for German at second level had a further impact which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

The challenges facing third level thus changed with the introduction of the communicative approach, suggesting that some adaptational moves at least had to be considered on the part of the universities. The purpose of the present research is to establish just what the implications for third level are by investigating the following questions:

- What is the role of formal grammar instruction in the second language acquisition process?
- What status does grammar instruction have in Irish second level curricula?
- Does the perception that the average Irish school-learner lacks structural knowledge, grammatical accuracy and analytical linguistic skills hold up to empirical scrutiny?
- If levels of grammatical knowledge and accuracy have deteriorated, are there negative implications for third level, or is the pursuit for accuracy an anachronism, cherished by those who mourn the demise of grammar-translation?
- If the implications for third level are negative, just how serious are they?
- What exactly can be done to remedy the situation? Should action be taken at second or third level or both?

According to Durrell (1993), an approach which suggests that grammar plays a distinctly subordinate role in foreign language learning "is wholly inadequate once one proceeds beyond the basic level of everyday oral communication" (ibid: 63). If this research confirms the impressionistic evidence gathered so far, i.e. that grammar has been sidelined at second level, it needs to be decided if the resulting lack of structural knowledge and analytical skills among learners is to be expected to have a seriously

negative impact on overall proficiency standards at third level. An analogy from the area of phonetics may serve to illustrate the gravity of the potential implications: At the 1998 spring seminar of the German Teachers' Association of Ireland, Hirschfeld pointed to the effect a speaker's flawed phonetic skills are likely to have on the listener: "Unverständlichkeit, Mißverständnisse, Irritation; Konzentrationsstörungen; Verlust inhaltlicher Informationen; Verschiebung der Aufmerksamkeit vom Inhalt auf die Form und auf den Sprecher; (negative) Assoziationen (sozialer Status, Bildungsstand, Intelligenz, Charakter); Veränderung der Einstellung zum Sprecher (Abwertung, Ablehnung)" (Hirschfeld, 1998). Anecdotal experience would suggest that seriously flawed grammatical output causes similar reactions from the listener, especially if what the listener considers to be basic morphosyntactic errors occur frequently. The impact of gravely deficient grammatical knowledge seems to be perceived as even more negative in written production - on balance, error tolerance levels would appear to be considerably lower here than in oral production. Depending on the gravity of the errors in either spoken or written language use, it may not just be the ease of communication which suffers as a consequence - it may be that even the less ambitious aim of 'getting the message' across cannot be achieved.

Another feature which would appear to be widely associated with the communicative teaching practice is that of rote-learning - chunks of texts are memorised largely without any morphosyntactic analysis whatsoever. As a consequence, the average school-leaver would appear to be unable to conduct even the most basic of parsing tasks and would very often be unable to state even the most basic of grammatical rules. According to Durrell (1993), approaches which do not encourage learners to develop an explicit awareness of target language structural properties in second level senior cycle seriously lack efficiency since "they fail to capitalise on adolescents' cognitive abilities in a sensible way or to encourage learner autonomy in actually continuing to learn outside the classroom" (ibid: 64).

The implications of the purported practices at second level for the higher education sector are obvious. By the end of their studies, Irish third level students are expected to demonstrate linguistic skills which extend well beyond those classified as basic survival skills. They are expected to demonstrate a high degree of linguistic proficiency, as characterised by advanced levels of fluency and accuracy in all aspects of language use. In their development of these skills, students are expected to employ analytical skills

which allow them to manipulate linguistic input and output freely and to become autonomous language learners. Until such time that third level education agrees to change these objectives in a radical manner, the development of both morphosyntactic knowledge and analytical skills continue to be of crucial importance at that level, even if it is true that they find less consideration at second level.

The question thus remains which practical inferences and consequences are to be drawn from the change in methodology at second level. At Dublin City University (DCU) it was decided, for reasons to be discussed under Section 1.1, that concrete remedial action must be taken *at university level* in order to overcome the perceived interface problem between the two levels and to bridge the expected gap between students' existing grammatical competence and performance levels and first year course standards. However, unlike the grammar-translation methodology, grammar will no longer be regarded as an end in itself nor as an intellectual challenge reserved for a small elitist minority. It is instead hoped that students will experience grammar first and foremost as an indispensable tool for efficient, advanced communication in all receptive and productive skills.

The purpose of this research is to examine the cross-over point between Irish second level institutions and Dublin City University with regard to the teaching and learning of German grammar in order to facilitate the transition for those first year DCU students who have studied German at second level. The programme which was developed for this purpose is informed by theoretical positions regarding the role of formal grammar instruction in the second language acquisition process as well as by findings from students' learning backgrounds. This dissertation describes and evaluates the design and implementation of that German grammar programme.

Chapter One introduces the conceptual and methodological framework within which this dissertation was undertaken. Chapter Two gives an overview of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature with regard to three issues which are considered to be of key importance to the present research - the role of motivation, the purposefulness of formal grammar instruction and the role of learning strategies in the acquisition process. Chapter Three looks at some of the educational aspects which have a bearing on Irish second level language instruction, including the Irish education system, the development of German in Ireland and the German second level syllabi. Chapter Four presents the results of research carried out between October 1995 and

November 1997 among second level teachers. Findings for research carried out at the start of the academic year 1995/6 among school-leavers entering Dublin City University are presented in Chapter Five. Chapter Six examines the expectations which Irish university lecturers including, most specifically, DCU lecturers hold with regard to school-leavers' German grammatical competence and performance levels. Chapter Seven outlines the structure and implementation of the grammar programme which was designed for first year students at DCU on the basis of the results presented in Chapters Two to Six. Chapter Eight presents and discusses the research findings for the programme after it having been in operation between October 1996 and May 1997. Chapter Nine draws some conclusions and outlines possible future research undertakings.

Chapter One

Conceptual and Methodological Framework of the Present Research

1.1 The Conceptual Framework

In the Introduction to this thesis, a number of questions were outlined which are considered to be of importance in determining language policy in Ireland and in the teaching of German in Irish second and third level institutions. It was suggested that the perceived parameter shift in second level grammar instruction was likely to have serious negative consequences for third level institutions. Thus the apparent interpretation, at second level, of communicative competence as 'managing to get the message across - no matter how', is clearly incompatible with the objectives and aspirations of third level education. While third level institutions undoubtedly welcome the increase in oral and aural skills achieved by many school-leavers, they would also insist that, in order to achieve *efficient* and *effective* communication, learners must command both fluency and accuracy[1]. Universities in particular would appear to continue to adhere to the overall course objective of helping students achieve high levels in both, as well as develop sound analytical skills. However, the average first year university student no longer seems to possess the kind of thorough knowledge of the structural properties of the language upon which the language component of university degree courses were traditionally built. The changes at second level language teaching would thus appear to pose some serious problems at the interface between the two levels. The question subsequently facing those involved in either teaching modern languages, be it at second or third level, as well as those determining language policy in Ireland, is if anything should be done to remedy the situation and if so, what and by whom.

At this point it seems pertinent to take a brief introductory look at the respective roles which second and third level institutions have been attributed in the Irish education system as well as the relationship and interaction between them. Due to developments which will be considered in more detail in Chapter Three, Irish third level institutions accepted the necessity to change the existing remit of second level modern language

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[1] The degree of accuracy required obviously varies among different third level institutions. What is of primary interest in the context of this dissertation is the general degree expected at university level (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six).

education with the introduction of the 1983 junior and senior cycle syllabi[2]. The new remit was explicitly stated in the revised 1995 senior cycle syllabus for all modern languages where it said that

" The Leaving Certificate Programme (LCP) aims to:

- enable students to realise their full potential in terms of their personal, social, intellectual and vocational growth
- prepare students for their role as active and participative citizens[3]
- prepare students *for progression onto further education, training and employment*" (Irish Department of Education, 1995b: 1, my italics).

According to this documentation, preparing students "for progression onto further education" (ibid) is clearly just one of the aims of the syllabus. Account has thus been taken of the fact that the vast majority of school leavers who may have studied a language at second level do not continue their studies at third level and do therefore not require the same degree of exposure to grammatical or analytical detail as dedicated language students. This broadening of second level educational aims is undoubtedly a development which many third level institutions and authorities, traditionally accustomed to more or less taking over where schools left off, have had great difficulty in accepting (cf. Bushell, 1995). The fact that the teaching of modern languages in many secondary schools is no longer exclusively geared towards carrying out specific groundwork in preparation for third level education has caused reactions at that level of consternation, frustration and resignation, culminating in the not uncommon accusation that secondary school teachers are 'not doing their jobs properly'. Obviously none of these reactions is particularly helpful when it comes to trying to find a constructive solution to this apparent problem.

So, what are the options then, if this is indeed the situation which presents itself? Some members of third level institutions would consider it an option to try and press for a radical rethink at second level with a view to re-establishing the schools' main function as that of laying the foundations for third level instruction. Calls for 'proper grammar

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[2] Ridley et al. inform us that "[v]on seiten der Hochschulen wurde eingesehen, daß die "Leaving Certificate" Prüfung [...] einen viel weiteren Bezugskreis hatte als den der zukünftigen Hochschulabsolventen" (1993: 12, markings in original).

[3] It could be argued that this citizenship is not limited to an Irish one but involves a European dimension, thus giving added importance to a profound level of interaction with a foreign language and its culture.

teaching' have been made at various institutional and other levels. Were these calls heeded (which looks exceedingly unlikely at the present time), they would almost certainly meet with stern resistance from second level institutions, their students and parents, who would argue that third level has no right to make any such demands. They would point out that the proposed move would ultimately only benefit a small minority of learners: most second level students would become disaffected and this disaffection would in all probability lead to a return of the pre-communicative syllabus era when German was perceived as a subject too difficult and inaccessible for the vast majority of learners (cf. Chapter Three for details). Numbers would fall and thousands of students would be deprived of job opportunities and mobility as well as communicative means on holidays. In view of the expected resistance, any call for an overall about-turn in teaching emphasis at second level seems futile and possibly also unjustifiable.

A second option might consist of third level lecturers resigning themselves, albeit reluctantly, to the fact that their expectations have to be lowered and that overall competence and performance standards at third level will fall. Going down this road is likely to be the least preferred choice to most of those teaching at third level, who would argue that this step would make a mockery of the concept of 'higher education'. As regards the studying of German at tertiary level, Ridley et al. (1993) rightly point out that third level degrees are not merely awarded for students' ability to communicate in German: "Der "B.A. in German" wird nicht nur für die Beherrschung der Sprache verliehen. Wäre dem so, könnte man ca. 100 Millionen dieser Abschlüsse sofort verleihen" (ibid: 17). There are obviously a number of other factors that matter in third level education. Ridley et al. conclude that "[z]umindest für den tertiären Sektor stellt sich daher hier in der Republik Irland die Aufgabe, Grammatik zu treiben [sic]", adding "[e]s wäre aber auch eine Überlegung wert, damit vielleicht in angemessener Form schon etwas früher zu beginnen" (ibid).

Ridley et al.'s deliberations suggest a shared responsibility between Irish second and third level education, hinting at the resonant effects second level education has at third level, both as regards curricular matters and general educational considerations (although the latter are not specifically mentioned in the above context).

Considering the overwhelming opinion in favour of the changes at second level, as expressed by vastly increased student numbers who have taken up German at school,

third level would nevertheless appear to be well-advised to adopt a pragmatic approach and accept *in principle* the parameter changes in second level grammar emphasis. As a consequence, third level institutions would take it upon themselves 'to deal with the grammar problem' and introduce some form of grammar element into their courses. If subsequently graduates' proficiency standards could be achieved at the level which was on a par with that achieved under grammar-translation, the problem would appear to be solved: instead of exposing students to grammar matters at second level, the exposure would merely be shifted to third level. While students at third level may have to work harder than in previous years (the overall workload will increase with more grammar learning), the final net results may be indistinguishable from those achieved in previous years. But what happens if this approach does not work? What if whatever grammar exposure students experience at third level fails to help them 'catch up'? As will be outlined in the Conclusions to this thesis, it would appear that, if high standards are to be achieved, some changes in second level grammar teaching are indeed advisable, although no such simplistic recommendations will be put forward which would ask all secondary school teachers 'to do more grammar'.

However, the main focus of this thesis is the exploration of what third, not second, level might be able to do about the current situation. Once third level institutions take on board the responsibility of at least trying to assist their students achieve very high standards of proficiency, those involved in syllabus design are presented with the question of *procedure*. As Rösler (1993: 87ff) points out, all methodological decisions must be based, firstly, on an analysis of learner needs and, secondly, on the linguistic aims of the course in question (cf. Lofmark, 1990: 171-179 and Woods, 1990: 181-197, for two accounts of how German departments at British universities have tried to adapt to their changed roles). Any attempt to resolve the issue of procedure must, of course, take into account the theoretical positions regarding the role of formal grammar instruction in the second language acquisition process.

The question which colleagues in the German department at DCU had to ask themselves was whether they should intervene in a direct and regulatory fashion in students' grammar learning efforts, or merely adopt an advisory role. In that advisory role they would impress on learners the urgency 'to catch up on grammar outside the classroom'

but leave the actual organisation of how to go about extending knowledge or improving on particular aspects of their language learning - including the development of cognitive analytical skills - to the students themselves. It has been argued by lecturers that, on entry into third level education, the responsibility to work on potentially weak points must rest primarily with the learner. According to this argument, lecturers ought to carry on with their syllabus progression irrespective of individual learner weaknesses and merely continue to impress on learners the need to put in the extra work in their own time. A second alternative would be to deal with grammar points explicitly on an ad hoc basis, whenever a difficult aspect presents itself in class. Yet another option would be to raise learners' language awareness through input enhancement (cf. Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of instructional methods). Experience in the German department at DCU has shown that none of these approaches is satisfactory. As regards making the input salient, students would 'register' the salient point and then make it clear, through impatient gestures or facial expressions, that they wished to go on to the next 'content point'. As for the ad hoc dealing with grammar points, because of its very nature, this approach lacks structure and therefore remains haphazard. It also became evident that few, if any, school leavers are equipped to structure their own learning approach. The realisation that a different approach was needed was confirmed by increasing calls on the part of the <u>majority of students</u> for the introduction of a grammar class into the German language course. Faced with the demands placed on them by third level course requirements, they expressed feelings of being at sea and badly needing direction. The call for grammar classes is, of course, a well-known phenomenon in many tertiary level institutions (cf. Engel and Myles, 1996) and 'giving into the request' is by no means a decision which meets with universal approval[4]. Considering the above options, and the fact that students' apparent shortcomings with regard to their grammatical knowledge could no longer be described as incidences of isolated or individual weaknesses, it was decided that a structured grammar programme had to be designed for post-Leaving Certificate students. Under the modular degree structure introduced in DCU in 1996, first year language courses for <u>all</u> intermediate level students (i.e. those who come to the university with a

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[4] For instance, Coleman refers to the introduction of grammar classes as providing a "security blanket" (1995b: 3).

previous knowledge of the language) were allocated three contact hours per week plus two hours of independent study time, bringing the total number of hours allocated to the German language course up to five. After careful consideration of the theoretical positions and empirical research, the decision was taken that, in order to attempt to ease the transition from second to third level, one of the three contact hours allocated to the first year German language module was to be dedicated to the treatment of grammar, while the remaining two were to be dedicated to a general language class with particular emphasis on reading and oral practice on the one hand, and a civilisation class on the other. For the grammar class, a programme was to be drawn up with a syllabus which was to be aimed at gradually equipping learners with the cognitive and metacognitive tools essential for the creative, independent language work which university learners were ultimately expected to demonstrate. This syllabus was to be arrived at, firstly, by taking into account the theoretical positions regarding the role of formal grammar instruction, secondly by examining school-leavers' language learning background as well as their competence and performance levels and, finally by comparing these research findings to the linguistic course aims at DCU. The overall pedagogical aim of the programme was to facilitate the transition between second and third level with regard to the acquisition of German grammar without lowering linguistic standards at DCU.

Although the programme was geared towards all post-Leaving Certificate students studying German at DCU, it was considered to be particularly relevant and beneficial to so-called 'core language students'. These are students whose degree courses include a substantial (compulsory) element of language studies and whose third year is spent at a foreign university. Core language students include those studying 'Applied Languages' with a view to becoming either translators or professional linguists, 'International Marketing and Languages', 'International Business and Languages' and 'Applied Computational Linguistics'. While students on either of the first three degree courses start off studying two languages, students of 'Applied Computational Linguistics' study only one. On the 'Applied Languages' and the 'Applied Computational Linguistics' degree courses, the German course components accounts for fifty percent in all four years. On the 'International Marketing with Languages' and the 'International Business with Languages' degree courses, the German component accounts for 25% in each of the

first two years; at the end of year two, students must decide in which of their two languages they wish to major. This language will then, for the majority of students, account for two-thirds of the language component in their final year, while the minor language accounts for the other third[5]. All 'Applied Languages' and 'Applied Computational Linguistics' students as well as those students on the 'International Business and Languages' and the 'International Marketing and Languages' degree courses who major in German are expected to demonstrate a high level of linguistic fluency and accuracy by the end of their four years of study.

In order to establish the exact standards of grammatical competence and performance which second level learners of German commanded after having completed the senior cycle, research was carried out among both second level teachers and post-Leaving Certificate students. This research took place, in the case of German language teachers, between October 1995 and November 1997, and in the case of the post-Leaving Certificate students in October 1995. Findings resoundingly confirmed the impressionistic evidence previously gathered with regard to generally low linguistic knowledge levels as well as learners' lack of appreciation for matters of accuracy. The results informed the subsequent design of the grammar programme which was conceived to help students overcome the most crucial of their grammatical shortcomings and build up analytical linguistic skills. The programme was designed to help learners achieve the first year course requirements at DCU and to lay the foundations for their future German academic career.

A selection of students from some of the abovementioned degree courses (i.e. 'Applied Languages', 'International Business and Languages' and 'International Marketing and Languages') were exposed to the grammar programme in the academic year 1996/7. Students' reaction to the programme, as well as their knowledge and performance levels at the end of the academic year were subsequently evaluated and assessed by means of questionnaire, interview, informal observation and written production tasks. The specific areas under investigation in this thesis are the effect of the programme on various socio-affective, cognitive and metacognitve aspects of the grammar learning process as experienced and demonstrated by those selected first year students.

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[5] Students also have the option of giving up their minor language altogether, engaging in a specialised translation course in their major language instead.

Conclusions are drawn for the future grammar teaching approach at DCU and wider educational recommendations are made on the basis of those conclusions.

Before turning to the main body of the thesis, there will now be a brief discussion of the type of research which was deployed in this dissertation.

1.2 The Methodological Framework

As outlined under Section 1.1, most Irish school-leavers educated under the communicative approach would appear to lack the kind of structural knowledge of German and analytical skills which were 'the natural product' of the grammar-translation teaching methodology. At the same time, Irish third level institutions, and in particular universities, continue to emphasise the importance of both aspects for their overall course objectives. It was argued in the previous section that universities would be well advised to formulate some kind of response to the new challenge in order to avoid a serious decline in overall third level proficiency standards. This research is concerned with the identification of an approach which may be considered as a response to the present dilemma. It is thus an attempt to cope with the present educational challenges and seeks to exemplify the kind of action which needs to be taken by Irish universities in order to assist in an effective manner students of German in their transition from second to third level language learning. The dissertation was undertaken in the tradition of *applied linguistics research* which is characterised by Brumfit (1996) as "being led by problems which are not defined mainly by researchers but by practitioners" (ibid: 6). The research results are thus expected to feed back directly into the teaching context. One specific area of applied research is classroom research, a sub-section of which is known as action research. Van Lier describes action research as research which "links theoretical and pedagogical concerns by identifying for treatment classroom problems or practices selected by the teacher" (Van Lier, 1996: 33)[6]. A practical step-by-step guide to the implementation of action research is provided by McNiff (1988).
Rösler (1992) observes that research in social sciences has often been criticised as lacking the empirical rigour of quantitative research in the mathematical-scientific tradition. In his examination of aspects of the (institutionalised) German equivalent of applied linguistics research, i.e. 'Sprachlehr- und -lernforschung' (SLF), or 'Sprachlehrforschung' for short[7], he focuses among other things on the issue of replicability of research, stating: "Wissenschaft darauf zurückzuführen, über Elemente

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[6] For an earlier summary of Van Lier's experiences with, and observations on, classroom research, cf. Van Lier, 1988; for a detailed account of action research programmes cf. Nunan, 1989.
[7] Bausch and Krumm (1995) point out that it has become common practice to use the shorter term.

und Zusammenhänge der Wirklichkeit *so viel, so genau und nachprüfbar wie möglich* herbeibringen zu wollen, ohne dabei eine institutionalisierte Vorgabe für ein Minimum an Exaktheit und Objektivität zu akzeptieren, die die Wahrnehmung bestimmter Aspekte der Wirklichkeit ausschließen könnte, ist ein für die SLF notwendiges Unterfangen, wenn sie ihrem komplexen Gegenstand gerecht werden und bleiben will. Sie muß z.B. in der Lage sein, auch subjektive Beiträge zu verdauen, ohne sie schon vorher aus 'formalen' Gründen zurückzuweisen" (ibid: 41, all markings in original)[8].

Grotjahn (1991 and 1995) examines research methodologies which have traditionally been associated with either social sciences or natural sciences (1991: 187ff). The former are characterised by their "explorative-interpretative" nature (1995: 458) while the latter adopt an "analytical-nomological" perspective (ibid). Grotjahn notes that increasingly attempts are made to overcome this unhelpful dichotomy[9].

On the same issue Nunan (1991), in his review of methodologies employed in classroom research, takes the view that "research should be driven by issues rather than methods. Methods themselves are neutral, only taking on value in relation to the problems or issues under investigation, and there is nothing intrinsically superior in one method rather than another" (ibid: 250). In his conclusion, he deplores the "paucity of research that is actually grounded in the classroom itself" (ibid: 265) and calls "for the active involvement of teachers in classroom research" (ibid: 266).

Action research, as Grotjahn (1995) points out, is closely associated with the "explorative-interpretative" research methodology. In fact, both it and the "analytical-nomological" methodology were applied in the current research: questionnaires, interviews, informal observation and written production tasks were the elicitation instruments which were used; questionnaires and interviews in particular produced both quantifiable data and data that underwent "interpretive analysis" (Nunan, 1991: 257).

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[8] Rösler (1994) points to the difficulty that arises when translating 'Sprachlehr- und -lernforschung' into English, stating that he would try to avoid this whenever possible by using the German term and paraphrasing it. If however he was forced to use an English term he would probably use that of 'Applied Linguistics' while at the same time insisting that this term could not be translated back into German as 'Angewandte Linguistik' (ibid: 145).

[9] Grotjahn (1991) describes the *Research Programme Subjective Theories* - which were developed in Germany by psychology and educational science researchers - as "an exceptionally well founded attempt to overcome the dichotomy between the humanistic and the scientific paradigms by means of an integration of hermeneutics and empiricism" which "has a considerable potential for integration [...] in SLR (Second Language Research, my explanation)" (ibid: 187).

Two points need to be made about the scope of the present research. Firstly, Brumfit (1996) states that an aspect which needs to be borne in mind when carrying out action research is its restricted or "local" applicability (ibid: 6): most action research is geared towards a particular target group with a particular background and particular course objectives in mind. The boundaries of this type of research are, however, transcended in the present study since the problems experienced by Dublin City University are experienced in a very similar vein in other universities (cf. Chapter Six). Since the findings of this research may be considered as more generalisable than the concept of action research would commonly suggest, it could be argued that the research presents a case study. The grammar learning approach adopted by DCU may thus serve as an exemplar for German departments in other universities as well as for other language departments within DCU or outside.

Secondly, as Van Lier (1996: 33 and 219) points out, action research very often transcends the classroom boundaries to touch upon "issues of educational infrastructure and policy" (ibid: 219)[10]. Königs (1992) argues that there must be constant feedback ('Rückkoppelung') between classroom research and what he calls the political dimension of foreign language teaching: "Diese Rückkoppelung darf jedoch *nicht* in der bloßen Einpassung in einen politisch vorgebenen Rahmen bestehen, sondern muß vielmehr auf dessen *begründete* Konsolidierung oder Veränderung zielen" (ibid: 92, italics in original). He concludes that " [f]remdsprachenpolitische Konzepte sollten sich [...] nicht im luftleeren Raum abgehobener und allein durch den politischen Rahmen diktierter Leitlinien ergeben, sondern ihre Entstehung sollte auf konkrete Situationen und Beteiligte abgestellt sein *und* sich unter Berücksichtigung gründlicher empirisch und konzeptuell abgesicherter Forschungen vollziehen" (ibid: 94, italics in original). Finally, Van Lier also warns that action research is not to be confused with *problem-solving*, the difference being that "research forms an essential link between practice and theory, whereas problem-solving is merely a part of practice *per se*, without necessarily implying a theoretical dimension" (Van Lier, 1996: 32, italics in original). It is this theoretical dimension that will be presented and discussed in Chapter Two.

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[10] Van Lier distinguishes between two types of action research, referring to one as the "technical/non-political" approach (i.e. focusing on pedagogical issues in the classroom) and the other as "critical/political" (ibid: 29) (i.e. an approach "which looks at the classroom as a historically evolving and culturally embedded system" (ibid: 33)).

Chapter Two

Determining Factors in Instructed Second Language Acquisition - A Review of the Literature

This chapter explores some theoretical positions in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research with regard to issues of grammar acquisition. The primary focus will be on those aspects which are susceptible to outside influence, such as motivation, classroom learning and language learning strategies. It is, of course, acknowledged that other factors, such as age, personality, general intelligence and aptitude are of crucial importance for the learning context since they mark individual learner differences and may account for differences in the level of linguistic attainment as well as differences in non-linguistic outcomes of the learning process. However, since they are largely beyond the reach of outside influence, they will not be included in the present thesis (for a discussion of some of these factors cf. Skehan, 1989, Gardner and MacIntyre, 1992, R. Ellis, 1994a, McLaughlin and Heredia, 1996).

Although a wide range of theories have been put forward in an attempt to explain the phenomenon of L2 acquisition (cf. Spolsky, 1989, Towell and Hawkins, 1994, Bialystok, 1978 and 1994a), few, if any, of these could be described as truly comprehensive[1] (R. Ellis, 1994a). Most theories of second language learning examine partial aspects of the overall acquisition issue which are of particular relevance to their area of investigation, be it psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics or educational theory[2]. Investigations typically seek to shed light on either or both of the two crucial questions of *what* learners acquire in the L2 learning process and *how* they acquire it.

As regards the relationship between SLA and *Foreign Language Pedagogy*, Rösler (1994) points out that it has never been an easy one[3] (cf. also R. Ellis, 1998 on this

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[1] According to Beretta (1993) "there is uncertainty as to whether there are *many* theories of SLA or *none*" (ibid: 221, my italics).

[2] Cook (1991) warns that while each individual theory might justifiably be used to account for specific areas of learning, "[w]hat is wrong with them is not their claims about their own front yard so much as their tendency to claim that the whole street belongs to them. Each of them is at best a piece of the jigsaw" (ibid:131). For an attempt to synthesise some of the findings from SLA research cf. Bialystok, 1994c.

[3] Rösler (1998) points out that the discussion about the extent to which FLP should base itself on SLA seems to have come full circle: after ties had loosened somewhat with the end of the audiolingual method, he now discerns "das erneute Auftauchen einer Basisfach-Abhängigkeitsdimension" (ibid: 5), given the influential effect which recent findings in cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics and neurology have had on FLP.

issue). Claims by what are often diametrically opposed theoretical models of L2 learning (for instance, Krashen's views vs. information-processing theories) have undoubtedly contributed to the sense of scepticism with which L2 theories have been viewed by many practitioners. Quoting Krashen's language learning model as an example, Spolsky (1989) states that "[t]he failure of [such] models [...] to stand up to detailed scrutiny has discouraged many scholars from expecting any kind of useful results from theorizing, and many others from expecting that theory will have any practical relevance" (ibid: 6). Spolsky suggests that teachers might be better advised to form their own theories, based on the practical knowledge they have acquired in the course of their teaching careers. Sharwood Smith (1993) agrees and warns that "[i]f whatever fledgling theories in second language research that are around were applied without restraint to language teaching practice, the results might be much worse than simply applying common sense and the fruits of practical experience" (ibid: 166). And Sharwood Smith (1994) adds that "[i]t would simply be dishonest to make a neat set of confident claims about what second language research can 'offer' the practitioner apart from confirming the fact that second language acquisition is complex and not fully controllable by either teacher or (conscious) learner" (ibid: 172, all markings in original).

Notwithstanding the above scepticism, it is obviously imperative for researchers engaging in action research to take note of and evaluate those theoretical frameworks and SLA developments which may be of immediate relevance to their area of investigation. Practical knowledge (derived from personal teaching experience), an awareness of specific target group needs, as well as 'common sense' must then be employed in order to decide on the most appropriate methodology and approach. This chapter presents some theoretical positions regarding aspects of language learning which are considered to be of crucial significance for the specific target groups in question. Section 2.1 investigates the role of motivation, while Section 2.2 examines the effect instruction is held to have on the acquisition process in general and, more particularly, on the acquisition of grammar. The final section in this chapter, Section 2.3, briefly outlines issues regarding the development of language learning strategies.

2.1 The Role of Motivation in Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Learning

Introduction

Motivation is widely considered a key factor in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Foreign Language Learning (FLL) (Skehan, 1989, R. Ellis, 1994a, Dickinson, 1995, Van Lier, 1996). There seems to be curiously little agreement, however, on a definition of this concept (cf. Van Lier's 1996 comments on this, and Ushioda, 1996), although various definitions have been put forward, notably by Gardner et al. (cf. e.g. Gardner, 1985 and Gardner et al., 1997). According to Oxford and Shearin (1994), the failure among those investigating motivation to agree on a clear definition of the concept is one of the reasons why students' motivation of L2 learning is still not fully understood (ibid: 13). What is undisputed, however, is that what is commonly termed as motivation (whatever its exact definition may be) has a direct impact on a number of learning aspects, such as how much L2 input students take in, how well they perform in tests, the extent to which they use L2 learning strategies, how much interaction takes place between them and native speakers etc. (cf. Oxford and Shearin, 1994: 12).

Section 2.1.1 gives an overview of the development of motivational theory-building in instructed SLA and various branches of psychology. Aspects of motivation in theories which focus primarily on non-institutionalised or *naturalistic* language learning will not be considered (e.g. Schumann's Acculturation Model). Subsection 2.1.1.1 presents some research findings supporting and refuting particular motivational theories. In Subsection 2.1.1.2, two motivational frameworks geared specifically towards practitioners working in a FLL environment will be described, one briefly (Dörnyei's 1994 multilevel motivational construct) and one in more detail (Ushioda's 1996 cognitive framework). Subsection 2.1.1.3 examines the relationship between extrinsic motivation, classroom instruction and external evaluation. Section 2.1.2 draws some conclusions.

2.1.1 Motivational Framework Construction in Second Language Acquisition and Psychology

For more than thirty years, the term *motivation* was principally associated with the work of Gardner, Lambert, and fellow researchers in Canada. In the early stages, much of their research focused on motivational orientations which they defined as *integrative* on the one hand and *instrumental* on the other. Integrative motivation *"reflects a high level of drive on the part of the individual to acquire the language of a valued second-language community in order to facilitate communication with that group"* (Gardner et al., 1975: 199, italics in original). Instrumentally motivated learners, on the other hand, are primarily interested in the practical aspects of engaging in an L2, such as passing an exam or the positive effect it might have on career prospects. According to the modified and expanded version of Gardner's 1985 *socio-educational model of language learning* (cf. Gardner, 1985), motivation is composed of three parts, "desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction, and satisfaction with the task" (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993b: 2). Attitudes, according to this framework, consist of "integrativeness" (i.e. "attributes that reflect a positive outlook toward the other language group") and "attitudes toward the learning situation" (ibid). Both "integrativeness" and "attitudes" are claimed to influence motivation in a direct manner (cf. Gardner, 1985).

Two points in the earlier work of Gardner et al. attracted much criticism from other researchers. Firstly, Gardner et al. suggested that there was a direct and therefore strong relationship between *integrative* motivation and linguistic learning outcomes (Gardner and Lambert, 1972 and Gardner, 1985). Secondly, success could only ever be seen as the result of motivation, not as its cause (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Gardner et al. have since changed their minds on both aspects, as will become evident below. In reply to some of the severe criticism regarding the limitations of the 1985 model, Gardner states that the socio-educational model "was never intended to be one that would explain all, or even most, of the variance in second-language learning [...]. It was intended simply as a useful heuristic tool that could explain existing data, suggest possible processes that might be operating in second-language learning, and indicate future directions for research" (Gardner, 1988: 102).

From the early 1990s onwards, many researchers found that the traditional motivational paradigm was too narrow. Calls for a more diverse conceptualisation of motivation began to emerge. One of the major shortcomings of Gardner's model, it was argued, was the fact that it rests exclusively on social psychological considerations. According to Crookes and Schmidt (1991), "[f]rom a conceptual point of view, much of the work in SL (second language, my explanation) learning has not dealt with motivation at all" (ibid: 502). The authors take as their focal point for investigations into the nature of motivation not the view of the SLA researcher, but of the classroom practitioner, highlighting "the invalidity of SL treatments of motivation in terms of their distance from everyday, nontechnical concepts of what it means to be motivated" (ibid: 480). Crookes and Schmidt are particularly critical of the overriding importance attached by Gardner et al.'s framework to the concept of attitude, especially social attitude (i.e. the learner's identification with the target language community), and the absence of a clear distinction between attitude and motivation. While acknowledging that social attitudes may have an impact on some learning contexts, they criticise the fact that motivational research has been weighted in favour of these ill-defined concepts to such an extent "that alternative concepts have not been seriously considered" (ibid: 501). One consequence of this, the authors point out, is the paucity of research exploring aspects which may be of particular interests for practitioners, such as the connection between input, attention (as a manifestation of motivation) and intake, active learner involvement in the learning process, intensity of engagement, the issue of appropriate challenges, the relationship between certain classroom activities and motivation, the employment of techniques designed to encourage motivation, syllabus/curriculum considerations etc.. Drawing on the work of Bunge, Crookes and Schmidt outline a three-step research agenda, involving firstly, a description of the motivational issues to be explored, secondly, an analysis of the methodological and conceptual issues and, thirdly, experimentation with a view to theory-building. They insist that this order must be adhered to, stressing the particular importance/relevance of "basic descriptive work" (ibid: 501). One such descriptive study is provided by Roberts (1992) who asked 703 American first year university students to name arguments in

favour of learning a foreign language. More than thirty answers were given and subsequently classified in nine different categories [4].

Oxford and Shearin (1994) also explore the issue of motivation with regard to practical L2 learning and teaching implications. They point out that the narrow focus of the social psychological approach on *integrative* motivation makes it more relevant to *second* language learners than to *foreign* language learners, i.e. to those who are learning a language in a *bilingual* environment, such as, for instance, Canada, where native speakers of English would learn French as a second language. This important point was previously raised by Dörnyei (1990) who postulated that all motivational constructs require a well-defined learning *milieu* (clearly denoting the distinction between *second* and *foreign* language learning environments, ibid: 49). Oxford and Shearin call for an expansion of Gardner's framework, arguing that findings from branches of psychology such as general, educational and industrial psychology, as well as cognitive developmental theories, can make a major contribution to language learning (1994: 13ff). Findings from all areas are examined in the light of their implications for both the L2 classroom and the individual learner situation.

Drawing on various *need theories* (Maslow's 'Hierarchies of Needs' and need-achievement theories) Oxford and Shearin stress

a. the importance of meeting L2 learners' requirements for psychological security (in order to keep down anxiety)

b. L2 learners' need to be provided with

- a variety of clearly identified tasks which are perceived by the learner as important
- regular and suitable feedback.

c. the provision of L2 learners with work that will have some beneficial outcome - "students must believe that doing the specified task will produce positive results and that these results are personally valuable" (ibid: 18).

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[4] Interestingly, Roberts points to the implications findings from studies like hers could have for educational policy. 80% of students named *a better understanding of cultural diversity*, both globally and within the U.S., as the most significant reason for engaging in L2 learning; only 48% cited business considerations. However, since the measurement of *results* in education is regarded as increasingly important and since proficiency guidelines introduced in the U.S. in 1986 eliminated cultural knowledge and understanding as a measurement for proficiency, course planners might find it difficult to convince policymakers of the need to retain foreign languages on the university curriculum against a background of studies such as the one conducted by Roberts (ibid: 281).

This last point is also emphasised by *instrumentality theories*. These explore the relationship between the effort an individual is prepared to make and the reward he/she expects for having made that effort. According to these theories, an individual will only engage in a task if the experience or outcome is likely to be judged as personally meaningful or satisfying (cf. Atkinson's *Expectancy-Value Theory*, quoted by Oxford and Shearin, 1994). Mastering the task at hand must be viewed as both important and as within one's power. Oxford and Shearin also provide the most salient findings from motivational research by industrial psychologists Locke et al. (1981). Their years of investigation have revealed that goal-setting plays a crucial role in individuals' evaluation of achievement and their subsequent perseverance or disillusionment. Locke et al. found that clearly identified, challenging goals yield higher performances than easy or vague goals. According to the authors, high achievers are associated with the setting of clear, challenging but realistic goals, while low achievers tend to set unrealistic goals for themselves: they either purport to strive for something they know they will not be able to achieve, so that subsequent failure becomes tolerable or they set themselves goals that are so low that failure is impossible. Locke et al. also state that the individual's commitment to pursuing an assigned (i.e. externally set) goal is as firm as the commitment to a goal set by the individual him/herself - provided the goal is accepted as meaningful and valuable. The researchers reiterate the importance of feedback as stressed in general psychology theories.

In their work on motivation and satisfaction in the workplace, Locke and Latham (1990) - apart from confirming certain aspects already emphasised by other branches of psychology - also explore the concept of *self-efficacy* (i.e. a learner's sense of control over the learning situation). According to Oxford and Shearin the implication of their findings for L2 learning is that "L2 learners with established goals and a sense of self-efficacy will focus on learning tasks, persist at them, and develop strategies to complete tasks successfully so they can meet their goals. [...] L2 learners must believe that they have some control over the outcomes (failure or success) because of their performance; they must feel a sense of effectiveness within themselves so that they will want to continue learning the target language" (ibid: 21). These findings are, of course, very similar to those by Crookes and Schmidt who have pointed out the importance of attention, persistence and active learner engagement in the L2 learning process.

Regarding Locke and Latham's theory on the issue of feedback and rewards, Oxford and Shearin point out the important part that teachers can play by making sure that their rewards are fair and by helping students to develop a "self-reward" system, "a long-neglected area of research in L2 learning " (ibid: 22). In their feedback, teachers should encourage students to adopt the view that the achievement of goals is within the individual's own power. They should assure learners that a sustained high level of effort will lead to success which learners can then attribute to their own hard work.

Oxford and Shearin also briefly discuss *reinforcement theories* which view behaviour as a sequence of *stimulus*, *response* and *reward*. These theories have come under heavy criticism with the decline of behaviourism. The authors point out that while L2 teachers obviously can provide students with extrinsic rewards (by praising them), "intrinsic rewards - those that come from within the student or from the language task itself - are often more powerful" (ibid: 20).

Finally, Oxford and Shearin briefly discuss the implications for L2 learning from research in cognitive developmental theory. Research quoted in this context is primarily associated with work by Piaget and Vygotsky. According to Piaget (1955 and 1979), motivation necessitates above all an environment that is rich in stimulation. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that teachers wishing to motivate their students need to base their teaching on learners' needs and interests and to provide both relevant and demanding input. Teachers must supply learners with the kind of assistance that allows the latter to proceed from their *current* level of development to the level they could *potentially* reach. He refers to the distance between the two as the "Zone of Proximal Development". According to this model, assistance is progressively scaled down until the learner reaches the stage of internalised and automatic command of the L2.

In his review of research on motivation in SLA, R. Ellis (1994a) echoes Crookes and Schmidt's as well as Oxford and Shearin's criticism of the dominance of the integrative-instrumental paradigm[5]. He points out that little research has so far been carried out on the aspect of *intrinsic* motivation in L2 learning.

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[5] In his motivational construct, Dörnyei (1990) establishes the clear need to establish more context-specific *subcategories* of the traditional integrative/instrumental paradigm. His paradigm also includes two further motivational factors, *need for achievement* and *attribution about past failures* (ibid: 69).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are concepts which have been extensively researched in cognitive developmental psychology (cf. Deci and Ryan 1985 and 1992, Ryan et al., 1992, Csikszentmihalyi, 1975 and 1993; Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1993). In its most general definition, *extrinsic* motivation is directed towards the achievement of standards and goals set by somebody other than the individual. Extrinsically motivated people "behave *in order to* attain some external award" (Ryan et al., 1992: 170, italics in original). The relationship between this type of motivation and instruction will be considered in Section 2.1.1.3.

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is characterised by an innate, active interest in a task and the desire to be competent, effective and autonomous. According to Deci and Ryan, the aforementioned characteristics are common to all humans (1992: 10)[6]. Pittman and Boggiano state that intrinsic motivation results in "a feeling of self-determination, the experience of competence, and enhanced quality of learning as indexed by conceptual reasoning, creativity, and achievement" (1992: 4). According to Deci and Ryan (1992), individuals assess the quality of their self-determination according to the choice, rewards and evaluations ascribed to them by the outside world. The enhancement of competence is seen to be determined by two factors, optimal challenges (to be examined in more detail below) and positive feedback. In their *cognitive evaluation theory*, Deci and Ryan identify three types of 'inputs' (i.e. challenges, feedback, choices, rewards and evaluations) which result in very different motivational processes:

1. *Informational* inputs are those which are perceived as confirming the individual's autonomy and sense of competence. These inputs have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation.

2. *Controlling* inputs are seen as externally imposed pressures. While these usually lead to a decrease in intrinsic motivation, they may enhance extrinsic motivation. However, inputs perceived this way have been shown to affect performance negatively (cf. contributions in Boggiano and Pittman, 1992).

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[6] While there is little doubt that all language learners would like to feel competent and effective, the claim that all learners also want to be active and autonomous must be challenged, at least in an Irish educational context. Experiences with first year DCU students have shown that many are neither particularly active learners (the school system does not require active learner involvement) nor do they wish to be self-regulated, being too accustomed to 'spoon-feeding'. Few practitioners at either second or third level would, however, dispute the desirability of encouraging students to develop both these attributes.

3. *Amotivating* inputs are those which are seen as "promoting or signifying incompetence" (Deci and Ryan, 1992: 23). They have a deleterious effect on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Thus, Deci and Ryan argue, if intrinsic motivation is not to be undermined in an institutional setting, educators must ensure that their 'inputs' are perceived by students as neither controlling nor amotivating, but as informational (cf. also Van Lier, 1996 on the same issue). Deci and Ryan point to research findings which have shown that engagement in intrinsically interesting activities is "associated with greater conceptual learning, more creativity, increased cognitive flexibility, a more positive emotional tone, and higher self-esteem than [...] externally controlled activity" (Deci and Ryan, 1992: 32). Intrinsic motivation would thus appear to result in the achievement of wider educational goals as well as yielding self-rewarding qualities for an individual's personal development. Extrinsically oriented individuals, on the other hand, "would take an *expediency* approach to their schoolwork [...] attempting to expend the least amount of effort necessary to obtain the maximum gain" (Flink et al., 1992: 192, my italics). However, as will become evident in Section 2.1.1.3, extrinsic motivation must not be viewed as a monolithic concept but as a continuum ranging from exclusively externally guided to goal-assimilated behaviour. It is also important to remember that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are by no means mutually exclusive but can exist side by side and also alternate. With a change in conditions (such as sustained effort leading to improved knowledge and skill), activities initially undertaken for extrinsic reasons can over time also become intrinsically rewarding. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1993), "[a]ny activity can become intrinsically rewarding when a person begins to recognize opportunities for action in it, challenges that will stretch the ability to respond" (ibid: 73).

Intrinsic motivation is closely linked to the issue of optimal challenges, an aspect which has been extensively investigated by Csikszentmihalyi and his associates. Much of their work has centred on the 'flow experience' which materialises when people are completely immersed in an activity that causes them to perform at the optimal point of their potential. Individuals thus absorbed become oblivious to feelings of fatigue, to time and anything other than the activity itself; they concentrate exclusively on the present - the past or future is of no concern to them. No outside pressure is needed to

urge people to engage in the activity - they undertake it out of their own accord and find the activity so enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding that they want to repeat it again and again. Two crucial prerequisites for a 'flow experience' are, firstly, the identification of clear goals coupled with immediate performance feedback and secondly, a high level of both challenge and ability (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1993). These findings thus corroborate evidence from the workplace as presented by Locke and Latham (1990) above. While 'flow' is not always the most desirable experience for individuals under pressure to perform in an academic context[7], it is nonetheless believed to be personally the most enriching one because it makes people realise "that one is growing in complexity as a result of matching one's skills to difficult challenges" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1993: 73).

It would appear from the discussion above that the concept of <u>achievement</u> which has repeatedly been mentioned as an important motivational factor, be it as a resultative or causal element, is in need of a much clearer definition than has been offered in the literature so far. Different learners with different needs, backgrounds, self-perceptions, levels of aptitude and motivations will inevitably hold very diverse concepts of the notion of achievement or success. Ryan et al. (1992) therefore criticise that the traditional definition of achievement as performance measured against absolute standards is too limited, claiming that "the content of achievement [...] is relative vis-a-vis one's *values* [...] and one's *capacities*" (ibid: 169, my italics). There are clearly a number of ways of assessing achievement and success, including an *objective* evaluation (= the achievement of a particular result in a test, A, B, C; H1, H 2.1, H 2.2 etc.) a *subjective* evaluation (= success as measured against perceived ability and/or effort expended), as well as an evaluation of the achievement of *wider educational goals*, as reported in Deci and Ryan (1992).

Ushioda (1993), while acknowledging the important connection between success and motivation, questions the widely held view that the former should be considered as the *most valued* effect of motivation. According to her, motivation can have many other

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[7] As Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1993) point out, there are circumstances under which, for instance, *boredom* is seen as preferable to *flow*. For instance, in anxiety producing activities such as preparing for an exam, an excess of skill over challenge is not necessarily perceived as negative. However, "flow is rewarding because it offers the most complete expression of one's potential - a personal peak performance" (ibid: 73).

beneficial effects apart from the successful attainment of specific goals, e.g. "persistence, classroom participation, productivity, attentiveness, enthusiasm, high input generation, high amount of L2 use, etc., which might equally be considered significant outcomes in themselves, or at least crucial to the process and progress of L2 development" (ibid: 3).

Van Lier (1996) makes the point we are only ever able to consider *measurable* achievement, such as test performance etc., adding "[i]t is quite possible that the deepest, most satisfying aspects of achievement, and the most profound effects of education, both in positive and negative terms, are entirely unmeasurable. For example, how does one measure a happy memory, or a dreadful one? What if we held educators accountable for the quality of the memories they gave their students, rather than for averages on national tests?" (ibid: 120).

Anecdotal evidence from observing students' behaviour at DCU would suggest that success can also have a negative effect on effort: students who have scored high test results are not necessarily inclined to increase or even keep up their learning effort. Most students calculate very carefully just how much work they need to put into the preparation for each exam. If a previously good performance has already secured them the result they had hoped to achieve, they are more likely to focus on subjects where this is not the case or which they enjoy better. Thus motivation, manifesting itself in the degree of effort expended, is not always sustained by success, let alone increased.

2.1.1.1 Empirical Studies of Motivational Theories

After looking at issues regarding motivational theory-building, some of the actual studies conducted in the area of SLA and FLL which sought to establish the effect of different kinds of motivation will now be examined.

As was pointed out above, due to the major influence of Gardner's socio-psychological model, the overwhelming majority of research undertakings have, until recently, tended to focus on an examination of aspects associated with this model. More particularly, as Gardner and Tremblay (1994a) point out, the research has concentrated on the issue of integrative motivation while only one major study was dedicated to a specific investigation on instrumental motivation (ibid: 360). Gardner et al. themselves have produced a plethora of empirical studies (e.g. Gardner et al., 1975; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993a; Gardner and Tremblay, 1994b; Gardner et al., 1997), by and large supporting their theoretical constructs and the validity and reliability of their measurement instruments, the main one of which is known as the *Attitude/Motivation Test Battery*, or AMTB.

However, research findings, including those produced by researchers who have worked within the Gardnerian paradigm, have cast doubt on certain aspects of the framework, including the evaluation mechanisms. A 1983 study by Clement and Kruidenier failed to produce - surprisingly, according to the authors - a factor which corresponded clearly to Gardner's integrative orientation (1983: 286). Ely (1986) in his study of 75 university students of Spanish in California established *three* clusters of motivation. Two of these resembled, but were not identical with Gardner's and Lambert's integrative/instrumental paradigm. A third cluster ('learning the L2 as part of course requirements') could not be described in terms of the traditional framework. Many of Gardner et al.'s own studies appeared to confirm their hypothesis of superiority of integrative over instrumental motivation by showing a strong link between *integrative* motivation and L2 achievement and a less strong effect of *instrumental* motivation on L2 achievement (e.g. Lalonde and Gardner, 1985, quoted in Gardner, 1988; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991). Other researchers have challenged this superiority claim (cf. Crookes and Schmidt, 1991, quoting studies by Oller, 1981 and Au, 1988), as well as the claim regarding the causal relationship between it and L2 achievement. Summing up Gardner's and

Lambert's findings, Crookes and Schmidt state that their research has produced mixed results, "so the best that can be said is that different attitudes and goal orientations seem to be important, but in ways that vary from situation to situation" (1991: 478/9), a view fully shared by Kasper (1995).

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993b) concede that their "old characterisation of motivation in terms of integrative vs. instrumental orientations is too [...] restricted. Many studies [...] have shown that achievement in a second language is facilitated by instrumental orientations [...] as well as integrative orientations and attitudes [...] or other motivational attributes [...]" (ibid: 4). Gardner and Tremblay (1994b) deny that integrative motivation in the 1985 socio-educational model was ever viewed as "paramount" (1994b: 361).

Among those who have contradicted Gardner's earlier view that integrative motivation must be seen as the *cause* of success are Hermann (1980), Strong (1984) and McDonough (1986). Hermann (1980), in her survey of 750 pupils learning English at a German secondary school, observed that success or failure in learning the L2 correlated with subsequent positive and negative attitudes. In her *resultative* hypothesis, she postulates that success can thus also be the cause of motivation (not just vice-versa, as claimed by Gardner). Perhaps more significant, according to her, are findings suggesting "that low achievement in a foreign language coincides with prejudice or hostile attitudes regarding the speakers of that language" (ibid: 253). However, when evaluating the results of this study it should be remembered that English is a compulsory subject in German secondary schools and that neither intrinsic nor integrative motivation are prerequisites for the engagement with the language. It could thus be argued that if there is no element of choice in a learner's engagement with a given subject matter (including the learning of the L2 which will be perceived by the average learner the same way as subjects such as mathematics, chemistry or history), success and failure will inevitably have a crucial effect on motivation. Engagement with the L2 under these circumstances might only be perceived as meaningful if it bears positive results. On the other hand, self-selecting students who are intrinsically or integratively driven might derive something else out of that engagement, even if their efforts do not always lead to the aspired achievement. Thus Strong (1984) concludes from his study of Spanish-speaking children in an American classroom that "integrative

attitudes *follow* second language acquisition skills rather than *promoting* them" (ibid: 1, my italics). Here, increasing communicative success is seen to have a positive effect on the learner's attitudes towards the target community in which he or she lives, and thus becomes instantaneously and tangibly rewarding. Skehan (1989) has criticised both studies on a number of points (ibid: 66). He concludes that the causal interpretation of motivation has been supported more convincingly by research findings than the resultative hypothesis. Gardner, meanwhile, has abandoned his earlier postulate that motivation can only ever be the cause of success (not vice-versa). Both Gardner (1988: 113-117) and Gardner and MacIntyre (1993b) acknowledge that motivation interacts with learning experiences and outcomes in a dynamic manner that allows for reciprocity. But even this concession is not considered to be particularly helpful by Ushioda (1996) since a dynamic concept merely accounts for fluctuations caused in the interaction of variables (depending on experiences and achievements, motivation increases and decreases) when the real issue should be to consider what concrete mediatory steps can be taken to create a more positive learning situation.

The biggest project into advanced L2 learning ever conducted, and examining, among many other factors, the role of motivation is the 'European Language Proficiency Survey', a joint project between the universities of Bochum, Duisburg and Portsmouth (cf. Coleman, 1995 a and b, 1996 a and b). The survey which was conducted between 1993 and 1995, involved approximately 25,000 university students studying French, German, Spanish, Russian or English as part of a degree in modern languages or as a course option on another degree course. Most students were enrolled in British universities but the study also included students from Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal, France and Ireland. The final results for university students in the British Isles (i.e. including Ireland) revealed that students were driven by a mixture of integrative, intrinsic and instrumental motivation (cf. Singleton and Singleton, 1992, for similar results in their investigation of a group of Irish university students). Top of the list were *career considerations*, followed by *liking of the target language*. Then came *desire to travel* and *interest in the target language culture*, followed by *desire to live in the target language country* and by *motivation resulting from prior L2 learning success* (Coleman, 1996b: 91). Coleman does not provide a full analysis of the European data as it was not complete at the time of writing. The pilot study, however, showed that there are

significant differences between individual languages. For instance, as many as 90% of German students of French claimed they were doing so primarily out of enjoyment of the target language. On the other hand, a group of Austrian business students clearly stated that career considerations were their principal reason for studying English (Coleman, 1995a). However, the vast majority of students named both career considerations and a liking of the L2 as their reasons for studying a particular language. Another finding of the study showed that in certain student groups success in learning the L2 as a motivating force was mentioned by as few as 20% of respondents (ibid: 11). Further observations with regard to this study will be made in Section 2.1.1.3.

2.1.1.2 Motivational Frameworks of Particular Relevance for Practitioners in the Area of Foreign Language Pedagogy

As was pointed out in Section 2.1.1, much of the research conducted into motivation has not specifically focused on the FLL context and its practical implications. The two frameworks presented in this section were designed with just that context in mind and are specifically geared towards practitioners in the area of FLL.

Dörnyei (1994) proposes a motivational framework consisting of three levels, a *language* level, a *learner* level and a *learning situation* level. The *language* level is the most general level and encompasses both integrative and instrumental elements[8]. The two crucial components influencing motivation at the *learner* level are the need for achievement and self-confidence. Finally, the *learning situation* level consists of three components which Dörnyei identifies as course-specific, teacher-specific and group-specific. Course-specific motivation depends on interest, relevance, expectancy and satisfaction (cf. also Crookes and Schmidt, 1991), teacher-specific motivation is determined by the individual student-teacher rapport (affinities), and group-specific motivation includes norm and goal orientation, evaluation and group cohesion (Dörnyei, 1994: 279/280). Dörnyei's theoretical construct is followed by an extensive and detailed list of practical strategies for each level which the author suggests teachers might consider in their attempt to foster learner motivation (ibid: 280-282).

Before turning to the second FLL motivational model under investigation in this section, it should be briefly noted that calls for new directions in motivational framework construction did not go unchallenged by Gardner et al.. Gardner and Tremblay (1994a) replied to some of the criticism levelled at their research tradition, by rejecting firstly the notion that their work has stifled other research efforts (a rejection fully supported by Oxford who in her subsequent contribution points out that Gardner could not possibly be held responsible for other researchers' lack of initiative (1994: 512)). Gardner and Tremblay also defend themselves against criticism of their work as being of little practical value by pointing out that their chief interest "has been to understand individual differences in the motivation to learn a second language, not to

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[8] Unlike Gardner, Dörnyei's definition of 'integrative' motivation specifically includes a general interest in foreign languages.

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proselytize on ways to teach or even learn languages" (1994a: 359). It should be pointed out that, far from claiming that their findings are the definitive answer to every teacher's prayers, both Crookes/Schmidt (1991) and Oxford/Shearin (1994) stress the need for further research. Dörnyei (1994) explicitly emphasises that the strategies he presents "are not rock-solid golden rules, but rather suggestions that may work with one teacher or group better than another and that might work today but not tomorrow as they lose their novelty" (ibid: 280).

In her proposition of a cognitive framework of language learning motivation, Ushioda (1996) also explores the practical implications of motivational constructs for L2 learning processes and outcomes. Like Crookes/Schmidt and Oxford/Shearin, she draws on findings from psychology and educational research. She subscribes to a concept of motivation that plays an "active, functional and dynamic role throughout the learning process" (ibid: 11). Taking as the focus of her deliberations the ultimate goal of learner autonomy in an institutionalised setting, Ushioda outlines an agenda for teachers wishing to help students to develop the intrinsic motivation and self-motivation they require in order to engage actively and independently in the language learning process. While, according to Ushioda, the kind of motivation crucial to autonomous learning can only come from within the students themselves, she points out that teachers can make certain contributions to a student's subjective involvement in learning the target language. According to Ushioda, knowing about student thought processes and not just measuring outward manifestations of motivation, such as time and effort expended on a particular task, is of vital importance. Drawing on work by Ames (1986), who points out that students have different motivational agendas and evaluate learning goals differently, she stresses that students must be shown how to reflect on learning experiences effectively in order to develop sustained *self-motivation*, defined as "effective self-management" (1996: 40). The question Ushioda then addresses is how learning experiences can be mediated so that they will be sustained (in the case of positive experiences) or successfully altered (in the case of negative experiences). Here Ushioda refers to attributional theories which explore beliefs held by individuals regarding causes of failure and achievement. In an educational context, all hypotheses learners construct with regard to the underlying reasons for their positive and negative experiences have obvious potential repercussions on future learner behaviour. If, for

instance, learners believe that an unsatisfactory performance was the result of their own lack of ability or inaptitude (both of which are regarded in attributional theory as 'stable' factors), they are unlikely to be particularly motivated for future learning because they feel that they have no control over the situation. If, on the other hand, the performance can be attributed to 'unstable' factors such as lack of effort, distraction, the use of unsuitable learning strategies, luck etc., the learner can still believe that it is within his/her power to do better the next time round. Teachers can encourage learners to adopt a view of their own capabilities that avoids a negative self-perception of themselves as 'not being any good at languages'.

Ushioda confirms findings reported in Oxford and Shearin regarding the importance of working towards clearly identified goals. The setting of short-term subgoals (leading towards the overall long-term target) is seen as essential if the learning effort is to be sustained on a day-to-day basis. On the issue of feedback, Ushioda stresses that both positive and negative feedback must be very precise in order to support students' self-perception and self-direction.

However, the crucial prerequisite for all successful learning, according to Ushioda, is *intrinsic motivation* (cf. Deci and Ryan, 1992, and Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1993). As was stated above, intrinsic motivation in its broadest sense is an interest in the learning task that emanates from within the language learner. Without it, there will in all probability be no sustained learning, autonomous or otherwise. According to Ushioda, even the most highly instrumentally motivated students, i.e. those with very clear goal orientation, need to be motivated intrinsically if their learning efforts are to be sustained on a day-to-day basis. The other essential component of independent learning, *self-motivation* can only be activated fully if the learner is already intrinsically motivated. If the classroom adopts the learner's motivational agenda, it can contribute to intrinsic motivation by providing the stimulus for the individual learner's active and independent involvement in and organisation of the learning process. The teacher can assist learners in the development of self-motivation, for instance, by suggesting and discussing the most appropriate learning strategies, by helping with the definition of short-term and long-term goals etc. According to Ushioda, "self-motivation entails taking personal control of the affective conditions and experiences that shape one's subjective involvement in learning" (ibid: 54). Therefore, "learners need to filter [their

language learning] experience in terms of its positive and negative elements, through patterns of rationalization, selective attributions and appropriate belief structures" (ibid: 55). Teachers can assist learners by tapping into the learners' motivational agendas, adopting fair evaluation systems, giving meaningful feedback, by encouraging positive self-perceptions and fostering constructive and effective self-reflection. While acknowledging that learners ultimately have "to take responsibility for managing affective learning experience and put themselves in control of their motivation, and thereby of their learning" (ibid: 63), Ushioda also points out that "[t]heir capacity for self-motivation and motivational autonomy [...] will depend on the extent to which [teachers] ensure that they become subjectively involved in language learning and language use" (ibid: 63/64).

Ushioda's framework thus stresses the responsibilities of both learners and teachers with regard to the development of learner motivation. The role of both will also be examined in more detail in the following section.

2.1.1.3 The Relationship between Extrinsic Motivation, Classroom Instruction and External Evaluation

As was pointed out in Section 2.1.1, the setting of goals and a belief in the merits of pursuing those goals are believed to be of crucial importance for the generation and sustained presence of motivation. As regards the former (i.e. the setting of goals), it was also pointed out that externally set goals are likely to be pursued with the same level of commitment as internal ones, provided the individual is convinced of their beneficial value to his/her own development. Applied to an educational context, this would suggest the possibility that extrinsically motivated learners may at least enjoy the same <u>degree</u> of driving power as intrinsically motivated students, although they may be lacking the 'beneficial side effects' which the latter type of motivation would appear to carry with it (cf. Deci and Ryan, 1992). If this premise is accepted, the question to be decided is then just what it is that makes individuals accept externally assigned goals. In other words, what makes students pay attention to and persist at tasks that are of no inherent interest to them because they are not perceived as intrinsically rewarding? According to Ryan et al.'s research into child psychology, teachers, in their attempt to create favourable learning conditions, must try and answer these questions by gaining what they call an "inner perspective" of learning (Ryan et al., 1992: 167; Ushioda, 1996 also stresses this point). Intrinsic motivation which derives from of the individual's own interests, is not necessarily the prime consideration in institutional settings. As Ryan et al. observe "[...] schools often serve the function of teaching not only *what interests the child* but also what is felt to be *in the child's interest*" (ibid: 174, italics in original). If children are to pay attention to and acquire information that is not of intrinsic interest to them, some extrinsic incentive is required. This incentive can be perceived by children in various ways. At the two ends of a continuum of extrinsic motivation are, on the one hand, the (reluctant) adherence to external regulation and, on the other, the identification with and integration of external values and rules. If a child's school-related task involvement is "externally regulated" (ibid: 175), i.e. if it is directed exclusively towards the fulfilment of requirements set by figures of authority such as teachers and parents, it has been shown to have negative implications for both the child's personal and academic development. Academically, studies have reported poor performance and learning

difficulties. If, on the other hand, children identify with a given task and regard it as personally meaningful and valuable they are likely to gain considerably through the experience. They are willing to take responsibility for their own learning and experience greater autonomy and self-esteem, both of which are, it will be remembered, considered to be crucial components of intrinsic motivation. The identification of conditions determining how children can accept externally set goals to the extent where they internalise them by integrating them into their own value system is therefore of major significance. Ryan et al. report that, apart from the opportunity for self-determination (discussed in Section 2.1.1), two other factors need to be in place for this to happen. Firstly, the individual must experience a positive personal involvement or "relatedness" (ibid: 181) with those setting external goals (a point also stressed by Multhaup, 1997). Secondly, an environment or structure must be provided where the meaning of and rationale behind the established goals are explained (cf. also Nunan, 1995). Teachers must demonstrate that course aims can meet the psychological need for optimal challenges as discussed above. These conditions need to be met if the classroom experience is to heighten a learner's extrinsic motivation. To sum up, recognising the importance of the classroom objectives is thus a crucial step towards a committed learning approach. If this recognition leads to subsequent task focusing and persistence, some very significant hurdles on the way to successful instruction will have been overcome (cf. Crookes and Schmidt, 1991).

Although, on the surface, the subjects investigated by Ryan et al. would appear to differ significantly from the target group under examination in this thesis - university students are supposedly self-selecting and therefore widely assumed to be sufficiently motivated - there are nonetheless parallels which make a comparison of the respective learning situations permissible. Firstly, as will be shown in Chapter Five below, there is in fact a minority of students who are enrolled in their specific degree courses 'against their will' or who can at best be described as 'non-committal'. Secondly, even those who are highly motivated to learn a foreign language do not always show the same enthusiasm when it comes to dealing with the grammatical aspects of the learning task. Thus, similar to the teaching of children who do not have a say in what they are exposed to at school, it may require some effort on the part of the lecturer to convince these students of the beneficial effects of 'knowing their grammar'.

One aspect which is stressed by both Ryan et al. (1992) and previously by Van Lier (cf. Van Lier, 1996) is the role of teacher attributes. Rösler (1992 and 1994) also points out that a teacher's personality, expertise and commitment are crucially important factors as regards sustaining learner motivation. A study carried out by this author at DCU in 1994/5 revealed that one of the most decisive factors in *student* motivation was, in fact, *lecturer* motivation: lecturers who came across as being genuinely interested in the learning situation as well as in their students' ideas, aspirations, progress and success were reported to have a significantly positive effect on student motivation (study presented at SALIS Research Seminar, Simon, 1995).

The effect of classroom instruction on learner motivation has also been investigated by Dörnyei (1997) who insists that one of the most effective tools for L2 learning is *cooperative learning* (CL). Classroom CL is characterised by three features: students work mostly in small groups, group members must make sure that every person in the group has achieved the set goal and finally, reward and evaluation of the entire group are considered more important than those of individual group members. According to Dörnyei, CL is "superior to most traditional forms of instruction in terms of producing learning gains and student achievement, higher-order thinking, positive attitudes toward learning, increased motivation, better teacher-student and student-student relationships accompanied by more developed interpersonal skills and higher self-esteem on the part of the students" (ibid: 482). As Van Lier (1996) points out, not all researchers agree with this appraisal of CL.

Zimmermann (1995) has investigated the issue of attitudes with specific regard to L2 grammar learning. Quoting findings from social psychology, he distinguishes between three types of attitudes, two of which, affective and cognitive attitudes, are of special interest to the grammar acquisition issue. Zimmermann points out that many students' attitude towards grammar learning is inconsistent, as they display simultaneously a negative *affective* and a positive *cognitive* attitude. Thus a student might well admit that he/she dislikes grammar, while at the same time acknowledging the necessity of having a sound grammatical knowledge. Since the existence of these conflicting attitudes is undesirable and likely to damage learner motivation in the long run, efforts must be made to create a balance. While recognising the difficulty as regards attempts to change negative attitudes (especially *affective* negative attitudes), Zimmermann is convinced

that a change can nonetheless be brought about through successful teaching. He identifies three common problems learners of any language are likely to encounter in grammar classes: they do not understand the grammar explanations, they perceive the content as too abstract, theoretical and meaningless, and they cannot fulfil their potential for active, creative and challenging involvement in the class. According to Zimmermann, teachers can counteract these problems in two ways. Firstly, in order to discover their students' underlying learning difficulties, to draw conclusions for future learning processes and in order to help students build up the strategic, procedural knowledge necessary for independent and self-regulated grammar learning, they must make learner questions an instrumental part of the grammar learning experience in the classroom. Zimmermann states that "Fragereaktionen der Lernenden sollten nicht nur zugelassen, sondern als dezidierte Erwartungen an die Lernenden in den Unterricht integriert werden, als [...] wichtiger Hinweis für die Entwicklung effizienterer Lern- und Lehrmethoden. Die Möglichkeit, solche Fragen zu stellen, kann [...] dazu beitragen, daß sich Änderungen in der Einstellung zum Grammatikunterricht vollziehen" (ibid: 193). Referring to findings by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1992), Zimmermann also points to the importance of taking into account learners' individual cognitive styles by adopting a range of teaching methods: obviously, not all teaching methods will suit all learners, but all will hopefully match *some* learners' styles.

That classroom instruction can have a beneficial effect on motivation has been resoundingly confirmed in Coleman's project (cf. Section 2.1.1.2 above). According to Coleman, *classroom motivation* (which forms a distinctive motivational cluster alongside instrumental, integrative motivation etc.) consists of both previous L2 achievement and the enjoyment of learning the L2 in the particular classroom context (1996b). As regards the relationship between various types of motivation and proficiency, as measured in a C-test, Coleman's survey reveals that both classroom motivation and 'integrative' motivation were linked to above-average achievement, while instrumental motivation was linked to below-average test performance. The most successful students were motivated by both classroom learning (enjoyment coupled with success) and the desire for integrativeness. The survey revealed a slight change from instrumental to integrative motivation during university attendance, confirming Oxford

and Shearin's observation that motivation can change over time (cf. also Ridley and Ushioda, 1997, on the dynamic nature of motivation).

The motivational constructs underlying all the studies quoted in this research have been criticised by Paris and Turner (1994). The authors reject the categorisation of motivation according to degree and type of motivation identified in *individual people* or associated with *specific tasks*. This perspective, they claim, ignores the fact that (just like cognition) motivation is "situated" (ibid: 215) - it is not a fixed entity but will vary according to the "person by situation interaction" (ibid: 221). The authors state that neither specific tasks nor specific individuals can be analysed separately in motivational terms. Individuals are not motivated to the same degree in every single situation they encounter. Rather, motivation increases or decreases with each task on hand and even the same tasks are not always approached with the same motivation. However, the authors have identified certain characteristics as generally conducive to promoting classroom learning: research findings have shown that engaging students in classroom activities characterised by "students' choice, challenge, control and collaboration" (ibid: 217), i.e. the four characteristics of what they term "situated motivation", is likely to have a positive effect on learner motivation (as well as on their use of learning strategies).

As has been repeatedly pointed out, learner motivation is closely linked to the identification of optimal challenges. Just what the perfect match of personal skills and identified challenge is, obviously varies from person to person. If a person perceives his/her ability to exceed the challenge on hand, the result is likely to be boredom. Conversely, if the individual's skill level is perceived to be lower than the level of challenge, the result is anxiety (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Ehrman (1996, chapter 7) offers some practical advice to foreign language teachers who are faced with learner anxiety, as do contributors in Horwitz and Young, 1991. Many of Ehrman's case studies bear testimony to the commonly accepted view that the learning of the L2 grammar is a source of grave anxiety to many students. Oxford and Shearin (1994) point out that one way in which teachers can help students overcome anxiety is by setting up peer support structures. Anxiety can, of course, have a facilitating as well as a debilitating effect on learning (cf. Scovel, 1991). While debilitating anxiety needs to be avoided, an excessively relaxed attitude towards the learning task (as the opposite affective extreme)

is not conducive to high achievement either. Many teachers would therefore consider a certain degree of task 'nervousness', as manifest in the resolution to tackle in a determined manner the matter on hand, as quite a desirable learner trait.

In an institutionalised setting, educators are faced with a dual task. On the one hand, they must urge and help individuals to explore and exploit their personal maximum potential. The pursuit of this goal might however be crucially compromised by the concurrent task of having to work towards the achievement of set course standards. Thus goals and challenges which have been identified by individuals as personally meaningful can be quite different from those identified for any core classroom programme which by its very definition can never satisfy *all* individual learner needs but should seek to satisfy as many as possible.

Finally, just as the acceptance of externally set goals crucially hinges on their perceived personal usefulness by the learner, the acceptance of external evaluations and examinations depends on their perceived meaningfulness in terms of achievement. While acknowledging that research findings which suggest a negative effect of 'controlling' evaluation on learner motivation present educational establishments with considerable difficulty, Deci and Ryan (1992) fail to make practical recommendations as to how evaluation could possibly be made less controlling. Educational psychologists Ames and Archer (1988, quoted in Oxford and Shearin, 1994) are more helpful in this respect when they postulate that teachers must use *absolute* evaluation criteria in the assessment of student work. According to Ames and Archer, student competence and performance should only ever be measured in terms of the attainment of set objectives, and not against fellow students' performances. Ames (1992) reports that students who compare their performance principally with that of their peers avoid challenging tasks and attribute failure to their own lack of ability (ibid: 263). Students must learn to assess their results and progress relative to preset objectives, if they are to receive a sense of personal achievement (cf. also Ushioda, 1996, and McNamara and Deane, 1995).

Thus, just as students can accept or reject externally set goals (and therefore the entire learning programme content), they can accept or reject external evaluation. They are more likely to accept external evaluation if the course objectives and criteria for evaluation are clear and transparent and if they are perceived as fair (Oxford and Shearin

1994). The acceptance of external evaluation procedures thus presupposes an acceptance of the underlying rationale of a particular instructional focus, such as the insistence on e.g. morphosyntactic correctness. If students fail to accept this rationale, their motivation to engage with the targeted features will be lowered and they are unlikely to accept the criteria set up for the evaluation of these features. Unless students are convinced of the validity and the potential benefits of the institution's chosen approach to both teaching and evaluating, they are likely to remain detached from classroom events.

2.1.2 Conclusions

Motivation is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon which can, as this section has shown, be fuelled from different sources. As was pointed out by a number of researchers, Gardner's paradigm, by emphasising over a long time the dominance of integrativeness, has proved to be of little immediate relevance to those trying to explain motivational forces driving foreign language learners (as opposed to second language learners). The fact was ignored that, as a rule, foreign language learners do not study the L2 first and foremost with a view to living in or assimilating with the target language community. Indeed few learners setting out to learn a foreign language will have a sufficiently clear picture of the target language culture to nurture ambitions of this kind. The overwhelming importance attributed to integrative motivation certainly seems unlikely to serve as an explanation for the motivational forces predominantly responsible for driving Irish students to learn German. They are more likely to be influenced by intrinsic, instrumental or resultative motivation or a combination thereof (cf. McDonough, 1986, for similar observations in Britain)[9].

In view of the widely acknowledged positive effects of intrinsic motivation, there can be little doubt but that educators would ideally like their students to be driven by this particular motivational force: intrinsic motivation makes individuals experience learning in a manner which is personally enriching and academically satisfying by helping to sustain the effort and persistence needed for high achievement as well as leading to greater self-esteem and confidence. However, in the less ideal environment of institutionalised L2 learning with a high degree of what Deci and Ryan call "controlling input" (1992: 23)[10], and with considerable emphasis on the attainment of externally set

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[9] As has been pointed out by a number of practitioners and researchers (cf. for example, Rogers, 1996), one of the most undisputed beneficial effects of the communicative approach has been the increase in intrinsic motivation it has induced. However, while the increase in intrinsic motivation brought about by the communicative approach is undoubtedly a most welcome development, it should not be forgotten that this motivation can easily dwindle when students discover that they are unable to use even the most basic target language structures correctly, thus being constantly forced to revise their interlanguage systems.

[10] As regards the widespread use in institutionalised learning of "controlling input" which is perceived as having a negative impact of intrinsic motivation, two points need to be made. Firstly, as Deci and Ryan (1992) admit themselves, while learners' intrinsic motivation might decrease in view of input which they perceive as controlling, their extrinsic motivation might increase (including goal internalisation). Secondly, students studying a language in a formal setting experience controlling input throughout their academic lives - nevertheless, many develop an inherent interest in learning the L2.

goals and standards as measured in results, students' diverse interests are not of sole concern. Although they can and should be taken into account, in particular with regard to foreign language learning with its multiple opportunities for engaging in the subject matter, there will more than likely be aspects which students will resist involving themselves in voluntarily. Grammar learning is widely regarded as being among those aspects. Of course, every conceivable effort must be undertaken in order to foster an inherently interesting learning environment at all times. At the same time, as regards the acquisition of L2 grammar the more modest aim of helping students to identify with the grammar learning task, i.e. to internalise an externally set objective which they discover as being of *relevance*, if not necessarily of *interest,* to their language learning experience and progress, might stand a better chance of more immediate success. As Ehrman (1996) puts it, by far the biggest concern facing a teacher with regard to motivation is not the identification of different motivational types but what to do "when there is not enough" (ibid: 141). As will be pointed out in Chapter Five below, even university students who are supposed to be self-selecting, are not necessarily driven by either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Matters such as learner internalisation of course objectives as well as an acceptance of the teaching styles used by the lecturers are thus much more pressing considerations for practitioners than the exact identification of various types of motivation.

A second point which has been criticised repeatedly with regard to Gardner's research is its failure to conduct research which might produce meaningful findings for teacher mediation in the learning process. If motivational constructs are to be relevant to teachers (and, by extension, to their students), they must account for the role they can play in the L2 learning process. A range of theories from various branches of psychology as well as from educational theory have been examined by a number of researchers and, to varying degrees, judged to carry significant relevance for foreign language pedagogy. It would appear that findings from goal setting, attributional and self-determination theories are of particular pertinence to the L2 process, both from a student's and a teacher's perspective. According to these theories, the L2 learning process and experience are likely to have a positive effect on learner motivation if they involve

1. active learner engagement in the L2 process (including the willingness to take risks and to take the initiative in identifying, planning and implementing personal learning tasks)

2.clearly stated classroom goals

3. a genuine acceptance (internalisation) of these goals on the part of the student - without this acceptance there will be no task attention or persistence

4. detailed and constructive feedback, aimed at enhancing the student's sense of effectiveness and competence

5. a fair and transparent criterion-referenced external evaluation system

6. the development of effective self-reflection mechanisms, setting in train constructive analytical processes, with a view to helping learners change or reinforce their language learning approach through the use of appropriate learning strategies

7. increased learner independence through gradual acceptance of responsibility for the learning process.

These points have obvious implications for both learners and teachers. While the ultimate responsibility for any L2 progress falls to the individual learner, teachers can assist learners in the process in a very significant manner. Classroom instruction has been shown to have a most beneficial effect on motivation in Coleman's study, while others (Crookes and Schmidt, Ushioda, Oxford and Shearin, Dörnyei, Ryan et al., Zimmermann) have outlined its enormous potential for the development of sustained learner motivation, provided certain considerations are taken into account.

Moving away from the issue of learner motivation, the next section examines the role of formal instruction on the L2 acquisition process.

2.2 Approaches to Instructed Language Learning

Introduction

As was stated in Chapter One, the aim of the current research is to establish how first year university students can best be facilitated in their transition between second and third level with regard to the acquisition of German grammar. As was also pointed out above, the methodological issue of how to approach grammar acquisition at university level is a divisive one. At two extreme ends of the spectrum are those who argue that post-Leaving Certificate students should be expected to work on whatever gaps and misconceptions they might hold independently, without direct teacher intervention, and those who would argue in favour of a specifically designed programme for this target group. One trap to be avoided in this context is the perceived need to choose between 'classroom-based learning' and 'autonomous learning' (cf. Rösler, 1998). While it is probably true to say that all third level institutions have learner autonomy as their ultimate educational *aim*, it would be wrong, as Little (1995) pointed out, to view autonomous learning as a *methodology*. As Little (1990) puts it, "[l]earner autonomy is essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning. We recognize it in a wide variety of behaviours as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (ibid: 7). In other words, autonomy is not determined by physical location, but denotes "geistige Unabhängigkeit" (Rösler, 1998: 4).

That guiding learners towards an increasingly autonomous learning behaviour might be a particularly arduous task in the case of Irish school-leavers will become obvious in the following chapters. While much of the hardship involved in the transition between second and third level learning cannot be altered, some of it can, and course designers must do their best to investigate in what way a situation can be avoided whereby students' perceive of university life as 'being out there on their own'.

As was pointed out previously, German course designers at DCU believed that the guidance and assistance required by the target group at the centre of this research, both in terms of content matter and learning approaches, could best be provided through classroom-based instruction which focuses on both the cognitive processes involved in

L2 grammar acquisition as well as on the development of the kind of metacognitive skills needed both inside and outside the classroom (not to mention for life after the university). Thus, rather than viewing classroom-based instruction and autonomy as two mutually exclusive concepts, the former was seen as a facilitative factor in gradually bringing about the latter.

But what evidence is there that instruction actually works, and if it works, which methodology is likely to yield the best results? Section 2.2.1 presents a number of second language acquisition theories which have examined the extent to which different instructional approaches can be regarded as being of benefit in the acquisition process. There will be no comparison of naturalistic learning environments and classroom-based ones since the former option does not present itself to the target group which forms the focus of this research (i.e. third level students of German in Ireland). Section 2.2.1.1 presents some empirical studies supporting a relationship between instruction based on skill-building theories, acquisition and performance accuracy. Since both linguistic and pedagogical grammars specifically designed for German as a Foreign Language will be discussed in Chapter Seven, there will no discussion of them in this chapter.

2.2.1 Classroom-Based Instruction and L2 Acquisition

Before examining in what way - if any - the second language classroom is held to affect the 'what' and the 'how' of acquisition, a few clarifications are in order. For the purposes of this research, 'formal instruction' will be understood to denote the treatment of target language structures under various guises, ranging from language awareness/consciousness raising activities to in-depth analysis/rule-based instruction. In other words, formal instruction will be used to denote the opposite of non-manipulated input. On another note of clarification, in the discussion of theories (although not in their presentation), *learning* and *acquisition* will be used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon; likewise, although these equations are by no means uncontroversial, *explicit* and *declarative* knowledge on the one hand and *implicit* and *procedural* knowledge on the other will be used synonymously, unless otherwise stated. Furthermore, no distinction will be drawn between the concepts of *language awareness* and *consciousness-raising* - both will be seen to serve as "advance organizers" (Terrell, 1991: 58), as 'Vorentlastung'[11].

Before discussing some theories regarding the effect of formal instruction on the second language (L2) acquisition process, there shall be a brief presentation of the debate surrounding the acquisition of a learner's first language (L1) and the two opposing views of L1 learning, the nativist view of language learning versus the constructivist/connectionist view. According to the former view of language learning, exemplified first and foremost in Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (UG)[12], all human beings come equipped with an innate *Language Acquisition Device* (LAD) and it is thanks to this language faculty (which Chomsky likens to a biological organ) that L1 acquisition takes place. The LAD, which contains principles common to all languages and parameters which differ from language to language, allows learners to generate grammar structures in their L1 that they may not have encountered in the input (cf. Chomsky, 1980). According to proponents of UG, the fact that L1 learners, as a rule,

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[11] Cf. Schmidt (1993) for a list of the diverse terminology used by individual researchers when discussing cognitive approaches to learning.
[12] For an introduction to UG cf. Cook and Newson (1996).

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manage to achieve perfect competence in their mother tongue, despite being exposed to input that is "finite, degenerate, and underdetermined" and despite receiving little negative evidence (Schachter, 1991a: 106), can only be explained if one is to assume that each individual comes equipped with this internal learning device. Constructivist and connectionist scientists, on the other hand, hold that language learning is environmentally driven, thus rejecting Chomsky's principle of innateness. Jean Piaget and his followers believe that language learning develops out of general cognitive growth. They hold "language to be all of a piece with acquisitions made at the level of sensorimotor intelligence" (Piaget, 1980: 164), i.e. at the stage when children discover symbolism in both language and other cognitive expression. Connectionists go one step further than constructivists by dispensing with the concept of *knowledge* altogether and emphasising *processing* as the crucial variable in all learning (Rumelhart and McClelland, 1986[13]; Bates and MacWhinney, 1989)[14]. While the concept of connectionism obviously plays a significant role in the overall acquisition debate, an in-depth analysis of this concept and its resulting learning models exceeds the scope of this project.

As regards L2 acquisition, followers of UG in L1 learning are divided on the issue of its availability to adult foreign language learners. Some argue that adults have the same access to UG as children (e.g. Krashen, 1987); others concede the possibility that adults' UG "may be somehow obstructed" (Felix, 1991: 97). In his Competition Model, Felix (1985) claims that while children have full access to a language-specific device, this device is no longer the only source of knowledge for adults. In adult language learning, the language-specific device constantly competes with a general problem-solving system, the result of which is diminished linguistic attainment. Other researchers

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[13] In their study, Rumelhart and McClelland sought to provide a counter-argument for the nativist claim that children acquire past tense regularisation in their L1 because of a built-in linguistic system. The authors present results from their computer simulations which led them to draw quite different conclusions. According to Rumelhart and McClelland, children manage to create new forms "because the past tenses of similar verbs they are learning show such a consistent pattern that the generalization from these similar verbs outweighs the relatively small amount of learning that has occurred on the irregular verb in question" (1986: 268).

[14] Karmiloff-Smith (1992) proposes a reconciliation between nativist and constructivist opponents. While subscribing to the concept of initial linguistic endowment, she stresses that "it is important not to equate innateness with presence at birth or with the notion of a static genetic blueprint for maturation. Whatever innate component we invoke, it becomes part of our biological potential *only through interaction with the environment*" (ibid: 10, my italics).

believe that UG is no longer available in any way. Clahsen and Muysken (1986) propose that learners must compensate for the *complete* lack of UG (as opposed to Felix's claim of a partial lack) by developing processing strategies or employing problem-solving procedures. Bley-Vroman (1988) reaches the conclusion that adult L2 learning is more akin to general adult skill acquisition than to L1 child acquisition, thus moving closer to a cognitive view of L2 learning. The debate would appear far from being settled (cf. Eubank, 1991 and Cook, 1994, for an extensive debate on this issue; cf. also Felix, 1995; Johnson, 1996 and White, 1996). The view that learning a second language cannot be equated with learning one's mother tongue is succinctly summed up by Sharwood Smith who observes that, for the average adolescent or adult foreign language learner, "[l]inguistic innocence is a thing of the past" (1996: 3).

What, if any, conclusions are to be drawn from the "UG or not UG" (Du Plessis et al., 1987) debate for foreign language instruction? As White (1991) points out, "UG is intended to explain the acquisition of linguistic *competence*, rather than *use* of language" (ibid: 187, my italics) whereas instruction is concerned with promoting both. Cook (1991) while stressing the enormous insights UG has to offer in terms of the acquisition of linguistic competence concedes that the concept is of little relevance to the foreign language teaching situation (a point echoed by Weydt, 1993). Rösler states that Chomsky's grammar theory "nicht nur in keiner der großen Beschreibungen des Deutschen [...] dominiert, sondern auch in der Grammatikdiskussion um DaF keine Rolle spielt" (1994: 54; cf. also Götze, 1996). While the issue of availability of UG to L2 learners is of obvious relevance to the overall acquisition debate, there will be no further discussion of this issue within the framework of this project.

Concepts which are of key importance in the debate regarding the effect of formal instruction are the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge (which will be discussed in connection with information-processing models below) and the explicit/implicit knowledge paradigm as well as their respective relationships. *Explicit* knowledge is widely agreed to be conscious knowledge about the target language rules. According to R. Ellis (1994a and b), *implicit* knowledge consists of two types, ready-made chunks (formulaic language) and rule-based knowledge which has been internalised. Unlike explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge is not conscious.

Two central issues with regard to formal instruction are

a. whether or not instruction has any effect on either of these two types of knowledge and if so, to what extent, and

b. whether or not there is any link between the two knowledge types, or, put differently, whether an interface exists between the two.

The theories which have been advanced with regard to either of these two issues range from regarding the development of explicit knowledge to be of extremely limited use to regarding it as crucial, with many researchers stressing the potential facilitative nature of instruction.

Although, as Spada and Lightbown (1993) have pointed out, form-focused instruction is on the whole far less disputed in acquisition-poor environments (i.e. where the foreign language is learnt outside the target language country/countries, such as is the case with the present student cohort) than it is in acquisition-rich areas, the basic controversy surrounding the issue of the nature of classroom input remains even there: at one end of the spectrum there are those who advocate that students should be exposed to authentic input without making salient target features encountered in the input explicit (cf. Krashen, 1987), while at the other end there are those who call for explicit, rule-based instruction, accompanied by practice and corrective feedback. Other approaches to instruction rest in between these two extremes.

Starting with theories which attribute a very limited role to grammar instruction, Stephen Krashen in his model of L2 learning puts forward five hypotheses, two of which will be briefly discussed in this context. In his *Monitor Hypothesis*, Krashen proposes that there is no interface between explicit and implicit knowledge, i.e. that "learnt" knowledge cannot become "acquired" knowledge (1987: 83). Nor does learnt knowledge help acquisition in other than a "trivial sense" (ibid: 84), i.e. other than allowing the learner to monitor his or her output. However, the learner is only able to monitor on three conditions: if there is sufficient time, if the learner is focused on form and if the form is known to the learner. According to Krashen's *Input Hypothesis* learners develop their linguistic competence by "understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond [their] current level of competence " (ibid: 21), or, put differently, by being exposed to "comprehensible input" (ibid: 22). Krashen sees the main function of the language classroom as supplying the learner with just that input. Since

instruction does not affect acquisition, the role of grammar teaching is reduced, firstly, to providing the learner with explicit knowledge (which, according to Krashen, can only ever be used as a monitor) and secondly, to supplying the learner with linguistic or metalinguistic knowledge in its own right (i.e. for purely academic purposes). Neither role is regarded by Krashen as essential.

Most aspects of Krashen's theory have come under heavy criticism from researchers both within the UG tradition and outside. In fact, as McLaughlin (1987) points out "Krashen-bashin" (ibid: 19) became a regular sport for quite some time. McLaughlin himself, while strongly criticising Krashen's theory on a number of accounts, also pays tribute to his "ingenuity and insightfulness" (ibid), as does N. Ellis (1994b) who acknowledges the research interest the theory has generated. The Input Hypothesis in particular has come under severe attack, with many researchers, including those in the UG tradition, rejecting the notion that input alone is sufficient to sensitise the L2 learner to grammar issues (cf. White, 1987 and 1996). Long (1996) sums up the findings by stating that, even though it is undoubtedly "*necessary* for [...] L2 acquisition, [...] there is abundant evidence that comprehensible input alone is *insufficient*, particularly with adults and if nativelike proficiency is the goal" (ibid: 423, italics in original; more about the input issue below). These contentions have, however, so far not been accepted by Krashen (cf. Krashen, 1994).

Hawkins and Towell (1996) add their voices to the criticism surrounding the Input Hypothesis by putting forward a strong case in favour of stressing explicit knowledge acquisition in the language classroom. They base their arguments on evidence from neurolinguistics and cognitive science which has shown that with the onset of the 'critical period', learners gradually lose the ability to assemble their knowledge about complex grammatical structures on the basis of mere exposure to target language features[15]. Drawing specifically on Fodor's construct of the architecture of mind (Fodor, 1983), Hawkins and Towell deduce that there are fundamental differences between the learning of the mother tongue and FLL due to the relative importance of central processing as opposed to the domain-specific 'language (grammar) module' in children and adults. The grammar module helps learners to construct grammatical

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[15] For a discussion of the controversy surrounding the concept and onset of the critical period cf. Long, 1990, Flynn and Manuel, 1991, and Bialystok, 1997.

representations automatically, "without conscious control [...] on the basis of exposure to samples of the language" (Hawkins and Towell, 1996: 202). Adolescent or adult foreign language learners are denied the same facilities as L1 learners because the 'grammar module' partly shuts down after the age of seven, thus becoming "physiologically incapable" of constructing all those grammatical representations they were able to construct effortlessly when learning their first language (ibid). Grammatical representations which are no longer catered for by the grammar module will now be dealt with by the problem-solving capabilities of the central processes, resulting in consciously acquired, or learned knowledge (in Krashen's sense). This, the authors suggest, has the potential of at least partially "overriding the impairment in the grammar module" (ibid: 203). The authors also reject Krashen's view of learned knowledge as being slow and static, suggesting instead that, as part of the central problem-solving mechanism, it is in fact dynamic and thus amenable to acceleration through practice. Hawkins and Towell's view is fully shared by Henrici who characterises the average L2 learner as someone "der auf klare Explikationen angewiesen ist und der systematische Hilfen braucht, um eine Sprache in vertretbarer Zeit angeleitet und selbstgesteuert zu lernen" (1986: 43). R. Ellis (1994b) supports the view that explicit instruction may be of particular importance for *adult* L2 learners (a point previously made by McLaughlin et al., 1983, and Schmidt, 1990) who might otherwise fail to notice certain features in the input[16]. And, as R. Ellis (1995) states, if the course aim is to lead students to high levels of grammatical competence, "*direct intervention* in interlanguage development" is essential (ibid: 87, my italics). Terrell (1991) suggests that formal instruction is necessary because the volume of input a classroom environment can offer to students will never be anywhere close to the volume an individual receives in a natural environment - input as the sole means of 'instruction' is therefore insufficient. He suggests that there are several ways in which instruction may be of potential benefit, one of which maps out a more extensive role for Krashen's monitor. Terrell proposes that the role of the monitor may extend beyond producing more accurate output to affect acquisition. He points out that the learner's own output is also available as input to the acquisition process. If learners pay attention

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[16] For instance, features that are grammatically redundant such as the plural -s morpheme in the sentence "they had three cups of tea".

to form in their production (i.e. if they use the monitor) and if this results in more accurate production, then monitoring can result in students acquiring their own (correct) output. As Terrell puts it "[a]cquisition of output will lead to more grammatical speech *if* the output is grammatical" (ibid: 61, italics in original). However, he also warns that because "incorrect output is as easily acquired as correct output", formal learning environments "will probably have to resort to strict error correction to avoid wholesale acquisition of incorrect forms and structures" (ibid - more below).

Acknowledging and advocating the necessity of formal instruction is not tantamount to believing that a one-to-one equation exists between teaching and learning (cf. Nunan, 1995, Rogers, 1996 and MacWhinney, 1997[17]). Many researchers have therefore adopted the view that formal instruction can act as a facilitating force, albeit not to the same degree for all learners and only under certain circumstances.

Similar to Krashen, Pienemann and his associates have also adopted an extremely cautious approach to formal instruction. Although their model has generated enormous research interest and has contributed significantly to the overall SLA debate, a detailed analysis of the framework is beyond the scope of this thesis. In their *Multidimensional Model* (Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann, 1981), the authors present research findings from natural learning environments which have revealed that there are two types of orders in which a language is acquired, a *developmental* and a *variational* order. Results have shown that because of psychological processing constraints, the learner processes and acquires certain grammatical items such as word order and some grammatical morphemes in clearly identifiable and identical sequences. Other items do not follow such a strict order, i.e. they are not developmentally constrained but variational. Individual learner variation is also observable when it comes to applying developmental rules. In his Teachability Hypothesis, Pienemann (1985) claims "that instruction can only promote language acquisition if the interlanguage is close to the point when the structure to be taught is acquired in the natural setting (so that sufficient processing prerequisites are developed)" (ibid: 37). He also states that (unlike items which are subject to a variational order), the acquisition sequence of items which are

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[17] MacWhinney (1997) reminds us that contributors to the discussion on explicitness in instruction and learning have not been sufficiently clear in their use of what are essentially separate concepts: it is a truism that not all explicit *instruction* will result in explicit *learning* while the latter can well occur by means other than explicit instruction.

subject to a developmental order is impervious to formal instruction or, as he puts it, "the course of second language development cannot be altered by factors external to the learner" (Pienemann et al., 1988: 225; cf. also Pienemann, 1989). On a practical note, Pienemann and Johnston (1985) describe and explain the order in which a wide range of morphosyntactic features in both English and German as second/foreign languages are acquired. Pienemann et al. (1988) provide a predictive framework for SLA and Pienemann (1992) also introduces a computational system which allows for the exact establishment of individual learner interlanguages.

Although Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis commands support from a number of researchers (cf. e.g. Sharwood Smith, 1996, Rogers, 1996), the postulate of adhering to developmental sequences in all classroom learning is far from being universally accepted. Without directly referring to Pienemann et al., Rösler (1994) notes that while institutionalised *second* language learning should certainly endeavour to maintain close links to natural language acquisition, it is by no means clear exactly how relevant acquisitional orders are for institutionalised *foreign* language learning (but cf. Sharwood Smith, 1994 who opposes this view). There have also been empirical studies in which the hypothesis could not be upheld (cf. Doughty, 1991, and Buczowska and Weist, 1991[18]). R. Ellis (1994a) has suggested that while implicit knowledge may not be promoted if acquisitional orders are not adhered to, explicit knowledge may well be unaffected by those orders.

Criticism also surrounds the exact starting point for teachers in any classroom. Even in a fairly homogeneous class, learners will inevitably have different interlanguage levels: how then can teachers be expected to adjust their teaching to this diverse situation and provide each individual learner with the optimal kind of input? How can a teacher accommodate the individual developmental stages of twenty or more learners? R. Ellis offers some consolation to teachers faced with this difficulty by putting forward his 'delayed effect hypothesis' (cf. R. Ellis, 1989, 1992a, 1994a and b). According to Ellis, learners who receive instruction 'at the wrong time' (when they were not developmentally ready) may still benefit from the instruction at a later point in time and

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[18] In an earlier study which was not related to the testing of Pienemann's hypothesis, Zobl (1985) found that the acquisition of more marked features facilitated that of less marked features, a finding which must be seen as evidence against the need to progress along Pienemann's prescribed processing continuum.

integrate the taught items into their interlanguage system at that point. Ellis claims that this hypothesis "is compatible with the general finding that instruction accelerates learning and results in higher proficiency levels [...] even though learners may fail to immediately learn what they have been taught" (1994a: 621).

There is yet another, related point of criticism with regard to Pienemann et al.'s suggested investigation of individual learners' interlanguage systems. Even if one were to assume for one moment that learners display fairly homogeneous levels (which they do not), thus allowing for a common starting point for the entire group, Pienemann et al.'s postulate that course objectives be adjusted to accommodate learners' present grammar levels (Pienemann et al., 1988) is obviously unrealistic in an educational context defined by criterion-referenced achievement levels. Standards which were set as objective points of reference cannot simply be altered with every variation in the knowledge and competence levels of specific target groups.

Turning to other SLA models and teaching, Tarone assigns a potentially beneficial, albeit indirect role to formal instruction. She asserts that a theory of SLA must take into account variation in individual learners' interlanguage systems (Tarone, 1990). Variation in learners' interlanguage systems (cf. Selinker, 1972 and 1992) or approximative systems (Nemser, 1971) has been described in the literature as backsliding (Selinker, 1972) or U-shaped behaviour (Kellerman, 1985): in its most general definition, a learner who appears to be able to use a target language feature correctly in one instance fails to do so in the next[19]. Tarone (1988) identifies a number of causes for this phenomenon, including the degree of attention a speaker pays to form[20]. She suggests that a learner's interlanguage rests on a continuum (ibid: 41) ranging from the *vernacular* style (which requires no attention) to the *careful* style (when the learner is fully focused on form/grammar) with a number of styles in between. According to Tarone, new information can enter the continuum via both styles

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[19] Kellerman (1985) points out that backsliding and U-shaped behaviour must not be used interchangeably. They differ since the former "is generally used to refer to unstable oscillation between later-acquired (often targetlike) forms and earlier (nontarget) ones [whereas] U-shaped performance [...] deals with movement through time from a targetlike phase to a nontargetlike one, and then back again, and represents changes in competence" (ibid: 353).

[20] While acknowledging the crucial importance of attention to speech, Tarone warns that it would be wrong to view its global presence or absence "as a monolithic causal factor" for interlanguage variation (1988: 102). Other factors include the linguistic context, the effect different tasks have on attention to certain aspects of form, the relationship with the interlocutor, choice of topic and social norms.

from where it can spread in either direction. Thus, although explicit knowledge resulting from formal instruction would initially only be available in the careful style, as this knowledge spreads along the continuum it will eventually benefit the more spontaneous, vernacular style as well. Towell and Hawkins (1994: 39-41) have criticised Tarone's as well as R. Ellis' variationist models, claiming that "in essence *why* particular L2 forms enter L2 grammars *when* they do, and *how* they spread through L2 grammars, are as mysterious as the notion of 'acquisition' in Krashen's system" (ibid: 41, my italics)[21]. While these issues are of relevance for an understanding of variationist models, further discussion is beyond the scope of this research.

It is precisely the issue of learner-internal acquisition processes which is the focus of R.W. Schmidt's (1990, 1993 and 1994) investigations. While Tarone's model focuses on the notion of attention in language *use*, R.W. Schmidt (1993), acknowledging the difficulties involved in his postulate, stresses the need to investigate learner internal mechanisms in order to establish what makes learners attend to, notice and understand grammar forms in the first place. The central focus of his deliberations is whether or not 'consciousness' is required when processing input or whether learning can occur without consciousness[22]. He suggests that the role of consciousness can only be investigated in a meaningful manner if three issues are kept separate: firstly, the issue of incidental learning, i.e. if learning is possible without the learner's intention to learn.

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[21] Towell and Hawkins themselves have identified three causes for variability:
1. learners have to use multiple, possibly competing knowledge sources to construct their L2 hypotheses
2. knowledge has to be turned into procedures which are available in real-time use
3. communication with L2 partners has to be adequate despite imperfect L2 knowledge: compensation strategies are developed (1994, chapters 10 to 13).
However, the authors agree with R. Ellis's distinction between two types of variation, *systematic* and *non-systematic*. Systematic variability denotes the consistent use of one particular form in one particular context or environment but not in another. For instance, the correct target language form may be used in written production but a deviant form is used in spoken production; alternatively, the correct form is used is some linguistic contexts but not in others. In other words, variation which is both explicable and predictable, is considered to be systematic (cf. R. Ellis, 1992, quoted in Towell and Hawkins, 1994). Non-systematic variation refers to the apparently random use of forms where correct and incorrect forms are used interchangeably in the same context.
Another explanation of variability in learner performance has been offered in Bialystok and Sharwood Smith (1985). They suggest that a learner's *knowledge system* changes with time, resulting in diachronic, cognitive variability, as well as the way he/she *accesses* that system, as displayed in synchronic, control variability (cf. also Bialystok, 1994a and Sharwood Smith, 1994).
[22] Schmidt (1990 and 1993) criticises the lack of terminological accuracy in SLA research by highlighting the inconsistent use of the concept of 'consciousness'. His criticism is echoed by other researchers who extend the list of inconsistently or ambiguously used terms to include 'awareness' (N. Ellis, 1994b) and 'mental representation', 'attention', 'processing' and 'strategy' (Bialystok, 1995).

Secondly, the issue of subliminal learning, i.e. if learning can take place without the learner paying attention to or noticing the input. Thirdly, the issue of implicit learning, i.e. if a learner can internalise input without awareness in the sense of 'understanding' (which to Schmidt shows a higher level of awareness than 'noticing', cf. 1993: 213). Drawing on research findings both from laboratory experiments in psychology and from applied linguistics as well as his own language learning experience (documented in Schmidt and Frota, 1986, quoted in R.W. Schmidt, 1993), he concludes that *incidental* learning is possible while *subliminal* learning is "probably impossible" (1993: 218). Research evidence in relation to the third issue, *implicit* learning, "justifies a cautious affirmative" (ibid). Regarding the explicit/implicit learning dichotomy, Schmidt (1994) reviews a number of studies purporting to demonstrate the significant role unconscious learning plays in SLA and dismisses most of them on various grounds (they either underestimate the learner's conscious knowledge or overestimate his/her unconscious 'knowledge', cf. ibid: 183-187). He now concludes that implicit learning may not occur as commonly as has been suggested by SLA research. As regards the significance of attention, he asserts more forcefully than previously that "[a]ttention to input (*not mere exposure to comprehensible input*) is a necessary condition for explicit learning and may be both necessary and sufficient for implicit learning. No learning in either mode is based on unattended stimuli or features of stimuli" (ibid: 198, my italics). Regarding the role of instruction in the development of explicit and implicit knowledge, Schmidt believes that it can facilitate both types. However, he warns that care must be taken to separate the individual issues involved: "It should not be assumed that incidental instructions trigger implicit learning processes, that rule-search instructions result in explicit knowledge [...]. It is important to investigate the effects of explicit instruction in SLA, but claims concerning implicit and explicit learning essentially refer to learner-internal processes and can only be directly supported when learner awareness is investigated" (ibid: 199).

R. Ellis (1990 and 1994b) has put forward a theory specifically designed to account for instructed SLA, the primary purpose of which is to explain how input can advance classroom-based second language acquisition.

In R. Ellis (1994b), the author proposes a weak interface between explicit and implicit knowledge. According to his model, new explicit knowledge (as the aim of formal

instruction) can be converted directly into the learner's implicit knowledge (i.e. his/her interlanguage system) in the case of features that are not subject to developmental constraints. In the case of developmental features, a new rule will only be integrated into the learner's implicit knowledge if the individual is developmentally ready. However, explicit knowledge also plays another crucial role, albeit a more indirect one. Explicit knowledge in Ellis' framework helps learners "*notice* features in the input that would otherwise be ignored" (ibid: 97, my italics) and facilitates the process whereby learners compare input with their own output ("noticing-the-gap", ibid: 98). In other words, it "may sensitise the language processor so that it takes account of data available in the input and is more able to undertake an adequate analysis" (ibid: 98). Only then can input become *intake*, i.e. be available in the learner's short and medium-term memory (cf. R.W. Schmidt who in his "noticing hypothesis" (1993: 209) makes similar claims by suggesting that noticing is both necessary and sufficient for the conversion of input into intake). Intake will however only become *implicit knowledge* and be committed to long-term memory, if the learner integrates the noticed features into the interlanguage system by forming new hypotheses (cf. McLaughlin, 1990, on the restructuring of interlanguage systems). Both implicit and explicit knowledge are eventually automatised through practice. In previous and subsequent contributions, Ellis remains sceptical of the beneficial effect attached to output practice, for instance, by information-processing theories[23], pointing out that new and existing knowledge need to be handled quite differently in this regard. As regards the introduction and practice of *new* grammatical structures, Ellis favours a comprehension-based approach, including consciousness-raising activities (cf. R. Ellis, 1993) and interpretation tasks (cf. R. Ellis, 1995). R. Ellis' views are shared by Sharwood Smith (1993 and 1996)[24]. Some empirical support for this approach is offered by Van Patten and Cadierno (1993). R. Ellis (1994b) argues that this approach takes into account (psychological) learnability constraints which production-based approaches ignore. However, he

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[23] In R. Ellis (1992b), the author states that the study in question "casts doubt on the methodological claim that sheer volume of practice helps learning" (ibid: 144/145).

[24] In Sharwood Smith 1993, he replaces his earlier notion of 'consciousness-raising' (CR, cf. Rutherford and Sharwood Smith, 1985, quoted in Sharwood Smith, 1993) by the concept of 'input enhancement'. He views CR as an attempt to turn input into intake by altering the learner's mental representations whereas input enhancement merely constitutes an effort to manipulate certain aspects of the input without assuming that this intervention will automatically become intake.

identifies a significant role for the latter by stating that both implicit and explicit *existing* (or at least partially existing) knowledge will benefit from output practice. R. Ellis (1994b) believes that implicit knowledge will best be automised through natural communication, under what Johnson (1996) has termed "real operating conditions" (ibid: 122) while explicit knowledge may well benefit from formal drills. Sharwood Smith (1994), drawing on his and Bialystok's *analysis of competence and control of processing framework* (Bialystok and Sharwood Smith, 1985), agrees when he states that control might be enhanced by the very form of exercise which became so tainted when behaviourism went out of fashion - pattern drills (1994: 181/2).

R. Ellis (1994b) points out that other types of knowledge, such as world knowledge and L1 knowledge[25], play crucially important roles in both instructed and naturalistic learning.

As regards learner output, Ellis suggests an explanation for the conflict observable in many language learners - the constant struggle of balancing fluency and accuracy. Many learners seem to automatise their existing knowledge (including faulty knowledge) rather than internalise new knowledge. According to Ellis, this is because there are two distinct psycholinguistic processes at work, one for *using* L2 knowledge and a different one for *acquiring* new knowledge: "To acquire the learner must attend consciously to the input and, perhaps also, make efforts to monitor output, but doing so may interfere with fluent reception and production" (ibid: 107). Learners may thus be forced to choose between one or the other, between using the language efficiently or acquiring it (cf. Johnson, 1996 below; cf. also Skehan, 1994, whose framework seeks to strike a balance between restructuring, accuracy and fluency in instruction).

To sum up R. Ellis' 1994b framework, explicit knowledge is seen to contribute to a learner's interlanguage system in a number of ways: firstly, rule knowledge can directly convert into implicit knowledge provided instruction takes into account developmental constraints (rules regarding variational features, i.e. features that are not subject to a fixed developmental order, can be converted into implicit knowledge at any stage).

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[25] The case for <u>integrating</u> the L1 into the L2 classroom has been argued by, among others, James (1994) and Tönshoff (1995). James urges teachers to draw their students' attention to the similarities between mother tongue and target language whereas Tönshoff suggests that teachers should highlight the differences between L1 and L2 (as well as the similarities and differences between L2 and L3 or L4, where appropriate).

Secondly, it can indirectly affect interlanguage development by facilitating the processing operations of noticing and comparing, both of which are necessary if input is to become intake, eventually resulting in the reorganisation of the learner's interlanguage system. According to Ellis, new grammatical structures might best be learnt not by asking learners for an immediate production of that feature but by manipulating the input for subsequent comprehension/interpretation tasks. Output practice, according to these theories, is most suitable for the automisation of already existing knowledge.

R. Ellis' framework is comprehensive and draws attention to a number of factors, both system-external (input) and system-internal (the build-up and representation of knowledge as well as its automatisation) which have been shown to affect classroom acquisition. He also addresses the crucial issue of learner output. Although a comprehensive critique of his model is beyond the scope of this project, it must be pointed out that the same criticism would appear to apply to his framework as was voiced above with regard to Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis (a point which Ellis himself indirectly acknowledges by mentioning again his previously established 'delayed effect hypothesis').

A researcher whose earlier L2 framework rested on the explicit/implicit paradigm but who later abandoned that dichotomy is Bialystok (cf. Bialystok, 1978 and Bialystok and Sharwood Smith, 1985). In her original 1978 model, she postulated, in line with the information-processing models to be outlined below, that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge through practice, a claim which was later expressly revoked (cf. e.g. Bialystok 1994b). In her 1994 framework for L2 acquisition and use (Bialystok, 1994a), she upholds her previously established distinction (cf. Bialystok and Sharwood Smith, 1985) between two processing components, *analysis of knowledge* and *control of processing*. Both join up to modify mental representations in order to increase cognitive competence and to develop language proficiency. The more the learner analyses the structure and organisation of mental representations, the more explicit these representations become. According to Bialystok, the increased analysis of mental representations in turn increases the accessibility to knowledge. Control of processing reflects the degree of attention an individual attributes to a situation in real time. With increasing control over one's mental representations, less attention is

required to deal with particular representations and processing becomes more automatic. As a result of increasingly explicit (accessible) knowledge and progressively automatic processing, proficiency levels rise. Put differently, the more analysed the knowledge and the more automatic the control, the more advanced the resulting language proficiency. However, Bialystok (1994b) emphasises that increased control of processing is not a reflection of knowledge that has been converted from explicit into implicit since "[l]anguage that is explicit does not become implicit" (ibid: 567). To Bialystok, the primary purpose of instruction is to speed up the rate of acquisition by facilitating and accelerating the build-up of mental competence[26].

Bialystok distances herself from other cognitive models, in particular information-processing theories, by asserting that language learning "is never exactly like learning everything else, no matter how much general cognitive apparatus is shared" (1995: 60). Information-processing models view L2 learning in much the same light as other skill acquisition[27]. Thus, while MacWhinney and Anderson (1986) acknowledge "that language is special in the sense that it, more than any other system, has utilized virtually every major aspect of the general cognitive system", they also insist that "the acquisition of language can be explained in terms of general learning principles" (ibid: 4). Information-processing models postulate a strong interface between explicit and implicit knowledge and, by extension, a definite place for formal instruction. According to Mc Laughlin's cognitive theory of second language learning (McLaughlin, 1987), there are two processes which underlie learning, *automatisation* and *restructuring*. Because humans have only limited processing capacities they need to automatise skills, or more precisely, subskills, so that the learner's attention, or 'controlled' processes, which are at the start of every skill-acquisition can be devoted to new tasks. The key to the automatisation of skills lies in *practice*. However, learning a complex skill goes beyond the automatisation of subskills. As McLaughlin puts it, "once the procedures at any phase become automatized, consolidated, and function efficiently, learners step up to a

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[26] One aspect of the analysis/control model that has been severely criticised is Bialystok's assertion that all second language learning starts with unanalysed knowledge. Hulstijn (1990) finds it "incomprehensible that the Analysis/Control framework does not account for a process we can observe in almost every foreign-language class" (ibid: 38), i.e. that learners "use explicit grammar rules as the starting point [...] for the establishment of automatic routines" (ibid). He strongly favours the information-processing models of L2 acquisition as a result of an analysis of Bialystok's approach.

[27] While this is also true of McLaughlin's (1987) theory, he acknowledges that his theory is not a stand-alone one but needs to be complemented by linguistic theory.

'metaprodecural' level, which generates representational change and restructuring" (ibid: 138). McLaughlin and Heredia (1996) point out that restructuring is also brought about by practice. The restructuring of internal target language representations is of equal importance as the attainment of automisation, since it involves "the transition from exemplar-based representations to more rule-based representations" or, what the authors call "novice-expert shifts" (ibid: 217): the more experienced the learner gets, the less he/she has to rely on formulaic speech. According to McLaughlin and Heredia, studies investigating novice-expert shifts have shown "that experts restructure the elements of a learning task into abstract schemata that are not available to novices, who focus principally on the surface elements of a task" (ibid).

One model which has been extensively used in cognitive SLA theory formation is Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT*) model (cf. Anderson, 1982). For example, Towell and Hawkins (1994) as well as Johnson (1996) incorporate the model in their respective frameworks: while the former use it to account for processing mechanisms in an otherwise UG-based model, Johnson takes the model as the foundation for his skill-based model of L2 learning. Although the ACT* model plays a most significant role in the overall language-acquisition debate, a detailed presentation of the model is beyond the scope of this research. The two central concepts upon which the model is built and which are of crucial importance for the research presented in this thesis are those of *declarative knowledge* and *procedural knowledge*. According to Anderson, learning consists of building up response strengths with the help of two types of memory, a *declarative* memory and a *procedural* memory (knowing that and knowing how). With increased use, declarative facts are turned into procedures, thus eventually cutting down on the amount of declarative memory required in language use. According to Anderson's original model, declarative knowledge is always the starting point: through automisation it becomes procedural knowledge. Johnson (1996) argues for an extension of that model, postulating that an L2 learning model should allow for the possibility that knowledge can be proceduralised directly, i.e. that procedural knowledge precedes declarative knowledge[28]. Characterising the two types of knowledge, Johnson states that declarative knowledge has the advantage of being

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[28] According to Multhaup (1997), researchers increasingly admit that learning can actually take place in either direction. DeKeyser (1997) points out that Anderson himself has also relaxed his view somewhat.

61

'generative', economical and 'low-risk' but the disadvantage of being slow and using up a lot of channel capacity. Procedural knowledge on the other hand is fast and does not use up much channel capacity but it is also 'non-generative', uneconomical and 'high-risk'. While Anderson sees declarative knowledge as the prime target for instruction, Johnson argues that instruction must target the development of both procedures. He regards all three components of his *PPP model* (*presentation* of items to be acquired, *practice* of those items and free-style *production*) as crucial to successful teaching and learning: the first P, presentation, is a vital component for the development of declarative knowledge, the other two Ps are essential for procedural knowledge. While particularly stressing the importance of the last P, he also underlines the role of declarative knowledge most emphatically. As he puts it, a learner who is expected to acquire the skill of using a second language must not just know how to use that skill but must have a "data base of knowledge" (Johnson, 1996: 104) from which he/she can work. Johnson also insists that all errors, regardless of whether they stem from faulty declarative or faulty procedural knowledge (i.e. irrespective of whether they are 'competence errors' or 'performance mistakes') be brought to the learner's attention and that, in the case of the latter, the learner be given the opportunity for a retrial under 'real operating conditions'. Thus Johnson puts forward three cogent arguments in favour of instruction: firstly, it focuses on the correction of faulty representations, secondly, it builds-up (correct) declarative knowledge and finally, it initiates and oversees the proceduralisation of declarative knowledge.

So far, the effect of formal instruction has been examined from a general framework-building perspective with the primary focus on theoretical positions regarding various interface hypotheses. On balance, the literature would suggest that the 'pro-instruction' side wins the day, although researchers are at variance as to the nature and the scope of the benefits. According to the weak interface position, instruction is beneficial, primarily because the explicit knowledge developed this way facilitates the eventual acquisition of implicit knowledge by making input more salient; the strong interface position views instruction, practice and corrective feedback as indispensable in the acquisition of both declarative and procedural knowledge. But what effect can formal instruction be expected to have on the L2 grammar development of the specific target group at the centre of this research, i.e. third level students of German with an average

of five years of learning experience behind them? With the exception of Johnson's model, the above theories and the studies to be presented under 2.2.1.1 focus primarily on a linear progression of L2 learning: they work on the premise that learning starts at zero and, in the normal course of events, progresses from there to some final point. Little, if any, consideration has been given to a 'remedial' teaching approach[29], Corder (1981) being an early exception. Of course, it is only natural that theory-building and theory-testing should primarily focus on how a linear progression can best be achieved. After all, the more that is known about the factors and processes contributing to successful language learning, the fewer the thoughts need to be spared for the eventuality of things going wrong and for what happens if learners do not learn what they are supposed to learn, despite fairly lengthy exposure to the target language. However, it cannot be denied that there are learners who fall into this category, as those teaching third level students are only too acutely aware (cf. Lofmark, 1990; also, contributions in Harden and Marsh, 1993, and Engels and Myles, 1996).

As was argued in Chapter One, anecdotal evidence would suggest that with the introduction of the communicative approach, grammar aspects of L2 learning have not received the same attention as under previous teaching methodologies. In much classroom teaching, exceptions notwithstanding, the pendulum would appear to have swung from the primary focus on form, prevalent under grammar-translation, to a primary focus on the communication of meaning and, importantly, a reliance on formulaic speech and rote learning, leading to a sidelining of form-focusing and structural analysis. Thus the communicative approach has, as a rule, produced learners who are, to use Skehan's terminology "memory-driven" (Skehan, 1994: 188, quoting his own 1986 study). Unlike the other type of learner identified by Skehan (the "analysis-driven" individual, ibid), memory-driven learners view language as (lexical) chunks and

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[29] At the eleventh 'Internationale Deutschlehrertagung' (held in Amsterdam in August 1997) where some 700 papers were presented, the issue of grammar teaching at third level for students with a previous knowledge of German was barely touched upon. One possible explanation for the fact that 'remedial' teaching is a largely unexplored area in empirical theory-testing is that it might be seen as too problematic in terms of measuring its outcomes.

tend to by-pass the target language syntax in order to achieve greater fluency[30]. In other words, they lack *creative linguistic ability*. Skehan's concept of a memory-driven approach to learning is similar to Johnson's characterisation of proceduralised knowledge as outlined above. Impressionistic evidence would suggest that much of the input received by second level learners under the communicative approach must be assumed to have been stored in procedural form. Johnson outlines the problems arising from storing knowledge this way: "encodings [...] which come into the system in an already proceduralized form, quickly become highly automized and impermeable to change" - they are "*inflexible* and *non-generative* because the relevant knowledge is contained in the production itself" (1996: 99, italics in original).

If the correct form has been stored, it would enable students to 'skip' the automisation stage for that particular feature while the problems of inflexibility and inability to use language creatively remain. However, the difficulty is infinitely compounded if the form that finds its way into procedural knowledge is a faulty one since, as Johnson graphically put it, "it will be the devil's own task to eradicate this behaviour" (ibid: 84). The result may well be a phenomenon which is commonly observable among intermediate second language learners - the fossilisation of certain interlanguage forms (Selinker, 1972 and 1992) or what Long (1988) refers to as "linguistic rigor mortis" (ibid: 119): a learner's language learning development stops with regard to certain features despite ongoing exposure and practice, leaving him/her with "partial attainment" in that area (Sharwood Smith, 1994: 33). Stressing the need for all learners to develop declarative knowledge, Johnson concedes that the task may be a particularly arduous one in the case of learners who have come to rely heavily on the storage of faulty rules in their proceduralised knowledge[31]. In fact, the phenomenon of

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[30] It would appear that many students will only use (morpho)syntactic knowledge if it is available to them in an already processed form (i.e. when it is available as a lexical entity). One result of this would be that syntactic information which requires manipulation (e.g. a table of adjectival endings) is of little or no benefit to non-analytic learners since they by and large lack the knowledge of how to make use of that information. As a consequence, learners come to view morphosyntactic information as of secondary importance or even redundant and focus on message communication that is primarily achieved on the strength of their lexical knowledge.

[31] It goes without saying that, in terms of error correction, faulty declarative knowledge which has become proceduralised is potentially just as problematic as faulty proceduralised encodings. Thus there are two sources for faulty procedural knowledge: either a faulty form was accepted into this knowledge storage straight away or the declarative knowledge which became proceduralised was faulty. An example for the latter is the overgeneralisation of certain rules which will be discussed in Chapter Five below.

fossilisation has provided critics of the Input Hypothesis with a powerful argument in favour of explicit instruction as well as corrective feedback (cf. Schachter, 1991b). White (1987) insists that some faulty target forms have to be explicitly brought to the learner's attention, pointing out that "the input hypothesis is geared towards handling *additions* to intermediate grammars, rather than *losses*" (ibid: 95, my italics). Thus for grammar items which students *think* they have mastered without this in fact being the case, input alone might not be sufficient in order to alert and sensitise students to the correct form and to make them abandon the incorrect one. Comprehensible input is likely to be too subtle to be <u>noticed</u> by the average first year student, who for the previous five years may have been immersed in just that kind of input as well as being exposed to their own and others' comprehensible output[32]. Accordingly, Long (1996) suggests that "comprehensible input may actually *inhibit* language learning on occasion, because it is often possible to understand a message without understanding all the structures [...] in the language encoding it, and without being aware of not understanding them all. [...] Learners may not notice new forms precisely because, at a global level, a message is comprehensible, with the result that their focal attention is directed elsewhere" (ibid: 425). Skehan (1994) insists that one important function of formal instruction is to signal to learners that their interlanguage system is as yet incomplete - learners are asked to keep an open mind regarding its future development. Agreeing with Long (1988), Skehan concludes that "instruction pre-emptively reduces the likelihood of inflexibility and fossilisation" (ibid: 189).

In her output hypothesis, Swain (1985) postulates that *production practice* should form an integral part of L2 instruction. However, she warns that merely giving learners the opportunity to produce in any way they please will be of little benefit since this may result in no more than the kind of output so frequently observed in communicatively oriented learners, i.e. 'getting the message across'. Swain argues that in order to acquire the structural properties of the target language learners need to be "pushed" (ibid: 249): learners need to be constantly reminded that in their output they must not only attend to meaning but to form as well. That output needs to be both monitored and accompanied

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[32] Valette (1991) observes learners may have been exposed to "large quantities of comprehensible but flawed input in the form of highly motivating but highly inaccurate peer speech" (ibid: 327). If this kind of faulty input was accepted by the message-focused receiver, the likelihood is that fossilisation will emerge over time in many aspects of learners' interlanguages.

by consistent feedback is also stressed by others (cf. Terrell, 1991 above). Towell and Hawkins point out that that since successfully getting a message across helps build up an increasingly robust production system (even if the communication is inaccurate), that system "will be able to resist *occasional* negative feedback" (1994: 211, my italics) - as was pointed out above, information stored in procedural memory is stored in such a way that it is not easily modifiable. Kleppin (1995) observes that withholding corrective feedback "heißt [...], den Lerner in seiner Eigenschaft als experimentierfreudigen Hypothesentester nicht ernst zu nehmen und ihm somit Chancen zu verbauen" (ibid: 23). Put differently, without feedback the learner is unlikely to arrive at the correct target language form and at least some parts of his/her interlanguage system will not be amenable to restructuring, with the danger of fossilisation looming prominently.

The issue of fossilisation is clearly one on which both researchers and, in particular, practitioners would like to receive more explanation. However, as Eubank et al. (1995) point out, although fossilisation is "a very real process" there would appear "to be few theoretical principles, *if any*, to cover this all-pervasive phenomenon" (ibid: 8, my italics), giving it something of a leper-status among SLA research areas. In the absence of a theory of fossilisation and until such a time when more is known about the issue, it must be assumed that theories postulating that instruction has at the very least the *potential* to contribute positively to the language learning process (and subsequent outcomes) are of obvious relevance for the target group under investigation. That leaves the question as to what teaching approach might be best suited. As was pointed out previously, Rösler (1993) insists that teaching methodologies can only be determined with specific programme aims and the needs of the target group in mind. If the ultimate course aim is a balance between fluency and accuracy, and if one has been stressed more than the other in the target group's language learning background, the programme to be designed will inevitably have to create some kind of counter-balance, without losing sight of the other aspect (cf. Weydt, 1993, Skehan, 1994). In terms of knowledge acquisition, this would mean that, where learners' past experiences were first and foremost shaped by implicit learning, including the widespread reliance on formulaic language, an analytical treatment of language and the development of explicit knowledge are crucial. Exposing learners to comprehensible input as the primary means of language learning is no longer sufficient: after years of following the dictum of

message-focused information conveyance, most students are likely to lack the sensitivity required to notice salient grammatical features in the input unless these are made explicit. Neither type of faulty knowledge (procedural or declarative) is likely to be successfully tackled this way.

Consciousness-raising (or input enhancement) and a subsequent focus on receptive (as opposed to productive) practice as the approach favoured by many of the weak interface proponents is also believed to be too subtle to succeed on their own. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that merely raising learners' awareness about salient grammar points without giving them the opportunity to produce the item in question straight away will rarely have the desired effect of helping learners to notice the raised features in subsequent input, then compare them to their output and finally, ideally, restructure their interlanguage systems. This approach requires levels of cognitive and metacognitive skills most learners will only begin to develop in the course of their first year at university. The target group under investigation in this thesis is also unlikely to be sufficiently challenged by receptive exercises as a follow-on from language awareness. Many learners in this group do not appear to be overly taxed by the comprehension exercises with which they are faced, since they have developed several strategies for processing input which do not require a great knowledge of syntax, taking their clues from the context, world knowledge, lexical items etc. instead (a fact which, as Swain, 1985, points out, is even acknowledged by Krashen)[33]. Thus it is primarily in production that the constraints of fuzzy or non-existing knowledge about the structural properties of target language features become painfully obvious: learners who lack the necessary knowledge are left with no other choice but to succumb to random guessing as to which grammatical form to use. Pushed output, to borrow Swain's expression, must therefore be stressed from the very beginning in a course which requires high levels of receptive *and* productive linguistic and pragmatic skills for successful course completion. Regular output practice, accompanied by consistent corrective feedback is

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[33] According to Wolff (1995), research on comprehension since the 1970s has virtually dismissed the role of grammar as insignificant in *receptive* language use. This is obviously not to deny the importance of morphosyntactic knowledge for all comprehension exercises. It is, of course, recognised that learners need grammatical knowledge to comprehend the finer points of the text. However, it is also true to say that, in general, learners have a range of compensatory strategies for coping with grammatical deficiencies *receptively* (cf. Long, 1996 on this point), but not *productively* - in production morphosyntactic gaps are cruelly exposed.

seen as indispensable in the proceduralisation of declarative knowledge and the restructuring of the learner's interlanguage system.

Some empirical evidence in support of this position will be examined next.

2.2.1.1 Studies on the Effect of Formal Instruction, Practice and Corrective Feedback on Language Acquisition and Performance Accuracy

Before looking at studies which suggest a beneficial effect arising from a focus on form, it should be pointed out that there have been a number of studies casting doubt on its virtue. Both the value of explicit knowledge and, by extension, form-focused teaching have been questioned in Alderson et al.'s (1996) study of British university students of L2 French in which the authors found that the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge[34] and proficiency was weak. Having received variations in correlation results between metalinguistic knowledge and a number of proficiency tests which they found "uninterpretable" (ibid: 11), they hypothesised that regarding the two entities as relatively separate was "the safest conclusion" (ibid). Results of Felix and Weigl's (1991) study, reported in R. Ellis (1994a), suggest that form-focused instruction made learners too conservative. The authors presented their L2 English subjects with (grammatical) target language sentences which were marked in some way. Subjects rejected these as ungrammatical because, the authors argue, they had not come across these marked structures in the classroom. Since the structures in question had not been taught, learners assumed that they had to be wrong. R. Ellis criticises this study on two accounts, firstly because there was no untutored control group, and secondly because native English speakers were not consulted - the latter, according to Ellis, may also have rejected some of the sentences as incorrect. Several other studies have argued against the role of formal instruction in language acquisition on the grounds that it cannot change natural acquisitional sequences. In his review, Long (1988) criticises a number of these studies, stating that "many of the conclusions about the limitations or inefficacy of instruction are non sequiturs or, at best, *inferences* from studies that have looked not at the *effects* of instruction, but at similarities in the interlanguages of naturalistic and classroom learners" (1988: 118, italics in original).

In his extensive review of empirical studies, R. Ellis (1994a) comes to the conclusion that, on balance, "[t]he case for formal instruction is strengthening" (ibid: 659). Similarly, Bausch and Krumm (1995) state that "[v]orliegende emprirische

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[34] The metalinguistic assessment tested terminological knowledge as well as the ability to identify and correct errors, and to state rules that were broken.

Untersuchungen bestätigen zumindest tendenziell, daß Steuerungseinflüsse (also auch das Lehren) gegenüber sogenannten Eigenvoraussetzungen dominieren" (ibid: 10). Unlike Alderson et al., Lorigan (1992) in her study of first year university students of German found that rule knowledge and performance in proficiency tests were very closely related. The results of Green and Hecht's (1992) investigation reveal a complex interaction between explicit and implicit knowledge. The authors asked some 300 learners of L2 English to provide both explanations and corrections for the errors with which were presented. They found that in what could be described as a typical 'monitor' situation, learners, in their corrections, relied heavily on implicit rules "which very possibly had been facilitated by explicit rules" (ibid: 178). Interestingly, they also found that even when producing an explicit rule wrongly, learners were more successful at correcting errors than when they were unable to recall any rule whatsoever. In a similar study, Hulstijn and Hulstijn (1984) discovered that in situations when learners were asked to pay attention to form, rule knowledge, whether implicit or explicit and even incorrect, helped improve learners' performance accuracy. Interestingly, the authors also found that time pressure was irrelevant as regards performance accuracy - the crucial variable in accuracy levels was focus on form.

A relatively recent development in the empirical testing of SLA theories has seen the implementation of studies under laboratory-type conditions (cf. N. Ellis, 1995, for an overview; cf. also the special issue of the journal *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 1997, vol. 19, no. 2). The main rationale behind their introduction is the obvious lack of control over variables in more traditional studies which, according to Hulstijn (1997), "have produced little in the way of hard evidence" (ibid: 132). However, Hulstijn also warns, that despite the enormous advantage of control over variables, caution must be taken as regards the applicability of these results to the foreign language pedagogy context. He insists there must be supplementary research in natural L2 environments to corroborate the laboratory findings. This is obviously especially pertinent in the case of artificial or semi-artificial languages.

Laboratory studies in which natural languages have been used include N. Ellis' 1993 study, the main results of which are presented in N. Ellis 1995. His study of a specific aspect of Welsh morphology acquisition revealed that a mixture of explicit and implicit learning worked best, or as he put it, "these two types of knowledge can be brought to

mutual influence or 'interface'" (1995: 134). He concludes that "explicit rule instruction which makes salient particular patterns in the surface form can affect the learners' subsequent processing of language exemplars so that they are more likely to acquire the underlying systematicity" (1995: 136) - noticed input as the indispensable prerequisite for intake.

In his laboratory study, Robinson (1997) also examined what effect different kinds of input had, firstly on learners' ability to make generalisations on the basis of the received input and secondly, on the response rate (automaticity). Subjects were divided into four groups, an *implicit* group which was told that the exercise was one on reading and memorisation, an *incidental* and an *enhanced* group, both of which were told to focus on meaning (but the enhanced group also received some limited structural information) and, finally, an *instructed* group which received metalinguistic explanations about the (artificial) target language feature. Subjects were then asked to judge the grammaticality of a number of sentences, known and new. All known sentences were correct whereas the new ones were half correct and half incorrect. Results revealed that learners who had received rule-based explanations were clearly both more accurate and faster than all other learners at transferring their previously developed knowledge onto new instances of knowledge use. All learners were quicker to decide on known sentences than on new ones, leading Robinson to conclude (just like Green and Hecht in their study) "that rule-based knowledge developed through conscious effort and implicit memory-based knowledge *interact* in decision-making" (ibid: 24, my italics). Thus, both N. Ellis' and Robinson's laboratory studies have confirmed Green and Hecht's and Hulstijn and Hulstijn's findings which were derived from 'natural environments'. However, even studies revealing a positive effect of formal knowledge on monitored production and/or an interaction between implicit and explicit knowledge are seen by some researchers to be of limited value since they fail to shed light on the role of the two knowledge types in unplanned language use (cf. e.g. Sharwood Smith, 1993 and 1994). Two studies which focused on just that aspect are those by Lightbown and Spada (1990) and White et al. (1991). Lightbown and Spada (1990) found that accuracy levels in their subjects' spontaneous oral production were related to the amount of focus on form they had received. In a study also investigating the use of relatively non-monitored language use in oral production, White et al. (1991) found that learners who

71

received explicit instruction and corrective feedback on English question formation outperformed those who had received no instruction. The authors conclude that form-focused instruction "can bring about genuine changes in learners' interlanguage systems" (ibid: 429). On the other hand, Trahey and White (1993) observed that learners who received no formal instruction or negative feedback failed to drop an incorrectly transferred L1 structure from their interlanguage systems.

The issue of whether or not explicit knowledge has an impact on spontaneous production does, of course, not pose itself in skill-acquisition theories. Taking declarative knowledge as a starting point, the primary focus in these theories is on the automatisation process and the roles of practice and corrective feedback. In his study, DeKeyser (1997) used an artificial language, Autopractan, which consists of four morphosyntactic and thirty-two vocabulary items. The experiments from instruction to final testing took place over an eleven-week period, with the practice phase lasting for eight weeks. Results show a clear improvement in both comprehension and production tests with the most dramatic drop-off rate in both reaction time and error rates, as expected, taking place between sessions one and two. The author concludes that his results confirm the hypothesis that second language learning follows the same path as skill-acquisition in other areas. According to DeKeyser, the implications for foreign language pedagogy are that firstly, there is a clear role for practice in the L2 curriculum and secondly, "the sequence of explicit rule learning, followed by a short period of activities focused on using explicit knowledge during performance of the target skills, and finally by a long period of repeated opportunity to use that knowledge, is likely to yield knowledge that is highly automatized" (ibid: 215). Despite this affirmation, the author acknowledges that automisation may not be equally successful in all cases (as regards both learners and rules) and that the kind of automatised knowledge elicited in his study does not necessarily equal implicit or native-speaker knowledge.

Turning to the issue of corrective feedback, Tomasello and Herron found that their particular methodology of leading learners 'up the garden path' proved to be successful (cf. 1988 and 1989). Carroll and Swain (1993) also investigated what kind of corrective feedback might be most beneficial to the acquisition process. In a previous study, Carroll et al. had established that subjects receiving corrective feedback on some morphological properties of French made clear advances on all tested items while

subjects in the control group only advanced on some (Carroll et al., 1992). In Carroll and Swain's 1993 study, subjects were divided into five groups, four of which received feedback of some sort and one control group. Results showed that all four experimental groups did significantly better on two posttests than the control group, with the group receiving explicit metalinguistic feedback performing best. The crucial importance of providing clear, unambiguous and appropriate feedback is demonstrated in another study by Carroll (Carroll, 1995). Exemplifying how feedback can easily be of no benefit at all or, at worst, highly irritating, she warns that "the interpretive processes to make sense of feedback are neither simple, culturally universal, nor guaranteed" (ibid: 86). What seems perfectly intelligible to the person providing the feedback need not necessarily be conceived as such by the person at which it is directed.

In their study on the correction of oral errors, Kleppin and Königs (1993) also examine the nature of the feedback. Comparing views by learners from diverse cultural backgrounds (German, Chinese, Moroccan and Brazilian), they conclude "daß Korrekturen grundsätzlich notwendig und sinnvoll sind" (ibid: 88). The authors remind us of the role of affect in the correction approach, warning that if students feel ridiculed or are unable to bring their point across because they are constantly interrupted in their train of thought, it might leave them with extremely negative and demotivating feelings towards the learning situation (cf. Section 2.1 on motivation). This is not to say that learners do not wish to be corrected - by and large they do (cf. Königs, 1995). Subjects in Kleppin and König's study also stated that specific corrective feedback triggered very positive learning experiences. All the more reason, the authors argue, why teachers should take great care when providing feedback. Kleppin and Königs also point out that if students are to learn how to correct themselves, discussions about the learning process itself and about the development of learning strategies and error correction strategies must be integrated into classroom learning (cf. Kleppin, 1995 for concrete suggestions as to how this might be achieved; cf. also Van Lier, 1988, chapter 7, on sequencing what he calls 'repairs' in spoken language use[35]). If error correction is considered to be an important part of the learning process, its handling in the classroom must also be

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[35] Extensive research into the issue of corrective feedback on oral errors has also been carried out as part of the 'Bochumer Tertiärsprachenprojekt', the results of which are reported in Bahr et al. (1996, chapter 5).

properly planned and must be consistent - errors should not be dealt with on an ad hoc basis. In his survey of the history of error correction, Königs (1995) concludes that there is a clear need for more empirical studies into the correction of both written and oral errors and their effect on the learning process.

To sum up, there would appear to be some empirical support for an approach to formal instruction which rests on the development explicit knowledge, practice and corrective feedback, as proposed by skill-acquisition theories.

2.2.2 Conclusions

It would appear that, on balance, Krashen's view of the role of explicit knowledge and, by extension, formal instruction has been rejected by many fellow researchers as too narrow. Weak interface models suggest that instruction facilitates acquisition *indirectly*: according to these theories, explicit knowledge helps learners notice features in the input and compare them with their own output, leading eventually to a restructuring of the interlanguage system. Since the monitoring of output with the help of explicit knowledge is also more likely to produce increasingly correct structures, this output can become valuable input. The strong interface hypothesis postulates a *direct* link between explicit and implicit knowledge: according to skill-acquisition theories, explicit knowledge becomes implicit through practice and corrective feedback.

One of the few uncontroversial conclusions which can be drawn regardless of interface theory preference is that explicit knowledge has some kind of role to play. As many of the above studies suggest (cf. Green and Hecht, Hulstijn and Hulstijn, N. Ellis, Robinson), implicit and explicit knowledge most probably interact in language acquisition and production in as yet largely undefined ways. Most researchers would also agree that both types of knowledge can be developed through instruction. A third undisputed beneficial aspect of instruction is its favourable effect on the rate of language acquisition[36]. In an educational context which expects learners to reach high levels of target language accuracy and which imposes considerable time constraints on all concerned, this widely observed beneficial aspect of formal instruction must be considered as crucial. The issue of *which type of instruction* is likely to work best is far more controversial. Thus R. Ellis (1994a) concludes his overview of a wide range of instructional approaches by stating that "[i]t is probably premature to reach any firm conclusions" (ibid: 646) of a generalising nature in this respect.

However, despite reservations which are largely attributable to the great paucity of

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[36] Cf. Long, 1988, for an overview of studies investigating the time factor.

empirical studies[37], a number of studies which were discussed in the previous section have shown that there is at least *some* evidence in support of the strong interface hypothesis. As regards the design and implementation of the instructional programme directed at the particular target group in question, the following conclusions will be drawn from the above research: firstly, declarative knowledge must be developed if learners are to extend their use of the L2 beyond fairly narrow boundaries. Secondly, all incorrect knowledge (explicit and implicit/proceduralised) must receive consistent corrective feedback. Thirdly, the programme must develop ways to help students proceduralise their explicit knowledge through output practice.

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[37] A number of researchers have pointed out that many areas in SLA theory testing are still largely unexplored (cf. e.g. DeKeyser, 1997 regarding output practice, Lightbown and Spada, 1993 regarding longitudinal studies). Others have warned against drawing conclusions on the basis of very limited research results: according to MacWhinney (1997), studies claiming a beneficial effect of explicit learning on natural language use tend to overestimate those effects (but cf. DeKeyser, 1994 who challenges the superiority claims made by those in favour of implicit learning). Thus, the only thing on which researchers from different traditions and with different beliefs agree is that more research, especially more "fine-grained analyses" (MacWhinney, 1997: 280), is needed. As regards the two types of knowledge at the centre of this research, MacWhinney points out that what researchers will have to do eventually is "to replace the simple dichotomy of explicit and implicit learning with a fuller model that looks at the detailed mechanics of second language learning of particular target structures" (ibid).

2.3 Learning Strategies with Specific Regard to the Acquisition and Application of Grammar

As was pointed out in the introduction to the previous section, the ultimate aim of all education, but in particular third level education, is to help learners become increasingly independent in their learning efforts. However, in Section 2.1 it was also stressed that certain conditions must be in place if individuals are to engage in and persist at any chosen task. *Self-efficacy* was pointed out as being of crucial importance in this context (cf. Oxford and Shearin, 1994) - individuals must feel that they have control over the learning situation. And in order to gain control, individuals must develop effective learning strategies. In motivational research, the development of appropriate learning strategies is regarded of particular importance for learners who need to overcome performance setbacks. Thus it was previously argued that a lack of success should be attributed to lack of strategy use rather than lack of intelligence or aptitude (cf. Ushioda, 1996), thereby giving learners the opportunity to focus on an achievable goal (i.e. strategy development), rather than allowing them to engage in self-doubting reflection about their language learning abilities[38]. According to Cohen (1998), learning strategies "constitute the steps or actions consciously selected by learners either to improve the *learning* of a second language, the *use* of it, or both" (ibid: 5, italics in original). Cohen thus recognises that the boundaries between strategies employed for acquisition on the one hand and use on the other are not necessarily as strict as is often thought (cf. also Weinert, 1995). For the purposes of this research, no distinction shall be made between the two types of strategies.

The development and use of learning strategies is an area that began to attract attention when the research and teaching focus expanded beyond the teacher-centred classroom to include individual learner differences and needs (cf. Wenden and Rubin, 1987). Various classifications have since been established (cf. O'Malley and Chamot, 1990 and Oxford, 1990), and a (limited) number of empirical studies have been conducted (cf. Poulisse, 1996 for a brief review).

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[38] Of course, as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have pointed out, there is no causal link between the use of strategies and an increase in motivation: just because learners have been persuaded to try out some strategies does not mean they are better motivated than before.

Attributes characterising successful language learners have also been identified (cf. e.g. Naiman et al., 1996). R. Ellis (1994a) in his overview of studies on the 'good language learner', summarises the characteristics of that individual as follows:

The good language learner

- focuses on both the role of language form and the functional element of language use
- adopts an active task approach
- is aware of the learning process
- alters strategies according to specific task requirements (ibid: 546).

Green and Oxford (1995) found that more successful learners employ strategies more regularly than less successful ones. Politzer and McGroarty (1985), on the other hand, concluded from their study that "caution in prescribing good learning behaviors is warranted" (ibid: 103) and that "[g]ood language learning behavior may, in the long run, be almost as elusive as good teaching behavior" (ibid: 118).

Chamot and O'Malley (1994) found that good language learners are able to describe in detail the strategies they use to learn a foreign language. According to them it is not frequency of strategy use that determines learning but metacognition, i.e. the ability to select the most appropriate strategy for the task on hand. They sum up their findings by stating that "explicit metacognitive knowledge about task characteristics and appropriate strategies for task solution is a major determiner of language learning effectiveness. In their unawareness of task demands and lack of metacognitive knowledge about selecting strategies, ineffective language learners seem to fall back on a largely implicit approach to learning in which they use habitual or preferred strategies without analysing the requirements of the particular task" (ibid: 382). Chamot and O'Malley's claim, that training learners in the use of specific training strategies will lead to more successful language use, is shared by other researchers such as Oxford who has also worked out specific guidelines for teaching strategy use (cf. Oxford, 1990). Oxford (1992/3) points out that strategy training gives students more flexibility and helps them employ strategies beyond their usual learning styles, thus reducing the likelihood of "style wars" taking place between students and teachers (ibid: 20). In Chamot and O'Malley 1993, the authors provide a framework for how strategy training can be integrated into the ESL classroom. An example of a German coursebook for intermediate students which includes a dedicated section on learning strategies is 'em' (Perlmann-Balme and

Schwalbe, 1997). The need for transparency which in Section 2.1 above was stressed as being essential for goal-commitment by the learner is thus echoed with regard to the development of learning strategies: learners must know what they are learning and why they are learning it (cf. Oxford and Shearin, 1994, and their discussion of need theories; cf. also Bimmel, 1995).

Some researchers (cf. R. Ellis, 1994a, and Bialystok, 1990) have expressed reservations as regards the instruction of specific strategies, insisting that not enough is known about the area. Cohen (1998) states that there is as yet no empirical evidence as to which approach to strategy training works best. According to him, the only characteristics crucial to all instructional frameworks are that they must, firstly, make learners aware of the purpose and the use of strategy training, secondly, provide learners with opportunities to practise strategies and, thirdly, help them understand how the newly acquired strategies can be used in other learning contexts.

Although O'Malley and Chamot (1990) concede that there are as yet few studies on FLL strategy training and fewer still regarding the training of strategies for productive language use[39], in a later contribution they claim that there is, in fact, some empirical support for their approach (cf. Chamot and O'Malley, 1994). In O'Malley and Chamot 1990, they identify and examine a number of issues which need to be addressed when implementing strategy training. They conclude that training had best be integrated into the instruction, rather than being treated as a separate entity and that training should be direct, rather than embedded (by which they mean that learners should be informed about the purpose of strategy training so that they can transfer that strategy onto other learning situations, thus becoming increasing teacher-independent). They also point to the obvious fact that teachers need to be familiarised with the concept of learning strategies (as opposed to teaching strategies): teachers must be trained themselves before they can teach students. As regards the allocation of classroom time towards strategy training, the authors state that "[a]s learning strategies are a part of procedural knowledge, we would expect that their acquisition would require a considerable investment of time for cued practice, feedback, and discussion activities" (1990: 186).

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[39] The majority of studies has focused on the first language. SLA studies have tended to focus on vocabulary acquisition, and listening and reading comprehension. One exception is O'Malley and Chamot's own study on *speaking*, described in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990.

As regards a classification of strategies, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Chamot and O'Malley (1994) identify three major categories - *cognitive, metacognitive* and *social/affective* strategies.

According to Chamot and O'Malley, *cognitive* strategies are employed in order to manipulate the incoming information mentally or physically. Examples of cognitive strategies listed by Chamot and O' Malley which are of particular relevance to the acquisition of grammatical knowledge are the use of cross-linguistic referencing and the recall of knowledge in both receptive and productive language use, by means of *deduction* or *induction* as well as through the use of *imagery* and *auditory representation*. While the strategy of applying explicit knowledge may be a general one (i.e. one to which all learners will be exposed on a regular basis), the exact nature of that strategy can be customised by learners in order to suit their individual learning styles. Thus, to take the above example of the application of grammar rules in language reception or production, some learners will prefer to recall lists or tables, while others strongly rely on visual or auditory imagery and others again employ verbal mnemonic techniques.

Rubin (1987), quoting her 1981 study, also includes inductive and deductive reasoning as well as memorisation in her typology. Both inductive and deductive reasoning necessitate the employment of analytical skills, i.e. skills which would appear to be largely underdeveloped in many (although not all) learners educated under the communicative approach. As will be remembered from Section 2.2, Skehan (1994) distinguished between the *analysis*-driven and the *memory*-driven learner, with the latter lacking the creative and analytical linguistic abilities which define the former. While all language use obviously relies to some extent on the use of formulaic, non-analysed speech[40], linguistic "experts", to use Mc Laughlin and Heredia's (1996) terminology, also need to be able to analyse and manipulate language structures in order to gain both a deeper understanding in receptive language use and an increased degree of flexibility in production output.

Metacognitive strategies (Chamot and O'Malley's second category) are employed in order to identify, plan, monitor, and evaluate a learning activity. Rubin (1987) discusses three strategies of importance for the present context: *clarification/verification, practice*

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[40] Cf. Weinert, 1995, for an overview of the literature regarding formulaic speech.

and *monitoring*. Thus, one way of confirming (or refuting) hypotheses, is through investigation of the issue involved, be it by asking other persons involved in the learning process (such as the lecturer) or by consulting reference books. The strategy of *practice* is employed when the learner is focused on "*accuracy of usage*" (Rubin, 1987: 24, italics in original) and involves, among other aspects, the application of rules as well as attention to detail (cf. Swain's 1985 concept of 'pushed output'). Finally, performance *monitoring* usually results in the learner noticing many of his/her errors. As Rubin points out, it is then up to the learner to decide what to do about these errors. In an institutionalised context, learners' output is, of course, also externally monitored. Learners may receive external feedback, and they may even be requested to react to that feedback on a regular basis, should it be negative. Whether or not learners benefit from any of the above cognitive strategies crucially depends on the individuals themselves: only if learners decide that strategies such as practising, monitoring of accuracy levels and acting on feedback are important to their learning effort in the first place will they be employed. In other words, the use of any <u>cognitive</u> strategy is determined by prior decisions on the <u>metacognitive</u> level. In the specific context of the DCU grammar programme the latter would include, among other things, the learners' decision to attend (or to miss) class, to carry out assignments such as homework (i.e. to practise their language skills), to monitor accuracy levels in production, to act on negative feedback, to identify and work on weak points, to regularly assess their progress (or lack thereof) and, where appropriate, to identify and try out alternative learning approaches. As will be established in Chapters Four and Five below, after having been spoonfed at second level, the average Irish school-leaver is unaccustomed to the vast majority of the decision-taking processes involved in the realisation of the above strategies.

Basing his argument in favour of dedicated strategy awareness-raising on Bialystok's *analysis of knowledge/control of processing model*, Wolff (1995) stresses that the learner must develop the ability "sich implizit aufgenommene Repräsentationen von Sprache *bewußt machen zu können*, [...] unanalysiertes Sprachwissen zu *analysieren* und zu *strukturieren* [und] kognitive Operationen bei sprachreflektorischen und sprachverarbeitenden Prozessen *bewußt* einzusetzen" (ibid: 216, my italics). According to Wolff, the development of analytical skills is thus not just a vital component in the build-up of any declarative knowledge but the employment of both cognitive and

metacognitive analytical skills is equally essential in the build-up of procedural knowledge. Similar to Chamot and O'Malley, Wolff postulates that the development of procedural knowledge feature much more prominently in the L2 classroom than has so far been the case. He states that "[d]er Lerner muß sich sein Sprachverarbeitungswissen erschließen, er muß sich bewußt machen lernen, wie er lernt und wie er Sprache lernt, seine Fähigkeit zur Reflexion über Sprache muß gefördert werden. Die Bewußtmachung des prozeduralen Wissens führt zu [...] einer stärkeren Berücksichtigung des eigenen Lernstils, weil sie ihn diesen als effizient erkennen läßt, und sie führt schließlich dazu, daß der Lerner das neu aufzubauende deklarative Sprachwissen in stärkerem Maße seinen persönlichen Erfahrungen mit Sprache entsprechend strukturiert" (ibid: 222). To sum up, according to Wolff, learners must be explicitly introduced to the role of all procedural knowledge, including learning strategies such as the use of cognitive and metacognitive analytical skills. As Chamot and O'Malley (1990) point out, strategy awareness-raising must subsequently be followed by the proceduralisation of the strategies themselves. Following Anderson's cognitive model, Chamot and O' Malley (1994) subscribe to a sequence of strategy acquisition whereby, similar to declarative knowledge, strategies which are initially used consciously are subsequently proceduralised through repeated use, thus becoming gradually automatised.

Finally, strategies classified under Chamot and O' Malley's third category, *social* and *affective* strategies, are evident when learners are "interacting with other persons or using affective control to assist learning" (1994: 375). These strategies include self-talk, group work and the use of questioning for clarification. The latter can obviously be directed at the teacher, fellow students or both.

As was pointed out above, the identification and development of learning strategies are not just crucial for the learning process which takes place within the classroom, but are equally important for self-regulated learning. It is therefore imperative that all students identify <u>for themselves</u> conditions which are particularly conducive to the proceduralisation of declarative grammatical knowledge and grammar-acquisition strategies, and those which are not. As O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have noted, the task of convincing students of the need to develop efficient learning strategies might not be an easy one. They point out that those students who need training most are often the

ones who reject the idea because they are not sufficiently motivated to make what they consider the extra effort. Great care must also be taken not to double up on skill and awareness training - if students are swamped with demands to reflect on strategy use they may end up feeling that the proceduralisation of skills takes precedence over the course content. Another difficulty may arise when students are effectively forced to conduct part of the course work in a learning mode which does not suit them. For instance, anecdotal evidence from language classes in DCU would suggest that a number of students have difficulty with the concept of group work, especially some of the more diligent and the less outgoing ones. As has repeatedly been pointed out, it is therefore essential that time be taken to explain to these students the rationale behind the emphasis on the training of certain common-core strategies which are considered essential for the successful implementation of a course (e.g. the use of analytical skills in the grammar programme), while at the same time pointing out to students that they will have to identify the strategies most suitable to their individual learning styles themselves.

To sum up, in this section it was argued that the development and automisation of suitable learning strategies is a crucial prerequisite for successful language learning. Learners need to be made aware of their own language learning behaviour as well as being familiarised with at least some of the strategies commonly reported to be used by successful language learners. Unfortunately, in view of time constraints and the need to strike a balance between content matter and procedural skill acquisition, the demands for extensive strategy training cannot always be met to the desirable extent. Nevertheless every effort must be made to give strategy training sufficient coverage, preferably in consultation with other colleagues in order to avoid over-saturation. Just how the process of awareness raising and strategy practice has been integrated into the DCU grammar programme will be discussed, together with other aspects of the programme implementation, in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Three

The Irish Education System, the Development of German in Ireland and the German Second Level Syllabi

Introduction

This chapter focuses on educational matters which are considered to be of importance with regard to the learning and teaching of German grammar at Irish second level institutions. Sections 3.1 and 3.2. outline some aspects of the Irish education system and language policy in Ireland, while Sections 3.3 and 3.4 give a brief overview of the development of German as a subject in Irish secondary schools, and look at the issue of teacher qualification and in-service provisions. In Section 3.5, aspects of the Junior Certificate and the two Leaving Certificate syllabi which are of relevance for the present research will be presented and discussed. Section 3.6 sums up the findings.

3.1 An Introduction to the Irish Second and Third Level Education System

3.1.1 Second Level Education

In 1996, the Irish second level sector comprised 775 state-aided schools: 452 secondary schools which, although primarily publicly financed, were privately owned and managed, 247 vocational and 76 community or comprehensive schools. 61% of students were educated in secondary schools, 26% in vocational schools and 13% in community or comprehensive schools.

Second-level education in Ireland consists of two strands: a three-year junior cycle, at the end of which students sit the Junior Certificate[1] and, depending on whether or not students avail of the one-year optional Transition Year Programme which follows the Junior Certificate, a two- or three-year senior cycle. The aim of the Transition Year which is interdisciplinary, learner-centred and not examined is to help students take responsibility for their learning and to develop skills that transcend the boundaries of institutional education (cf. Irish Department of Education, 1996a: 13). In the senior cycle, students are presented with a choice of three different types of Leaving Certificate programmes, certification in two of which (the *Leaving Certificate Programme* and the *Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme*) can lead to qualification for direct entry into third-level courses. The vast majority of students follow the *Leaving Certificate Programme* for which they are required to take at least five subjects, Irish, English and Mathematics being compulsory subjects for most students[2]. Students typically sit the Leaving Certificate examination at the age of 17 or 18.

The two institutional bodies with prime responsibility for second level education in Ireland are the *Department of Education and Science[3]* and the *National Council for*

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[1] The Junior Certificate was first examined in 1992; until then the examination at this level had been called the *Intermediate Certificate.*

[2] According to the 'Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 1987/88 to 1996/97', students can choose their Leaving Certificate subjects from five approved groups: Language, Science, Business Studies, Applied Science and Social Studies. The document recommends that students take at least three subjects from the group which best suits their interests and abilities and at least two from the other groups (ibid: 10). According to the NCCA, in 1994 some 77% of students took seven subjects in their Leaving Certificate examinations (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 1995a: 13).

[3] Before 30th September, 1997, this institution was called the Department of Education.

Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)[4]. The Department is in charge of the administration of public education, i.e. of all primary, post-primary as well as of special education. The NCCA advises the Minister for Education on matters regarding curriculum design and assessment procedures in first and second level education. The 1997 Education Act put the NCCA on a statutory basis for the first time, increasing its powers from its former consultative function to a more active role (cf. Irish Department of Education and Science, 1997b: 29). While the drawing up of curricula is carried out by the NCCA, the responsibility for the setting of examination papers, including sample papers, as well as the marking of those papers lies exclusively with the Department. However, the harmonisation of marking systems between the various languages falls within the remit of the NCCA.

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[4] The council is composed of "persons involved in the education system at primary and post-primary levels, in particular national organisations of parents, recognised school management organisations and recognised trade unions and staff associations representing teachers, and [...] other persons who have experience or skills, including experience in and skills of business and industry " (Irish Department of Education and Science, 1997b: 28).

3.1.2 Third Level Education

The third level sector comprises seven universities, the institutes of technology[5], the teacher training colleges and some private colleges which receive no state funding. In 1996, about 89,700 students were enrolled in third level institutions, 53,400 of whom attended universities and 35,500 institutes of technology. All universities and some institutes of technology are self-governing institutions. Teacher training colleges cater for primary-level teachers only; the requirements for second level teachers' qualifications will be discussed under 3.4.

The two institutions with a remit for higher education are *The Higher Education Authority* (HEA) and the *National Council for Educational Awards* (NCEA). The HEA has two main functions, firstly, to advise the State on the development of the higher education sector (e.g. the building of new universities etc.) and, secondly, to administrate funding (except for student grants but including, for instance, funding under the SOCRATES system). However, the HEA does not have a say in the validation of courses or the award of third level qualifications. While universities validate their own courses and award their own qualifications, the validation of courses and award of qualifications for successful completion of degree and other courses in the non-university sector of higher education presently fall (with a few exceptions[6]) into the remit of the NCEA. The 1995 White Paper on Education envisaged that institutes of technology be "brought within the remit of a reconstituted Higher Education Authority" (Irish Department of Education, 1995a: 34). However, this has not yet materialised, although working groups are supposed to be set up shortly with a brief to examine this issue.

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[5] The majority of studies in these institutions will lead to the award of a *Certificate* or a *Diploma*. In most colleges, certain subjects can also be taken to *degree level* (B.A., B.Sc. and B.B.S).

[6] Among the exceptions are degree courses in the Dublin Institute of Technology which are awarded by the University of Dublin and some other qualifications awarded by the Institute itself (cf. Irish Department of Education, 1996a: 24).

3.1.3 A Brief Introduction to Third Level Entry Requirements - the Points System[7]

The Leaving Certificate Examination at the end of the senior cycle consists of two strands, a so-called Higher Level and an Ordinary Level. As can be seen in table 3.1, all examination results are allocated specific grades, each grade representing a percentage range of marks.

Table 3.1[8]

Percentage Range	Grade
90 - 100	A1
85 - 89	A2
80 - 84	B1
75 - 79	B2
70 - 74	B3
65 - 69	C1
60 - 64	C2
55 - 59	C3
50 - 54	D1
45 - 49	D2
40 - 44	D3
25 - 39	E
10 - 24	F
0 - 9	No grade

Source: *The Irish Times*, January 21, 1997

In order to gain entry into third level education, students must apply to the Central Applications Office (CAO), submitting a list of their preferred third level courses. For the purpose of discrimination between individual student performance and in order to guarantee an equal treatment of all applicants, the results which students achieve in their Leaving Certificate examinations are converted into points, as illustrated in the 1997 points scheme in table 3.2. Performance in a student's six best subjects is taken into account when calculating the total number of points.

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[7] The points system was introduced in 1971 by Dr Tom Murphy, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in UCD, who considered it to be the fairest system after free secondary education had been introduced in all Irish secondary schools in 1967.
[8] This is the common points system which does not take into account bonus points which some institutions give for certain subjects. The system with its present gradings was introduced in 1992.

Table 3.2

Leaving Certificate Grade	Number of points		
	Higher Paper	Ordinary Paper	Higher Maths
A1	100	60	140
A2	90	50	125
B1	85	45	115
B2	80	40	105
B3	75	35	95
C1	70	30	85
C2	65	25	75
C3	60	20	65
D1	55	15	-
D2	50	10	-
D3	45	5	-

Source: *The Irish Times*, January 6, 1998

According to the NCCA publication *The 1994 Leaving Certificate Examination: A Review of Results*, an increasing number of students aim to sit the Higher Level paper, although there is considerable inter-subject variation (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1995a: 8). The reasons for this general increase are obvious: even average performances on the Higher level paper secure a higher number of points than a very good performance on the Ordinary Level paper (for example, a C2 in a Higher Paper yields 5 more points than an A1 in the Ordinary paper). Since the points system is demand-driven, the number of points required to gain access to a particular course undergoes constant fluctuation, depending on the number of applicants who on their CAO form expressed an interest in this course and on their subsequent performance in the Leaving Certificate examination[9]. In addition to the points system, the National University of Ireland (NUI), until 1992, offered the so-called Matriculation examination

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[9] In 1997, the average number of points needed to get into a DCU course with a language element was around 420.

as a minimum university entrance examination for all NUI colleges[10].

The points system has been severely criticised by many (including educational advisers, teachers, parents and students themselves) as putting an inordinate degree of pressure on learners. Educational advisers and teachers in particular have been critical of the almost exclusive focus on exams (i.e. the product-driven approach to learning and teaching) which a maximum attainment of points in these examinations has forced on teaching practices in Irish secondary schools.

In its consultative paper entitled *Assessment & Certification in the Senior Cycle - Issues and Directions*, the NCCA states that "[i]ncreasingly over the past two decades, the [Leaving Certificate] examination has come to be regarded less as a test of achievement and more as a means of discriminating between students for the purposes of selection for and allocation of places in higher education" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1994: 15). While recognising "the important role of the Leaving Certificate as a selection mechanism" (ibid: 16), the organisation quotes from one of its previous publications (*The 1991 Leaving Certificate Examination: A Review of Results*), stating that "[e]xaminations designed mainly for selection purposes tend to be less concerned with documenting *what the candidates know or can do*, and more concerned with the problem of discriminating reliably between candidates of different ability levels" (1994: 15, my italics). While the NCCA, by their own admission, are primarily concerned with the needs of students who "complete their formal education at the end of second-level schooling" (ibid: 15), it also points out that "[i]t is important for students that the Leaving Certificate should provide a ladder of progression to further and higher education" (ibid: 16). The NCCA thus criticises the fact that this 'ladder' at the moment is merely based on statistical values: knowledge or skills not tested in the narrow framework of the terminal examinations are of subordinate, if any importance.

This point underlines an argument which was raised by many secondary teachers in the course of the research to be presented in Chapter Four. These teachers insisted that the

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[10] The exam was perceived to be more difficult than the Leaving Certificate exam and was primarily geared towards more academically minded students. For modern languages this exam consisted of a language paper with a translation and a comprehension component but no literature question. If the mark achieved in this exam was higher than the Leaving Certificate German result, the points for this exam were carried forward; if the exam was failed but the Leaving Certificate had been passed, the student could still get into the course. Students could also 'buy the matriculation': if their Leaving Certificate result was of a sufficient standard then they were able to obtain this entrance examination by merely registering for it without actually having to sit the examination.

majority of learners saw the primary purpose of second level education as being taught and prepared in such a way that will allow them to achieve the highest possible score in the Leaving Certificate examination. And it was suggested that, in many instances, second level education is not so much a place of learning but a place where students are taught how to master exams. As such, Leaving Certificate results would appear to say more about a learner's ability to perform well in an examination than about *absolute* knowledge levels or performance ability[11]. The points race thus clearly takes away the emphasis from the process orientation of learning and turns it into an approach that is almost exclusively results-driven. Although the introduction of the 1995 senior cycle syllabus was to be an attempt to place increased emphasis on a process-driven approach, there would appear to be little chance of a radical shift in practices unless third level entry requirements change first[12].

Another indication of the strong exam focus and the significance of achieving maximum points is the annual publication in one of the national newspapers of an 'Exambrief' for both the Junior and the Leaving Certificate, compiled by the Institute for Education. The brief comprises precise guidelines as regards topics likely to come up in the exam, the recommended amount of time to be spent on each exam part as well as a list of 'dos and don'ts' - all in all very useful guidelines indeed which students would do well to remember. However, its very appearance must be considered as yet another sign of the overriding importance of exam results, alongside with, to name another example, the fact that role-plays and picture sequences are known to students before they go into the oral Leaving Certificate exam. The latter initiative is undertaken at least partly to enable students to score as highly as possible.

An example of the inadequacy of the points system as a reliable third level entry indicator can be witnessed in the various language combinations on DCU degrees: traditionally students combining French and German in their degrees have needed higher entry points than those with Spanish and German because the demand for the

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[11] Teachers at second level also reported that most students who scored a very high number of points in the German Leaving Certificate examination do not go on to study the language at third level but use those points in order to get into highly sought-after courses such as medicine or law.

[12] In view of what has become known as the *points race*, the well-meant reminder by *The Irish Times* that "the average Leaving Cert result is around 245 points" and that "[o]nly some 10 per cent of Leaving Cert candidates exceed 400 points" (1995: 4) would appear to offer little comfort to those who do not find themselves included in the top bracket.

former combination is higher. However, most lecturers would agree that the latter is the more demanding of the combinations. So, if we accept the premise that higher points equal higher ability, motivation, knowledge and proficiency levels, strictly speaking, students should need higher, not lower points to enter courses with the Spanish/German combination.

Finding a solution to the many problems arising out of the points system will be a most challenging task for the commission which was set up by the Minister for Education and Science in October 1997 and whose brief it is to review the system. Some universities have considered establishing an entrance test of their own because they do not believe that the points scored in the Leaving Certificate are an adequate indication of the students' level of attainment[13]. Others use interviews to identify suitable candidates[14]. Both measures entail their own difficulties which will not be discussed further within the framework of this thesis.

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[13] One university, NUI Cork temporarily introduced such a test.
[14] For example, NUI Maynooth.

3.2 Language Policy in Ireland

3.2.1 Primary Level

In 1993, the NCCA published the discussion paper *Culture and Communication - Foreign Languages in the Primary School Curriculum* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1993). This paper discusses in some detail aims and objectives of such a scheme, operational issues and a development strategy for a pilot project. The aims and objectives at the centre of the discussion are very similar to those introduced in the 1995 Leaving Certificate syllabus to be discussed in Section 3.5.3 below, and include course objectives such as language awareness, cultural awareness and general communicative competence. In October 1997, it was announced by the Minister for Education and Science that the European Commission had approved funding to the sum of £ 1.5 million for a pilot project. The two-year scheme got under way in September 1998 when one of the four main European languages currently taught in Irish secondary schools - French, German, Spanish and Italian - was introduced to fifth and sixth year classes in 270 primary schools nationwide, providing them with 1.5 contact hours per week. German is currently taught in 67 of these schools.

3.2.2 Second Level

According to Ruane (1990), modern languages (other than the native languages of Irish and English), are not included in the list of compulsory second level school subjects. However, most schools offer at least one foreign language (Ruane, 1990: 5).

As regards the range of languages taught in Irish secondary schools, French, due to historic links between Ireland and France, has traditionally been the predominant L2 in Irish second level institutions - German, Spanish and Italian are usually taught as L3 or L4. The situation changed somewhat in the course of the 1980s when, for reasons to be discussed under 3.3 below, a concerted effort to diversify was made. Far-reaching recommendations for modern language teaching on a curricular level were made in 1987 in a report published by the Board of Studies under the auspices of the predecessor of the NCCA, the Curriculum and Examination Board (CEB)[15]. Many of the suggestions made in this report were incorporated into the 1995 Leaving Certificate syllabus to be discussed below, including the attempt to strike a balance between product-oriented and process-oriented language learning (Curriculum and Examination Board, 1987: 38). However, some of the report's considerations went much further. For instance, on the issue of *language awareness* the report advocates a cross-curricular approach to fostering language awareness, to include English and Irish, and suggests that a Language Awareness course could be time-tabled as a subject in its own right (ibid: 47). Recommendations for a *school language policy* include, among other aspects, the call for guidelines in the following two areas:

1. "guidelines for a co-ordinated approach to language in education. This would aim to sensitise *all teachers* to the role of language in learning and cause them to reflect on their own use and on the learner's use of language in the classroom" (ibid: 48, my italics).

2. "guidelines for time-tabling (e.g. need for daily classes in all languages; importance of continuity in language learning; positive discrimination of less widely taught languages)" (ibid: 49).

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[15] Two years prior to the publication of this report, the CEB had proposed in a consultative document a core curricular framework for second level in which modern languages were not even mentioned (cf. Ruane, 1990: 11).

While not making detailed suggestions as regards forms of assessment, the report suggests that these might include *continuous assessment* and *learner self-assessment* (ibid: 51)[16].

Modern languages taught in Irish second level schools now include Dutch, Portugese and Modern Greek.

3.2.3 Third Level

Due to the curricular diversification of third level institutions there is no common language policy. Framework elements of university degree courses for first year German language students will be briefly discussed in Chapter Six.

The next section focuses at the development of modern languages, and in particular German, in the Irish education system.

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[16] According to official sources, teachers are opposed to continuous assessment for two reasons: they resent the concept of being asked to do additional work without extra payment and they also anticipate accusations of bias.

3.3 The History of German as a Subject in Irish Second Level Institutions

3.3.1 The Pre-1983 Syllabi for Modern Languages

Both the pre-1983 *Intermediate Certificate* and the *Leaving Certificate* syllabi were shared by all modern languages - French, German, Spanish and Italian.

The *Intermediate Certificate* syllabus read as follows:

"The main aims of the teaching should be to enable the pupils (a) to understand the target language as spoken by an educated native, (b) to develop accuracy and fluency in oral expression, (c) to read at sight with a good grasp of the meaning, passages of a reasonable standard of difficulty, (d) to translate passages of a standard similar to that mentioned under (c) into either Irish or English, (e) to acquire competence in writing (i) easy free composition and (ii) easy prose from dictation.

It is recommended that the target language should be approached through a course based on an up-to-date language learning method, and that the teacher should have been trained in Modern Language teaching techniques. Exercises in the sounds and intonation of the target language together with conversation practice should be a regular feature of classroom activity.

The pupils should gradually be made acquainted with the life and culture of the people whose language they are learning.

The Examination syllabus will consist of:

(i) *Free composition* (extent: 180 words) [...]

(ii) *Comprehension Tests*: These will be based on passages of both prose and poetry [...]. Questions on the content of the passages will be in the target language (answering to be through the same medium). [...]

(iii) *Translation at sight*: Unprescribed prose passage(s) for translation into Irish or English. [...]

(iv) *Grammar*: Functional grammar (to be tested in structural exercises).

[...]".

(Irish Department of Education, 1979: 85-86)

The *Leaving Certificate* syllabus read as follows:

" [...] The aims of the teaching shall be the same as those outlined in the preamble to the Intermediate Certificate Syllabus, but a higher level of proficiency will be required, and candidates taking the Higher Level paper will be expected to have acquired competence in translation into the target language. All candidates should be encouraged to read widely from modern works in the language they are studying.

[...]

Higher Level Examination: [...]

The written tests will consist of:

1. Free composition of about 200 words. Three composition topics will be set. Some guidance will be provided.

2. Translation of a short passage of unprescribed Irish or English prose, simple in style and vocabulary, into the target language.

3. Comprehension test: This will be based on a passage (or passages) of prescribed prose. Questions on the content and context of the passage(s) will be in the target language and will be answered in the same language.

4. Translation at sight. Unprescribed prose passage [...] for translation into Irish or English" (ibid: 152/153).

As is obvious from the above quotations the pre-1983 syllabi, in both teaching and examination, were characterised by the grammar-translation methodology with some oral and aural elements in the teaching, but not in the examination syllabus.

Languages other than Greek or Latin did not become firmly established in the Irish education system until the start of the nineteenth century (Ruane, 1990). Religious orders played an instrumental role in the institutional establishment of modern languages by incorporating them into the school curricula. French was the predominant language with only a small minority of learners engaging in German, Spanish and Italian. Ruane points out that "German was valued for the avenue it opened up to the widely influential academic and scientific research being undertaken by German scholars in the 19th century [...]" (1990: 8). After Irish independence in 1922, the Irish language soon became a compulsory subject in both the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations, thus sidelining other modern languages. Simultaneously, Latin began to play a major role which lasted until the late 1950s. Since its fate was closely linked to the status it held within the Catholic Church, the demise of Latin was unstoppable when changes began to make themselves felt in the Church in the early 1960s. In 1974, Latin was finally removed as a requirement for an NUI Matriculation in the Arts Faculty. This move was to have a major impact on the uptake of modern languages with French being the main benefactor. The number of students opting for German, together with those opting for Spanish and Italian, fluctuated somewhat, rising from 0.2 % in 1960 to 7.3 % in 1977, only to decrease again to 6.8 % in 1980. During the same period the popularity of French rose steadily from 41.2% to 64 % (Ruane, 1990: 9).

When, for reasons which will be explored below, in the mid -1980s the demand for German began to soar on an unprecedented scale there were a number of factors which seriously hampered the uptake of German at second level. The first obstacle was the status of German within the school system: thus, if there was only one language offered at school level, it was usually French which, contrary to official regulations, was often awarded the status of core subject[17]. As a survey conducted in the 1980s by the German Teachers' Association (Gesellschaft der Deutschlehrer Irlands, GDI) revealed, German was often introduced as a second year option, along with the other languages and highly popular subjects such as Commerce, Home Economics and Science. Furthermore,

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[17] Ruane points out that all languages are supposed to have optional status (1990: 14).

German was in many cases taught in double or even treble periods which ultimately meant less progress could be made in this subject[18].

A second problem manifesting itself concerned the examinations: the same level of achievement was expected in languages which were taken up in second year (or later) as was expected in the core language (usually French). A connected problem emerged with regard to the grade of difficulty of exam papers in the various languages. Although all modern languages shared the same curricular requirements and syllabus, there was a clear disparity of standards in that the other language papers were more difficult than the French paper. Leaving Certificate exams in German were generally judged to be of an excessively high standard and German was therefore generally perceived as a difficult subject. In view of the choice limitations dictated by the university entrance system, there was considerable parental pressure on their sons and daughters to go for the 'safe options' and to choose subjects which offered a better chance of yielding higher points. As a consequence, there was a sharp decline in the number of schools offering German, from 190 schools in 1979 to 166 in 1984, sending alarm bells ringing with all those who had a vested interest in the survival of German on the school curriculum.

A third exacerbating factor was the economic climate in the 1980s. Due to the considerable national debt incurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, fiscal rectitude was the order of the day and, as a result, sizeable cutbacks were made in the educational sector. An embargo on public service recruitment was introduced, and from about 1982 onwards there was a drastic deterioration of the pupil/teacher ratio. As a consequence, most schools had 5 or 6 teachers over the quota which meant that no new positions were created for the next few years. Thus, unless there was someone on the staff who could teach German it was not possible to introduce German in any given school.

The Inspectorate at the Department of Education was also severely understaffed: while there were two French inspectors, there were none for German or Italian. An inspector for German was not appointed until 1984.

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[18] Although these circumstances would presumably be described as almost idyllic by those who taught German during their lunch break or after school.

3.3.3 Determining Factors in the Take-up of German

The following would appear to have been the developments at the core of the changed fortunes of German in Ireland in the course of the 1980s:

1. Curricular changes

In the 1970s, the Council of Europe launched a major European-wide campaign (cf. Van Ek's *Threshold level*, 1975[19]) in order to promote language proficiency, stressing the need for effective communicative skills as well as the consideration of individual learner needs. In Ireland, the call for a change in language policy was heeded when in 1983 syllabus committees convened for the purpose of drawing up new 'communicative' syllabi for both the then Intermediate Certificate and the Leaving Certificate, to be examined from 1985 onwards. These syllabi were to include an aural element and from 1986 onwards an oral element[20]. It was hoped that this step would, in particular, promote languages other than French and, in the case of German, that it would have a favourable impact on the negative perception of German.

2. A campaign of consciousness-raising

In 1982, the *National Modern Languages Convention* brought together teachers of the different modern languages taught in Ireland in order to discuss ways of enhancing the status of all languages. On the German teachers' side, the German Teachers' Association GDI was particularly committed and active. They received strong support from the Goethe Institute and third level institutions, as well as (from 1984 onwards) from the Inspector of German. The GDI in particular worked very hard to counter the perception of German as a difficult subject at a time when grammar-translation was still the main mode of teaching and examining. The organisation had various meetings with the Minister for Education and sustained a campaign of pressure on politicians and public opinion.

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[19] The 1975 version was revised and extended by Van Ek and Trim in 1990.

[20] Although the pre-1983 examinations included the option of an oral element in both the then *Intermediate Certificate* and the *Leaving Certificate* (cf. Irish Department of Education, 1979: 86 and 152/3), this option was very rarely exercised. Since it was administered, without remuneration, by the pupils' own teacher, the unions eventually banned participation.

In 1983, the Royal Irish Academy's *National Commission for the Teaching of Modern Continental Languages* published a report which considered the obstacles to a diversification of modern languages in Ireland and outlined paths towards possible solutions. The paper called for:

- an inspectorate in each language
- equitability of examination standards
- provision of time-tabling assistance to schools

The post of Inspector for German was filled in November 1984. In October 1984, a cultural agreement was signed with the Federal Republic of Germany, providing for a Language Adviser who was to be established from 1985 onwards in the Department of Education and who was to work hand in hand with the Inspector for German. In a related move, the Head of the Pedagogical Service at the 'Pädagogischer Austauschdienst (P.A.D.)' visited Ireland in April 1985 and offered 20 language course places for secondary school pupils with German as of 1986, with an additional 20 more from 1988 onwards. In 1992, a second Inspector for German was appointed.

3. Career prospects

These must be considered as possibly the single strongest motivating force behind the dramatic take-up of German. The argument in favour of learning German was made against a background of massive youth unemployment which made job prospects on the relatively successful German labour market seem very attractive indeed, to both students and their parents.

In October 1984, a number of Dublin-based third level colleges organised a conference with the title *German in Ireland - The Challenge of Business and Technology - The Response of Education*. It brought together members from the business community, Germanists and experts in the area of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), with the purpose of drawing attention to what was considered by many as a highly unsatisfactory situation in the Irish educational system[21]. As became apparent at that conference, the then Confederation of Irish Industries (CII)[22] was preparing for a major expansion of their exports onto the German market. Acutely aware of the modern language

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[21] Cf. Broderick et al., 1991: 1-4.
[22] Now Irish Business and Employers Confederation, IBEC.

shortcomings at second level, the industry urged educational bodies to take immediate action. The CII itself commissioned a survey on language needs in the workplace in Ireland[23] which was carried out by Professor Konrad Schröder from Augsburg University. The Goethe Institute played an instrumental role in supporting the requirements which were established by the report. The rationale behind the publication of the survey was to make the German component of third level courses in Marketing, Business and Technology as relevant as possible to the needs of Irish business and industry. 767 firms were approached, 248 of which replied. Results revealed that to 54% of businesses, German was the most important language. 26% of businesses expressed a need for staff with French language skills and a mere 1% stated an interest in Spanish language skills (Schröder, 1991: 10-15).

The report was launched in March 1988 in the Allied Irish Banks' (AIB) head office in the presence of the Minister of Education, the Minister of Trade and Commerce, the Director General of the CII and the President of the German- Irish Chamber of Commerce and Industry, all of whom confirmed that there now was a very clear and cogent argument for the teaching of German in a wide variety of Irish educational institutions.

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[23] The survey was commissioned together with the Association of Lecturers of German and the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

An examination of the circumstances and reasons of how, in view of a most adverse economic situation, German was taken up on an unprecedented scale in the late 1980s, reveals that a major driving force was the spirit of co-operation between all those with an interest in the teaching of German in Ireland - albeit for quite diverse reasons. The co-operation between second level teachers of German, and above all, their representative body, the GDI, the Goethe Institute, third level lecturers, the Department of Education, in the form of the Minister for Education, the Inspector and the Language Adviser, the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the then CII and the German Embassy all worked together in a most determined manner. Examples for this co-operation are the formation in 1987 of an LSP group under the auspices of the Goethe Institute with a view to developing materials and discussing methodological approaches for the newly stated need of supplying Irish businesses with graduates who possessed the foreign language skills necessary to cope in a commercial or scientific environment[24]. Third level institutions followed suit by diversifying their traditional language degrees and combining languages with options such as Marketing/Commerce/Business studies, Computer Science, European Studies, Applied Sciences and Law (cf. Broderick et al., 1991: 2/3). In order to raise the general awareness of the significance of learning German, the Goethe Institute made available to all second level schools a video with accompanying brochures (*"What about learning German?"*) which had been developed with the help of Irish teachers and lecturers of German. The video clearly spelled out the urgent need to introduce German into Irish second level institutions in order to improve career prospects for Irish students. Due to the problems outlined under 3.3.2 (time-tabling difficulties, competing options etc.), diversification at second level proved to be a most challenging task indeed. However, the main obstacle remained the abovementioned ban on the creation of new posts, due to educational cutbacks. With a change of government in 1987, the new Minister for Education asked the NCCA to convene a seminar on modern languages which included

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[24] This group was formed by the Goethe Institute, the Association of Lecturers of German and others, notably lecturers who had come to Ireland under the auspices of the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Auslandsdienst - DAAD).

representatives from educational and cultural institutes as well as industry. The subsequent report strongly emphasised the need for a greater stress on language learning and diversification.

As a result, in 1988 the Department of Education conducted a survey of second level schools ('Trawling through schools', cf. *The Irish Times*, June 21, 1988) to establish to what extent qualified teachers of modern languages were under-utilised. It emerged that almost all teachers qualified to teach German were already doing so. So in order to release schools from the quota bind, the Minister granted a derogation from the quota by introducing a part-time hour scheme in schools intending to introduce German. Arrangements were made for senior cycle students who wished to take up a language at ab initio level but were not in a position to take a Leaving Certificate course: from 1989 onwards these students were granted permission to sit the junior level exam (cf. Varilly, 1991: 6). The extra hours granted by the Department lasted until 1994. The above measures ensured a dramatic rise in the demand for German, as is evident from the figures in table 3.3 below: the number of schools offering German in the junior cycle rose by almost 100 between 1987 and 1988, while the number of pupils who took up German at second level increased by more than 12,000 in 1988 and by another 42,000 between 1988 and 1991. The percentage of students sitting the Leaving Certificate German examination reached its highest level so far in 1994 when 20% sat the exam; since then numbers have been falling slightly.

However, even with one administrative hurdle overcome, another one still needed to be tackled, namely that of adequate teacher supply to meet the burgeoning demand. Again, the Goethe Institute could be relied upon for help: a number of scholarships in Germany were introduced for those teachers who had done German at some stage in their past and were now to take on the task of teaching ab initio German to students at their schools. It was envisaged that these teachers would teach the first few years to get German off the ground and then qualified teachers would take over for the Leaving Certificate - an ad hoc solution. For those who could not go abroad, a one-week course was held in Killarney in the South West of Ireland. The Department of Education's INSET budget for German was also substantially increased (and to a far greater extent than that of other languages) in order to provide an in-service response.

Table 3.3

Schuljahr	Anzahl der Schulen mit Deutsch- unterricht	Deutsch Lernende im Sekundar-bereich	Gesamt: Schüler im Sekundar-bereich	Leaving Cert.-Schüler im Fach Deutsch	% der Schüler, die Leaving Cert. in Deutsch ablegen
1983/84	keine Angaben	keine Angaben	keine Angaben	1660	keine Angaben
1984/85	166	15818	keine Angaben	1701	keine Angaben
1985/86	179	17117	315083	1969	3,74
1986/87	204	20685	316065	2250	4,54
1987/88	230	27396	316336	2377	4,67
1988/89	330	39932	316021	2700	5,13
1989/90	411	54364	313037	3323	6,08
1990/91	450	673360	321456	4437	7,21
1991/92	457	82052	359292	5502	9,84
1992/93	532	90353	358600	8142	14,23
1993/94	603	94196	keine Angaben	12174	20,00
1994/95	598	94463	371000	11741	18,00
1995/96	597	91787	369685	11500	17,00

Source: *Goethe Institute,* 1998

3.3.5 The Current Situation

Although numbers have been falling slightly since 1994, to most outside observers German would appear to be firmly established as a subject in many second level schools by now. Listening to teachers at in-service seminars such as the biannual GDI meetings, however, reveals a different picture. Many teachers fear that because of disparities in the implementation of the common modern languages syllabus, notably in the oral examination procedures[25], German is once again being seen as more demanding than the other languages. Teachers have warned against another imminent decline unless steps are taken to bring exam practices in line in all languages (as stipulated by the harmonised syllabi).

Inevitably, stock-taking and critical evaluations have brought to the fore other shortcomings which will need to be addressed if the tremendous effort made by the various parties in the 1980s is to continue to pay off. Ridley et al. (1993), for instance, are highly critical of the lack of resources made available by the state for coping with the burgeoning demand for German, one of which is the lack of adequately trained teachers who are capable of carrying out the new curricular tasks of the communicative syllabus.

When asked to comment on these criticisms, official sources point to the shoestring budget on which educational establishments have traditionally been forced to operate. Thus, while the overwhelming sense of solidarity in 1980s managed to haul German out of its obscure school corner, the sobering realisation has set in that even the most laudable - and successful - ad hoc solutions run into difficulty unless they are, over time, supported by consistent structural and financial policies.

Another aspect which has frequently been criticised regards the increasingly common linkage between education and industry - not just in Ireland. Krumm (1992: 97) claims that decisions on *which* foreign languages are taught and learnt, and *when*, have always been guided by economic-political considerations rather than by language learning theories, not just in the case of German as a foreign language. He argues against a purely utilitarian language policy, insisting that through its excessive emphasis learners

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[25] For instance, in the oral part of the Leaving Certificate examination, students of French and Spanish are not asked to perform the task of describing a picture sequence which is the part testing accuracy.

lose out on other vital aspects of foreign language learning such as the development of their own personal identify and a critical examination of their own and others' cultural depiction. Similarly, Broderick et al. also warn that "[e]ducation is, of course, about more than providing a service to industry and commerce - it is concerned to help learners develop analytical skills and personal autonomy as they acquire the knowledge and skills important to their life in society - and the learning of a language is an activity whose human dimensions are paramount" (1991: 1). But with reference to the development of German in Irish second and third level institutions they maintain that "nevertheless, it seemed sensible to ensure that - where appropriate - language education took cognisance of real, not imagined, needs" (ibid). The 1995 Leaving Certificate syllabus seeks to redress the balance between commercially-driven considerations and other educational aspects by introducing a section on cultural awareness[26].

Another aspect of the current teaching situation at second level which arose out of the developments in the 1980s will be discussed in the next section .

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[26] However, as will become obvious in Chapter Four, a sizeable percentage of teachers would appear not to give much prominence to this section of the syllabus.

3.4 Some Aspects of Teacher Training and Teacher Qualification

Irish second level teachers' qualifications generally consist of a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree and a Higher Diploma in Education (HDip). Some 75% of those training to become second level teachers attend one-year postgraduate (HDip) courses at one of the universities; the remaining 25% go to teacher training colleges with a specialised curricular focus, e.g. Art and Design or Home Economics (Irish Department of Education, 1996a). Several Masters (M.A. and M.Phil.) courses which include foreign language learning and pedagogy are also on offer as another, obviously optional, possibility for further teacher education. Apart from the HDip courses, occasional in-service seminars and courses are offered by the Goethe Institute, the Department of Education and Science[27], and the German Teachers' Association. The latter holds seminars and issues bulletins on a biannual basis as well as organising regional group meetings. The European Union also provides some services through the funding of programmes such as SOCRATES, where units such as LINGUA and COMENIUS are geared, in particular, towards assisting second level teachers in their efforts to keep up or improve their language skills.

However, the soaring demand for German teachers from 1988 onwards soon exposed a lack of suitably qualified teachers, a tendency which would appear to have lasted into the present time. According to the Department of Education and Science, a major difficulty in this respect is the fact that while it has some jurisdiction over *public schools* such as vocational, community and comprehensive schools, *secondary schools* - which comprise the vast majority of schools at second level - are given a relatively free rein in staffing policy matters. Rules for public schools stipulate that:

1. All new positions in public schools must be advertised.

2. Teachers must have taken the subject they teach to degree level.

3. Teachers must have a teaching qualification (the HDip).

4. Teachers must have a qualification in Irish (as a rule the *Ceardteastas*)[28].

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[27] In 1994, the area of in-services was taken over by the 'In-career development unit', an EU-funded unit at the Department of Education.

[28] This is a qualification awarded by the Department of Education, *'Ceardteastas'* meaning 'Trade Certificate'. All Irish second level teachers are obliged to take an oral examination set by the Department and until 1998 those wishing to teach in a vocational school also had to take a written examination.

Secondary schools on the other hand are privately owned and managed, and are not obliged to advertise new positions. In these institutions, German is on what is known as the 'open register'[29]. Subjects on this register can be taught by any teacher with a B.A. and a HDip qualification. In other words, German can be taught by someone who has no qualification in that language. While this practice is considered deplorable and untenable by many in the educational field (above all, by teachers themselves), there would appear to be no statutory ground for intervention by the Department of Education and Science. In other words, the Department has no power to dismiss teachers in these sectors, regardless of how ill-qualified they are. Only in the vocational sector does the Department have any sanctionary power: here, 'memorandum V 7' stipulates that inspection by the Department can lead to dismissals.

From the outset of the enormous increase in the demand for German, the need for in-service training, in order to avoid a drop in standards in the teaching of German has been impressed on the Minister for Education (cf. GDI Bulletin, 1988). This concern was echoed by many in the educational field (cf. Ruane, 1990: 12). In their briefing session for principals and vice-principals before the introduction of the 1995 syllabus, Department of Education officials strongly recommended that in view of the increased allocation of marks towards oral and the aural examination elements only teachers with a good command of the spoken language should be appointed. However, the shoestring budget on which educational institutions, including the Department of Education and Science, are forced to operate often put a stop to even fairly basic in-service requirements. For instance, while in-service courses for teachers were conducted prior to the introduction of the 1995 syllabus, the lack of funding has meant that these initial familiarisation seminars were never followed up by a series of systematic methodological training courses[30]. In view of the lack of clear practical guidance, many teachers are likely to adhere to teaching practice methods to which they have grown accustomed and which they, presumably, insist work as far as they are concerned.

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[29] Subjects on the 'restricted register' currently include Art, Home Economics, Religion, Sports and Woodwork.

[30] The Goethe Institute is equally plagued by financial constraints, offering applicants for 1998 scholarships either courses in Ireland or abroad, but not both. Similarly, unlike in the past, LINGUA now only offer one grant per teacher per language - once teachers have availed of a grant for a particular language, they are no longer eligible for a second one in that same language.

Another manifestation of the funding problem is the fact that, as a rule, Irish teachers are expected to attend in-service courses in their own time - very few, if any, would receive 'time in lieu' for attending seminars. Attendance at these seminars is commonly viewed as a measure of a teacher's dedication to his/her job and is therefore given little or no official recognition.

While echoing the above criticism regarding the lack of state-provided in-service, Fischer and Schewe (forthcoming), in their assessment of the status of German in Ireland, also call for a number of changes in the existing teacher training programmes at Irish universities. In particular, they recommend increased co-operation between the education and language departments of universities engaging in teacher training to ensure that teachers receive the most up-to-date and relevant training. They also point out that compared, for instance, with countries such as Germany the Irish teacher training period of one year is quite short. As Mitchell's 1994 investigation in Britain shows, concerns regarding the adequacy of qualifications among foreign language teachers are not confined to Ireland (cf. Mitchell, 1994b).

In 1995, a White Paper on Education in Ireland was launched containing a number of points which, if accepted and implemented, may have constituted a significant step forward towards providing adequate in-service teacher training and ensuring quality control. Part III of the Paper which outlined envisaged changes vis-a-vis the teaching profession included the following provisions:

- "An induction year will be introduced for all first- and second-level teachers. Successful completion of this year will be a pre-condition for registration as a teacher.

- A major programme of **in-service education** for all teachers [...] will address the development needs of serving teachers to meet the major challenges and changes which are proposed in the White Paper.

- [...]

- A school-based scheme for the **appraisal of teachers** will be introduced, in consultation with the concerned interests. Arrangements will be put in place for dealing effectively with unsatisfactory teachers.

- A statutory **Teaching Council** will be established for the registration of all teachers, the regulation of the profession and the promotion of professional standards" (Irish Department of Education , 1995a: 35, all bolds in original).

When the Education Bill was put before the Irish parliament in December 1997, none of these provisions were included. Instead, the NCCA has been asked "from time to time to review the inservice training needs of teachers and to advise the Minister in relation to those needs" (Irish Department of Education and Science, 1997b: 29).

The next section looks at the grammar learning requirements under the communicative syllabi and the accompanying examination regulations.

3.5 The German Syllabi and Examinations

Introduction

If the syllabi which succeeded grammar-translation were supposed to usher in the age of the communicative approach and if true communicative competence could not be achieved without grammatical competence (cf. Introduction to this thesis), what were the guidelines provided under that syllabus as regards the teaching and examining of grammar?

There now follows an examination of the three syllabi which are of relevance to the teaching and examining of German in Irish second level institutions. Section 3.5.1 looks at the Intermediate/Junior Certificate syllabus, Section 3.5.2 at the 1983 Leaving Certificate syllabus and Section 3.5.3 at the 1995 Leaving Certificate syllabus.

3.5.1 The 1983 Intermediate Certificate/ Junior Certificate Syllabus

The 1983 Intermediate Certificate German syllabus (which, in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 1987/88 to 1996/97*, is presented in conjunction with that for French, cf. Irish Department of Education, 1996b: 49-76) is a detailed *teaching* syllabus which lists the productive and receptive skills needed to meet certain (listed) communicative tasks at that level. A list of linguistic exponents is included "merely to provide a few immediate reference points for the syllabus user, and are not intended as any kind of definitive statement about the linguistic knowledge a learner would need in order to perform particular productive tasks" (ibid: 51). The only reference to written examination requirements in this document is the statement that the list of exponents "is *not a prescriptive list* for setters of the [...] examination" who "are not restricted to the list [...]" (ibid: 49, italics in original). The most reliable indication as to what is required in the examination has therefore traditionally been given in the examination papers themselves. Exam papers are widely available in bookshops and, according to findings presented in Chapters Five and Eight, are commonly used as teaching materials in schools.

In 1992, the Intermediate Certificate which was examined at one level only was divided into two levels and was renamed 'Junior Certificate'. The 1983 syllabus as such was not revised, even though at the time there were movements within the NCCA to introduce elements such as Language Awareness into the syllabus. Recommendations for revisions were drafted by the course committee but were never published.

3.5.2 The 1983 Leaving Certificate Syllabus

Unlike the Intermediate/Junior Certificate which lacks explicit reference to written examination requirements, the *examinations* for the Leaving Certificate were the focal point for change in 1983, a change which was accompanied by a standardisation of the marking system for all modern languages. The only (teaching and examination) *syllabus* available was that for German; the other languages merely offered sample papers. The syllabus was first examined in 1985.

According to the 1983 syllabus for senior cycle German, the aims of *teaching* were as follows:

"(i) to enable students to use German as a medium of oral and written communication inside and outside the classroom;

(ii) to give pupils a critical awareness of how meaning is organized and mediated through the forms and structures of German" (Irish Department of Education, 1996b: 113).

With regard to examinations, the document lists the three exam types, i.e. the listening comprehension, the written paper and the oral examination. No reference is made as to the expected level of grammatical accuracy in the oral examination which was introduced in 1986. Since the questions in the listening comprehension were to be answered in English, there will be no further discussion of this part of the examination. In the written paper, on the other hand, candidates are required "to demonstrate their grasp of the meaningful organization of the forms and structures of German" (ibid: 113). This statement is followed by an outline of the functional-notional skills as required by "the revised examinations" (ibid).

As regards the precise role grammar has to play, the syllabus states that "[e]fficient communication, of course, depends on correct use of structures. Students should be able to cope receptively and productively with the functions of

- verbs and tenses

- nouns, pronouns, articles and cases

- adjectives, declension and comparison

- prepositions and cases

- conjunctions.

Students should be trained in the correct use of orthography, punctuation and word order and be aware of differentiations of register" (ibid: 114).

The third part of this short document states, with regard to the examination of the Higher level written paper, that:

"The written examination will consist of:

1. Comprehension

[...] questions will be in Irish and in English, and candidates will be required to answer in Irish or in English[31].

2. Letter-writing

Candidates will be required to write a piece of continuous German [...] which responds to a German text (e.g. another letter, and advertisement) [...]. Candidates will be expected to make maximum use of the German text provided and to observe the rhetorical and orthographic conventions of letter-writing in German.

3. Elaboration of notes

Candidates will be required to write a piece of continuous German [...] on the basis of German notes supplied on the examination paper. The topic will be within the possible experience of candidates [...].

4. Compositional exercise

Candidates will be required to demonstrate their grasp of the meaningful organization of the forms and structures of German by linking a series of German sentences into a paragraph of continuous discourse. This exercise will require candidates to handle a variety of syntactic transformations and to supply appropriate connectors" (ibid: 115).

The allocation of marks for the individual exam parts was as follows:

<u>Written paper:</u>   280 marks (=70% of the overall exam marks)

<u>Aural and oral:</u>   60 marks each (= 15% each of the overall exam

                   marks)[32].

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[31] Included in this part of the examination is a cloze-type text testing grammatical knowledge.

[32] At briefing sessions for the 1995 syllabus for principals and vice-principals in November and December 1994, the Department of Education informed those present that the allocation of marks for the examination of the 1983 syllabus had been an interim arrangement put in place to allow teachers to "come to terms with the demands of the new aural and oral tests" and that "[t]he revised allocation reflects more accurately the relative importance of the four language skills for young Europeans of the 21st century" (Irish Department of Education, 1994: 3).

The oral examination consisted of

a. general questions

b. a role-play (testing fluency)

c. a picture sequence (testing accuracy)[33].

On a curricular level, there is thus no evidence that attention to grammatical accuracy had been abandoned in the new communicative syllabus. The need to attend to it was, however, not spelled out as clearly as an exam criterion as had been the case in the previous syllabus[34]. Grammar-translation with its implicit evaluation criteria had been replaced by an approach the interpretation of which caused considerable confusion among practitioners: how was one to marry grammar with the concept of communicativity on a practical level? How and to what extent was grammar to be taught? After all, two new elements, an aural and an oral, had been introduced and needed to be attended to. The added emphasis on the latter must have placed considerable demands on many teachers whose own oral competence may have been somewhat rusty, as there had been little need for a demonstration of that skill under the grammar-translation approach. Thus the task of preparing students for an oral and an aural exam element while at the same time having to 'cover the grammar' and to practise the skills of reading and writing - and all this against a background of less than ideal circumstances, as will become evident in Chapter Four - must have been a most daunting, if not overwhelming task to many teachers indeed.

A certain degree of guidance regarding more specific examination requirements was provided in the *Notes for Teachers in connection with the revised syllabuses in Leaving Certificate German for examination in 1985 and after* (cf. Irish Department of Education, 1983). As regards the importance placed on grammatical competence in the preparation for Higher level examinations and in the examinations themselves, the notes state the following:

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[33] Cf. Gesellschaft der Deutschlehrer Irlands, 1988: 44.

[34] The only indication as to the expected level of competence under the 1983 syllabus is the following note which was to be found in *one* but not all of the versions of the syllabus under 'Form of Examination': "For the tests of productive German a knowledge of the vocabulary and grammatical structures of the Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache will be required" (date of publication unknown).

"1. Comprehension

[...]

For this exercise, as for the entire examination, students should be encouraged in the skills of reading comprehension, combining a grasp of the essentials of a text with an *understanding of the basic structures of German grammar* adequate to their task. [...]" (ibid: 3, my italics).

"2. Letter-writing

[...] This task tests:

i) the correct use of register (Du/Sie) including the correct lay-out and format of a letter.

[...]

v) correct spelling and syntax" (ibid: 4).

"3. Elaboration of notes

[...] It tests the use of the appropriate structures, vocabulary and register. [...]" (ibid: 5).

"4. Compositional exercises

To understand the purpose of a grammatical/compositional exercise in a syllabus whose clear emphasis is on the communicative, two kinds of reflection are necessary. First: that the grammatical structures will, of course, remain an integral part of the teaching of the language and will be tested as such. Secondly, because of the focus on grammatical items in section 4 of the paper, the marking system applied to the productive sections of the written examination (sections 2 & 3) will be positively weighted towards *rewarding positive achievement in German* and *treat matters of accuracy in grammar as only a partial aspect of the performance*" (ibid: 6, my italics). Thus, while the teaching syllabus was wide open to interpretation in terms of grammatical requirements, teachers were informed in the accompanying notes that there were certain exam questions in which accuracy was "but one of several criteria set up for the assessment of effective [...] writing" (Tonkyn, 1994: 4).

According to the accompanying notes, students were rewarded for 'successful communication' (which could be interpreted as 'managing to get the message across') and only partial importance was attributed to the way this message is expressed grammatically. At the same time grammar was tested in a separate exercise where learners were given the clear signal that they were to pay attention to grammar matters in this instance. This fragmentation encourages a view of grammar which reduces its

importance to its application in some specific exam-related questions. According to this conception, grammar is not an integral part of language but an optional extra which must be recalled in certain contexts but can be put on the back-burner in others. Learners who internalise this conception are likely to activate their grammatical knowledge only when receiving the explicit signal to do so, as a rule in dedicated grammar exercises (cf. Townson and Musolff, 1993, who take issue with treating 'communicative ability' and 'linguistic accuracy' as two discrete assessment categories).

To conclude, despite the above criticism, Singleton (1992) is right to observe that while the communicative method had an "'anti-grammar' profile" in some educational contexts elsewhere, "[i]n Ireland the version that has established itself has no such complexion" (1992: 49). (At least not on a curricular level, one might add). However, as was also pointed out above, in view of the introduction of new elements, the existing aspects could not possibly be given the same attention as before. Since the actual grammar teaching requirements of the 1983 syllabus were rather vague, the decision of what was and what was not important was therefore, to a large degree, left up to the individual teacher.

3.5.3 The 1995 Leaving Certificate Syllabus

In 1995, a new syllabus was introduced for the senior cycle. This syllabus was first examined in 1997. As stated under 3.2 above, many of the recommendations made by the then CEB in 1987 were realised in this syllabus, including the introduction of a more *process-oriented* approach to language learning. In its general aims and behavioural aspirations the 1995 Leaving Certificate syllabus is identical for all modern languages. According to the Department of Education, those aims are, firstly, the adaptation of an integrated approach to language teaching[35] and the increased use of the target language in the classroom. According to a source in the NCCA, the new syllabus also places increased emphasis on linguistic competence. The general aims are spelled out in the Department of Education document under the three sections of behavioural objectives which form part of the integrated approach: *basic communicative proficiency* (Irish Department of Education, 1995b: 6-18), *language awareness* (ibid: 19/20) and *cultural awareness* (ibid: 21-23). All items in the basic communicative proficiency category are divided into performance targets under eleven specific activities/themes. A list is also provided of the linguistic skills and grammatical structures needed to realise these targets. The sections on language awareness and cultural awareness likewise list very detailed performance targets. As regards the relationship between syllabus and assessment, the document states that "[e]xamination tasks will always be based on the syllabus content" (ibid: 24)[36].

One of the core objectives of the new syllabus is the assessment of candidates' ability to "express themselves with *relative fluency* and *correctness* in the target language both in speech and in writing" (ibid, my italics). The stipulations for individual parts of the assessment (oral assessment, listening and reading comprehension and written production) do not include any further reference to linguistic accuracy. The production part of the written paper requires candidates "to use the target language for purposes of

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[35] This might suggest that an attempt was to be made to avoid the obvious fragmentation of grammatical knowledge among learners (cf. the Chief Examiner's Report in Chapter Five on this point).

[36] According to a facilitator at the Spring 1997 GDI seminar, the format of the written paper was not to be as rigid as in previous years. This policy was introduced in order to alert students to the fact that learning is a life-long flexible objective and will therefore not be confined to the learning of a limited range of structures which may come up in an examination.

communication, such as expressing feelings and attitudes, giving and obtaining information, describing, relating, offering explanations, summarising, elaborating, etc." (ibid: 26). In other words, the examination requirements for this part of the paper are described in purely functional-notional terms without any reference to the structures that were laid out in such detail in the syllabus. Accordingly, the overall format of the examination is presented as testing the candidate's ability to

"(a) understand the spoken language

(b) understand the written language

(c) communicate in the spoken language

(d) communicate in the written language" (ibid: 25)

In fact, the only reference to the requirement of *accuracy* in the entire assessment section is made under the heading of "Assessment Criteria" which are to be used as differentiation criteria between Higher and Ordinary level exams. The document states that assessment criteria "will take account of:

[...] *degrees* of accuracy and appropriateness of language, including the range of vocabulary and structures used" (ibid: 25, my italics).

In line with the quest for the increased use of the target language in the classroom, a shift has taken place in the allocation of marks. Table 3.4 illustrates the changes for Higher level exams:

Table 3.4

Exam part	% in 1983 syllabus	% in 1995 syllabus
Oral exam:	60 marks (=15%)	100 marks (=25%)
Listening comprehension:	60 marks (=15%)	80 marks (=20%)
Written paper: Reading comprehension Written production	 140 marks (=35%) 140 marks (=35%)	 120 marks (=30%) 100 marks (=25%)

The changed allocation of marks has thus put an increased emphasis on the oral and aural aspects which are clearly perceived to be the most important skills for students who wish to function in a communicatively oriented global market.

As an extension of the integrated approach in classroom teaching, the entire written paper (i.e. both the reading comprehension and the written production) is to be based on two texts. Unlike in previous examinations, some of the reading comprehension questions are to be answered in the target language.

As was the case with the introduction of the 1983 syllabus, the new syllabus was accompanied by guidelines for teachers (a much more detailed document this time)[37]. The document devotes an entire chapter to each the treatment of grammar and to the question of assessment.

In the introduction to the role of grammar, the document states that "[a] communicative approach does not imply that the teaching of grammar is of secondary importance or that fluency should be sought at the expense of accuracy" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1995b: 39). The document particularly stresses the importance of grammatical knowledge and skills for the consultation of reference materials, as part of the newly introduced emphasis on language awareness and learner autonomy. As regards the place of grammar within the communicative approach, it encourages teachers to help learners "to recognise the *communicative value of grammatical structures*" (ibid: 39, my italics). It also warns that "[f]ormal and extensive grammar presentations should be restricted" (ibid) and advocates a consciousness-raising approach instead (ibid: 40). With regard to error correction, the document calls for a balance between fluency and accuracy which does not place excessive emphasis on the correction of errors and recommends that "[e]rror tolerance should be based on a recognition of *the priority of message transfer*" (ibid: 45, my italics).

As regards the role of grammar in assessments, grammatical knowledge in Higher level *listening* and *reading* is not specifically tested in either of these, while an assessment of *oral* competence will include assessing the "awareness and the use of grammar" (ibid: 77). With regard to the role of accuracy in written production, the document states that

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[37] In addition to the 1995 document published by the NCCA, teachers of German received further guidance through the supplementary guidelines published by the Department of Education in February 1997. These guidelines included a glossary of German vocabulary for instructions in the paper as well as a list of grammar terms which might come up in the written paper (cf. Irish Department of Education, 1997a).

one of the criteria used in the assessment will be the "range and accuracy in use of structures" (ibid).

A look at the actual marking scheme for the written examination, as explained to teachers on a number of occasions, reveals that, in actual fact, grammatical accuracy plays a fairly subordinate role. Firstly, the actual grammar section in the paper ('Angewandte Grammatik'), is allocated no more than 25 marks out of a total of 220 marks. Secondly, more than half the marks for the written paper (120 out of 220 marks, i.e. the marks allocated to the reading comprehension) will not be allocated on the basis of grammatical accuracy: At the GDI seminar preceding the 1997 examinations, teachers were informed that, unless student answers are ambiguous, no marks would be deducted for grammatical inaccuracy in those reading comprehension questions that are answered in German. At a subsequent regional group seminar on the new Leaving Certificate marking schemes which took place in November 1997, teachers were advised to urge their students not to use their own German but to quote from the text instead with some evidence of manipulation, e.g. changing a noun to a pronoun[38]. It is obvious, that the grammar knowledge required for this kind of manipulation can only be described as minimal. The November seminar also revealed that the allocation of marks for two of the questions in the written production ('Äußerung zum Thema' and 'Schriftliche Produktion') is divided up into 50% for each the *content* and the *expression*. The expression mark is made up of an assessment of how well a message is communicated and how correct this communication is. Grammatical accuracy is only one aspect making up the expression mark, alongside the correct use of vocabulary, the range of vocabulary, the appropriate use of 'set phrases' etc.. It is recommended that students use fairly basic structures when writing German. The principal grammatical considerations centre around the verb (agreement and tense formation, the use of modal verbs) and word order, plus the use of the occasional conjunction: students who manage to apply these features correctly in most cases are assured of very high marks. As regards the relationship between content and expression, even if students lose out on the

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[38] At the Spring 1998 GDI seminar, teachers were told that having to answer questions in German would appear to have worked to many students' advantage: since little to no evidence of linguistic proficiency was required (even verbatim answers were allocated some marks), high marks were scored by most. On the other hand, when students had to answer questions in English it became obvious that many had not understood the text.

expression marks (e.g. because of faulty grammar), they can still achieve a high overall mark by scoring high on content. Conversely, if the content is too poor, the expression marks cannot exceed a certain upper ceiling. The presenter of the regional group seminar described the overall marking scheme for the Leaving Certificate examinations as very positive and as trying to reward even the slightest evidence of adequate performance. To sum up the status of grammatical knowledge in the written examination, it would appear to be required for only a limited number of both questions and concepts. Although sound grammar may facilitate other aspects of language use, it is by no means considered to be of central importance.

Thus, the fragmented approach to the application of grammatical knowledge which had been ushered in with the 1983 syllabus has been proliferated in the current examination marking scheme. Despite the attempt to introduce an integrative approach to language learning in the teaching syllabus, the marking scheme effectively reinforces the view that grammar is not equally important in all language use. It is also evident from these recommendations that the actual expectations regarding the *range* and *extent* of correctly used grammatical features are very low, not taking into account, for instance, noun phrases or prepositional phrases. It would thus seem that regardless of the emphasis placed on grammatical accuracy in the syllabus and in the classroom, the reality is that students can score very good Leaving Certificate results (and a 'B' is commonly considered to be such as result) without having a good knowledge of the basics of German grammar and without being able to apply basic features correctly in most instances.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to describe the circumstances and structures which form the framework for the teaching and learning of German in Irish second level institutions. As was demonstrated, in the course of the 1980s, German developed from a language which was learnt by a very small group of students to a subject enjoying rapidly increasing popularity. This rise in numbers was as the direct result of a change in both syllabus and examination regulations and brought with it a number of problems. The introduction of the functional-notional syllabus and the concomitant changes in weightings in the Leaving Certificate examinations, according to which achievements in the lexical-pragmatic area were regarded as at least equally important as grammatical competence and performance accuracy, would thus appear to provide at least a partial explanation for the anecdotal lack among the majority of learners of the kind of structural knowledge and appreciation for accuracy which had been common under the grammar-translation method. The actual impact of all the abovementioned aspects on the teaching and learning of German in Irish second level institutions will be examined in the next two chapters which focus on those at the chalkface, the teachers and students themselves.

Chapter Four

The Role of German Grammar in Second Level Teaching and Learning from the Teachers' Perspectives

Introduction

Having explored the structures of the Irish education system as well as looked at the German Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabi, this chapter is concerned with the interpretation and implementation of the curricular requirements by Irish second level teachers in the classroom. Section 4.1 presents subjects and outlines data collection procedures. Section 4.2 focuses on the interpretation of the role of grammar in the 1983 Leaving Certificate syllabus and examinations, i.e. the regulations under which the student cohort at the centre of this research was taught. Section 4.3 looks at the same issue regarding the 1995 syllabus and examinations. Section 4.4 presents some conclusions.

On a note of clarification, since the non-systematic variation in learners' interlanguage use does not always allow for the clear-cut distinction proposed by Corder between non-target-like 'competence' (classified by Corder as *errors*) and non-target-like 'performance' (classified as *mistakes*) (cf. Corder, 1967[1]), the terms 'error' and 'mistake' will be used interchangeably in both this chapter and in Chapters Five and Eight.

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[1] James (1998) points out that in a later paper (1971), Corder refers to the *mistakes* of the 1967 paper as *errors*. James himself admits that it is difficult to distinguish between the two concepts, underlining a point previously made by R. Ellis (1986).

4.1. Subjects and Data Collection

In order to establish which role Irish second level teachers have attributed to grammar acquisition under the communicative approach, a cross-sectional investigation was conducted in which both quantitative and qualitative research instruments were employed (cf. Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, and Lynch, 1996, for a discussion of research methodologies).

In phase one of the teacher-focused research, questionnaires regarding the 1983 senior cycle syllabus and examinations were disseminated in February 1996 to two-hundred and ten secondary school teachers of German in Ireland. Eighty-nine teachers replied, a response rate of 42% [2]. Teachers were asked to indicate in the questionnaires if they were willing to elaborate on a number of aspects arising from answers in the questionnaires in a subsequent telephone interview. Forty-one teachers (= 46%) indicated their willingness to be interviewed and were contacted between March and April 1996. Since a new senior cycle syllabus was introduced in September 1995 and examined for the first time in 1997, and since any potential changes to this syllabus or the corresponding examination requirements could have repercussions on the German grammar programme at DCU, a further two-hundred and ninety questionnaires were disseminated to teachers in November 1997. 140 teachers returned the questionnaires, a response rate of 48%.

Percentage rates in the questionnaires were calculated out of 89, in the case of the questionnaire regarding the 1983 syllabus, and out of 140 in the case of the questionnaire regarding the 1995 syllabus. Percentage rates in the interviews are calculated out of 41. Since percentage rates are rounded, not all totals add up to exactly 100%.

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[2] In 1995/6, about 850 German teachers were registered in Irish second level schools. The exact number of those who were involved in senior cycle teaching is difficult to ascertain but is estimated to be closer to 650.

4.2 Results Regarding the 1983 Syllabus and Examinations

As indicated in Chapter Three, the vague nature of the requirements in the 1983 Leaving Certificate syllabus effectively placed the onus of deciding which grammatical elements were relevant in the exam context onto teachers. So, how exactly did teachers interpret the teaching syllabus and what role did the examination requirements play in their teaching? The specific issues which will be addressed in this section are:

1. The interpretation of the status of German grammar in the teaching of a communicative syllabus (Section 4.2.1)

2. Methodological approaches with respect to the teaching of grammar (Section 4.2.2)

3. The treatment of individual grammar points (Section 4.2.3)

4. Teachers' perceptions of student attitude and difficulty with regard to German grammar (Section 4.2.4).

Answers in all tables will be shown in both percentage rates and absolute figures. For a copy of the questionnaire see Appendix A.

4.2.1 The Status of German Grammar in the Teaching of a Communicative Syllabus

The first question in the questionnaire asked teachers to indicate what emphasis they put on certain aspects of German language learning. The results are shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 (out of 89 subjects)

Skill	No emphasis at all		Little emphasis		Fairly strong emphasis		Strong emphasis		Very strong emphasis	
	rel	abs*	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
Listening	0	0	1	1	25	22	42	37	33	29
Reading	1	1	13	12	17	15	34	30	35	31
Writing	0	0	1	1	13	12	49	44	36	32
Speaking	0	0	6	5	30	27	44	39	20	18
Grammar	0	0	2	2	20	18	46	41	31	28
Pronunciation	2	2	26	23	40	36	22	20	9	8
Vocabulary acquisition	0	0	2	2	13	12	43	38	40	36

* rel = relative (percentage) figure, abs = absolute figure

According to these results, 77% of teachers (69) stated that they were placing either a strong or a very strong emphasis on grammar, thus ostensibly contradicting the claim that communicative language teaching is bereft of grammar. In terms of applying a strong to very strong emphasis, this puts the teaching of grammar in third place after *writing* (85%/76) and *vocabulary acquisition* (83%/74) and ahead of skills such as *listening* (75%/66) and *reading* (69%/61). 13% (12) more teachers said that they were putting a strong to very strong emphasis on grammar than on *speaking*. This could be seen as surprising since oral practice is supposed to be one of the focal points of the communicative approach. However, since the allocation of marks in the Leaving Certificate examination under the 1983 syllabus was weighted in favour of the written paper, the practice of written skills, vocabulary acquisition and grammar would appear to have received more attention than the newly introduced oral and aural skills. As the interview results will reveal, another possible explanation as to why the oral element was not emphasised more is the lack of command of spoken German among many teachers. The fact that speaking German is not a classroom priority is further underlined by the results for *pronunciation* which was stressed least of all items.

Teachers were also asked to indicate how important an aim for Leaving Certificate students they considered grammatical accuracy compared to overall fluency. Results revealed that 26% (23) insisted it was *very important*, a majority of 47% (42) said it was *important* and 27% (24) stated it was *fairly important*. No teacher considered grammatical accuracy to be of *little* or *no importance*.

Teachers were asked whether, without being subjected to time or exam pressure, they would shift their teaching emphasis in any way. Their answers revealed that the two areas which a considerable number would stress more are *speaking* (76%/68) and *pronunciation* (53%/47), while there was little agreement on a change in emphasis on other aspects. This confirms that the actual classroom teaching is dominated primarily by exam requirements.

In the interviews, teachers were asked to expand on the role grammar learning and teaching plays in a communicative syllabus. This time they were asked to state reasons for their particular emphasis on grammar.

The following answers were provided by teachers who put on either a *strong* or a *very strong* emphasis, plus two teachers who put on a *fairly strong* emphasis:

Answers (multiple answers possible):

"You will never come to grips with a language unless you have a
good grounding in grammar"[3]   66% (27)

"Grammatical knowledge is required for the written exams"   29% (12)

"I emphasise grammar because of my own learning experience"   15% (6)

Thus while the majority of teachers stress the importance of grammar as a foundation for the entire language, approximately one third also mentions the exams as part of their teaching rationale. All except two teachers (who were against the communicative syllabus on the whole and called for a much stronger emphasis on grammar) said that they accepted and were in agreement with the aspirations of a communicative approach in a world with an increasing demand for communicative

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[3] Some teachers added that they considered this to be particularly important for those students who might want to study the language at third level.

language skills. Some teachers who had been taught under the grammar-translation approach welcomed the changes because it allowed students to function abroad, something they themselves were unable to do after their Leaving Certificate. Others insisted that they did not consider a disadvantage the fact that their own communicative skills in the foreign language were only developed *after* they had received their grounding in grammar. While most teachers, for reasons stated above, continue to believe in the crucial importance of teaching grammar to their students, some admitted that because of changed syllabus demands they were no longer in a position to dedicate as much time to grammar teaching as previously. However, in view of the above results there can be no question that grammar teaching at second level has been summarily abandoned.

4.2.2 Methodological Approaches with Respect to the Teaching of Grammar

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked about the materials they use when explaining grammar. Answers are shown in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 (multiple answers possible)

I use	Yes		No		No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
a grammar book	42	37	29	26	29	26
the grammar section in the text book	51	45	18	16	33	29
my own notes and handouts	88	78	1	1	11	10

The grammar books most frequently used to explain grammar are: *Übung macht den Meister* (Campbell-Schotsaert, 1994) (named by 33% of teachers, or 29 in absolute figures), *Zur Sache! 3 and Zur Sache! 4* (Hayes and Hayes, 1993) (22%/20) and *Alles klar!* (Rogers and Long, 1982) (15%/13).

Teachers would appear to rely primarily on their own 'pedagogical grammars' which are presumably compiled to suit the needs of each respective class group. Teachers were asked whether they recommend a reference book for German grammar: 49% (44) stated that they did, while 51% (45) said they did not. Other findings regarding methodological aspects revealed that 83% (74) stated that they favoured a mixed approach of setting time aside for explicit grammar teaching and dealing with a point of grammar as it arose, e.g. in the context of a reading comprehension or a piece of writing. 99% of teachers (88) asked students to do follow-up exercises both at home and at school. When asked how much time they spent on both the introduction of new rules and the discussion of follow-up exercises, most teachers stated that this varied quite considerably. 75% of teachers (67) also stated they practised a mixture of inductive and deductive introduction of grammar points, with the remainder saying that they preferred the deductive approach. 69% of teachers (61) said that they explained German grammar through English, while 31% (28) used German.

As regards the use of terminology, 62% of teachers (55) indicated they used it frequently, 28% (25) said they used it constantly and 10% (9) stated they used it rarely.

In the interviews, teachers were asked to expand on the kind of terminology used in the classroom: 90% (80) answered that they were using only very basic terminology. Comments regarding the use of terminology included the following :

- even good learners find it difficult
- terminology needs to be repeated constantly right up until 6th year
- there should not be such a fuss over the use of terminology - after all, students are asked to memorise a whole range of unknown terms in science or maths and they manage to do so without too much of a problem
- terminology should be taught right from the beginning
- students understand the concept in German but not in English
- students have no concept of English grammar
- terminology should be introduced in English classes first

The last two points were made by virtually all teachers. Since parsing and in-depth grammatical analysis is no longer part of the English language syllabus, students are not familiarised with even the most basic grammar concepts such as 'verbs' and 'nouns' until they start learning a foreign language. According to teachers, this development coincided (or was the cause of ?) a perceived general decline in literacy and command of the English language - expressions such as 'I seen' and 'I done' made their entrance into both spoken but also into written language on a larger scale than ever before. Foreign language teachers have apparently expressed great resentment of the current syllabus in English because they feel that they are doing the work that their colleagues in the English department should be asked to do[4]. There was a virtually unanimous call for a reintroduction of at least some grammar teaching in the primary and early secondary level English course by those interviewed in the course of this research.

It would appear that problems with regard to terminology are not confined to Irish classrooms: Tönshoff (1995) investigated the use of metalinguistic terminology in German secondary schools and found that it was the one feature of language learning which was regarded with much scepticism even by otherwise very keen learners

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[4] There is some reference to structural knowledge requirements in the Leaving Certificate syllabus for *Irish*, and anecdotal evidence would suggest that whatever terminological knowledge school-leavers possess has in most cases been acquired in their Irish classes.

(cf. also Raasch, 1995 for his survey on learners' and teachers' opinions on the matter). Just like the Irish teachers who took part in the current research, German teachers interviewed by Tönshoff identified as the major stumbling block for the development of metalinguistic terminology in the foreign language the learners' enormous gaps in their own mother tongue (cf. Alderson et al., 1996, for similar observations among British university students).

In the interviews, teachers also pointed to other constraints (besides the lack of mother tongue grammatical knowledge) which prevented them from conducting their classes in the manner they would ideally choose. Major stumbling blocks, in particular with regard to the teaching of grammar include, firstly, the heterogeneity of classes (named by 80%, or 33 in absolute figures)[5], secondly the lack of suitable teaching materials[6] (49%/20), and thirdly overly large class sizes (24%/10). 17% of teachers (7) - all except one from outside Dublin[7] - stated that they were adversely affected with regard to all three aspects[8].

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[5] As was pointed out in the Introduction to this thesis, this heterogeneity arose because German language studies now attract a much wider spectrum of learners than under grammar-translation.

[6] Teachers who quoted this as a source of pressure criticised that there was not one single book on the market that suited all their students' needs, and that the vast choice of books meant a lot of photocopying. What was striking in this context was that the same book (e.g. 'Brennpunkt' by Fandry and Somerville, 1994) which had earlier in this research (cf. results regarding the use of grammar-teaching materials) been considered as the ideal senior cycle book by some teachers was rejected in this connection by others who saw it as being far too difficult for their students.

[7] Some teachers in the west of Ireland made the point that the circumstances under which they tried to teach German were so far removed from those in other parts of the country and, in particular, in Dublin that they felt there was a distinct lack of appreciation of those difficulties on the part of both other teachers and the authorities.

[8] Since none of these issues had been anticipated as problematic at the start of the research they had not been included in the questionnaires.

4.2.3 The Treatment of Individual Grammar Points

In the questionnaires, teachers were asked to indicate the degree of coverage which select grammar points received in their teaching[9]. Answers are shown in table 4.3. Figures indicate the number of teachers who stated that they covered these items either <u>thoroughly</u> or <u>very thoroughly</u>.

<u>Table 4.3</u>

<u>Grammar item</u>	Answers	
	rel	abs
1. Conjunctions	87	77
2. Prepositions	83	74
3. Verb position in subordinate clauses	80	71
4. Formation of the present perfect tense	72	64
5. Verb position in main clauses	71	63
6. Formation of modal verbs	70	62
7. Verb position in questions	69	61
8. Relative pronouns	67	60
9. Formation of the preterite	66	59
10. Personal pronouns	65	58
11. Word order (TMP)	63	56
12. Formation of the present tense	63	56
13. Formation of regular verbs	61	54
14. Formation of auxiliary verbs	61	54
15. The cases	59	53
16. Formation of separable and inseparable verbs	58	52
17. Possessive pronouns	55	49
18. Formation of the future tense	51	45
19. Adjectival endings	51	45
20. Negation	51	45
21. Formation of reflexive verbs	49	44
22. The passive	48	43
23. Formation of the conditional	47	42
24. Formation of irregular verbs	43	38
25. Formation of the pluperfect	36	32
26. Gender of nouns	35	31
27. Interrogative pronouns	34	30
28. Formation of the imperative	34	30
29. Comparative/superlative	28	25
30. Plural of nouns	24	21
31. Strong/weak nouns	20	18

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[9] In the same question, teachers were also asked to state to what degree they expected items to have been covered previously. Since only approximately one third of respondants answered this part of the question, there will be no presentation of results.

Grammatical items which were important for certain parts of the Leaving Certificate examination were, not surprisingly, emphasised most - *verb and tense formation, personal pronouns, the position of the verb, conjunctions* and *prepositions* were all of significance for the written paper under the 1983 syllabus. The majority of items listed were covered either thoroughly or very thoroughly by less than 60% of teachers. Although it could be argued that most teachers may have expected many of the items above to have been covered previously, therefore not requiring additional in-depth coverage, there are obvious exceptions such as *gender* and *plurals of nouns*. In any teaching approach that stresses the need for accuracy - as would have been the case under grammar-translation - these aspects must be learnt for each new lexical item. However, according to the above results, the *gender of nouns* was covered consistently by only 35% of teachers (31), while the figure for *plurals* was even lower at 24% (21).

Teachers were also asked about the treatment of errors in both written and spoken German. Results revealed that 58% of teachers (52) corrected all errors in written work, with 31% (28) correcting most, and the remaining 10% (9) correcting the most blatant errors.

As regards oral work, no teacher claimed to correct all errors, while 29% (26) corrected most, and 70% (62) the most blatant errors.

Teachers were then asked to state what they considered a serious grammatical mistake. Answers are shown in table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Item/Type of error	Serious		Not serious		No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
1. Regular verbs	99	88	1	1	0	0
2. Modal verbs	99	88	1	1	0	0
3. Verb position in main clauses	98	87	0	0	2	2
4. Personal pronouns	92	82	3	2	4	4
5. Irregular verbs	91	81	9	8	0	0
6. Past participles	90	80	6	5	4	4
7. Position of the verb in questions	90	80	6	5	4	4
8. Auxiliary verbs	88	78	9	8	3	3
9. Verb position in subclauses	88	78	9	8	3	3
10. Possessive pronouns	84	75	10	9	6	5
11. Conjunctions	83	74	9	8	8	7
12. Government of verbs	78	69	8	7	15	13
13. Separable and non-separable verbs	74	66	15	13	11	10
14. Government of prepositions	72	64	15	13	13	12
15. Verb-noun agreement	71	63	17	15	12	11
16. The difference between 'nicht' and 'kein'	69	61	28	25	13	12
17. Government of nouns	56	50	27	24	17	15
18. Interrogative pronouns	53	47	36	32	11	10
19. Umlaute on verbs	53	47	37	33	10	9
20. Reflexive pronouns	53	47	37	33	10	9
21. Declension of nouns	52	46	40	36	8	7
22. Gender of nouns	48	43	44	39	8	7
23. The difference between preposition, conjunction and adverbial	48	43	38	34	13	12
24. Formation of the conditional	44	39	43	38	13	12
25. Formation of the imperative	43	38	47	42	10	9
26. Government of adjectives	42	37	42	37	17	15
27. Umlaute on nouns	38	34	51	45	11	10
28. Adjectival endings	31	28	59	53	9	8
29. Umlaute on adjectives	27	24	63	56	10	9
30. The passive	26	23	64	57	10	9
31. The position of 'nicht' in a sentence	20	18	71	63	9	8

As the above results show, answers are very similar to those for the previous question. Thus the errors considered to be most serious are those which are made with regard to Leaving Certificate examination items. Again, errors made in connection with approximately half of the above items are considered as being serious by fewer than 60% of teachers.

A comparison of results in the two tables reveals a contradiction with regard to certain grammatical items. For instance, although less than half of all teachers placed a strong emphasis on the concept of *irregular verbs* in their teaching (cf. item 24 in table 4.3 and item 5 in table 4.4), almost all considered it serious when this item was produced incorrectly (cf. also the discrepancies regarding *possessive pronouns* - item 17 in table 4.3 and 10 in table 4.4). As regards items below the 60% mark in either table, many of which are identical, impressionistic evidence would suggest that most of these concepts are indeed problematic for a great number of learners at third level, including learners whose accuracy levels would otherwise be fairly high. Items such as *gender* and *declension of nouns* were shown to have received thorough coverage by no more than a third of all teachers (cf. items 26 and 30 in table 4.3). Table 4.4 shows that errors in these areas are also considered as serious by only about 50% of teachers (cf. items 21 and 22). Other aspects known to cause difficulties are the *declension* and *comparison of adjectives* as well as the *formation of the imperative, the pluperfect tense* and *the passive*. Results in table 4.4 also indicate that only slightly more than half of all teachers consider mistakes involving *Umlaute* on *verbs* (item 19) as serious, while figures for Umlaute on *nouns* and *adjectives* (items 27 and 29 respectively) are even lower at 38% (34) and 27% (24). As regards one item of the verbal phrase involving Umlaute, the *formation of the conditional* (item 23 in table 4.3), it received attention by less than 50% of teachers, and its incorrect production was deemed to be a serious mistake by even fewer (44%/39, cf. item 24 in table 4.3).

The above results confirm impressionistic evidence gathered in the teaching of school-leavers over the last number of years. Thus items which received thorough to very thorough coverage and regular corrective feedback would appear to be less problematic for a greater number of learners than those items which were not covered thoroughly or were not given corrective feedback. The above findings would

139

therefore appear to confirm that instruction and corrective feedback pay off to at least some extent.

4.2.4 Teachers' Perceptions of Student Attitude and Difficulty with regard to German Grammar

Teachers were asked to state which attitudes the majority of their students displayed towards German grammar (they could name any number of attitudes). 51% of teachers (45) stated that their students found German grammar difficult, 40% (36) said theirs considered it to be a necessary evil, 27% (24) claimed their students found it challenging, 12% (11) boring, 11% (10) very difficult and only 7% (6) said their students found German grammar interesting. This would appear to confirm some of the observations in Chapter Two, i.e. that levels of intrinsic interest with regard to grammar learning are generally low.

Teachers were also asked to state which three features of German their students find most difficult and which they find easiest. The three most frequent answers for each category are shown in table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5

Features students find most difficult	Answers	
	rel	abs
Adjectival endings	43	38
Cases	42	37
The passive	33	29
Features students find easiest		
Formation of regular verbs	38	34
Tense formation in general	21	19
Formation of the present tense	20	18
No answer	10	9

A number of teachers commented that their students do not find any grammar aspects easy. As will become evident in Chapters Five and Eight, those items which are reportedly perceived as difficult constitute indeed a problem to the majority of learners.

Unlike in the questionnaire, teachers who were interviewed were also asked what they thought would be the most problematic areas of language learning for students entering third level and what those teaching at third level should do to alleviate any potential difficulties. Their answers are as follows (multiple answers possible):

141

1. Grammar   34% (14)

Teachers agreed that this was the single most difficult area, stating that not enough could be done and was done at second level. One teacher criticised that "having been immersed in the communicative approach for five years students are faced, on their entry into college, with the grammar approach of 15 years ago".

2. The all German-speaking environment   22% (9)

3. Miscellaneous:

- *Literature*
- *Oral competence*
- *The big jump in expectancy*
- *The introductory test at UCC*
- *Discussing issues in-depth and at a higher level*
- *Long texts - students are used to chunks and small paragraphs*
- *Assuming responsibility*
- *Much more creative writing at third level*
- *The general language is not up to scratch after the Leaving Certificate but that does not mean that university levels should be lowered - standards have got to be maintained*
- *Some very good students might feel that they are not challenged enough*
- *The oral should not be a problem any more*
- *Weaker learner might be afraid of not knowing how much the others know*
- *Maybe some lecturers feel that they have to give students the impression that things are much more difficult at third level*
- *How come people at third level are generally speaking so unaware of what we do at second level?*

A number of teachers (15%/6) said they had no idea what problems their students might encounter in their university studies. Overall, teachers seemed divided on the issue of second to third level transition. While some argued that more should be done

to facilitate that transition, others insisted that the changeover was inevitably difficult and that the gravity of the issue should not be exaggerated.

In the course of the interviews, teachers were also encouraged to make additional comments. The following synthesises their remarks.

1. The Junior Cycle and the Junior Certificate

Most of those interviewed suggested that the junior cycle and the Junior Certificate were not sufficiently demanding in terms of developing grammatical knowledge and accuracy. The consensus among teachers was that the transition from junior to senior cycle amounted to a 'quantum leap' and that more groundwork should be laid in the first three years of second level education.

2. Teacher qualification

A number of teachers made reference to the poor qualification of practising teachers of German. They severely criticised the existing modus operandi of asking teachers who do not hold a degree in German, whose only qualification may consist of certificate obtained through a course at the Goethe Institute or who are entirely 'self-taught' to teach that language to second level students. Interviewees insisted that this practice was unacceptable for all involved, learners and fellow teachers. One teacher claimed that there was "a whole generation of teachers out there who more or less do not know what a noun is", adding that "it will be a while before any metalinguistic knowledge can be expected from their students ... ". On the other hand, teachers also remarked that many of those who obtained their formal education some time ago are quite 'rusty', while others without a formal qualification actively sought to improve their command of the language.

3. Exam pressure - the points race

Virtually all teachers emphasised how much their teaching practices were dominated by the exam regulations. They deplored the fact that the vast majority of both students and parents were exclusively interested in how many points the German exam will allow the former to score. Some stated that their students went as far as trying to dictate the classroom content to them by quoting exam requirements and

demanding that the teacher omit elements which are not needed for the examinations. Teachers admitted that because of the pressure to prepare students in the best possible manner for the exam, aspects of language learning which they consider to be important are sidelined. Some said that as much as they would like to dedicate more time to aspects which they believed would be of benefit to a better understanding of the language (notably grammar aspects), the allocation of marks simply did not justify such practice. As regards taking the performance in the German Leaving Certificate examination as an indicator for a student's depth of knowledge and overall command of German, teachers claimed that, through selective teaching, students could be prepared to perform extremely well in the examination without actually achieving high overall levels of linguistic command[10]. Thus, while the use of examination papers as teaching materials makes Irish Leaving Certificate candidates "test-wise" (McDonough, 1995: 105), it would appear that Leaving Certificate results cannot be seen as providing any reliable information regarding learners' knowledge levels and overall performance standards: they merely give an indication of a learner's ability to perform well in that particular test. Some teachers also stated that even very weak students tended to sit the Higher level paper because a low mark on that paper carries higher marks than a better mark on the Ordinary level paper (an observation echoed in the Chief Examiners' Report in Section 5.3 below). This practice begs the question just how much learning can actually go on if virtually all classroom activities are exam-driven. It would certainly appear, from these teachers' responses, that the concept of second level education as sowing the seeds for life-long *learning* (as opposed to exam preparation) is unlikely to receive much attention.

4. The standard of German grammar - accuracy levels

A number of teachers expressed concern at the low level of accuracy which they felt was acceptable under the 1983 syllabus and examination regulations. One teacher deplored that the old and the new syllabus (i.e. the 1995 syllabus) "are selling the children short - they get an Honour at Leaving Certificate and the German they write just isn't accurate. We haven't time to spend on accuracy and deep down we feel that

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[10] See Lofmark (1990: 171) on how a school-leaving qualification in a language (in this case the British A-level) does not mean that students have mastered the grammar of that particular language.

that is wrong. The whole secondary school system militates against taking time to pursue accuracy". These concerns with regard to low accuracy levels were echoed at the GDI conference in March 1996 when teachers urgently called for an increase in emphasis on grammar matters in the 1997 examination[11].

5. Miscellaneous

- A number of teachers were critical of what they considered an excessive emphasis on rote-learning as well as the use of ready-made chunks. Not many expected this to change under the new syllabus.

- The Irish school year was mentioned by others as being too short and leading to a rush at all times. One teacher said she would be in favour of adding on another year to the school-going time.

- As regards oral classroom practice, several teachers pointed to the apparent reluctance of Irish students to speak a foreign language as well as the difficulty their students displayed with regard to overcoming the psychological barrier of anticipating that they would make errors in language production.

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[11] N.B.: The call was made with respect to the examinations and <u>not</u> the syllabus, a further indication that ultimately the examination requirements take precedence over the teaching syllabus.

4.3 Results regarding the 1995 Syllabus and Examinations

As was stated above, in November 1997 a further round of questionnaires was disseminated to second level teachers in order to establish if a major shift in the teaching of grammar had taken place with the introduction of the new Leaving Certificate syllabus and examination format. Some additional questions were included in order to corroborate tentative conclusions from the research (from both questionnaires and interviews) carried out with regard to the1983 syllabi. For a copy of the questionnaire see Appendix B.

The results in detail:

In the course of the interviews regarding the 1983 syllabi, many teachers had expressed concern about the 'quantum leap' between grammar requirements for the Junior Certificate examinations and those for the senior cycle. The first question in this questionnaire therefore sought to establish the role of grammatical accuracy required in the Junior Certificate, as perceived by second level teachers. Results for this question are shown in table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 (out of 140 subjects)

Grammatical accuracy is	Answers	
	rel	abs
very important	14	19
important	34	47
fairly important	35	49
not very important	11	16
not important at all	0	0
No answer	6	9

The above results do not tally with those obtained in the course of the interviews since almost 50% of teachers regard grammatical accuracy as playing an important role in the Junior Certificate examination. There is, however, a possibility that the interpretation given to this question in the current questionnaire was such that teachers felt they were asked how they *personally* viewed the importance of grammar in the

146

Junior Certificate, whereas those who raised the issue during the interviews did so in connection with the status grammar was given in the syllabus and especially the examinations.

Teachers were asked to answer all subsequent questions, where appropriate, with Higher Level Leaving Certificate candidates in mind (and in the case of mixed classes, for the entire class). The next question related to the emphasis teachers place on certain features of German in their senior cycle classroom. Results are shown in table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Item	Strong emphasis		Fairly strong emphasis		Not a very strong emphasis	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
Vocabulary learning	71	99	27	38	2	3
Writing	56	79	40	56	4	5
Reading	63	88	32	45	5	7
Grammar	65	90	31	44	4	6
Speaking	69	97	28	39	3	4
Listening	69	97	30	42	1	1
Cultural awareness	22	31	58	81	20	28
Learner autonomy	20	28	49	68	31	44

It should be noted that, overall, the percentage of teachers who are placing a *strong* emphasis on certain elements has decreased considerably in comparison to the previous questionnaire.

Vocabulary acquisition was ranked highest (it was second highest in the previous questionnaire), closely followed by *listening* and *speaking*. The emphasis on the latter has increased considerably in the ranking order, thus reflecting the additional allocation of marks towards these two skills in the Leaving Certificate examination[12]. *Grammar* is now in fourth place (it was third in the previous questionnaire), while the status of *reading* is unchanged. The emphasis on *writing*, on the other hand, has plummeted. This comes as a surprise in view of the fact that written production accounts for a sizeable 25% of the overall 55% allocated to the Leaving Certificate written paper. Cultural awareness and learner autonomy are emphasised strongly by less than a quarter of all teachers. Although both were given a very prominent status

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[12] The increase in the emphasis on speaking in particular cannot necessarily be equated with "using more German for classroom communication" in all cases. Realistically speaking, it most probably has to be viewed as spending more time on preparing students for the role plays and picture sequences (i.e. as practising the language in very limited oral contexts).

in the 1995 syllabus the fact that they are not examined directly would suggest that scarce classroom time is spent on items which are of more immediate relevance for the examination.

Teachers were then asked what made them decide on the degree of emphasis they put on certain features. Results are shown in table 4.8.

Table 4.8

I am guided in my decisions by	Answers	
	rel	abs
a. my own beliefs	28	39
b. the Leaving Certificate syllabus	12	17
c. the Leaving Certificate exam requirements	32	45
a. + b.	2	3
a. + c.	13	18
b. + c.	4	5
a., b. + c.	8	11
No answer	1	2

These results confirm the interview results for the 1983 syllabus where teachers had drawn attention to the overwhelming impact of the examination requirements on the classroom: all in all 57% (80) stated that examinations played a substantial role in their teaching. The results also indicate that, irrespective of particular syllabus requirements, many teachers rely primarily on their own experience and expertise when it comes to deciding on the teaching content. However, since these teachers are also only too aware of the significance of examinations for their students, they will take into account in their teaching all relevant exam requirements. The actual syllabus, according to these results, plays merely a subordinate role.

Teachers were asked if, with the introduction of the new syllabus, their emphasis on *grammar teaching* had changed. 53% (74) replied that there had been no change at all, while 20% (28) stated that they were teaching as much grammar as before but in a different manner. 19% (26) stated that they were teaching more grammar than before and 6% (9) said they were teaching less. Teachers were also asked if there had been any change in the emphasis they place on *vocabulary learning*. 55% (77) replied that there had been no change, 37% (52) stated that their emphasis on vocabulary learning

had increased while 3% (4) stated that it had decreased. 5% (7) did not answer this question.

The next question related to the strategies teachers pursue when teaching grammar, bearing in mind obvious time constraints. 83% (116) stated that they focused above all on the Leaving Certificate syllabus and exam, while 12% (17) said that in their teaching they regularly went beyond the Leaving Certificate requirements. 5% (7) did not answer that question. In view of the results in table 4.8 (regarding the dominance of examination requirements for classroom practice), it must be again deduced that it is not so much the grammar *syllabus* but the grammar expectations for the *examinations* which are the focus of attention. When asked to what extent their grammar teaching included grammatical analysis/parsing, 60% (84) replied that grammatical analysis was done regularly, 29% (41) said it was done occasionally, 8% (11) stated it was done rarely and 1% (2) admitted it was never done. The figure of 60% (84) may seem surprisingly high - however, considering the answers to the previous question which had established the Leaving Certificate examination requirements as the yardstick for grammar focus in the classroom, analytical processes are unlikely to exceed the very limited parameters of those requirements. However, preparation for the 'Angewandte Grammatik' question in the Leaving Certificate written examination might just familiarise learners with at least some of the previously unknown terminology and introduce some element of analysis (which had certainly not been explicitly required under the 1983 syllabus).

Teachers were then asked if they agreed that many students lacked a basic knowledge of grammar concepts in English and Irish. Everyone agreed that this was the case[13]. This again confirms the concerns raised by teachers in the course of the interviews for the 1983 Leaving Certificate syllabus.

The next question related to the importance teachers attached to certain grammatical items in their grammar teaching. Answers are presented in table 4.9.

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[13] When asked at the 1998 GDI spring seminar, the majority of teachers claimed that this was true, not just of 'many' but of 'most' students.

Table 4.9

Item	Very important		Important		Fairly important		Not so important		No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
Verb formation	85	119	13	18	1	1	0	0	1	2
Tense formation	89	124	9	12	1	2	0	0	1	2
Word order	84	118	14	120	1	2	0	0	1	2
Subject-verb agreement	82	115	14	19	3	4	0	0	1	2
Prepositions and their cases	65	90	27	38	7	10	0	0	1	2
The most commonly used verbs and their cases	56	78	35	49	7	10	0	0	2	3
Declension of articles	65	90	24	33	6	9	4	6	1	2
Capital letters on nouns	61	85	24	33	7	10	7	10	1	2
Declension of pronouns	49	69	35	49	13	18	0	0	3	4
Gender of the most commonly used nouns	43	60	38	53	17	24	1	1	1	2
Plurals of the most commonly used nouns	24	33	38	53	27	38	9	13	2	3
Adjectival endings	30	42	39	54	19	27	10	14	2	3
Umlaute	29	40	35	49	17	24	17	24	2	3

This question corresponds to a similar but more extensive question in the previous teacher questionnaire (cf. table 4.3). While not all items can be compared, results show that four of the five highest ranking items in the above table were considered to be *(very) important* by a clear majority in both questionnaires - *verb formation*, *tense formation*, *word order* and *prepositions*. Looking at those items which were emphasised least, results also confirm those obtained in the previous questionnaire in that *adjectival endings*, *Umlaute* and *plurals of nouns* were judged to be 'fairly important' or 'not so important' by between 29% (40) and 36% (51).

The next question in the current questionnaire related to the importance of grammatical accuracy for the achievement of high Leaving Certificate results. Teachers were asked if they believed that a student could get an A or a B1 or 2 in the Leaving Certificate Higher level without having a good knowledge of the basics of German grammar (e.g. without being able to use the items listed in the previous question correctly in most instances). 95% (133) stated that they believed that this was impossible; only 5% (7) thought it possible. In fact, results to be discussed below show that many students whose written performance on entry into DCU revealed that they were not able to use the above features correctly were awarded high Bs.

As mentioned under Section 3.3.5 above, at the November 1997 GDI seminar many teachers expressed concern that German had once again become a language which was perceived to be more difficult than other European languages, notably French. Teachers were therefore asked in the current questionnaire what perception their

students had of German. 68% (95) answered that their students considered German more difficult than other modern languages. Some added that this was mainly due to the grammar, underlining the view which many first year German language students have adopted regarding the nature of 'German language' on the one hand and 'German grammar' on the other (this view will be considered in more detail in the next chapter). 28% (39) stated their students considered German as being equally difficult as other languages and 3% (4) said their students regarded German as less difficult. These results are thus in contradiction with the findings presented in the 1991 survey by Kennedy and Schröder, according to which the majority of Irish learners found German easier than French (cf. Kennedy and Schröder, 1991).

The next question related to the importance teachers attributed to grammatical accuracy in written work, as compared to fluency. 60% (84) replied they considered both to be of equal importance, 31% (44) considered accuracy as less important than fluency while 9% (12) considered accuracy as more important. These results are virtually identical with those to a similar question in the previous teacher questionnaire. While they would seem to support other findings in this research which indicate that teachers do consider grammatical accuracy as important (cf., for example, table 4.4), there is a sizeable minority of teachers who, when asked to judge the relative merits of fluency vs. accuracy, rate competence in the former more favourably than competence in the latter. In order to ascertain how exactly teachers assess the fluency-accuracy issue in written production, teachers were asked how they would rate the following essay by a Leaving Certificate Higher level student:

Aufsatz: *Meine Zeit in der Schule und meine Erwartungen an die Universität*
Seit 5 Jahre habe ich Deutsch in die Schule gelernt und ich muß ehrlich zugeben, daß ich das Fach in die Schule ganz prima fande. Ich habe mich immer sehr gut mit meine Lehrerinnen und die andere Studentin verstanden und obwohl wir hätten viele Arbeit, wir hätten viel Spaß gemacht auch. Ich habe ein Brieffreundin in Gelsenkirchen, eine Stadt im "Ruhrpott", die mir jedes Monat ein langer Brief geschriebt hat. Für das Zeit an die Universität ich hoffe, einen guten Zeit ins dritte Jahr zu haben, wann ich im Ausland fahre. Ich freue mich sehr darauf, fremden Kulture und verschiedenen Leuten kennenlernen. Hoffentlich klappt alles. Drück mir die Daumen!

Teachers were asked to choose from a list of ratings, ranging from 'very good', through 'good', 'fairly good', 'fairly poor' to 'poor'. While the language used in the essay can be characterised as fluent, indicating a good range of vocabulary, the piece also contains a large number of basic grammatical errors. By not being given the option of a 'neither-nor' answer, teachers effectively had to decide which they considered more important: *fluency* (in which case they would opt for one of first three answers) or *accuracy* (in which case they would opt for one of those describing this work as 'fairly poor' or 'poor'). Teachers' answers are shown in table 4.10.

Table 4.10

I consider this essay to be	Answers	
	rel	abs
very good	3	4
good	14	20
fairly good	41	57
fairly poor	33	46
poor	6	9
No answer	3	4

Results show that a majority of teachers judged the overall performance as being 'fairly good', 'good' or 'very good' (= 58% or 81 in absolute figures). This would suggest that fluency is, after all, viewed as (slightly) more important than accuracy when it comes to judging a learner's overall performance. On the other hand, when asked to underline the errors they would bring to the attention of a potential Leaving Certificate candidate, 65% of teachers (90) indicated that they would underline most or all errors, 21% (30) underlined about half of all errors and 14% (20) only marked a few. These results also match those for a similar question in the previous questionnaire. Thus while the majority of teachers would give this work an overall positive evaluation, the same number would nonetheless draw students' attention to matters of accuracy.

The last question put to teachers concerned the transition from second to third level. Teachers were asked which aspect in the transition they believed was the single most difficult aspect with which students had to cope. Answers are shown in table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Statement	Answers	
	rel	abs
Grammar and accuracy related matters	41	58
Literature	22	31
German as the predominant classroom language	11	15
Autonomy	11	15
Reading longer texts	8	11
Translation	8	11
Vocabulary level expected	6	9
Other:		
Oral fluency		
Writing long pieces of text that have not been learnt off by heart		
More in-depth analysis of everything		
Third level lecturers' assumption that aspects were covered in detail at second level		

Grammar is thus again confirmed as the biggest stumbling block. 6% of teachers stated that they could not answer the question because they had no experience of third level teaching. One teacher remarked that the difference between second and third level was not that significant since the grammatical standard of most Honours students was sufficient to cope with first year at third level.

4.4 Conclusions

It would appear from the above that the vast majority of those teachers who filled in the questionnaires and of those who were interviewed are aware of the importance of grammatical knowledge and linguistic accuracy and try to take these into account in their teaching methodology and emphasis. However, there are system-inherent reasons why a generally high level of grammatical competence among secondary school students might be difficult to realise.

The narrow parameters of the grammar-translation method have been widened in the communicative syllabus to include - it would appear - an ever increasing number of new elements which no longer have grammar as their pivotal point - oral and aural skills, cultural awareness and learner autonomy etc.. Although, as results in table 4.7 demonstrate, some of these new elements may not be given the degree of consideration originally envisaged, they nonetheless take away some of the focus which would otherwise have been on a smaller range of aspects. After all, when new elements are added, existing ones cannot possibly be given the same attention as previously. This is true of both the 1983 syllabus which ushered in the communicative approach and of the 1995 syllabus which was designed to strengthen this approach. Thus, although grammar matters were never excluded from the Leaving Certificate syllabi and examinations, teachers realised that the aims of the communicative syllabus could only be achieved if their teaching focus shifted away from grammar onto the new features. The extent of that shift will inevitably vary from teacher to teacher. There would thus appear to be at least three approaches to dealing with the issue of grammar:

1. Some teachers do not seem to place much emphasis on grammar, be it for reasons to do with their interpretation of the syllabus or examination requirements, their personal beliefs or possibly also their qualification[14].

2. Others firmly believe in giving their students a grounding in grammar that extends beyond the Leaving Certificate requirements in order to equip them with

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[14] These teachers would include those who said they put a 'fairly strong emphasis' on grammar. However, others in this category might well interpret 'fairly' as 'quite a lot'.

'grammatical building blocks'. These blocks enable students to manipulate grammatical structures rather than relying exclusively on set situational phrases. These teachers will ignore the fact that their focus on grammar exceeds the examination requirements and continue teaching the way they believe is right. Some of them would appear to emphasise this point with a view to their students' future studies (cf. 12% or 17 in absolute figures in the 1997 questionnaire).

3. The vast majority of teachers teach grammar in such a way as is necessary in order to equip their students with the kind of grammar knowledge required in the context of the Leaving Certificate examinations. As was shown above, teachers as a rule look to the examination requirements, not the syllabus, when it comes to deciding on classroom contents. Most would thus appear to decide that they can only devote an amount of time to it that is proportionate to its relevance in the examinations.

Thus, while the vast majority of teachers would consider grammar to be important (in fact, few, if any, will tell their students that grammar is not important), the exact kind of grammar they teach most likely varies enormously.

There is, however, another aspect which needs to be borne in mind when putting the above findings into context and that is the truism that at any level, be it primary, secondary or tertiary, *teaching does not necessarily equal learning*. As Rogers points out, the relationship between the two is by no means a straightforward Cartesian equation along the lines of "I teach therefore you learn" (1996: 29). Student responses in Section 5.2.1 will show that the degree of emphasis on particular aspects in their German classes at second level is consistently perceived as being less strong than it was according to the teacher survey. There would thus appear to be a considerable discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the extent of what is being taught. On the teachers' side, most practitioners will have experienced the sense of frustration when, despite their 'perfect' preparation and boundless enthusiasm, they fail 'to get through to students' (and this is not because their students are unintelligent). The heterogeneous composition of many learner groups is quoted as another major obstacle. On the student side , the *selective attention* many learners attribute to the learning situation might provide one explanation for a possible mismatch between teaching and learning (although by no means the only one). As was pointed out previously, students are well familiar with the Leaving Certificate

155

examination requirements for each subject (going through past examination papers and pointing out the allocation of marks are, after all, a common feature in the language classroom). Many learners will therefore only focus on what is likely to be demanded in the Leaving Certificate examinations and switch off when other, 'less relevant' items are discussed. In view of a most daunting examination diet, expediency, to most learners, is the order of the day.

Closely related to the issue of exam-driven teaching and learning is the lack of a sense of responsibility among many learners as regards their own learning progress. In the interviews for the 1983 syllabus, some teachers told of their attempts to encourage students to carry out some work which might not be examined but could be conducive to deepening or extending students' language learning experiences. The feedback these teachers received invariably indicated a lack of interest, motivation or quite simply time. Results for the 1995 syllabus would suggest that not much change is to be expected in this respect (cf. results for learner autonomy in table 4.7 above) - unless it is tested, a course objective is unlikely to be taken seriously by more than a few exceptional students and a minority of teachers. Therefore, whatever grammar exposure students receive will in all likelihood not exceed the confines of the classroom. The vast majority of students will rely on the teacher to provide them with whatever is required to get through the Leaving Certificate examinations - most learners would not appear to be interested in aspects of language learning beyond these boundaries.

Another area affected by the product- vs. process-driven approach is that of general language awareness. As was pointed out above, many foreign language teachers criticise the lack of knowledge among learners of basic grammar concepts, and demand that teachers of English in particular should introduce at least some of these in their teaching. Although they have not been consulted in the course of this research, the latter would presumably point to the fact that they, too, are under time pressure to fulfil their respective syllabus and examination requirements. Unless these include language awareness issues, they are unlikely to see themselves in a position that would allow them to give grammar the attention it arguably deserves. As outlined under 3.2.2, the CEB report makes some far-reaching recommendations regarding this issue, advocating a cross-curricular approach to language awareness

and including the suggestion that 'Language Awareness' might be time-tabled as a subject in its own right. If such an approach were implemented it would obviously be of enormous potential benefit to students who continue their language studies at third level.

Besides the factors outlined above there are of course many other factors which make the realisation of a high levels of grammatical competence at secondary level very difficult. These include class size, disciplinary factors, a general lack of motivation and application among learners and, as was suggested by teachers themselves, among some of their fellow teachers.

Some additional conclusions will be drawn at the end of the next chapter which focuses on students' experiences of second level grammar teaching.

Chapter Five

The Role of German Grammar in Second Level Teaching and Learning from the Learners' Perspectives

Introduction

This chapter examines on the issue of knowledge and performance levels among first year university students of German, as well as their attitudes towards aspects of German grammar learning. Section 5.1 presents subjects and outlines data collection procedures. Section 5.2 presents and discusses results from the various stages of learner-focused research, while Section 5.3 presents some of the findings from the Chief Examiner's Report of the 1995 Higher level Leaving Certificate examination for German. Finally, Section 5.4 draws some conclusions.

5.1 Subjects and Data Collection

Just as with the teacher-focused research, this part of the investigation was conducted cross-sectionally, and both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Firstly, in-class questionnaires were distributed in October 1995 in order to investigate issues of learner background, learners' attitudes towards the role of grammar in language learning as well as linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge levels. Subjects participating in this part of the research were eighty-seven first year students studying German as part of their degree courses. 42 of these were enrolled for the course in 'International Marketing and Languages' (IML), 33 were enrolled to study 'Applied Languages' (AL) and 12 were studying 'Applied Computational Linguistics' (ACL). These students represent 96% of the overall student cohort studying German on the above degree courses. Questionnaires were chosen as a research instrument for the purpose of extracting a considerable range of information from the largest possible number of students. It was decided that this part of the research had to be implemented in class because previous experiences with the administration of questionnaires have shown that these are not likely to be returned once they are removed from the classroom. Since data obtained in the questionnaire was to be compared and correlated with data from learner performance in free-style production, students had to be asked to fill in their names. While the evaluator was aware of the potential drawbacks in terms of sincerity of responses, there was no easy alternative. Students were told that the information given in the questionnaire would be used for educational research purposes only and that their names would not be disclosed to a third party. Students were further informed that responses given and the knowledge levels displayed in these questionnaires were to have no impact on the marking of future academic work.

In order to establish production accuracy levels, learners' written production was analysed. Due to time constraints, this exercise took place outside the classroom. 78 students participated in this part of the research. Twenty-one selected students (= 23%) were subsequently interviewed with regard to certain aspects which had previously been touched upon in the questionnaire.

All percentage rates in the questionnaires are calculated out of 87. In the written production, rates are calculated out of 78 and in the interviews out of 21. Since percentage rates are rounded off, not all totals add up to exactly 100%. For a copy of the questionnaire see Appendix C.

5.2 Results regarding Students' Learning Background, Attitudes towards Grammar Acquisition and Competence and Performance Levels

Section 5.2.1 presents results regarding students' language learning background as well as their affective and cognitive attitudes with regard to German grammar learning. Section 5.2.2 investigates metalinguistic and linguistic knowledge levels and Section 5.2.3 examines accuracy levels in written production.

5.2.1 Students' Language Learning Background and their Affective and Cognitive Attitudes with regard to German Grammar Learning

There are certain considerations which must be borne in mind when analysing the data from the questionnaire:

1. The survey came unannounced, which may have caused some nervousness among students (although students were assured that the results of the survey would not contribute to their first year marks in any way).

2. The survey was conducted four months after the Leaving Certificate examination which, it could be argued, might account for a certain 'rustiness' in students' linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge.

3. Students were asked to fill in a lengthy questionnaire under time pressure (which is apparent from the results, as the number of unanswered questions increases towards the end of the questionnaire). Unfortunately, due to a lack of foresight on the part of the researcher, there had been no trial run in which the time factor could have been detected. This constitutes a major flaw in the research implementation, making a meaningful interpretation of some of the questions towards the end of the questionnaire virtually impossible. As a consequence, some aspects of students' linguistic knowledge could not be explored in sufficient detail. While 76% of ACL students and 75% of IML students completed the entire questionnaire, only 38% of AL students finished theirs.

4. As regards research into attitudes, be it by questionnaire, interview or other means, the evaluator has to bear in mind at all times the so-called "Hawthorne effect" (Lynch, 1996: 47), according to which certain responses are only given because subjects assume they are the answers the evaluator wishes to receive.

The first question regarding students' language learning background, which was put to students in the questionnaire corresponded to a question teachers were asked in their questionnaires. The question inquired about the degree of emphasis which was placed on certain aspects of language learning at second level. Answers are shown in table 5.1. The figures in brackets indicate the results from the teacher survey. Specific reference will be made to the figures in bold.

Table 5.1

Skill	Column 1 No emphasis at all		Column 2 Little emphasis		Column 3 Fairly strong emphasis		Column 4 Strong emphasis		Column 5 Very strong emphasis	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
Listening	0 (0)	0	18 (1)	16	43 (25)	37	36 (42)	31	**3 (33)**	3
Reading	0 (1)	0	18 (13)	16	33 (17)	29	37 (34)	32	**11 (35)**	10
Writing	0 (0)	0	5 (1)	4	40 (13)	35	34 (49)	30	21 (36)	18
Speaking	1 (0)	1	**40 (6)**	35	31 (30)	27	**16 (44)**	14	11 (20)	10
Grammar	2 (0)	2	15 (2)	13	37 (20)	32	31 (46)	27	15 (31)	13
Pronunciation	8 (2)	7	47 (26)	41	30 (40)	26	8 (22)	7	7 (9)	6
Vocabulary acquisition	0 (0)	0	16 (2)	14	28 (13)	24	25 (43)	22	31 (40)	27

Although students who filled in the questionnaires may not have been taught by the those who formed part of the teacher survey, a comparison between student and teacher answers yields some noteworthy results. Thus the two items teachers claimed were emphasised most in their teaching (*vocabulary acquisition* and *writing*), are also perceived by students as having been stressed strongly or very strongly (56% and 55% respectively/49 and 48 in absolute figures). *Reading* ranks third (48%/42), closely followed by *grammar* (46%40). In the teacher survey, these items ranked fifth and third respectively. *Listening* which ranked fourth in the teacher survey ranks fifth here. Students and teachers agree that *oral skills* were one of the less emphasised classroom elements. However, there were also some remarkable discrepancies in perception, notably with regard to the degree of practice of oral skills but also with regard to other items (see in particular figures in bold). As regards the overall degree of emphasis on all items, it was judged to be much stronger by teachers than by students, indicated by a considerable shift towards column 4 and, to an even greater degree, column 5 among teachers. These figures would appear to confirm the point made under Section 4.4 that, for a variety of reasons, teaching does not necessarily result in learning. It should also be borne in mind that while teachers were self-selecting, students were not - in other words, teachers who put less emphasis on certain aspects than they knew they should had the option of not responding to the questionnaires while students were unable to opt out that easily. As regards the emphasis on *written work*, most students in the interviews indicated that it had

consisted largely of letter writing and the practice of set phrases. Several students observed that the main class objective had been the preparation for the Leaving Certificate examination and that sample papers had featured prominently in most classes. There was also general consensus that *grammar instruction* was by and large geared towards the requirements in the Leaving Certificate examination. Several students pointed out that, even without a sound grammatical knowledge, they had managed to score good results in the Leaving Certificate exam.

Although correlation results between teacher emphasis on grammatical instruction (as perceived by students) and student performance in written production did not reveal a significant correlation, a qualitative analysis of the 17% of students (15) who claimed they received little or no grammar instruction showed that some did indeed have considerable accuracy problems in their written production. On the other hand, there would appear to be only a small percentage of students with poor performances who claimed that their teachers put a strong to very strong emphasis on grammar instruction, and an equally small number of students with strong performances who said that grammar had not been stressed much at their school[15].

Interview results showed that, according to 57% of students (12), German grammar was covered primarily for the Leaving Certificate. 29% (6) stated it was covered for both the Junior and the Leaving Certificates and 14% (3) stated they did not do much grammar at any stage of their second level education.

In the interviews, students were asked to expand on their overall German language learning experience at second level. 43% (9) said that this experience was entirely positive, while 29% (6) claimed it was entirely negative. 24% (5) said it was a mixed experience. One student learnt German outside school. Reasons given for the *positive* experiences were:

a. class content   24% (5)

b. teacher   10% (2)

c. both teacher and content   10% (2)

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[15] As emerged in the course of the interviews, many of these students received tuition outside the classroom.

Reasons for *negative* experiences were:

a. teacher   24% (5)

b. content   5%   (1)

Reasons for *mixed* experiences were:

Positive

a. language as such   24% (5)

Negative (5% each)

a. too many substitute teachers

b. the unstructured way it was taught

c. bad teacher

d. not enough work done

e. everything was done through English

It would appear that content (i.e. 'language as such') is the more decisive factor in terms of the enjoyment of language learning. While much of the blame for negative learning experiences would appear to be apportioned to teachers, 'bad' teachers do not seem to leave a sufficiently negative impression for a student to not consider studying the language. At the same time, they are likely to have an adverse effect a student's overall learning motivation.

As regards the methodological approach to grammar learning, students were asked in the questionnaire if a grammar book had been used in their German language class and to name the book(s), if any. 63% (55) replied that a book had been used. The book titles were identical with those named in the teacher survey, with the following named as the most commonly used: *Alles klar!* (36%/31), *Zur Sache 3* or *Zur Sache 4* (17%/15) and *Übung macht den Meister* (15%/13). When asked if they had found the German grammar books useful, 87% (76) replied that they did, quoting as their reasons (multiple answers possible):

- the book was easy to understand and use   43% (37)
- there were good exercises for lots of practice   38% (33)
- the book was a good reference book   26% (23)
- the book gave plenty of examples   21% (18)

An analysis of the books in question revealed that the cartoon book of German grammar (*Alles klar!*) - while most appealing to students who respond favourably to visual stimuli - approaches the illustration of grammar points in a manner which lacks emphasis on the structural rationale behind the German grammar system, presenting points instead by loosely arranging bite-size chunks on the grammatical dinner plate. *Übung macht den Meister* is at the other end of the spectrum in that it gives simple, clear definitions of grammar rules in a well-structured manner and provides ample opportunity for practice. *Zur Sache* also encourages and demonstrates a very systematic approach, focusing on the specific context of the comprehension and application of German grammar points in the Leaving Certificate examination. Books in the series contain past examination papers and provide step-by-step recommendations as to how students should approach certain grammatical hurdles in the written paper. The above books certainly cater for very diverse learner needs, and their individual appeal is obvious in each case. There can, however, be little doubt that none of these books could provide students with the solid basis of fundamental German grammar knowledge required at third level.

In order to ascertain students' attitudes towards and awareness about the organisation of the learning of German and, in particular, the learning of German grammar, students were asked, in the questionnaire, if they agreed that German was quite a difficult language to learn. Their answers are shown in table 5.2.

Table 5.2[16]

Statement	Answers	
	rel	abs
I agree	41	36
I disagree	40	35
It is difficult but do-able	7	6
No answer	13	11

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[16] Since these research results were obtained before the introduction of the 1995 syllabus, there will be no comparison of responses with a similar question put to teachers in November 1997.

The number of students who disagreed with that statement is thus not considerably lower than those who agreed.

On the one hand, a result showing that 40% of students (35) do not consider German to be a difficult language would appear to be an indication that the way German is now taught in many secondary schools has demonstrably lowered anxiety levels and has made German more accessible to a much wider spectrum of students. On the other hand, it can hardly be denied that there are considerable hurdles which learners with morphosyntactically less challenging L1s should be expected to find quite daunting. In this respect, findings which indicate a potential lack of awareness of these difficulties on the part of the learner must give rise to concern with regard to its repercussions for third level. A subsequent analysis of student work revealed that some of those students who disagreed with the statement would appear to considerably overestimate their language abilities: their linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge as well as their performance in written production by no means warranted their optimistic judgement on this issue. There were, of course, other students whose perception of German as being a difficult language was equally surprising considering their standard of excellence.

Answers to the next question revealed that, while many students did not consider *German language* as such as a major hurdle, many were well aware of the demanding nature of *German grammar*. Students were asked what they found most difficult about learning German and what they found easiest. Their answers are shown in table 5.3.

Table 5.3 (multiple answers possible)

Aspects about German that are difficult	Answers	
	rel	abs
1. Grammar	65	57
2. Adjectival endings	21	18
3. The cases	16	14
4. Word order	11	10
Aspects about German that are easy		
1. Pronunciation	29	25
2. Vocabulary	22	19
3. Listening	21	18
4. Reading	18	16
5. Speaking	15	13

Not surprisingly, aspects which students perceive as being most difficult are grammar-related. Answers 2. and 3. under 'difficult aspects' correspond to the answers given by teachers when asked which grammar items their students found problematic. When comparing the answers to this question with those to the previous one, a suspicion raised in the context of the fragmented grammar requirements for the Leaving Certificate examination would appear to be confirmed: while 48% of learners (42) stated that they found German language in general difficult, a further 17% (15) stated that they found German grammar difficult. This is further evidence of the distinction in many students' mind between the language as such - which many find quite manageable - and the grammar part of it. A majority of learners find the latter much more daunting - they have, however, also grown to disregard it under many circumstances. This is precisely why to many students there is no apparent contradiction in a statement such as 'my German is quite good but my grammar is dodgy'.

In order to investigate students' affective and cognitive attitudes towards the learning of German grammar, students were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements in table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Statement	(Strongly) Agree		(Strongly) Disagree		Neither/nor		No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
1. I enjoy learning languages	95	83	1	1	3	3	0	0
2. I enjoy learning German	98	85	0	0	1	1	1	1
3. I find German grammar interesting	28	24	41	36	30	26	1	1
4. (German) grammar is a necessary evil	53	46	33	29	13	11	1	1
5. I find German grammar fairly easy	24	21	51	44	25	22	0	0
6. I find German grammar impossible to learn	10	9	70	61	18	16	2	2
7. The best way to learn a language is to learn the grammar first. The rest will follow automatically	21	18	51	44	24	21	5	4
8. Unless you are good at grammar you will never be good at the language	38	33	36	31	25	22	1	1
9. The best way to learn grammar is to be presented with a rule, followed by exercises	67	58	16	14	13	11	5	4
10. The best way to learn grammar is to figure out a rule for oneself, verify it and then do exercises	31	27	34	30	34	30	0	0
11. Grammar should be taught explicitly in a grammar class • at secondary level • at third level	64 70	56 61	20 11	17 10	13 16	11 14	3 1	3 1
12. All grammar should be explained through English or Irish	74	64	9	8	16	14	1	1
13. Students should be made familiar with grammar terminology	87	76	0	0	9	8	3	3
14. Grammar should be taught in the context of a listening or reading comprehension, when speaking or writing the language but not in a grammar class	21	18	47	41	30	26	2	2
15. I do not want to learn grammar, I just want to be able to communicate in German	10	9	78	68	10	9	1	1
16. Grammatical correctness is not as important as fluency	26	23	52	45	20	17	1	1
17. I want to be corrected when making a mistake in my written German	95	83	3	3	0	0	1	1
18. I want to be corrected when making a mistake in my spoken German	92	80	6	5	1	1	1	1

The majority of students would appear to enjoy both language learning and the learning of German. This should not come as a surprise since the vast majority of third level students are assumed to be self-selecting. However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that this is not always so. Thus, in the case of German language studies in particular, a student's choice to study the language at university was, in the past, not infrequently dictated by parental pressure[17]. Other students are denied the degree course of their choice because of an insufficient number of points scored in the

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[17] Given the present economic climate in Germany, the career argument which is often cited by parents in favour of studying German may have ceased to be a cogent one, temporarily at least.

Leaving Certificate examination, and have to settle for a different, often entirely unrelated course instead. Experience has shown that although students include a particular course on their third level application (CAO) form, little thought may be given to the 'what-happens-if-I-do-not-get-my-first-choice' scenario. Finally, a number of students may lack sufficient points, not for the degree course of their choice as such but for a particular language combination. Thus students who had hoped to study German and French, may have to settle for German and Spanish instead. Since most students take the latter language at beginners' level, this usually has repercussions for *both* languages (cf. Chapter Eight below)[18]. As emerged in the course of the interviews for the current research, one student was not enrolled for her first preference course and was not content as a result.

As regards students' attitude to the role of German grammar, more students than expected claimed they found grammar interesting (28%/24)[19] and fewer regarded it a necessary evil, while a quarter of all learners (21) considered German grammar easy. On the other hand, only 10% (9) found it impossible to learn. In the interviews, students were also asked whether or not they liked the way grammar had been tackled in their German classes at second level. Results showed that 67% (14) reacted negatively to the handling of grammar, while 33% (7) reacted positively. The most frequently stated reasons for negative reactions were:

- grammar was boring
- certain aspects were not covered in sufficient detail
- the teacher did not get her work done
- I hate grammar
- the teacher had no control over the class
- there was no grammar done for the Junior Certificate - it was all too late by 5th year

The first two statements in the list below were made by several students.

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[18] The implications of basing a university entrance system exclusively on the number of points scored in the Leaving Certificate was discussed in Chapter Three.
[19] Teachers had previously indicated that only 7% of their students showed an intrinsic interest in grammar learning.

Those who reacted positively quoted as their reasons that their teacher had explained things very well, that they were always able to ask the teacher questions and that, while exercises may have been boring, they were also worthwhile.

In the interviews, students also largely confirmed the answers given by teachers as regards the methodological approach to classroom grammar teaching (cf. Section 4.2 above). 71% (15) confirmed that exercises were done both at school and at home, that *basic* terminology only was used (52%/11)[20], and that grammar was explained mainly through English (67%/14). They also confirmed that those aspects of German grammar which teachers in their questionnaires had stated had been emphasised strongly, were indeed stressed most.

Returning to the questionnaire results shown in table 5.4 above, as statement 7. shows ("The best way to learn a language is to learn the grammar first. The rest will follow automatically"), less than a quarter of students considered grammar as the basis from which all other aspects will inevitably follow[21]. As regards statement 8. ("Unless you are good at grammar you will never be good at the language"), students were divided with respect to the importance of grammar. These results confirm the learner view expressed in table 5.2 above, according to which, in many students' minds, 'grammar' is separate from 'language'. According to this view, general language skills are not necessarily dependent on sound grammatical knowledge - deficiencies in the latter can be compensated by a good lexical knowledge.

When asked to choose between deductive and inductive teaching methods, the majority of students opted for the deductive method. Although there were some contradictory answers to statements 11. and 14., results would suggest that students on the whole are in favour of having a dedicated grammar class at third level. However, quite a few students insisted that grammar should also be pointed out in other aspects of the German course, such as reading comprehension exercises. No student disagreed with statement 13. ("Students should be made familiar with grammar terminology"). Learners may dislike terminology but at the same time they seem to recognise its necessity. Answers to statement 15. ("I do not want to learn grammar, I

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[20] 14% said that terminology was used very rarely.

[21] This statement would presumably have yielded quite different results under a grammar-translation approach to language learning.

just want to be able to communicate in German") must be seen in a similar light. Thus, while to a sizeable number of students grammar may not be of overriding importance (cf. statement 8. above), learners nonetheless do not wish to exclude it from the language learning process altogether. As emerged in the interviews, learners are, however, unsure of the exact role of grammatical knowledge in that process. More than half of all students disagree that "Grammatical correctness is not as important as fluency" (statement 16.), although a sizeable minority agrees.

In the questionnaire, students were also asked to give their ideas on how to best organise German grammar learning at both secondary and third level.

The following were the most frequently named suggestions:

- give clear definitions and examples
- get students to practise a lot
- point out grammar in the context of a reading comprehension, an aural etc. - in everyday German
- go over grammar continually
- start off on the basics, then go on to the more difficult stuff
- make sure students understand the rules - do not go on to the next point without it

The above suggestions were carefully considered; some were taken on board in the design of the first year German grammar programme at DCU.

In the interviews, students were asked to expand on their conceptions regarding the organisation of grammar teaching and learning at third level. Students were asked what their expectations regarding grammar learning were before they entered college. The most frequently given answer was that they had no idea what to expect (33%/7), followed by 29% (6) who said they certainly did not expect a separate grammar class. 5% each (1) stated that they expected

- more than one grammar class
- no change from school
- a big thick book
- handouts with rules and definitions
- a very methodical approach to grammar
- that grammar had been covered at second level

- to have to do grammar on their own
- a grammar class

The first two answers above ("I had no idea what to expect" and "I did not expect a separate grammar class"), as well as some of the other answers, would suggest that a large number of students were oblivious to the possibility that the kind of grammatical knowledge they acquired at second level may not be sufficient at third level. Since the vast majority of AL, IML and ACL students at DCU were awarded an A or a B in their German Leaving Certificate examination, they - understandably - believed that their overall German language skills (which, as was discussed above, to a sizeable number of learners would appear to be separate from - and more important than - their grammar skills) were indeed adequate and in no need of special treatment. Alternatively, students may have been aware of the more challenging nature of grammar learning at university but would point to the fact that this is equally true of all other course aspects: thus university is expected to take over where school left off and to bring everything onto higher competence and skill levels. According to this view, third level simply builds on what was started at second level - the possibility that some of the competence and skills acquired at second level may be in need of 'an overhaul' does not seem to enter the equation. Yet a third alternative interpretation of the above answers would be that students do not give much thought to what is in store for them at third level.

In another question interviewees were asked if they thought the introduction of a separate grammar class at third level was a good idea. 90% (19) answered in the affirmative, with 10% (2) adding that grammar should also be pointed out outside the grammar class. In the questionnaire, this figure had been slightly lower - there, only 70% had been in favour of a grammar class. The difference in answers could be taken as a sign that at the time of the interviews - which took place in the second week of term - students were more aware that perhaps some exposure to grammar instruction was required after all.

Finally, students in the interview were asked if they believed there should be a grammar test. 90% (19) were in favour of a test, quoting as their reasons (multiple answers possible):

1. it makes you sit down and learn things - the pressure is needed   43% (9)

2. it is a good way to check on your progress   19% (4)

3. it helps you focus on grammar in reading and writing   10% (2)

4. you need an assessment to take grammar seriously   10% (2)

5. if you teach it you must test it   10% (2)

6. it would be interesting for the teacher   10% (2)

These answers are indicative of the Leaving Certificate mentality which teachers in their survey had pointed out. According to this way of thinking, the rationale behind all classroom activity is determined by examination consideration - unless something is tested, it is not considered worth spending time on. This attitude must be regarded as one of the biggest stumbling blocks for students at third level where they are expected to gradually assume responsibility for their own learning without constant external examination pressure.

5.2.2 Some Aspects of Students' Language Awareness and Metalinguistic Knowledge

In the questionnaire, students were asked which linguistic features were shared by English and German and where the two languages differed. Table 5.5 shows their answers.

Table 5.5 (multiple answers possible)

Statements	Answers	
	rel	abs
Shared features:		
1. Vocabulary	51	44
2. Pronunciation	33	29
3. Spelling	22	19
Differing features:		
1. Grammar in general	36	31
German nouns have genders	18	16
Endings in German change frequently	16	14
Word order	13	11
German grammar is more complicated	11	10
German marks its cases	11	10
2. Pronunciation	22	19
German is pronounced the way it is written	10	9
3. Spelling	17	15
No answer	20	17

As is obvious from the table, two identical aspects (*pronunciation* and *spelling*) are classified as both a shared and a differing feature. *Vocabulary* is, not surprisingly, mentioned as the main shared feature, while grammar is stressed as being quite different in the two languages. As is evident from one of the answers under the grammar heading ("German marks its cases"), there would appear to be a certain lack of awareness as regards grammatical structures in the English language.

In order to ascertain *metalinguistic* knowledge levels, students were asked to define certain grammatical terms and to provide an example in either English or German. Semantic as well as grammatical definitions were accepted. Results are shown in table 5.6.

Table 5.6

Grammar item	Column 1 Correct and complete definition (with and without examples)		Column 2 Correct example only		Column 3 Correct but incomplete definition		Column 4 Incorrect definition		Column 5 No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
1. Verb	92	80	3	3	1	1	2	2	1	1
2. Conjunction	92	80	6	5	1	1	1	1	0	0
3. Subject	78	68	3	3	8	7	3	3	7	6
4. Noun	77	67	3	3	15	13	3	3	1	1
5. Adjective	72	63	2	2	13	11	6	5	7	6
6. Object	64	56	10	9	6	5	7	6	13	11
7. Imperative	38	33	3	3	0	0	15	13	44	38
8. Subclause	26	23	3	3	20	17	10	9	40	35
9. Personal pronoun	24	21	23	20	6	5	30	26	17	15
10. Auxiliary verb	11	10	6	5	26	23	13	11	44	38
11. Preposition	7	6	31	27	30	26	13	11	20	17
12. Modal verb	1	1	31	27	43	37	6	5	20	17
13. Adverb	0	0	11	10	53	46	10	9	25	22
14. Past participle	0	0	7	6	55	48	23	20	15	13

The following is an attempt to establish some kind of categorisation:

Category I. (= unproblematic concepts, as indicated by figures well above 50% in columns 1 and 2):

Verb, *conjunctions* (but see results for next question as regards this item), *subject*, *noun*, *adjective* and *object*.

Category II. (= problematic concepts, as indicated by low figures in columns 1 and 2 and correspondingly high figures in one or more of the other columns). These items are problematic for a number of various reasons:

1. The concept may not have been introduced under this term at second level - examples are *imperative*, *subclause* and *auxiliary verb*. The high number of students who did not even attempt to provide a definition or an example for these terms (= more than 40%) would indicate that they may never have come across them before.

2. It may be difficult to give a fairly succinct but complete definition of the concept, e.g. the concept of *preposition*.

3. The interpretation of the concept is too narrow, as would appear to be the case with *modal verbs* and *adverbs*. Although a fairly high number of students managed to provide either a correct example or a partial definition, hardly any gave a complete definition. *Modal verbs* were most commonly defined as verbs 'that take another verb' which would ignore the fact that they are also used as full verbs. The concept of an

adverb also needs to be broadened considerably: more than half of all students limited the definition to 'describing a verb', not bearing in mind that an adverb can also refer to an adjective, another adverb or an entire clause[22].

4. The concept is confused with others, for example *personal pronoun* and *past participle*. The most frequent error with regard to the former was that it was either mixed up with *possessive determiners* or that it was limited to refer to human beings only. As regards *past participles*, it was either confused it with the preterite or taken to denote the entire verbal bracket (e.g. 'ich bin gegangen'). No student mentioned that *past participles* are also used to form the passive.

Overall and individual student performances were measured by allocating one point for a correct and complete definition plus one point for a correct example, thus making up a total of 28 points. The mean calculated out of 100 was 58.32% and the Standard deviation was 17.5%, underlining the considerable heterogeneity in knowledge levels which was previously identified as a major problem at both second and third level.

Students were also asked to provide the correct grammatical terms for items which were underlined in the text below. Unlike the previous question, the terminology demanded in this question went beyond what might be considered *basic* concepts.

Rotkäppchen[23]

Eines schönen Nachmittags wartete ein <u>wilder</u>[1] Wolf in einem finsteren Wald darauf, daß <u>ein</u>[2] kleines Mädchen mit einem großen Korb voll mit vielen Lebensmitteln für seine <u>Großmutter</u>[3] vorbeikommen würde. Endlich <u>kam</u>[4] auch das kleine Mädchen und <u>der</u>[5] böse Wolf fragte <u>es</u>[6]: "Bringst du <u>diesen</u>[7] herrlichen Korb zu <u>deiner</u>[8] lieben Großmutter?". Das kleine Mädchen sagte ja, <u>und</u>[9] der Wolf fragte <u>mit</u>[10] einer weichen Stimme, wo denn die liebe Großmutter wohnt. Das kleine Mädchen <u>hat</u>[11] es ihm <u>gesagt</u>[12] und er ist <u>schnell</u>[13] in den tiefen Wald gelaufen.

<u>Als</u>[14] das Mädchen die Tür des alten Hauses seiner Großmutter öffnete, sah es jemanden in einer weißen Nachthaube <u>im großen Bett</u>[15] liegen. Das Mä<u>chen</u>[16] war

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[22] This overly narrow definition would account for faulty noun phrases which even strong students are known to produce, such as 'Sie hat einen wirkli<u>chen</u> guten Geschmack'.

[23] The text which is an adaptation of a story by James Thurber was taken from 'Grammatik zum Üben', (Brenner and Jentsch, 1988: 111).

noch keine 3 Schritte auf das Bett zugegangen [17], da sah es, daß nicht seine alte Großmutter, sondern der böse Wolf darin lag, denn selbst in einer weißen Nachthaube sieht ein böser Wolf [18] einer Großmutter nicht ähnlicher als der Metro-Goldwyn-Löwe dem Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten. Deshalb nahm das kleine Mädchen einen schweren Revolver, den [19] es immer dabei hatte, um sich [20] sicherer zu fühlen, aus seinem Korb und schoß den bösen Wolf tot.

Moral: Es ist heutzutage nicht mehr so leicht wie früher, einem kleinen Mädchen etwas vorzumachen.
(jemandem etwas vormachen - to fool someone)

The following terms were accepted as being correct (although some are in fact not correct such as 'pronoun' under numbers 7 and 8).
1= adjective; 2= indefinite article; 3= noun; object; 4= verb in preterite tense/preterite; 5= definite article; 6= personal pronoun; accusative object; 7= demonstrative adjective/article/pronoun; 8= possessive adjective/article/pronoun; 9= conjunction (1); 10= preposition; 11= auxiliary verb; 12= past participle; 13= adverb; 14= conjunction (2); 15= prepositional phrase/place complement; 16= suffix; 17= prefix; 18= noun phrase; subject; 19= relative pronoun; 20= reflexive pronoun.
Deviations from these answers were judged to be either 'correct, but incomplete' or 'incorrect': Answers are shown in table 5.7.

Table 5.7

Item number	Column 1 Correct answer		Column 2 Correct but incomplete answer		Column 3 Incorrect answer		Column 4 No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
3. (Noun; object)	90	78	0	0	8	7	2	2
9. (Conjunction no. 1)	87	76	0	0	6	5	7	6
1. (Adjective)	86	75	0	0	11	10	2	2
12. (Past participle)	71	62	14	12	6	5	9	8
10. (Preposition)	65	57	0	0	14	12	21	18
14. (Conjunction no. 2)	60	52	0	0	22	19	18	16
4. (Verb in preterite; preterite)	56	49	9	8	29	25	6	5
13. (Adverb)	51	44	0	0	40	35	9	8
5. (Definite article)	43	37	5	4	26	23	26	23
6. (Personal pronoun; accusative object)	37	32	20	17	15	13	29	25
2. (Indefinite article)	34	30	8	7	36	31	22	19
11. (Auxiliary verb)	34	30	40	35	20	17	6	5
19. (Relative pronoun)	16	14	17	15	39	34	28	24
20. (Reflexive pronoun)	13	11	20	17	40	35	28	24
18. (Noun phrase; subject)	7	6	20	17	52	45	22	19
8. (Possessive adjective/article/pronoun)	7	6	15	13	43	38	34	30
17. (Prefix)	3	3	11	10	56	49	29	25
7. (Demonstrative adjective/article/pronoun)	1	1	15	13	28	24	56	49
15. (Prepositional phrase; place complement)	1	1	24	21	53	46	22	19
16. (Suffix)	0	0	13	11	51	44	37	32

Findings for this question would appear to confirm some of those for the previous question while contradicting others. Thus, the concepts of *noun* (item 3 in table 5.7) and *adjective* (item 1), which had previously been classified as unproblematic as regards their definition, were also identified correctly by the vast majority of students. As regards the concept of *conjunction*, there seems to be quite a remarkable gap between the number of correct identifications from one conjunction to the next, although both are named correctly by a majority: while a very high number of students correctly identified 'und' as a conjunction (item 9), the conjunction 'als' (item 14) was not quite as easily identified and was frequently held to be a preposition. Results for two other concepts which were previously categorised as not posing any difficulty in their definition showed that their identification in context proved to be more problematic: although there were two opportunities for the identification of an *object* (items 3 and 6), students opted to name other (equally correct) terms on both occasions. Thus, with regard to item 3, almost all students opted for *noun* as a response, while with regard to item 6, most students stated that this was a *pronoun* rather than pointing out that it was an accusative object. While answers for the

concept of *past participles* would appear to contradict findings for the previous question, considering that 71% (62) identified item 12 correctly, results for item 4 showed that 29% (25) were unable to identify the *preterite* as such - the most common incorrect answer here was, in fact, *past participle*. Answers for item 11 (*auxiliary verb*) confirmed that this concept is not widely known: only 34% (30) identified it fully correctly while 40% (35) merely stated that this was a *verb*. On the other hand, the concept of *preposition* (item 10) which very few students were able to define in its entirety was identified correctly by two-thirds in this question, an indication that students are familiar with the concept.

As regards two other concepts which were previously categorised as problematic - *pronouns* and *adverbs* - the difficulty with those items was confirmed in this question. Thus item 8 (*possessive adjective/article/pronoun*) was erroneously identified as a *personal pronoun* by most of the 43% (38) who provided an incorrect answer. The number of correct answers for other pronouns is also low (cf. items 19 and 20, *relative* and *reflexive pronouns*). And as regards the concept of *adverb*, while 51% (44) managed to identify it correctly, 40% (35) gave an incorrect answer, most of whom stating that this was an *adjective*. Correct answers for the *definite* and the *indefinite article* (items 5 and 2 respectively) were also provided by less than half of all students. Most of the 36% of students (31) who identified the latter incorrectly stated that it was a definite article. The other determiner in the text (demonstrative adjective/article/pronoun, item 7) is virtually unknown, as are items 15 through 17. Overall and individual student performances were again measured by allocating one point per correct and complete answer, making up a total of 20 points. The mean calculated out of 100 was 43.35 and the Standard deviation was 15.65 which is again quite high.

A correlation test was carried out for the two questions regarding metalinguistic knowledge levels, revealing a significant correlation at the 99% level. A selection of terms were tested in a t-test to ascertain if the same term was both defined and identified either correctly or incorrectly. The examined terms were:

- auxiliary verb
- past participle
- adjective

- conjunction
- adverb
- preposition
- personal pronoun

The t-test showed that, with the exception of the concepts of *past participle* and *preposition*, there was a direct link between the degree of correct definition and the degree of correct identification.

To sum up, findings would suggest that most learners are on firm ground with no more than a very limited number of basic concepts. These include the concepts of *verb*, *noun*, *adjective*, *preposition* and *conjunction*. Terms such as *modal verbs* and *adverbs* are conceived in an overly narrow way and, in the case of the latter, also confused with other concepts (e.g. adjectives). A substantial number of students hold rather fuzzy notions with regard to the nature of specific *pronouns* and *determiners* as well as with regard to *past participles*. As regards the concepts of *subject* and *object*, on the limited evidence of the above answers, it would appear that while they are known in theory, their identification in practice might cause difficulty. A range of other concepts which most teachers would regard as rather basic, such as *imperative*, *subclause* and *auxiliary verb* are not widely known, while less basic concepts such as *prefix*, *suffix* and *place complement* are altogether novel.

The next question sought to examine levels of rule knowledge with regard to two specific aspects of German grammar. In part a., learners were asked to state the correct <u>case</u> for the items marked in the text below and to give a reason as to why a particular case was used. The same text was used as previously.

*Eines schönen Nachmittags wartete ein wilder Wolf in einem finsteren Wald darauf, daß **ein kleines Mädchen**[1] mit einem großen Korb voll mit vielen Lebensmitteln für seine Großmutter vorbeikommen würde. Endlich kam auch das kleine Mädchen, und der böse Wolf fragte es: "Bringst du **diesen herrlichen Korb**[2] zu deiner lieben Großmutter? ". Das kleine Mädchen sagte ja, und der Wolf fragte es mit einer weichen Stimme, wo denn die liebe Großmutter wohnt. Das kleine Mädchen sagte es ihm[3] und er lief schnell **in den tiefen Wald**[4].*

*Als das Mädchen die Tür des alten Hauses **seiner Großmutter**[5] öffnete, sah es*

jemanden in einer weißen Nachthaube im großen Bett liegen. Das Mädchen war noch

keine 3 Schritte auf das große Bett zugegangen, da sah es, daß nicht seine alte

Großmutter, sondern der böse Wolf darin lag, denn selbst in einer weißen

Nachthaube sieht ein böser Wolf einer Großmutter nicht ähnlicher als der Metro-

Goldwyn-Löwe dem Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten. Deshalb nahm das kleine

*Mädchen einen schweren Revolver **aus seinem Korb**[6] und schoß den bösen Wolf tot.*

The following answers were accepted as correct*:

Item number	Case	Reason
1. (ein kleines Mädchen)	nominative	subject
2. (diesen herrlichen Korb)	accusative	'direct' object (as demanded by 'bringen')
3. (ihm)	dative	'indirect' object (as demanded by 'sagen')
4. (in den tiefen Wald)	accusative	'in' with motion (towards a goal) takes accusative
5. (seiner Großmutter)	genitive	denotes possession
6. (aus seinem Korb)	dative	'aus' is a preposition that requires the dative

*The information in brackets did not have to be provided in order to be awarded full points.

Student answers to this question are shown in table 5.8.

Table 5.8

Item in text	Correct case plus correct or no reason		Correct case plus 'incorrect' reason		Incorrect case plus 'incorrect' or no reason		No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
1.	47	41	2	2	33	29	17	15
2.	56	49	8	7	13	11	23	20
3.	68	59	1	1	9	8	22	19
4.	52	45	10	9	14	12	24	21
5.	49	43	6	5	16	14	29	25
6.	67	58	6	5	3	3	24	21

Less than 50% of students identified the nominative case correctly (cf. item 1), with almost a third of the entire cohort stating an incorrect case. The most frequently given incorrect answer was "the accusative case", the form for which is, of course, in this instance identical with the nominative case. One possible explanation for the misidentification is that students expected the conjunction 'daß' to introduce an object and not a subject. Another explanation is that students associate the verb 'warten' with the accusative case since, if used as a prepositional object with 'auf', it is indeed

followed by that case. This latter hypothesis is borne out to some extent by the error analysis findings discussed under Section 5.2.3 below. Results there suggest that the presence of a verb requiring the accusative case leads learners to put most other conceivable elements in that sentence into the accusative case as well.

Just over half the students identified the genitive case correctly (item 5), with most students who provided an incorrect answer stating that this was the dative case (again, there is no morphological difference). The accusative case in both object (item 2) and direction complement (item 4) was identified correctly by considerably fewer students than identified the dative case (items 3 and 6).

In part b. of this question students were asked to identify reasons for the particular word order in the following sentences:

*Eines schönen Nachmittags **wartete**[I] ein wilder Wolf in einem finsteren Wald darauf, daß ein kleines Mädchen mit einem großen Korb voll mit vielen Lebensmitteln für seine Großmutter vorbeikommen **würde**[II].. Endlich kam auch das kleine Mädchen, und der böse Wolf **fragte**[III]. es: "**Bringst**[IV]. du diesen herrlichen Korb zu deiner lieben Großmutter?". Das kleine Mädchen sagte ja, und der Wolf fragte es mit einer weichen Stimme, wo denn die liebe Großmutter wohnt. Das kleine Mädchen sagte es ihm und er lief schnell in den tiefen Wald.*

*Als das Mädchen die Tür des alten Hauses seiner Großmutter **öffnete**[V]., sah es jemanden in einer weißen Nachthaube im großen Bett liegen. Das Mädchen war noch keine 3 Schritte auf das große Bett zugegangen, da **sah**[VI]. es, daß nicht seine alte Großmutter, sondern der böse Wolf darin lag, denn selbst in einer weißen Nachthaube **sieht**[VII]. ein böser Wolf einer Großmutter nicht ähnlicher als der Metro-Goldwyn-Löwe dem Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten. Deshalb **nahm**[VIII]. das kleine Mädchen einen schweren Revolver aus seinem Korb und schoß den bösen Wolf tot.*

Answers are shown in table 5.9.

184

Table 5.9

Item number and reason	Correct answers		Incorrect answers		No answer	
	rel	abs	rel	abs	rel	abs
I. - verb second place/inversion	41	36	20	17	39	34
II. - verb end after conjunction 'daß'	55	48	10	9	34	30
III. - verb second place /no inversion after 'und'	40	35	13	11	47	41
IV. - verb first place in question	53	46	14	12	33	29
V. - verb end after conjunction 'als'	44	38	21	18	36	31
VI.- verb second place/inversion	24	21	18	16	57	50
VII. - verb second place/inversion	7	6	36	31	57	50
VIII. - verb second place/inversion	47	41	8	7	45	39

As is obvious from table 5.9, a considerable number of students did not answer either the entire question or individual parts, most likely for lack of time.

It should also be noted that quite a few incorrect answers were probably prompted by the full stops which had been inadvertently placed at the bottom of the line instead of the top, together with the respective number. This would appear to be especially relevant in the case of item number VII. which shows a striking number of incorrect answers (36%/31). In view of the low number of replies, an interpretation of the above results does not seem prudent.

Answers to the final question which included aspects of *linguistic* knowledge will not be considered since the overall number of students who attempted this question was quite small.

In the questionnaire, students were also asked about the interface between explicit and implicit knowledge. They were asked to state if they found it difficult to apply grammar rules in a non-grammar context, for example when writing an essay. 80% of students said that they found it difficult indeed. About half of these added that they were very insecure when it comes to using their grammatical knowledge.

Students were further asked to give reasons as to why remembering grammar rules in free composition was difficult. The most frequently given answers are shown in table 5.10.

Table 5.10

Statement	Answers	
	rel	abs
The concentration is more on vocabulary and content, so you forget about the grammar aspect	23	20
Grammar is taught in isolation, i.e. separated from other aspects of language learning (the context is often lacking):	22	19
There is a lack of continuous practice of newly acquired rules	16	14
There is too much to be remembered	10	9

The first answer confirms the emphasis on lexical issues in second level language learning and the view that, in many circumstances, the application of grammatical knowledge is of secondary importance. Response number two indicates that, while current levels of learner knowledge may justify the introduction of a dedicated grammar class at third level, grammar issues covered in that class also need to be pointed out in other areas of learning. Thus students' attention needs to be drawn to grammar issues in reading and listening comprehension exercises as well as in written and oral production to counteract compartmentalisation and to demonstrate the importance of grammatical awareness in all instances of language use. Finally, answers three and four indicate that students need extended practice to use the explicit information gathered in the course of their grammar learning effort.

5.2.3 Levels of Accuracy in Learners' Written Production

Students were asked to write an essay entitled: *Meine 4 Jahre an DCU - Hoffnungen und Erwartungen.* The recommended length of the essay was 300 words. Students were advised that the purpose of the essay was to ascertain the level to which they were able to apply grammatical knowledge in free production and were therefore urged to pay attention to production accuracy. If and to what extent production was guided by explicit or implicit knowledge was not examined, although the written, rather than the oral, medium was used to give students a better chance to apply their explicit knowledge. As Hulstijn and De Graaff (1994) point out, implicit knowledge is "a theoretical construct, not directly accessible by means of language tests" (ibid: 106). Thus R. Ellis' (1993) claim that an error analysis shows up gaps in the learner's *implicit* knowledge cannot be upheld. For logistical reasons, students had to be asked to write the essay outside class-time. Students were allowed to use reference materials if they wished but had to indicate if they did so.

The rationale behind this part of the research was to put to the test the impressionistic evidence that levels of accuracy among school-leavers were wanting. If they were indeed low, two aspects had to be established: firstly, common core gaps in learner knowledge had to be identified for inclusion in the German grammar programme and secondly, error sources had to be detected. The analysis of accuracy levels focused primarily on three types of error category - morphosyntax, particles (i.e. the use of prepositions and conjunctions) and spelling/orthography. Although the rationale behind this part of the research was to ascertain, above all, accuracy levels, fluency levels and the ability to communicate ideas were obviously also put to the test.

Results

Message-communication was achieved in most cases, with some impressive performances. Syntactically, most students adhered to fairly basic structures, avoiding structures which are perceived as difficult, such as relative clauses, as well as the use of conjunctions and adverbials (presumably because of implications for word order). There was accordingly little sign of syntactic variation. Several essays also revealed considerable reliance on set phrases which form part of the Leaving

Certificate repertoire[24]. The first person singular pronoun 'ich' formed the subject of the overwhelming majority of phrases. Other pronouns featured hardly at all - in most instances nouns were simply repeated, just as there were widespread lexical repetitions in general. Difficulties of a morphosyntactic and lexical nature manifested themselves when students attempted to express ideas without resorting to Leaving Certificate type vocabulary or set phrases.

The distribution of the most common *lexical* errors is shown in table 5.11.

The results for the most common grammatical errors in the three categories listed above are shown in tables 5.12 and 5.13 respectively. In tables 5.11 and 5.12, each error was counted as 1 error; in table 5.13 each error was counted as 0.5. Percentages were calculated out of the total number of incorrect occurrences in each category. Where an identical structure was repeated incorrectly more than once, only one error was counted.

As is obvious from the tables below, the total number of lexical errors was far lower than the number of major grammatical and orthographic errors (314 lexical compared to 879 grammatical and 160 orthographic errors). While those semantic errors which occurred frequently will be considered in the context of the German language programme, they will not be discussed in any further detail in this research.

Table 5.11: Lexical errors (total number of errors: 314)

Category	%	Examples of the most common errors
Adverbs and adjectives	37	ich vermisse meine Familie viel; heimwehkrank sein; fließlich Deutsch sprechen
Verbs	34	Freunde machen; bei einer Familie bleiben; jeden Tag 5 Stunden studieren
Nouns	29	Sozialleben; ich habe keine Idee

Fischer's list of types of error sources include the following: L1 transfer (according to Fischer, the biggest source of errors, cf. Fischer, 1990), L2 overgeneralisation, lack of attention, L3 transfer and attempt to avoid an L2 structure which is identical with the L1 for fear of interference. Looking at the lexical errors produced in the essay, it

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[24] Examples of these set phrases are: "Ich freue mich, die Gelegenheit zu haben, ..." and "Wie du schon weißt, ..." - both are standard phrases with which students would have been familiarised in their preparation for the the Leaving Certificate examinations. Neither phrase is particularly appropriate in the present context.

became clear that in the categories of *verbs* and *nouns*, most were indeed due to an incorrect L1 transfer. As regards *adjectives* and *adverbs*, students seemed to have been

influenced to some degree by the L2, using suffixes that they would have come across before in that language (e.g. the suffix -lich on the adverb 'fließend' which subsequently became 'fließlich'). In another (frequent) error, L1 and L2 lexical items were amalgamated to create the adjective 'heimwehkrank'.

Table 5.12 shows the main grammatical errors, while table 5.13 shows the orthographic errors.

Table 5.12: Grammatical errors (total number of errors: 879)

Category	%	Most common errors
I. Verbal phrase		
1. Verb and tense formation; use of the tenses	16	*ich werde besser bekommt*; *ich muß arbeitet*; separable verbs; preterite forms such as *schreibte* and *fande*; modal verbs in the present tense and the preterite, e.g *in der Schule müßten wir immer...*; *ich möchte immer Deutsch an der Uni machen*; the verb *werden*; the use of past participles; omission of auxiliary verb ('ich gesehen'); incorrect auxiliary verb ('ich habe Klubs beitreten'); use of the pluperfect: in der Schule hatten wir viel gelernt
2. Valency of the verb *[1]	9	ich setze große Hoffnungen auf diesem Kurs; ich weiß nicht viel über der Geschichte von Dtld.; ich treffe hier mit vielen Leuten; ich möchte diese Leute helfen; er war einen sehr guten Lehrer; ich glaube, daß diesen Kurs schwierig ist
3. Verb/noun agreement	6	die Familie wohnen; ich kennt; die Studenten macht
Total % number of errors in verbal phrase	**31**	
II. Noun phrase		
1. Gender of nouns *[1]	12	ein gutes Zeit; das Gelegenheit; das Umgebung; die /das Kurs; ein gutes Beruf; die Jahr
2. Declension of nouns, articles and pronouns *[1]; use of articles	10	im Laufe des 4 Jahre; das 3. Jahr dieses Kurs; am Ende die 4 Jahr; das 3. Jahr meines Studium; ich möchte meinen Kenntnisse verbessern; eines gutes Wissen haben; alle vs alles: wir machen alles unsere Hausaufgaben; jeder vs jemand: das weiß doch jemand; in der Schule
• plurals	8	die Freunden/Leuten/Jahren; alle Lehrern; elf Studentin; Computers
3. Formation, declension and comparison of adjectives and adverbs *[1]	11	viele Arbeit/Zeit; mit andere Leute; die beste Studenten; ich freue mich auf mein dritten Jahr; ich hoffe, daß ich mein nächste 4 Jahre genießen werde; sie sind alter als ich
Total % number of errors in noun phrase	**41**	
III. Prepositional phrase		
Government of prepositions	**8**	mainly adverbials of place (cf. examples below)
IV. Syntax		
1. Word order of the verb in main clauses	5	violation of 'verb second' rule
2. Word order of the verb in subclauses	3	violation of the 'verb end' rule
3. Word order of adverbials; word order surrounding infinitive clauses	3	the position of 'auch' which in many instances appears at the end of a clause; embedding of infinitive clauses, e.g. 'ich habe Fremdsprachen zu studieren beschlossen'
Total % number of syntax errors	**11**	
V. Particles		
Prepositions	4	various
Conjunctions	3	als vs. wenn, e.g.' wenn ich 15 war, bin ich nach Deutschland gefahren'; wann vs. wenn, e.g. 'ich freue mich auf das 3. Jahr, wann ich ins Ausland fahre'
Total % number of errors involving particles	**7**	

Other errors accounted for less than 2%.

Table 5.13: Orthographic errors (total number of errors: 160)

Category	%	Most common errors
1. The use of capital letters	61	no capital letters on nouns; the use of capital letters on the pronoun 'Ich' other than at the beginning of a sentence; capital letters on adjectives
2. General spelling	39	

A few points need to be made with regard to an analysis of the above student essays. Firstly, certain types of potential errors could not be investigated because of the topic of the essay (e.g. some aspects of the verbal phrase such as the *imperative mood*). All other aspects of the verbal phrase, as well as aspects of noun phrases and prepositional phrases could however be investigated since there was a sufficient number of examples. It should also be pointed out that the error analysis does not take into account the fact that some students used relatively simple structures successfully, while others tried out more elaborate ones and failed.

In the interpretation of error sources, there is a difficulty regarding a classification of errors marked [*1] (i.e. the *valency of verbs, gender of nouns* as well as *declension of nouns, articles and pronouns, the declension of adjectives and adverbs* and *the government of prepositions*). The source of error in these instances is not always obvious. In other words, it is not always possible to identify whether it is the <u>case,</u> the <u>gender</u> or the actual <u>declension</u> that is not known - or a combination of these. For instance, in the phrase "das Ende von dieser Absatz" it is unclear whether it is the case, the gender or both that are unknown to the producer, likewise with phrases such as "mit andere neue Studenten" or "ich möchte alte Leute helfen" (case, declension or both?). Other examples would appear to confirm impressionistic evidence that learners are actually either unaware of the existence of organising principles in the target language grammar, and/or have learnt to 'survive' without fully grasping these. As emerged in the course of the interviews, to many students, the features that make up German grammar appear fairly arbitrary which leads them, in turn, to adopt a haphazard approach when using the language. For instance, learners would appear to be completely overwhelmed by the use of *Umlaute* (in particular in the formation of verbs), as well as by what they perceive as the ever-changing nature of what interviewees referred to as 'word endings'. Even allowing for the concept of 'non-systematic variation' (cf. Chapter Two), it is in many instances quite difficult to uphold the notion of a <u>rule-governed</u> interlanguage system: for how does one tell language use that is 'non-systematic' from one which is utterly 'random'? To give an example, if a student produces as articles for the noun 'Zeit' not just 'die' and 'der' but also 'das', all in the one text and all for what is supposed to be the nominative case, it may be that his/her interlanguage system is not so much in need of being *restructured*

as in need of being *structured* in the first place. Thus, knowing the declension of articles (i.e. recalling that 'der' changes to 'den' in the accusative) is obviously only of benefit to the language user if he/she also knows <u>when to use the accusative,</u> i.e. which verbs and/or prepositions require the accusative case. As a consequence of this lack of understanding, students admitted in the interview that they were not very confident and often frustrated when they find themselves in a situation of having to apply whatever grammatical knowledge they have been taught.

As regards the vast majority of errors under *prepositional phrase,* these did not occur in connection with fixed prepositions but with adverbials of place or time involving double-track prepositions. Examples of those include:

1. Ich möchte eine gute Zeit <u>in das erste Jahr</u> haben.
2. Ich hoffe, daß ich gute Noten <u>in meine Examen</u> bekomme.
3. <u>In die 4 Jahre</u> hier hoffe ich, viele Leute zu treffen und kennenzulernen.
4. Ich möchte Fremdsprachen <u>auf die Uni</u> studieren.
5. Ich möchte meine Fertigkeiten <u>in meine 2 Sprachen</u> entwickeln.
6. Aber erst muß ich die Prüfungen <u>in das erste Jahr</u> bestehen.
7. <u>Vor das Examen</u> setze ich mich unter viel Druck.
8. <u>In mein drittes Jahr</u> hier muß ich ins Ausland fahren.

In all of the above clauses, an overgeneralisation was made with regard to the use of the accusative case: in sentences 1. to 7., the presence of a transitive verb would appear to have prompted many students to put not only the object complement into the accusative case, as required, but also all other elements, including *adverbials of time* and of *place.* Similarly, in sentence number 8., the accusative case of the direction complement is extended to the adverbial of time. Thus, no distinction is drawn between *complements* on the one hand and *adverbials* on the other in any of the above clauses.

A statistical analysis of the overall number of grammatical and orthographic errors reveals that the mean, which was calculated out of the number of mistakes made per 100 words, is 12.29. As is obvious from results in table 5.12, the highest number of errors was made with regard to aspects of the *noun phrase* (41%), followed by the

verbal phrase (31%). Errors involving *syntax* and *prepositions* accounted for 11% and 8% respectively, while the number of errors involving *particles* amounted to 7%. Although the mean of 12.29 is quite high, it must be stressed that this can by no means be taken as an indication of weak learner performances across the board, regarding all grammar structures: the high Standard Deviation of 5.07 clearly underlines the heterogeneity of learner performance levels. A look at the distribution of errors reveals that, while certain areas indeed caused difficulty to a large majority of learners (notably those aspects included under *noun phrase* as well as the concept of *verb valency*), error rates in other areas are driven to their high levels by a much smaller number of students. Thus, as was suggested previously, aspects which received both strong coverage and regular error feedback at second level, such as basic elements of the *verbal phrase* and the use of *conjunctions* (cf. tables 5.3 and 5.4 above), tend to be less problematic with strong or fairly strong students, although they are nonetheless most problematic for a sizeable number of weaker students. The use of *prepositions* would appear to be an exception since it was both emphasised strongly at second level and produced errors across the entire learner spectrum. However, considering that the main source of these errors was the use of prepositions in *adverbial phrases* or *place and direction complements* it may be suggested that, perhaps, these features did not receive the same coverage as other aspects of the prepositional phrase (e.g. the use of prepositions with fixed cases).

Correlation tests were carried out between student results for the <u>definition</u> of selected terminology (illustrated in table 5.6 above) and the number of errors learners made in free-style composition. Results reveal a correlation between these two categories, significant at the 95% level. The same tests were also conducted between results for the <u>identification</u> of selected terminology (illustrated in table 5.7 above) and the number of errors made in free-style composition. No significant correlation was established between these two categories. Correlation results between Leaving Certificate German results and metalinguistic knowledge on the one hand, and Leaving Certificate results and essay performances on the other, revealed a correlation at the 95% level.

Finally, although this error analysis gave some indication of general learner weaknesses, it did not provide lecturers with a sufficiently accurate picture of each

student's individual strengths and weaknesses. Since students were allowed to use reference books, it was not possible to gain an insight into their 'unaided' performance levels. For this reason, it was decided that future essays which are to be used as a diagnostic instrument for identifying individual student strengths and weaknesses must be produced in class (cf. Chapter Eight).

5.3 The Chief Examiner's Report of the 1995 Higher Level Leaving Certificate Examination for German

A brief look will be taken at the report of the 1995 Leaving Certificate examination, as it was the exam which was taken by the present subject group.

The report was compiled on behalf of the Department of Education in order to give teachers an indication of the performance of candidates in that examination and to assist them in preparing their senior cycle students for future examinations. The report states that approximately 68% of candidates sat the Higher level paper but points out that "some candidates would have done better to choose the Ordinary level paper" (Irish Department of Education, 1996c: 1).

According to the report, the Listening Comprehension yielded some very good results, although few candidates achieved full marks. As regards the cloze-type test in the written paper, the report states that this analytical test which requires a top-down approach to discover exactly which lexical and grammatical markers are to be filled into the blanks "is not popular with the majority of pupils and teachers" (ibid: 4)[25].

As regards written production, the report criticises the over-use of chunks of learnt-off material which, it was pointed out, was not always appropriate in both the letter-writing and the elaboration of notes. The report states that "[s]imple, correct German would be welcomed in place of stilted purple passages" (ibid: 5, underlining in original). With regard to the level of accuracy in written expression, the report expresses concern "that levels of accuracy and appropriateness of language seem to be worsening" (ibid: 8). A look at the list of the most frequently made mistakes compiled by the Chief Examiner reveals that many of those mistakes are indeed identical with those detected in the error analysis under Section 5.2.3 above. The report thus confirms the impressionistic evidence many in the teaching profession hold with regard to effects of the communicative approach: accuracy levels leave much to be desired and students tend to rely excessively on ready-made chunks. With regard to the compositional exercise which is the other dedicated grammar exercise in the paper besides the cloze-type test, the report notes that candidates performed well

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[25] This is presumably one of the reasons why it was removed from the paper under the revised examination regulations.

in this question but continues to state that "[e]xaminers commented that <u>word order</u> was good in this question, in contrast to questions 2. and 3. [the letter-writing and elaboration of notes, my explanation] (where there was a high level of word order errors), indicating that candidates practice [sic] focussing [sic] on word order in the compositional exercise *but do not transfer or apply that to writing of a freer nature*" (ibid: 11, underlining in original, my italics). The report also states that "[i]deally this exercise should lead to greater accuracy in written expression" (ibid). The fragmentation of grammatical knowledge as demonstrated by students in the above exercises should, of course, come as no surprise at all in view of the compartmentalisation established by the examination requirements themselves. With regard to the oral examinations, the report notes that some candidates failed to produce the plurals of such nouns as 'Bruder' and 'Schwester' correctly and that some candidates recited material that they clearly did not understand. A reminder is issued that it is important to constantly practise speaking the language in class. As regards the role play, the report remarks that "[t]he whole question of accuracy/inaccuracy in use of language continues to be a problem" (ibid: 21).

5.4 Conclusions

It was the aim of this chapter to establish what impact the Leaving Certificate teaching syllabus and examination requirements have had on second level grammar learning from the students' point of view. What then are the most pertinent results from this investigation for third level teaching? Looking at students' knowledge and performance levels, it would appear that few students have a thorough understanding of grammar. Most seem to have have the kind of limited knowledge required for the Leaving Certificate examinations, while some would appear to owe their good Leaving Certificate results to skills that have little or nothing to do with grammatical knowledge (cf. Lofmark, 1990 for similar observations in Britain). Notwithstanding individual student differences, there are discernible difficulties which are common to the majority of students:

1. Most students' terminological knowledge does not exceed rudimentary levels. The vast majority of concepts put to students in the course of this research were either confused with other terms, given an overly narrow interpretation or were quite simply not known.

2. Due to insufficient student responses in the questionnaire, results regarding explicit linguistic knowledge levels are largely inconclusive. However, results from the teacher survey give some indication as to the levels which can be expected from school-leavers. As was pointed out in Chapter Three above, the requirements for grammatical competence, under both the 1983 and the 1995 examination regulations, are very limited in both the range of knowledge to be displayed (i.e. requirements are confined to some basic aspects of the *verbal phrase* and *word order*, including the use of *conjunctions*) and the need for its applicability. Thus, although teachers' answers in the 1997 questionnaire suggest they do not believe that students can score either As or B1s or B2s without a fairly sound knowledge of basic aspects of *noun* and *prepositional phrases*, many teachers in the interviews for the 1983 syllabus maintained that this was in fact quite possible: according to these teachers' experiences, very selective teaching can secure students high marks in the relatively narrow context of the Leaving Certificate. Consequently, teachers in the interview repeatedly warned that a good performance in the Leaving Certificate could by no

means automatically be equated with a sound overall knowledge of even the most basic German grammar concepts.

3. Error analysis findings would suggest that there are fundamental grammar areas which pose difficulties to students across the board (for example, the concept of *valency*, most aspects of the *noun phrase* as well as aspects of the *prepositional phrase*), while other aspects, such as basic elements of the *verbal phrase* and *syntax* proved to be problematic for a smaller, albeit still sizeable, number of learners. The results of both the student and the teacher survey, and in particular the error analysis results, are confirmed by findings in the 1995 Examiners' Report. Furthermore, the annual examination reports published in the bulletins issued by the German Teachers' Association (GDI) bear ample testimony to the fact that levels of accuracy among many second level school-leavers are indeed far from satisfactory. An investigation of the 1995 syllabus and examination requirements would suggest that not much change can be expected in the immediate future.

Findings in both this and the previous chapter would suggest that the approach to grammar acquisition and usage which has been adopted at second level has at least three major implications for third level language learning. Firstly, as was discussed above, both the 1983 and the 1995 German Leaving Certificate examinations (and therefore, as was established in the teachers' survey above, teaching practice in the average classroom) give overall preferential treatment to the aim of communicativity[26]. Requirements for grammatical competence are not only very limited in their range, they are also confined to specified parts of the examination, thus fostering an utterly inconsistent approach to the use of grammar. Under both old and new Leaving Certificate regulations, grammatical knowledge and accuracy are of overriding importance in certain instances (cf. the cloze-test in examinations under the 1983 syllabus and the 'Angewandte Grammatik' question in examinations under the 1995 syllabus), of limited importance in others (cf. the 'Äußerung zum Thema' and 'Schriftliche Produktion' under the new syllabus) and of virtually no importance in the rest (cf. the reading comprehension questions under both syllabi). Learners are

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[26] It may have to be stated again that full recognition is taken of the fact that, for the majority of teachers, the pursuit of the aim of communicativity does not lead to an abandonment of grammar emphasis.

effectively told that it is permissible to ignore grammar when doing certain exercises in the foreign language (e.g. the reading comprehension), while concentrating exclusively on aspects of grammar in other exercises. What this approach fails to underline is the fact that grammar does not serve a purpose in itself but that it is an integral part of efficient and effective communication *at all times* (cf. the Chief Examiner's Report, 1995). Many (if not most) students have therefore adopted the view that grammar is useful only in dedicated grammar exercises and when there is an explicit call for accuracy (as if accuracy were a goal in itself). According to this conception, 'grammar' is separate from the rest of 'language', just as accuracy is separate from communication. Thus, although on the face of it, students acknowledge that grammar has some role to play in language learning, they are not sure what exactly that role is (cf. statement 15 in table 5.4). The recognition of the importance of grammar would thus appear to be of a rather theoretical nature, since the majority of students fail to see its true purpose.

A second feature which seems to be common to many second level classrooms is the fairly minimal analytical (cognitive) challenge and concomitant widespread reliance on non-creative formulaic speech (cf. again the Chief Examiner's Report, 1995). Although 60% of teachers in the 1997 questionnaire stated that they engaged their students in regular parsing exercises, it is clear that this practice is confined to the very limited requirements of the Leaving Certificate which, as was established earlier, do not demand an overview or in-depth understanding of German grammar. Results from the student survey confirm that the average student does not have a thorough knowledge of either the underlying structures of or the rationale behind the target language. Thus both grammar acquisition and usage remain largely unreflected and are superseded in their importance by memorised learning instead (cf. Skehan, 1994). Although it was probably the furthest thought on the minds of proponents of the communicative approach, this practice would appear to have helped bring about a learning environment which is not altogether dissimilar to that prevalent under behaviourism. On the face of it, both seem to be characterised to a large extent by rote learning and the use of set phrases. There is however one crucial difference between the kind of grammar knowledge acquired under behaviourism on the one hand and the communicative approach on the other hand: vilified as they may have

been, it has been argued that pattern drills actually helped learners to produce an infinite number of 'original' sentences, while some communicative learning contexts allow students to rely on "a cluster of holophrases useful for everyday survival" (Mitchell, 1994a: 97). Learners thus instructed can 'holophrase' their way through a limited number of set pieces, and are denied the chance to become truly linguistically 'creative'. Rösler sums up the approach at second level to the handling of language learning in general and grammar in particular by pointing out that "[j]e stärker Lernziele [...] nicht aus Sprachverwendungsgründen heraus bestimmt sind, sondern durch in einer Institution zu absolvierende Prüfungen, desto stärker bestimmen sie, *was*, und zum Teil auch, *wie* gelernt wird" (1994: 4, my italics). As long as the use of ready-made chunks of speech and the lack of analytical abilities do not affect Leaving Certificate results adversely, the average language teacher may therefore have little choice but to continue to rely heavily on those features, in view of the plethora of demands and pressures arising from the examination requirements as well as classroom circumstances (cf. Chapter Four above). The result of this approach is similar to that regarding the application of grammatical knowledge: analytical skills are, by and large, only 'activated' when the signal for accuracy is explicitly given, i.e. in dedicated grammar exercises, while the remainder of the time they are put onto the back burner.

Both the compartmentalised approach to grammar usage and the lack of understanding the underlying structures of the language have undoubtedly contributed to the sense of insecurity which many students display towards the application of grammar. Thus, in the student survey grammar was singled out as *the* most difficult aspect of German language learning (cf. table 5.3) and the use of explicit knowledge was reported by 80% of learners to cause considerable difficulty in free-style production. As a consequence, results regarding learner motivation reveal, not surprisingly, that only a minority of students are intrinsically motivated to learn German grammar, while, at the same time, virtually all students showed an intrinsically motivated interest in the acquisition of German language as such (cf. table 5.4, statements 3 and 2 respectively).

Leaving the specific issue of grammar acquisition at third level aside for a moment, there can be little doubt that the general psychological impact of the transition

between second and third level is perceived by many students as a most daunting and sometimes even traumatic prospect. Thus, after years of 'spoon-feeding' and compulsory class attendance which provided many learners with a great sense of security, students, upon entry into university, are forced to develop organisational skills on a hitherto unknown scale. The move from second to third level is known to be even more unsettling for many (although liberating for others) who have had to leave their parental home in order to attend college. The above facts are often overlooked by those who claim that embarking on a new life (which life at university undoubtedly is) is necessarily fraught with difficulty and that there is very little that can be done to remedy the situation.

It hardly needs to be stressed that the above observations do not constitute a criticism of the instrumentally-driven learning approach displayed by the majority of learners - it would be unjust to reprehend students for wishing to secure an opening into their chosen careers by trying to perform well in their school-leaving examinations. However, there are two issues which cannot be ignored: firstly, the erroneous assumption needs to be challenged that a good performance in the German Leaving Certificate examination equals a good command of the language - good marks can just as well be the result of a successful match of selective teaching and selective attention (to name but one option). Secondly, it must be pointed out that as a consequence of the exam-driven teaching approach, examination requirements are allowed to dictate the classroom content in many, although obviously not all classrooms, to an extent that can only be described as alarming in terms of foreign language pedagogy.

If, as predicted, student numbers at second level do indeed fall in years to come, thus removing some of the pressure of gaining entrance into third level institutions through the highest possible Leaving Certificate score, a more process-oriented syllabus might just stand some chance of success. Considering the present demand for third level places, changes in the immediate future seem unlikely. Similarly, recommendations regarding alternative assessment modes, as suggested in the 1987 CEB report, would appear to have little chance of being implemented.

Finally, some of the above conclusions may be unpopular in certain circles and should not be isolated from the undoubtedly many merits which the introduction of the communicative approach has brought about. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt

that this approach and its ramifications continue to present third level with a number of major difficulties, as will become evident in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

The Role of German Grammar at University Level from the Lecturers' Perspectives

Introduction

The total number of students who in 1998 were taking German as part of their tertiary studies amounted to approximately 5,600 (Goethe Institute, 1998). This figure comprises all years (not just first years) in all third level institutions (i.e. Institutes of Technology and universities) and includes those who start German at ab initio level on entry into college[1]. Studies consist of either 'German Studies' degree courses or studies such as *Applied Languages, Applied Computational Linguistics, International Marketing and German, Law and German, Engineering and German, Commerce/Business and German* or *European Studies and German*. The length of degree courses with German varies between three and four years, with some colleges offering an optional year abroad between the last two years of study, whereas others prescribe a compulsory year during that time. When comparing the figure of 5,600 with the number of students who sit the Leaving Certificate examination each year, it becomes obvious that fewer than 11% of school-leavers continue German at third level. As pointed out under Section 3.1.3 above, entry into an Irish university is usually gained by applying through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Points requirements for degree courses involving German go up as high as 550 points, with the majority of courses demanding points well in excess of 400. Minimum entry requirements for language degrees involving German range from a B2 in the Leaving Certificate German examination to a C3[2].

Although the main focus of this thesis is on the role of German grammar in the first year programme at DCU, the situation at other Irish universities (but not Institutes of Technology) was briefly examined as well. The rationale for this was to ascertain whether or not the abovementioned changes with regard to school-leavers' competence and performance levels were also perceived to be problematic at institutions other than DCU. To this purpose questionnaires were disseminated in October 1997 among first year co-ordinators of German at NUI Dublin, NUI Maynooth, NUI Galway and NUI

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[1] Due to the increasing availability of German at second level, most universities have ceased to offer ab initio courses (e.g. Trinity College, University of Limerick, NUI Maynooth).

[2] It should be noted that many of those students who achieve the highest Leaving Certificate results in German often opt for the most popular degree courses overall, such as medicine, veterinary studies or law, rather than languages.

Cork, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Limerick. Colleagues from all but one college replied. All lecturers involved in the first year German language course at Dublin City University (five in total) were also asked to complete the questionnaire and were subsequently interviewed. Section 6.1 presents the results for all universities, including DCU, while Section 6.2 focuses on conclusions drawn from the findings by the latter.

6.1 The Role of Grammar in Post-Leaving Certificate First-Year University Courses

As stated under Section 3.2 above (language policy), due to the autonomy of the third level sector there are no common national syllabi at that level comparable to the second level Junior or Leaving Certificate syllabi. The majority of university faculties however issue students with written guidelines for their specific degree courses. Questions in the questionnaire aimed at ascertaining the expectations at university level with regard to students' previously acquired grammatical knowledge as well as establishing the status of grammar instruction and methodological approaches to grammar acquisition in the university context. For a copy of the questionnaire see Appendix D.

The first question in the questionnaire is identical with that put to second level teachers who were asked to indicate the degree of emphasis put on certain aspects of German language learning in their courses. Perhaps not surprisingly, *grammar* was the course element most emphasised by lecturers, followed by *writing, reading, speaking, vocabulary acquisition, listening* and *pronunciation*. As regards the overall learning outcomes of the various first year German courses, answers confirmed the pursuit of fairly diverse aims in the individual universities which left little common ground. The status of grammar teaching and learning was the one notable exception. All lecturers stated that they expected students to demonstrate a 'thorough knowledge of basic German grammar' by the end of the first year. This includes the ability to analyse and manipulate grammatical structures and to form phrases that are grammatically largely correct as well as increasingly complex, without having to rely on ready-made chunks. An examination of non-prompted (i.e. additionally provided) lecturers' answers revealed that much of the grammar work now done in first year university courses is considered to be *remedial*, with many lecturers stating that very 'basic' German grammar had to be covered. The general concurrence was that most of the grammar-related course aims would previously have been tackled at second, not at third level. The shift in emphasis at second level has thus led to a situation in which it is in their first year at college that students are asked to acquire the kind of knowledge that, under the grammar-translation syllabus, had been achieved prior to students' entry into university.

When asked to compare the importance of grammatical accuracy to that of fluency, the former was judged to be very important by the majority of lecturers, with three stating that accuracy was more important than fluency. No lecturer stated that accuracy was less important.

Another question pertained to the degree of coverage certain grammatical items were expected to have received at second level and the coverage they received in the first year German language course at third level. Lecturers were asked to indicate their answers on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = no coverage, 2 = superficial coverage, 3 = fairly thorough coverage, 4 = thorough coverage, 5 = very thorough coverage). Answers revealed a significant variation in expectations, with the expected coverage at second level for most items ranging from *superficial* to *very thorough* coverage. The only items which were expected to have been covered *thoroughly* to *very thoroughly* were:

1. Position of verbs in main clauses and questions (average degree of coverage: 4.5)
2. The use of capital letters (4.4)
3. The position of verbs in subclauses (4.1)
4. Formation of regular verbs and the use of conjunctions (4).

Answers would appear to indicate some knowledge among lecturers of Leaving Certificate requirements where point 1. as well as points 3. and 4. feature strongly indeed. One course co-ordinator commented that it was impossible to give an answer to this question because of the disparate standards at second level. A colleague from another college gave two separate sets of answers to, firstly, what he said he *knew* to expect and secondly, what he *would like* to be able to expect[3]. Yet a third co-ordinator made a similar point by stating that her interpretation of 'expect' equalled 'I know students will have done this'.

As regards items at the other end of the scale (i.e. items lecturers did not expect to have covered *thoroughly*), these were:

1. Indirect speech and the conditional (1.6)
2. Valency of nouns and adjectives (1.7)
3. Umlaute on nouns, adjectives and verbs (2.1).

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[3] Only the former interpretation was taken into account for the above calculation purposes.

Depending on the expected degree of coverage at second level, answers regarding the coverage at third level varied accordingly. The most common answers for the top end of the scale (i.e. items that are covered *thoroughly* to *very thoroughly* at university) are:

1. The passive (4.8)
2. Valency of verbs (4.6)
3. Separable and non-separable verbs, irregular verbs, modal verbs and past participles (4.5)
4. Government of prepositions and demonstrative pronoun (4.4)
5. Demonstrative article and adjectival endings (4.2)
6. Regular verbs, verb-noun agreement, declension of nouns, comparison (4).

Just as with second level teachers, aspects of the verbal phrase receive much attention in among university lecturers, underlining the importance of this aspect at every level as well as the difficulty many students have in coping with its features. Compared to the list of items which were expected to have been covered at second level, the list of features that are covered *thoroughly* or *very thoroughly* in first year university courses is extensive.

The only features which are not emphasised much in first year university courses are:

1. Indirect speech (1.8)
2. The use of capital letters (2.2).

In a number of universities, the former would appear to have been moved from first into second year teaching now, an indication of the shift of grammar teaching necessitated by the introduction of the communicative approach at second level. The latter feature is expected to have been covered thoroughly prior to students' entry into university. Lecturers were asked if they used reference books when explaining German grammar. All said they did. The books used were:

Bock et al.: Themen neu 1 - Workbook

Aufderstraße et al.: Themen neu 2 - Workbook

Dreyer/Schmitt: Lehr-und Übungsbuch der deutschen Grammatik

Durrell: Hammer's German Grammar and Usage

Durrell et al.: Practising German Grammar

Brenner/Jentsch: Grammatik zum Üben

Kars/Häussermann/Hime-Everschor: Grundgrammatik Deutsch

Helbig/Buscha: Deutsche Grammatik

Grebe et al.: Duden-Grammatik

Reimann: Grundstufen-Grammatik

Geschossmann-Hendershot: Schaum's German Grammar

Zorach /Melin: English Grammar for Students of German.

None of the books frequently used by second level teachers, as reported in their survey, are consulted or recommended by university lecturers.

As regards methodological approaches to grammar instruction, results revealed that:

- lecturers both set aside time for explicit grammar teaching and deal with grammar points as they arise
- most lecturers practise a mixture of inductive and deductive teaching
- all do follow-up exercises, both in class and as part of homework
- only one lecturer explained grammar through German, most others through a mixture of German and English
- grammar terminology is used constantly to frequently
- the majority of students, according to their lecturers, consider German grammar a *necessary evil*, *difficult* or *challenging*.

These findings are very similar indeed to the answers given by second level teachers in their 1996 survey. The same is true of the approach to the correction of errors, with all but one lecturer stating that they correct *all* errors in written work but only the most blatant in oral work[4]. As regards the seriousness of grammatical errors, the following were considered to be serious by *all* lecturers:

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[4] The one lecturer who does not correct all, corrects *most* errors in written work. One outside lecturer and all DCU lecturers stated that they do not correct errors themselves but ask students to correct them.

1. Formation of all verbs

2. Position of verbs

3. Declension of definite and indefinite articles

4. Personal and possessive pronouns.

The following were considered serious by *most* lecturers:

1. Tense formation

2. Verb-noun agreement

3. Government of prepositions

4. Conjunctions

5. Umlaute on verbs.

Again, there are significant similarities between these answers and those given by second level teachers, with the exception of *definite and indefinite articles* and *Umlaute on verbs*.

Errors judged to be least serious (0 to 1 response) were:

1. Indirect speech

2. Valency of nouns

3. The use of capital letters

4. Indefinite pronouns.

Major differences between individual degree courses emerged as regards the allocation of class time towards the teaching of grammar. This ranged from 20% to as much as 75% with the average at around the 40% level.

Participants were also asked what assistance they offered weak students with regard to the studying of German grammar.

Self-access systems, in particular computing facilities and language laboratories were named most frequently as aids given to students. Most lecturers also insisted that they could be approached both inside and outside the classroom to discuss problems, and some were even prepared to put on extra classes for weak students. Some added that

210

they placed great emphasis on helping students to view grammaticality not as an end in itself but as a useful tool from which their entire language knowledge can be expanded. Two course co-ordinators claimed that the vast majority of students now fell into the category of displaying a "weak grammatical knowledge", thus having necessitated structural changes in the entire German language programme. In one university, students were at one point streamlined according to their command levels at entry into university.

In a final question, co-ordinators and lecturers were asked if they would like to make any other comments. While most made comments expanding on some of the answers given in the questionnaire, one co-ordinator made the point that the superficial coverage some grammar received at second level was arguably worse than none at all since, as a result of it, students came to college confused about the grammar they had encountered and unable to use it in practice.

To sum up, the results show that there is unanimity among the German language co-ordinators and lecturers who participated in this research as regards generally low standards of grammar among first year university students. Grammar would appear to be the most emphasised feature in first year university German courses. A thorough knowledge of basic grammar is the only feature that is included in the list of aspired first year learning outcomes of *all* universities.

Differences as regards the handling of grammar in the individual universities have emerged in the following areas:

1. The expectations of what has been covered at school
2. The subsequent emphasis on individual grammar points
3. The time allocated to grammar teaching.

Thus while all Irish universities would appear to have taken account of decreased levels of linguistic knowledge and performance accuracy, the starting points for third level classroom teaching, the coverage of individual points and the overall time dedicated to the teaching of grammar vary quite considerably.

6.2 Conclusions for the German Grammar Programme at DCU

Turning to the specific situation at the centre of this research, findings among DCU lecturers' suggested that the items listed in table 6.1 below should form the basis for the first year grammar course. Lecturers also agreed on a number of linguistic aims as well as one general educational objective with regard to the acquisition and application of German grammar which ought to be achieved by the end of semester two.

The linguistic course objectives are as follows:

1. Students will be expected to demonstrate in their oral and written production an adequate command of the morphosyntactic features listed in table 6.1 below. In order to pass the examinations at the end of semester two, error levels in either type of production must not exceed specified levels. This is the only one of the linguistic aims which is enforced under current DCU examinations regulations.

2. Students should be able to display rule knowledge in defined areas as well as an understanding of the underlying system of German grammar (= analytical competence).

3. Students should be able to display terminological knowledge of commonly used terms (i.e. those used in table 6.1).

Table 6.1

Grammar item
1. Verbal phrase, part I - verb formation, tense formation and use of tenses
1.   the indicative
2.   subject-verb agreement/finite and non-finite verbs
3.   formation/conjugation of regular and irregular verbs
4.   formation and use of auxiliary verbs
5.   formation and use of modal verbs
6.   formation of separable and non-separable verbs/prefixes
7.   formation and use of the preterite tense
8.   formation and use of the perfect tense/ formation of past participles
9.   formation and use of the pluperfect tense
10. formation and use of the future tense
11. formation and use of the 'present' conditional/subjunctive I (for identification purposes only)
12. formation and use of the imperative
2. Syntax: the verbal bracket
1.   position of the verb in main clauses
2.   position of the verb in subordinate clauses/the effect of subordinating and coordinating conjunctions on word order
3. Valency
the most commonly used verbs and the cases they require (transitive and intransitive verbs)/complements/the case system
4. Noun phrase
1.   definition of nouns/the use of capital letters
2.   gender of nouns/suffixes
3.   plurals of nouns
4.   declension of nouns and determiners (incl. weak nouns); use of determiners
5.   declension of personal pronouns
6.   declension of relative pronouns without a preposition
7.   declension of indefinite pronouns
8.   declension of possessive pronouns
9.   declension of reflexive pronouns
10. declension of adjectives
11. formation of the comparative and the superlative
12. formation of nouns (incl. compound nouns); formation of adjectives
5. Prepositional phrase
1.   use of prepositions with fixed cases
2.   use of prepositions taking either the accusative or the dative case
3.   use of relative pronouns with prepositions
6. Adverbials
1.   adverbials of time, place, direction and manner; the difference between adverbials and complements
2.   difference between preposition, conjunction and adverbial (vor-bevor-vorher)
7. Word order
8. Verbal Phrase, part II
1.   formation and use of the passive
2.   the subjunctive, part two: the 'past' conditional
3.   the use of the double infinitive

As regards the wider educational aim mentioned above, it was agreed that students should be able to demonstrate both an awareness of their own grammar learning responsibilities and the ability to put this awareness into practice.

When comparing these objectives with school-leavers' competence and performance levels (as presented in Chapter Five), it becomes obvious that a wide gulf exists with

regard to average existing levels at the beginning of first year and those expected at the end of that year. The issue at the centre of this research is to establish just how best that gulf can be bridged. The approach adopted at DCU will be described in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Design and Implementation of the German Grammar Programme for Post-Leaving Certificate Students at DCU

Introduction

As was stated in Chapter One, the aim of the programme under investigation in this thesis was to facilitate the transition between second and third level education with regard to the acquisition of German grammar. Consequently, the design of the first year German grammar programme, as regards both the syllabus content and the overall pedagogical approach, is informed by and based on findings from the following areas: firstly, some of the theoretical concepts presented and discussed in Chapter Two; secondly, research into the framework and effects of second level learning and teaching, as presented in Chapters Three to Five; thirdly, research regarding the grammar standards students are expected to achieve by the end of their first year at DCU, as outlined in Chapter Six.

The most salient results from the research into learner backgrounds and DCU course aims can be summarised as follows:

1. Results regarding second level:

- Accuracy levels among some students are low to very low in virtually all areas of grammar while the majority of learners have difficulty with aspects which were not covered in great detail at second level.

- The 1983 Leaving Certificate examination regulations and marking schemes fostered a fragmented approach to grammar usage, signalling to the learner that the principal role for explicit grammatical knowledge is its application in 'grammar exercises', while in free-style production content conveyance can also be achieved by relying primarily on lexical knowledge. This view does not recognise grammar as a communicative tool, but regards as an end in itself which is almost reserved for separate purposes. Thus, while students may indicate that they are convinced of the importance of grammatical knowledge, in practice, they seem unaware of its actual communicative function.

- Although, due to flaws in the research implementation, the present investigation failed to establish exact levels of linguistic knowledge among students themselves, results in the teachers' survey confirmed that the grammatical knowledge required in the Leaving Certificate examination is very limited. As was outlined in Chapter Three above, under both the old and the new syllabus, grammatical knowledge is

216

confined to a small range of aspects while for the remainder students are challenged lexically rather than morphosyntactically. Fairly high results (certainly Bs) can be achieved by the skilful application of formulaic speech and by focusing on message communication, with only minimum requirements for accuracy in a limited number of grammar categories.

- Since Leaving Certificate examination requirements do not exceed a very low level of analytical parsing (and since the majority of teachers confess to adhering in their teaching primarily to examination requirements), it must be deduced that the majority of school-leavers are not equipped to meet the kind of cognitive demands they are likely to encounter in the course of their university career. Nor do they have the kind of understanding of the workings of German grammar which would allow them to recognise the system underlying the structures.

- Since the majority of students fail to see the rationale behind the German grammar system, many perceive the system as arbitrary and subsequently adopt an equally haphazard approach to using it (relying on the 'sounds/looks right' principle). Confidence in their ability to make sense of what they perceive as an insurmountable hurdle is accordingly low, especially in free-style production.

- The majority of students are familiar with only a fraction of the most basic terminology.

- Students are by and large unaccustomed to making decisions regarding the organisation of their learning activities - questions of when, how much and what to learn have traditionally been answered by the teacher and the examination requirements, not by learners themselves.

2. Results regarding third level:

The following objectives are to be achieved by the end of year one:

1. Students will be expected to demonstrate in their oral and written production an adequate command of the morphosyntactic features listed in table 6.1 below. In order to pass the examinations at the end of semester two, error levels in either type of production must not exceed specified levels. This is the only one of the linguistic aims which is enforced under current DCU examinations regulations.

2. Students should be able to display rule knowledge in defined areas as well as an understanding of the underlying system of German grammar (= analytical competence).

3. Students should be able to display terminological knowledge of commonly used terms (i.e. those used in table 6.1).

4. Students should be able to demonstrate an awareness of their own grammar learning responsibilities as well as give an indication of their ability to put this awareness into practice.

A comparison of second and third level results thus confirms the considerable gap between what learners are equipped with on entry into university and what they are supposed to be equipped with by the end of year one of their studies. Thus, there would appear to be distinct difficulties which stand between the learner and his/her learning successes and which prevent many learners from fulfilling their potential. It is the objective of the German grammar programme to assist learners in bridging that gap by the end of semester two of year one by easing the transition from second to third level learning on an affective as well as a cognitive and metacognitive level. Learners were thus to receive both pedagogical and structural assistance in their attempt to achieve the above third level objectives. While guidance (both pedagogical and structural) was to be provided in a weekly grammar class, there was to be a strong emphasis on the responsibility of the individual learner as regards his/her learning progress.

More specifically, the grammar programme sought to achieve the following:

Firstly, the programme was to help students either adopt or maintain a positive attitude towards grammar learning and usage. According to research presented in Chapter Two (cf. Oxford and Shearin, 1994 and their discussion of instrumentality and goal setting theories) individuals will only become fully involved in a task if this task is perceived as meaningful and personally valuable. As was also pointed out, although, in an ideal world, learners would develop an <u>intrinsic interest</u> in aspects of language learning (including grammar acquisition), this aspiration is not always realistic. However, research by Ryan et al., 1992 has shown that, if learners become convinced of the value of, and subsequently internalise, an externally set goal, they will pursue that goal with the same level of commitment as goals which are of intrinsic interest. Therefore, while ultimately aspiring to achieve a positive <u>affective</u> attitude towards grammar acquisition and application, the pursuit of a genuinely positive <u>cognitive</u> attitude is likely to stand a

better chance of more immediate success (cf. Zimmermann, 1995 on these two types of attitude). As the research presented in Chapter Five has shown, this goal is by no means an easy one. Although the majority of students would seem to be convinced of the importance of grammatical knowledge, results have shown that this conviction tends to be of a rather theoretical nature. Many, if not most students attach importance to grammar learning and usage for the purpose of applying this knowledge in dedicated grammar exercises or when there is an explicit call for accuracy (as if accuracy were a goal in itself). They thus fail to see the importance of grammatical competence for efficient and effective communication in all receptive and productive language functions. Students must be convinced that grammar is an integral part of communicative competence, not an awkward extra which in free-style production can be compensated by a good lexical knowledge. Functional and structural language use are not to be separated.

The programme also sought to help students develop growing confidence in their grammar acquisition and application skills. Motivational research discussed in Chapter Two stressed the L2 learner's requirement for psychological security in order to keep down anxiety (cf. Oxford and Shearin, 1994). Research by Csikszentmihalyi 1975, and Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1993, also showed that if challenges are pitched at too high a level, the result is frustration. By providing those students with guidance and regular opportunity for practice, it was hoped that the programme would contribute to an increase in learners' confidence levels regarding one of the more dreaded features of German language.

As regards the development of specific learning strategies, the programme sought to assist students in all three areas identified in Chapter Two above, socio-affective, cognitive and metacognitive. With regard to the cognitive and metacognitive course aims outlined above, the development and regular practice of analytical skills, as well as the monitoring of performance output were to be particularly emphasised (cf. Rubin, 1987). These skills are necessary in order to achieve what McLaughlin and Heredia (1996) call "novice-expert shifts" (ibid: 217). On a socio-affective level, learners were to be encouraged to ask clarifying questions and to engage in group work.

As regards the role of the current programme in relation to the immediately relevant course aims outlined above, it is hoped that the programme will be able to assist the

greatest possible number of students in their attempt to achieve these aims and thus to facilitate for these students the transition from second to third level grammar learning. However, at this point it also seems important to put the programme into a wider perspective: thus the approach must be seen as, above all, a stepping stone, laid down in order to help learners reach *long-term aims*. The course objectives for year one must be seen as an attempt to set in motion something that may not come to fruition until much later. This applies to the development of all of the above learning strategies and includes the drive for learner autonomy. The achievement of increasingly higher levels of both <u>fluency</u> and <u>accuracy</u> in production output in particular requires time. Taking into account R. Ellis' delayed effect hypothesis (cf. Chapter Two above) as well as the postulate put forward by information-processing theories, i.e. that only repeated practice 'makes perfect', there is a distinct possibility that improvements in terms of linguistic competence and performance accuracy might not become fully evident until students go abroad or even until year four of the course. To sum up then, the initiation of the programme in year one should be seen as the first step to help change non-analytic, holophrase-dependent (cf. Mitchell, 1994a), inaccurate and spoon-fed language learners into reflective, creative, accurate and increasingly independent ones.

Section 7.1 discusses aspects of linguistic and pedagogical grammars which are of relevance for the design of the present grammar syllabus. The syllabus itself which formed the basis of the one hour weekly grammar class will be presented in Section 7.2. Section 7.3 describes the design of the wider pedagogical programme and its two strands, and, finally, Section 7.4 outlines the programme's implementation.

7.1 Aspects of Linguistic and Pedagogical Grammars

The linguistic basis for the grammar syllabus has been derived from valency grammar. Based on Tesniere's 'Elements de syntaxe structurale' (1982), dependency/valency grammar has, as Götze (1996) points out, been didacticised by, notably, Helbig and Schenkel, 1975, Engel and Schumacher, 1976, and Götze, 1979 (all quoted in Götze, 1996). A step-by-step guide can be found in Rall/Engel/Rall (1977[1]). Müller-Küppers (1991) provides a thorough examination of dependency/valency models, looks at their application in the classroom and investigates the application of theoretical models in a number of text books for German as a Foreign Language[2]. As the author points out, most researchers and practitioners concur that valency theory provides a particularly suitable basis for German as a Foreign Language. She warns against the ad-hoc dealing with grammar issues as they crop up in the classroom and postulates an approach to grammar teaching "der zumindest für einen jeweils gut eingrenzbaren Teilbereich der zu vermittelnden und zu übenden Strukturen sich auf ein zusammenhängendes Modell mit möglichst großer Erklärstärke für alle in diesem Bereich eventuell auftauchenden Fragen bezieht" (ibid: 163).

The components which form the basis for the syllabus at the centre of this research are, firstly, the central syntactic role of the verb as well as its valency, secondly, the valency of prepositions and, thirdly, the distinction between complements and adverbials[3]. Results in previous chapters have shown that students, after having been exposed to a functional-notional syllabus, often fail to realise the existence of an organising principle underlying German grammar. As research results to be presented in Chapter Eight confirm, few learners can be expected to be aware of the central role of the verb and the implications of its valency for the rest of the sentence.

As regards differences between pedagogical grammar and other types of grammar, notably linguistic grammar, it would appear that these are not easily definable.

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[1] A revised version of this book was published in 1985.

[2] Cf. also Fischer, 1990, on aspects of the didacticisation of valency models.

[3] The distinction between complements and adverbials and their role in a pedagogical grammar is far from being universally accepted among proponents of dependency/valency grammar. Weinrich (1993), while acknowledging the pivotal role of the verb ("Verben [...] werden als Organisationszentren der Texte aufgefaßt" , ibid: 29) makes no reference to the abovementioned distinction in his 'Textgrammatik'. Neither Fischer (1990) nor Brons-Albert (1990) see the pedagogical need to introduce the concepts into the L2 classroom while they are of central importance in Rall et al. (1977).

Although there have been multiple demonstrations as to what a pedagogical grammar could consist of and how it can be implemented in the classroom (cf. for example contributions in Odlin, 1994), as well as theoretical investigations into the concept (cf. e.g. Rutherford and Sharwood Smith, 1988), definitions of the concept of pedagogical grammar itself are fairly elusive. One exception can be found in Roos (1995) who defines pedagogical grammar as follows: "Sie stellt die wichtigsten Gesetzmäßigkeiten der Zielsprache mit Hilfe von - präskriptiv und normativ verstandenen - Regeln dar. Auswahl und Anordnung der aus linguistischen Beschreibungen übernommenen Fakten und deren Darstellung erfolgen nach fremdsprachendidaktischen Gesichtspunkten. Dabei orientiert sie sich an den Lernenden, ihrem Lernniveau, Vorwissen etc." (ibid: 250). According to Roos, a pedagogical grammar has to take into account "die möglichen Lernschwierigkeiten und die spezifischen Bedürfnisse der Lerner mit einer bestimmten Muttersprache" (ibid: 252). Roos points out that designers of a pedagogical grammar must also ensure that it includes a description of current language usage (which may not always correspond to the norm[4]), and that rules are presented in such a manner that they can be expanded in future, thus allowing for more in-depth and differentiated treatment. R. Schmidt (1990: 154) provides a useful comparison between a linguistic and a learner grammar. He points out that three crucial psychological aspects need to be borne in mind when exposing learners to grammatical rules: comprehensibility, memorialisability and applicability. Swan (1994) lists six design criteria for pedagogic rule formulation, some of which, the author points out, will conflict with each other. The six criteria are:

1. *Truth* - the stipulation that rules be true is most likely to conflict with one or more of the other criteria.

2. *Demarcation*: pedagogic rules must clearly state the limits of the form in question.

3. *Clarity* in the wording of the explanation.

4. *Simplicity* - this criteria is likely to conflict with other criteria such as 'truth' and 'clarity'.

5. *Conceptual parsimony*: the conceptual framework available to the learner must be taken into account by the teacher - while this framework may have to be complemented,

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[4] Examples are the current usage of 'weil' and 'obwohl' in spoken German.

222

any 'intervention' should be kept to a minimum. Again, this aspiration is likely to clash with that of 'truth'.

6. *Relevance*: each learner's interlanguage system must be borne in mind when explaining a rule. If rule explanation is to be effective it must be geared directly at a specific learner with a specific need or problem. This includes knowledge about the exact source of error.

Taking into account research findings regarding students' background as well as their knowledge and performance levels on entry into DCU, it is clear that the first year grammar syllabus is to a large extent remedial in nature. Thus, with the exception of the central element of valency, most grammar items are likely to have been touched upon at second level. As regards the issue of designing a remedial syllabus, Corder (1981) points out that great care must be taken to not merely repeat items in exactly the same way as they were previously taught. If remedial teaching is to be effective, "it is not sufficient merely to classify [learner] errors in some superficial way [...] but it requires a deeper analysis of the error, leading to an understanding or explanation of the cause of the error. Only when we know *why* an error has been produced can we set about correcting it in a systematic way" (ibid: 52, italics in original). Like Swan and Roos, he urges course designers and above all teachers to gain an insight into how learners *think*. The origins of gaps in both learner implicit and explicit knowledge must be explored and understood[5].

Pedagogical grammar books obviously vary in type - some are reference books only (e.g. Engel's *Deutsche Grammatik*, 1988, Weinrich's *Textgrammatik der deutschen Sprache*[6], 1993, Durrell's *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage*, 1991), others are combined reference and practice books (e.g. Gschossmann-Hendershot's *German Grammar*, 1983 ('Schaum's'), Häussermann/Piepho's *Aufgaben-Handbuch*, 1996, Brenner and Jentsch's *Grammatik zum Üben*, 1988, Rug and Tomaszewski's *Grammatik mit Sinn und Verstand*, 1993, Kars/Häussermann/Hime-Everschor's *German Elementary Grammar*, 1993, Dreyer and Schmitt, *A Practice Grammar of German*, 1994). Others

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[5] Areas covered in the current remedial syllabus would appear to be much more basic than areas which have been viewed as being problematic with intermediate learners in some of the literature. For instance, Weydt, 1993 names the correct use of the genitive and dative relative pronoun as a typical source of error, as in the sentence "Die Frau, deren (oder der) ich mich erinnere, deren Kind ich gesehen habe" (ibid: 123). Treatment of this kind of error exceeds the focus of this remedial syllabus.

[6] The inclusion of this grammar book under pedagogical grammar is debatable.

again are practice books based on reference books (e.g. Durrell/Kohl/Loftus's *Practising German Grammar*, 1996 which is linked to Durrell's *Hammer's German Grammar*). Pedagogical grammars also vary enormously in their accessibility for language learners. Neither Engel (1988) nor Weinrich (1993) are suitable self-study grammars for the present target group and are more likely to be used by teachers. *Hammer's German Grammar and Usage* is considered particularly valuable by the latter, especially by those of German origin, since it approaches the German grammar system from the point of view of an English native speaker. It was therefore to be one of the primary sources of information for explanation within the classroom, together with *German Elementary Grammar*. *Grammatik mit Sinn und Verstand* and *Grammatik zum Üben* provided useful texts and the latter also provided some useful cartoons. Dreyer-Schmitt's *A Practice Grammar of German* was not used extensively for in-class explanation. However, it is listed in a course handout as a reference-cum-practice book which, just like *Practising German Grammar* and *'Schaum's'*, includes an answer book and can therefore be used in self-study. Another reference book which was to be pointed out to students is Zorach and Melin's *English Grammar for Students of German*, 1990.

7.2 The Pedagogical Syllabus

It may seem unusual that the concept which was to form one of the central parts of the syllabus, verb valency, was not to be introduced until week 7 of semester one. As will become obvious, the design of the syllabus is such that it initially focuses on features to which students have supposedly been exposed in some detail at second level and then progresses to less familiar structures. According to DCU experience, it takes most students the best part of six weeks to settle into their new environment. Disadvantageous and undesirable as it may be for students to miss any of the classes in the first six weeks, it is felt that they would have a better chance of catching up on those items than they would if they had to figure out the valency issue by themselves. If learners were to miss out on the crucial aspect of valency, most of the remainder of the syllabus would become unfathomable for them.

While obviously not losing sight of the importance of pragmatic aspects of language use, the DCU first year grammar programme focuses primarily on morphosyntactic issues. The considerable emphasis on the latter reflects the belief that unless basic features in this area are mastered, learners are unlikely to be able to function convincingly (both receptively and productively) on an advanced pragmatic and discourse level (not to mention grammatical level): in-depth textual understanding or coherent production will not be possible without that fundamental morphosyntactic knowledge (cf. Engel, 1988). While the syllabus particularly emphasises morphosyntactic features within a clause, some aspects of textlinguistics were also introduced, such as the structuring of a text as well as basic elements of syntactic and semantic cohesion. It was agreed that students must at the very least realise that an idea or argument does not end at the full stop and that text cohesion crucially depends on the employment of certain intratextual cohesive devices. However, the bulk of this work was to be dealt with in year two of all courses.

The pedagogical grammar includes the familiarisation with at least some terminology, despite the aversions students regularly display towards its use (cf. Chapters Four and Five above). The introduction of terminology is based primarily on pragmatic, not on intellectual considerations: classroom discussions require a common metalanguage (irrespective of the terminology students might create for their own memorisation

benefit) and, perhaps even more importantly, terminology is required for work with reference books. Exposure to terminology was, however, to be confined to fairly basic concepts.

Listed below is the projected time-frame for the treatment of individual grammar points.

Curriculum

Semester One	Week
1. Verbal phrase - part one:	
1.1 Subject-verb agreement	3[7]
1.2 Verb inflection, tense formation and use of the tenses	3
1.3 Some special verbs	4
1.4 Mood, part I	5
1.5 Position of the verb/verbal bracket (including conjunctions)	6
1.6 Valency of the verb	7
2. Noun phrase	
2.1 Definition of nouns; gender and number of nouns	8
2.2 Declension of nouns and determiners; use of determiners	9
2.3 Pronouns	10
2.4 Declension of adjectives	11
2.5 Comparison of adjectives	12
2.6 Formation of nouns and adjectives	12

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[7] Weeks one and two are spent on the diagnostic test and individual interviews - more in Section 7.3 below.

The basic class structure which will be explained in more detail in Section 7.3 below, was as follows:

1. (after class one) revision and feedback on homework
2. advance organisers
3. rule explanation
4. practice session, followed by feedback
5. (homework and feedback)

The only aspect under consideration in this section is that of 3., 'rule explanation'. After the introduction of an advance organiser, students were to be asked to state their knowledge of the particular grammar item in question. If students failed to produce acceptable rules, teachers were to step in. Teachers were expected to ensure that for each feature *all* aspects listed in the syllabus below were covered.

The exact approach to rule explanation for each aspect in the syllabus was determined by the criteria listed by R. Schmidt, 1990, Swan, 1994, and Roos, 1995 above. Some of the rules differ considerably from those found in standard reference grammars - the approach makes use of, as Swan puts it, "corner-cutting rules of thumb, half-truths and unscientific terminology" (1994: 54). The grammar students were to be exposed to in class was designed to help learners to gradually recognise the underlying linguistic system. Not every single rule aspect of a particular grammar item was to be taught, and most exceptions were only to be taught after a rule had been firmly established.

The programme also sought to cater for learners with analytical inquisitiveness, i.e. those who need to know exceptions, the finer details: they had to be put in a position that allowed them to look up things and work out issues independently. The use of dictionaries was to become a regular feature of the grammar class after their initial introduction in the context of valency[8].

There now follows a presentation of the individual aspects of the syllabus, in the order in which they appear in the curriculum[9]. This syllabus forms part of the teachers' notes

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[8] Other than in its initial introduction, the use of dictionaries was not designed to be linked to specific features in the syllabus below but left to the discretion of the teacher, with the one stipulation that regular practice sessions be conducted.

[9] For a detailed version of the curriculum see Appendix E.

which were given to all colleagues involved in teaching first year intermediate students[10]. A number of aspects in the syllabus were to be brought to students' attention not so much to encourage active production but in order to facilitate comprehension and to dispel possible confusion (for example, the use of the subjunctive in reported speech and of verbs such as *fahren* which can take both *sein* and *haben* in the perfect tense). Texts were taken from *Anspiel* (Krusche and Krechel, 1984), newspaper articles, student work, *Grammatik zum Üben* and *Grammatik mit Sinn und Verstand.*

1. Verbal phrase - part one:

1.1 Subject-verb agreement

1.2 Verb inflection, tense formation and use of the tenses

1.3 Some special verbs

1.4 Mood

1.5 Position of the verb in the sentence- verbal bracket

1.6 Valency of the verb

Introduction

Brainstorming session - all of the terminology for the verbal phrase (cf. table 6.1 above) will be introduced this way.

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. pivotal role of the verb, due to its position and its effect on other elements

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[10] The full set of teachers' notes included suggestions as to how to proceed with regard to the other aspects of the grammar programme, such as the selection of texts and exercises and the use of mnemonic techniques, a small list of which was compiled from Sperber, 1989. As regards the latter, it was left to the discretion of the teachers, if, and to what extent, they decided to make use of these. As emerged at the end of the academic year, these techniques were not widely employed. All teachers involved (including the researcher) felt that the time and effort which would have to be expended into the practice of these techniques exceeded the potential merits.

1.1 Subject-verb agreement

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. agreement
2. collective nouns and agreement in German and in English
3. the difference between finite and non-finite verbs

1.2 Verb inflection, tense formation and use of the tenses

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. verb formation - weak verbs, strong verbs
2. tense formation - simple tenses, complex tenses; *haben* vs. *sein* in the perfect
3. use of tenses - difference between preterite and perfect, between present and perfect; pluperfect; future

1.3 Some special verbs

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. *haben*, *sein* and *werden* as auxiliaries and as full verbs
2. modal verbs - tense formation with and without another verb; no *zu*
3. separable and non-separable verbs
4. the verbs *kennen* and *wissen*

1.4 Mood - part I

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. existence of three moods
2. formation and use of the imperative

3. the subjunctive - the 'present' conditional of auxiliaries and modals; indirect speech

1.5 Position of the verb/verbal bracket

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. three basic positions for the verb
2. identification of main clause and subclause - coordinating and subordinating conjunctions
3. the use of commas
4. infinitive clauses - usually not embedded

1.6. Valency of the verb

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. valency has to be noted in all cases
2. main verb, not auxiliary determines valency
3. complements vs. adverbials
4. the most basic types of complements
5. function, distribution and the frequency of cases (leaving aside prepositions)
6. how to look up the valency of verbs in a dictionary

2. Noun phrase

Introduction: see introduction for verbal phrase.

2.1 Definition of nouns; gender and number of nouns
2.2 Declension of nouns and determiners; use of determiners
2.3 Pronouns
2.4 Adjectives and adverbs
2.5 Comparison of adjectives

2.6 Formation of nouns and adjectives

2.1 Definition of nouns; gender and number of nouns

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. definition of a noun
2. gender of nouns

2.2 Declension and use of determiners

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. difference between English and German regarding the use of cases and the use of word order for emphasis
2. the main determiners in the nominative case - definite, indefinite, negative, demonstrative, possessive and interrogative article
3. declension of some common nouns
4. the use of determiners
5. the difference between *kein* and *nicht*

2.3 Pronouns

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. personal pronouns
2. demonstrative pronouns
3. interrogative pronouns
4. possessive pronouns
5. indefinites
6. reflexive pronouns
7. relative pronouns without a preposition

<u>2.4 Declension of adjectives</u>

<u>Main aspects to be pointed out:</u>

1. the difference between adjectives and adverbs
2. adjectival endings
3. adjectives before countable and non-countable nouns

<u>2.5 Comparison of adjectives</u>

<u>Main aspects to be pointed out:</u>

1. formation of regular and special forms
2. the declension of comparatives and superlatives preceding nouns

<u>2.6 Formation of nouns and adjectives</u>

<u>Main aspects to be pointed out:</u>

1. formation of nouns - prefixes and suffixes
2. formation of adjectives

3. Prepositional phrases

3.1 Government of prepositions
3.2 Prepositional objects
3.3 Prepositional adverbs
3.4 Government of nouns and adjectives

3.1 Prepositions and their cases

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. in prepositional phrases the case is determined by the preposition, plus, with two-track prepositions, by the verb
2. the most common prepositions and their cases
3. double-track prepositions - motion towards a goal vs. motion within an enclosed area/rest

3.2 Prepositional objects

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. rules regarding double-track prepositions and their cases in prepositional objects

3.3 Prepositional adverbs

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. prepositional adverbs vs. personal pronouns
2. prepositional adverbs to refer to the whole sentence
3. prepositional adverb as connection between main clause with either infinitive clause or subclause
4. prepositional adverb as replacement for a relative pronoun with a preposition

3.4 Relative pronouns with prepositions

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. relative clauses with a preposition or a prepositional adverb

3.5 Government of nouns and adjectives

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. nouns with prepositions
2. cases with adjectives
3. adjectives with prepositions

4. Adverbials

4.1 Adverbials and complements

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. the main types of adverbials - time, place, manner, direction
2. the difference between adverbials and complements
3. cases for adverbials of time with and without a preposition
4. cases for adverbials of place and place complement on the one hand and direction complements on the other

4.2 The difference between adverbials, conjunctions and prepositions

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. the most commonly used adverbials and their semantic equivalents in terms of prepositions and conjunctions

5. Word order

Main aspects to be pointed out:

1. basic word order rules in the 'Mittelfeld'

2. the position of *auch*

3. the position of *nicht*

4. the importance of adverbials (and conjunctions) for <u>text cohesion</u>

6. Verbal phrase - part two

<u>6.1 The passive</u>

<u>Main aspects to be pointed out:</u>

1. use of the passive

2. formation of the passive

<u>6.2 Mood - part II</u>

<u>Main aspects to be pointed out:</u>

1. The 'past' conditional

<u>6.3 The double infinitive</u>

<u>Main aspects to be pointed out:</u>

1. revision of modal verbs used with another verb in the perfect tense

2. *hören, sehen* and *lassen*

2. word order in subordinate clauses with a double infinitive

The above points were to constitute the backbone of the in-class programme. The teaching team consisted of four teachers, two of which had extensive experience in teaching the target group under investigation while the other two teachers had one year's experience. While the two 'experienced' teachers were in close consultation regarding the syllabus design, logistical reasons made it impossible to involve the other two

teachers. However, before the start of semester one an intensive briefing session was held at which the syllabus was discussed in detail. At the end of that session the syllabus as well as the overall approach were unequivocally embraced by all involved. It was agreed that the prescribed order of the syllabus was to be adhered to closely - the syllabus was to be followed in a systematic manner and at no point was there to be a reversion to an ad hoc treatment of difficult points as they arose in class (e.g. giving into the temptation of explaining adjectival endings before introducing the concept of valency). It was acknowledged that this decision was going to place high demands on each teacher's discipline.

7.3 The Design of the Wider Pedagogical Programme

In the Introduction to this chapter it was stated that, ideally, learners should identify with all goals which are set in the course of their studies. Goal-setting can be teacher-initiated (as in the case of the common core syllabus in which students do not have a say), set by students themselves or arrived at commonly in student-teacher deliberations. What is important in all three cases is that students internalise the belief that what they engage in is meaningful, useful and ultimately beneficial to their learning progress. In the case of grammar learning this means, firstly, accepting the existence and the content of the grammar class, secondly, recognising the importance of grammar in all receptive and productive language functions and thirdly, as a consequence of the previous point, working towards building up knowledge systems and focusing increasingly on matters of accuracy in production. As was pointed out in Section 2.1, identification with the grammar learning task as a manifestation of extrinsic motivation might be a more immediate aim than intrinsic motivation. It is therefore the aim of the current programme to help those who are not *intrinsically* motivated to engage in grammar (i.e. apparently the majority of learners) to at least identify with and internalise the external aims on the evidence of the increasingly strong case made in its favour in the course of the entire German language module (i.e. the benefit of grammatical knowledge for all language use).

Another aspect which is commonly accepted as being of particular importance with regard to learner motivation is learner self-perception. While low self-perception is undoubtedly an enormous problem, an inflated self-perception (i.e. rating one's competence and performance abilities higher than they actually are) is equally problematic. This can be the case if results achieved in a school-leaving exam would suggest to the student that his/her language command is of a higher level than is actually the case. Students must therefore learn to reflect in a critical manner (including *self-criticism*) about learning outcomes, both positive and negative. It is the aim of the grammar programme to help students develop a realistic self-perception in relation to *all* aspects of learning German language. While, in view of their Leaving Certificate results, many students perceive their 'general' standard of German is quite good, they would confess to having difficulty with the grammar aspect of it (cf. Chapter Five

238

above). So the important thing is to boost student confidence vis-a-vis grammar learning by helping them to view it as manageable and as ultimately facilitating the acquisition process, while at the same time helping them to improve (or extend) their actual competence and performance. At the end of the day, only the latter will provide students with tangible proof that they have reason to be increasingly confident in their language learning abilities. To sum up the above aims, the grammar programme must convince students of the benefits of grammar learning and make grammar accessible. If students feel that an improvement of their grammatical competence is not within their power or that they can get by without this competence they are unlikely to put much effort into the the learning task.

There are two strands to the DCU grammar programme. Strand one constitutes the common core grammar class which provides students with the structure and orientation identified as crucial in the learning process (cf. Ryan et al., 1992). Strand two comprises the individualised programme which takes into account differences in learners' knowledge and performance levels as well as in their learning style preferences.

Both strands will now be described in detail.

7.3.1 Strand One: The Common Core Programme

As mentioned in Chapter One, the total number of hours allocated to the German language module for students with Leaving Certificate German is five. Three out of those five hours are contact hours and the remaining two are supposed to be used for preparation and follow-up work as well as independent study. Under the current approach, one of the three classroom hours was to be dedicated to the discussion of grammar issues and written work, with the other two dedicated to the development of oral, aural and reading skills on the one hand, and civilisation on the other. Students were to be reminded regularly that the overall number of hours for that module was in fact not restricted to the three contact hours but included the two hours to be spent on the subject outside the classroom.

While in previous years far fewer grammar items had been discussed in class than was now envisaged, those that were discussed received fairly thorough coverage and involved extensive practice sessions. This meant that students were not asked to spend much time on grammar exercises outside the classroom. Under the current approach there was thus to be a dramatic shift of onus onto students to show increasing self-initiative. As regards one of the central course objectives, i.e. to convince students of the need to adopt an integrated view of form and function, it was agreed that it was crucially important to ensure that regular reference be made to those grammar aspects which had been covered in the grammar class in other parts of the course (the other two language classes, the translation class, in spoken German, in listening and reading exercises etc.). While exposing students to formal instruction in a dedicated grammar class was considered to be the most appropriate forum in which to pursue the aims of the overall pedagogical grammar programme at DCU, the need was stressed to extend grammar awareness beyond the boundaries of the grammar class into *all* instances of receptive and productive use.

It was agreed that the standards towards which students were to be asked to work in the course of the year (cf. table 6.1 above) were to be absolute and could not be modified to accommodate individual target groups. Students were to be informed that, in order to pass the second semester examinations (consisting of one oral and one written examination), they had to fulfil certain minimum requirements.

240

Thus the morphosyntactic error rate was not to exceed between 15% and 20% for written end-of-year work, while the rate for the oral examination was not to go beyond 25% to 30%[11]. For the written examination, students were also to be advised not to make excessive use of learnt-off chunks of text, and to vary their sentence structure adequately[12]. The content of both written and oral production obviously had to be of acceptable quality as well. Once these minimum requirements were fulfilled, marks in the written examination were to be decided on a combination of factors, including the degree of morphosyntactic correctness, content, range of vocabulary and structural complexity.

Students were to be provided with a list of the items which were to form the basis for the teaching and examination syllabus at the beginning of the academic year. They were also to be informed about examination procedures and marking criteria. All classes were to be interactive and students were to be encouraged to ask as many questions as they liked. Grammar classes were to be conducted primarily in English, in line with the preference expressed by students in the beginning-of-the-year questionnaire[13].

The procedural sequence in each grammar class was to be as follows:

1. (after the first class) **Revision and feedback on homework**: each class was to start with a short revision of the previous class. Students were presented with a checklist, i.e. a list of questions regarding items they had encountered the week before. They were to be given a few minutes to discuss the answers with their neighbours, then the entire class was to be asked to provide answers. All questions arising out of the particular feature under investigation were to be dealt with. Next, homework from the previous grammar class was to be discussed. Learners were to be given written

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[11] The greater tolerance regarding oral errors takes into account the heightened demands placed on the speaker in oral production, such as attention to pronunciation, less time to prepare and to monitor, increased performance nervousness, awareness of immediate scrutiny by listeners etc. (cf. Horwitz et al., 1986 on heightened anxiety in oral production).

[12] For example, students were to be told to vary the basic subject - verb - object order on at least some occasions. Thus, while the general error rate allowable was to vary between 15% and 20%, the precise cut-off point for each student was to depend on the complexity of structures used, the variation of structures, whether they displayed systematic or non-systematic variability etc..

[13] As Tönshoff (1995) points out, there are at least three reasons why teachers prefer giving grammatical explanations in the learners' mother tongue: it saves precious classroom time, it is likely to be cognitively less demanding on the average learner and it helps learners when using reference works which will, as a rule, consist of explanations in the mother tongue.

summaries of the most salient points from the previous grammar class[14]. If essays had been handed up the week before, they were to be returned next. Students were again to be encouraged to ask questions and the most common sources of errors were to be discussed. A discussion on learning strategies was to follow, where appropriate[15].

2. The use of **advance organisers** (cf. Tönshoff, 1995, Terrell, 1991), including a discussion of **terminology**: Before turning to content matters, teachers need to find out if their language of communication is one that is actually understood by learners. Although this seems like an obvious point to make it is one that is all too often neglected, especially at third level where many teachers consider it unacceptable that students lack the kind of metalanguage needed to discuss even the most basic points.

   On introduction of each new item, questions which served the purpose of *advance organisers* were to be put to the students to raise their awareness about the features under discussion. Questions were either to be asked about the target language itself (cf. James, 1994) or about a comparative aspect of the target language and mother tongue (cf. Hawkins, 1986; cf. also Sharwood Smith, 1988 on the potential merits of a contrastive pedagogical grammar). Students were to be asked to work in pairs and answers were to be elicited from the entire class, not by asking individual students.

3. **Rule explanation**: As was pointed out under Section 7.2 above, rules were to be stated either by students themselves or by teachers. Where appropriate, the rationale underlying a particular rule was also to be discussed. Rule discussion was to include examples of its application to demonstrate its meaning in concrete terms. All students, but in particular 'strong' students, were to be encouraged to become actively involved in the organisation and the implementation of the grammar class, since it was believed that if learners had mastered a particular item successfully they might have a better 'pedagogical' way of explaining this rule to their fellow students than the teacher. Teachers were to meet these 'teacher-students' well in advance of the

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[14] Only those present received a copy and copies were only handed out in that particular class, not in any of the following classes.
[15] Strategies were not discussed in every single class.

grammar class they were supposed to hold, in order to discuss content as well as procedural matters.

4. **Practice and Feedback**: All rule introduction was to be followed by one of two types of in-class exercises. In *error detection exercises* students were to be asked to identify incorrect versions of the item under discussion and to provide the correct form. The other type of practice were controlled grammar exercises - transformation exercises, gap-filling exercises etc..

5. **Homework and feedback**: After having been discussed in class, each grammar item was to be practised as part of homework. For reasons outlined in Section 2.2 above, practice focused primarily on target language output (as opposed to input practice). It was stated in that section that controlled practice was a necessary first step in order to help students proceduralise their explicit knowledge. As a second step towards proceduralisation, learners were to be provided with regular practice opportunities in written and oral work which exceeded the narrow boundaries of dedicated grammar exercises. Oral practice was to take place primarily in the 'general language class'. While in semester two written practice was to consist of essay writing, course regulations in semester one demanded the keeping of a learner diary as part of the module assessment. Students were to be required to make regular entries into their diaries, reporting about and evaluating learning activities they undertook outside the class in order to improve their language skills. Learners were to reflect on their learning progress as well as their use of cognitive, metacognitve and socio-affective learning strategies[16]. Diaries were taken up every three weeks, giving teachers an opportunity to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness (or lack) of students' chosen strategies and to relate their comments to the students. Students were to be given detailed feedback on a range of aspects, such as content, the use of learning strategies, the choice of vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. Teachers were encouraged to give as much positive feedback as possible, acknowledging well-planned learning efforts, lexical and pragmatic achievements, the skilful use of complex structures and increased accuracy in features which had previously constituted major problems. This section focuses only on grammatical aspects of the

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[16] The basic checklist provided in Bimmel (1995: 19) was to be used for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities and strategies.

diary. Morphosyntactic errors were marked in two ways. Errors which students were to correct were to be marked, firstly, by underlining the item in question and, secondly, by indicating the source of the error. Only errors with regard to items which had previously been covered in the grammar class were to be marked this way. Other errors were simply underlined but no corrections were required. It should be noted that, in line with Johnson, 1996, no distinction was to be drawn between *competence* errors and *performance* errors - *all* occurrences of errors were to be marked[17]. Students were to be asked to hand up corrected versions the next time diaries were due. Corrected versions were to be checked and subsequently be returned to the learners. If errors remained, students were again to be asked to correct these and to hand up those corrections. In semester two, the diary was to be replaced by essay writing (which formed part of the written end-of-module assessment). The correction procedure was to remain unchanged, the only difference being that students were now only allowed to hand up essays if at least one corrected version of the previous essay had been handed up.

Crucially, students were also to be urged to practise items that had been covered in class during independent study time. The course designers recognised that the limited number of grammar exercises conducted either in the classroom or as part of homework was clearly not sufficient to induce automisation of explicit knowledge.

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[17] There was greater error tolerance in oral production, especially with less outgoing students, due to reasons named previously.

7.3.2 Strand Two: the Individualisation of the Programme

As was indicated in the curriculum above, there were to be no grammar classes for the first two weeks of semester one. The slots allocated to the German language module were to be used instead to draw up individual learner profiles. In week one, a diagnostic survey was to be conducted for the purpose of investigating language learning backgrounds and beliefs about learning German, as well as students' linguistic competence and performance. Surveys were to consist of a questionnaire and an essay. The surveys were to be followed by one-to-one interviews with all students in week two.

Given the differing standards within each target group, this test was to help identify strengths and weaknesses of individual members of that group. As was pointed out above, pitching challenges at the right level for each individual is of crucial importance for learner engagement in the language learning process. It was therefore decided that learners were to not only work towards the common-core requirements, as defined by the syllabus, but were also to be asked to set individual goals for themselves. Findings from the abovementioned questionnaires as well as the essays were to be taken into account when, in the one-to-one interviews in week two, teachers were to discuss with learners individual strengths and weaknesses of the latter. At the end of the interview, students were to be asked to select and note down three skill-related tasks and three-grammar related tasks on which they were to focus in the course of the year[18]. A copy of the 'contract' was to be kept by both the student and the teacher. Students were to be informed that progress in the defined areas was to be one marking criterion for assessing the learner diary at the end of semester one. Prior to the interviews, learners were to have been asked to fill in another questionnaire regarding cognitive, metacognitive and social/affective strategy use. This questionnaire was to ascertain students' awareness of their own language learning behaviour and to serve as a basis in the interview for discussing the most suitable strategies for the learner in question.

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[18] Although the element of choice thus introduced is of a limited nature, it is nonetheless an important one: as was pointed out in Section 2.1 on motivation, the development of a sense of self-determination resulting from decision-making of the above type, is seen as crucial to the learning process. The other element of choice in the German language module was the selection of topics for the 'general language class': each group was asked to choose from a total of eighteen topics the eight they wished to discuss in the course of the two semesters.

Responsibility for progress in individually set aims was to rest principally with the student, although the teacher was obviously to be available for consultation. Students were to be provided with a detailed list of reference works to be used for looking up and practising individual grammar points (cf. Appendix F). Learners were to be informed that multiple copies of the books listed there were available in the 24-hour loan section of the library. Students were also to have access to a multimedia centre, with television and CALL facilities.

It should be noted that, beside the reasons outlined so far, the setting up of challenging individual learning programmes was considered especially important for the present target group because of the perception many students have been shown to have with regard to the place of the *language class* in the overall course programme: since students have been exposed to German language classes at school, some may be inclined to focus more strongly on other, newer subjects, at the expense of their language skills. By asking learners to sign a contract in which they commit themselves to pursuing certain goals, they are presented with a focus as well as a clear responsibility for their own learning.

To summarise Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, the grammar programme was to retain some of the features to which students are accustomed from their secondary level schooling, most notably the regular checking of homework. On the other hand, there were to be significant differences in many other respects, such as discussing the underlying structure of German, placing the onus on students to work on individual weaknesses outside classroom time, as well as stressing the importance of process-oriented learning.

7.4 The Implementation of the Syllabus and the Overall Programme

As was stated above, the programme and, in particular, the request to adhere closely to the sequence of the in-class syllabus were expected to place high demands on teachers' discipline. However, an examination of teacher diaries and interviews, conducted at the end of semester two, revealed that colleagues had indeed followed the agreed route (even though not all points were covered, see below) and that they also largely complied with the requirements of the wider programme (for exceptions, see below).

Thus, most aspects of the programme were implemented as had been envisaged in the design. These included

- survey and interviews ('contracts')
- the weekly grammar class
- coverage of grammar points in the recommended order
- the availability of multimedia facilities
- learner diaries
- feedback procedure for diaries and essays
- the discussion of learner strategies.

This section will focus on those aspects which, for various reasons, could not be implemented.

Firstly, due to initial logistic difficulties, the student-as-teacher scheme was only introduced in one group ('Applied Languages' students studying German and French). Secondly, in all groups some aspects of the syllabus were not covered to the extent that had initially been envisaged. While all aspects of 'verbal phrase, part one' were covered as planned, coverage took considerably longer than anticipated, with the result that the extent of coverage of subsequent sections had to be somewhat curtailed.

As regards aspects of the 'noun phrase', four areas did not receive the attention originally envisaged: *pronouns*, the *comparison of adjectives*, *formation of nouns* and *formation of adjectives*. While *personal pronouns*, *relative pronouns* (without a preposition) and *indefinite pronouns* were discussed in detail, *demonstrative, interrogative, possessive* and *reflexive pronouns* were not introduced in their entirety. In the case of *demonstrative* and *interrogative pronouns*, it was merely pointed out that their declension did not differ from the form of the determiner. As regards *possessive* and

reflexive pronouns, they were not fully declined in class, nor were there any practice periods on any of these four types of pronouns. The *comparison of adjectives* was discussed only briefly, while the *formation of nouns and adjectives* was omitted altogether, although *compound nouns* were briefly mentioned when discussing the issue of gender of nouns. The coverage of aspects under 'prepositional phrase' focused exclusively on the *government of prepositions* and *prepositional objects* - other aspects such as *prepositional adjectives* or *relative pronouns with a preposition* were not covered. While items under 'adverbials' and 'word order' were covered as planned, the time delay that had by now built up meant that 'verbal phrase, part two' could not be implemented at all.

There are several reasons as to why the syllabus progression did not go according to plan. Firstly, the syllabus was very ambitious. Secondly, the degree of difficulty which many students displayed with regard to a number of structures to which they had been previously exposed had been underestimated. Thirdly, in spite of constant reminders, many students continued to display an extraordinary lack of consideration for matters of accuracy: much time was taken up to impress on students the need to pay attention to form as well as to content. Thus the changeover from communicatively oriented to analytical language use proved to be more fraught than had been anticipated.

As a consequence, the syllabus for the following academic year was amended (cf. Chapter Eight for an outline of the amendments). However, as the discussion in the next chapter will show, the lack of coverage of the above points did not seriously impinge on the overall implementation of the current programme.