



Subject Centre Grammar Supplement

July 2001

Notes, presentations and case studies from the Subject Centre seminar
Teaching Grammar: Perspectives on Language Learning in Higher Education

In January 2001 the Subject Centre held a cross-disciplinary seminar, the purpose of which was to highlight current issues, developments and practice for grammar teaching. It brought together colleagues from Linguistics, Education and Modern Languages in order that they could compare and share experiences. This supplement includes papers and feedback from the event and is complemented by the Subject Centre's Grammar pages at:

<http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/lings/linggrammar.html>

Contents

Introduction	1
Where has grammar got to?	2
Grammar Teaching: why, when, how and what?	3
The servant of two masters: teaching grammar to undergraduate students following literature and QTS degrees	5
Sugaring the syntactic pill: grammar theory and foreign language studies	7
Raising metalinguistic awareness - theory versus practice	9
Discourse analysis as a tool for grammar teaching: some examples in French	12
From zero to competence: ab initio ad astra	15
What Grammar is actually for	17
Implications of the developments in the National Curriculum for MFL and GCSE specifications	19
Useful grammar links	22
And finally . . .	23

Introduction - Professor Richard Towell (University of Salford)

The theme of 'Grammar' for one of the first seminars organised by the Subject Centre was chosen precisely because of the wide resonance of the term. People who are centrally involved in Linguistics, in Modern Foreign Languages and in English as a Foreign Language all see the topic as central to what they do, although they clearly see it from a different point of view. For people in Linguistics departments, grammar under the name of syntax is likely to be a central preoccupation of their studies. For the Modern Languages departments, it is likely to be seen as one of the means to the end of enabling people to acquire second languages. The topic thus brought together people from two out of the three sub-areas which the Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Subject Centre has been set up to address. As Mike Kelly pointed out in his introduction, society 'at large', as represented by some of those reporting to the Nuffield Inquiry, has a rather broader vision. For these people, 'grammar' is symbolic of a system of values, of an education system designed to ensure that people who go through it attain certain 'standards' and sign up to certain 'rules', thus enabling employers, amongst others, to know who is worthy of employment and who is not. Whilst the participants in this seminar were aware of this latter role for grammar, they were (rightly or wrongly) more centrally interested in the first two areas.

The papers presented during the day covered the use of grammar at various stages in the educational process. The government has relatively recently introduced a National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in primary schools. This is intended to ensure that pupils become more consciously aware of language structure and acquire the ability to talk about language. The absence of this ability has been bemoaned by many language teachers in secondary and higher education for many years. Whilst some linguists may wish to quarrel with the terminology and definitions used in the Literacy Strategy, it is now a fact of life in the education system and we will all have to adapt to it, preferably in such a way as to turn it to our advantage. As we heard, this represents a challenge to trainee teachers, who themselves have not been educated with a descriptive metalanguage, and presumably to many (if not most) teachers in post. It is important that all those who, at later stages, will teach the current generation of primary school children know what it is that they have been taught about language. It is pleasing to note that in the evaluator's report on some of the outcomes of the seminar a number of participants had taken the trouble to inform themselves further about the Literacy Strategy.

As expected, most of the presentations were centrally concerned with the role of grammar as a potential aid to learning, whether learning about language as a human phenomenon or learning to communicate via a second language. The approaches adopted by participants varied from generative linguistics through to Hallidayan linguistics

via a number of individuals showing how they incorporated grammar to a greater or lesser degree within their language teaching syllabus. It was clear that there is no easy consensus but that each of the participants, in his or her own way, was providing something of value to their students. Dick Hudson concisely presented the arguments for and against the explicit teaching of grammar as they have been put forward over the last fifty years. Despite the many articles which appear to have demonstrated the lack of effectiveness of explicit instruction, Dick was able to point to recent syntheses which appear to demonstrate that grammar instruction provides clear benefits for language learners, although only if it is introduced in ways which build on what we have learnt about second language acquisition. Discovering exactly how to do that is a central challenge for those who believe in the importance of grammar teaching.

The participants in the seminar appeared to be unanimous in their agreement that this latter point deserved much more attention in the research activity of the British Higher Education system. Most of the reported research in the major journals seemed to come from outside this country. In seeking to explain why this was the case, the participants noted that the research agenda in British HE tended to downplay such issues, despite their obvious centrality to the Higher Education process. This came about for a variety of reasons. First, Modern Languages departments generally gave priority to research in literature, with perhaps one person per department dealing with language (compared with six or seven dealing with literature). In addition, the 'language person' often had the time-consuming responsibility for organising the language teaching and was not thought of as a 'researcher' in RAE terms. Furthermore, many of these individuals (mainly women) had arrived at their current responsibilities after a period as a foreign language lecturer. As such, they had not normally had the research training which would have placed them in a position to put bids before the appropriate research councils. There was also a lack of clarity about the role of the research councils. Whilst most Modern Languages departments thought of the AHRB as 'their' research funding body, it would not fund pedagogically oriented research, even with a theoretical emphasis. This belongs more to a panel within the ESRC. The relevant panel potentially includes educationists, linguists and psychologists who have the (legitimate) expectation that research submissions will show an awareness of current thinking in each area. Being able to put in a credible bid to such a panel requires a thorough interdisciplinary background which not many of those involved in teaching language in Higher Education manage to obtain, for the reasons noted above.

It was difficult to see how this situation could change. A significant modification would require three essential

factors. First, there would have to be a willingness to provide research training for those responsible for language teaching in Higher Education. At present there is no willingness to do this because the teaching of language (as opposed to e.g. the teaching of literature) is seen as something which can be done without any research background. Second, at least a proportion of those undertaking that teaching would have to want to acquire the research training in this area, including the not insignificant responsibility for achieving outputs worthy of RAE recognition. Third, there would have to be a recognition amongst potential research funders that this is

an area deserving of funding, both for the training required and for subsequent post-doctoral projects of the kind which are common in the US and in many parts of Europe, notably Holland.

The evaluator's report on the day indicated that the participants contacted at a later stage found the event useful. There were some lessons to be learnt but on the whole the Subject Centre can congratulate itself on putting on an event which reached a mixed audience not usually reached by the existing agencies or associations.

"A very useful and much overdue meeting of grammarians and grammar teachers."

Ewa Jaworska, member of the Education Committee of the Linguistic Association of Great Britain

Where has grammar got to?

Dr Keith Brown (Chair: Subject Centre Linguistics Specialist Group)

When the Kingman Committee¹ reported in 1988, it said that 'there is a widespread concern that pressure on time and energy, together with inadequacies in the professional training and education of teachers and a misunderstanding of the nature of children's learning, are causing important areas of English Language teaching to be neglected, to the detriment of children's facility with words'. The committee was set up to recommend a model of the English Language as a basis for teacher training and professional discussion, and to consider how far and in what ways that model should be made explicit to pupils at various stages of education. The 'concerns' reported by Kingman have been around in English education for a long time: similar concerns were expressed in *The Bulloch Report* of 1974, which itself reported 'observations of a very similar kind' in *The Newbolt Report* of 1921. Nor have these beliefs disappeared: they were part of the impetus behind the establishment of the National Literacy Strategy.

How should we react to such perceptions? Kingman reported that 'many people believe that standards in our use of English would rise dramatically if we returned to the formal teaching of grammar which was normal practice in most classrooms before 1960. Others believe that explicit teaching or learning of language structure is unnecessary'. Kingman rejected both these extreme positions. It declared that it would not be right 'to return to old-fashioned grammar teaching and learning by rote', not only because it 'gave an inadequate account of the English language' but, more crucially, because this approach was 'ineffective as a means of developing command of English in all its manifestations'. On the other hand it also rejected the contrary positions, 'that any notion of correct or incorrect use of language is an affront to personal liberty (and) knowing how to use terminology in which to speak of language is undesirable'. The Government accepted Kingman's view in favour of the formal teaching of 'knowledge about language' and it launched two initiatives. The first was the approach to

language in the National Curriculum, that followed *The Cox Report*²: The second was an initiative in teacher education, the LINC project³, designed to introduce 'new style grammar' into teacher education so that teachers could prepare themselves for the introduction of grammar in the school curriculum. Sadly some parts of the LINC materials proved to be politically contentious and so they were never formally published, though they circulated widely in 'samizdat' form and were perhaps influential for that reason.

Both of these initiatives have grown and developed and today grammar teaching has got its feet firmly under the table, both in the school curriculum and in teacher education. Professor Mike Kelly reported to the Subject Centre's recent workshop on the teaching of grammar that 'over the last three years, in consultation with teachers, advisers and awarding bodies, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has made significant revisions to the National Curriculum and to the criteria for GCSE and AS/A level. These changes put greater emphasis on grammar and the accurate application of grammatical knowledge. QCA has also produced non-statutory guidance for teachers to promote a more grammar-based approach in the early stages of learning a modern foreign language'. The Subject Centre's contribution both to the ongoing general debate and to the dissemination of information about methodologies for grammar teaching has been to organise a seminar on 'Teaching Grammar' at which a variety of approaches to teaching grammar were presented - all reported on the Centre website <http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/lings> - and to establish a web page with links to other sites and an invitation to join in the discussion.

Footnotes

1. DES (1988) *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of English Language* (The Kingman Report) London. HMSO. P.1.
2. DES (1989) *Report of the English Working Party 5-16* (The Cox Report) London HMSO.
3. DES (1990-1) *Language in the National Curriculum (LINC): Materials for Professional Development*. London HMSO

Grammar teaching: why, when, how and what?

Presentation Notes from Richard Hudson, UCL

1. Why teach grammar?

For **interest** and **insight**, as part of a liberal education and perhaps even as a training in **thinking skills** or the scientific method.

- Uncontroversial, but weak - grammar takes its place alongside philosophy etc.

Because it improves language **skills**.

- Controversial, but powerful - grammar is an essential tool for language development.

Does it work?

Previously: **No** - it can even be worse than useless for L1 (and L2?).

- 'Formal grammar instruction appears to contribute nothing to the development of writing and reading skills.' (Elley 1994)
- 'Only grammar teaching showed an overall negative effect. ... On the basis of a comparison of 67 experimental studies,' Hillocks commented, 'Nearly everything else is more effective in increasing the quality of writing'. (Hillocks 1986:214) in Weaver 1996).
- Consequence: **the death of grammar** in schools throughout Anglophonia (plus elsewhere - but not everywhere).

Increasingly: **Yes**.

L1: Grammar teaching is one of the main pillars of the **National Literacy Strategy** for Primary Schools (and now Secondary Schools too).

L2: Recent projects have shown positive effects; e.g. Bryant and Nunes have shown that teaching about morphology helps children to learn to use **apostrophes**.

L1: My own recent **survey** of research (<http://www.phon.uc.ac.uk/home/dick/bib.htm>) has turned up many projects which show clear positive effects of grammar teaching on children's writing.

L2: A recent **meta-analysis** of about 50 projects shows overwhelmingly clear benefits of 'focus on forms' (i.e. on grammar) for L2 learning (Norris and Ortega in Language Learning 50:417-528, 2000).

L2: An ongoing project in Swansea has shown that those with training in grammar are better at learning **artificial languages**, and those without it do very badly.

Conclusions for HE:

- Being taught grammar **can be good for you** - but the **negative** results still have to be explained. Presumably this is at least as true at HE level as at school level.
- If grammar is needed at school, future teachers need a firm grasp of it.

2. When to teach grammar?

Previously in Anglophonia: Only **older** (and more academic) pupils can cope with grammar teaching.

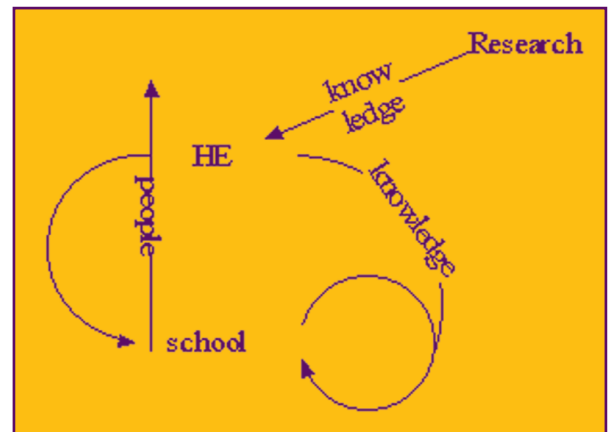
- e.g. A-level English Language.

Elsewhere: **6-year olds** have the metalinguistic skills to cope with it:

- In **Russia** all 6-year olds learn the word classes and 7-year olds learn the grammatical functions.
- The **National Literacy Strategy** introduces basic grammar (e.g. 'prefix', 'synonym' in Year 2, main word classes in Year 3). Children don't just cope with grammar - they like it.
- Bryant and Nunes' work on apostrophes was with 9-11-year olds.

Conclusions for HE:

- **Students** can cope with grammar and enjoy it.
- HE is a particularly important level because this is where **research** feeds into education.
- Traditionally research has not fed grammar teaching - teachers simply re-cycled what they learned at school.



3. How to teach grammar?

The negative research shows that it is possible to teach grammar **unsuccessfully**:

- Students fail to learn concepts
- They cannot apply concepts
- They cannot see the point
- They are bored.

Obviously, successful methods vary according to the aims of the teaching e.g.

- theory of grammar
- text analysis
- language comparison
- writing skills etc.

Successful methods can be developed:

- Some **school** methods seem successful and HE teachers should be aware of them:
 - *Not whether but how. Teaching grammar in English at key stages 3 and 4.* (QCA 1999)
 - *Grammar for Writing* (for Key Stage 2). (DfEE 2000)
- Some **HE** methods seem successful in terms of their goals:
- E.g. my own course for first-year BA Linguistics students focuses on text analysis, and is reasonably successful in teaching an exhaustive analysis of sentence structure; but it does not teach much theory. (Hudson, *English Grammar*, Routledge 1998).

Conclusions for HE

We need **new and imaginative** methods in HE because:

- Existing methods may not be the best possible
- This is where future teachers will learn their methods.
- If properly tested and related to relevant research and publications, teaching methods should count as **research** in the RAE.

The **Subject Centre** for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies is an ideal channel for disseminating results.

4. What grammar to teach?

There is no single 'grammar' for any language.

The teacher has to make various **decisions** (apart from the choice of target language):

- An overview of the whole grammar or focus on selected parts?
- Focussing on the system (i.e. the internal logic of the grammar) or on texts?
- What kind of grammar: old-fashioned, modern descriptive or modern theoretical?
- Which particular grammar of the type selected?

In order to make these decisions, the teacher needs:

- Clear **aims**
- **Knowledge** of available alternatives in grammar
- **Knowledge** of what the students already know

Conclusions for HE

- HE teachers of grammar should be able to **select, modify and even produce** grammars to suit their purposes.
- Some non-Linguistics departments (MFL, English, Education) need to greatly **increase their expertise** in grammar.
- Some departments of **Linguistics** need to greatly **increase their availability** to other departments as a source of expertise.
- **Mainstream** (Chomskyan) grammars may not be the most suitable; nor may **standard** (old-fashioned or

descriptive) grammars.

- All HE grammarians need to know what students have already been taught at school.

5. Time and the National Curriculum

Curriculum changes are **already** introducing grammar teaching into schools:

1999	The National Literacy Strategy started in all primary schools.
2000	The new grammar-focussed MFL syllabus applied to AS/A level teaching.
2001	The NLS will be introduced in all secondary schools for years 7-9.
2001	The new grammar-focussed MFL syllabus will apply to GCSE teaching.

The children now receiving this teaching will eventually reach **HE**:

2002	The first national cohort with grammar-focussed MFL AS/A.
2005	The first national cohort with grammar-focussed MFL GCSE.
2006	The first national cohort with any experience of NLS (Y9 2001).
2011	The first national cohort with NLS from Y1 (Y1 1999).

Questions for HE

How should HE:

- **Build** on the grammatical expertise that these students will have?
- **Inform** this expertise with research findings on (a) content (b) methods in order to feed back into teaching at school?

"Students with an English Literature (not English Language or Combined English) 'A' level background are arriving in Higher Education to study English Language and Linguistics without knowing what a preposition is. Their knowledge of word classes does not extend beyond noun, verb and, sometimes, adjective."

Alan Fortune, King's College, London

The servant of two masters: teaching grammar to undergraduate students following literature and QTS degrees. Mick Randall and Jack Kissell (University College, Chichester)

This case study describes the approaches to grammar teaching which we adopt with our first year undergraduate students following a general language awareness programme within the language strand of an honours degree in English. It lays out the choices and challenges which we faced and the solutions we have evolved. The general solutions and materials which are outlined in this paper are the result of the collaboration and contributions over the years from all the tutors involved in teaching the programme.

The context

The grammar element forms part of the two first year language awareness modules of 45 hours each which occur over two semesters. The two modules, *Language: Nature, Form and Function* and *Language: Variety and Change* are intended to give the students an introductory course into different aspects of language and linguistics as preparation for their second year modules; *Language and Authority* and *Language into Literature*. The cohort of about 100 students is divided into two main groups: intending primary school teachers who follow the first two years language strand of the BA English degree in the School of English as part of their BA QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) studies and students who will go on to take single honours or a joint degree in English. The QTS students form about 60% of the cohort and the other students the remaining 40%. Within this group there is also a small but growing number of overseas students and British students taking TEFL as a joint or minor subject study within the BA Arts and Humanities programme. The modules are delivered once a week for the two semesters with a plenary lecture followed by seminars and tutorial groups. The grammar component consists of seven three-hour sessions in the first semester module, *Language: Nature Form and Function*.

The challenges

When designing the programme the team considered the following factors:

1. In general, we find that many of the students following the programme have studied little or no grammar in their schools. Therefore we need to provide an introduction to grammar to students whose understanding of linguistic terminology is very poor.
2. However, with the increase of students following 'A' level English language, we find that there are a group of students who have a more confident grasp of linguistic ideas. Therefore, increasingly, the course needs to provide an extension for those students who have a more confident grasp of terminology from studying 'A' level English Language.

3. To many of our students, the idea of grammar equates with a prescriptive attitude to language. They come with the notion that the written form of English is the 'proper' form of English and we aim to provide on the programme an introduction to the idea of linguistic description rather than language prescription.
4. With the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy, primary school teachers are required to have a reasonable grounding in linguistic terminology. Thus one of the specific outcomes of the programme must be to provide the necessary background and understanding of linguistic terminology to allow the QTS students to meet Teacher Training Agency (TTA) guidelines for primary teachers.
5. The presence of overseas students, whose knowledge of grammar is good, and intending TEFL teachers on the programme provides an interesting opportunity to integrate the different grammatical discourses, i.e. those of EFL and the NLS.
6. For those continuing the language strand into the second year, the course needs to provide a springboard for the second year exploration of language in areas such as language and authority and genre.
7. However, a significant number of students will not be continuing with the language strand in the second year, but will instead be studying creative writing or literary criticism. In order to be meaningful to such students the course needs to provide a description of English which will be relevant to their future studies.
8. Finally, the course aims to encourage, through the use of linguistic analysis, the development of an analytical rather than an emotional interpretative approach to literature.

The overall solutions

The first decision was to relate the study of linguistic features to written literary and media texts. This would prepare students for their second year study in language where the focus of study will be much wider than the purely literary texts which many of them equate with the study of English. These second year modules cover such issues as language and gender, language and technology, and literary and non-literary stylistics. In order to do this we need to isolate the necessary linguistic features which will enable the students to understand different effects created by literary and media texts. The plenary lectures cover an area of language form, e.g. the noun phrase, and this is developed through the study of literary and media texts in the seminar groups. This approach involves more than merely using texts for **exemplification** of linguistic features, but involves using linguistics to provide an explanation for literary effects. Texts are chosen where the linguistic analysis provides a

framework for understanding the literary effect intended by the authors. Thus linguistic analysis becomes a tool in the discovery of literary meaning rather than literary texts being used as a tool for linguistic understanding. Arising from the problem which we had identified with attitudes to 'proper' English, we decided to place the study of linguistic study within a general Hallidayan framework of spoken and written language styles and to examine the way that modern texts increasingly exhibit features of both styles ('informalization', Graddol, 1996). Finally, in addition to identifying concepts and terminology useful in literary analysis we also needed to draw up a list of 'core' concepts and terminology which will allow the students of literature to understand how writers produce different effects which will also meet the needs of primary school teachers (DfEE Circular 4/98 and The National Literacy Strategy framework for teaching).

The specific solutions: the grammar syllabus.

What has emerged from the consideration of the above needs and our experience of teaching the module over the years is a fairly traditional set of areas and a fairly restricted set of grammatical terms.

Areas studied

Parts of speech:

The noun phrase:

The verb phrase:

Verb form:

Morphology:

Sentence structure:

Discourse elements:

Terminology:

nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions (possessive, reflexive), conjunctions.

head, pre and post-head modification.

main verbs, auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries, finite and non-finite verbs, participles.

tense, active and passive voice, aspect (perfect and continuous).

the morpheme, inflectional and derivational affixes.

simple, complex and compound sentences, finite and non-finite clauses and phrases, main clauses, co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions.

contractions, ellipsis, lexical density, reference.

Examples of texts used

The following are examples of some of the texts which we have found useful for the exploration of different aspects of grammar. The two contrasting poems of Seamus Heaney and Samuel Johnson, for example, rely heavily for their effect on the types of nouns used by each. Seamus Heaney creates a powerful effect by the use of concrete nouns to describe the actuality of blackberry picking, yet this intensely physical description is used as a metaphor for the discussion of abstract ideas such as autumnal decay and religious feelings. Samuel Johnson, on the other hand, in a typical eighteenth century manner, takes the specific situation of enrolment into a university, yet deals with the emotions and issues involved through the discussion of abstract ideas and concepts. In order to be able to appreciate the different effects created by the

two poets it is necessary to isolate and examine the different nouns used in the poems. This is the approach adopted by the programme to both provide an understanding of different parts of speech and to use that understanding in constructing an analysis of the emotional and literary effects of the poems. Thus, later in the course the literary meaning achieved by such diverse writers as Raymond Chandler, Oscar Wilde, Paul Durcan and Virginia Woolf are explored by examining their use of simple past tense, progressive and non-progressive aspect in the verb phrase, and auxiliary and modal verbs. In examining such linguistic features students are able to understand the richness and flexibility of the English tense system in creating atmosphere and in conveying the nuances of human experience.

Parts of speech: *Blackberry-Picking*, Seamus Heaney
The Scholar's Life, Samuel Johnson

The noun phrase: 'Off course', Edwin Morgan

Sentence structure: *The Blind Assassin*, Margaret Atwood

Verb form: *The holiday of a lifetime*, Newspaper Advertisement

The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy

The Big Sleep, Raymond Chandler

The Portrait of Dorian Gray Oscar Wilde

Tullynoe, Paul Durcan

Mrs. Dalloway, Virginia Woolf

Morphology: *Jabberwocky*, Lewis Carroll

'Discourse' elements: *The Birthday Party*, Harold Pinter

Child benefit form, DHSS

Delia gets a grilling, Observer review

Measurement of take-up

We use three main methods of assessing the degree to which the grammatical concepts on the course are being assimilated. The first method, a profile, lists the terminology; that is introduced on the course and asks the students to keep a record of their understanding of this terminology; definitions and examples of the concepts in use. The second, and the first formally assessed element of the course, is a transcription of informal speech and commentary on this transcription. This involves the students in analysing speech/writing differences using ideas such as ellipsis, contractions and deictic reference, all of which involve students in understanding and being able to analyse a text in terms of parts of speech. The third method is a formal examination which consists of two parts; the first being the identification of parts of speech in sentence contexts and the second being a commentary on a media text which asks students to identify features typical of spoken and written discourse in the text. The responses to the commentary question clearly indicate that at the end of the course students have grasped the concept of informalization (Graddol 1996) and have revised their stereotypical view of spoken and written English as separate modes of language.

Conclusion

On this programme we have tried to accommodate different student motivations in the way that we approach the study of grammar. Central to this approach is to use the study of grammar to provide insights into the effects produced by different texts, both traditional literary texts and media texts. This approach also resonates well with the approaches to grammar used in the NLS. The model of grammar which has emerged as being useful for this approach is relatively traditional and limited, but we have found that, nevertheless, it is still a powerful tool for the examination of the way that writers create meanings in texts. We believe that by using this approach to the study of grammar, we are not only providing a firm basis for the intending primary school teacher to be able to teach the National Curriculum, but that we are also providing a motivation for those students intent on studying literary criticism and creative writing. Evaluations of the course by means of a questionnaire give initial indications that newcomers to grammatical analysis find the course challenging but stimulating, while those students who have studied 'A' level English Language report that the course consolidates and extends their previous study in useful ways.

References:

Goodman, S and D. Graddol, Eds. (1996), *Redesigning English: new texts, new identities*. London: Routledge.
 DfEE Circular 4/98.
 DfEE, *The National Literacy Strategy: framework for teaching*.

"Grammar is an area which is so central to what's happening in mainstream education as well as in teacher education courses . . . there's naturally a very important language awareness component in many courses, and within that of course grammar has a very big role to play, and I think therefore that getting to grips with what it is that the Literacy Strategy and the National Curriculum are trying to effect now in terms of improvement in that area is very relevant . . . that particular component at the moment is much more challenging than it ought to be, because we're still of course getting through graduates who were part of a generation that simply haven't had any grammar teaching at all."

Teresa Haworth, Free-lance language and education consultant

Sugaring the syntactic pill: grammar theory and foreign language studies – John Field (King's College, London)

A good story, say the creative writing gurus, needs a conflict and a resolution. In the present tale, the conflicts were manifold. As for the resolution, some might suggest it amounts to little more than the reinvention of the wheel. But the process which led to it provides a cautionary case history for anyone facing the problems of presenting grammar at university level.

The task: to design a first-year course for a group studying at King's College London for a BA degree in Modern Languages with Education. By signing up to this degree, most participants have signalled their wish to become those *rarae aves* of the British classroom, teachers of Modern Foreign Languages. Naturally, they study the grammar of their chosen language in depth, but they also need a framework of general linguistic theory against which to set this knowledge. Hence the

requirement for a course which, in the module described here, charts a queasy voyage through the choppy waters of syntax.

Some of the inherent conflicts will already be apparent to those who work in this area. The students' goals are career-oriented and fuelled by the affinity they feel for a particular language rather than by an interest in Language in general. They may be very competent performers in their target language, but that is by no means the same thing as saying they have an aptitude for the study of linguistic theory. Add to this the fact that they specialise in a range of European languages – with English (precisely the language which none of them are likely to teach) as the single language that we all share. Those from overseas have an impressive familiarity with the terminology of traditional English grammar, even if not always with the

concepts (there is a disturbing tendency to root around anxiously in search of subjunctives). Those from Britain display an unsullied innocence about their own language worthy of the Garden of Eden - though they are sometimes tolerably well informed about the grammar of other people's.

What would seem to be required is an approach which reflects the students' perceptions of their own needs. But academic considerations intervene. The course has to be comprehensive and academically demanding; the name *Chomsky* has perforce to be uttered, at the risk of striking fear into young hearts. The course has to provide students with a battery of terms and concepts which they can use in describing their chosen MFL. It also has to equip them with the terminology they need for third year courses in Discourse Analysis and Second Language Acquisition.

All this, by the way, in five sessions of two hours.

My attempts at a solution went through three stages: the erratic contours of this learning curve may be of interest.

Solution 1: Lecturer-driven. Specify and teach the topics which you as 'expert' believe to be essential to a broad understanding of grammar theory.

Result: a course covering: a) types of grammar plus fundamental concepts such as word class; b) the ideas of early linguists (de Saussure, Bloomfield), c) basic Chomsky tree diagrams; d) an exploration of the English verb. To these, add two topics (semantic roles, thematisation) which demonstrate alternatives to the types of grammar that focus on form at the expense of function and that operate only at the level of the sentence. Stir well and administer to students with adequate provision for them to undertake practice tasks.

Evaluation: All very well on paper; but it takes so long to impart all this information that there is no time to perform the tasks - humiliation indeed for an ex-language teacher such as myself with a belief in inductive and interactive learning. Face validity is low: students remain unclear as to what TG, English verb forms and theta roles have to do with being an MFL specialist. Being first year undergraduates, they smile fatalistically and get on with it.

Solution 2. Theory-thin. Prepare staged self-access materials so that Bloomfield, de Saussure *et al.* can be relegated to home (or Tube) study, with follow-up discussion in class. Deliver lecture hand-outs on main topics a week ahead of each session, asking students to read them in advance.

Result: loss of opportunity for theatrical surprise by lecturer but enormous increase of intake by students. They even ask questions - and the tasks get done, too. Problem of face validity remains.

Solution 3: Learner-driven. Redistribute entire contents of course. Omit nothing, but structure everything around word-classes, those staples of traditional grammar; so as to provide friendly landmarks in this unfamiliar terrain. Throw in the odd tree diagram as you go. Session 1: Problems of determining word class. Session 2: the noun and NP and all their fellow travellers (including pronouns and the notions of post-modification, deixis and definiteness). Session 3: the preposition and PP together with phrasal verbs, complements and adjuncts. Session 4: the sentence: word order; theta roles and thematisation. Session 5: The English verb and VP: tense and aspect.

One further development: wherever possible, trace cross-linguistic parallels and contrasts: flexible word order in Italian; thematisation in Russian; postpositions in Japanese, imperfectivity in French; the representation of Middle Voice in Spanish.

Result: increased commitment by students and more positive feedback. Even an occasional *frisson* of excitement as insights are gained into the features that determine and distinguish the shapes of languages.

Sounds trite and obvious? Perhaps. But it took this hardened old trouper four years to get there.

It was only after teaching Solution 3 that I had a sudden flashback to an experience in another life, when I was designing syllabuses for Arab secondary schools. There was resistance by Arab adolescents to the notion of grammar, so I resorted to using lexical sets (food, clothing, furniture) as distractors. They formed the focus of each lesson, and the grammar was tacked on to them, apparently incidentally. It made the learning process more concrete and the hard truths of verb forms and inflectional endings easier to absorb.

How galling that I'd reinvented my own wheel.

"There were sage nods at the notion of a pro-drop, but how many of us think it's a brand of sweet?"

Richard Aplin, University of Leicester School of Education

Raising metalinguistic awareness - theory versus practice Siobhan Casson (University of Durham)

This paper discusses a collaboration between the School of Education (SoE) and the Department of Linguistics and English Language (DLEL) at the University of Durham. The two departments are jointly co-ordinating a language module for first year undergraduate primary teacher trainees. The paper will focus on the teaching of syntax for this module and relate this to the trainees' subject knowledge requirements. It is acknowledged that the language specialism lies within DLEL. However, this specialism needs to be adapted for educational needs.

Introduction

First year BA(Ed) teacher trainees take a compulsory module called Language and Learning. The module was created in line with the guidelines on English Language in the Initial Teacher Training Curriculum [C 4/98] (DfEE 1998). The aim of the module in *assessment* terms is to enable the trainees to meet some of the requirements of C 4/98 relating to their subject knowledge for English. The aim of the module in *educational* terms is to raise the trainees' own knowledge about language. The focus on raising metalinguistic awareness means that the module is not aimed at presenting the content in a pedagogically practical way, but represents theoretical aspects of language that will contribute to their subject knowledge.

Module outline

The module consists of 22 weeks of one-hour lectures. Staff from the DLEL deliver 19 of these lecture hours, the SoE the remaining 3 hours. Each lecture is followed up with a one and a half-hour workshop and education-focussed tutorials are held every two weeks.

Weeks	Term One
1-6	Sentence structure - syntax
7-8	Word formation - morphology Punctuation
Term Two	
10-11	Spoken language features and reading
12	Language sounds and systems
13	Accents and dialects
14	Child Language Acquisition
15	Metalinguistic Development
16-19	Text
Term Three	
20-22	Language in Education

This is the third year this module has run, and the outline represents changes and modifications made after a review of each of the previous years. This reflects input from all involved, including feedback from the students. We expect the module to continue to evolve to reflect on-site reviews of needs and assessment and the curriculum requirements for both teacher training and schools (in

particular the Termly Objectives for the National Literacy Strategy (NLS)).

I will not be discussing the whole module in this paper. My aim here is to:

- Describe the theoretical basis of the **syntax** component.
- Focus on main and embedded clauses and how they are presented in the lectures.
- Explain how this is consolidated with the students through workshops and tutorials.
- Refer to ongoing research on the effects of the syntax component on the trainees' metalinguistic knowledge.
- Discuss problems that have arisen directly from this particular approach to teaching syntax.
- Explain the motivation for pursuing the generative approach.

Syntax component

1. **Word classes** - the form, function and distribution in English of: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions
2. **Simple sentences** - subject and predicate, finite/non-finite verbs, participants (subject and object), transitivity, subject/verb agreement, pronouns and case
3. **Modals, auxiliaries and the passive construction**
4. **Complex sentences** - conjunctions (complementizers), main and embedded clauses, adverbial clauses, tag questions, subject/auxiliary inversion.

1. Theoretical Basis

The syntax component of the course is delivered by Dr Maggie Tallerman. The presentation reflects the generative approach used in her textbook on cross-linguistic syntax (Tallerman 1998). However, the six-week syllabus deals only with English, does not rely on cross-linguistic examples and does not delve deeply into generative theory. The component was designed to parallel the kind of metalanguage and language understanding required of teachers for implementing the NLS.

2. Presentation of main and embedded clauses in the lectures

1. Kim **wondered** [why the dog was **barking**].
2. [Because the dog **barked**], I **woke** up early.
3. Lee **said** [(that) she hadn't **finished** her assignment yet].
4. [After the storm **ended**] we all **left** the bus shelter.
5. The teacher **assumes** [you'll be **staying** late after class tonight].

Using sentences such as these the trainees are taught, for example:

- Complex sentences contain more than one verb
- The term clause is used to refer to a unit containing one verbal element, to avoid confusion with the term sentence
- Each clause has its own subject and thus main (lexical) verb
- Embedded clauses can be selected as the 'transitive object' of the main clause verb (examples 1 and 5)
- Embedded clauses can precede or follow main clauses

It is clear the trainees are being asked to analyse such examples structurally. However, the exploratory nature of this approach is also emphasised i.e. rules can be generated but also systematically broken, and examples of usage which appear to break the standard rules may represent language in context or dialectal variation and so on. The trainees are thus being given a method by which they can analyse language syntactically. This method is something they are encouraged to adapt to enhance their own understanding of language structure rather than as a way of teaching grammar to pupils.

3. Consolidation

Workshops - the workshops (led by DLEL staff) review and develop the lecture material. The teaching style for post-lecture workshops has been to produce worksheets for encouraging practice and discussion amongst the workshop groups. The nature of descriptive versus prescriptive grammar is regarded by DLEL and SoE as an important concept to develop, so the trainees are encouraged to contribute their existing knowledge and openly question the examples they are given. Through these activities it is intended that the trainees become familiar with the metalanguage used in the lectures and develop more confidence in their own knowledge of language structure.

Tutorials – the tutorials are given by members of the Primary English teaching staff in the School of Education. They do not make direct links to the lecture or workshop material in the same way as the workshops, but instead take a topic, such as prepositional phrases or conjunctions, and have the students prepare materials as they might for the classroom. It needs to be re-emphasised that the trainees are encouraged to see such activities as related to their own syntactic knowledge, which is one element of the subject knowledge base for English, and how that knowledge can be used for creating activities in the classroom.

4. Research

My ongoing research into the metalinguistic syntactic knowledge of trainee teachers uses pre- and post-module questionnaire data to obtain a picture of the trainees' metalinguistic syntactic knowledge before and after taking the Language and Learning module. They are asked to demonstrate their knowledge of metalanguage *and* language structure in the questionnaires. The data is still being analysed, but what is emerging is a continuum of metalinguistic awareness possessed by the trainees. Also, it appears the acquisition of metalanguage does *not* by default come with understanding of what that metalanguage refers to. This has implications for the trainees' subject knowledge when they are implementing the elements of the NLS concerning metalanguage. In the shorter term, it has implications for the trainees' ability to pass the proposed Teacher Training Agency (TTA) tests (Casson 2000).

5. Issues

There are two things I want to make observations on.

a. Theoretical approach

Using a generative approach to language structure might be imagined to conflict with the notions of 'language in context' and 'language in use' - the perspectives with which trainees in the UK will become most familiar; through the education literature they access, during their training and beyond.

Much is made of the irreconcilable positions of Hallidayan/systemic/functional approaches to grammar and the generative/structuralist approaches. Through my research I hope to demonstrate that, in regard to teacher education and grammar teaching, it is possible to see the two approaches complementing each other. For this to happen it must be understood that it is not a choice of 'form' over 'function', but an acknowledgement that within the functional aspects of language, form exists. The Language and Learning module takes the perspective that raising the trainees' own awareness of form *before* pursuing the functional and practical areas of literacy teaching gives them a foundation from which to understand the structure of language separately from its usage. It also gives them the terminology with which to talk about these aspects of language.

If the trainees are eventually to end up working as literacy teachers using a more Hallidayan framework, that does not have to conflict with the kind of metalinguistic knowledge they use to help *them* look at pupils' writing in terms of form when needed. The NLS presents language in such a way as to suggest it can be broken down into smaller and smaller structural chunks, while at the same time focussing on text and genre work. In other words, while operating at a macro-level of 'language in context', the teachers are still expected to have a micro-level knowledge of the structural elements of language and reveal them explicitly to the children.

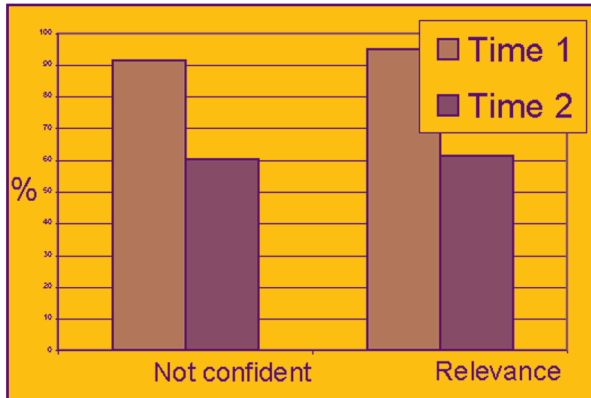
b. The trainees' reactions

There has been a tendency for trainees to rebel against the generative approach to syntax. A number of reasons can be proposed:

1. They may lack previous experience of learning grammar during their own schooling.
2. The approach may feel non-intuitive - it is easy to fall back on meaning and usage when struggling to analyse linguistic structures.
3. Traditional grammar has been seen as an authoritarian imposition of Standard English (Cameron and Bourne 1989). Structural approaches to grammar teaching may become conflated with the traditional approach.
4. The trainees are not able to see how this knowledge can be applied in the classroom.

Trainees ask questions such as 'why are we doing this, we won't be teaching it to the children' or 'this is far too hard and not practical'. One possible reason for these queries

may be the expectations of the trainees in regard to the English components of their degree, based on their own educational experiences. From my own data, the bar charts below show pre- and post-module questionnaire responses to the questions 'how confident are you about your own language knowledge?' and 'how relevant is this kind of knowledge to teaching?'.



The post-module responses to confidence seem to be encouraging, until compared with the responses to relevance. There seems to be some correlation between thinking the grammar is too hard for the level they will be teaching, and feeling more confident about their own knowledge. In essence, the problem appears to be that the trainees expect only to learn about the grammar they will teach the children, rather than to work on their own metalinguistic knowledge.

Motivation

So should we be discouraged? Well, we think not. There is a precedent in Education for viewing this type of subject knowledge as important, for example in Maths (Carré and Ernest 1993). The fact that it is a new approach within an English module will mean some initial resistance, but we believe this will slowly change. In particular, the effects of the NLS need time to permeate the school system, and especially to influence the grammar taught at 'A' level.

Conclusion

The module is increasingly successful due to the collaboration of the two departments, and we continue to work on all the areas causing difficulty or conflict. If it were the case that 'linguists' were presuming to dictate to 'teachers', we might have encountered more problems. However, with the help of the School of Education, DLEL staff are able to adapt their linguistic knowledge to make it useful for trainee teachers. In the same way DLEL staff are helping to demonstrate how linguistic knowledge can be useful in primary teacher education when it might not have previously seemed so.

CAMERON, D. and J. BOURNE (1989) *Grammar, Nation and Citizenship: Kingman in Linguistic and Historical Perspective*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

CASSON, S.K. (October 2000) 'Can teachers be told - the problem of teaching metalinguistic knowledge'. Paper given at BAAL/CUP seminar on Teacher Cognition, Leeds University School of Education.

CARRÉ, C. and P. ERNEST (1993) Performance in subject-matter knowledge in mathematics. *Learning to Teach*. N. BENNETT and C. CARRÉ London: Routledge: pp.36-50.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1998) *The National Literacy Strategy: Framework for teaching*. London: DfEE.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1998) *Teaching: High Status, High Standards. Requirements for Courses of Initial Teacher Training*. London: DfEE.

TALLERMAN, M. (1998) *Understanding Syntax*. London: Longman.

I'm a believer that an EFL teacher does have to have a very sound knowledge of grammar, even though you're not teaching that knowledge to the students directly, but you have to have a good knowledge yourself before you can answer any of the questions that they may have, and often in the past you've noticed that students coming in particular from other European countries have a much greater knowledge of grammar of their own language, so they are then able to understand English grammar very well, maybe more so than some of the teachers who haven't studied grammar at all, so that is a problem I think that does need to be addressed, and it was quite encouraging to hear that that was being addressed with the changes in the curriculum."

Sandra Fraser, City College, Manchester

"I especially liked the fact that there were people at the seminar from all language backgrounds; although grammar is common to MFL, EFL and teacher education, it has a different role to fulfil in each so it is important to hear all these viewpoints"

Sandra Fraser, City College, Manchester

Discourse analysis as a tool for grammar teaching: some examples in French - Dounia Bissar (University of North London)

Introduction

It has become a common concern that grammar is often perceived as the most 'problematic' aspect of language learning by both students and teachers. Whatever their educational background and experience of grammar teaching, most students are concerned that their instruction was not sufficient or not effective, that they lack knowledge and find it difficult to reintegrate grammar into speech, even at an advanced level.

It seems that at least part of the problem lies in the gap that exists between theories of language learning on the one hand, and approaches to grammar teaching on the other. The first have evolved a lot recently, and methodologies alongside them, whereas the grammar teaching element is still too reliant on prescriptive methods based on morpho-syntax and semantics, within the confines of the sentence. Little insight seems to have been gained from research into discourse analysis and pragmatics. There has been, of course, a great contribution from functional grammar and, in the case of French, from the 'grammaire du texte', but the majority of foreign language course books and syllabi still rely too much on the old ways.

Hence the aim of this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of introducing concepts of discourse analysis into grammar teaching, as a tool for better description, understanding and manipulation of grammar forms. The examples used for this purpose are in French.

Discourse analysis and grammar teaching

Grammar teaching sometimes needs to go beyond the level of the sentence when features of the whole discourse have to be taken into account in the description of forms. Indeed, some of the grammatical structures notoriously difficult to master by language students can be closely related to discourse factors, such as textual cohesion, thematic importance, or constraints on the choice of tense and aspect. For example, it is the case with determiners and pronouns, active versus passive voice, and the use of different verb forms. Records of the difficulties students experience with these forms can be found in many studies: to name but a few, McCarthy (1991), Little and Singleton (1991), Bardovi-Harlig (1999), Edmondson (1984), Bourdet (1992), Dewaele (1996), etc.

Hence the status of 'advanced' or 'complex', given to these structures, and the expectation that only 'advanced' students can manipulate them, and only a minority of them successfully. This is, indeed, the view taken by some linguists, Lambert (1997) for example who suggests that the pragmatic competence needed to use such structures is the most complex of linguistic competence and therefore constitutes the last stage of language acquisition. Others like Coppieters (1987) go even further and argue that some cognitive domains are impossible to acquire.

However, arguments can be put forward for the introduction of discourse and pragmatic concepts at the early stages of language instruction. First of all, the fact mentioned earlier that they direct the speaker's choice between different forms and the hearer's interpretation of these forms (or the writer and the reader), sometimes very early in the learning process. This is the case for example in French with the use of articles or other determiners, or the present as opposed to the future tense, forms introduced at beginner's stage. The opposition between past perfect and imperfect often remains a stumbling block too, like that between active and passive voice, although they too are introduced quite early in most courses, but often practised exclusively at the level of the sentence.

The problem with a reliance on sentence-based examples, especially if they are presented out of context, is that it can result in learners making erroneous assumptions (consciously or unconsciously) about the meaning and use of grammatical forms, as it is argued by Petrovitz (1997), for instance. The following examples, taken from mainstream French language course books, are illustrative of this problem.

The first one, a typical verb conjugation exercise to practise the perfect versus the imperfect tense, is problematic because of the lack of context. Indeed, although only the imperfect is given in the answer key for the verbs 'travailler' in the first sentence and 'téléphoner' in the second, a perfect tense would be perfectly acceptable as well.

- a. Quand j'..... jeune, je dans un café-théâtre. (travailler)
 b. Elle à son amie quand son mari (téléphoner - arriver)
 (*Grammaire - Entraînez-vous*, Exercices 1, Clé International, 1991: 89)

Both forms should therefore be presented to students, together with the discourse concepts necessary to interpret them. These have to do with the speaker's or writer's perspective, whether the information is put in the background or in the foreground, whether it is relevant to the present or not. Students could be told for example about the deictic value of the perfect tense.

The second example is of the classical sentence transformation type, here to practise active versus passive voice.

- a. Les Français apprécient de plus en plus *les plats étrangers*.
 b. Mais le pain accompagne toujours *tous les plats*.
 (*Panorama 3*, Clé International, 1996: 114)

Although there is a context in this case (the whole exercise comprises six sentences about French eating habits), it is incomplete, and important facts are again overlooked. Nothing is said about the change of meaning resulting from the permutation of the noun phrases, or the way intonation can also affect the interpretation. Students should, therefore, be made to compare the two structures and introduced to the notions of theme versus rheme as well as text cohesion. For that, of course, they would need to work on a whole passage, to know what comes before the sentence. (In the second sentence of the exercise, the pronominal form would, in fact, be more suitable, and the generalising function of this form should therefore be underlined).

This leads to another argument in favour of an early introduction of discourse concepts: that concentrating on syntactic, semantic or even socio-cultural factors is not enough, that all the different aspects must be shown to interrelate with each other. Such an integrative approach can, indeed, be the key for bridging the gap between students' declarative and procedural knowledge, again reported in many studies. This is because it gives the opportunity to highlight how grammatical forms interrelate with other elements of the text and the context to create meaning. Students can thus learn to perceive these links and understand the factors which affect the selection of forms and, consequently, be better able to reintegrate them in communication.

Examples of application in French

1) Active versus passive voice

To illustrate the point made above, the following type of exercise can be used as an alternative to practise the use of active versus passive voice (see Bissar and Tschirhart, 2000). First, a clear learning objective should be given,

such as summarising the plot of a film or a book, making appropriate use of active and passive voice.

To begin with, students can be asked to construct sentences putting their elements in the right order so that they follow appropriately from the preceding sentence:

- a. *C'est l'histoire de deux voleurs, un Français et un Belge.*
 commettre - Belge - meurtre
 b. *C'est l'histoire d'un meurtre et de ses conséquences.*
 commettre - Belge - meurtre

For reasons of topic continuity, 'Belge' is more likely to be the subject of the first sentence, giving: 'C'est l'histoire de deux voleurs, un Français et un Belge. Le Belge commet un meurtre.' Whereas in the second case, we would expect the second sentence to start with the topic 'meurtre', and have: 'C'est l'histoire de deux voleurs, un Français et un Belge. Le meurtre est commis par un Belge.' This activity should provoke discussions on the impact of the context on the choice of verb form, but also on the choice of article (*Le Belge commet un meurtre*. (a) versus *Le meurtre est commis par un Belge*. (b)).

For further practice, students can be given a whole text containing some inappropriate use of active and passive voice, decide how the way information is presented can be improved, and make the necessary changes. The text can also be authentic: it can be the students' own materials that they can revise them in the light of what they have learnt.

Finally, as a more productive step, students can write a passage summarising the last film they have seen or book they have read, making appropriate use of the forms practised before.

This type of problem-solving activity, in which the students not only have to manipulate the language but also provide reasons for doing so, taking into account the whole context of discourse, can be more stimulating for learners with different levels of grammatical knowledge, as they do not just rely on this knowledge but use both analytical and text comprehension skills. This is best done in pairs or small groups, so that students can share information and prior knowledge, and in so doing reformulate the theory and articulate explanations, which can help them consolidate their knowledge and even develop pedagogical skills.

2) The case of the definite article

Another illustrative example is the treatment of the definite article. The articles and other determiners, indeed, make a good case for the need to go beyond the frame of the sentence to understand discourse phenomena and adopt an integrative approach. This is because these forms fulfil many functions, under the influence of multidimensional factors. These can be syntactic, such as the presence of another modifier in the noun phrase; semantic, such as the

characteristics of the noun they determine (i.e. abstract or concrete, animate or inanimate, countable or uncountable); and finally and especially pragmatic, namely the referential intentions of the speaker, how they control the organisation and the progression of the discourse, and what they know about the knowledge of their interlocutor and their capacity to record the information.

Although these pragmatic principles of referential accessibility and thematic importance have been found to be universal (see Givón, 1992), it doesn't follow that students are able to use referential markers in a spontaneous manner; of course, since different markers exist not only between different languages, but also within the same language, that can fulfil the same functions. Some degree of instruction in discourse and pragmatic notions is therefore necessary, so that learners don't use markers from their native language or another language they know, if such markers exist, or use different forms indiscriminately.

In practical terms, activities can be developed in which the definite article is considered in relation to other structures that can also be used to fulfil some of its functions, in contexts where different factors come into play. The form can be presented to learners at different stages depending on the complexity of its use, and key discourse concepts introduced when relevant.

As a first step, students can identify the opposition between definite and indefinite articles, with the help of the discourse concepts of 'old' versus 'new' information (which interacts with the opposition between definite and indefinite: see Cook, 1989) and of shared knowledge. The use of articles can later be contrasted with that of possessive and demonstrative adjectives. At a further stage, the use of articles in narrative texts can be studied, and students made to think about their value as cohesive devices used to refer backwards or forward in the text. (For examples of activities, see Bissar and Tschirhart, 2000.)

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn on the benefits of teaching grammar in the context of discourse. First, to check the validity of this approach, a longitudinal study should be carried out, using students who would receive some discourse and pragmatic instruction. This could, for example, consist of studying and practising the use of referential tools, taking into account the accessibility of the referents to the interlocutor, in particular contexts. The students would be tested before and after the course. If the majority improved their performance, it could indicate that pragmatic competence can be acquired in a foreign language. One would also have to check whether this competence can be used in other contexts than the one chosen for the study.

However, the fact remains that students can only benefit from an approach that favours activities involving observation, analysis and deductive skills rather than the assimilation of rules. Indeed, it can be argued that a discourse-based approach better reflects the diversity of cognitive skills used by students with various experiences and learning styles. Perhaps, as Bardovi-Harlig (1999) suggests, 'if learners were taught better grammar, they would get pragmatics for free'.

References

- Bardovi-Harlig, K (1999) Exploring the Interlanguage of Interlanguage Pragmatics: A Research Agenda for Acquisitional Pragmatics, in *Language Learning*, 49, 4.
- Bissar, D and Tschirhart, C (2000) Grammar, consciousness-raising and independent study: a discourse-based approach as applied to French, in Fay, M and Ferney, D (eds) *Current Trends in Modern Languages Provision for Non-Specialist Linguists*, CILT/Anglia Polytechnic University.
- Bourdet, J-F (1992) Pratiquer une grammaire textuelle, in *Le français dans le monde*, 252.
- Cook, G (1989) *Discourse*, OUP.
- Coppieters, R (1987) Competence differences between native and non-native speakers, in *Languages*, 63.
- Dewaele, J-M (1996) Effet de l'intensité de l'instruction formelle sur l'interlangue orale française de locuteurs néerlandophones, in Engel, D and Myles, F (eds) *Teaching Grammar: Perspectives in Higher Education*, AFLS + CILT.
- Edmondson et al. (1984) Learning the pragmatics of discourse: a project report, in *Applied Linguistics*, 5, 2.
- Givón, T (1992) The grammar of referential coherence as mental processing instructions, in *Linguistics*, 30, 1.
- Lambert, M (1997) Temporal reference in story retellings. Comparison between French and English native speakers and French advanced learners of English, in Regan, V (ed) *Current Approaches in Second Language Research*, Dublin.
- Little, D and Singleton, D (1991) Authentic texts, pedagogical grammar and Language Awareness in foreign language learning, in James, C and Garrett, P (eds) *Language Awareness in the Classroom*, Longman.
- McCarthy, M (1991) *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*, CUP.
- Petrovitz, W (1997) The role of context in the presentation of grammar, in *ELT Journal*, 51, 3.

From zero to competence: *ab initio ad astra*

Anna Proudfoot (Oxford Brookes University)

I decided to subtitle this paper *ab initio ad astra* firstly because, being from Oxford, one is expected to talk and write fluent Latin, and, secondly, because I strongly believe that it reflects the steep but meteoric learning trajectory of our *ab initio* Italian students at Oxford Brookes. At Oxford Brookes, Italian is one of the five languages students can study as main language (or second language) on the Languages for Business degree. This is a four year Honours degree course, during which the students carry out two work placements in Italy, one of 3 months in year 2 and one of 6 months in year 4. Most of our LB Italian students have been offered jobs with their placement company after graduating. One is now with Telecom Italia in Rome in charge of marketing for South America, one is working locally with Britain's biggest manufacturer of sailing dinghies, in charge of marketing for Europe, three are working in Genova, another in Trieste, all working for well-known organisations. In the last HEFCE TQA, Italian achieved top scores thanks to a combination of innovative teaching and highly motivated students. My experience in teaching *ab initio* undergraduate students is backed up by my time spent planning language programmes for *ab initio* learners from the world of work, for the language training unit at Oxford Brookes.

In common with all other UK Universities, given the dearth of applicants who have taken A-level Italian at school, we take *ab initio* applicants for Italian and offer them an intensive course. Since not all students realise they can do this before coming, we sometimes have to rely on them changing language choice after they arrive. Often students who have studied French or German all through school are ready for such a change. After the first year, the post-A-level and *ab initio* intakes are taught together.

It's my experience, documented in video and audio tapes of our final year assessments and presentations, that the level reached by these *ab initio* students after 4 years is higher than that of the post-A-level cohort and in this brief paper I investigate some possible reasons.

Possible reasons for higher level of language achieved

I've listed some possible theories as to why the *ab initio* students achieve a higher level of language skills by the end of the course.

Firstly, there are several non-native English speakers who choose Italian: for example, Finnish, Swedish, German, Greek, Brazilian and Chinese. Their language learning skills are already highly developed, with many of them speaking three languages fluently.

Secondly, the vocabulary and structures we teach are those which our students actually need in order to live and work in Italy, so we are able to concentrate on the essential.

Thirdly, we place strong emphasis not only on language skills and study skills, but also on transferable skills and independent learning. The element of practical skills, such as IT, makes it easier for students to adapt to the workplace as soon as they arrive in Italy, allowing them to focus on their language skills during this difficult period of transition, rather than worry about other elements.

Fourthly, the *ab initio* learners, precisely because they make rapid progress, gain a sense of achievement which in turn motivates them to further learning. As concrete indicators of progress, they complete a logbook and/or learning diary each week.

Finally, and leading on to the focus of our discussion here, for English mother tongue students with no formal grammar learning, the functional approach to grammar that we have adopted works best. This is not necessarily the approach that the post-A-level cohort has experienced while learning Italian at school. On our course, the grammar is taught in context and the vocabulary used is that actually needed to live, work and study in Italy.

Grammar in context

The GCSE exam is partly to blame for making us think only in terms of discrete skills. Listening, speaking, writing, reading - how will we ever have time to fit in grammar as well? All those verb tenses! The lecturer faced with the Herculean task of teaching the whole range of Italian grammar to an *ab initio* cohort is apt to set an over-ambitious programme which has the students studying the imperfect subjunctive by the end of term 2. Meanwhile separate oral classes are held to allow the students a chance to say something! But a course which divides language into one hour grammar, one hour oral, half an hour listening and so on, is a course based on a rather narrow idea of how a language works.

Grammar has to have a context - grammar structures are the building blocks of a language, and just as you wouldn't want to live in a house where you could still see the breeze blocks, there wouldn't be much point in just learning the verb form or the noun endings. They need to be 'clothed' with vocabulary. Those with A-level language have varying ranges of vocabulary, according to the syllabus studied. Some areas of vocabulary are more useful than others. Literary terms, for example, would not be a good basis for working in an Italian office. With *ab initio* students we can choose the vocabulary we want to clothe the structures with. The students arrive entirely free of any lexical baggage. We also choose the context into which each grammar point fits. In this we are not constrained by the vocabulary lists prescribed by any language bodies.

The functional approach

Having written four grammar books along functional lines, I'm happy to say that this approach actually works in practice! Forms can be learnt at home - there is little point reciting verbs in class. Our motto in fact might well be '*Learn at home - use in class*'. The focus of my classes is functions not structures. Students might for example spend one session on 'Giving orders' or 'Asking someone to do something' which might well involve the imperative form or even the subjunctive, but might equally well involve a polite request using the conditional, the simple present tense, or a phrase such as '*Le dispiace ... ?*'.

Similar points can be made for verb tenses. Let's take the example of 'Expressing the future' (function) as opposed to 'Learning the future tense' (form). The traditional emphasis on form means that Italian teachers tend to teach the future immediately followed by the conditional, so as to minimise expenditure of energy (the verb stem is the same). But it makes more sense to talk about language points in functional terms. You might want to express intention. You might be referring to *immediate* time or a *distant* future. So while you might need to use the future tense, you could just as well use a simple present tense with an indicator of future time as in '*Domani vado a Roma*'.

Conversely a future tense might not be expressing future function at all, but simply probability, as in English. An example might be '*Sarà già arrivato*' ('*He'll be there by now*').

Another example of function versus form is that of 'Expressing possession' (function) and 'Learning possessive adjectives' (form).

There is little point in students devoting hours to learning the possessives, the different forms of *mio, tuo, suo*, and whether to use the definite article or not, only to be told in the next lesson that Italians don't actually use the possessive very much at all. The English sentence '*I put my socks on*' if translated literally into Italian ('*Metto i miei calzini*') is apt to leave Italians perplexed. Why bother to mention the fact that the socks were yours - why would you want to put on someone else's socks? Italian prefers the indirect reflexive pronoun, which expresses 'on myself', ('*Mi metto i calzini*') to the possessive.

Equal caution needs to be adopted when teaching past tenses: teaching the *passato prossimo* (*perfect*) and *imperfetto* (*imperfect*) in isolation doesn't work. They generally only make sense when viewed together and when considered under the banner of 'aspect' rather than 'chronology'.

Lastly, mood: the rigid rules that govern the use of indicative or subjunctive soon cease to make sense when the student is confronted by contradictory examples. It all depends on the context!

An obvious advantage, therefore, of using the functional approach is that it avoids students getting too hung up on the forms. ('*What if I get the ending wrong? What if I get the verb wrong?*'). Far better that students should get into the habit of learning to express a function, communicating as well as possible, using the structures they know, rather than wait in silence until they achieve 100% accuracy.

So to sum up our approach to teaching grammar:

Firstly, always contextualise. Don't just pile up breeze blocks. And secondly, don't give too many rules - they only get broken and lead to disappointment.

Finally, one of the main reasons that first year students view grammar with horror is because the book they are using often explains it badly or not at all. Those teaching grammar - and indeed those writing textbooks - are not always aware of new research in language teaching, and continue to teach grammar in the same way their own teachers did: articles first, verbs second, and imperfect subjunctive as the cherry on the cake. As long as this situation continues, we are unlikely to see any progress in the teaching and learning of grammar and the sense of achievement that should go with both.

Recent grammar publications:

Proudfoot, Anna and Cardo, Francesco (1997) *Modern Italian Grammar: a practical guide*. London: Routledge.

Proudfoot, Anna (1999) *Modern Italian Grammar Workbook*. London: Routledge.

Proudfoot, Anna (2000) *Italian Grammar: a new approach (Teach Yourself series)*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

"I'm aware of a mismatch between the perception of grammar in teachers in applied linguistics for instance and those within the field of language teaching in Higher Education, and I think that came through in some of the discussions."

Richard Aplin, University of Leicester School of Education

What Grammar is actually for

Paul Tench (Centre for Language and Communication, Cardiff University)

A first year course at Cardiff University entitled *Language in Communication* attracts about 175 students each year. Of them, about 50 will go on to take a BA degree course with a clear language orientation with courses in phonology, syntax, lexis, discourse, sociolinguistics and a variety of applications of linguistics; about 60 will take a BA degree course in Communication with a focus on non-linguistic communication as well as a variety of language-based communication topics, like gender, persuasion, the media, etc; and the remainder (the largest group!) take the course as a 'subsidiary' subject as a result of the present University of Wales policy of offering a 'broadening' programme in the first year. This remainder include students of modern languages, music, history, English literature, etc. - the typical range of subjects in the Humanities. About 25 will have taken A level *English Language*, and about 30 an A level in another language; these will have a good, basic, grasp of linguistic terminology, including grammatical terms like *noun*, *verb*, *subject*, *indirect object*, *passive*, etc, but about 120 will have little, or no, idea at all.

Language in Communication is a 'double' module, with 20 lectures and 5 seminars (12 groups of 14/15) within a single semester, with 50% coursework (which involves the students in recording their own spontaneous speech, transcribing a portion, analyzing conversation management, and a small task of grammatical analysis) and 50% written exam of mainly short-answer questions. The challenge is to devise a programme that will appeal to the majority with little linguistics background and yet provide something new and interesting to those who have a relatively good background. The first two lectures are an introduction to salient characteristics of the phenomenon we call language ('Ten things you ought to know about language'), which are followed by a short series on lexical semantics ('Ten things we all know about words') and the written and spoken forms of words. Then come about seven or eight lectures on grammar, which are followed up by an introduction to pragmatics.

The focus throughout is on meaning rather than form. The students are native speakers of English or advanced non-native speakers (IELTS 6.5). There is no traditional parsing of text, nor advice on improving language skills. The basic questions are: what is language? and what is language for? No distinction is made between standard forms and non-standard; so '*You ain't seen nothing yet!*' is treated as having meaning just as any standard form (although the sociolinguistics of it is dealt with elsewhere in the programme). Words are introduced as (linguistic) signs that represent single categories in the conceptualization of our experience of life, and a few illustrations are given of how different languages 'slice up' that experience in different ways to those of English.

Then comes grammar! And there is a visible shudder throughout the audience!

But I ask the same two questions: what is grammar? (the shaping, i.e. morphology, and the sequencing, i.e. syntax, of words in phrases, clauses and sentences) and what is grammar for? Or, why is there grammar at all in the world? Why does every single language in the world have it? It is interesting to see what answers they themselves give, which reveals their prejudices about correctness, clarity and social acceptability. But they have to concede that '*You ain't seen nothing yet!*' has clear meaning and is socially acceptable in context, George W Bush having just made such a pronouncement in the aftermath of the USA's voting controversy.

My primary objective was to present the experiential function of grammar, and secondarily the textual and interpersonal functions (Halliday, 1985/1994); the interpersonal function at the level of clause types (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamative) provides a means of introducing pragmatics (statements, questions, commands, exclamations, and a host of other speech acts) and thus, eventually, that level of meaning too. (Students who are not familiar or confident with traditional grammatical terminology are recommended to study Crystal (1996) by themselves!).

My starting point was that just as words have meaning - a notion that no one disputes - grammar too has meaning - a notion that is much less familiar; and not just the meaning related to morphology (plurality, tenses, comparison) but an order of meaning related to syntax. Whereas words represent the categorization of our experiences of life in terms of entities: things, qualities, states, actions, and relationships like time, manner and place, syntax represents the categorization of our experience of life in terms of happenings: who does what? and to whom (or what), and why, how, where, when?

Bonfire night presents a useful illustration. Pretending to read the instructions on a firework - and then pretending to do it - illustrates the language representing a happening: *Place the firework on a firm surface, light the blue touch paper, and retire.* There are 'processes' (placing, lighting, retiring) involved, 'participants' (who does the placing; what gets placed, etc), and circumstances (in this case, a location). There were three different kinds of processes: *placing* requires an actor (or agent), a goal (or affected), i.e. the firework, and a circumstance of location - all three 'participants' are obligatory in our (English) notion of what happens in *placing*. *Lighting* requires an actor and a goal, but does not require the specification of a circumstance; *retiring* requires an

actor but not a goal, and again circumstances are optional. This illustration gives me the opportunity of introducing the term 'transitivity', with the idea of an action 'passing' from one participant 'across' to another, or not, as the case may be. Certain processes are transitive, and others are not; thus the concept of transitivity is related to the way we perceive different kinds of happenings, and thus constitutes a kind of meaning that can be compared with the kind of meaning associated with words. Transit vans and transit lounges help to illustrate the concept of 'passing from one thing to another'.

Babies provide another useful illustration, this time of intransitivity - the kind of activity they engage in that does not involve another participant. What do they do? They sleep, wake up, smile, chuckle, shout, cry, lie in their cot, look, stare - all intransitive processes that are primarily realized as intransitive verbs.

Giving and sending provide illustrations of ditransitive processes, and weather expressions illustrate processes which in English are perceived as not involving any participant; who or what does the it refer to in *it's raining/snowing/blowing a gale*? Here is also an opportunity to discuss cultural divergences in perception: this is how we represent *raining* in English, but in a dialect of Chinese, it is represented by the equivalent of 'the sky is dropping water' (Halliday 1985: 102).

Once the concept of transitivity is grasped, the passive construction can be explained. Although I cannot escape referring to form - and, in any case, they all know how to 'form passives' - it is the function of the passive that I emphasize. Why do we do it? Why do we have the option of expressing an event in quite radically different ways? The two main answers involve the textual function and the choice of not specifying the actor of a transitive process. If someone has been talking about John, it would be natural to say, for example:

He's painted the wall.

but if the talk has been about the wall, the alternative is more natural:

The wall's been painted (by John).

In other words, the choice reflects the local orientation of the message, at a particular point in the text (Martin et al 1997:21).

Why should we ever want to avoid specifying the actor of a process? Perhaps the actor is already known or, in a given culture, obvious (e.g. *I was brought up in Somerset*); or the identity of the actor may be irrelevant or unknown (e.g. *He was killed in the war*), or possibly deliberately treated as if unknown (e.g. *Oh dear, the jug's been broken*, when knowing full well who broke it!). An advert for AA Car Data Check was helpful: a man is holding a placard which says:

**I am angry and upset
I was sold a stolen car
It was impounded
I lost the car**

Why the passives? The seller is now irrelevant; the thief who stole the car is unknown; it is obvious therefore now who upset him; and we all know that it is the police who impound stolen cars. Such an illustration also helps to separate the ideas of grammatical 'subject' and (semantic) 'actor'.

Circumstances are my third topic in grammar - and their realization as adverbs, adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses. When we talk about happenings, we often need to refer to their relative timing, location, manner (quality; means, etc.), causes, conditions, accompaniment (e.g. *together, with/without me; by myself*), addition (e.g. *too, also; as well as me; nor do I*), substitution (e.g. *instead; in place of; instead of going home*), exception (e.g. *otherwise, else; except for; bar the kitchen sink*), matter (e.g. *about food; advise someone of their rights*), role (e.g. *as a friend; for a youngster*) and viewpoint (e.g. *technically; morally; in my opinion, according to experts*). In certain processes like *putting*, a circumstance is obligatory and thus acts as a participant of the process. With circumstances I complete my review of the semantic/experiential components of a clause/sentence.

I then deal with types of processes other than 'action' (material) processes. *Mental* processes (like *seeing, liking, knowing*) operate with different syntactical characteristics: a progressive form is untypical; a *that* clause is a typical complement; it does not answer the question 'What does x do/What is x doing?' (see Halliday 1985: 108-11 for a full discussion). *Verbal* processes act as a cross between material and mental; *relational* processes indicate a state of affairs, how things 'happen' to be; and *existential* processes account for the *there is/are* type of states.

Next comes a warning of the polysemy of verbs in terms of processes. Seeing, for instance, is assumed at first to represent a mental process of sensation/perception:

**Do you see those three trees on the top of the hill?
(not * are you seeing)**

But there are other kinds of *seeing*, as in the mental process of cognition:

I see that they have decided to chop them down

and a material/action process:

I am seeing the councillors about it tomorrow

which all display different syntactic components. I produce a sample list of such 'tricky' verbs!

I feel then, I have to address the issue of mismatching

between process types and linguistic form, such as intransitive processes being realized via transitive forms like *I had a long hot bath*, and transitive processes via intransitive forms like *I washed, shaved and dressed*. The first I explain as an English preference for ways of indicating the quality of certain intransitive processes; we could not say anything like **I bathed hotly for long*; the second as an assumption in English-language culture that if the 'goal' of certain transitive processes is covert it indicates that the goal is identical to the actor:

Such explanations lead to a consideration of cross-linguistic mismatches. An identical happening can be realized in different ways in different languages; *washing* is always transitive in French and German, but not in English - we do not feel the necessity of using reflexive pronouns. Welsh does not have a separate form for indicating an existential process, as English, French (*il y a*) and German (*es gibt*). Welsh and Spanish have two verbs for *being*; Arabic has no copula. Atmospheric processes (*it is raining*) vary quite considerably. French and German distinguish movement processes in a way that English does not, with *être/sein* forms in the perfective tenses. German has a range of 'social' processes which require not a goal, but a beneficiary (i.e. an indirect object), e.g. *helfen, dienen, danken, trauen*.

I do not have time to cover modals, phase, causation, or phrasal verbs with non-literal meaning (e.g. *step in* = 'intervene'; etc.) if I wish also to introduce the textual and interpersonal functions as a prelude to an introduction to pragmatics. The three functions of grammar are investigated in three genres: recipes, informal conversation and academic writing. The intention is to present something that is interesting and new to the informed and the uninformed, and the results in coursework and examination have been very encouraging.

References/Bibliography

- Bloor, T & Bloor, M (1995) *The Functional Analysis of English* London: Arnold.
 Crystal, D (1996) *Rediscover Grammar* rev. ed. Harlow: Longman.
 Eggins, S (1994), *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* London: Pinter.
 Halliday, M A K (1985/1994) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold Leech.
 G & Svartvik, J (1994) *A Communicative Grammar of English* 2nd ed Harlow: Longman.
 Lock, G (1996) *Functional English Grammar*. Cambridge: CUP.
 Martin, J R, Matthiessen, C M I M & Painter, C (1996) *Working with Functional Grammar* London: Arnold.
 Thompson, G (1996) *Introducing Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.

"The mix of more traditional approaches to grammar and other, perhaps more practically-based views was really helpful - it reminded me (again) of the HE split between linguistics and language teaching; and the emphasis on the need for more research (and resultant status) I thought was highly relevant. It was also good to have Nuffield and QCA colleagues there."

Paul Harvey, English Language Centre, University of Exeter

Implications of the developments in the National Curriculum for MFL and GCSE specifications

Emma Marsden (PhD student and MFL teacher, University of Southampton)

This article gives the perspective of a secondary MFL teacher / PhD student on a selection of the issues discussed during the Teaching Grammar in HE Seminar. In particular, two morning sessions emphasised that important changes at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 were likely to have significant effects on future cohorts arriving in HEIs. This article reviews, in more detail, some of the changes in MFL at Key Stages (KS) 3 and 4, providing some support for the claims that there have, indeed, been some welcome developments. The discussion also highlights areas in which caution is needed when interpreting the claims and makes some suggestions about future directions in grammar pedagogy research.

Chris Maynard's presentation aimed to highlight, amongst other things, that the recent changes to the National Curriculum (NC) and GCSEs have improved the guidance to teachers regarding grammar pedagogy¹. I will adopt Dick Hudson's 'why, what, when, and how' structure, to discuss the information secondary school teachers receive.

Why?

The 1999 MFL NC now offers some indication of the position taken regarding the interface between knowledge about language and the ability to use language. 'During Key Stage 3 . . . pupils become familiar

with the sounds, written form and grammar of the language, and use this knowledge with increasing confidence and competence to express themselves in role plays, conversation and writing'. In addition, it is suggested that 'identifying the grammatical function of unfamiliar words' (Programme of Study, 3b) will help learners to 'interpret meaning'. These are welcome additions to the scant attention previously paid to this issue. I counted approximately 9 potential reasons to learn grammar; out of a total of 31 items given in the Programme of Study (PoS), ranging from 'pupils should be taught how to ask and answer questions' (2c) to 'using the target language creatively and effectively' (5f). Some of these were already in the NC but some are additions or refinements.

What?

The claim that information has increased regarding what grammar to teach is certainly true when one considers the non-statutory guidance now published in the KS 3 Schemes of Work (SoW). The SoW give a helpful indication of what is thought to be good practice for systematically incorporating language structure into a functional syllabus. Perhaps more important than this is that it has been recognised and recommended that grammar should feature. Of course, it would be of great interest to know how many schools are actually using these schemes of work (an admittedly small sample would suggest that the schemes are used very little). Nevertheless, the QCA's work provides a solid, practical and much needed foundation, which can be refined as and when the theoretical and empirical evidence bases improve and become more widely acknowledged.

The statutory guidance, however, found in the PoS in the NC, still gives no clear guidance to teachers about the actual grammar that is needed, beyond 'Pupils should be taught the grammar of the target language and how to apply it' (PoS, 1,b, DfEE 1999)². This constitutes about 3% of the total PoS, which mainly ensures that pupils have exposure to a variety of contexts, media and strategies of learning a language. In addition, it is debatable whether the generic level descriptions, designed to refer to all MFLs, really encourage teachers to increase the focus on specific grammatical issues. Several colleagues commented during the Grammar Seminar Day that if one looked at the level descriptors, without knowing who they are intended for, that they could be mistaken for measures of

progress at A level or undergraduate level, rather than KS 3. To illustrate, 'Although there may be some mistakes, [learners] make themselves understood with little or no difficulty' (speaking, level 5). An average 13/14-year old is expected to attain Level 5/6 after approximately 78 hours of lessons³. Perhaps the inclusion of some specific linguistic structures, beyond the published exemplars of pupils' work, would help not only teachers, but also the publishers who aim to incorporate the most recent version of the National Curriculum. As Chris Maynard commented, there is considerable reliance on textbooks in schools.

Chris Maynard also made it clear that the GCSE specifications are now obliged to contain a list of grammatical structures, prescribed by QCA, which could be included in the examinations. To my knowledge, most of the major examination boards already included a similar, wide-ranging list of possible structures - the difficulties arise in ensuring that a representative sample is included in the exam papers (Page, B., personal communication). Ample anecdotal evidence, personal experience and empirical studies (Chambers & Richards 1993) show that, as Chris Maynard pointed out, there is considerable 'backwash' from these exams. In fact, at a training day for teachers regarding the new GCSE syllabus⁴ one of the awarding bodies' representatives advised attendees to start teaching the GCSE content and using their assessment criteria at KS 3. Teaching priorities tend to lie in what will be tested in the exams, even if this does not accurately reflect the linguistic structures listed in the Specifications. Thus individual teachers' craft theories which will dictate whether the learners are introduced to those structures unlikely to appear in the exams. A useful study, which as far as I know has not yet been carried out, would be to compare the linguistic content of the GCSE exams, with the Specifications and teachers' perceptions of the linguistic structures required and taught at GCSE.

It was emphasized to those at the Grammar Seminar that 20% of the total GCSE grade will now be allocated to 'knowledge and accurate application of the grammar and structures'. It will be interesting to see whether this will make a great deal of difference to the teaching and assessment. Marks previously assigned for accuracy alone were approximately 12.5% (at least 25% of speaking and

Ratio of marks⁵ allocated to 'Communication' : 'Quality of language & accuracy' in oral and writing in the new GCSE 2003 examinations.

	AQA*		OCR		Edexcel	
	Comm	QL & A**	Comm	QL & A	Comm	QL & A
<i>Found. Oral</i> ⁶	55	45	60	40	67	33
<i>High. Oral</i>	55	45	60	40	67	33
<i>Found. Writ.</i>	52	48	60	40	60	40
<i>High. Writ.</i>	40	60	60	40	50	50

*the AQA is the only board which has a 'spontaneity and fluency' criteria. As it is not clear which category this falls into, I have shared it out equally between the 'communication' and the 'quality of language & accuracy' categories.

**this label varies slightly from body to body, though the essential meaning is the same.

writing assessment was generally awarded for accuracy), not including the 'language use' type categories which rewarded variety and complexity of structure. The table (on page 20) illustrates how the awarding bodies (AQA, Edexcel and OCR 2000) will represent the 20% 'knowledge and accurate application of the grammar and structures'. The awarding bodies all state that none of the 20% awarded for 'knowledge and accurate application of the grammar and structures' will be allocated in the reading and listening skills.

These categories actually seem to carry almost identical proportions to the current examinations. For example, in 1998 the NEAB awarded a total of 18 marks for 'Communication' and 12 for 'Accuracy' and 'Quality of Language' at foundation writing.

The presentation of the exam question does appear to have changed slightly. One awarding body will have a section in foundation writing based around a traditional verb paradigm activity, where learners have to adapt the given infinitive to fit the gap. Another board had a similar activity where learners were prompted by pictures to provide accurate forms (verbs, prepositions, determiners).

Messages regarding the extent of the changes in the GCSE specifications seem mixed, depending on the target audience. The QCA 'Language World' conference abstract and the presentations given by all three exam boards at a 'New GCSE training day' in Bristol, intended mainly for teachers (potentially bringing concerns that their working lives were about to be subjected to another major overhaul?), suggested that the changes were not profound. The Grammar Seminar presentations seemed to offer reassurance to HE that there had been significant changes.

When?

The NC Attainment target level descriptors still offer some interesting interpretations of when learners are expected to produce and understand particular grammatical structures. For example, it is usually assumed that learners may be able to understand past or future references earlier and at a more complex level than their ability to produce them accurately (given the fact that lexical temporal references are believed to facilitate processing at a semantic level, Swain & Lapkin 1995). However, the level descriptors maintain that these capabilities will occur at level 5 across all skill areas. Is this an implicit acknowledgement and expectation that learners will perform at higher levels in the receptive skills?

One of the major changes that seems to have been welcomed by teachers (based solely on anecdotal evidence) is that the ability to 'refer to recent experiences and future plans', in all four skill areas at level 5, has now been changed to 'refer to recent experiences *or* future plans' [my italics]. The ability to do *both* has now been put up to level 6. Of course, this could be helpful if this

apparent 'linguistic milestone' was causing the SATs results from MFLs, reported home at the end of KS 3, to appear one or two levels 'behind' other subjects that have a head start at primary school. In fact, it is possible for 11-year olds to reproduce a few lexical phrases (*je suis allé, j'ai regardé* or *je vais aller*), making it possible to reach level 5 or 6, so long as it is recognised that this does not indicate that learners have 'acquired' the perfect tense. The lack of clarity in the guidance causes one to wonder whether using the present or conditional (*je voudrais* would be an obvious possibility) would be counted as 'referring to future events'. Or is this an indirect way of stating that learners must demonstrate morphosyntactic manipulation of verbs to produce examples of the future simple tense?

In actual fact the level descriptors do not seem to have changed in any fundamental way. For example, they still imply that second language acquisition follows a route where progression can be measured by the length of the conversations (in fact, verbless communication can go on for hours!). The levels also suggest a uni-directional improvement in accuracy. In fact, we see that learners can accurately imitate highly complex structures very early on but then 'accuracy' actually decreases as they begin to manipulate structures creatively (Myles, Mitchell & Hooper, 1999). Are we encouraging learners to take control of their language if we insist on accuracy when they are making their first tentative steps towards manipulating foreign language structures that they cannot be expected to create accurately? This question seems relevant whether we believe that SLA is an unconscious, language specific process or that it is constrained by general cognitive processing limitations. For example, should we really consider **allerai* or **j'ai allé* as wrong for this stage of learners or can this kind of 'quality error' (it is a step on from **je aller*) be considered evidence that the learner has reached a particular stage of development? The task may be to investigate, and then make clear to policy-makers, teachers and learners, the developmental routes that *can* be expected, and whether, and if so how, it is possible to speed them up.

How?

Whether to use target language or English to teach grammar has been a problematic issue, as teachers tend to feel that the use of English is necessary to teach grammar (Mitchell, 1988), yet the official line encouraged the target language as the main medium of instruction. Although the empirical investigations into when, why and how to use the LI in classrooms is still in need of development (Macaro, 2001), the acknowledgement, albeit non-statutory, that teachers may feel it more effective to use LI 'when discussing a grammar point or when comparing English and the target language', is welcome.

As already noted, the non-statutory Schemes of Work for KS3 constitute a significant step forward by suggesting activities, which the wide variety of learners will find

motivating, that incorporate linguistic structure into a functional syllabus. However, the fact remains that we need a set of principled questions to approach this highly debated issue, as put forward in Dick Hudson's presentation. As recommended, Norris & Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis of studies investigating a focus-on-form has been very helpful in setting out where the field is in terms of investigating grammar pedagogy.

Perhaps even more important than the finding that explicit means of focussing on grammar are more effective than implicit means, is the commentary regarding the methodological rigour and increased consensus needed in this area. Norris and Ortega's trawl of studies found 250 that were potentially relevant but only 77 of these reached their standards of rigour and clarity in order to be included in the final synthesis. They make several useful recommendations. For example, the reporting of all the necessary statistics, including an effect size; the importance of having a pre, post and delayed post tests; the need for consensus regarding the amount of time required between post test and delayed post test; the necessity for at least a comparison group, if not a true control group and the importance of describing the developmental stage of the learners rather than simply reporting the stage reached within the institution. In addition, Norris & Ortega's meta-analysis found a lack of investigations carried out in secondary school contexts (non-immersion).

The authors also suggest that this area of linguistic enquiry may be prone to a bias towards publishing findings which are statistically significant, pointing out that this can give an inaccurate impression of the state of cumulative knowledge (i.e. that form-focussed instruction is more effective than it is in reality). After informal enquiry, I get the impression that other fields (psychology, chemistry and engineering) frequently publish results that disprove aspects of the proposed theory, compared to the tendency in grammar pedagogy studies to provide evidence that supports the proposed theory.

Hudson also reminded us that there are many (e.g. Truscott 1998) who find that explicit focus on form does not have any effect on learners' ability to use the language during unplanned production. However, even Truscott offers possible avenues for investigation - perhaps a heightened metalinguistic awareness can compensate where 'true language acquisition' is not yet developed, or perhaps learners' ability to auto-correct means that they provide better input for themselves which could induce unconscious linguistic processes.

A Final Thought

Dick Hudson aimed to get HEIs thinking about the changes that were coming through the primary and secondary sectors, providing a clear timetable of when the new cohorts would be arriving. I think that these thoughts are also of immediate relevance to the secondary sector. Before the cohorts reach HE, is the

secondary sector building on any progress made by the National Literacy Strategy? It is important to document whether the NLS is having an impact on MFL teaching and learning at secondary level, and if so, what the nature and potential of that impact is.

References

- AQA (2000) *Introduction to the Revised GCSE Specifications for First Examination in 2003*.
- Chambers, F. & Richards, R. (1993) 'Oral assessment: the views of language teachers' *Language Learning Journal* No. 7.
- DfEE (1999) *Modern Foreign Languages: The National Curriculum for England* www.nc.uk.net.
- Edexcel (2000) *Edexcel GCSE in French: Specification*
- Macaro, E. (2001) 'Using the target language: reviewing the issues', *Links*, 23, pp6-7.
- Mitchell, R. (1988) *Communicative Language Teaching in Practice* CILT.
- Myles, F., Mitchell, R. & Hooper, J. (1999) 'Interrogative chunks in French L2: a basis for creative construction' *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* v21, pp49-80.
- NEAB (1998) *Syllabus for GCSE French*
- Norris, J. & Ortega, L. (2000) 'Effectiveness of L2 instruction: a research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis' *Language Learning* v50, 3, pp417-528.
- OCR (2000) *GCSE French Specimen Assessment Materials*.
- Page, E. (1999) 'An investigation into the interlanguage of learners of French as a foreign language in a classroom context' Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Southampton.
- QCA (2000) *GCSE Criteria for Modern Foreign Languages*.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1995) 'Problems in output and the cognitive process they generate: a step towards second language learning' *Applied Linguistics* v16, 3, pp371-391.
- Truscott, J. (1998) 'Noticing in second language acquisition: a critical review' *Second Language Research* v14, 2, pp103-135.

Footnotes

1. It is worth acknowledging that these changes have improved some issues of reliability in the GCSE exams, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.
2. 3b also suggests, as a non-statutory example, 'pupils should be taught how to use the context and other clues to interpret meaning' [for example, by identifying the grammatical function of unfamiliar words].
3. If they have 2 hours a week on one language.
4. Now referred to as 'specification'.
5. The figures are shown as a percentage of marks for that skill area, to facilitate cross-body comparison.
6. For candidates obtaining a maximum of grade C.
7. Why only 'recent'? It is possible that this may encourage teachers and learners to think of tense as fitting in somewhere on a 'time continuum' (as found in Page, 1999), rather than the use of tense depending on the relative time of events.

Grammar Supplement: Useful links

National Literacy Strategy

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/literacy>

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

<http://www.qca.org.uk/>

Dick Hudson's pages

<http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/home.htm>

Subject Centre Grammar Pages

<http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/lings/linggrammar.html>

And finally...

...the Teaching Grammar event attracted a large audience and a fair number of requests, from those unable to attend, for follow-up activities (hence this supplement and the web pages). However, in order to maintain the momentum, the Subject Centre needs your support and participation in the form of comments, ideas and news. We have set up a discussion list called Learning which we invite you to join and which we are keen to see become more actively used to share thoughts and ideas on this topic. In addition, we would like to hear from you regarding your own practice in the area of grammar teaching which might include comments (such as those quoted in this supplement), ideas for teaching strategies, sample materials from your own teaching, suggestions for collaborative activities. We are planning to establish a Resource Area on the Subject Centre website which will include a database of teaching materials that colleagues are willing to share which will be either held locally (for copyright or property rights reasons) or will be downloadable from our website (where they have been produced by collaborative projects or are copyright free). More information on this will shortly be available on our website. Last, but by no means least, if you have any responses to the material in this supplement we would like to hear from you.

To submit your comments to the Subject Centre contact:

To join Learning send a message containing the request **joinLearning** to:

To find out more about our forthcoming events visit our website:

adickens@soton.ac.uk.

j.bartle@selc.hull.ac.uk

www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk