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**Structured Monitoring of Second Order Errors:
Focus on Writing Accuracy of 2nd year Advanced level Students
of French.**

Submitted by

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BA(Hons), Monash University.

A thesis submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in
French studies.

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February, 2002

ERRATA

- p 10 last line: "Virgil and Ovid" for "Virgile and Ovide"
- p 12 line 3: "Les Femmes Savantes" for "Femmes Savantes"
- p 14 line 26: "is that" for "is that that"
- p 33 line 7: "fewer" for "less"
- p 35 line 6: "our practical goal" for "out practical goal"
- p 40 para 3 second sentence: "IL" for "IT"
- p 43 para 3 second sentence: "*particulié*" for "*particulier*"
- p 45 para 1 last sentence: "*particulié*" for "*particulier*"
- p 49 section 3.7.2: "thirty-six" for thirty six
- p 64 para 2 second sentence: "progress more slowly" for "progress slower"
- p 72 para 2 third sentence: "gestalt" for "geschalt"
- p 77 para 2 second sentence: "Chapter 5" for "Chapter 4"
- p 78 first line: "than the first" for "then the first"
- p 94 para 1 last line: "is exposure" for "in exposure"
- p 94 para 3 second line: "position. It..." for "position It..."
- p 99 para 3 second sentence: "Eliza" for "Elisa"
- p 107 para 3 second sentence: "none of the four" for "neither of the four"
- p 120 line 4: "they retrieve" for "it retrieves"
- p 124 line 9: "*fascisme*" for "*fachisme*"
- p 125 para 2 second sentence: "This has..." for "This have..."
- p 131 para 2 last sentence: "an 'accuracy first'" for "a 'accuracy first'"
- p 140 para 2 second last sentence: "must be incidental" for "must incidental"
- p 143 para 2 line 7: "thereby" for "whereby"
- p 148 para 4 first line: "basing his study" for "basing"
- p 153 line 14: "stand up to inspection" for "stand to inspection"
- p 153 para 2 second sentence: "Lalande's" for "Laland's"
- p 157 line 8: "ensure" for "insure"
- p 167 Table 3: the empty box should contain "A".

- p 168 first line: "Ch" for "CH"
- p 168 para 2 second sentence: "interpretative" for "interpretive"
- p 169 line 4: "expressions" for "utterances"
- p 169 para 2 line 14: "fewer" for "less"
- p 179 para 1 last line: "proportion of the..." for "proportion of..."
- p 180 second last line: "apply" for "aply"
- p 184 para 1 line 5: "Mauritian" for "Maurician"
- p 185 para 2 line 3: "followed by" for "following by"
- p 186 para 2 line 4: "[ism]" for "[izm]"
- p 191 first line: "vertical" for "red"
- p 203 line 8: "very" for "most"
- p 208 para 2 line 10: "processing" for "processed"
- p 209 para 2 line 2: "our fifth chapter" for "our fourth chapter"

ADDENDUM

- p 3 line 7: delete "responsibility" and read "validity and general academic standard..."
- p 7 line 17: to the end of the sentence add "of this attitude:"
- p 166 last line, incomplete sentence: add "word, one correct the other(s) incorrect, could be found in the same composition. In these cases all non-repeated deviations were counted as errors."
- p 197-8 Table 12: Comment: It was necessary to present the ratios up to the tenth decimal, otherwise the percentages generated on the basis of this data would appear inconsistent with the data; e.g 50% of 1.56 = 0.78, while 50% of 2 = 1.

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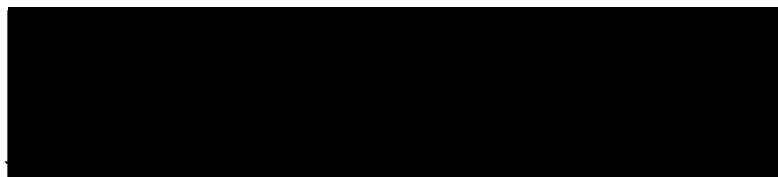
I. Summary.

This thesis deals with the problem of morphosyntactic accuracy in the writing of second year advanced level university students of French as a foreign language. The research undertaken here can be summarised as follows: firstly, it was necessary to establish the current level of writing accuracy exhibited by students. A detailed error analysis of 212 300-word examination compositions showed that, on average, students made close to ten errors per hundred words in morphology and syntax (Mogilevski and Burston 1999). Secondly, an investigation of the sociopragmatic value attached to writing accuracy in contemporary French society was carried out in order to see whether low morphosyntactic accuracy represents a serious problem. This being the case, it was necessary to find causes of the problem and means of dealing with it. An investigation of the causes entailed a discussion of the relevant issues in Second Language Acquisition Theory, including the Principles of Processing Instruction (VanPatten 1996), Attention and Awareness (Schmidt 1990, 1995, Tomlin and Villa 1994, Robinson 1996), Variability Theories (Ellis 1985, 1990, 1994, 1997, Tarone 1983, 1988) and the Monitor Theory (Krashen 1982 *et passim*). It was claimed that a significant proportion of error categories represent fragile linguistic features, that are not acquired despite considerable exposure and practice. This happens because these features are not semantically significant, and do not affect the exchange of meaningful messages, therefore learners do not allocate sufficient attentional resources to their acquisition. It was concluded that the key to the problem is not further exposure and practice, but rather finding the means of making learners focus on the fragile features. A search for the best way of doing so involved a discussion of *focus on form* as a theoretical concept and of various means of its practical application proposed in recent literature (Long 1991, Long and Robinson 1998, Doughty and Williams 1998, Schmidt 1995, Ellis 2001). Several teaching and learning strategies have been devised, targeting specific error categories. They were tested on a large body of students in 1999 and 2000 and found efficient, with a statistically significant improvement in morphosyntactic accuracy. These results call for more theoretical and action research in this direction, applied to the teaching of other languages as well as French.

II. Statement.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the reward of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Melbourne, 02 February 2002.

A large black rectangular box used to redact the signature.

Signature

Eugene Mobilevski

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Introduction.

The starting point.

The origin of this work can be traced back to an otherwise unremarkable day somewhere in the middle of the second semester 1996 when, as an Honours student, I was waiting for my supervisor in her office. Out of pure curiosity, I glanced at a paper lying on her table and was surprised to see nearly as much writing in red ink as in blue. Upon further investigation, the paper proved to be a second-year advanced level student's composition on some routine subject. It was obvious that the exercise was language- rather than content-based. Having nothing else to do, I counted the number of markings in red ink and came up with the total of fifty two mistakes. Incredulous, I counted again, with the same results, and verified the course code to confirm that the student indeed belonged to the advanced stream of the second-year French language course.

I would have dismissed this case as an exception, but soon afterwards, while assessing a computer French grammar checker, I was given a batch of some forty authentic student essays to be fed to the computer. It was difficult not to be overcome by pity towards the poor machine as it choked on mistakes at an average rate of one per ten words. It is noteworthy that the compositions were written by students of two different universities, thus negating the hypothesis of a singular incompetence displayed by the staff or the students of either of these teaching institutions. From then on, my academic interest was fuelled by the following questions: firstly, should this exceedingly poor display of writing skills be considered a serious problem? Secondly, what caused this proliferation of mistakes? Finally, what can be done to reduce the error rate? These questions might seem naive at first glance, but the reader will discover, as I did, that they involve a number of the most important theoretical issues in the field of second language learning / acquisition and that it takes years of practical research and experimentation to reach the first glimmerings of an answer.

Description of the research approach.

Just as we can distinguish between applied linguistics and linguistics applied, so we can also distinguish applied SLA and SLA applied. In the case of the latter, an attempt is made to apply SLA research and theory to language pedagogy. This is what many SLA researchers have expressed doubt about doing, advising caution. In the case of applied SLA, however, an attempt is made to examine the relevance of SLA in educational terms: it requires the SLA researcher to have knowledge of the theory and practice of both SLA and language pedagogy. Only when SLA researchers engage in applied SLA do they function as applied linguists.

(Ellis 1997: 31).

The research described in this thesis represents an attempt to evaluate a particular problem observed in the linguistic behavior of advanced French language students, namely, a high rate of surface level morphosyntactic imprecision. It also aims to propose and justify teaching strategies that would be effective in dealing with this difficulty. Following Ellis's suggestion, and given that pragmatic teaching considerations represent the primary focus of this research, SLA concepts and theories will be examined for their relevance to the problem at hand. In so doing, one in particular will be selected for its demonstrated usefulness in dealing with the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' writing.

The research reported in this thesis was conducted in the classroom, pursuing pedagogical goals relevant to the educational expectations of a particular teaching institution. The proposed instructional treatment was integrated into a language course curriculum, and all the testing was undertaken by student subjects as part of the normal examination process. Therefore, this pedagogical and academic activity can be classified as action research.

As Ellis points out (Ellis 1997:23-24), there are three types of action research: *technical, practical, and critical*. *Technical action research* takes place when researchers work in collaboration with teachers to evaluate some aspect of some theory. *Practical action research* (Carr and Kemmis 1986, Hopkins 1985) occurs when teachers do research in their own classrooms in view of monitoring and improving local practices. When engaging in this kind of research, teachers are not expected to produce generalizable conclusions, nor should they articulate theoretical implications of their findings (Crookes 1993). Finally, there is *critical action*.

research, where teachers must take the responsibility both for doing research and for discussing it, taking into account the underlying social causes of the local problems.

The research undertaken in this thesis aims to solve a local problem, yet looks for guidance in the field of SLA theory. Moreover, its conclusions are expected to be relevant to the concerns of applied linguists and teachers alike. Therefore it can be classified as *critical action research*. This means that the researcher assumes full responsibility for the validity, responsibility and general academic standard of the research and expects the conclusions to be generalizable in a wider context of SLA theory and its applications.

Action research is a cyclic activity (Carr and Kemmis 1986, Ellis 1997): planning, or identification of the problem, is followed by action that provides material for reflection, that may, in turn, result in further planning, and so forth. As Ellis points out (1997:23), planning is the most problematic part of the cycle: while in theory teachers must plan their actions on the basis of their practical experience, in practice they are more likely to address questions raised in the SLA literature. The present research is motivated by an observation of students' linguistic behavior that was considered a local pedagogical concern. The problem was evaluated through action that combined teaching and empirical research (Mogilevski and Burston 1999), and led to a theoretically informed reflection that resulted in further action.

Thesis outline.

The first chapter of the thesis provides an examination of the social and pragmatic importance accorded in the French society to the ability to comply with the language norm, most particularly with regard to morphosyntactic accuracy. It presents an overview of the historical roots of the current emphasis on standard language accuracy and lists advantages possessed by a French speaker with perfect command of written language.

The second chapter comprises a discussion of the results yielded by an empirical observation of our students' writing undertaken in 1995-97 (Mogilevski and Burston 1999). This is followed by an analysis of the implications these findings may have for

educational outcomes, and more generally, for the students' eventual integration in the French sociocultural environment.

The third chapter contains a more detailed qualitative analysis of learners' errors, based on the theoretical framework of Error Analysis (Corder 1967, James 1998). In particular, the discussion focuses on the extent to which students' errors are determined by their linguistic competence. It also includes an investigation of the phenomena of free variability and fossilization as well as theoretically and empirically motivated observations on the relationship between the two. A discussion of the terminology and its theoretical underpinnings is followed by an empirical study probing the relationship between students' declared linguistic knowledge and its practical application in a free writing task, on one hand, and in a self-correction exercise on the other hand. The discussion of the findings leads to the investigation of current theories describing the language learning process and its implications for language production.

The fourth chapter presents a discussion of the mostly widely known SLA theory - the Monitor Theory (Krashen 1981, 1982, 1985), and of the criticisms directed at it by a number of scholars. Following a brief overview of the place of the Communicative Approach in historical context, every hypothesis of the Monitor theory is considered in turn, in order to ascertain its general reliability, validity and trustworthiness, and also to determine its relevance to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy evidenced by our students. Overall, the discussion of the literature on this subject aims at finding a suitable theoretical basis for the elaboration of practical and efficient teaching strategies that would be immediately applicable to the problem at hand.

Chapter 5 is also devoted to theoretical considerations, but from a different perspective. It examines the concepts of Variability theories and their relevance to the goals of the present research. A review of the literature in this domain focuses on determining the relationship between linguistic competence and linguistic performance, and centers around the key notion of linguistic capability or proficiency. Insights into the relationship between language learning and language production offered by the variabilist perspective will lead to a discussion of practical means of

enhancing learners' linguistic capability, that will be the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 6 contains a review of the literature on focus on form. It comprises an evaluation of explicit and implicit focus on form strategies and a discussion of the distinction between *focus on form* and *focus on forms* (Long 1991, Long and Robinson 1998). The examination of the potential effectiveness of different focus on form techniques in dealing with the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in writing, evidenced by adult foreign language learners, leads to the elaboration of an instructional treatment aiming to reduce this problem in the classrooms under study.

Chapter 7 provides a description of the empirical research conducted in the first semester 1999, including justification of the methodology, design of the study, results and discussion of findings. The study follows a pretest-posttest design, and aims to justify empirically the pedagogical decisions determined both by teaching practice and by the analysis of theoretical arguments proposed in the SLA literature. Chapter 8 presents a final series of experiments carried out in the second semester 1999 and in the second semester 2000. Finally, Chapter 9 contains conclusions and recommendations, as well as the summary of theoretical discussion and empirical research undertaken in the thesis. This is followed by the implications for the classroom foreign language teaching in the context of the development of writing skills at the university level. The last chapter also includes a brief discussion of research questions that have not been fully explored in this thesis, but that might be of interest, and indeed of benefit, to language teachers and scholars alike.

Chapter 1. The importance of morphosyntactic accuracy.

1.1 The importance of writing skills in contemporary French culture.

Dans un contexte socio-culturel où nul ne peut être considéré comme cultivé s'il ne pratique l'écrit couramment... on ne peut prétendre enseigner prioritairement ou même exclusivement une langue parlée. (Kahn 1993: 4.).¹

Certainly, the sociocultural importance of writing skills varies according to local culture. However, it seems that generally the statement of Gisèle Kahn can be accepted as representative of French attitudes and therefore being of considerable importance for students of French as foreign language, given that a degree in French as a foreign language should give students the ability to work within the French sociocultural environment.

It is true that many reasons can be brought forth to justify one nation's love for the language they use, and these should be of equal importance to all language bearers. It seems, however, that in this field the French endeavor to be more equal than other nations.

Les Français, à quelque horizon social ou politique qu'ils appartiennent, aiment leur langue et ne tolèrent pas qu'on la transforme; on pourrait certes avancer diverses raisons qui justifient cet amour: c'est par la langue que chacun se constitue comme sujet, définit son identité, son rapport au monde et aux autres, c'est elle qui en quelque sorte nous enfante. Elle est aussi un héritage, qui nous relie à une culture dont nous sommes fiers et à un passé prestigieux... (Leeman-Bouix, 1994:37)².

¹ In a sociocultural environment where one cannot be considered educated without being a fluent writer... one can hardly set out to teach primarily, let alone exclusively, spoken language. [Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.]

² The French, whatever their social or political strata, love their language and do not tolerate any attempts to transform it. One can advance several reasons to justify this love: it is by the language that everyone constructs themselves as a subject, defines their identity, their relationship with the world and other persons, it is the language that, in a way, gives us birth. It is also our heritage, linking us to the culture that makes us proud, and to a prestigious past...

Few countries can boast of having an Academy whose main task is to keep constant vigilance over the language lest a malicious outside influence or an internal ignorance bring it to harm. The activity of the Académie française is greatly supported at the governmental level. The Loi Bas-Lauriol of 1975 prescribes the obligatory usage of French in all commercial exchanges, contracts and advertising; the circular of 1982 extends the law's authority in the matter of foreign import. A 1983 decree makes the usage of French, including neologisms created by special committees, obligatory for all state institutions, and most recently the Loi Toubon of 1994 strengthens and broadens the scope and authority of the Bas-Lauriol law.

The main concern of this legislation is to keep the French language uncontaminated by outside influence. At the same time, a tremendous nation-wide effort is made to combat unorthodox expressions and unauthorized morphological structures that some under-educated French may inadvertently use themselves: "après que + subjonctif" or "le cheval à mon père" being well-known examples. People write letters to the editor to express their indignation at some grammatical error in the latest publication, no matter the social status of the author. An interview with Maître Capello, TV star of the syntax and grammatical arbiter, gives a good example:

- Et chaque fois que vous rencontrez une erreur, vous la corrigez?
- Oui, chaque fois. Le Président de la République dit le verbe réouvrir. Je regrette, papa, c'est rouvrir. On dit réouverture, mais on dit rouvrir.³ (Léandri 1996, Vol.2: 137).

Finally, hundreds of thousands of French attempt Bernard Pivot's dictations and enjoy it, too. How many other nations write dictations for fun? The French would seem to be fairly unique in this respect.

1.2 The evolution of the French standard language.

Such abiding respect for formal features of a language has deep historical roots. Prior to the XVIII century, France—or more particularly its northern part that became the nucleus of a powerful European nation—consisted linguistically of an agglomeration

³ - So every time you see an error, you correct it?

of local versions of the langue d'oïl which served uniquely as means of communication within a given community. While adequate for fairly infrequent linguistic exchanges between different communities, these patois were not suitable for a centralized, unified and powerful monarchy.

As Bourdieu (1982) shows, until the arrival of the Revolution the standardization of French was part of the formation of the French monarchical state. The local *parlers* were reduced to the state of *patois*, a pejorative term signifying "langage corrompu et grossier, tel que celui du menu peuple" (Furetière 1696)⁴. Possession of the formal norm became a mark of social status and a sign of one's link to the Court and hence to executive and legislative power. Certainly, in the southern part of France different dialects of the langue d'oc had flourished both in spoken and written forms throughout the Middle Ages. But with the spread of printing, by the 18th century French and Latin were virtually the only written languages in France, whence the decline in Occitan until Mistral at the end of the 19th century. Although there was no standard language in France until the 18th century, the King's French became established in provinces in the XVI century with the arrival of numerous agents of royal power. These judges, lieutenants and administrators possessed both the local dialect and the language of the Court, serving as mediators between the monarchy and the people. Once again, the formal norm was seen as a mark of high social status, being a tool of royal power as well as a means of appealing to it.

Those who already could speak and write the Parisian dialect welcomed the language standardization policy brought by the Revolution, as their linguistic skills gave them a virtual monopoly in politics. However, the conflict between the local patois and standard French was not merely a by-product of the emerging central power:

Le conflit entre le français de l'intelligentsia révolutionnaire et les idiomes ou les patois est un conflit pour le pouvoir symbolique qui a pour enjeu la formation et la ré-formation des structures mentales. (Bourdieu 1982, p.31).⁵

- Yes, every time. The President of the Republic says *réouvrir*. Sorry, old man, it's *rouvrir*. They say *réouverture*, but they say *rouvrir*.

⁴ A corrupted and crude language, such as the one spoken by the lower classes.

⁵ The conflict between the French of the revolutionary intelligentsia and regional languages or local dialects is a fight for symbolic power, where *formation* and *re-formation* of mental structures is at stake.

New language shaped new attitudes, ones that were in accordance with the new socio-political situation; and those in command of the new language were much better able to function within this environment. Throughout the history of France, standard language –unmarred by errors and corruption by the local patois– came to be strongly associated with power, be it executive, legislative or spiritual. The ability to create and promulgate the law through various circulars and decrees passed from the aristocracy to the educated bourgeoisie. Language skills became a highly valued mark of elevated social and political status, fulfilling to some extent the function of *lettres de noblesse* made obsolete by the Revolution. Acquisition of this knowledge became the *sine qua non* of ensuring one's success in life. A brief analysis of the French educational system from the Napoleonic Empire to the present day shows that the importance of language skills, and specifically that of written language found its reflection in the curriculum.

1.3 The place of language in education: historical background.

Much of what the French educational system is today was created in the beginning of the XIX century under the First Empire. Education was divided into three parts: primary, secondary and higher education; and the secondary school got the most attention from the Emperor. Primary schools were considered superfluous, as simple cannon fodder, farmers and artisans did not need to know anything even remotely academic. As education for the poor mainly served to enable them to read the Bible, teaching at primary schools was given into the care of 'Congrégation des Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne' with the annual governmental subvention of 4250 francs covering the whole country. To put this in perspective, it should be noted that direct taxes levied annually until the disasters of 1812 amounted to 250 million francs (Connelly 1985) and that the government's expenses on primary education equaled less than a single average baronial pension (4950.5 Fr), received every year by 420 *anoblis d'empire* of this rank (Petiteau 1997). Higher education also was rather neglected: universities, the glory of mediaeval France, were not restored. The Imperial University was an administrative body created to support the state's monopoly on education. France was divided into Academies, and each Academy contained faculties

of Arts, Sciences, Law, Medicine and Theology. However, lectures were provided by secondary school teachers.

Under the First Empire, the secondary school system was the most highly developed educational institution in France. The law of II Floréal Year X (May 1, 1802) completely reorganized secondary education, replacing former secondary schools - which the Emperor mistrusted - with *lycées*. The government offered 6400 scholarships to the lycées, 2400 of them for sons of soldiers and officials (Connelly 1985). Teachers were recruited through the most strenuous examinations and a secondary school certificate was a vital requirement in order to obtain any administrative position. It is interesting to note that secondary education was mainly concerned with literary subjects:

Bien petite fut la place faite aux sciences dans les programmes. Les élèves firent des versions latines, des thèmes, des discours et des vers latins, et pour devenir de bons bonapartistes, rédigèrent des discours français sur les vertus ou sur le génie de l'Empereur. Des compositions fréquentes, où ils étaient classés par ordre de mérite, des distinctions de prix annuelles, entretenaient leur zèle. (Lanson, R. and J. Desseignet, 1922: 126)⁶.

The attention given to Latin, the language of the glorious past, and to French, the language of an equally glorious present, emphasizes the importance of language skills as the source of symbolic power: "les échanges linguistiques sont aussi des rapports de pouvoir symbolique où s'actualisent les rapports de force entre les locuteurs ou leurs groupes respectifs" (Bourdieu 1982: 14)⁷.

The Restoration did not significantly change the system, other than replacing the Emperor by the King as an object of adoration. Under the Third Republic primary education was made obligatory, free and dissociated from the Church. As for secondary education, the French language usurped the role of Latin as the main focus of study. Corneille and Racine replaced Virgile and Ovide, but the analysis of their

⁶ Science did not figure in the curricula to any significant extent. Pupils did Latin-French and French-Latin translations, studied speeches and poems in Latin, and, to become good bonapartists, wrote speeches in French on the genius or the virtues of the Emperor. They frequently had to produce written essays in French, and were ranked by merit; annual awards fueled their zeal.

⁷ Linguistic exchanges are also negotiations of symbolic power, where the strength of an individual or of a group is determined in relation to others.

works was done with the same nearly religious devotion. "Le médecin, le professeur, l'homme politique, est souvent jugé par sa culture littéraire... Par nécessité, mais aussi par goût, les classes de français sont les plus populaires de lycée." (Parker, C. and P. Grigaut 1969)⁸. To those of Anglo-Saxon heritage, it may seem strange to judge professional competence by a person's linguistic skills and literary culture, but one must not forget the ingrained French sensitivity to the symbolic power conferred by language.

1.4 Historical legacy and modern outcomes.

Lanson and Desseignet (1922) write about two important aspects of French culture, which remain alive and well: the attention given by the educational system to language and competitive excellence. The latter principle was introduced by Napoleon and is still a major factor in the marking policy of French schools and universities. A student's relative position in the class is extremely important, both academically and socially. Being first in French, for example, paves the way to a diploma and commands the respect of one's peers. The French language is the first subject among equals: an ability to express one's thoughts in a clear, logical and grammatically impeccable manner is the major requirement for any academic diploma.

From the French cultural perspective, macro- and micro-discursive skills are just facets of the same competence. This tendency to group grammar and rhetoric under the same category has a rather long history. Pierre de la Ramée, one of the first French grammarians, writes: "Dite moi donc, c'est-ce que Gramere? S'est un art de bien parler." (1562)⁹. While discussing sounds, syllables, gender of words and conjugation of verbs, as befits a true grammarian, he gives a definition of his object of study that is identical to the most widely accepted definition of rhetoric. An assiduous student of Aristotle, La Ramée could not confuse the two by accident; rather, he treated grammar as an intrinsic, unalienable part of linguistic competence. This attitude towards grammar has not changed much over the centuries: a spelling error has the same negative effect upon the teacher as an unclear expression and a mark given to a

⁸ Doctors, teachers or politicians are often judged on their literary culture... By necessity, but also by inclination, French language courses are the most popular at secondary school.

⁹ Tell me now, what is Grammar? It is an art of speaking well.

composition in a French school depends as much upon grammar and syntax as upon general clarity of expression and an elegant turn of phrase.

In *Femmes Savantes* (1672) Molière gives an interesting example of seemingly unreasonable irritation caused by lack of grammatical competence. Philaminte, an educated lady, is ready to dishonorably discharge her servant Martine for a persistent infringement of correct grammar:

Elle a, d'une insolence à nulle autre pareille,
Après trente leçons, insulté mon oreille
Par l'impropriété d'un mot sauvage et bas
Qu'en termes décisifs condamne Vaugelas.¹⁰ (Act II Scene VI).

An examination of Martine's speech reveals cases of wrong subject-verb agreement, *je parlons*, multiple negation, *ne servent pas de rien*, and incorrect pronunciation transcribed as a spelling mistake, *cheux nous*. These errors are caused by lack of education, as Martine points out: 'je n'avons pas étugué comme vous'¹¹. She does not perceive the need to improve her speech, maintaining that success in communication is all that matters: 'Quand on se fait entendre, on parle toujours bien'¹². Such emphasis on the ability to get a message across, at the expense of formal features of language, has its modern counterpart in communicative approaches, which remain one of the most popular contemporary foreign language teaching methodologies.

Certainly, Philaminte's indignation is laughable, but only because impeccable linguistic performance should not have been expected of a servant. The situation would not be funny, no less today than in the seventeenth century, if the mistakes in question were produced by a university educated person. Certainly, at least in the French context, the ability to communicate successfully is not enough because, however small their effect on comprehension, mistakes generate irritation and thus can have a significant negative affective impact.

¹⁰ This creature, who for insolence has no peer,
Has, after thirty lessons, shocked my ear
By uttering a low, plebeian word
Which Vaugelas deems unworthy to be heard. (Translation by Richard Wilbur, 1978).

¹¹ I hasn't studied like youse.

¹² When you make yourself understood, your speech is always good.

1.5 Comprehension, irritation and linguistic tolerance of French native speakers.

While the French may be more tolerant towards foreign speaker errors than those committed by compatriots, the relationship between irritation and comprehension is an interesting one. Research shows that errors which have the most negative impact on comprehension are not necessarily those that cause most irritation. Piazza (1980) investigated French tolerance for grammatical errors made by Americans by asking 264 Parisian students to rate their comprehension of spoken and written language samples, and the irritation caused by errors they contained. The twenty types of errors embedded in the samples were considered the most typical of Americans' linguistic output in French. An error-free sentence would be rated 100% on the comprehension scale as well as on the irritation scale, i.e. the higher the value, the greater the comprehension and lack of irritation.

The study showed that sentences with relatively high comprehensibility ratings could still trigger considerable irritation: for example, the regularization of irregular past participles (e.g. *croyé*) in writing was rated 76% on the comprehension scale and 38% on the lack of irritation scale (i.e. a 24% incomprehension vs 62% irritation factor); the regularization of irregular future stems (e.g. *devenira*) was rated 80% and 41% respectively (i.e. a 20% incomprehension vs. 59% irritation factor). It is noteworthy that the overall median comprehension rate of written erroneous sentences was 81.9, while the median irritation score was 55.4. Especially in the written language, high comprehensibility is thus no guarantee of a wholly positive affective response from native speakers, precisely because language is more than just a means of communicating messages.

Piazza's study also provides insight into the relative effect of grammatical errors on comprehension as reported by native speakers. For example, the comprehension ratings of the sentence *Je pense que nous le trouvera dans la cuisine* (conjugation error) were 71% comprehension in speech and 75% in writing. It is difficult to imagine, however, how such a sentence could not be understood 100%, as its grammatical structure, although faulty, does not allow for any misinterpretations of

the message. The same is true for a past participle error, such as *croyé*, as the root of the verb is present and easily recognizable. It is likely, therefore, that although Piazza's subjects were asked to rate sentences according to their comprehensibility, they in fact judged the severity of the infringement against the TL grammar and syntax rather than the error's impact upon communication.

Similar results have been obtained by Chastain (1981). Investigating error-specific tolerance of Spanish native speakers, he showed that "comprehensible" does not always mean "admissible" for all types of errors. Specifically, in the case of faulty adjective agreement, one of major error categories in our data, native speakers noticed 86 out of 135 errors. No errors of this type were marked as incomprehensible, yet 53 out of 86 (62%) were classified as inadmissible. This data shows two things: firstly, even native speakers, whose linguistic competence can be classified as optimal, may fail to notice breaches of linguistic norm and correct them. This means that optimal linguistic competence is not sufficient for error-free linguistic performance. This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Secondly, fully comprehensible erroneous utterances are often judged inadmissible by native speakers. Therefore these errors should be targeted by appropriate teaching strategies, rather than ignored.

We have seen that Martine constantly made errors in negation, spelling and subject/verb agreement. Unfortunately, incorrect negation and spelling did not figure in Piazza's study, although they –especially spelling– are among the most common errors made by English learners of French. On the other hand, incorrect subject/verb agreement is rated, associated with 50% irritation in speech compared to 39% lack of irritation (i.e. 61% irritation) in writing. Out of twenty error categories, incorrect subject/verb agreement is ninth most irritable in speech, and second in writing. While Piazza doesn't attribute any specific cause to this discrepancy, a likely explanation for it is that the act of writing itself traditionally presumes a higher social status of the writer; thus errors in writing attest to a certain misplaced ambition on the part of the writer. Also, there may be more intrinsic tolerance to errors in the spoken language, even with native speaker interlocutors. False starts, incomplete sentences, etc. are no less common in French than in any other language, and native speakers naturally learn to tune these out. In the written language on the other hand, for all the reasons above, the French are taught to strive for perfection. Another factor may also

be at play here and that is the cumulative effect of errors on irritation. It would appear that Piazza did not take this into consideration. As any French teacher will attest, one's tolerance for errors decreases in inverse proportion to their concentration in any particular stretch of language. Since perceptible subject-verb errors are considerably less in speech than in writing, error concentration is less and so the listener may be less inclined to be irritated. In any case, the point here is that errors cause irritation and some errors cause even more irritation in writing than in speech.

1.6 Advantages of high linguistic accuracy in French.

To summarize the above socio-cultural factors fostering the use of normative French, it is possible to say that there are three historically defined advantages to aspiring to a perfect command of the standard language in France. Firstly, linguistic skills convey an impression of power, as throughout the history of modern France a person who could speak and write the state language was part of the governmental system and/or had the means to appeal to the central power. Secondly, a competent standard language user wielded symbolical power as defined by Bourdieu, being part of the group empowered to form and reform the mentality of the society. Finally, well-developed linguistic skills, being a result of successful studies, attested to one's relative level of intellectual capacities. A French secondary school or university diploma is not merely proof of one's level of professional competence; it is also an indication of overall level of intelligence and cultural background.

While educated native French speakers may accept the linguistic demands placed upon them, one must question whether such high standards of written and spoken language in France can be applied to a foreigner's linguistic production. Of necessity, non-native speakers need to be given the benefit of tolerance for their less than perfect command of the language, and it certainly would be unrealistic for teachers of French as a foreign language to expect their students to produce impeccable French. Notwithstanding, given the great importance the French themselves attach to linguistic accuracy, especially in the written language, it is really doing a disservice to students for teachers not to place as much value on formal accuracy as on communicational fluency in the classroom.

Low linguistic accuracy can have a profound impact on the learning process. Enar Haugen (1956) distinguished two social functions of language – communication and social identification – and warned that while communication requires only a modest amount of linguistic skills, social identification needs native-like proficiency. Making a similar distinction, Gardner and Lambert (1972:3) argue that a desire to achieve social identification is the most powerful motivation behind language learning. If social integration is impossible due to poor linguistic skills, a study of culture alone becomes meaningless and the learners' motivation to study culture suffers. Thus formal accuracy in writing must be an important pedagogical goal for the teachers of French as a second or foreign language both because of its intrinsic value in the French society and because of the influence it has on the other areas of study of the French language and culture.

Chapter 2. Evaluation of morphosyntactic accuracy.

2.1 Introduction.

Given that adherence to formal norms of language usage is such an important factor within the French socio-cultural environment, insistence upon linguistic accuracy must logically be an essential part of any university curriculum which seeks to form competent French majors, both in terms of language proficiency and sociolinguistic identification. While such a goal seems manifestly desirable in principle, its realization in actual practice is far from widespread, as the study (Mogilevski and Burston 1999) upon which this thesis is based, clearly demonstrates. The purpose of the latter was to measure the nature and extent of morphosyntactic inaccuracy in the written work of advanced level (i.e. semester 7-8 equivalent) students of French in what can arguably be considered a typical Anglo-Saxon university program.

2.2 Data.

The corpus of Mogilevski & Burston (1999) consisted of 212 final examination essays written in the second year advanced level French language subject at Monash University between 1995 and 1997. More precisely, four semester results were involved: first semester 1995 (n=78), second semester 1996 (n=46), and first (n=48)/second (n=40) semester 1997. The format of the examination remained constant during this period and, in order to standardize results for text length, all error counts were made on the basis of error/number of words ratio for every composition. Statistical analysis of the results showed no significant differences between the groups. A t-test with null hypothesis produced the p-value = 0.64. Results from the four groups have thus been combined for purposes of analysis.

2.3 Error classification.

In order to determine grammatical accuracy, an error count with linguistic classification was chosen, as it is generally held to yield the most information about error source and concentration (P. Corder 1973, 1981; I. Ruin 1996; C. Polio 1997). The linguistic classification used for the analysis had to provide a maximum amount of detail with a minimal number of categories. After some initial experimentation, a matrix of twenty two linguistic categories, which accounted for more than 95% of morphosyntactic errors, was adopted. It is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1
Error Categories & Examples

Error Class	Error Type	Examples
<u>Noun Group</u>	noun gender	<u>un</u> université
	noun number	<u>les</u> politiques m'intéressent
	pronominal error	mauvais film <u>lequel</u> j'ai vu
	il/ce	<u>il</u> était un temps terrible
	determiners	j'ai vu beaucoup <u>des</u> films
<u>Adjectives:</u>	gender agreement	une <u>joli</u> fille
	number agreement	les gens <u>pressé</u>
	form	une histoire <u>oublier</u>
<u>Verbal group:</u>	tense	il m'a dit qu'il ne <u>sait</u> pas
	conjugation	j'ai <u>devé</u>
	mood	il voulait que je <u>venais</u>
	voice	il a eu informé
	subject agreement/ person	nous <u>connaissez</u>
	subject agreement/ number	ils <u>arrive</u>
	negation	personne n'est <u>pas</u> venu
	adverbs	c'est <u>facilement</u> d'apprendre

<u>Orthography:</u>	accent	ecrire
	character	tel_ement
	approximation	particuliaire
	elision	que il
<u>Prepositions:</u>		refuser <u>de</u> faire
<u>Conjunctions:</u>		j'ai oublié __ il m'a rendu le livre
<u>Unclassified:</u>		les images du boire américain

2.4 Error count.

In order to determine the reliability of the above marking scheme, fifteen compositions out of forty eight written in the first semester of 1997 were corrected by another teacher using the same guidelines. To assure a representative sampling, from essays previously assessed by the original examiners, four were selected from those with high marks, seven from those with average marks and four from those with low marks. Overall inter-rater reliability on the assessment of morphosyntactic errors was 95%. Of the 5% discrepancy, 2% were due to differences in interpretive evaluations (legibility; ambiguous intended meaning; questionable native-like usage; debatable prescriptive rule) and the remainder consisted mostly of overlooked errors.

2.5 Results.

The results of the overall error analysis of second year examination compositions written between 1995-1997 are summarised in Table 2. The figures show an alarmingly low level of morphosyntactic accuracy, as the students averaged two errors per sentence or ten per hundred words.

Table 2

Overall end-of-semester results 1995-1997

Number of compositions: 212
Total number of words: 61173
Average number of words per composition: 289
Average sentence length: 19 w
Total number of errors: 6310
Number of errors per 100 words: 10
Average number of errors per composition: 30
Average number of errors per sentence: 2

Table 3 includes the numbers of errors in every category as well as the overall percentage of errors in each category. The results identify the weakest areas in our students' writing: noun gender, adjectival gender and number agreement, conjugation, accent and character misspelling and the use of prepositions.

Table 3

Error analysis of 1995-1997 results by linguistic category

Error Class	Error Type	Number	Percentage
<u>Noun Group</u>	noun gender	610	9.7
	noun number	163	2.6
	pronominal error	178	2.8
	il/ce	121	1.9
	determiners	378	5.9
<u>Adjectives:</u>	gender agreement	398	6.3
	number agreement	223	3.5
	form	96	1.5
<u>Verbal group:</u>	tense	254	4
	conjugation	618	9.8
	mood	120	1.9
	voice	83	1.3
	subject agreement/ person	66	1
	subject agreement/ number	86	1.4
	negation	56	0.9
	adverbs	93	1.5
<u>Orthography:</u>	accent	830	13.2
	character	767	12.2
	approximation	189	3
	elision	116	1.8
<u>Prepositions:</u>		845	13.4
<u>Conjunctions:</u>		73	1.2

<u>Unclassified:</u>	218	3.4
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The determination of relative error importance required the calculation of an error/token ratio for each error category, a token being defined as an opportunity to make an error.

Table 4 includes the percentages of the numbers of errors in every category in relation to the total number of tokens in this category, as well as the overall percentage of each category. The results of the error/token count indicate that while, for example, conjunction errors are not found in abundance in our corpus, they can still be considered a serious problem, because their use is erroneous in 9% of occurrences. Other error classes whose importance is brought out by the error/token count are noun gender (11%), adjective gender agreement (8%) and verbal tense (9%). As can also be seen, accent errors account for half of all spelling mistakes. Lastly, the 18% error/token rate for preposition usage is by far the highest of all categories. With the exception of verbal tense and conjunctions, the relative frequency of error within categories thus corresponds closely to the absolute error counts.

Table 4 1995-1997 Error/token ratios			
Error Class	Error Type	E/T ratio (%)	Absolute %
<u>percentage</u>			
<u>Noun Group</u>	noun gender	11%	9.7
	noun number	2%	2.6
	pronominal error	3%	2.8
	il/ce	3%	1.9
	determiners	5%	5.9
<u>Adjectives:</u>	gender agreement	8%	6.3
	number agreement	5%	3.5

	form	2%	1.5
<u>Verbal group:</u>	tense	9%	4
	conjugation	5%	9.8
	mood	5%	1.9
	voice	5%	1.3
	subject agreement/ person	2%	1
	subject agreement/ number	4%	1.4
	negation	2%	0.9
	adverbs	1%	1.5
<u>Orthography:</u>	accent	6%	13.2
	character	3%	12.2
	approximation	1%	3
	elision and contraction	2%	1.8
<u>Prepositions:</u>		18%	13.4
<u>Conjunctions:</u>		9%	1.2

A comparative evaluation of morphosyntactic accuracy in examination compositions written in first and second semester 1997 was carried out to determine the rate of progress, if any, over the semester. The results are summarized in table 5.

Table 5

1997 exam essay comparison: overall results

	Semester 1	Semester 2	%
Difference			
Number of compositions:	40	40	0%
Total number of words:	11412	11658	+2%
Average number of words per composition:	285	291	+2%
Average sentence length:	18w	19w	+5%
Total number of errors:	1240	1171	-6%
Number of errors per 100 words:	11	10	-9%
Average number of errors per composition:	31	27	-13%
Average number of errors per sentence:	1.95	1.90	-3%

As can be seen, viewed globally, a slight reduction (-9%) is evident in the number of errors per 100 words between the first and second semester results. Nevertheless, the difference did not attain the level of statistical significance. Analysis of the same data with respect to linguistic categories, presented in Table 6, revealed the irregular distribution of this improvement.

Table 6

Error Class	Error Type	1 st semester	2 nd semester
<u>Noun Group</u>	noun gender	107	102
	noun number	29	31
	pronominal error	29	37
	il/ce	17	15
	determiners	62	69
<u>Adjectives:</u>	gender agreement	84	71
	number agreement	55	54
	form	28	19
<u>Verbal group:</u>	tense	68	33
	conjugation	107	90
	mood	30	23
	voice	43	40
	subject agreement/ person	11	12
	subject agreement/ number	10	23
	negation	8	15
	adverbs	13	18
<u>Orthography:</u>	accent	153	176
	character	131	159
	approximation	49	30
	elision	15	30
<u>Prepositions:</u>		195	144
<u>Conjunctions:</u>		23	19
<u>Unclassified:</u>		49	25

The comparison between first and second semester compositions showed a considerable improvement in tense (-52%)¹³, the occurrence of spelling approximations (-39%) and use of adjectival forms (-32%). Significant error reduction is also evident in the use of prepositions (-26%), verbal mood (-23%), and to a lesser extent, verbal conjugation (-16%), the use of conjunctions (-17%) and gender agreement with adjectives (-16%). All other areas either showed no progress or, as in the case of single spelling (+21%) and accent errors (+15%), actually got worse.

2.6 Conclusions.

Mogilevski and Burstson (1999) confirmed a serious problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in their subjects' writing and pinpointed its sources and distribution. Moreover, lack of significant progress, either from year to year across the student body or from semester to semester in the case of individual students, demonstrated the deeply engrained nature of the difficulty. The study concluded that the problem is a result of an intrinsic natural inclination to focus on concrete lexical meaning, coupled with a corresponding inattention to abstract formal properties.

2.7 Morphosyntactic imprecision: causes and remedies.

One may say that learners' indifference to surface level morphosyntactic imprecision could be the result of lack of pragmatic motivation, both inside and outside of the classroom. Outside of the classroom, students who learn the French language in Australia practice it mainly over short tourist trips to France, or in mainly informal setting, such as the French club activities. In these circumstances, oral expression is prioritized, and occasions to practice writing, not to mention focus on accuracy, are rare. In respect to classroom teaching, the increasing popularity of communicative methodologies in recent decades had given priority to the development of linguistic fluency rather than accuracy. Possibly, over their school years, our students learned to ignore surface level "stuff-ups" if the meaning of their messages was still intelligible. Outside of the classroom, it is likely that even if they had "live" exposure to the target

¹³ The improvement in tense usage was most likely determined by the nature of the task: the topic of the second composition allowed constant usage of the present tense.

language, these contacts did not emphasize high morphosyntactic accuracy inasmuch as it did not affect the semantic interpretation of their utterances.

On the other hand, not all secondary school teachers adhere to the communicative approach in practice. Many of them still tend to prioritize grammatical correctness (Scarino 2001) and *focus on forms* activities and syllabi in Long's (1991) definition are still alive and well in the Australian LOTE classrooms. Moreover, writing accuracy is constantly evaluated at the university level, although the percentage of the mark allocated for it may differ from one institution to another. It seems likely, then, that our students did have some practice in form-focused activities and some pragmatic motivation to pay attention to formal linguistic features. Nevertheless, their writing accuracy remains poor, which fact hints at the existence of some underlying causal factors that prevent learners from acquiring formal elements of the target language in full measure.

VanPatten (1990, 1996) proposes that grammatical inaccuracy in the linguistic production of language learners results from an intrinsic discrepancy between the richness of morphological input and the relative poverty of its intake. More specifically, he posits that the processing of L2 input is governed by the following principles:

P1 Learners process input for meaning before they process it for form.

P1(a). Learners process content words in the input before anything else.

P1(b). Learners prefer processing lexical items to grammatical items (e.g. morphological markings) for semantic information.

P1(c). Learners prefer processing "more meaningful" morphology before "less" or "nonmeaningful" morphology".

P2 For learners to process form that is not meaningful, they must be able to process informational or communicative content at no (or little) cost to attention. (VanPatten 1996:14).

The first principle of processing instruction is supported by Huot's (1995) findings. In a longitudinal study investigating English language learning processes of an eight-year old francophone child Huot distinguished the following processing operations: acknowledgement of the acquired material, comparison, translation, rule formulation and analysis of linguistic elements. (Huot 1995: 97). Huot reported that focus on meaning was significantly greater than focus on form in all operations except rule enunciation, which was the least common operation. She also found that the learner naturally focused on lexical items much more than on grammatical elements (pp. 118:119), thus supporting Van Patten's position. Further support for this argument can be found in Pienemann (1998), who lists a number of studies that show that "grammatical information is not normally attended to and can only be memorized if attention is focused on it" (p.58).

It is interesting to consider in this regard Krashen's view (1984:23) that written accuracy can best be improved by extensive reading in L2. In all but artificially contrived or heavily annotated pedagogical materials, the rich vocabulary and more complex syntactic structure of written texts makes far greater demands on the learner's attention than does the classic $i + 1$ input condition. Moreover, rare indeed would be the reader, native speaker or otherwise, who approaches a text with any other purpose than to extract from it the meaning conveyed. Though extensive reading can undoubtedly expand vocabulary acquisition, Van Patten's second principle predicts it would have little, if any, effect on the morphosyntactic accuracy of written composition.

There is no doubt that students can benefit from additional exposure to the language; more reading or a stay in France can significantly enhance their linguistic performance. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether every aspect of language proficiency will improve under these conditions.

Krashen (1984) argues that reading for pleasure plays a critical role in learning how to write in a foreign language. Unfortunately, Krashen does not give any evidence that reading and writing are related in the field of second/foreign language acquisition; his argument is based upon studies investigating first language performance of schoolchildren. Furthermore, it is not clear whether, in Krashen's view, good writing

includes morphosyntactic accuracy. Likewise, the exact effect of reading upon morphosyntactic precision remains undemonstrated: no study cited by Krashen shows a clear improvement in error rate attributable to a given number of reading hours.

Janopoulos (1986) investigated the effect of pleasure reading on writing performance in a second language. In his study, 79 adult ESL students were required to provide a 1-hour writing sample for evaluation. They were subsequently asked to fill in a questionnaire designed to determine the amount of time they devote to pleasure reading in L1 and L2. Statistical analysis of the data showed a positive correlation between L2 reading and L2 writing ($p = .008$), although no correlation between L1 reading and L2 writing was found. Notwithstanding, the writing of Janopoulos' students was evaluated holistically on a four-point scale, therefore his results cannot suggest a relationship between, for example, reading and morphosyntactic accuracy. Although it can be accepted that L2 reading improves L2 writing, it is not clear what aspects of language proficiency benefit from reading. Unlike Krashen, Janopoulos is cautious in claiming any causal relationship between reading and good writing:

These data provide evidence that proficiency levels for L2 reading and writing are closely associated. However, the question of whether this can be interpreted to mean that exposure to L2 print features through reading facilitates the acquisition of L2 writing proficiency cannot be answered by this study. A symmetrical research design was purposely chosen because it was felt that the data base was insufficient to warrant stating a directional hypothesis. Hence, results must be stated in terms of correlation instead of causation. (Janopoulos 1986: 767).

Reading for pleasure may simply lead to more reading, i.e. more exposure to the language. While no one would doubt that reading in particular, and greater linguistic exposure in general, can promote language acquisition, in themselves they do not necessarily constitute sufficient learning conditions and long unregulated exposure may even have negative effects (Towell 1987, Selinker 1976, Selinker and Lamendella 1978, and other fossilization studies). Moreover, a correlation between good writing and pleasure reading per se does not prove anything. Students who read more in a foreign language may simply be better motivated, and therefore progress in writing could stem from motivation rather than from reading itself. The cause and effect relationship between reading and writing is made even less clear by the fact that

pleasure reading in a foreign language in itself calls for a high level of linguistic competence. Thus an advanced student would be more able to read for pleasure than a novice, i.e. linguistic competence facilitates reading rather than the other way around.

In view of the lack of evidence that simple exposure to the language - even reinforced by extensive reading - leads to grammatical accuracy in writing, some other means must be sought to remedy the problem of morphosyntactic imprecision. Based on Van Patten's insights regarding information processing constraints, it seems clear that any alternative approach needs to concentrate on turning morphosyntactic input into intake. In so doing, it is important to recognize that such focus on grammaticality cannot take the form of teaching rules to students. After five or six years of exposure to French grammar, students know very well what it is they are supposed to do; repeating the rules yet again just won't make it happen. In this respect, it is important to establish the exact extent of the linguistic competence of the learners under study. A different approach should be taken depending on whether we aim at the improvement in an area where the students' competence is insufficient, or whether we try to make them apply more efficiently the linguistic knowledge they are supposed to possess for years. Lastly, given the practical constraints affecting an instructed language learning environment, whatever remedial action is taken must also fit into the normal time constraints of a curriculum.

Chapter 3. Second order errors: an addition to EA dichotomy.

3.1 Introduction.

The following chapter represents an effort to investigate the nature and the causes of the errors commonly found in the written production of our students. It is intended as an essential part of the search for remediation techniques that would be effective in our particular situation. In this endeavor we follow Doughty and Williams (1998):

...teacher intuition and needs assessment evidence of learner difficulty alone may be insufficient, or, at least, may not be the most efficient basis for making instructional choices. Unless more is known about why specific learners commit these particular errors at a given time in their language development, teachers' efforts to correct them may be futile. (Doughty and Williams 1998: 213).

The most common assumption in error analysis is that learners' errors are caused by insufficient linguistic competence. Therefore efforts to assist the development of learners' interlanguage involve teaching strategies that provide additional instruction and/or exposure targeting items and structures considered 'new' for learners. Yet, at least with the learners under study here there are reasons to believe that a considerable number of errors are not generated by gaps in learners' linguistic competence. In which case, a traditional approach is unlikely to be effective, and teachers should search for techniques that would enable learners to realize the full potential of their existing knowledge of the target language.

3.2 Second order errors.

In an early seminar article Pit Corder (1967) introduced a distinction between *errors* and *mistakes*, which has been widely accepted by SLA researchers and still remains one of the cornerstones of error analysis. According to Corder, errors are systematic breaks of a given linguistic rule that reveal the learner's "underlying knowledge of the language to date, i.e. one's "transitional competence" (Corder 1967), or, in more recent terms, the state of the learner's interlanguage (Selinker 1969, 1972). Mistakes,

on the other hand, are slips of the tongue (or pen) due to various physical and psychological conditions. They are not systematic, and therefore are considered to be of little interest to a teacher, as they do not reflect the state of learner's interlanguage. Moreover, they cannot be corrected, precisely by virtue of their erratic appearance. Therefore, linguistic deviations from the norm should be treated seriously, i.e. investigated and corrected, only when they are competence- rather than performance-related. As Corder states later,

...so long as we do not make the mistake of assuming that the idiosyncratic sentences of a learner of a second language are simply the result of performance failure, that is, that he knows the rules of the target language but has, for some reason or other failed to, or chosen not to, apply them, then there is no harm in talking about error or correction. (Corder 1971 in Corder 1981:18-19).

It follows that, from Corder's perspective, errors appear when the learner does not know the rule, and mistakes are caused by the learner's failure to apply a known rule. Another important distinction between the two is that errors are considered to be systematic while the appearance of mistakes is not governed by any sort of rules. This clear distinction becomes rather clouded, however, as Corder distinguishes elsewhere between pre-systematic errors, that cannot be explained nor corrected by the learner, and post-systematic errors that can be explained and corrected (Corder 1973: 272). In the latter case, the breaking of a linguistic rule occurs when the learner "had overlooked something or simply forgotten to apply a known rule", which is virtually Corder's own definition of mistake although he uses the term error. To adequately capture the pre-/post systematic dichotomy referred to by Corder, a new terminological distinction needs to be introduced into the analysis to avoid confusion.

To illustrate the above argument we refer again to Mogilevski & Burstn (1999). In this study, a detailed analysis of ungrammaticality showed the following rates of distribution by linguistic category: adjectival gender agreement [6.3%], adjectival number agreement [3.5%], verbal subject agreement for person [1%], verbal subject agreement for number [1.4%], negation [0.9%] and elision and contraction [1.8%] (see Chapter 1, Table 4). These categories (six out of twenty two) are of particular interest because they consist almost exclusively of what Corder calls mistakes. Students know all the rules concerning verbal and adjectival agreement, negation and

elision, as they well might after seven years of studying French, but they fail to apply them consistently.

These inadvertent breaches of linguistic norm adhere to Corder's definition of mistake, because students are assumed to know the rule in question, yet they are different because this type of inaccuracy appears persistently in the students' written production. This fact can be proven by sheer weight of numbers, as these *fautes bêtes*, as they are called in French, predictably constitute nearly 15% of all ungrammaticalities. Of course, some students make less *fautes bêtes* than others; nevertheless, among 212 compositions analyzed in Mogilevski and Burston (1999), only one was free from errors in adjectival agreement. Therefore errors of this type are pervasive, although their ratio to competence-related errors can differ from learner to learner. It is possible to talk about the systematicity of these mistakes because an analysis of written compositions over three years (1995-1997) reported in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) shows that their rate remains stable both in different student groups from year to year and within the same group from one semester to another. This suggests that they are caused by the same factor, the influence of which does not change over time.

It should be noted that other problem categories also contain a number of systematic *fautes bêtes* linked to specific lexical items. For example, in the accentuation category of the compositions studied (Mogilevski and Burston 1999), the lack of accent on the preposition *à* occurred 53 times out of 878 tokens, i.e. in 6% of the cases. With *était(t-ent)*, the accent was lacking in nearly 10% of cases (49 out of 508 tokens). It would not be unreasonable to assume that all second year advanced level university students know that *à*, as well as *était(t-ent)* should be spelled with an accent. Therefore, given Corder's definitions, these breaches of the target language (TL) norm should be classified as mistakes. Nevertheless, the statistical predictability of such mistakes makes it possible to argue that they are considerably more systematic than the definition allows.

As can be observed, Corder's error/mistake dichotomy does not adequately account for the phenomenon of systematic mistakes. A third category needs to be introduced, which could be called *second order errors*. Within this three way distinction, *first*

order errors are those caused by ignorance of a given rule; they cannot be corrected by the learner and appear systematically. *Second order errors* are those caused by a persistent failure to apply a known rule; they permit self-correction and appear systematically. *Mistakes* are a result of an unpredictable failure to apply a known rule, i.e. a slip of tongue. Mistakes can be corrected by the learner and appear randomly. *First order* and *second order errors* can also be called competence-related and performance-related errors, so long as we distinguish between the latter and mistakes. True, both *second order errors* and *mistakes* are caused by performance-related factors; however, while the unpredictable nature of mistakes entails the existence of randomly acting extraneous factors (e.g. false starts, inattention, fatigue, etc.), the persistence of *second order errors* presupposes a causal factor that is permanently at work. When, in a short text, we see twenty instances in a single composition where the student failed to apply a known rule, it would be a violation of Occam's razor to presume that in every case this person was affected by a random factor.

James (1998) proposes a similar, although more detailed classification of idiosyncrasies in the learner language. He defines slips, or lapses of the tongue or pen, as deviant language forms that can be easily detected and self-corrected by their author without any additional input. Mistakes, on the other hand,

can only be corrected by their agent if their deviance is pointed out to him or her. If a simple indication that there is some deviance is a sufficient prompt for self-correction, then we have a *first-order mistake*. If additional information is needed, in the form of the exact location and some hint as to the nature of the deviance, then we have a *second-order mistake*. (James 1998: 83).

Errors, according to this classification, are breaches of linguistic norm that "require further relevant learning to take place before they can be self-corrected." (James 1998:83). James also mentions *solecisms*, defined as breaches of rules imposed by purist and formal education: the use of *ça* instead of *cela* would probably qualify under this category.

From the practical point of view, it is difficult to distinguish between slips of the pen and *first-order mistakes* in James' definition. In a written composition slips of the pen should not be present in the final draft, given that they must be self-corrected by

the author. The same goes for **first-order mistakes**, given that every learner knows that there are breaches of linguistic norm in his or her writing. James' definition of **second-order mistake** most closely resembles the definition of **second order error** given above. It remains to be seen whether this type of linguistic idiosyncrasies accounts for a significant percentage of the whole error count. Also, bearing in mind out practical goal of improving writing accuracy, it remains to devise a strategy whereby learners would possess the knowledge necessary to self-correct such errors beforehand, thus avoiding the necessity of postfactum prompts.

3.3 What do they know and what do they show: a literature review.

It has been claimed above that second order errors account for a significant percentage of learners' ungrammaticality. This claim may be validated by an analysis of findings produced by several studies investigating self-correction and learners' reaction to different types of explicit feedback. Krashen (1982) provides a review of studies investigating self-correction. He recognizes the crucial role of focus on form in the effectiveness of self-correction and distinguishes five conditions that form a scale of focus on form intensity, from zero to maximum.

Table 1.

Instructions	(1) None	(2) Rewrite	(3) Correct the error	(4) Correct this error	(5) Correct this error use this rule
Includes error:					
Existence	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Location	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Rule broken	No	No	No	No	Yes

From: Houck, Robertson and Krashen (1978) Cited in Krashen 1982: 107.

Five studies, cited by Krashen (Schlue 1977, Fathman 1980, Houck et al. 1978, White 1977 and Krashen and Pon 1975) report percentages of self-correction ranging from 7.2% in free speech (condition 1) to 95% (condition 4). The percentage of self-

corrected errors increases with the intensity of focus on form: in Schlue's study, for example, subjects self-corrected 7.2% of their errors in free speech, but managed to repair 31%, listening to the recording of their speech after having been instructed to look for morphosyntactic errors. Of course, the efficiency of self-correction also depends on the overall level of the subject's linguistic competence: the more a subject knows about the TL, the less he or she is likely to produce first order errors, which, unlike second order errors, cannot be self-corrected. For example, P., in the Krashen and Pon study, a qualified linguist with a near-native level of proficiency in English achieved a 95% self-correction rate under condition 4.

Figures cited by Lyster and Ranta (1997) in a study investigating the effectiveness of different forms of feedback in the acquisition of French as a second language by anglophone schoolchildren reveal a high percentage of second order errors in his subjects' linguistic performance. Lyster and Ranta analyzed six different forms of feedback: recast, elicitation, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, explicit correction and repetition. Out of these, only explicit correction, recast and, to a lesser extent, metalinguistic feedback enable the student to correct a first order error. Other feedback forms only hint at the existence of error and prompt the student to use his or her linguistic knowledge to correct it. Given that students cannot correct what they do not know, all errors repaired with the help of elicitation, clarification request and repetition, must logically be classified as second order errors.

The study showed that elicitation (a request to reformulate or generate an utterance of the type "How do we say X in French?"), led to 46% of error correction, while a clarification request resulted in 28%, and repetition in 31% of student-generated repair. This means that students corrected, on average, 35% of their errors after feedback that did not give them any additional linguistic information. One may thus confidently surmise that 35% of the errors in Lyster and Ranta's subjects' linguistic output were, in fact, second order errors.

Makino (1993) observed that some learners can activate their linguistic competence, or knowledge, to self-correct their errors either independently, or following hints or cues given by their peers or teachers. Makino noted that little research had been done in this area, and conducted a study on the self-correction of writing material provided

by sixty-two Japanese EFL college students. Students wrote nine tests, each targeting an English grammatical morpheme: progressive, auxiliary, copula, article, plural, possessive, regular past, 3rd person singular and irregular past. Then three copies of the answer sheets were made and distributed to students: one unchanged, together with the instruction to find and correct errors, another with (X) marks in front of ungrammatical sentences, and the third with all errors underlined, thus indicating the precise location of errors. The next table displays the results of Makino's study, with percentages of correct answers for the original test copy (0), and for the three feedback copies (1, 2, and 3).

Table 2.

Category	0	1	2	3
Progressive	81.6	84.3	89.0	94.3
Auxiliary	73.7	79.7	83.0	85.5
Copula	73.7	76.0	80.2	83.4
Article	70.6	72.1	75.1	78.4
Plural	61.8	64.3	76.1	82.1
Possessive	62.5	65.5	68.0	75.8
Regular past	57.7	61.6	64.1	78.1
3rd pers. sing.	53.5	55.8	65.8	75.5
Irregular past	50.8	54.9	60.9	70.4

(Makino 1993:339)

The results of Makino's study clearly show that even a simple instruction to self-correct results in an improvement of morphosyntactic accuracy, while more detailed cues lead to even more pronounced progress. It can be calculated on the basis of this data that instructions to correct errors underlined by the teacher resulted in the elimination of the following percentages of errors in every category:

Table 3.

	Correct 0	Correct 3	Errors 0	Errors 3	% difference
Progressive	81.6	94.3	18.4	5.7	69.0
Auxiliary	73.7	85.5	26.3	14.5	44.9
Copula	73.7	83.4	26.3	16.6	36.9

Article	70.6	78.4	29.4	21.6	26.5
Plural	61.8	82.1	38.2	17.9	53.1
Possessive	62.5	75.8	37.5	24.2	33.5
Regular past	57.7	78.1	42.3	21.9	48.2
3rd pers. sing.	53.5	75.5	46.5	24.5	47.3
Irregular past	50.8	70.4	49.2	29.6	39.8
Average difference					41

Makino's freshmen college students corrected, on average, 41% of their errors in the targeted grammatical structures once they were detected, without any feedback that could add some information to their linguistic knowledge. Lyster and Ranta's schoolchildren corrected 35% of the total number of their errors in the same conditions, although in oral mode. It is possible that adults can activate their conscious knowledge of linguistic rules more efficiently than children, due to their superior cognitive abilities. On the other hand, the performance of Makino's subjects could be affected by their knowledge of the exact nature of the targeted morphemes, and by the binary character of corrections in some categories, i.e. if it is not singular, it must be plural, if the article is not determinate, it must be indeterminate, etc. Besides, the simpler morphosyntax of English allows more binary choices than the more complex morphosyntax of French. Nevertheless, it can be concluded on the basis of the reviewed studies that a significant proportion of learners' idiosyncratic utterances can be classified as second order errors. It remains to quantify this argument in respect to the written performance of the students under study in this thesis, taking into account such variables as age, language and the extent of the subjects' linguistic competence that may be activated via self-monitoring.

It can be problematic to gauge the exact extent of a learners' linguistic competence, i.e. to determine which rules, items and structures they know. A definition of an acquired rule, i.e., one that is constantly present in memory and can be activated accurately and automatically, can be found in studies investigating developmental patterns of first language acquisition. The most commonly accepted definition is proposed by Brown (1973). He considers a feature to be 'acquired' if it appears correctly in the learner's output 90% of the time upon three consecutive data tests. It should be noted that in the context of first language acquisition, 90% is only the threshold. In the process of first language acquisition the accurate production rate of

known rules with more mature speakers, and especially with educated speakers, would eventually closely approximate 100%. It is taken for granted that the norm is reached within a certain period of time (which would vary with the morphosyntactic complexity of the language, e.g. Russian would take longer than English). This natural continuing progress would be a main distinguishing factor with SLA since it is well documented that non-native speakers rarely achieve anything like 100% accuracy.

Brown's definition purports to gauge learners' linguistic competence via evaluation of their performance. This can be problematic, however, as there is a difference between knowledge of a rule and its consistent application. This, in fact, is precisely what prompted Krashen to introduce the distinction between "learned" and "acquired" rules (Krashen 1981, 1982). A learner may be able to articulate a rule concerning adjectival agreement in French, yet still make errors of this type, as our data abundantly attests. On the other hand, a consistent and correct application of a rule may be an entirely conscious operation. As McLaughlin points out in his early critique of Krashen's Monitor Model, one can both know and articulate the rule governing the grammatical structure of a given sentence, and feel (subconsciously) whether the sentence is correct or not (McLaughlin 1978:317). This argument makes irrelevant the distinction between 'acquired' and 'learned' rules, because a rule can be 'known' and correctly applied consciously, subconsciously, or in both ways at the same time.

Brown (1973) applies the 90% rule to first language acquisition. Were this criterion to be applied to the error ratios found in Mogilevski and Burston (1999), which were 6% for token (percentage of errors within a particular category) versus 10% total error count, one would have to conclude that the linguistic structures under study were acquired.

It can be argued, however, that in the area of SLA, any attempt to provide a general definition of an 'acquired' rule in terms of percentages would be too arbitrary and imprecise to be considered seriously. For example, if we admit that a 90% success rate in the category of past participle/adjectival agreement means that the rule in question is 'acquired', that leaves 10% of mistakes, or approximately 2 mistakes in an average 300 word composition. If we multiply that number by the typical twenty or so different error categories found in our students' writing, we would have a composition

covered with red ink, even though all the rules needed to produce a perfect text are supposedly 'acquired'. This is precisely what happens in the written production of our students; although this observation can be most strongly justified in the case of errors in adjectival and verbal agreement, elision, simple negation and conjunction, it is possible to suggest that some errors in other categories also could be classified as second order errors.

Although it would be problematic to validate a global definition of 'acquired' rules in SLA, it is possible to provide a justifiable operational definition of this concept in relation to particular language learners and their linguistic output. An operational definition consists in determining how and by what means one can measure a given variable (Wiersma 1995). Therefore, if a student is able to correct his or her own error once its existence, location or both are indicated, and when no additional linguistic information is given, this means that the rule covering the error is known to this student. Following our discussion of Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Makino (1993) studies, it is possible to suggest that if learners are able to significantly improve their linguistic accuracy after feedback that does not include any new information about rules relevant to their errors, than these learners know these rules, even if they fail to apply them at the moment of production.

3.4 Variable category-specific errors: variability or fossilization?

The abundance of second order errors in our corpus supports the view that interlanguage as a system of internalized linguistic patterns is never completely stable. Even if the difference between the interlanguage (IT) and the TL, brought forth by means of error analysis, does not evidence a significant change, it is possible to notice a constant and continuous shift between target-like and idiosyncratic items. This variability, fluctuation or free variation in a foreign language learner's linguistic production has attracted the attention of several researchers. It appears that this phenomenon occurs in a number of linguistic categories. Ellis (1984) cites an example of a Portuguese boy producing No V and Don't V negation, one form being articulated within minutes of the other in the same linguistic and situational context. Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann (1978) found numerous examples of variability in negation at every stage of the subjects' development and Wagner-Gough (1975)

reported free variation in the use of simple and progressive verb forms produced by a Persian learner of English. White (1998), describing oral data elicited from grade 6 ESL learners, states: "The most striking characteristic of the oral production data was the enormous variability in the use of *his* and *her*. Grammatical and ungrammatical uses of these forms frequently co-occurred in the same utterance, and learners used *his* and *her* along with developmentally earlier forms like *your* and *the* to describe a single picture." (White 1998: 94). The subjects of these studies were children in their beginning to intermediate stage of second language learning. It was hypothesized that free variation is essentially a feature that belongs to an early stage of acquisition, and that it disappears as learners make progress in developing a more structured and target-like interlanguage (Gatbonton 1978, Ellis 1985).

However, other studies indicate that it is not the case. Eisenstein, Bailey and Madden (1982) found free variation in the use of simple versus gerund verbal forms in the linguistic output of adult ESL learners. Long (1998) demonstrated a persistent free variation in a set of data spread over thirteen years in a study of an adult Japanese learner of English. Towell (1987) investigated the phenomenon of non-systematic variability in a longitudinal study of an advanced adult learner of French. His data, collected over four years, suggests that variable errors such as *c'est difficile + de / à / Ø* persist and fail to systematize even over a lengthy period of time

...during which the exposure to the language had been very great, including positive and negative, inductive and deductive information about the language. And yet it would seem that any move towards systematicity, even if it eventually does take place, is nonetheless extremely slow. Some explanation is needed to account for the failure of an intelligent adult to make better use of implicit and explicit information available to approximate native speaker behavior. (Towell 1987: 119).

Towell hypothesizes that the explanation of error variability may lie in "the internal consequences of the constant pressure on the learner to process language as fast as possible" (p.123). Schlue (1976: 134) echoes this idea, suggesting that language learners attend to the accuracy of the message and the appropriateness of the utterance to the discourse rather than to their grammatical accuracy in situations of communicative urgency (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982:64). Given the temporal constraints, the learner tends to neglect certain items of linguistic structure. While this

explanation may be relevant for oral output, it does not explain the proliferation of examples of free variation in the written compositions analyzed by Mogilevski and Burston (1999), where the 90 minute time limit allowed to write an essay did not impose an excessive 'need for speed'. Furthermore, it does not explain why some elements, such as *difficile à/de/Ø* suffer from internal pressure, while others do not.

Selinker (1972), talking of re-appearance of seemingly eradicated idiosyncratic structures, states that the phenomenon occurs

...when the learner's attention is focused upon new and difficult intellectual subject matter or when he is in a state of anxiety or other excitement, and strangely enough, sometimes when he is in a state of extreme relaxation... (p. 215).

It is a platitude that too many exceptions weaken a theory. In the present case, if free variation can have for a cause both relaxation and excitement, one can be tempted to express some doubts concerning any causal relationships between the above-mentioned factors and variability.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) suggest that free variation can be caused by the speed of IL development towards the target norm. It is hypothesized that if a learner does not encounter many linguistic structures similar to those of his own IL on his way to native-like proficiency, the latter do not stabilize or fossilize. However, while this explanation may seem reasonable in the case of early stages of SLA, it does not account for free variation after seven or eight years of foreign language learning, as is the case of our students. Moreover, the idea of linear progress towards the TL does not explain the case of 'triple' variation, such as *particulié/particular/particulaire*. If *particulié* is the current IL norm, one might expect a certain amount of fluctuation between it and the TL norm along the line of progress. Nevertheless, the presence of other variable forms suggests that IL should rather be described as a conglomeration of definite and hazy areas of linguistic knowledge. In this perspective, a systematic error reveals the presence of a definite, but not TL-like area, while free variation is a symptom of a hazy area. Many such areas become definite and TL-like over time, but often a linguistic production of an advanced learner exhibits signs of hazy or

incomplete acquisition despite years of learning and exposure. Paradoxically enough, one can say that such areas have fossilized in the state of permanent variability.

The problem of non-systematic variability is directly connected to the phenomenon of fossilization. The existence of the latter as a psycholinguistic phenomenon has been widely accepted in the literature ever since Selinker coined the term in 1972. Its manifestation consisted in "fossilizable linguistic phenomena... linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL will tend to keep in their IL relative to a particular TL". (Selinker 1972). In the same work, fossilization was linked with variability: "fossilizable structures tend to remain as potential performance, re-emerging in the productive performance of an IL even when seemingly eradicated". In fact, variability was a cornerstone of the whole fossilization and interlanguage theory, as, according to Selinker, re-emergence of idiosyncratic items occurs when the learners revert to their IL norm, as opposed to random or NL determined variation.

In this respect, fossilization does not seem a particularly precise term, as the "fossilized", i.e. "set in stone" linguistic items are, in fact, the most affected by variability. Our data indicates that this variability is not necessarily binary: the case of *particulier / particulier / particulaire* leads to some doubts on the existence of a firmly established IL norm. Given that it is unlikely that the three forms are accepted as correct in the learner's IL, the variability can be treated as a manifestation of linguistic uncertainty. The IL appears to be blurred and hazy in some areas, and this phenomenon leads to second order errors in linguistic production. However, the question remains as to why advanced level learners display persistent variability in certain linguistic categories while showing constant error-free performance in others.

3.5 Causes of free variability.

The explanation may lie in the first principle of processing instruction formulated by VanPatten (VanPatten 1996:14) that has already been cited in our first chapter. If learners have a natural inclination to disregard those linguistic features that do not have a significant impact on communication, this would explain persistent variability in accents, and many cases of spelling and agreement. This would be even more likely

to occur if no effort has been made to address these problems in the teaching curricula.

Corder (1973) expresses similar ideas, saying that success in communication can prevent learners from focusing on the form of the message, and ultimately, from any further learning. Talking about people who reside in a foreign country for a number of years with no visible improvement in their ILs, he writes:

...having found that they can communicate and understand well enough for all their normal needs, they have no motivation to eliminate those errors.

If one examines the errors made by such people, one finds that they often involve 'redundant' features of language. Some linguists have reckoned that language may consist of up to 50 percent redundant features. One need only to think of concord in English subject-verb relations, the personal endings of the verb in French, or the concord system of the determiner, adjective and noun in German, to see areas of redundancy very often exploited by the fossilized competencies of foreign residents. (Corder 1973: 269)

It is unlikely, however, that learners consciously notice 'redundant' linguistic features and then choose to ignore them. When VanPatten says that learners prefer to process data for meaning first, he does not imply that this is a conscious act. This tendency should rather be treated as a natural, intrinsic part of the language acquisition process. Nevertheless, if the learner's goal is to approach the norm in his or her linguistic performance, the tendency to ignore formal features, however redundant they may be, has to be remedied.

The examples of non-systematic variability given by Towell - errors in prepositions (*c'est difficile + à / de / Ø*) and determination (*pas de / des / de la / Ø*) support the hypotheses stated by VanPatten, as they fall under the category of "non-meaningful" or "redundant" morphology as far as the lexical meaning is concerned. However, Towell's explanation of the phenomenon differs from that expressed by VanPatten, as he suggests that variability may be caused by the pressure to process linguistic items at a native-like tempo.

Towell's data represents a set of recordings of oral conversations with learners. It is probable that in oral communication the 'need for speed' can be one of the factors

responsible for the variable inaccuracy in linguistic production. In a written task, such as a 300-word examination composition with a time limit of 90 minutes, its influence should be considerably weaker. However, the analysis of Mogilevski & Burston (1999) data reveals a steady presence of non-systematic variability across a number of error categories. Within the same composition, examples of variability were found in prepositions (*regarder à / Ø, continuer de / Ø,*), determination (*beaucoup de / des*¹⁴), spelling (*particulier / particulier / particulaire*), accentuation (*était / etait*), elision (*la université / l'université*), noun gender (*un université / une université*), and conjugation (*il peut / il peux*), to cite but a few. Moreover, the "need for speed" hypothesis does not explain why some linguistic categories are more affected by errors than others.

3.6 Non-systematic variability and second order errors.

According to Ellis (1985: 124) one can talk about non-systematic variability when two forms occur in the same situational, linguistic and discursive context, perform the same illocutionary function, and where there is no evidence from the manner of their production of any difference in the amount of attention paid to the form of the utterances. However, when an advanced language learner produces a second order error such as *etait*, it would be safe to assume that in another production task, in the same situational, linguistic and discursive context, the student will at some stage produce the correct spelling of the verb. It follows that second order errors and linguistic variability are the phenomena of the same order, because every second order error is a representation of potential variability. A second order error can be considered non-systematic because the appearance of the idiosyncratic utterances is random and unpredictable. On the other hand, however, it is systematic in that this variability is category-specific. It would be impossible to predict that a given idiosyncratic utterance that belongs to the category of second order error will, or will not appear in the next production task carried out by a particular student in the same circumstances. It would be eminently possible, however, to predict that this student will make a number of second order errors in the same error categories, and that the

¹⁴ 'Des' was not possible in this context. *Beaucoup des* means 'many out of a given set', as in *beaucoup des étudiants n'ont pas rendu leurs devoirs* – many of the students did not hand in their homework. The error was made in the sentence *Il y avait beaucoup des gens au concert* – There were many people at the concert. Thus the use of a determinate article was not warranted.

latter will mainly represent the linguistic features that VanPatten calls "non-meaningful" and Corder calls "redundant".

Ellis (1987) suggests that the features of the learner's interlanguage that suffer most from variability should make prime targets for effective use of remedial teaching. Elsewhere (Ellis 1997: 69:70) he distinguishes feature resiliency/fragility, saliency and redundancy among factors that determine instructional choices. Fragile features (Goldin-Meadow 1982) are mainly morphological properties of the language that are usually acquired late. Agreement markers, verb inflections and accents can be considered prime examples of fragile features. Harley (1994) claimed that such features cannot be learned through classroom communication. Ellis (1997: 69) supports this claim and argues that grammar instruction should focus on fragile features.

Saliency is defined as a propensity of a given feature for being noticed in the input. It was argued (Schmidt and Frota 1986, Schmidt 1990, 1995) that noticing, or detection (Tomlin and Villa 1994) are determining factors in input processing. Therefore less salient forms stand lesser chance to be acquired through communication, and should rather be taught via explicit instruction (Ellis 1997).

Redundant features are those that do not carry a semantic load. For example, the absence of an accent in *étudiant* in writing would not influence the interlocutor's understanding of the word. There is a striking similarity between fragile, non-salient and redundant features. Fragile features are typically acquired late or not at all; this happens because they are non-salient, and therefore less likely to be detected and subsequently processed; and this is due to the fact that they are not crucial for the interlocutor's understanding of the message.

The acquisition of a given feature is not an all or nothing affair (Romaine 1984:78). When a feature is called "late-acquired" this does not mean that it is completely absent from learner's interlanguage. It may be that this area of the IL is hazy due to insufficient noticing and feedback, resulting in free variation in performance. There are reasons to believe that our students consciously know the rules pertaining to verbal and adjectival agreement in French. Yet their application of these rules is not

consistent. They have also acquired accentuation features in commonly used words to some extent, but free variation in their performance testifies to an incomplete acquisition.

It can be suggested, therefore, that fragile, non-salient and redundant features are most likely to be used in free variation, and that explicit remedial teaching is better able to clarify and structure these hazy areas of the IL than communicative teaching. However, the question is what form remedial teaching should take, because, as Towell remarks, neither direct exposure nor traditional instruction guarantee a noticeable decrease in variability. Assuming that variability and second order errors represent the same phenomenon, some new forms of instruction need to be tested and put into practice, ones that would specifically aim at improving and facilitating the application of a known linguistic rule, thus reducing the 'haziness' of a given area of linguistic knowledge. If second order errors are significantly responsible for learners' inadequate linguistic performance, additional grammar lessons would be of little use in dealing with the problem, as students would simply become bored by the repetition of rules they already 'know'. Instead, new learner strategies must be applied to enable learners to use their linguistic competence more efficiently.

Commenting upon Corder's distinction between errors and mistakes Dulay, Burt and Krashen remarked: "The distinction between performance and competence errors is extremely important, but it is often difficult to determine the nature of the deviation without careful analysis".(1982:139). This led them to apply the term error to any deviation from the TL norm observed in learners' output. As has been suggested above, however, different teaching strategies are needed to decrease the rate of first-order as opposed to second order errors. In developing such strategies for our students, it remains to be seen what relative proportion of second order errors can be found in their written performance. It is also necessary to establish whether second order errors appear at random across all error categories, or whether, in the case of our students, they are concentrated in particular areas of language use. The understanding of the nature of errors made by our students should greatly facilitate research aimed at the improvement of writing accuracy. To summarize, before considering the practical pedagogical steps that need to be taken, it is necessary to establish at first the nature and distribution of second order errors. The study reported in the following part of this

chapter deals with this issue. Secondly, it is necessary to define the theoretical framework that will be adopted. This will be undertaken in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

3.7 Second order errors: data, results and findings.

3.7.1 Hypotheses.

The study aims to verify the proposition that many error types are not caused by lack of linguistic knowledge. To sustain this hypothesis the results must show that students know the rules that underline particular instances of their linguistic performance, yet fail to apply them in a consistent manner.

It is further hypothesized that some error categories will almost exclusively contain second order errors. To sustain this hypothesis, the results must show significantly higher rate of self-correction in such categories as negation, elision and adjectival and verbal agreement.

3.7.2 Data.

The study was undertaken with the voluntary participation of thirty six second-year students of French in first and second semester 1998 and in first semester 1999. The activities reported below were part of an extra-curricular program of weekly one-hour seminars designed to improve learners' ability to focus on form in their writing. The participants were mainly weak-to-average students who perceived the need to improve their performance accuracy.

3.7.3 Procedure.

Students were given a 200-word composition in French containing 50 morphosyntactic errors, and asked to detect and underline them. The composition was written by one of the weakest students in the previous year's group, and chosen for the test because of the high rate of common errors. Non-morphosyntactic errors initially present in the composition were corrected beforehand. No external resources, such as dictionaries or computer spellcheckers were used. The students, working individually with paper and pen, were not limited in time and were strongly urged to detect as many breaches of linguistic norm as possible. They were not given any

information pertaining to the number of errors in the composition or to their types. Subsequently, they were given a copy of the same composition with all the errors already underlined, and asked to correct the errors. All detected and corrected errors in every copy were counted and the percentage in relation to the overall number of errors was calculated.

In a follow-up session, the same students were asked to produce a 200-word composition in French and to scan it for errors before submitting it. They were not limited in time, although many students finished the task within an hour. During the next session they were asked to correct the errors in their compositions underlined by the teacher. All post-corrected errors in every copy were counted and the percentage in relation to the overall number of errors initially present in the compositions was calculated.

3.7.4 Error count.

Errors were counted and classified under the classification system adopted in Mogilevski & Burston (1999) (see Chapter 1 Table 1).

3.7.5 Results.

The results of the first experiment are represented in the following table:

Table 1

Students	Errors detected %	Errors corrected %	Overdetection
1	44	78	2
2	44	89	4
3	20	92	2
4	44	88	6
5	40	84	6
6	36	78	8
7	44	84	4
8	29	80	6
9	34	86	7
10	24	81	2
11	35	78	5
12	45	93	8
13	34	91	3
14	48	87	9
15	31	88	7
16	31	90	4
17	40	76	5
18	49	78	4
19	38	80	6
20	45	85	7
21	47	83	7
22	58	81	7
23	59	78	3
24	46	84	4
25	56	82	1
26	55	87	8
27	56	92	2

28	34	77	6
29	45	88	1
30	34	83	5
31	39	79	5
32	41	89	3
33	57	79	6
34	27	82	2
35	28	89	1
36	32	86	2

Headings:

Errors detected: percentage of errors detected in the text out of the overall number of errors.

Errors corrected: percentage of errors corrected in the text out of the overall number of errors underlined by the teacher.

Overdetection: number of correct linguistic features perceived as errors during the initial error detection procedure.

On average, the students detected 40% of errors¹⁵ during the detection exercise, while they were able to correct 84% of errors. This represents a two to one gap between correction and detection rates. It should be noted that the improvement (from 60% undetected down to 16% uncorrected, i.e. 73%) was much greater than that reported by Makino (41%). This may be explained by the fact that Makino's students had to take into consideration all types of errors, including the categories with intrinsically higher percentages of the first order errors, such as vocabulary, structure and register of language. Meanwhile, the subjects of this study concentrated only on morphosyntactic errors, a large proportion of which were covered by rules the students had long known.

An analysis of the compositions written by students, corrected by the researcher and post-corrected by students revealed the following results:

Table 2

Students	Errors	Words	Errors/100w	Postcorrected	% Postcorrected
36	794	8113	9.8	190	24

Headings:

Errors: sum total of all errors in syntax and morphology.

Words: overall number of words in the compositions.

Errors/100w: average number of errors per hundred words.

Post-corrected: number of errors detected by the teacher in students' compositions and subsequently corrected by the students.

Post-corrected %: percentage of post-corrected errors in relation to the overall number of errors.

The analysis of error distribution and error correction rates in students' own compositions revealed the following results.

Table 3

Error category	Errors	Postcorrected	% Postcorrected
1 Prepositions	97	24	25
2 Determiner	36	8	22
3 Conjugation	88	19	22
4 Adj. agreement	82	73	89
5 Elision/contraction	14	14	100
6 Negation	12	12	100
7 Verbal agreement/person	6	5	83
8 Verbal agreement/number	28	27	96

There is a clear statistically significant difference between self-correction rates in categories 1-3 and in categories 4-8 ($p = 0.000$).

¹⁵ This is consistent with the findings of K. Schlue (1976), where the rate of error detection was

3.7.6 Discussion.

Results reported in Table 1 clearly show that error detection is a crucial step towards error correction. Once learners focus on form of a given utterance, they can apply their linguistic competence to the task of error correction. A 44% gap between detection and correction rates evidenced by the subjects of this study supports the view that linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for optimal linguistic performance.

It is interesting to note that while students were able to decrease the error rate by 73% in the first task (Table 1), including both corrected and postcorrected errors, they improved their own performance only by 24% in the second task (Table 2). This can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, the composition given to students in the first task was written by a very weak student, and the linguistic items and structures used in the original text were quite simple. Thus only 27% of her errors were in the areas where the linguistic competence of the subjects under study was insufficient. For example, all students under study were able to repair a conjugation error on a very common verb: *j'ai étais*, contained in the text, yet could not correct errors on more rare or irregular verbs, such as *il suive*, in their own compositions. Only the second order errors can be self-corrected, and their ratio to competence errors in a given text is defined by the extent of the corrector's linguistic competence.

Secondly, it can be suggested that the allocation of attentional resources is a determining factor in achieving morphosyntactic accuracy. In the first task, students could concentrate totally on the form of the text, and did not pay much attention to its content. In the second, however, they had to produce the text themselves, and this required focus on content. In these conditions, students paid less attention to form as they naturally prioritized what they wanted to write over how they were going to write it. Although they were instructed to focus on form, their performance on a production plus correction task was bound to be less spectacular than on a pure correction task.

reported to be 35%.

Figures cited in Table 2 support the hypothesis that many errors are not caused by lack of linguistic knowledge. Given that students cannot correct what they do not know, it can be suggested that 24% of all morphosyntactic errors made by the subjects of our study should have been avoided if only they managed to use efficiently the rules they know. In the absence of any feedback carrying additional information on the rules relevant to learners' errors, all self-correction must be guided by linguistic knowledge that had already existed in the learners' IIs. Every self-corrected error, where the correction is not facilitated by a binary choice¹⁶, attests to the learner's knowledge of the relevant rule(s). Therefore, nearly a quarter of errors made by our students can be classified as second order errors.

Table 3 shows that focus on form leading to error detection is most beneficial in those error categories that almost exclusively consist of second order errors. While students may not know a number of rules pertaining to syntax and conjugation, their errors in adjective and past participle agreement, verbal subject and number agreement, elision, negation and contraction are certainly not caused by any case-specific or category-specific idiosyncrasies in their competence. One should take into account, however, that the correction rate may be affected by the binary nature of errors such as agreement in masculine versus agreement in feminine. Nevertheless, the high rate of non-binary error correction in the category of agreement, such as agreement both in feminine and in plural, suggests that students were aware of the rules governing this area of language, as they should be after seven years of instruction and exposure.

3.7.7 Conclusions.

The above studies support the argument that a large percentage of learners' morphosyntactic errors are not caused by lack of linguistic knowledge. Schlue reports 31%, Fathman 20% and 32% in two groups, Houck et al. 17.5%, White 52% and Krashen and Pon 95% of self-corrected errors in conditions conducive to focus on form. Lyster reported that 35% of all subjects' errors were amenable to self-

¹⁶ The category which was presumably most affected by the binary choice was prepositions, as a large part of errors in this area involved the wrong choice between *à* and *de*. Yet even in this area students had to know that some preposition should be used in this context, as the French language permits syntactical structures without a preposition in many cases. This argument raises again the issue of hazy knowledge, that has been discussed earlier.

correction after feedback that, in fact, amounted to error detection and elicitation of repair (Krashen's condition 4). Makino's subjects showed even better results in this condition, self-correcting 55% of their errors, although their performance could be affected by the knowledge of the targeted feature, the discrete-point grammar type of the test, and the binary nature of some corrections. Under the same condition, our students managed to self-correct 24% of their errors. These percentages depend, of course, on the subjects' level of linguistic proficiency, or, in other words, on the ratio of first order and second order errors in their output. They also depend on the production mode (oral versus written), on the nature of the discourse (free production or discrete-point tests), on learners' motivation to obtain error-free output as well as on a number of other performance-related factors (physical condition, anxiety, attention span, etc.).

Thus, there is extensive evidence to support the argument that a considerable percentage of learners' errors is caused not by lack of knowledge, but by some other factor(s). This must be performance- rather than competence-related, as the studies reported here show that learners improve their output by self-correction in conditions conducive to attention to form. Theoretically, in ideal conditions learners should be able to self-correct 100% of second-order errors and produce an output that would contain only errors generated by competence failure, thus reducing their error rate by 17.5% (Houck et al. 1978) to 95% (Krashen and Pon 1975), depending on the level of subjects' linguistic competence. In practice, however, teachers often find that just asking students to concentrate on form does not usually lead to any considerable improvement. This observation prompted Krashen to undervalue the role of conscious attention to form in his Monitor Theory, which will be discussed at some length in the next chapter.

This thesis is not limited to description and evaluation of the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' compositions. One of the goals of this research is to elaborate and apply teaching and learning strategies that would result in a significant improvement of the learners under study. This undertaking needs an inquiry into some quintessential questions of Second Language Acquisition Theory: how students learn, what they learn, what the factors are that encourage or inhibit learning and what the relationship is between learning and production of the learned

material. One can find several models of linguistic information processing in the field of SLA (see Ellis 1994 chapter 9 for review) that try to answer these questions by describing the transformation of input into intake, the organization and storage of the intake and the activation of the intake or linguistic performance (Ellis 1994:392). If we assume that our students' level of linguistic knowledge is higher than that of their linguistic performance, it would be logical to turn to the theories describing the third aspect of language processing in the search for means of making the students realize the full potential of their linguistic competence. Ellis indicates four theoretical frameworks that try to offer a representation of intake activation: the Monitor Theory, Variability theories, Operating Principles and Multidimensional Model. Out of these, the Monitor and Variability theories are most relevant to our research, as they deal expressly with variation in linguistic performance and with factors, such as conscious focus on form, that may improve morphosyntactic accuracy and limit free variation.

Chapter 4. The Communicative Approach and the Monitor Theory.

4.1 Communicative approach: some historical background.

This discussion of the Monitor Theory begins with a brief description of the communicative approach and the changes in the methods adopted by second/foreign language teachers in recent history. Although teaching methods do not always closely follow SLA theories (Long 1983, 1990), changes in teaching methodology are often prompted by theoretical considerations, especially in recent decades. So, too, teaching methodologies themselves can influence the development of SLA theory, as is in fact the case with respect to communicative approaches and Monitor theory.

The communicative approach was hailed as a revolution in the early seventies. Grammar and translation drills, which had constituted the backbone of language teaching until the late 1950s fell increasingly out of favor with instructors (Whitley 1993, see also Stern 1992, Chapter 12 for a detailed historical overview), and many new teaching techniques and methods were proposed as an alternative. The most widespread of these was the audiolingual method, inspired by developments in technology. It was claimed to be radically different from the traditional grammar-translation method in that it emphasized inductive rule learning through listening and extensive oral practice. Nevertheless, a large-scale comparative study known as the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Project (Smith 1970) did not show any significant difference between the effects of 'traditional', 'functional skills' (i.e. audiolingual) and 'functional skills plus grammar' teaching methods on beginning and intermediate German and French high school learners. As Savignon (1983:1) put it, the notion of communicative competence "served as a focus for the pent-up frustration that resulted from the failure of audiolingualism to keep the promises made in the optimism of the 1960s".

Another reason for the emergence of the communicative approach was the decrease in student enrollments experienced at the time. According to Grittner (1977) the number of foreign language students in schools and colleges declined steadily in the sixties

and seventies, and language teachers had to devise methods of instruction that would attract and motivate students.

Changes in teaching methods were partially motivated by innovations in the field of linguistic theory. Chomsky's attack on behaviouristic theories of language acquisition (1957) contributed to the fall of audiolingual method, but as he was concerned neither with second language acquisition nor pedagogy, his research did not lead to a theory that would be immediately applicable to pedagogy. This gap between theory and practice was articulated by Corder (1973), who distinguished three levels of the 'total language-teaching operation' (Corder 1973:11). This distinction is illustrated in the table below.

Hierarchy of planning functions in the total language-teaching operation

Level 1 Political	Government	Whether, what language, whom to teach
Level 2 Linguistic, Sociolinguistic	Applied linguist	What to teach, when to teach, how much to teach
Level 3 Psycholinguistic, Pedagogic	Classroom teacher	How to teach

Corder 1973:13.

Van Els et al. (1985: 8-12) criticized such a restricted view of applied linguistics:

It is our opinion, however, that the integration of principles from educational and didactic sciences cannot be left to politicians and teachers, who are mainly concerned with practical problems, but that these principles, too, have to be 'translated' like those of linguistics, by a 'theoretician' for them to be applicable to FLT [Foreign Language Teaching].

What is essential is that one and the same FLT theoretician attempts to integrate the principles of the various source disciplines into a 'theory' of FLT. (Van Els et al. 1985:10)

The claim for a specific theoretical foundation for classroom pedagogy was articulated by a number of linguists in the seventies (Mackey 1973, Spolsky 1978, Girard 1972), and communicative approach constitutes probably the most wide-spread

and popular theoretical basis for practical second and foreign language teaching, despite certain inadequacies that will be discussed later in this chapter.

The key element of the communicative approach, communicational competence, was introduced by a number of scholars in the seventies (Campbell and Wales 1970, Habermas 1972, 1979, Hymes 1971). Dell Hymes' definition of the term has played a major role in the development of applied linguistics (Berns 1990:29), as his position represented a challenge to the most influential theoretical statement of that time, made by Chomsky (1965), namely, the definition of linguistic competence as the primary domain of linguistic inquiry.

Hymes argued that language in use, rather than linguistic knowledge, should be the main subject of investigation. With the emphasis placed on the construction of meaning, a theory of language should take into account the sociolinguistic factors that regulate the appropriateness of language use, and the performance phenomena that Chomsky excluded: "memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic)" (1965:3), insofar as they influence the creation and exchange of meaning, should all be objects of interest for a linguist. Scholars whose work exploited the notion of communicative competence (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, Krashen 1981, 1982, 1985, Savignon 1983, Prabhu 1987) tended to interpret 'appropriateness' in terms of vocabulary register and message presentation, while the focus on meaning led them to disregard errors that did not interfere with communication. Nevertheless, whereas the role of such errors in the process of meaning construction and transfer can be disregarded, they still belong to the area of language use that Hymes termed 'appropriateness'. When language in use is regarded as an essential part of the process of social integration (see Chapter 1), the appropriate, i.e. correct use of 'communicationally redundant' linguistic features may become crucial (Higgs and Clifford 1982).

The notion of communicative competence became the point of departure in the creation of several language teaching methodologies, such as The Silent Way, the Natural Approach, Suggestopedia and Total Physical Response (TPR). The communicative approach served to channel the energy of teachers and researchers frustrated with the ineffectiveness of audiolingual methods based on the behaviorist

paradigm. It was an attempt to suggest solutions to practical teaching problems based on a theoretical framework elaborated by applied linguists, and in this manner to bridge the gap between theory and practice in teaching second/foreign language (Krashen 1982:1).

4.2 The Monitor Theory.

The Monitor Model became the best-known theoretical basis of the communicative approach, and still serves as a set of guidelines for course designers and textbook authors. It is of relevance to our research because, unlike other communicative theories, the Monitor Model adds a performance-related aspect (monitoring) to a theoretical framework mainly concerned with the development of linguistic competence.

The Monitor Theory proposed by Stephen Krashen (1981, 1982), consists of five hypotheses: the acquisition/learning distinction, the natural order hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. We will comment on each one separately, as well as on counter-arguments provided by Krashen's critics (McLaughlin 1978, 1990; Gregg 1984, 1986), keeping in mind the degree of their relevance to our search for the most efficient teaching strategies that would improve morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' writing in French.

4.2.1 The Acquisition versus Learning Distinction.

The acquisition/learning distinction is supposed to operate in the field of the development of linguistic competence. It posits that there are two 'distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language' (Krashen 1982:10): 'conscious' learning and 'subconscious' acquisition. Acquisition plays a major role in the development of linguistic competence, as it is essentially the same process that enables children to attain adult competence in their native language. Learning, on the other hand, is restricted to a small number of 'simple' and 'learnable' rules, and serves as a performance monitor. Krashen argues further that these two processes do not interface; what is learned cannot become acquired (1982: 83). He maintained this non-interface position later, declaring that it explains cases such as

'P.' (Krashen and Pon 1975), who consciously knew rules like 3rd person -s, but still made errors in her speech (Krashen 1985: 39-40).

The distinction between acquisition and learning came under heavy fire from its first appearance in the literature (Krashen 1975, 1977). As one of Krashen's earliest critics, Barry McLaughlin, pointed out, it would be impossible to distinguish in practice whether a learner is operating 'by rule' or 'by feel' (McLaughlin 1978: 317). Moreover, it would be impossible to substantiate or to falsify Krashen's claim that the development of linguistic competence starts with subconscious acquisition, not with conscious learning of rules and structures that are subsequently automatised. McLaughlin argued that any such claim would be based on introspective and anecdotal speculations, not on empirical evidence. He proposed an alternative model of the development of linguistic competence, based on Schneider and Schiffrin (1977) work, where the crucial distinction is made between automatic and controlled thought processes. In this model, knowledge is learned through a controlled procedure and then is used more or less automatically with practice, i.e. becomes acquired in Krashen's definition.

In L2 learning, for example, the initial stage of new item or rule acquisition will require moment-to-moment decisions, and controlled processes will be adopted and used to perform accurately, though slowly. As the situation becomes more familiar, always requiring the same sequence of processing operations, automatic processes will develop, attention demands will be eased, and other controlled operations can be carried out in parallel with the automatic processes as performance improves. (McLaughlin 1978: 319).

McLaughlin's latest position in favor of controlled-to-automatic knowledge development is influenced by Schmidt's work (Schmidt 1990) in the area of awareness in SLA. While it might seem that McLaughlin's model denies the possibility of 'implicit' or 'subconscious' learning, he points out in later work that

Both controlled and automatic processes can in principle be either conscious or not. Because most automatic processes occur with great speed, their constituent elements are usually, but not necessarily, hidden from conscious perception. Some controlled processes also occur with great speed, so that they may not be available to conscious experience. (McLaughlin 1990: 620).

This amounts to a repetition of his previous argument: it is impossible to establish introspectively, and even less so empirically, whether a given rule, item or structure was initially accessed through controlled, or automatic thought processes.

Learners are required to participate in the learning process as active agents rather than passive recipients of linguistic knowledge contained in the input. This participation requires a mental effort, the amount and focus of which determines the features of the target language that will become part of the interlanguage.

Corder (1967) introduced a crucial distinction between input and intake: input is what is available, intake is what is actually retained in memory, or learned. He suggested (Corder 1973:269) that redundant features are less likely to become intake. In Krashen's view, however, all linguistic features, redundant or not, should become intake as long as they are part of comprehensible input on I+1 level and as long as the Affective Filter stays low. Unfortunately, in practice this has not proven to be the case, as evidenced by the concern researchers express with the low level of morphosyntactic accuracy in 'natural' learning environments (Higgs and Clifford 1982). Evaluations of French immersion programs, which were entirely based on Krashen-inspired communicative methodologies, have shown that despite favorable acquisition conditions learners demonstrate low levels of morphosyntactic precision (Harley and Swain 1984, Swain 1985, Lyster 1987). These findings lend weight to the distinction made by Faersh and Kasper (1980) between two types of intake: one that is simply decoded as communication, and another, that is used for learning, i.e. intentionally or unintentionally processed to form a basis for linguistic hypotheses with which learners build up their interlanguage. Chaudron (1985) suggested a similar distinction between 'preliminary intake' - where the learner is focused on comprehension only, and 'final intake', that is data storage and organization into linguistic systems.

Schmidt (1990), referring to Chaudron's concept of 'preliminary intake', suggests that intake is the part of the input which the learner notices. He cites his own experience in learning Portuguese (Schmidt and Frota 1986), noting that the appearance of new forms in his linguistic output matched up with journal comments referring to noticing a given linguistic feature in the input. Schmidt argues that there is no learning without

noticing, i.e. conscious attention to a particular item in the input. In a later work (Schmidt 1995) he posits that while there can certainly be learning without intention, there cannot be learning without attention. Learning without intention does not mean 'subconscious' acquisition, even when learners are unable to ascertain later the exact process by which they acquired competence in a particular aspect of language. Noticing is a controlled activity in McLaughlin's definition, even though this process may take place too quickly to be available for a subsequent conscious analysis.

These arguments support McLaughlin's critique of Krashen's distinction between learning and acquisition, and give evidence in favor of the view that linguistic competence progresses from conscious intake to automatic output procedures. If attention is a limited resource, as many researchers believe (Schmidt 1995; Tomlin and Villa 1994; Robinson 1996), one can also argue that the development of writing ability should progress slower than that of oral discourse, simply because there are more things to notice and process. For example, a written sentence *Ils rejettent la réponse* (They reject the answer) is much richer than its oral counterpart. The learner must notice the spelling of each word, including the consonant doubling (as opposed to an *è*) in the verb stem and the accented *é* vowel in *réponse*, and take into account the conjugation, especially verbal agreement in number, which is silent in oral French. On the other hand, a sentence *tu est ma meilleur ami* contains three errors (verbal person agreement, adjectival gender agreement and noun gender ending), that would be imperceptible in oral speech. In this manner, writing presents the learner with more opportunities to make noticeable errors in semantically redundant areas of grammar and morphosyntax. This view is supported by the low level of morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' written output (Mogilevski and Burston 1999). Several recent studies attest to the presence of this difficulty with native Dutch speakers of French (J.-M. Dewaele 1994) and English students of Spanish (VanPatten 1996) as well as with French learners of German (R. Métrich 1994). The latter characterizes his students' writing in no uncertain terms: "Dire que leurs productions écrites sont truffées d'erreurs, grammaticales aussi bien que lexicales, relève souvent de l'euphémisme"¹⁷ (Métrich 1994: 23).

¹⁷ To say that their written production is stuffed with errors, grammatical as well as lexical, often borders on euphemism.

Following VanPatten's principles of processing instruction (VanPatten 1996), it is possible to suggest that students tend not to notice 'communicationally redundant' linguistic features because they are not forced to undertake this activity by communicational constraints. In the absence of other constraints, such as those imposed by focus-on-form curriculum or socio-cultural pressure, learners do not improve their morphosyntactic accuracy over time, despite any amount of exposure to the TL. Thus, learners in immersion settings often show low grammatical accuracy in comparison to their vocabulary range and other communication-related aspects of linguistic competence (Johnson 1997, Swain 1984, 1991, Harley 1994).

Kevin Gregg (1984) attacks Krashen's acquisition versus learning distinction from another perspective. While McLaughlin argues that this distinction is based on introspection, and is therefore unfalsifiable, Gregg points out that, according to Krashen's own logic, this distinction should not be made at all. Given that Krashen undervalues conscious learning to the point of suggesting that it would be useful only in a discrete-point grammar-type test (1982: 18), it would be pointless to consider learning as an independent means of linguistic competence development. Indeed, if a given aspect of linguistic competence is practically useless, or at least does not show up in real life conditions, why consider it at all? Gregg argues further that Krashen's proposition, that adults learn foreign languages through Language Acquisition Device, just as children acquire their first in Chomskyan framework, bears closer examination:

...The LAD as a construct is intended to describe the child's initial state, before being presented with primary linguistic data (PLD). ...It is not immediately clear how this concept of LAD can be applied to an adult. Not only is an adult not in an initial state with respect to language, but he also is endowed with a much richer set of cognitive structures, which theoretically at least could enable him to violate the constraints of UG. (Gregg 1984: 81)¹⁸.

Krashen's recourse to Chomsky is as untenable as it is inappropriate, since Chomsky himself emphasizes the difference between child's and adult's language acquisition process:

¹⁸ See Bley-Vroman 1988 for a review of differences between L1 and adult SLA processes.

[Answering the question: 'Why is teaching language to adults so difficult, when children learn language without instruction so readily?']

Scientists don't know the answer. Something must happen to the brain about the time of puberty. Nobody knows much about this. It would not be a surprising fact. Most biological capacities have a time at which they have to operate, and they won't operate before or after that time... For the language teacher, that means that you simply cannot teach a language to an adult the way a child learns a language. (Chomsky 1988:179).

Whether or not Chomsky can be considered a well-informed authority on the issue of instructed language acquisition, it is clear that his own position does not lend support to the first-/second language acquisition similarity hypothesis.

Certainly, superior cognitive abilities can put adults at a disadvantage, enabling them to formulate false hypotheses about the nature of TL, while children are barred from such acts by UG principles. On the other hand, adults' superior linguistic skills may serve where their LAD fails, enabling them to notice features that are present in the TL and nonexistent or deficient in their IL a process that Schmidt and Frota (1986) call 'noticing the gap' and deem crucial for input processing.

Another point that should be made here is that, contrary to what Krashen implies, and what is considered an axiom in the literature, (Bley-Vroman 1988, Ellis 1994), children do not attain perfect command of their native language without conscious learning and practice, even as far as phonology and basic syntax are concerned. An uneducated child, teenager or adult would produce sentences like *I dunt do nuthin* in English or *Les choses que j'ai besoin* in French. Even the most educated French feel an urge to consult Grevisse over some grammatical point more than once in their lives, and many an anglophone may be puzzled by the *who/whom* distinction, not to mention punctuation or complex syntax.

The role of conscious learning is even greater in the acquisition of writing skills, and particularly morphosyntactic accuracy. With oral production, there are sociolects with "less elaborated codes" that by definition constitute the "norm" for a particular group. But even in languages with only an oral tradition, some speakers are recognized as more proficient than others, i.e. they must have learned their language more thoroughly than other speakers. With written language, because of its intrinsically

normative nature, acquisition is very much the result of conscious learning and practice.

This means that even if, for the sake of the argument, we accept Krashen's claim that adults learn foreign languages in much the same manner as children learn their native tongue, this does not imply that subconscious acquisition alone would automatically lead to perfect command of oral or written language. This argument is especially relevant in the area of writing: a text written by an eighty-year old native speaker whose education stopped at primary school is bound to contain numerous errors, even though this person has been exposed to written language for most of his or her life. If it is impossible for a native speaker to attain total accuracy in writing just through exposure to comprehensible input, it is at best wishful thinking in the case of a foreign language learner. As DeKeyser points out, the existence of successful adult language learners who have attained a native speaker level of competence in the TL without formal training and learning is highly dubious. (DeKeyser 1994: 92).

To summarize, Krashen's first hypothesis of the Monitor Theory is vulnerable to criticism in several important respects. Firstly, there is no empirical evidence (and nor can there be, as McLaughlin argues) to enable one to divide linguistic features into 'acquired' and 'learned'. Neither can it be claimed that learning cannot transform into acquisition. McLaughlin's model based on automatic and controlled thought processes is more convincing, as it avoids the issue of 'conscious' versus 'unconscious', but still acknowledges the possibility of unintentional learning.¹⁹ Secondly, Krashen's claim that adults learn in the same manner as children, i.e. that unconscious acquisition is the primary driving force behind acquisition processes irrespective of the learner's age, is doubly doubtful. On the one hand, as Krashen himself argues, adults pass through a critical developmental period at puberty and may lose some natural acquisition mechanisms (Krashen 1982:44, also Krashen 1981). On the other hand, adults have superior cognitive and linguistic skills and are capable of conscious attention to form. Lastly, while all normal children acquire competency in their native language, total proficiency in their first language, especially in writing, does not come without conscious learning.

¹⁹ In this thesis the words 'acquisition' and 'learning' are used as synonyms, except in the discussion of Krashen's theories.

4.2.2 Explicit knowledge versus implicit knowledge.

The distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge mirrors Krashen's distinction between learning and acquisition, or controlled and automatic processing (Schmidt 1994). Thus, explicit knowledge is learned, while implicit knowledge is a result of acquisition. We have discussed the role of this hypothesis in Krashen's Monitor Theory. Now we turn to a review of literature on this subject in order to understand in more detail the interplay between these two kinds of knowledge and the way it is reflected in learners' performance. More precisely, we are seeking to understand how our students progress in the acquisition of French, what conditions are needed to ensure this progress, and most importantly, how learners may incorporate in their ILs and correctly use items and structures that are vital for morphosyntactic accuracy.

Explicit knowledge in the field of SLA is usually defined as a conscious representation of linguistic items, rules or structures that a learner can articulate on demand. This type of knowledge is associated with instruction and rule learning. Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is stored below the level of consciousness and thus the learner cannot access it by conscious effort. Implicit knowledge as an innate structure that defines first language learning (Chomsky 1986) plays an important role in the concept of Universal Grammar (UG). White (1990) suggested that implicit knowledge in this definition can also determine second language learning. This is a controversial claim, however, as Bley-Vroman's Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (1989) states that first language acquisition differs from second language learning in that the former allows implicit access to UG while the latter is a conscious problem-solving process. Following this hypothesis, our students should be encouraged to solve problems that are detected in their linguistic performance to progress in this area. It is unlikely, however, that students would find grammatical, as opposed to lexical, deviations and gaps in their output and in their ILs, perceive them as problems, and make an effort to solve them, if they are expected to do it "naturally" and on their own. Given that most problems in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy involve communicationally redundant features, this activity would go against learners' natural inclination to go for meaning first (VanPatten 1996), and is likely to be considered a waste of effort in communicatively oriented classrooms. It follows

that students must be made aware of the problem, and encouraged to solve it; for instance, they may be told the average number of morphosyntactic errors they can expect to make in their next assignment, and prompted to confront the problem by giving morphosyntactic accuracy a place in the marking criteria. Also, they should be made aware of the likelihood of better sociocultural integration with native speakers who share a long tradition of respect for linguistic accuracy.

Implicit knowledge has also been defined as an automatised output procedure that does not require conscious effort and is either a result of practice (McLaughlin 1987, Strayer and Kramer 1990) or of the strength of a particular representation in memory (Logan and Stadler 1991, Robinson and Ha 1993). Automatised linguistic performance supersedes controlled language processing in the model of SLA proposed by McLaughlin, Rossman and McLeod (1983), however, as Hulstijn (1990:34) points out, in this model implicit and explicit learning processes are not necessarily consecutive, since both can participate in the development of automaticity. It can be argued that explicit learning may be more efficient in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy, as, following VanPatten's argument (1996), learners would be unlikely to acquire communicationally redundant features implicitly.

The distinction between learning and acquisition, or explicit and implicit learning, or again deductive versus inductive learning, has been a central issue in the field of SLA for more than a decade. Ellis (1994: 362-363) provides a list of main features of this principle, with amendments and alternatives added by other researchers:

- *Learners possess two types of knowledge, explicit and implicit.*

This statement is widely accepted in the field of SLA theory and cognitive psychology (Bialystok 1981, Ellis 1994). There are three positions with respect to the relationship of explicit and implicit knowledge. Krashen is a most ardent proponent of the no-interface position: he maintains that there is no relationship between the two. He also asserts the existence a strong interface position: "Some second language theorists have assumed that children acquire while adults can only learn" (1982:10). It should be noted, however, that no SLA theorist has expressed this point of view: as Gregg (1984) points out, Krashen is attacking a straw man. Nevertheless, several researchers

argued that explicit and implicit types of learning represent two different, yet compatible aspects of knowledge development. (Schmidt 1992, 1995, Shanks and St. John 1994, Robinson 1996). In their view, knowledge is a result of response to natural and artificial stimuli, and is activated by means of access to short-term or long-term memory. The response to linguistic stimuli, or noticing in Schmidt's terms, must be conscious to activate the process of memory storage. Thus linguistic knowledge development can occur both as a result of instruction, where attention to stimuli is encouraged by the teacher, and as a product of self-generated noticing of repeatedly appearing linguistic items or structures. It follows from this argument that when self-generated noticing does not result in significant progress in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy, as evidenced by Mogilevski and Burston (1999) data, other strategies need to be adopted to help students enhance their performance via explicit teaching.

- *Learners can internalize L2 knowledge both explicitly and implicitly.*

As we have seen earlier, several researchers have sustained this claim. The prevalence of one or the other means of IL development depends on the learning environment, subject matter and task orientation and individual capacities. Some researchers prefer to view acquisition and learning as two aspects of the same developmental process, and not as separate mental processes as they were originally defined in Krashen's work (1982, 1985). Robinson (1996) for example, following Schmidt (1990, 1994a, 1994b, 1995) and Shanks and St. John (1994), postulated a Fundamental Similarity Hypothesis. He claims that noticing, under any condition, is necessary to learning, that knowledge incorporates learned rules and specific memorized instances and that the same memory systems are responsible for explicitly and implicitly learned knowledge storage and retrieval (Robinson 1996:105). This hypothesis also incorporates McLaughlin's (1987, 1990) and Gregg's (1984, 1986) criticism of Krashen's learning/acquisition distinction. These researchers showed that it is impossible to demonstrate experimentally whether a particular feature of a learner's linguistic output is a result of learning or of acquisition. They have also cited evidence of 'learned' items becoming 'automatised' or 'acquired' (see also Schmidt and Frota 1986). Applying this argument to the situation of our students, it is possible to suggest that both intentionally learned and unintentionally noticed and acquired knowledge

can play a role in the process of input's conversion to uptake. Moreover, both types of knowledge can serve to monitor learners' output at the moment of production or after enunciation. It is essential, however, that items, structures and rules necessary for the production of correct utterances be noticed by learners, and, in the case of explicit knowledge, perceived as being worth the effort to learn them.

- *An alternative to the explicit/implicit distinction is to view knowledge as more or less 'analyzed' as opposed to more or less controlled.*

From this perspective, 'learning' can lead to acquisition, as controlled operations become automatised over time (McLaughlin 1978, 1987, Bialystok 1978). In Bialystok's model explicit knowledge can become implicit via formal practicing, and can also be derived from implicit knowledge through deduction. In Bialystok's terms, explicit knowledge is generated by the learner's focus on language code and is developed through conscious attempts to learn new features of the TL and to practice the applications of items and structures that have already been learned. Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is obtained through exposure to the TL and its development is facilitated by the learner's communicational use of the language. In Bialystok's later work, however, the difference between explicit and implicit knowledge is defined by the extent to which linguistic performance is controlled and analyzed. (Bialystok 1991). At this point, Bialystok's work represents a functional model of linguistic performance, where the use of more or less controlled knowledge depends on the type of a given task. (Ellis 1994, Hulstijn 1990). It follows that at the production stage, a learner's linguistic performance is a manifestation of both explicit and implicit knowledge, and that a given task, such as a written composition, can provide both formal and communicational practice. This view is compatible with Robinson's Fundamental Similarity Hypothesis and congruent with the argument that both acquired and learned linguistic knowledge can promote learner-generated monitoring, once learners are motivated to engage in this activity.

- *Neither a non-interface, nor a strong interface model satisfactorily accounts for the relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge.*

The non-interface position (Krashen 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985) is based on the hypothesis that the development of explicit and implicit knowledge should be viewed as two separate mental processes rather than two aspects of the same process. It was argued that this hypothesis is unsatisfactory for several reasons. A strong interface model, i.e. that acquisition is only possible through explicit learning, can also be dismissed, as it has not received the support of any prominent researcher for the good reason that there are numerous examples of adult learners achieving communicational competence in a naturalistic setting. It can be accepted, on the one hand, that implicit knowledge can become explicit as itemized learning is followed by the development of general structure of the IL (Ellis 1994, 1997). On the other hand, explicit knowledge can become automatised over time. Thus one can only reasonably conclude that the existence of the interface between the two types of language development must be acknowledged, and that explicit knowledge can fill the gaps and clarify hazy areas left in learners' IIs as a result of predominantly implicit, meaning-focused acquisition process.

- *Increasingly, explicit knowledge is being viewed as a facilitator of implicit knowledge, by enabling learners to notice features in the input and compare them with their own interlanguage representations (Schmidt 1990).*

It seems that Schmidt is talking here not only about the explicit knowledge itself, but also about the means applied to acquire it: a conscious attempt to memorize a given rule or linguistic item. When a learner is keen to 'notice the gap' it may indeed facilitate the development of language proficiency and accuracy. (Schmidt and Frota 1986, Schmidt 1990, 1995). It has been argued that a learner may have more than one interlanguage representation for a given feature, as a result of its hazy, *geschtalt*-like acquisition, leading to the production of such representations in free variation (see Chapter 2). Explicit knowledge may enable the learner to choose the representation that is most congruent with the TL norm. Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis states that explicit knowledge can improve the learner's output, as far as grammatical accuracy is concerned. This claim, at least, is uncontroversial and accepted by all prominent researchers in the field of SLA. The debate is rather about the potential effectiveness of monitoring on linguistic performance, on one hand, and on the development of learner competence, on the other hand. Thus when a learner correctly chooses

between two possible representations of a given TL feature with the help of explicit knowledge, it serves to reinforce the appropriate form in the learner's IL. In this manner, the output becomes input as learners notice and understand unautomatized elements in their linguistic production. Thus consistent monitoring can not only improve the output produced in a specific task, such as an examination composition, but also have a long-term effect on the learning process. It follows that when students are encouraged to monitor their writing and told what to monitor and how to monitor, their immediate improvement leads to an enhanced noticing of the targeted features in subsequent language learning/acquisition activities. Of course, such a procedure is possible only when conditions are favorable to self-correction, or monitoring: some tasks allow its use, while in others it is more a hindrance than a help.

- *Different types of language use typically require different types of knowledge (Bialystok 1982).*

Of course, formal speeches or journalistic writing often require monitoring, at the planning stage as well as at the moment of production. Written output is especially suited to post-enunciation editing, when the demands on the standard and level of language promote motivation to engage in monitoring. On the other hand, simple verbal exchanges between native speakers usually does not involve conscious attention to language. Nevertheless, any complex linguistic task cannot rely on one type of knowledge alone. In speech, for instance, in both first and second/foreign language it is common to pause between words to search for an appropriate item or structure, or to make a correction after enunciation: this search and correction can rely both on implicit (what feels to be right) and explicit (what was learned to be right) knowledge.

Written academic performance should, in theory, rely on explicit knowledge more than an informal speech does, especially in second language production. There is evidence, however, that some learners prefer to write and to self-correct making recourse only to implicit knowledge. In compositions used in the Mogilevski and Burston (1999) study, as well as in the material of the second order errors study reported in Chapter 2, it is common to see words spelled in two or three different ways in the draft copies of compositions, where the student was searching for the spelling that would 'look right'. These multiple spellings were found not in the body

of the first drafts, but on the margins; they attest to an intentional search for the right spelling rather than to variable use unaffected by conscious consideration. Although this strategy did not always lead to the right choice, it was observed that the chosen spelling never varied throughout the composition. Thus learners became aware of hazy areas in their IIs and did their best to clarify them on the basis of implicit knowledge. As a result of this conscious activity, the area in question became stabilized, although not always as a form most congruent with the TL norm. Still, this type of monitoring is better than none (see Chapter 3:2.5 for the detailed discussion of monitoring). In response to a questionnaire devised to investigate the students' use of a French spellchecker, one student wrote: 'I did not start to pay more attention to my writing. It just flows.' The problem with this attitude is, of course, that the students' implicit knowledge, or 'feel', is often inadequate. It is necessary to take into account the fact that neither implicit, nor explicit knowledge is absolute. Explicit knowledge, when present, can be erroneous, as in the case when the learner does not question that the noun *travail* is spelled *travaille* even when asked to consciously evaluate the spelling, or incomplete, when the student ignores exceptions to the rule, such as *festival/festivals*. Implicit knowledge can often be 'hazy', as when a learner has a 'gestalt' of a word, but cannot feel whether the details of spelling or functional usage are correct. One could suggest that for optimal second/foreign language performance the learner should realize the full potential of both explicit and implicit knowledge, to 'drag it to the surface', so to speak. This can only be achieved when the learner is prepared to engage in the process of monitoring, and when all favorable conditions are present.

4.2.3 Explicit learning versus implicit learning.

It should be noted that explicit and implicit knowledge are products, while learning and acquisition are processes. The investigation of these processes is a central issue in SLA theory. Although our primary focus is on the improvement of learners' performance,²⁰ a brief review of the literature on learning processes should help us explain the current state of our students' linguistic competence, which is partially

²⁰ An investigation of the phenomenon of second order errors (Chapter 2) leads to the conclusion that linguistic performance is not a direct consequence of linguistic competence. The relationship between competence and performance will be further explored in Chapter 4.

responsible for the low morphosyntactic accuracy in their written performance. Krashen divided learning processes into "conscious" and "unconscious" mental operations. Schmidt (1994), following McLaughlin's call to avoid the empty and dubious umbrella terms "conscious" and "unconscious" (McLaughlin 1990), proposes a fourfold distinction of consciousness.

- *Consciousness as intentionality.*

The incidence of unintentional, or incidental learning has been widely researched, and cannot be doubted (Krashen 1989, Hulstijn 1992). It can be questioned, however, whether intentional and incidental learning processes result in different kinds of knowledge, an issue that has been discussed earlier in this chapter. In respect to incidental learning, Schmidt argues that "It is important not to assume without independent evidence that either the process or the product of such learning is unconscious in any other sense, e.g. that such learning is unaccompanied by attention or awareness or that the knowledge gained cannot be expressed" (Schmidt 1994:16). Of course, it would be extremely difficult to obtain this independent evidence: while it is possible to prove that a given item or structure is present in the learner's IL despite the fact that it has not been expressly studied (Hulstijn 1992, Ellis 1994), it is difficult to ascertain whether the learner paid attention to the said item or structure at the moment of uptake.

It is unclear whether all elements of the TL can be acquired via incidental learning. Krashen (1989) defends the value of incidental approaches to the acquisition of spelling and vocabulary, claiming that extensive reading is as effective as focused study. It should be noted that extensive reading may be a manifestation of superior motivation to learn the language, or superior cognitive abilities on the whole.

Therefore, extensive reading can be caused by a number of factors, some of which can be directly responsible for the learner's superior results. Be that as it may, the data produced by our students abounds in morphosyntactic errors despite seven years of exposure to the language both in written and oral forms. In these circumstances the intentional approach may be worth a try. The most important consideration, however, is that unintentional learning does not presuppose the absence of attention and cognitive effort. A student may try to find out what happened to D'Artagnan after his

duel with Atos, yet spare some attentional resources to notice an accent over the word *épée*. This example brings us to the second aspect of consciousness defined by Schmidt:

- *Consciousness as attention.*

Based on studies in psychology (Nissen and Bullemer 1987, Boakes 1989), Schmidt argues that incidental learning is impossible when all attentional resources are depleted. Therefore, learning cannot occur without noticing (Schmidt 1990, 1993a, 1993b). Schmidt recognizes that it may be impossible to find an operational definition of noticing that would allow falsifiability of this hypothesis, and, following Baars (1988), proposes a modified version of this claim that states that more noticing results in more learning (Schmidt 1994: 17-18). It should be noted, however, that available attentional resource is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for incidental learning of linguistic features that are most affected by errors in the learner's output. It is unlikely that every time the learner encountered these features, his or her attention was fully occupied elsewhere. Therefore, whatever the primary object of learners' attention, they need to apply the remainder of their attentional resources to the learning of unfamiliar, or incompletely acquired linguistic elements (Long 1991, 1998). To do this, they must be aware of the fact that these elements are new to them, or that they do not always produce them correctly. This is the next aspect of Schmidt's definition of the term "consciousness".

- *Consciousness as awareness.*

One issue related to the role of awareness in learning that is particularly relevant to SLA is the process of "noticing the gap" (Schmidt and Frota 1986, Ellis 1994, Leow 2001). Thus the acquisition of a particular item is prompted by the learner's detection of the item, and its subsequent classification as unfamiliar or incompletely acquired. The practical methods of promoting the awareness of the "gap" will be discussed in Chapter 5 that deals with focus on form and its various applications. For the moment, it suffices to say that a general readiness to notice the gap does not equate to intentional learning: a learner may not set out to learn the spelling of a particular word, yet still do so as his or her attentional resources are briefly allocated to notice

the gap and mend it. Another interesting question is whether the concept of awareness is relevant solely to language acquisition as opposed to language production. It can be argued that error awareness can be a determining factor in language production, that serves to focus learners' attention on the weakest aspects of their linguistic output, leading to a more controlled language production (Lalande 1982).

- *Consciousness as control.*

Schmidt points out that second language learning has two main aspects: knowledge and skill, or declarative knowledge as opposed to procedural knowledge (Anderson 1983, 1990). The second aspect deals with performance rather than competence, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Schmidt warns that automatic, or "unconscious" performance is not necessarily the result of solely implicit learning. This warning echoes McLaughlin's critique of the acquisition/learning distinction: although implicit learning may have a role in language acquisition, it cannot be proven that it is the way that leads to a faultless performance.

Having discussed the acquisition/learning distinction, both in terms of its role in the Monitor Theory and as an issue in a broader context of SLA theory, we come to the conclusion that this distinction is both untenable and unnecessary *per se*, and inapplicable to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy experienced by our students. Language learning may be intentional or unintentional, yet it must start with the noticing of linguistic features, and the features that pose most problems for our students in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy are unlikely to be noticed and acquired unintentionally due to their low saliency and communicational load. Language production may be controlled or automatic, but the degree of control must depend on the reliability of the production processes and on the demands imposed by the task. Certainly, academic writing at tertiary level must involve more controlled production of linguistic elements that are most affected by errors. We now turn to Krashen's next hypothesis, that purports to explain the process of language learning/acquisition in terms of developmental stages.

4.2.4 The Natural Order Hypothesis.

Krashen's second hypothesis is less controversial than the first. It states that SLA displays developmental patterns in virtue of which some linguistic elements and structures are acquired later than others. This hypothesis has direct relevance to the purpose of our research, namely, to understand the causes of low morphosyntactic accuracy exhibited by our students and to elaborate and apply appropriate and efficient teaching strategies to help them improve this aspect of their linguistic proficiency. If acquisition orders are found to be "natural", global and immutable, any "artificial" attempt to improve learners' performance of certain linguistic features may be bound to fail, as these features could belong to the next developmental stage, or be even further distanced from the learners' present stages. It is therefore necessary to investigate whether developmental changes are amenable to outside influence, and to discuss forms that such beneficial influence might take. This discussion must also include an investigation of the factors that determine the position of morphosyntactic linguistic features on the developmental ladder, as a manipulation of these factors could influence the rate of progress between stages. Another point to discuss here is the applicability of the Natural Order Hypothesis to groups of learners, and the extent to which the concept of developmental changes should influence our treatment of the pervasive deficiency in morphosyntactic accuracy observed in the written output of our students.

The interest in developmental sequences in language acquisition arose when Brown (1973), in a longitudinal study involving three English children acquiring their mother tongue, found evidence that several English morphemes are acquired in a set order. The same order was found in De Villiers and de Villiers' cross-sectional study with a larger number of subjects (1973). A number of studies in this area, both longitudinal and cross-sectional, established a pattern of early stages of first language acquisition: silent period, followed by formulaic speech and language simplification. It was observed, however, that this pattern may be significantly influenced by learner-related factors. For example, many learners do not go through a silent period (Saville-Troike 1988, Gibbons 1985), or extend it to cover any transitional stages of linguistic development (Peters 1977). Some children display more usage of formulaic speech than others (Nelson 1973). Finally, inter-learner variability significantly affects not only the sequence, but also the rate of linguistic development (Wells 1986).

While psychological and biological factors play a crucial role in the first language development, second language learning is more determined by cognitive abilities and the learning environment. Therefore the question arose whether learning sequences exist in the area of second/foreign language learning, and whether their order is different in comparison with first language acquisition process. A number of so-called 'morpheme' studies (Dulay and Burt (1974); Larsen-Freeman (1975); Bayley, Madden and Krashen (1974))²¹ postulated the existence of a natural order of acquisition in mostly informal second language learning settings. Krashen (1977) proposed the following acquisition order for ESL:

*Auxiliary
article*

*-ing
plural
copula*

*Irregular
past*

*Regular past
3rd person singular
possessive -s*

Krashen 1977, also in Krashen 1982:13.

One of the criticisms directed at the morpheme studies is that the morphemes in question are incomparable, as they present different linguistic tasks to the learner (Wode et al. 1978:184). For example, as Ellis points out (Ellis 1994: 95) while articles are invested with a semantic load, 3rd person singular -s is a purely formal feature. Indeed, both in spoken and written English the pronoun is nearly always present,

²¹ See Ellis 1994: 90-104 for a review of these.

therefore the verb ending does not accomplish any communicational task. In fact, one may argue that all morphemes that supposedly belong to a later stage of acquisition are formal in nature, rather than semantic. It can be suggested that those morphemes are most likely to be grammatical rather than lexical.

It is true that regular past ending usually carries an important semantic load. It should be noted, however, that most morpheme studies investigated the acquisition order in obligatory contexts. Thus in a sentence such as 'I work there yesterday' there is already a key element that situates the action in the past: 'yesterday'. In this manner the regular past ending can be considered a redundant feature. Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann (1981: 112) interpreted the speech of Alberto, an ESL learner in Schumann's study (1975: 35-53) as an example of just such an acquisition-independent error: 'From the data quoted by Schumann, it seems as if Alberto only deletes the endings when there is an adverbial like yesterday, after... three years, etc. This would be in accordance with some of our own findings...'. This argument is consistent with VanPatten's principles of processing instruction (VanPatten 1996) supported by Lyster (1998) and with Schmidt's statement that noticing is vital for language acquisition. Learners process language for meaning before they process it for form; in so doing, they do not notice, and therefore do not acquire, linguistic elements that do not define the meaning of an utterance. If this process is universal, as VanPatten argues, it would provide significant motivation for the Natural Order Hypothesis.

Another criticism leveled at the Natural Order Hypothesis is that it presents a view of language acquisition as an accumulation of consecutively acquired items (Rutherford 1988), similar to the process of acquisition of dinner, from aperitif to coffee (Gregg 1984). Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann (1981) argue that cross-sectional studies that are intended to determine developmental stages in SLA assume that the process of acquisition is linear and uniform (p.113). Ellis (1994) convincingly refutes this view of language acquisition:

The progress along this route is a gradual one. Some learners can take longer than two years and some never travel the whole distance. The stages are not clearly defined, but overlap considerably.

Development does not consist of sudden jumps, but of the gradual reordering of early rules in favor of later ones. There are also some differences among learners, reflecting their L1. (Ellis 1994:100.)

Also, learners may vary in how they progress through the sequence. Some learners appear to move slowly, consolidating each new stage before they move on to the next, whereas others move on to a new stage very rapidly, not bothering if they have not achieved a high level of accuracy in the structure belonging to the prior stage. (Ellis 1994: 103-4)

As for longitudinal studies, they may indeed shed some light on the development of linguistic competence, but are usually lacking in scope and thus unable to serve as a basis for universally applicable teaching methodology. As Meisel, Clahsen and Pienemann (1981) argue, "L2 acquisition may develop less uniformly [as opposed to L1 acquisition] to the extent that interpersonal similarities in L1 acquisition can be explained as a result of biological maturation and cognitive development, whereas socio-psychological factors exert a stronger influence on the acquisition of a second language (p.111). Thus the results of longitudinal studies cannot lead to the design of teaching methodology that would be valid for all learners in all environments, precisely because, as Ellis points out, learners differ in their interlanguage development.

From this perspective the Natural Order Hypothesis proves singularly unhelpful if we try to apply it to a practical teaching situation. In a given classroom we may find individuals at different stages of acquisition who display different levels of accuracy in their usage of various linguistic items and structures. Because of this practical difficulty Krashen proposes to 'reject all forms of grammatical sequencing in all cases where our goal is language acquisition'. He suggests, however, that the hypothesis may form the basis of instruction leading to language learning. (1982: 115). In this manner, teachers should define the late-acquired items or structures in their students' performance through error analysis and offer their students an opportunity to learn the relevant rules. Theoretically, if the rules are simple enough ('learnable'), students should be able to apply them during the monitoring process. It should be noted, however, that if the results of learning such rules can be evidenced only in a discrete-

point test, as Krashen suggests (Krashen 1982: 18), there seems little use teaching them if the goal is the improvement of writing accuracy in real situations.

One way to resolve this contradiction would be to ensure that learners monitor their output via conscious focus on form. If a large number of 'simple' rules are learned and, more importantly, applied, this may improve the quality of linguistic output. Krashen's next hypothesis explores the concept of the Monitor and states the conditions necessary for the activation of this device.

4.2.5 The Monitor Hypothesis.

Krashen defines learning as 'conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them' (1982: 10). This type of knowledge serves as a Monitor, which enables learners to edit their linguistic output before or after its production. (Krashen 1982:15). The language acquisition process is subject to individual differences; thus, Krashen distinguishes three main types of Monitor users: over-users, under-users and optimal users. Learners in the first group monitor their output excessively, gaining correctness at the expense of fluency. Monitor under-users do not apply conscious rules to their speech or writing, relying solely on their acquired knowledge. Optimal users monitor wherever the task conditions allow them to apply their conscious knowledge without losing fluency. Given that learners have a limited processing capacity (VanPatten 1996; Schmidt 1995; Tomlin and Villa 1994; Robinson 1996), the Monitor functions only when a significant portion of attention resources can be allocated to activate and maintain focus on form. Krashen suggests that "our pedagogical goal is to produce optimal users" (1982:19), as they would take full advantage of both learning and acquisition.

Although the distinction between learning and acquisition is dubious, Monitoring as a strategy permitting learners to transpose the full extent of their linguistic competence to their performance is certainly a concept of utmost relevance to our research. It remains to investigate what effect Monitoring can have on learners' performance, what factors can influence Monitor's efficiency, and most importantly, what strategies must be implemented to turn learners into optimal Monitor users.

The Monitor's efficiency is limited by a number of factors inherent to the learner's personality, but also by constraints imposed by the structure of the target language. Krashen (1982:96-98) argues that only a small number of rules can be used for monitoring; these rules should be simple and easily described in order to facilitate memory storage and activation. He notes, however, that a rule's simplicity and the fact that it has been learned do not guarantee that it will be applied through monitoring. He gives the example of the utterance *I have talk to Sylvia already*, produced by Eva, an advanced ESL learner in Cohen and Robbins study (1976). His argument is that this example serves to demonstrate the limited role of conscious rules in linguistic performance. Krashen does not ask though why this particular rule has not been applied to this specific sentence. A likely explanation would be, as we have argued in the previous chapter, that this sentence already contains two temporal indicators – 'have' and 'already': thus the regular past ending was discarded as redundant.

Krashen defines 'learnable' rules as those that are easiest to describe and remember by virtue of their formal and functional simplicity. He argues that even 'simple' rules are often not applied through monitoring, and more complex rules stand even less chance of being applied. There is evidence, however, to support the hypothesis that even complex rules can be learned and applied when their importance is sufficiently emphasized. Lightbown and Spada (1990) describe the effect of form-focused instruction on the learner usage of *have* and *be* in introductory or presentational sentences. They had observed over the years that learners tended to produce sentences like *We have a classroom* rather than *There is a classroom*. In one class among the four that provided data for their study, Lightbown and Spada perceived a considerably higher accuracy rate in using these forms. It transpired that the teacher of this class was particularly sensitive to the correct usage of these verbs and consistently provided feedback:

When someone introduced a descriptive statement by saying "You have a...", she (or another student) would look at her empty hands or look around behind herself and say, "I do? I have a...? Where?" (Lightbown and Spada 1990: 435)

It can be argued that in this case that the teacher dealt with a fairly complex rule, inasmuch as presentationals involve a semantic/functional distinction that is quite difficult to explain. After all, one should not say *You have a house*, while *The house has only one bathroom* is a correct utterance. Thus, while Krashen's definition of 'learnable' rules seems to cover only basic morphology, such as elision in French (1982:98), complex rules can be learned via explicit instruction. The most recent study to date investigating this issue is Abu Radwan (1999), whose investigation of the learning of English dative alternation by adult ESL students showed that counter to claims by Krashen (1985) and Reber (1989), explicit learning is superior to implicit learning in the domain of complex syntactic structures.

It appears that 'simple' rules, such as the third person singular ending in English, are often not acquired nor applied through monitoring, while rather complex rules can be acquired or supplied by the Monitor. Following Schmidt (1990) and VanPatten (1996) it can be suggested that any linguistic structure, either complex or simple, can be realized accurately if its correct form and usage are consistently noticed and practiced by learners. This may occur either because the structure in question is vital to comprehension; in which case the structure can be 'acquired' without additional feedback. It may also occur when the given linguistic feature is constantly emphasized during the learning process through feedback from the teacher or peer group. When a linguistic structure is non-essential to communication and the learner is not prompted to notice it, it is unlikely to be used correctly no matter how complex or simple it may be.

Krashen claims that successful monitoring of performance depends on three main conditions: time, focus on form and knowledge of the rule, besides the limits imposed on the functioning of the Monitor by the structure of the language itself and by the influence of affective factors.

The time condition is not normally met in oral production, and over-use of the Monitor leads to hesitation and loss of attention to the message of the other speaker. Krashen argues that monitoring is too difficult a procedure to have a major impact on content-based output:

The reader may argue that (s)he has no problem doing all these things [monitoring] at the same time, and with a little practice and good teaching everyone else can as well. If this is what is going through your mind, you are probably a Monitor super-user. This sort of interest and ability may be what brought you into language science in the first place, and got you interested in books such as this one. You are not typical. ... I maintain that in cases where this [learning turning to acquisition] seems to work, one of two things is happening: (1) acquisition is occurring separately and catches up to a student's learning level; the learning that preceded the acquisition did not play any direct role, moreover, in helping acquisition develop. (2) The successful learner was a super Monitor user and very atypical. (Krashen 1982:98).

With this argument, Krashen neatly manages to defend both the learning/acquisition hypothesis and the Monitor hypothesis against any criticism directed at them by any reader of his book and by any researcher in the field of SLA, as critics are identified as Monitor super-users par excellence. Krashen claims that the Monitor is inefficient in speech and content-based writing, when time is an issue. If it proves efficient, the subject must be very atypical, and the experience should therefore be disregarded. Such sophistry casts doubt on the validity of Krashen's arguments on the whole. In fact, while Krashen should be credited with the introduction of the concept into SLA theory, his insistence on rejecting its utility *a priori* seems unfounded.

In principle, the Monitor should be more effective in the case of a written task within a reasonable time limit, e.g. the production of a three hundred-word composition on a prepared topic within ninety minutes, such as that regularly undertaken by the advanced level university students who were the focus of the research reported in this thesis. In the second order errors study (Chapter 2), students were shown to be capable of writing and monitoring a text of comparable size (≈ 250 words) within an hour. Therefore, it can be claimed that the advanced second year students whose work is the main source of data for the present research do have enough time to monitor their linguistic performance.

Another condition that is necessary for monitoring is focus on form. In Krashen's terms, this means that the learner should be thinking about correctness while communicating in a second/foreign language. Focus on form is necessary because "Even if we do have time, we may be so involved in what we are saying that we do not attend to how we are saying it." (1982: 16). This warning is reflected and

substantiated in the principles of processing instruction defined by VanPatten, who claims that inattention to formal elements of communication is part of a natural tendency shared by most learners (VanPatten 1996). Linguistic elements can be learned in the classroom, but would not appear in their correct form in the learners' speech or writing unless they are invested with a meaning that would determine the success of communication, or unless the linguistic output is produced under conditions conducive to focus on form. This argument runs counter to Gregg's critique of the Monitor hypothesis, where he writes:

Condition 2, focus on form, is really a false distinction; with a few exceptions (e.g., in English, the -s ending of the third person singular present, plural markers, etc.) focusing on form is focusing on content... If, on the other hand, 'focus on form' means no more than 'thinking about correctness', then there is no distinction being made between form and content, and the condition boils down to trying to say what one means to say.

(Gregg 1984: 83).

Although one can agree with the general thrust of Gregg's critique of the Monitor Model, in this particular case he appears to have been led into error by too narrow a focus on English. In languages with richer morphological systems, because of the considerable number of redundant morphosyntactic features they contain, focus on content does not necessarily entail focus on form. In French, for example, errors in noun gender (*un université*), that constitute 9.7% of all morphosyntactic errors in our data (Mogilevski and Burston 1999), rarely, if ever, interfere with comprehension. The same is true for adjectival agreement in number or in gender (*elle est joli, ils sont brave*), which accounts for 9.8% of the error rate, and verbal agreement (*il sont*) (2.4%). Errors in spelling (*etudiant, profesionei*), that amount to 25.4%, and elision (1.8%) also do not have a noticeable impact on the success of communication. It should be noted here, in reference to our previous distinction between the role of formal features in speech and in writing, that very few of these errors are noticeable in oral mode. In fact, only major syntactic idiosyncrasies, errors in verbal tense, conjugation, mood and voice, and wrong choice of vocabulary can hamper communication to any significant extent. Even here, it can be difficult for a native speaker listener/reader (as opposed to a teacher) to know for sure if an error has occurred, e.g. misuse of the *passé composé* for the imperfect or the indicative for the

subjunctive. A message gets communicated, but the intent of the speaker does not correspond to the interpretation of the listener and no one is even aware of the discrepancy.

We do not communicate just to pass on and receive messages. Our verbal skills also attest to our social status, level of education and general ability to interact with, and influence other people. The information-related aspect of communication may be emphasized during early stages of language acquisition, however, at the advanced level teachers and students need to pay more attention to more closely approximating the full range of native speaker communicative competence. If learners fail to do so, due to internal constraints (VanPatten 1996) compounded by the teaching approach, their progress may stop. As Selinker put it back in 1972, "This strategy of communication dictates to them, internally as it were, that they know enough of the TL in order to communicate. And they stop learning." (Selinker 1972: 217).

Moreover, understanding messages in the target language is unlikely to diminish the problem of morphosyntactic accuracy, which is the subject of this work. It has been demonstrated that most errors in syntax and morphology have little, if any, impact on the interlocutor's ability to understand the message sent by a learner. Exposure to, and processing of comprehensible input may indeed improve learners' communicational skills in the target language, but only when the definition of such skills does not include morphosyntactic accuracy. To this end, learners need to adopt learning strategies different from these proposed by the communicative approach.

Krashen's concept of the Monitor posits an important distinction between two ways of treating a language. The first and most natural behavior would be to use the language as a tool for communicational purposes. The other attitude consists in treating language as an object of study; it may not develop naturally. Learners' language may be more or less sophisticated, and the degree of its precision depends on the scope and difficulty of communicational challenges the learner must face. It is used not only to pass on and receive messages, but also to communicate one's social status, trustworthiness and level of sophistication as well as information. It has already been argued that morphosyntactic accuracy is essential to the accomplishment of these tasks in a French socio-cultural environment. It is possible that monitoring may

promote linguistic accuracy. Yet monitoring involves treating language as an object, and some learners may never discover this strategy on their own.

The communicative approach to second/foreign language teaching, based on the Input Hypothesis and the acquisition/learning distinction, is bound to neglect morphosyntactic accuracy in favor of comprehensible communication, especially in writing:

When students are required to write, usually at sentence level but sometimes beyond, the teacher or examiner tends to look for evidence that the student knows the answer and to ignore accuracy or style of presentation. (Johnson 1997: 181)²²

Teacher-generated emphasis on communication may result in learner-generated neglect of grammar accuracy. As Ellis argues

When the learner produces an utterance like 'hitting' (= 'He hit me'), it is possible that the learner is simplifying for the purposes of production (i.e. does have the necessary knowledge to say 'He hit me', but does not do so because it is too difficult in the particular communicative circumstances). (Ellis 1997: 89).

This reasoning implies that under 'communicative pressure' an ungrammatical utterance can produce the same result as the correct one, especially when accompanied by a gesture, but is easier to produce. This reduces the need for an accurate performance of semantically non-essential linguistic features, and lowers the chance that such features would be noticed and practiced. Therefore, once the learners' communicational tool is developed enough for successful completion of everyday tasks, its growth stops, as is attested by numerous studies in the field of fossilization. This does not mean that errors become 'set in stone'; it is rather a disregard for formal 'redundant' features that becomes deeply ingrained.

Therefore, although the learner is consistently exposed to all the elements of morphosyntactic structure of the TL, those which convey grammatical as opposed to lexical semantic information tend to be subject to variability. It was hypothesized that,

²² See also Swain 1984, 1991.

in the absence of instructional focus on morphosyntax, formal linguistic features tend to escape the notice of language learners because they place meaning before form, using language as a tool rather than treating it as an object (VanPatten 1996). Moreover, even when learners' attention is explicitly directed to formal elements in the classroom, they often do not perceive the need to retain them in memory, nor to use them in situations where the informational aspect of communication is emphasized. In the learner's mind, priority is given to attention to meaning and focus on successful information exchange. Spontaneous focus on form will come poor second, if at all. This hypothesis accounts for numerous examples of weak morphosyntactic accuracy found in the performance of advanced learners despite years of exposure and instruction. It also enables us to explain why Krashen can consider the influence of Monitor in everyday communicational tasks as negligible, although learners have the potential to successfully monitor and repair at least 24% of their errors with help of focus on form (See Chapter 2). As learners are not accustomed to treating language as an object and do not perceive the need for high morphosyntactic accuracy, they do not focus on form unless the teacher specifically demands it. In the latter situation (condition 2, Houck et al 1978), learners simply do not know what to focus on: they would naturally tend to investigate the aspects of their linguistic output with the most communicational load, unaware of the fact that these areas mostly contain first order errors that cannot be repaired by monitoring. A demand to concentrate on correctness does not guarantee focus on 'redundant' linguistic features, although they account for a majority of idiosyncratic utterances in learners' linguistic output, especially in the written production.

To summarize, the Communicative Approach has become a self-fulfilling prophesy. When teachers believe that exposure to $i+1$ is the only way to learn languages, conscious attention to formal features is not given a place in the curriculum, so learners will never learn how to monitor their output. When accuracy is neglected in favor of fluency and comprehension, learners will not be aware that it is important to monitor. When it is assumed a priori that error correction is inefficient, learners will never even know that there is something to monitor. In these conditions the impact of the Monitor, i.e. of conscious learning, on learners' linguistic performance will of course be negligible. QED for Krashen.

Another fault that can be found with Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis is that he states that only conscious learning is available for the monitoring process. Krashen acknowledges that subconsciously acquired knowledge can also serve as a monitor in the case when native speakers self-correct their linguistic performance, but implies, however, that acquired rules do not influence the monitoring done by a second language learner. We have already discussed McLaughlin's argument that one cannot support empirically the claim that a given error was corrected 'by feel' or 'by rule' alone. Besides, there are no grounds for maintaining that this would apply any differently to second language learners than to native speakers. Moreover, as far as performance is concerned, it is also irrelevant whether a second language learner corrects an error 'by feel' or 'by rule', or both. What is important for the Monitor's efficiency, besides time and knowledge (both conscious and acquired), is the ability of learners to treat their linguistic output as an object, to identify those areas of it that mostly contain second order errors and to maintain focus on form through the duration of the procedure.

In summary, Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis is deficient in several aspects. Firstly, Krashen implies that 'acquired' knowledge is unavailable for monitoring, although this claim is not based on any empirical evidence. Secondly, the conditions that Krashen specifies as necessary for monitoring do not guarantee full Monitor efficiency. Moreover, they will not be present in a curriculum developed on the basis of acquisition/learning distinction. This leads Krashen to underrate the Monitor's potential to improve linguistic proficiency.

Nevertheless, Krashen's suggestion that learners may make up for their deficient performance of late-acquired linguistic features through monitoring may be applicable to the situation at hand. Given that our students have been learning French for six years on average, all common morphosyntactic errors in their written production can be considered signs of late-acquired items in Krashen's terminology. We have already advanced the hypothesis that these particular items and structures are affected by errors because they mostly bear grammatical rather than lexical information. As learners naturally tend to ignore such features, and this tendency is reinforced by communication-oriented curricula, their linguistic competence lacks in this respect. Moreover, even if the competence is present, learners often fail to apply it to their

linguistic output, which results in second order errors. We have showed that the proportion of such errors in our subjects' writing amounts to at least 24% of the overall error count. It remains now to find the means to make students realize the full potential of their linguistic knowledge, i.e. to repair 24% of their errors either 'by feel' or 'by rule'. In the latter case, Krashen specifies that only 'learnable', simple rules can be used by the Monitor. It is unclear how 'simple' a 'learnable' rule should be; it seems that adjectival and verbal grammatical concordance in French, that is among the largest error categories, is governed by mostly simple rules. At any rate, one can hardly object to the suggestion that students should be equipped with rules to deal with the areas of their written output which are most affected by low accuracy.

4.2.6 The Input Hypothesis.

The Input Hypothesis is central to Krashen's theoretical framework, as it attempts to explain the manner in which children and adults progress in the development of their first or second language. The explanation of the second/foreign language learning process would be most relevant to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' writing in French. Understanding this process may serve as a basis for a teaching methodology that would improve students' competence in this area. It should be noted, however, that, unlike the Monitor hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis accounts solely for the development of learners' competence. Therefore, it would *a priori* be unable to deal with the problem of second order errors, as these are not related to the state of learners' interlanguages.

The Input Hypothesis is divided into four separate claims, that are summarized below:

The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning.

We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence (i+1). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information.

When communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, i+1 will be provided automatically.

Production ability emerges. It is not taught directly.

(Krashen 1982: 21-22)

The first claim is a corollary of the acquisition/learning hypothesis. Thus, acquisition and learning are two separate processes, and we acquire language by understanding the input that is 'a bit beyond our current level of competence', while we learn by activating deeper cognitive processes, such as memorization and cognitive organization of the input. It should be noted, however, that during the process of acquisition, and especially when learners face an unfamiliar linguistic structure, they might correctly deduce the rules that govern it, and even be able to talk about these rules. Alternatively, the learner may remember the relevant rule that has been taught before, and realize that it can be applied to the structure in question. Conscious awareness of rules can be teacher-generated, or learner-generated, but in both cases what comes into play is learning in Krashen's definition: 'knowing the rules, being aware of them and being able to talk about them.' (1982:10). It is reasonable to assume that a hypothesis concerning the cause of linguistic development cannot ignore the role of conscious mental processes, which is explicitly neglected in the strong form of the input hypothesis.

The second claim of the Input Hypothesis is central to Krashen's theory of acquisition. The $i+1$ condition purports to describe a mechanism that is responsible for the learner's progress from one stage of acquisition to another. Krashen maintains that we acquire a language, including its formal aspects, by focusing on meaning and understanding input that is 'a bit beyond our current level of competence'. More specifically, we acquire language competence "by 'going for meaning' first, and as a result, we acquire structure!" (1982:21). Krashen's assertion, however, begs a critical question: what exactly is the process by which focus on meaning, and subsequent understanding, translates into language acquisition, i.e. active control of linguistic structures? How does input become intake? More precisely, how can learners acquire formal features that are most affected by errors in our data by focusing on meaning?

Schmidt's argument that noticing is crucial to acquisition (1990, 1992, 1995) may be helpful in understanding this process. From this perspective, when learners hear or read $i+1$, they notice the 'bit' that is understandable in the context, but unfamiliar by itself. Following Schmidt's argument it is possible to suggest that noticing is the first step on the road to acquisition; it leads to the storage of the 'bit' in memory and is followed by a formulation of a hypothesis relating to the correct usage of the bit and

an application of this hypothesis in speech or writing. This process may seem straightforward as far as vocabulary items are concerned, because they can be expected to be naturally salient, but it becomes more complicated in the case of less salient morphosyntactic features, such as spelling, gender or conjugation. Moreover, Krashen claims that 'the 'distance' between 'i' and 'i+1' cannot be too great - 'i' and 'i+1' can only differ in small ways (1982:28). It remains unclear how 'small' or how 'great' a difference there must be for acquisition to occur. Schmidt's hypothesis that attention is vital for acquisition would seem to support the view that the greater the difference, the more likely it is to be noticed and acquired. Of course, there must be a limit to the beneficial effect of a greater difference: a very big difference can be noticed, but not understood.

We have already argued that producing a fully comprehensible utterance can often occur irrespective of the level of morphosyntactic accuracy. For example, the sentence *je suis etudiant à la universite* contains two errors in accentuation and one in elision, yet it would be fully understood by any learner who has mastered basic conjugation and vocabulary. If we define communication in a narrow sense as an ability to pass on and receive messages, as Krashen seems to do, it would be successful in this case. And if learners are unaware that there is anything wrong with their linguistic performance, they would obviously have no motivation to improve their morphosyntactic accuracy.

Alternatively, the same sentence in its correct version will not contain any '+1' bits, including accentuation, for advanced students, who will then still make errors of this type in their output. In this manner, when learners produce second order errors, they will not improve their morphosyntactic accuracy via exposure to i+1 because, by definition, their errors are not linked to competence deficiency and thus the correct forms would not be '+1' to them. Just because unacquired material is in the input, it does not follow that it will be noticed no matter how frequent or common it may be. On the contrary, advanced learners may very well have "learned" early on to ignore these features because they have little or no visible effect on communication, and because they are ignored in curricula modeled on a communicative approach. This may explain the "fossilization" of learners' linguistic performance despite great periods of exposure (Corder 1973, Higgs and Clifford 1982).

If Krashen's Input Hypothesis is true, then the reverse must also hold: input that is fully understood by definition cannot be considered $i+1$. It follows that if a learner fully understands the input, there is no opportunity (or motivation) to make further progress in language acquisition. This observation is in fact substantiated in a number of studies which show that learners in a naturalistic setting do not notice redundant morphosyntactic features by themselves, without any additional stimulation. (Lyster and Ranta 1997, Schmidt 1995, VanPatten 1996, Allen, Swain, Harley and Cummins 1990, Swain 1985, 1988, 1993, Corder 1967). A study conducted with Krashen's own participation before the advent of the Monitor Theory showed only a weak relationship between years of residence in the TL country and linguistic proficiency (Krashen, Jones, Zelinski and Usprich 1978) while a strong relationship was found between years of formal study of the TL and linguistic proficiency. The findings of this study, among others, led Krashen and Seliger to claim that "for adults, formal instruction is in general of more benefit to second language learning than in exposure to and use of the second language in "natural" situations" (Krashen and Seliger 1975: 173), adopting a position that Krashen will completely abandon six years later (Krashen 1981).

The whole concept of $i+1$ is based on what an individual learner would consider to be 'i', and what is '+1'. Once learners are sufficiently advanced to understand the meaning of the input, they must monitor it in search of the features whose role and usage are still unfamiliar, thus engaging in the process that Schmidt and Frota (1986) call 'noticing the gap'. Such monitoring may not be intentional; a learner can read for pleasure and still notice an accent in *forêt* or the spelling of *professionnellement*. It is crucial, however, that learners be in the right state of mind to notice such things: they must be able to recognize the importance of morphological correctness, or, in other words, to treat the language as an object as well as a communicational tool.

As Gregg (1986) points out, Krashen seems to deny that learner's output can be used as input, as it would contradict his non-interface learning/acquisition position. It is likely, however, that learners do read and hear their own linguistic production. In fact, this assumption is behind all pedagogical activities that involve learner-generated comparison between learners' and native speakers' linguistic output. In this case, 'If

output is available as input, and if Monitoring can increase the incidence of correct utterances of a given structure, then it would seem that output is being used to further acquisition, and thus that the Monitor can be used for acquisition" (Gregg 1986:88). There is a distinction to be made here: Krashen's formula $i+1$ describes input that includes unknown features, while the Monitor is applied to the output that contains incorrect elements. 'Known' does not mean 'correct': thus the Monitor can prompt acquisition only when the learner realizes that 'the bit beyond his current level of competence' is present in the output/input in the form of incorrect spelling, for example, even if it does not affect comprehension. Of course, learners may not realize this by themselves, especially when areas subject to second order errors are concerned: when learners encounter correct forms of adjective number agreement, for example, they would not be aware that anything unknown is present in the text.

The idea that learner's output can be used as input can also contradict Krashen's claim that learning cannot lead to acquisition. Krashen acknowledges that learning can facilitate acquisition in an indirect manner: "Adults have means of producing language earlier, of 'beating the "Silent Period"', means that have nothing to do with natural language acquisition but that may nevertheless help them participate in conversation and hence obtain comprehensible input" (1982:44). It is claimed thus that learning can allow students to participate in the creation of comprehensible input. They can also beat the "Silent Period" in writing, producing sentences with the help of conscious learning. One must assume that such sentences would be comprehensible to them, and would therefore, constitute ideal input in Krashen's terms. Krashen, however, leaves unasked, let alone answered, how it is that learning can facilitate acquisition but cannot lead to it.

Taken literally, the third claim Krashen makes is self-contradictory. He states that 'if communication is successful, if the input is understood and there is enough of it, then $i+1$ will be provided automatically'. If 'enough' means a great quantity of oral and written input rather than its variety, then one can easily imagine a situation where there would be no $i+1$ in the input. Advanced learners French may not be altogether perfect, yet they can listen to everyday conversations for years without encountering one single bit that would be 'beyond their current level of competence'. Does that mean that their French is bound to fossilize forever? Hopefully not, even if this

contradicts Krashen's hypothesis. Beyond the beginning stages of language acquisition, the abundance of input does not guarantee the presence of the '+1' element. Moreover, the presence of such does not guarantee that it will be noticed. Clearly, there must be more to language acquisition than mere exposure to large doses of comprehensible input.

Krashen claims that studies investigating caretaker speech (CS) in first language acquisition, as well as simplified input and silent period in SLA give evidence in support of the Input Hypothesis. This claim, however, is controversial. To begin with, there is no evidence that CS improves the first language acquisition rate (Wexler and Culicover 1980:60). Secondly, CS is not 'simpler' overall than the normal speech (Gregg 1986:89, Newport et al. 1977:122), and cannot be compared with teacher-talk. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence to support the claim that teacher-talk or foreigner-talk are beneficial for acquisition. Thirdly, the assumption that one can theorize about SLA on the basis of studies in the area of first language acquisition is dubious, as there are major differences between the two (Ellis 1994:106-108). Finally, the silent period is not necessarily observed in second language acquisition (Saville-Troike 1988, Gibbons 1985), especially with adults and in formal learning situations (Gregg 1986, Ellis 1994). Thus while children may need some time to acquire enough information, adults can start using language as a communicational tool immediately after learning some common items.

The evidence that forms the basis for the Input Hypothesis comes from studies investigating first language acquisition (MacNamara 1972, Newport, Gleitman and Gleitman 1977) or second language acquisition in children (Hatch 1972). Studies that investigate the performance of advanced adult learners, such as 'P' (Krashen and Pon 1975) are not cited in the chapter devoted to Input Hypothesis (Krashen 82: 20-22). It remains unclear whether in Krashen's view such learners acquire in the same manner as children or beginners. It would appear that in this case Krashen argues the opposite:

"Advanced" second language acquirers, especially those who have been in the country where the target language is spoken for a few years, may have acquired a great deal, but not all, of the second language, enough to meet communicative needs, but still short of the native speaker standard. Their chief need may be conscious rules

to use as a supplement to their acquired competence, to enable them to appear as educated in their second language as they are in their first. (Krashen 1982:112).

This reasoning implies that, at some point in their development, learners have to rely on learning rather than on acquisition in order to make progress. It has been argued that 'a great deal' of linguistic knowledge is not that great if it is only 'enough to meet communicative needs'. It follows that, at the intermediate to advanced stage of development, the learner must pay attention to formal features of the language and not rely on the 'automatic' acquisition generated by input alone. This hypothesis will be discussed in more detail in the chapter devoted to focus on form. For the moment, it suffices to say that focus on form has received the support of numerous researchers in recent years (see Pica 1994 and Doughty and Williams 1998 for reviews). Yet Krashen seems to refute this argument in claiming that "adults are still 'acquirers', that they retain the natural language acquisition capacity that children have... some adults can achieve extremely high levels of competence in a second language and may even be taken for native... In many cases the [affective] filter prevents the adult only from going the last few inches" (1982:45). Krashen thus maintains that near-native proficiency can be achieved by acquisition alone, and that advanced adult learners are prevented from attaining full proficiency only by reason of the affective filter. As indicated above, however, Krashen himself does not completely endorse the former statement; as for the latter, it forms the backbone of the last hypothesis of Krashen's SLA theory.

4.2.7 The Affective Filter Hypothesis.

This hypothesis is formulated to explain why adults rarely, if ever, attain perfect mastery of second language. It is therefore extremely relevant to our research question, as understanding of the factors behind our learners' lack of progress in morphosyntactic accuracy (Mogilevski and Burston 1999) must form a basis for any attempt to improve the situation. It is well known that adults rarely acquire a second language equal to educated native speakers' performance. It would be pertinent, however, to investigate the factors responsible for the imperfections found in the performance of learners under study in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) as well as in this thesis. Ideally, a hypothesis that purports to define the handicaps affecting adult

language learners can be expected to shed light on why learners do not attain perfection specifically in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy.

Krashen argues that first and second language acquisition processes are essentially similar; it is therefore incumbent on him to explain why adults' acquisition of a second language does not attain the same level as children's acquisition of their first language. In his view, this is due to the following factors:

Motivation - Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition.

Self-confidence - Performers with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to do better in second language acquisition.

Anxiety - Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety. (Krashen 1982:31).

These affective factors are grouped under the name of the Affective Filter. High Affective Filter corresponds to low motivation, low self-confidence, and high anxiety. Overall, the Affective Filter hypothesis is supposed to answer the following questions: "(1) which target models the learner will select; (2) which parts of the language will be attended to first; (3) when language acquisition efforts should cease; and (4) how fast a learner can acquire a language." (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 46).

According to Krashen, the filter is the major obstacle between input and intake: if the filter is high, firstly, the learner would be less likely to seek additional input, and secondly "the input will not reach that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device"²³ (Krashen 1982:31). The filter is the cause of the difference between a child's and an adult's levels of linguistic proficiency attainment.(1982:45). Krashen implies that the Affective Filter exists in children, as he theorizes that "the child's superiority in ultimate attainment has been hypothesized to be due to the strengthening of the affective filter at about puberty" (p.44). The filter becomes stronger, as adolescents experience "increased self-consciousness, feelings of vulnerability, and lowered self-image" (Krashen 1981:35, also Dulay, Bart and Krashen 1982:93).

²³ It is unlikely that Chomsky would concur with the equation between the LAD and 'a part of the brain'. Such careless comparisons lend weight to Gregg's judgment that Krashen's references to Chomsky and Piaget amount to simple name dropping (Gregg 1984:92).

The claim that affective factors, such as motivation, self-esteem or anxiety, play an important role in adult SLA, is widely accepted in the literature (Bley-Vroman 1988, Ellis 1994). It is also considered axiomatic that these factors do not influence child L1 acquisition to the extent that would determine its overall success (Bley-Vroman 1988). It is necessary, however, to define what is meant by successful language acquisition. Given that morphosyntactic accuracy is our major concern, it is assumed here that successful language acquisition leads to a very high level of accuracy in linguistic performance.

It is common to judge linguistic proficiency of second/foreign language learners against the benchmark of 'native-like proficiency'. When we say 'native-like' proficiency, however, we imply an accuracy rate in writing as well as speech that is characteristic not just of any native speaker, but of an educated native speaker. As discussed earlier, within the French sociocultural context the level of linguistic proficiency expected of an educated native speaker would be a more suitable benchmark. Indeed, Molière's Martine is a native speaker of French, but it would not be appropriate, for the reasons described in the first chapter, to use her level of linguistic competence as a benchmark for our graduates. By the same token, the level of linguistic proficiency in writing displayed by a five-year-old native speaker would be insufficient as an educational goal at tertiary level.

It can be safely asserted that a child does not need any external motivation to succeed in the development of communicational proficiency in the spoken mode. It can even be argued that native-like phonology can also be acquired at this stage independently of affective factors, although it may require correction later on due to social and pragmatic constraints –Elisa Doolittle's speech, for example, would be considered the norm in her original sociolect, but no teacher would welcome it in educational environment. Any primary and secondary teacher would confirm that the development of reading and writing skills requires a great deal of motivation, both external and internal, as well as conscious (intentional) participation. It is a long process that goes on through the school years, and the result is sometimes far from perfect. In fact, morphosyntactic accuracy in writing in both first and second/foreign language is one of the areas of linguistic proficiency that continues to develop from childhood to adolescence and beyond. The rate of achievement depends on a number of other

factors, besides length of studies. They can be divided into internal factors, such as motivation, individual cognitive capacities, self-esteem, ability to withstand pressure and anxiety, etc., and external factors, such as the efficiency of teaching methods and socio-educational environment. These factors affect both native speakers and second language learners, at least when it comes to linguistic development beyond the stage of oral communicative competence. It follows that the presence of affective factors per se may influence, but cannot totally determine the success in language acquisition as we define it.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis is supposed to explain why certain features of the TL are 'successfully acquired', and others are not. As usual in Krashen's theorizing, the evidence cited in support of the hypothesis comes from the field of first language acquisition:

Learners, for instance, will select certain types of phrases or vocabulary items to learn and use over others; children, for example, tend to first learn phrases and sentences that are essential for social participation. (Dulay, Bart and Krashen 1982:46).

The learning of phrases, items and sentences as separate objects belongs to the first stage of language acquisition. It is unclear how this hypothesis applies to the case of an advanced learner who persistently omits the accent in *écrire*, for example. It can be safely assumed that such learners have 'acquired' this item, as they produce it effortlessly in any written composition. Is it possible to say that there are two items in this case - the verb and the accent, where the former is acquired while the latter is not? Generally, one should distinguish here the acquisition of lexical meaning as opposed to the acquisition of formal features; for example, learners often use the infinitive of a verb they are unable to conjugate. The acquisition of a given rule also does not necessarily translate to absolute knowledge: as Romaine (1984:78) points out, 'rule acquisition is not an all or nothing affair'. It seems more likely that whenever a rule or an item is 'acquired', some of its features that are non-essential to communication can remain unnoticed, and therefore unprocessed (Schmidt 1990, 1995, VanPatten 1996). This would be a likely cause of most first order morphosyntactic errors made in writing by our advanced students. In the case of second order errors, the rule or the

item in question would be noticed, processed, but not applied or used correctly, again because of their perceived low semantic and sociopragmatic value.

Krashen suggests that the Affective Filter grows in strength at the onset of puberty, when adolescents experience low self-esteem, high self-consciousness and anxiety. It is doubtful, however, that its negative effects can still be traced in an adult's learning experience. Is an adult who started learning a language at the age of thirty still suffering from such 'psychological acne'? As Gregg (1984:93) points out, most adults successfully overcome the psychological hurdles of adolescence, and yet even highly motivated advanced learners with high self-esteem frequently fall short of the educated native speaker level of proficiency. In particular, this relates to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy experienced by our advanced mature age students, whose motivation and psychological stability are not likely to be detrimental factors.

4.3 Summary of the critique of the Monitor Theory.

Having examined the five major hypotheses of Krashen's Monitor Theory, we have seen that all of them exhibit faults and inconsistencies, and that they do not adequately explain the linguistic behavior of the subjects of our study nor offer means of improving it. Our conclusions at this stage can be summarized as follows:

- *The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis.*

This distinction is unfalsifiable, as it is based purely on subjective evidence. It is also unnecessary, as McLaughlin's concept of automatic and controlled processes provides a comprehensive view of language development, including unintentional learning, while being subject to empirical verification. Finally, it does not provide an appropriate tool for the analysis of our students' written output, as it is impossible to ascertain whether they perform 'by rule', 'by feel' or both.

- *The Natural Order Hypothesis.*

It can be accepted that linguistic development of both first and second language learners follows a given pattern. The hypothesis does not explain, however, why certain features are acquired sooner or later; VanPatten's principles of processing instruction are more helpful in this respect. Furthermore, the Natural Order and the rate of acquisition can be influenced by a number of factors. Given that learners in a classroom may be at different stages of acquisition, with an infinite number of personal variations within each stage, the hypothesis cannot serve as a foundation of a teaching strategy.

- *The Monitor Hypothesis.*

The concept of the Monitor as an editing and proofreading mechanism that improves linguistic output is the only element of Krashen's framework that deals with performance rather than with the development of competence. It is thus able to deal with the problem of second order errors. It is also the only hypothesis that describes the role of conscious mental activity in linguistic development. It was argued here that a great number of our students' errors are performance related, and that they are amenable to conscious correction. Thus it is hypothesized that monitoring can, in theory, significantly improve the performance of our study's subjects.

Nevertheless, several objections to Krashen's definition of the Monitor can be raised. Firstly, it is argued that monitoring can occur before, during and after the writing act. Secondly, both 'feel' and the knowledge of the rule can serve for monitoring. Finally, ideal monitoring conditions in Krashen's terms do not guarantee faultless application of 'simple' rules. On the other hand, rather complicated rules can form part of monitoring.

- *The Input Hypothesis.*

Learners certainly need input to develop linguistic proficiency. It is argued, however, that a great quantity of input does not guarantee the presence of $i+1$ when a learner is beyond the beginner stage. Furthermore, the $+1$ elements in the input can remain unnoticed, and therefore not acquired, if they are formal and redundant in nature. The

results of Mogilevski and Burston (1999) support this argument: after six to eight years of exposure to a large quantity of comprehensible input, our students still display low morphosyntactic accuracy. It is hypothesized that they would need external help to notice the redundant elements, as focus on correctness, unlike focus on comprehension, does not come naturally.

- *The Affective Filter Hypothesis.*

None would deny that high motivation, low anxiety and high self-esteem facilitate language learning, or any other undertaking. It is likely, moreover, that optimal development of writing skills is affected by these factors both in first and second language acquisition. Of course, a native speaker with a high affective filter would still perform better than a second language learner with the same handicap, or even with a low affective filter. Nevertheless, the difference in performance should be ascribed to longer practice and the influence of various pragmatic and social constraints: an Englishman can live comfortably in England even if his French is poor, but a Frenchman has, by definition, a much higher motivation to attain optimal linguistic proficiency in his or her native language²⁴.

Besides stating the obvious, this hypothesis does not offer any help in dealing with our students' errors. On one hand, we should not assume that the past six years of their language learning experience were characterized by a persistently high affective filter. After all, why would students continue studying French if their past experience was negative? As there is no compulsory foreign language requirement in the curriculum, it would be reasonable to assume that few, if any, students experienced a high affective filter for any appreciable length of time. On the other hand, it is unclear how we could lower it to any significant extent within the constraints imposed by the structure of university education. It is also unlikely that such an accomplishment would drastically improve the students' level of morphosyntactic accuracy within a short period of time. Finally, the hypothesis does not explain the distribution of errors

²⁴ Of course, motivation cannot be considered an important factor in the development of oral, and especially phonological first language proficiency. Reading and writing are another matter, however, since these are linguistic skills that have to be "learned". In this respect, motivation would appear to be much more closely linked to "learning" than acquisition.

per error categories and does not offer any insight into how learners' performance may be improved specifically in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy.

Krashen's acquisition/learning distinction and the Input Hypothesis deal with the development of language competence while the Monitor hypothesis explains linguistic performance. An attempt to cover both these aspects of language development within the same theoretical framework can result in an insufficient precision of theoretical constructs and even incompatibility of certain elements. Thus, Gregg (1986) argues that the Monitor hypothesis defies Occam's razor as it is a performance-related hypothesis within a framework that describes the development of language competence. Yet, as the purpose of our research is to find means to improve our students' linguistic performance, we must consider language in use, and thus explore the relationship between competence and performance. It has already been argued that linguistic competence does not always translate to linguistic performance, as attested by the second order errors study in Chapter 2. The next chapter is devoted to a more detailed discussion of the concepts of competence and performance as part of the variabilist approach to the study of SLA.

Chapter 5. Variability theory and the notion of linguistic capability.

5.1 Variability theory.

Applied linguistics research operates in essentially two ways. A researcher can choose to verify some strong theory by empirical means. The explicit/implicit distinction is an example of a strong theoretical concept that remains to be verified via experimental evidence. A second approach, exemplified by variability theories, tries to explain data already obtained by empirical observations. As the research reported in this thesis started with quantified observation of learners' linguistic performance, we naturally adopt the latter approach. By definition, any theoretical conclusions that emerge from such research are supported by empirical findings. A discussion of theoretical constructs that attempt to explain linguistic variability is relevant to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in the written output of our students because, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2, this is characterized by a high level of free variation. The following discussion attempts to establish the causes of this phenomenon and subsequently suggest ways to reduce its negative impact on linguistic performance, especially in writing.

Performance data provided by language learners includes numerous examples of variable use of linguistic items or structures. This led a number of researchers (Selinker 1972, 1990, Dickerson 1975, Schmidt 1977, Gatbonton 1978, Tarone 1983, 1988, Ellis 1985, 1990, 1994) to agree that learners' interlanguage is variable. On the other hand, ever since the term 'interlanguage' was coined by Selinker (1972), it has been accepted that interlanguage is systematic. Ellis (1985) and Tarone (1983, 1988) are two major proponents of a theory that reconciles the notions of systematicity and variability in interlanguage. They view variability as a sign of interlanguage development on a diachronic level, while the IL remains systematic on the synchronic level. The variability in the learner's performance can be systematic, as the performance changes depending on the task, or non-systematic, when an item or a structure are performed differently in the same situational context.

Tarone (1983) formulated three major paradigms in the debate about the nature of interlanguage. The first approach is based on Chomsky's theory of language, and sees variation in performance as a phenomenon that is not linked to the learner's linguistic competence. The homogenous competence paradigm states that a learner's competence remains stable at any given moment, and attributes variation in performance to the influence of performance-related factors, such as limited time, anxiety and stress. Neither Tarone, nor Ellis (1985) accept this paradigm, as it is difficult to ascertain which of the two linguistic features present in free variation in the output of learners represent their competence.

The second approach Tarone considers is the capability paradigm, which claims that the learner's competence consists of a variety of styles, ranging from the vernacular to the careful. The use of a given style depends on the degree of attention to form, which, in turn, is determined by the processing constraints that accompany linguistic performance. Tarone is inclined to support this paradigm, as it represents interlanguage as a coherent system while explaining the performance variability. It should be noted, however, that the capability paradigm only accounts for cases of systematic variability, where the degree of attention to form varies due to different situational constraints. As Ellis (1985) points out, this model does not apply to a situation where the performance of learners varies while they are performing the same task in the same situational and linguistic context, with the same degree of attention to form, such as the previously cited example from our data of *particulié*, *particular*, and *particuliaire* occurring within the same composition.

The third model discussed by Tarone – the dual competence paradigm – derives from Krashen's Monitor theory (Krashen 1981, 82). This model was discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Briefly, Krashen posits the existence of two separate kinds of competence – acquired and learned, and argues that the latter serves as an editing device, while the former is directly responsible for linguistic performance. It was argued that this model does not explain free variability when all conditions necessary for monitoring are present, i.e. sufficient time, knowledge of the rule(s), focus on form ("thinking about correctness"), and low affective filter. Krashen warns that these conditions are necessary, but not sufficient for efficient monitoring (Krashen 1982:16); but he does not define what condition(s) would be sufficient. It was argued that new teaching and

learning strategies must be elaborated and applied to ensure more efficient application of linguistic competence at the performance level.

Ellis (1985), following Selinker and Douglas (1985), adds a fourth paradigm to the three discussed by Tarone, which he calls the multiple competence paradigm. In this view, the learner builds a number of interlanguage systems that can share some features, but can also contain unique rules. Every system is linked to a given discourse domain, that is defined as a 'personally and internally created area of one's life that has importance'. Selinker and Douglas give the example of a Polish linguist, whose linguistic output varied depending on whether he was performing in the domain of 'being an international professor who lectures in English' or in the domain of 'telling stories about Poland in English after drinking several vodkas'. Ellis argues that this approach does not explain free variability where all pertinent factors remain constant. It can be added that this paradigm has a striking resemblance to Tarone's capability paradigm based on Labovian notion of style-shifting: thus a discourse domain can be equated with a given style, respectively careful and vernacular in Selinker and Douglas' example.

All four paradigms are similar in that they attribute variation in performance to a different degree of attention to form, be it linked to performance-related factors, use of different styles or interlanguage systems, or more or less careful monitoring. All four are equally unable to explain free variation in the situation where all relevant factors remain constant. Moreover, neither of the four offers means that would enable language teachers to eliminate the persistent free variation so frequently encountered in the written production of their students.

Ellis (1985, 1990, 1994) argues that free variation is a sign of interlanguage development. In this view, when a new item enters the IL, it exists initially in free variation with the items that had already entered the learner's competence. Of course, a newly arrived item 'dog' cannot enter into free variation with a pre-existing word 'cat'. Therefore, free variation is possible only when two items exhibit certain semantic or formal similarities. This state of affairs, Ellis argues, is contradictory to the economy principle of linguistic organization. The latter 'states that in ideal form a linguistic system will contain enough and no more distinctive features than are

required to perform whatever functions the user wishes to communicate' (Ellis 1985: 126). Thus a new item (or a new formal feature of the same item) is either dissociated from the old one by being invested with a different function, or one of the forms is eliminated over time.

In this definition, the economy principle is similar to the internal constraints that regulate interlanguage development in the chomskyan framework of Universal Grammar. Given that the economy principle is supposed to operate without the learner's conscious involvement, it is similar to Krashen's concept of acquisition in that it ultimately improves linguistic performance without any effort on the part of the learner. This idealized formulation of the economy principle can be considered its most vulnerable part, at least when it applies to a practical situation. While idealized formulations can provide useful theoretical tools, they are seldom encountered in practice. A learner's interlanguage does not 'naturally' tend towards an ideal form of organization. Learners must notice a new item, distinguish it from the old, invest it with a different function or eliminate the old form. All this involves mental activity (not necessarily accessible to conscious introspection) which is directed at the optimal organization of the interlanguage. Nevertheless, this activity takes place only when the learner is ready and willing to engage in it, and it is efficient only to the extent that the learner is able to sustain the effort. As Schmidt (1995: 17) puts it, 'in order to acquire phonology, one must attend to phonology; in order to acquire pragmatics, one must attend to both linguistic forms and the relevant contextual features; and so forth. Nothing comes free.' This noticing may be teacher-generated or learner-generated; it may be intentional or unintentional; however, a mental effort must be expended for language acquisition to occur. If, for whatever reason, learners are not prepared to improve the organization of their IL, the variant items will be used in free variation indefinitely. Ellis himself acknowledges the role of motivation in this process of distinction or rejection:

Often a learner's knowledge is anomalous in the sense that she may not be sure whether form x or y is required in a given linguistic context. As a result, she sometimes uses one, and sometimes another. In time, given motivation, she will sort out which one to use. (Ellis 1990:386).

Gregg (1990) criticizes the position of Ellis and Tarone on the subject of linguistic competence on the grounds that it blurs the useful and time-honored distinction between competence and performance. He defends the rationalist or generative tradition of SLA theory that is derived from chomskyan concepts of competence and performance, where variability is seen as a performance phenomenon that should be ignored by theoretical linguistics (Chomsky 1965).

It is not self-evident that systematicity should be a sufficient condition for calling something part of competence. Nor is it clear in what way performance ('learner behaviour'), systematic or otherwise, can be regarded as part of competence. This merging of performance and competence robs the concept of competence, under whatever name, of any useful function. (Gregg 1990: 369).

As Ellis points out in his response to Gregg in the debate on the variable competence model (1990), there are two distinct styles of research in the area of second language acquisition. The first consists in verification of some aspect of a strong theoretical model by an analysis of data provided by second language learners. The strong theory at the moment is the Universal Grammar (UG) approach that is defended by Gregg. The second style can be described as an effort to create a theoretical model that would explain the learners' linguistic behavior. This model is bound to contradict the UG model, as it is derived from the performance data that Chomsky deliberately excludes from the field of linguistics. Both approaches are potentially valid, nevertheless, one may be preferable to the other depending on the phenomena one is attempting to explain.

In this debate, Gregg appears to defend the chomskyan view of the purpose of theoretical linguistics. Chomsky declared that the object of study for a linguist should be the abstract and hidden representation of language knowledge held in the mind, that has an ability to create and understand utterances in a given language. Furthermore, linguistic competence cannot be studied via performance data. The preferred tool of research for linguists working in this tradition has been grammaticality judgment tests, although, as Gregg pointed out, other research tools have also been applied. It should be noted, however, that grammaticality judgments produced by second language learners often fail to provide reliable data, as their internal mental representations of language are not as stable as those of native

speakers (Sorace 1996). Moreover, as Gregg himself acknowledges, grammaticality judgments are also instances of performance: thus any attempt to study the problem is negated by the definition of the problem. If competence is abstract and hidden, how can it be studied through concrete instances of performance, no matter what form they take?

In her response to Gregg, Tarone (1990) argues that a study of second language acquisition in a chomskyan perspective does not offer a satisfying explanation of this process. The two major claims of the chomskyan tradition are that a) much of linguistic competence is not acquired, but innate, and b) that there is a language acquisition device (LAD) that enables the learner to build linguistic competence within constraints imposed by innate linguistic knowledge, or universal grammar. The actual *modus operandi* of the LAD remains a mystery that is impossible to clarify on the basis of performance data. Another major weakness of the UG paradigm, pointed out by Tarone, is that it considers linguistic knowledge as an absolute and perfect entity; thus a flawed performance can be explained by a corresponding gap in the learner's linguistic competence. As Tarone points out, a given instance of language use must be derived from some competence: it cannot be produced by nothing.

Tarone and Ellis' rejection of the chomskyan framework stems from models proposed by Firth and Halliday, who argue that language in use should be the object of linguistic research, and that the distinction between performance and competence is unnecessary (see Stubbs 1996 for the review of this tradition). The hallidayan perspective is more attractive to educators, who see an immediate problem of language in use as more relevant to their work than a more abstract problem of linguistic competence. Moreover, any attempts to investigate learners' competence must be based on their performance, be it think-aloud protocols (Raines 1987, Vann and Abraham 1990, see Ericson and Simon 1993 for a review), or written output of the type under study in this thesis. Since performance cannot be dissociated from competence in any empirical setting, and it is precisely the purpose of this study to explain and modify its subjects' performance, the chomskyan perspective must be rejected in this context in favor of a more hallidayan approach.

Given that the performance data provided by the subjects of this study displays numerous examples of variation, it is logical to turn to variability theories in order to understand the causes of this phenomenon and to determine the causal factors behind it. It is most likely that low morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' compositions is caused both by their inadequate competence and by their inability to use the competence they possess in an efficient manner, as their written production includes both first- and second order errors. It has also been suggested that an improvement in competence, besides being a time-consuming undertaking, would not directly lead to a comparable improvement in performance, because students keep on making errors even when they know the relevant rules. It follows that, in order to improve performance, our students have to improve their ability to use the competence they possess, a skill that Tarone (1983, 1988) calls linguistic capability.

5.2 The notion of linguistic capability.

Taylor (1988) distinguishes between linguistic competence, linguistic performance and linguistic proficiency. Thus, performance is exemplified by instances of language use while proficiency represents an ability to use language in a given situation. Tarone (1983) also makes a distinction between linguistic competence, linguistic performance and linguistic capability, the definition of which is similar to Taylor's definition of proficiency. Anderson (1983, 1990) distinguishes between declarative knowledge as knowledge, and procedural knowledge as a skill. In Anderson's view, the major shortcoming of the traditional grammar and translation method was that it did not equip students with procedural knowledge. Although their declarative knowledge was well-developed, they were not able to activate it in real-life communication. Linguistic capability, proficiency and procedural knowledge bear a strong resemblance, as they describe the activation of the relevant knowledge and its transfer to the domain of performance. The introduction of this third element into Chomsky's dual system of competence and performance articulates the link between mental representation and actual utterance. Moreover, it can deal with the paradox that is inherent in a dual representation of language, as Tarone shows:

...can a gap in competence underlie a specific bit of interlanguage performance? Can language performance be produced sometimes by competence, and sometimes by... nothing? In such cases, is it incompetence which underlies learner performance? Or, does the learner know that she does not know something? If so, is she forming a binary variable rule? The attempt to deal with the problem of variable output by resorting to a competence/performance distinction seems to lead to contradiction. (Tarone 1990: 393).

It can be added that in the absence of a proficiency/capability element, any incorrect performance can only be assigned to a gap in competence or to a fault at the level of performance. Such explanation does not account for a great number of second order errors in our students' output that have been discussed in Chapter 2.

Linguistic capability theory is of utmost importance to language teaching, and to our thesis in particular, because the purpose of our research is to improve learners' ability to make the best use of the linguistic knowledge they possess. The concept of

linguistic capability is essentially related to the interface between competence and performance. Linguistic proficiency or capability is the ability to use language in a given situation. It consists of

- a) the ability to retrieve a mental representation of an appropriate item or structure from the pool of linguistic competence;
- b) the ability to create a new appropriate item or structure on the basis of available linguistic competence.

Before a word is spoken, it must be found, judged appropriate, and brought to the surface level of performance as a ready-to-use mental representation. Thus linguistic capability is a process rather than a cognitive state, a process initiated and carried through by what we may term a capability device or mechanism. This hypothesis articulates the difference between linguistic capability and linguistic performance. Some mistakes, such as a spoonerism, are likely to be strictly performance-related. Nevertheless, the common point of all such mistakes is that the mental representation speakers had 'on the tip of their tongues' had been faultless (provided, of course, that appropriate items or structures were found in the domain of competence and that the performance of the capability mechanism did not suffer due to external pressure of some kind). A slip of the tongue is a slip of the tongue, not of the brain. In fact, the appearance of the faults in the working of the performance department of an average language user is erratic, and few such mistakes would happen in written production which warrants a focus on correctness. As James (1998) points out, slips "can quickly be detected and self-corrected by their author unaided" (p. 83), and so should be rare, if at all present in a monitored discourse.

To summarize this argument, the difference between linguistic capability or proficiency, on one hand, and linguistic performance, on the other hand, is defined by the presence or absence of a ready-to-use representation of the required linguistic item or structure in the mind of the speaker/writer. When we are searching for something which is "on the tip of our tongue", we exercise the mechanism of linguistic capability. We know somehow that the necessary information forms part of our linguistic competence, yet temporal or situational constraints may prevent us from finding it. When, on the other hand, the required item or structure is indeed "on the tip

of our tongue" as a found, complete and correct mental representation, then any audible or visible fault is a performance failure.

Most researchers agree that language use may be more or less controlled depending on the conditions and demands imposed by a particular task. Time pressure, for example, may reduce the efficiency of linguistic capability. Yet a distinction should be made between mistakes at the level of performance and second order errors at the level of proficiency. Both can be caused by external pressure: the difference is that in the first case the mechanism of linguistic capability or proficiency provided a correct mental representation, while in the second case it erred. In academic writing, at least, performance errors are atypical of a speaker's production; the speaker really does know the correct (grammatical/lexical/phonological) forms to use – and can find and produce them in an environment which is devoid of extraneous outside interference. Linguistic capability, on the other hand, is subject to variation/impairment depending not just on extraneous factors (fatigue, time constraints), but more importantly on the by linguistically relevant factors such as allocation of attentional resources to particular aspects of linguistic production and the ability to engage in cross-checking and referencing activities.

Let us suppose that the item required by the context has never been noticed or acquired by the learner (a gap in competence). In this case, if the capability mechanism is well trained in cross-referencing techniques, it will choose the item whose functional characteristics resemble most closely those of the required item. Of course, depending on the current stage of competence's development, it can sometimes offer only a distant cousin of the required item. On the other hand, items contained in the learner's IL can be reorganized or combined to produce a new, not necessarily target-like item. The resulting error is not produced by nothing, as in Tarone's paradox; it is simply the best the capability device can offer, even when the learner in question is motivated to focus on form.

Such competence-related errors are well known and the remedies are numerous; their aim is to help learners develop their competence. Nevertheless, an untrained, unmotivated, ignorant, distracted or disorganized capability device can be a disaster even when the resources are adequate, causing errors of the second order. These errors

are systematic, because the quality of the device's performance remains constant, but they have nothing to do with the quality of the competence itself. It may be there, but insufficient linguistic capability would hamper its consistent application.

One must distinguish between *controlled* or *automatic* language learning/acquisition on one hand, and *controlled* and *automatic* language production, on the other hand, precisely because different mechanisms may be responsible for the addition of a particular item or structure to a learner's competence pool, and for their activation²⁵. We have already discussed the concepts of *controlled* and *automatic* language processing in Chapter 3. The focus of the present chapter, however, is language production. It should be noted that control over the capability device can be accessible to introspection or not, at least in the original definition of controlled language processing proposed by Schneider and Shiffrin (1977). Learners may not be able to articulate the exact manner in which the device performed a particular operation, yet they can say whether or not they were focusing on a particular aspect of their production, such as formal features in writing. The focus of the control over the interface between competence and performance determines the allocation of learners' attentional resources to microdiscursive or macrodiscursive features of their output at the moment of production. As previously argued, the degree of learners' attention to form is, in turn, a crucial factor that determines their morphosyntactic accuracy.

It can be argued that optimal linguistic performance does not require optimal linguistic competence. A well-trained and fast-working device of linguistic capability can choose another appropriate item or structure, or compile a new one without interrupting an on-going production activity. In response to a complex search it can produce a number of items that belong to several different areas of competence. This body would represent a new item, compiled on the basis of existing elements. A good example of such activity can be found in the Swain and Lapkin (1995) study, where a grade 8 immersion student was looking for the right word in a think-aloud session:

²⁵ "Activation" would be a more suitable term than, e.g., "retrieval", as it expresses the intrinsically dynamic process of "realization" of linguistic structures.

La dé...truc...tion. Et la destruction. No, that's not a word. Démolition, démolisson, démolition, démolition, destruction, détruision, détruision, la détruision des arbres au forêt de pluie (the destruction of trees in the rain forest).

Swain and Lapkin indicate that the student had previously written the verbal form *détruisent*, and was therefore creating a noun form of the verb he had just used by compiling the root of the verb and a French suffix. In this manner, the mechanism of linguistic proficiency can create new knowledge on the basis of the existing one, and thus become a crucial factor in the development of the interlanguage (Swain 1998).

The activity reported by Lapkin and Swain (1995) took place while students were concentrating on their writing, and encouraged to verbalize their thinking with no time restraint. Thus students had both time and motivation to focus on form. In real-time oral communication, a slow capability device would interrupt, or altogether cut the supply of required items. In writing, an untrained or unmotivated mechanism of linguistic capability can supply items that lack some formal feature, provide inappropriate items or create new ones in a haphazard fashion.

Let us take an example of a single item *étudiant* in the sentence *Je suis étudiant à l'université*. (I am a university student). If this word is replaced by the English word written in brackets, or by an inappropriate French word, i.e. *élève* ("pupil"), as it often happened in the compositions that comprise our data, one can suppose that the mechanism of linguistic proficiency did the best it could, given the learner's limited competence. Let us suppose, however, that this word makes up part of the learner's linguistic competence. This can be verified by asking the learner 'do you know this word?'. One can even ascertain that the relevant domain of competence is complete via questions like 'what does this word mean?', 'how do you spell this word?', 'is there an accent in this word?', or 'what kind of accent is there in this word?'.

Nevertheless, when the learner has to produce the word unassisted, it may lack the accent. This can mean that the device of linguistic capability was not prompted to pay attention to formal detail, being content with bringing only essential features that are necessary for communication. This can also mean that it did not have enough time to form a complete mental representation of the required word, or was somehow distracted. Moreover, an untrained capability device can fail to cross-reference the

required items with similar ones contained in the domain of competence, such as *étude* or *étudier*. Finally, such a mechanism can omit to note that an accent on a word has just been used, leading to free variation within the same text.

When learners' linguistic capability is not focused on form, errors may appear despite a well-developed competence. In fact, even native speakers may make errors that would be amenable to self-correction. This means that optimal linguistic competence is not sufficient for optimal linguistic performance. Learners, as well as native speakers, must not only possess the required items and structures, but also be able, and motivated, to choose the appropriate elements and monitor their correctness. This argument leads to the following premise:

- Optimal linguistic performance requires optimal linguistic proficiency.

The speaker, or writer, must not only know, but also be able to use this knowledge appropriately. This argument represents the other side of the issue of value of performance – related breaches of linguistic norm. Following Johnson (1988, 1996) James (1998) challenges Corder's claim that mistakes are "of no significance to the process of language learning" (Corder 1967:167), asserting that "learners know more than we credit them with knowing." (James 1998: 86). James claims that while the only cure for error is acquisition, mistakes warrant another approach:

Mistakes, by contrast, can be attended to: feedback can be given, the learners can learn how to monitor, and opportunities for further practice can be provided. It therefore follows that mistakes are of interest, at least to teachers and learners. Whether or not they are of interest to the researcher is irrelevant, like much of the research itself. (James 1998: 86).

Bearing in mind that James' definition of **second-order mistake** resembles that of **second order errors** used in this thesis, it is possible to interpret James' statement as a call for an approach that would enable learners to develop their linguistic capability: "the learners must learn how to monitor".

Recognition of the crucial role played by linguistic capability in linguistic production makes it possible to suggest several strategies aimed at the improvement of linguistic

performance. Firstly, it is necessary to ascertain the cause of the problem. If an error is caused by insufficient competence, the learner should endeavor to add more items and structures to the domain of competence. The teacher can help by providing the input and prompting the learner to pay attention to the input through, for example, input enhancement, feedback and testing. As far as morphosyntactic accuracy is concerned, the most common competence-related problem is revealed when certain formal features are missing from the area that represents a given item.

These "fragile" features (Goldin-Meadow 1982, Ellis 1994) are usually not essential to the success of communication. Learners should therefore be especially encouraged to notice and acquire these features together with all other elements that form an item. This can be done by focusing on form (as well as on the content) at the moment of acquisition. It should be noted, however, that focus on form can be both teacher-generated and learner-initiated. A teacher cannot urge the learner to notice and retain all formal features of an item every time a learner is exposed to a new item. A teacher must therefore attempt to promote a general awareness of the importance of formal features in the classroom.

Of course, a fault in performance can be a strictly performance-related phenomenon. The appearance of such mistakes is not systematic nor predictable. (Corder 1967). Provided performance errors are not related to any physical disability, it is sufficient to create performance conditions that would not put undue pressure on a learner's performance mechanism. As argued before, the difference between the performance mistakes and capability related second order errors lies in the correctness of the mental representation of required features that learners form immediately prior to enunciation. Performance faults, or mistakes, can indeed be ignored – after all, even educated native speakers occasionally commit a slip of the tongue. Nevertheless, when a mistake in a given linguistic category is not related to insufficient competence, yet appears with disturbing frequency, that can be predicted, one can have reason to suggest that its cause lies in an inefficient interaction between competence and performance, or, in other words, in the domain of linguistic proficiency or capability.

Once this is accepted as a working hypothesis, the next logical step would be to focus on production and teaching strategies that could be employed to maximize linguistic

capability. Yet before doing so, it is necessary to discuss in more detail the distinction between learning and production, as, on one hand, learners need to develop their competence in the areas which are most affected by errors, and on the other hand, they need to learn how to apply this competence once they possess it.

5.3 From language learning to language production.

It is possible to distinguish two aspects of second language acquisition. The first, and the most studied aspect is, of course, the process of language acquisition itself, i.e. the processes that regulate the transformation of input into intake and its storage in memory. It has been argued, in respect to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' written output, that the features that are most affected by errors in our data (Mogilevski and Burston 1999) would not be acquired naturally, irrespective of the amount of general language practice and exposure to the comprehensible input. To achieve any progress in this area, learners must be encouraged to focus on the formal aspects of the input, thus developing their linguistic competence. Focus on form in the input can help learners to clarify "hazy" areas of their interlanguage by storing in memory formal as well as functional linguistic elements.

Learners must activate their language resources in order to perform in the target language. The aspect of language production has been less thoroughly investigated, probably because of the popular assumption that once learners "know" a given item or structure, it will be produced correctly. Following the above discussion of the terms "competence", "capability" and "performance" it is possible to suggest, however, that successful language performance does not depend solely on well-developed competence, but also on learners' capacity to realize the full potential of their competence resources. It remains to discuss possible teaching strategies that would result in an improvement of this capacity.

It can be argued that insufficient linguistic proficiency/capability is one of the major causes of errors in the compositions written by second year advanced level students of French that constitute the data pool of the present study. A strategy aimed at the improvement of linguistic proficiency in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy can

combine several aspects of focus on form. In the first place, the learner must realize the importance of formal features of the TL, even if they are semantically redundant or irrelevant. In other words, their capability devices must control the formal aspects of the items or structures it retrieves to provide complete sets of functional and formal features whenever an item is required. It should be noted here that general motivation to learn does not necessarily entail the motivation to learn formal features. And the latter does not necessarily lead to motivation to use formal features, especially in a low-pressure social or educational environment. Further, when something is learned but not used, it can be forgotten again, while a constant usage of a given item or structure is doubly beneficial, as the output becomes input. Thus a learner should ideally be ready to learn new items, to notice and learn formal features that would naturally be left out or fuzzily remembered, and to use a correct form of a given item. Focus-on-form feedback and testing, inside or outside of the classroom, can help to foster the motivation to acquire and correctly use grammatical features of the target language.

In addition, it should be verified that the capability device has good working conditions: enough time and few distractions. Such conditions may be impossible in oral mode, therefore learners' capability devices should be practiced in performing rapidly, yet accurately in conversation. Such skill comes from long practice, as previously controlled operations become automatic (Anderson 1982, McLaughlin 1990, Bialystok 1981, 1988).

Learners should also be trained in cross-referencing and combination of available items. If, for example, *ration*, *nation* and *portion* are listed as feminine nouns, a learner with good linguistic proficiency should automatically produce *la tradition* or *une portion*. If learners know the correct conjugation of a first group verb, they should perform accurately even if the verb in question is not familiar. It is thus necessary to instruct the learner in such general rules, choosing first the ones that can be applied on a large scale (Hulstijn 1995).

All these skills come into play at every given instance of linguistic performance. It should be taken into account, however, that from one instance to another external conditions or internal motivation and focus on form might vary. Thus, learners may be so preoccupied with the meaning at one point, that their ability to combine focus on

form with focus on meaning can suffer. As already mentioned, the motivation to produce a correct text and the motivation to produce a correct instance differ, because the former is constant while the latter tends to fluctuate from one moment to another.

5.4 Pre-enunciation and post-enunciation monitoring strategies.

When linguistic proficiency fails at any given instance, leading to a second order error, it is still possible to improve the performance postfactum. At this point, it would be pertinent to recall that Krashen's concept of monitoring does not contain a distinction between pre-enunciation monitoring and post-enunciation monitoring. This distinction is necessary, however, because the two strategies are based on different mental operations. In the first case, the production of a correct form depends on the degree of control that the learner maintains over an operation that has not yet become automatic, or over an automatic operation that has to be modified in light of recently arrived information. In both cases the successful enunciation largely depends on linguistic proficiency, or, in other words, on the ability to use language.

Post-enunciation monitoring, on the other hand, brings into play another mechanism: that of error recognition. This mechanism is part of a larger body of cognitive devices in charge of language recognition and understanding. It can be activated to verify and control previously produced linguistic output. According to Krashen, the efficiency of the Monitor depends upon three conditions: knowing the rule, time, and focus on form (thinking about correctness). As Krashen points out (Krashen 1982:16), these conditions are necessary, but not sufficient for successful monitoring. Persistent second order errors in our students' writing beg for an attempt to formulate a new condition, or to modify the existing ones in order to create, at least theoretically, the optimal model of self-monitoring.

The study reported in Chapter 2 demonstrated that knowing the rule is indeed insufficient for error-free production. The above discussion of the notion of linguistic capability/proficiency aimed to support the argument that learners should not only possess the relevant linguistic knowledge, but also be able to apply it. It remains to investigate the other two conditions – time and focus on form.

Kroll (1990) investigated the effect of the time variable on the written production of advanced ESL students. Each subject produced four essays, where two were written in class within one hour, and two written at home over 10 to 14 days. An analysis of writing accuracy measures did not show any statistically significant differences between in-class and home output, suggesting that "subjects did not spend much, if any, time on grammatical revision" (p.151) in the absence of specific form-focused instructions. Kroll concludes that "it does not appear that additional time *in and of itself* leads to a sufficiently improved essay such that there is a statistical significance to the differences between class and home performance" (p.150). Certainly, the fact that students had 10-14 days to complete an assignment does not necessarily mean that they spent all that time on the project. There is little more common than students putting off an assignment until the last moment. Likewise, one cannot be certain that students actually used dictionaries and grammar books just because they had access to them. Nevertheless, Kroll's study seems to support Krashen's statement that time is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for grammatical accuracy (Krashen 1982:16).

Certainly, time is necessary for monitoring, just as it is necessary for any other mental or physical operation. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the quantity of time *per se* should be an issue. Krashen concedes (1982:98) that a trained Monitor user can perform a number of mental operations required for monitoring effortlessly and almost instantaneously. The question, therefore, is not just whether learners have enough time, but rather whether they are willing and able to use this time efficiently. In writing, of course, learners must have enough time to re-read their text and to make corrections. Nonetheless, the success of self-correction depends more on the willingness of students to spare the effort and on their ability to recognize potential error sites, and to compare and crosscheck produced items and structures with the comparable ones that had been firmly and fully acquired.

It seems likely that comparison should take less time than cross-referencing or inferencing on the basis of available information: if the accent in *étudiant* is part of the set of features that represent this item in the learner's competence, the mental operation required for monitoring can be almost instantaneous. Thus the accent feature is a good candidate for pre-enunciation monitoring. If, however, the learner has to find the appropriate rule ($\acute{e} = [e]$) and to apply it to the case at hand, the

operation may take longer. In addition, the process may be further delayed in the case of a complex structure, as, for example, a past participle agreement within a long and convoluted sentence, when a learner has to ascertain the relationship between several items with help of several rules. Therefore, learners should target these features during the post-enunciation monitoring stage. In any event, time will always be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for monitoring, as beyond a certain point more time does not equate with better accuracy (Kroll 1990). If a learner needs two hours to write and correct a text of three hundred words, an additional three or four hours allocated for monitoring would not change the residual error rate.

Of course, in the case of competence-related errors the success of monitoring would largely depend on the linguistic competence of the learner, although a well-trained linguistic capability device may compensate for the gaps in competence, constructing a new item on the basis of available knowledge. It has been argued, however, that a large percentage of errors in the written production of advanced learners is not due to any shortcomings in the domain of their competence. It can be suggested, furthermore, that many seemingly competence-related errors are, in fact, caused by the learners' inability to find and apply rules that make part of their competence and to compare items with similar ones already stored in the mind, which is the job of the mechanism of linguistic proficiency. For example, learners may say 'I don't know' when asked about the gender of the noun *terminaison* that they have just written. This response indicates that the learner was not only unable to find the necessary feature of the item due to insufficient competence, but also that he or she could not infer the correct gender by comparing the items to similar ones, such as *raison* or *maison*. Either the learner was unaware that such a tactic could be helpful, or simply found it easier to plead ignorant; after all, gender marks do not usually make part of functional features and can thus be considered redundant for the success of communication. In the first case, the learner should be instructed in cross-referencing strategies; in the second, the teacher should make the learner appreciate social and pragmatic importance of formal features in the language.

Errors that appear in free variation with the correct form in the same production task (see Chapter 3) also attest not only to the presence of a hazy area in the learners' interlanguage, but also to their inability to detect the variation and to decide on the

most appropriate form on the basis of existent linguistic knowledge. In this case, several comparisons are required: firstly, that of the produced items, to detect discrepancies; secondly, it is necessary to compare each version with the one the learner can consciously judge correct; finally, if the learner does not possess this information, an attempt at cross-referencing should follow. For example, a text may contain *tourism* and *tourisme* in free variation. Once this is detected, the learner may correct the error immediately if the correct spelling is known. If not, the learner may infer the correct spelling via a comparison with similar known items, such as *communisme*, *fachisme*, etc. Of course, it may be that learners try to "hedge their bets", being consciously unsure of the correct form and unable to find it due to insufficient competence. Yet the presence of multiple variations, as well as numerous examples of free variability in the case of the most basic items and structures support the argument that conscious strategies are not responsible for the majority of variation cases.

It remains to investigate the third condition affecting the Monitor: focus on form, or thinking about correctness. Theoretically, and with sufficient time and knowledge present, monitoring should be effective when learners are motivated to focus on form, either because they are aware of the sociocultural importance of morphosyntactic accuracy, or because, in academic environment, their mark depends to a considerable extent on the correctness of their written or oral expression. In addition, the teacher may also urge learners to pay particular attention to form while performing some activity. All these conditions are fulfilled (although the first may be less developed) when students write a composition on an examination. Nevertheless, surprisingly enough, second order errors abound in these compositions, despite sufficient time, knowledge and focus on correctness.

A large number of errors in our data can be, at first glance, linked to lack of necessary linguistic knowledge. Yet, as previous discussion shows, the problem may be rather in a poor linguistic capability, as opposed to linguistic competence. Learners must have a sufficiently trained mechanism of linguistic proficiency to cross-reference items (e.g. if "traduction" is feminine, "production" must also be feminine), transfer items that are judged appropriate from other domains of competence (e.g. "production" may

be transferred to French as "production") and apply general rules to particular cases, e.g. all words that end in -tion are feminine, therefore production must be feminine.

The notion of learner-generated focus on form²⁶ implies a willingness to use the available linguistic knowledge in order to improve performance accuracy.

Nevertheless, learners may concentrate on different aspects of their output. At this point, we should distinguish between formal and functional correctness. In the course of workshops on morphosyntactic accuracy that yielded the data for the second order errors study (Chapter 2), the question 'What do you think about when you attempt to correct your own text?' most often generated the reply 'I think about whether it makes sense'. Thus pragmatic/communicative properties are, once again, given precedence over formal features. In order to improve their error rate, students must think about form, or, in other words, treat language as an object rather than just as a communicational tool.

Secondly, even when students honestly try to concentrate on form, they still miss many obvious second order errors. This has been demonstrated in Chapter 2.

Besides, the data used in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) also contains idiosyncrasies that most likely represent errors that are not related to a competence fault, such as *etaït* or *a/à*. It can be hypothesized that when students try to correct all errors, whether first- or second order, at once, their ability to recognize, compare and cross-reference is overloaded. To avoid cognitive overload, the process of self-correction should be divided into several steps. For example, students can try to judge the correctness of every element of a structure before they consider the whole structure.

As the data reported in Chapter 2 shows, post-enunciation monitoring largely consists of error recognition. Once learners realize that a given item or structure is somewhat suspicious as far as its formal features are concerned, they can search for applicable rules or cross-reference with other items or structures. If error recognition has already been carried out by the teacher, as in Krashen and Pon's study of P. (1978), and if the learner is sufficiently competent, willing to make the effort and aware of cross-referencing strategies, the efficiency of self-correction can be considerably improved

²⁶ Learner-generated focus on form can be observed when learners concentrate on formal correctness while producing linguistic output. Teacher-generated focus on form is a teaching strategy designed to

(95% in Krashen and Pon's study). Nevertheless, ultimately, learners must recognize their errors themselves. A teacher can help them by indicating areas in their production that are particularly prone to second order errors, and by instructing them in rules and cross-referencing strategies applicable to this kind of errors.

To maximize the efficiency of both pre-enunciation and post-enunciation monitoring, this process must be guided by clear instructions, divided into several steps, and concentrated on the error categories consisting mainly of second order errors, which in principle should be amenable to total elimination. This should result in a considerable improvement in morphosyntactic accuracy given that the number of second order errors and mistakes constitutes nearly a quarter of the overall error count in our data pool. Moreover, attention to form at the moment of production could also be beneficial in the long term, as learners use their improved output as input and practice viewing language as an object as well as a communicational tool.

In summary, it has been argued that linguistic competence alone does not guarantee faultless performance. Sufficient competence resources must be activated by the mechanism of linguistic proficiency or capability (Tarone 1983, 1988, 1990). This mechanism is naturally biased towards focus on meaning, giving priority to correct retrieval and activation of items and structures crucial for the comprehension of the message. To improve the accuracy of competence's reflection in performance, learners must allocate their attentional resources, i.e. 'prime' their mechanism of linguistic proficiency to focus on form.

make learners notice and acquire formal features. This distinction will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6. Monitoring and focus on form.

6.1 Why focus on form.

This research is output-oriented: we are interested in the level of morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' written compositions. Our aim is to improve the students' ability to avoid errors, while working under temporal constraints imposed by the university course structure. Given that our students' individual rate of progress in morphosyntactic accuracy is negligible from one semester to another in their second year of university study (Mogilevski and Burstson 1999), the analysis of the exam database leads us to expect a ratio of eight morphosyntactic errors per hundred words in the written work of our graduates. Such level of written proficiency would not enable a student to function satisfactorily in the French socio-cultural environment, which could reasonably be expected of a French major. As was argued in the first chapter, the French take particular pride in their language, and have a low acceptance of poor spelling or grammar. If our students aspire to native speaker norms of acceptable grammatical and morphosyntactic accuracy, teaching strategies have to be developed to decrease the error rate in their writing, and these strategies need to produce a noticeable effect as quickly as possible.

The majority of our students have had seven years of instruction in French. Obviously, further formal instruction in the rules governing basic morphosyntax would be unlikely to have a noticeable positive effect.²⁷ We know that our students have all learned, if not automatised, rules and structures pertaining to elision, negation, agreement and many cases of spelling and accentuation. It would also be reasonable to suppose that more undirected exposure to the language would not result in an improvement in accuracy in the short term. If seven years of exposure have not succeeded in improving morphosyntactic accuracy, further exposure is unlikely to be effective in dealing with the problem of high rate of morphosyntactic errors in our students' written output. This is all the more so the case since learners naturally ignore

linguistic features that do not have a major impact on communication (Selinker 1972, VanPatten 1996). Further unregulated exposure would only reinforce the lack of attention to morphosyntactic detail.

Krashen's view of the purpose of classroom-based instruction as an input provider does not offer a solution to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy displayed in our students' written work. If we accept VanPatten's hypothesis that learners are naturally inclined to process information for meaning before they process it for form, more exposure to comprehensible input will not change this tendency. Furthermore, it follows from such an assumption that linguistic elements that do not prevent a message from being conveyed will rarely be used correctly, no matter whether the rules that govern their applications are simple or not. For example, rules that govern adjectival agreement in French are rather simple: if the subject is feminine, the adjective should take its feminine form; if the subject is plural, the adjective should also be in plural. Nevertheless, 'simple' adjectival agreement accounts for ten percent of the errors made by our students.

It is true that instruction can provide a means for the development of the knowledge of linguistic features. Yet both Krashen and VanPatten agree that there is a considerable gap between knowledge as a mental representation and its practical application. While learners are able to correct a large percentage of the errors they make, once these have been identified, most often they lack the capacity to detect them in their written work. It is likely that their low error detection rate is a result of the natural tendency to use the TL as a message conveyor and to ignore errors that do not interfere with this function. The only way to overcome this tendency to neglect 'redundant' linguistic features is to concentrate on syntax and morphology, or, in other words, to focus on form.

²⁷ One should distinguish between formal instruction and attention to form: the former largely consists in teaching linguistic rules and structures while the latter serves to make learners aware of the rules and structures, including those that they have already learned.

6.2 Focus on form as a reaction to the Monitor Theory.

Conscious attention to formal features of TL has become an important issue in SLA theory in recent years. Interest in formal accuracy has increased in proportion to the dissatisfaction of teachers and researchers with the communicative approach based on Krashen's Monitor Theory. As was discussed earlier, a number of researchers (McLaughlin 1978, 1990, Gregg 1984, 1986, Schmidt 1990, Schmidt and Frota 1986) found the Monitor Theory lacking in several important aspects. The most important objection to it was that the theory could not be verified through empiric research, being inherently unfalsifiable and based on subjective and introspective evidence. Twenty years after the Monitor Theory's appearance in the field of SLA, it still lacks firm empirical proof, being unable to obtain it due to its flawed theoretical design. Thus some researchers rejected it outright pending the unlikely appearance of unequivocal empirical support for Krashen's hypotheses:

If the Krashen distinction between learning and acquisition is absolute, then explicit instruction in pronunciation can be of no value in the second language classroom... Furthermore, if, as Krashen has hypothesized, learned information cannot cross over to become acquired behavior, then, once again, explicit pronunciation training would be of no value in teaching a second language. However, these notions remain only hypotheses and have never been empirically tested... the validity of the hypotheses has yet to be determined. (Hammond 1995:301).

The Monitor Theory has been one of the most widely known and discussed theories of SLA over the past two decades. If the validity of its hypotheses still remains to be determined in spite of years of research, it is likely that it cannot be determined at all.

Teacher dissatisfaction with communicative or natural approach (Krashen and Terrell 1983) was brought forth mainly by unsatisfactory results in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy demonstrated by learners in immersion programs. The latter were considered to be prime examples of teaching syllabi based on the Monitor Theory (Krashen 1982: 170-171). Although learners in immersion settings demonstrated considerable progress in communicative abilities, the message they managed to get across was likely to fall short of the expected standard, as far as

grammar is concerned (Harley and Swain 1984, Swain 1985, 1989, Genesee 1987). The aspects of language structure that were not essential for successful communication suffered most, hence Harley's warning:

Less salient morphosyntactic features of the target system, incongruent with the L1 and/or not crucial for comprehension or for getting meaning across may fail to become intake (Harley 1993:11 in Larsen-Freeman 1995: 137).

This conclusion is consistent with VanPatten's first principle of processing instruction, which asserts that learners process information for meaning before they process it for form, and complies with Corder's suggestion that 'redundant' linguistic features can never become part of learner's interlanguage despite considerable exposure to linguistic input (Corder 1973:269). Consequently, a pedagogical approach focused entirely on meaning simply cannot lead to high morphosyntactic accuracy.

The shortcomings of immersion techniques, or more generally, of a "pure" communicative approach in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy, led Hammerly (1987) to judge them inadequate, and to claim that immersion education produces "dysfunctional bilinguals who can convey messages but do so very ungrammatically (Hammerly 1991:215). Although the ability to convey messages successfully should probably not be downplayed to such an extent, lack of morphosyntactic accuracy in learners' oral and written output prompted teachers and researchers alike to search for teaching strategies that would be more effective in this area.

Various teaching strategies designed to improve morphosyntactic accuracy may be classed under a generic term 'focus on form'. Their theoretical grounding resides in the rejection of two hypotheses that form the backbone of the Monitor Theory, namely the Acquisition/Learning distinction and the Input Hypothesis. As discussed previously, Krashen maintains that language can be learned, i.e. consciously processed, or acquired subconsciously. Learned linguistic information can only be used consciously and requires time and motivation to influence linguistic production. Acquired information, on the other hand, is produced automatically and is predominantly responsible for linguistic output. The Input Hypothesis is a corollary of the Learning/Acquisition distinction: as learning is considered practically useless in

real-life communication, students should not learn through conscious attention to input, but acquire language through exposure to comprehensible input. Researchers investigating various focus on form strategies reject these two hypotheses, claiming that a) learning can become acquisition and b) the presence of comprehensible input is not sufficient: learners must pay attention to formal linguistic elements, especially those that are not essential to communication. It has also been claimed that learners' output can become input; thus when learners focus on their output in the process of monitoring, they are exposed to more comprehensible input.

Early on, Higgs and Clifford (1982) criticized teaching approaches aiming at communicative competence. They warned that a teaching syllabus that excludes or downplays grammar instruction may produce fossilized language learners who would be unable to progress beyond the ability to survive in the TL environment, and call for a 'accuracy first' instruction-based syllabus that would enable learners to develop correct and accurate, as well as effective, communication in the foreign language. (Higgs and Clifford 1982: 73-74).

Michael Long's (1983) equally early review of research investigating the effect of formal instruction examined twelve studies comparing the effects of instruction versus the effects of exposure to comprehensible input. Long concluded that out of twelve, six studies support the claim that instruction is beneficial, two can be interpreted either way, and three have null findings. These results ran counter to Krashen's Monitor Theory, as instruction was shown to benefit children as well as adults and advanced learners as well as beginners. This held true on integrative as well as discrete-point tests and in acquisition-rich environments. (Long 1983: 374).

VanPatten (1988) criticized Higgs and Clifford, asserting that not enough valid quantifiable evidence is cited in their article to support the conclusion that the absence of formal instruction in the curriculum of beginner learners would eventually lead to fossilization of their grammar and accuracy rate. He found the same fault with Long's review of instruction versus exposure studies, claiming that "research evidence to date does not suggest that a focus on form is either necessary or beneficial to early stage learners" (VanPatten 1988: 243). Nevertheless, VanPatten calls for more studies investigating the effects of focus on form on intermediate and advanced learners. As it

is difficult to control rigorously the amount of unregulated exposure outside the classroom in a second language learning environment, VanPatten suggests that such studies would best be conducted in the context of foreign language learning (pp. 255-256). The research reported in this thesis follows VanPatten's guidelines in that it involves intermediate-to-advanced learners and is carried out in an actual foreign language learning environment.

The design of most studies comparing the effects of instruction versus exposure is similar in that subjects are taught new rules, either through explicit instruction or through exposure to input containing these rules, and their performance is subsequently tested. The testing can prove problematic, as, on one hand, if it takes form of a meaning-oriented task, there is no guarantee that learners would use the newly taught structures. A discrete-point test gives such a guarantee, but, as VanPatten puts it, 'if grammar is taught and then grammar is tested, one would expect to find instruction having made a difference' (p.251). Still, an improvement is an improvement, and better performance on a discrete-point test might indicate an increase in linguistic competence that would be valuable in real-life communication. Moreover, it is possible to design tasks that elicit required items and still are meaning-oriented (Doughty and Varela 1998).

Evaluation of focus on form activities aims to answer the following questions:

- Is focus on form beneficial to learners?
- Is focus on form more beneficial to learners than exposure alone? and
- How can focus on form be integrated in the teaching syllabus promoting a cohesive and complete language acquisition?

If empirical studies ascertain that focus on form results in statistically significant improvement in learners' performance, and especially if these effects persist over time, this would undermine Krashen's claim that learning cannot become acquisition. If focus on form is shown to produce better results than exposure to $i+1$, the Input Hypothesis can also be rejected. Finally, if the first two premises are correct, it remains to evaluate the effectiveness of various focus on form strategies and to determine the mode of its implementation in the curriculum.

Demonstrating long term effectiveness of focus on form activities is an important, and achievable, goal; but it is also theoretically problematic. Maintaining a cause and consequence relationship between focus on form activities and interlanguage development over a long period of time is always subject to contradiction by supporters of the acquisition/learning distinction on the grounds that improvements were achieved solely through exposure to comprehensible input, irrespective of the amount of conscious language learning.

Results of several studies investigating the effectiveness of focus on form can be negated in this manner. For example, Day and Shapson (1991) implemented a range of teaching materials focusing on the correct use of the French conditional mood over a period of six weeks in an immersion classroom. Learners were required to engage in the planning of an imaginary space colony. The experimental group showed considerable improvement on the immediate post-test, and maintained these gains at the time of the delayed post-test eleven weeks later. Lyster (1994) applied essentially the same design to a study investigating the effectiveness of focus on appropriate use of language register, forms of address and *formules de politesse*. Teaching materials included explicit comparisons of language styles, role plays, structural exercises highlighting the verbal forms resulting from the use of *tu* and *vous*, reading, writing and group activities targeting formal and informal uses of French. They were implemented over the period of five weeks, for an average of twelve hours. On the post-test the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group and retained the gains on the second post-test administered four weeks later.

A likely objection to Lyster's and Day and Shapson's optimistic evaluation of focus on form activities would be that students in the experimental groups simply received more exposure to the targeted features of the TL, and that the gains found in their performance are still the result of acquisition, as opposed to learning. In this manner, the Monitor theory can withstand any criticisms based on empirical evidence, although by the same token it would undermine its validity as a theory.

It should be noted that, by definition, any focus on form will necessarily involve exposure to the target language. However, if additional exposure does not result in

any significant improvement (as was the case in Mogilevski and Burston 1999), then any difference observed after subsequent focus on form treatment should logically derive from the treatment and not just from additional exposure. Empirical data would be better suited to challenge the Input Hypothesis; one must design the study carefully, however, to forestall claims that instruction plus exposure works better than exposure alone simply because instruction means additional exposure. One way to avoid such interpretation of findings would be to control the amount of exposure, leaving conscious or incidental processing of the input as the only variable.

Robinson (1996) conducted a large-scale study, comparing the effects of four learning conditions: implicit, incidental, explicit rule search and explicit instruction. The study involved 104 adult ESL learners at the University of Hawaii. All subjects were pre-tested and only those who were unfamiliar with targeted rules took part in the study. The instruction and testing were completed in one day, thus negating the possibility of any input outside of the classroom. Subjects in the implicit condition were presented with sentences that included the targeted rules and asked to memorize them. Subjects in the incidental condition were given the same set of sentences and questioned on their content. In the third condition subjects were told that the sentences presented to them exemplified a number of rules of English, and urged to identify them. Finally, subjects in explicit instruction condition were offered the explanation of the rules contained in the sentences. The study targeted two different types of rules: easy rules and hard rules. The distinction was made on the basis of the judgement of seven experienced and qualified ESL teachers. During the post-test, students were asked to pick out grammatically correct sentences in a list of twenty grammatical and twenty ungrammatical examples. Their judgement accuracy and response time were measured using statistical software packages. Subjects were subsequently asked whether they had noticed any rules in the input, whether they were searching for rules and whether they were able to verbalize them.

Robinson's study yielded interesting findings in several respects. Firstly, the explicit instruction group performed significantly better than the implicit group in 'easy rule' judgement accuracy (84.615% to 66.346%). Secondly, contrary to Krashen's claim that only 'easy' rules are learnable (1982: 98) the explicit group performed better than the implicit or incidental groups on the judgement of hard rule sentences (66.923% to

61.346% and 58.654%). Thirdly, no significant difference was found in the verbalizability of easy and hard rules, lending further support to the rejection of Krashen's claim. In addition, there was significantly less variance in accuracy for instructed subjects versus all other subjects, which fact also counts in favor of form-focused instruction. Finally, the distinction between implicit and explicit knowledge entails the hypothesis that explicit knowledge needs more time than implicit knowledge in order to be activated under assumption that any implicit knowledge can be activated directly whereas explicit knowledge entails a mediated response to apply rules to a context. This hypothesis was not supported by Robinson's findings, as no significant difference in reaction time was found between 'explicit' and 'implicit' groups.

The findings of the previously mentioned study conducted by Abu Radwan (1999) - who found that explicit learning is superior to implicit learning in the domain of complex syntactic structures- as well as Robinson's study support the hypothesis that teacher-generated focus on form leading to conscious processing of the input can be more beneficial to the learners than exposure alone. It remains to investigate

- a) the role of focus on form activities in the teaching syllabus, and
- b) b) the relative efficiency of various focus on form strategies applied to particular linguistic features.

6.3. Focus on form: theoretical considerations.

As discussed earlier, the concept of method has played a central role in the design of teaching syllabuses in recent decades: grammar and translation in the sixties, audiolingualism in the seventies, and communicative approaches in the eighties. Nevertheless, the complex and dynamic nature of the learning process can withstand attempts to design a 'method' that would be valid and efficient for all learners in all situations. Michael Long (1991) makes a convincing statement concerning various flaws of the 'method' approach to language teaching. He argues that it is pointless to discuss the merits of different methods: firstly, different methods and their practical applications have many features in common, secondly, their practical applications may have nothing to do with their theoretical conceptualization, and finally, studies set up to compare different methods have all proved inconclusive. Long suggests that the discussion in SLA theory should rather revolve around the merits and disadvantages of design features of language teaching, and the way they should complement each other to result in cohesive and complete language acquisition.

6.3.1 Incidental focus on form.

Long emphasizes that dissatisfaction with the communicative approach should not mean a return to grammar and translation exercises. Focus on form activities should rather become part of a meaning-oriented syllabus. Long distinguishes between *focus on forms* as a feature of structural teaching syllabi, and *focus on form* as an approach designed to promote awareness of formal linguistic features in a content-based learning environment:

Whereas the content of lessons with a focus on *forms* is the forms themselves, a syllabus with a focus on *form* teaches something else...and overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication. (Long 1991:46).

Along the same lines, Doughty and Williams (1998) point out, 'the learner's attention is drawn precisely to a linguistic feature as necessitated by a communicative demand' (p. 3), which provides a 'cognitive processing support'. Long and Robinson (1998: 31) acknowledge that this view of language processing contradicts VanPatten's

principles of Processing Instruction. They suggest that a limited attentional resources model, such as that assumed by VanPatten, may be less appropriate than multiple-resource models (Wickens 1989, see Robinson 1995:293-295 for discussion). It remains unclear, however, how focus on meaning can provide support for the acquisition of communicationally redundant formal linguistic features. If attention is a single resource, it would be invariably allocated to the construction of meaning at the expense of form; if there are multiple attentional resources, i.e. one for meaning and another for form, meaning would still be prioritized by the task demands.

6.3.2 Attentional resources and focus on form.

Recent findings in the area of psychology, or more specifically in the field of the complexity of cognitive processes seem to support the argument that insufficient allocation of limited attentional resources to form causes a large proportion of errors in our students' writing. Halford, Wilson and Phillips (1998) defined the complexity of a given cognitive task by the number of variables that must be processed in parallel. For example, it would be difficult to understand the sentence "The boy that the girl that the man saw met slept" (example taken from Halford 1998:17), although the vocabulary is simple, the aggregate amount of information is small and the sentence is grammatical. The difficulty lies in the fact that our mind has to process several variables in parallel: the boy slept, the girl met (the boy), and the man saw (the girl).

Apparently, human mind is limited to relating about four variables in parallel (Halford 1998). The more variables there are, the greater is processing demand²⁸. Tasks with excessive processing demand can result in information processing overload. Halford (2000) distinguishes the following signs of information processing overload:

1. A subjective feeling of effort which does not seem to have any apparent explanation. The operators might be highly competent, and may even be able to explain clearly what should be done in a given situation. The problem however is that too much information needs to be processed in each decision.

²⁸ In the psychological literature the terms "demand", "effort" and "load" tend to be used interchangeably.

2. Appearance of unexplained errors by otherwise competent operators in otherwise satisfactory work environments.
3. Unexplained but otherwise intractable difficulties in training, or in achieving mastery of a task.

It seems that these observations can be applied to the situation of our students. Fragile linguistic features can indeed be considered "intractable difficulties in achieving mastery of the task". Second order errors on fragile features are made by "otherwise competent operators" in satisfactory work environments, and these operators are able to explain what should be done in a given situation, i.e. demonstrate their linguistic competence when their attention is focused on form. At the moment of production, however, they have to process several content-specific and form-specific variables, naturally giving priority to content.

6.3.3 Focus on form as a teaching and learning strategy.

The allocation of attentional resources plays a central role in the Long and Robinson (1998) definition of focus on form. Following Long's (1991) distinction between focus on form and focus on forms, they claim that the aim of focus on form teaching strategy should be to make learners focus their attention on particular linguistic features at a particular moment. "Focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (Long and Robinson 1998:23). This is a very important notion, and one that may be applicable both at the moment of input processing and at the moment of output production. In the former case, if a teacher manages to focus learners' attention on formal features of a given item or structure, they will more likely be noticed, processed and acquired (Sharwood Smith 1981, Schmidt and Frota 1986, Rutherford 1987, Hulstijn 1989, Ellis 1993, Schmidt 1990, 1993, 1994, 1995, Doughty and Williams 1998). In the latter case, when learners' attention is focused on form, they will be able to monitor their production and improve its accuracy. Chaudron (1977) examined the effectiveness of different types of corrective feedback and found that learners were more likely to correct their output when the teacher isolated the idiosyncratic elements in their utterances and added emphasis through a questioning tone or stress. In this manner, if learners' output can serve as an input (Gregg 1984, Ellis 1994, Lyster

1994), consistent monitoring would not only be beneficial at the particular moment of enunciation, but also able to have a long term positive effect on the whole learning process.

It should be noted, however, that perception of the gap between the TL and the IL is the key issue in the area of focus on form, especially in respect to written performance. As mentioned earlier, most morphosyntactic errors would not have a significant impact on comprehension, and thus would not be perceived as a problem that requires rectification in a meaning-oriented course (Johnson 1997). Moreover, it can be problematic to shift learners' attention to form while they are performing a meaning-oriented written task, because, unlike in speech, in writing the teacher cannot provide immediate feedback²⁹. A delayed feedback and practice, on the other hand, would be classified as a form-oriented task, and thus counter-productive in Long's terms.

The distinction between focus on form and focus on forms has profound ramifications in respect to the design of teaching syllabi. Structural syllabi are judged counter-productive (Long 1991:47), whereas content and task-based syllabi with occasional focus on language as an object should make for the most effective language acquisition. Nevertheless, a replacement of a structural syllabus with a content-based one featuring intermittent focus on form would seem a worthwhile undertaking only in a case where time is not an issue. In a typical advanced level class, it is not feasible to teach second year university students French literature, civilization and culture all over again, bringing their attention to formal features of the language when and if the opportunity arises. What is needed is an effective crash course rather than a syllabus stretched over years. We also have to find means to focus learners' attention on form while they perform written tasks, and to strike an optimal balance between form- and meaning oriented distribution of attentional resources at the production stage.

²⁹ Of course, it is possible: for example, a computer grammar checker can immediately mark misspelled words. However, such feedback is more likely to be correct in English than in French due to the latter language's richer morphosyntax and a greater number of homophones. In the writing lab environment we developed for our students, the instructor was in fact on hand, as were other students, to provide immediate feedback. Usually, this concerned redrafting, but it is also possible to do this with first drafts. Nevertheless, this feedback was usually given once the student had completed a paragraph, or at least a sentence.

Following Long's 1991 work, "focus on form in communicative context" became a buzzword in the area of applied linguistics. This concept has also become popular among language teachers, who saw it as a theoretically motivated permission to give form-focused corrective feedback, something they have been itching to do, but that was practically forbidden in the framework of communicative methodologies. Yet now it risks to become a method itself, rather than a design feature, counter to Long's original intention. "Focus on form" does not necessarily mean "in communicative context": as a teaching strategy, it means "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to linguistic form" (Ellis 2001). As a learner strategy, it means allocation of attentional resources to formal linguistic features according to the demands of the situation at hand, communicative as well as sociopragmatic.

It would be extremely difficult, not to say unfashionable, to advocate grammar and translation methods in this day and age. It is also possible that task-based syllabi enable learners to develop their communication skills better and faster than structural approach to language learning. Moreover, focus on meaning may need to be the primary design feature for certain types of language courses, even to the exclusion of focus on 'redundant' form in, for example, a crash 'survival' course for immigrants. However, it is no less necessary that focus on form should be present in academic language courses aiming at native-like proficiency. Further, focus on form prompted by the demands of communication would leave "out of focus" communicationally redundant features that account for a larger part of our students' errors. In this situation, the insistence on focus on form within a communicational context would simply be a theoretically face saving device. Obviously, no one wants to go back to a grammar and translation syllabus, but is it really necessary to embed all focus on form activities in some communicative act, incidental to the direct communication of meaning? This is essentially Long's position. Just how incidental focus on form needs to be is a matter of opinion, as is evident in Doughty and Williams (1998). In the case of our students, immediate communicative activity must be incidental to concentrating on the nitty-gritty problems at hand, because no communicative demand is relevant to many surface level morphological features. Thus, for advanced learners who want to achieve high writing accuracy, focus on form must be a primary rather than secondary mental activity. This approach does not negate the importance of communicative

goals for a curriculum. It recognizes, however, that not every single activity needs to be embedded in a communicative act and that in fact some pedagogical goals may be better, more effectively, met by encouraging language learners to focus their limited mental resources on specific formal problems, namely, on morphosyntactic accuracy.

6.4. Application of focus on form.

Long and Robinson (1998: 24-25) distinguish three focus on form techniques: input enhancement, explicit negative feedback and implicit negative feedback, such as recasts. As focus on form has been chosen as the most fruitful path to follow in the context of our research question, namely, the improvement of morphosyntactic accuracy in the written production of advanced French learners, it remains now to evaluate the efficiency of these techniques and to choose the appropriate direction leading to the practical implementation of focus on form. The review of studies below provides a discussion of results obtained with three different kinds of focus on form treatment defined by Long and Robinson (1998).

6.4.1 Input enhancement.

Input enhancement (Sharwood Smith 1991) is an attempt to influence input processing via rendering targeted linguistic features more salient. Input can be enhanced structurally, or superficially. In the first case, the targeted linguistic features become salient due to the nature of the task presented to learners. When learners are required to read texts that contain a large number of given linguistic items, and/or are presented with a task that requires them to use these items frequently, they can be expected to process and retain these items. Structural input enhancement, or input flooding (Trahey 1992, 1996, Trahey and White 1993) seems an obvious technique as far as lexical items are concerned. If learners have to read and use a given vocabulary often, chances are that they will retain it better than one that is rarely needed. It would be another story with grammatical items, however, and especially with those semantic component is quite abstract (e.g. gender). Thus, Trahey and White found that "input flooding" did not enable learners to recognize errors in adverb placement in English.

Orthographic details are not very good candidates for input flooding enhancement either.

Accents, for example, constitute one of the most common formal features in any French text that our students had to read over, on average, seven years of learning the language. Although correctness in accentuation may not have been emphasized throughout their learning experience, students certainly would have been expected to use them in any writing task. Nevertheless, as documented in Mogilevski and Burston (1999), errors in accentuation account for over 13% of the overall morphosyntactic error count.

Superficial input enhancement involves attempts to render targeted linguistic features more salient through changing their appearance in the input. Doughty (1988) suggested that visual enhancement of written input is the equivalent of stress and emphasis in spoken input (pp. 87:88). In writing, the targeted linguistic features can be underlined, italicized, colored or printed in a larger font. This strategy enables the teacher to target any aspect of learners' interlanguage, including 'redundant' morphology.

J. White (1998) investigated the effect of increased typographical saliency on grade 6 ESL learners' acquisition of possessive determiners. The study "was designed to increase the perceptual salience of a set of linguistic features without placing excessive demands on learners' attentional resources" (J. White 1998:86). It is unclear how this proposition relates to the principles maintained by VanPatten (1990): if the increased salience of grammatical features does not sufficiently distract learners from focusing on meaning, the features in question will not be processed. White reports that "care was taken not to make the enhancement so salient that it would cause students to become irritated or distracted while reading" (p. 90). In other words, typographic salience was not intended to distract students from focus on meaning implied by the reading task.

White's subjects were divided into three groups. The first group received 10-hour instructional treatment involving reading material with visually enhanced possessive determiners, tasks that required them to understand the targeted feature in the context plus a supplemental book program extended over five months, two to three hours per week. The second group received the same package minus pleasure reading and

listening activities, while the third group read the same texts but without typographical enhancement of the possessives, and completed general comprehension tasks instead of specifically oriented ones. It was hypothesized that the results on the post-test would reflect the differences in the instructional treatment, with the first group outperforming the second and the third, and the second group outperforming the third.

White's findings did not support the hypotheses of her study. The differences between the three groups were not statistically significant at any of the test administrations. It can be suggested that focus on meaning remained the determining factor in learners' information processing, and that typographical input enhancement failed to manipulate the allocation of learners' attentional resources at the point of encoding to any significant extent. Moreover, no attempt to activate focus on form was made at the production stage, whereby decreasing the efficiency of the Monitor. White reports striking variability in learners' oral performance, with correct and idiosyncratic forms found within the same sentence. It can be suggested that some learners may have processed the information concerning English possessive determiners, but lacked motivation necessary to activate this knowledge and 'update' their interlanguage by excluding or rearranging preexisting items.

Another study that investigated the effect of typographic input manipulation is Shook (1990), reported by Jourdenais et al. (1995: 187)³⁰. In this study, 48 learners of Spanish were divided into three groups. The first group received a text with the target feature (Spanish present perfect) typed in bold uppercase and was instructed to focus on the enhanced elements; the second group received the same text but no specific instructions while the control group received an unenhanced text without instructions. Jourdenais et al. report that "No significant differences were found among the three groups in a post-treatment multiple choice translation task, a multiple-choice sentence completion task, and a free written recall of the passage" (p.187).

Jourdenais et al. (1995: 183:209) investigated the effect of visual text enhancement on the subsequent production of Spanish preterit and imperfect verbal forms. The study

³⁰ It was not possible to access the primary source, as it is listed in Jourdenais et al. bibliography only as "unpublished manuscript", without additional details.

began with fourteen volunteer participants, all native speakers of English, although the data for four subjects was discarded for various reasons. Thus the experimental and the control group numbered five subjects each. Subjects in the experimental group received a sample text with imperfect and preterit forms visually enhanced, while subjects in the control group received the same text printed in one font type. All participants were required to narrate in writing a sequence of past events illustrated by thirteen pictures. The data was elicited via the think-aloud protocol procedure.

Jourdenais et al. report that subjects in the experimental group attempted to use past verbal forms significantly more often, and outperformed those in the control group on the target-like use of imperfect and preterit forms in obligatory contexts. ($p < 0.05$ in a Wilcoxon rank sums test). Nevertheless, when the control group subjects did use past verbal forms, their accuracy did not differ from that exhibited by the enhancement group subjects. It can be concluded that the difference between the groups' performance was caused by changes in the allocation of attentional resources rather than by any sudden development of linguistic knowledge. This lends further support to our hypothesis that learners' performance does not only depend on their linguistic competence. It should be noted, however, that although the results reported by Jourdenais et al. are encouraging, they should be treated with extreme caution. First of all, as authors themselves indicate, think-aloud protocol technique may influence subjects' processing strategies. Secondly, inter-learner differences may determine the results to a significant extent. Therefore, statistical analysis of data provided by two groups of five subjects, and especially references to the p -value cannot be deemed conclusive.

Leeman et al. (1995) also investigated the effects of form-focused instruction on the intake of preterit and imperfect past in Spanish. The focus on form group numbering 10 subjects received a mixed form-oriented treatment, including recasts, explicit awareness-raising feedback targeting temporal relationships in Spanish, explicit correction, and visual input enhancement. The control group (12 subjects) received an unenhanced text and meaning-oriented feedback. The Leeman et al. subjects who received form-focused treatment exhibited significant improvement in the accuracy and frequency of suppliance of the targeted features on the post-test debate in comparison with the control group, and some improvement on essay and cloze

paragraph tasks, although no significant differences were found. It should be noted, however, that only five subjects participated in both pre- and post-test debates in the focus on form group, therefore any statistical analyses should be treated with caution. It is also unclear which instructional technique caused the improvement due to a mixed nature of focus on form treatment; it may be, for example, that recasts and text enhancement techniques were less efficient than explicit corrective and awareness-raising feedback.

Alanen (1995) analyzed the effects of different instructional treatments on the acquisition of Finnish locative suffixes by adult learners at a beginners level. Thirty-six subjects were divided into four groups: Control (text only), Enhance (visually enhanced text), Rules (text preceded by one-page rule explanation) and Rules & Enhance. Statistical analysis of the subjects' performance supported the hypothesis that groups that received explicit rule-based instruction would outperform other groups. However, no results showing a clear-cut effect of visual enhancement were obtained, leading Alanen to conclude that "visual input enhancement appeared not to have had an effect on learners' performance" (Alanen 1995:288).

Uncertain results yielded by implicit input enhancement studies led J. White to suggest that a more explicit type of enhancement may be in order, up to explicit rule explanation at the beginning or during the instructional treatment.(White 1998:106). This constitutes the second option proposed by Long and Robinson (1998).

Having found the error to be pervasive and systematic, and (from SLA literature and/or prior teaching experience) knowing the problem to be remediable for learners at this stage of development, the teacher is usually justified in briefly interrupting the group work in order to draw attention to the problem, using pedagogical devices appropriate for students of the age, literacy level and metalinguistic sophistication. (Long and Robinson 1998: 25).

Let us apply this statement to the situation concerning morphosyntactic accuracy of our students. We have found errors in accentuation, spelling, prepositions, adjectival and verbal agreement, noun gender, elision and negation to be pervasive (Mogilevski and Burston 1999). We have argued that these errors can also be considered systematic, even though some of them are not caused by lack of linguistic knowledge.

Certainly, many linguistic features affected by persistent errors in our students' output can be considered "fragile" features under Ellis' definition: those that are acquired late, often with effort, and only when there is access to adequate input (Ellis 1994: 703, 1997: 69). Examples given by Ellis - plural and tense markings and verb inflections in general - represent linguistic categories that are among the most affected by errors in our data. However, keeping in mind that our students have been studying French for over six years, and that they will graduate in another year, we cannot afford to wait until they progress to the next developmental stage, where the problem might be more remediable, or might even disappear by itself. Moreover, if the problem persists over a long period of time, it may become even more engrained and difficult to rectify. Besides, inter-learner variation makes the concept of developmental stages largely irrelevant as far as the elaboration of teaching strategies in the classroom is concerned. In summary, an attempt to focus on the cited formal features can be considered well justified.

The second part of Long and Robinson's statement abounds in reservations: "The teacher is usually justified in briefly interrupting... using pedagogical devices appropriate for students". Such careful phrasing is perfectly appropriate for a general statement; yet, as argued before, these reservations may be more motivated by the desire to maintain methodological purity than by a concern for pedagogical effectiveness. It remains, therefore, to investigate the effectiveness of explicit negative feedback in respect to our particular situation and to find pedagogical devices that would be appropriate for our students.

6.4.2 Implicit negative feedback.

Before we do so, it would be appropriate to consider the third option in focus on form suggested by Long and Robinson (1998): the provision of implicit negative feedback. Recasts represent the most commonly advocated form of such feedback (Long 1991, 1996, Long and Ortega 1997, Long and Robinson 1998, Doughty and Varela 1998). Recasts are defined as "utterances that rephrase a child's utterance by changing one or more sentence components... while still referring to its central meanings" (Long 1996: 434). The corrective potential of this form of feedback has been investigated in the area of L1 child acquisition (Baker and Nelson 1984, Farrar 1990, 1992, Marcus

1993) and has recently attracted the attention of several SLA scholars (see Long 1996 for a review, also Doughty and Williams 1998, Lyster and Ranta 1997, Lyster 1998, 2001). Long and Robinson (1998: 26) suggest that recasts represent a focus on form technique that enables teachers to shift learners' attention to targeted formal features upon occasion, while maintaining the predominant focus on meaning throughout the lesson. In this manner, recasts would be the favorite choice for a teacher who accepts Long's definition of focus on form and its implications for classroom teaching.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) investigated the effects of different forms of corrective feedback on learner uptake in four French immersion classrooms at Grade 4 level. They distinguished six types of corrective feedback: explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation and repetition. The recast technique is illustrated by the following examples:

Student: L'eau érable? [Error-grammatical]

Teacher: L'eau d'érable. [FB-recast] C'est bien.

Student: Parce que il veut juste lui pour être chaud. [Error-grammatical]

Teacher: Oh. Quelqu'un qui veut juste avoir la chaleur pour lui-même. [FB-recast]³¹

(Lyster and Ranta 1997: 47).

Lyster and Ranta found that recasts were the most common type of feedback, accounting for 55% of all feedback occurrences. They have subsequently determined the percentage of each type of teacher intervention that resulted in uptake, defined as the student's utterance that follows the feedback and represents a reaction to it. Lyster and Ranta report that only 55% of feedback led to uptake of some kind, and that only 27% resulted in student repair of the error. Despite the fact that they were the most frequent forms of feedback, recasts were found to be the least effective technique, as only 31% of recasts led to uptake, and only 18% of errors in question were completely repaired.

³¹ Student: Juice maple?

Teacher: Maple juice. Good.

Student: Because he wants just him for being hot.

Lyster and Ranta note that repetition of the recast utterance was counted as repair in their analysis. However, simple repetition does not necessarily mean that learners understood the nature of their errors, nor even that they understood that an error has been made (see below for the discussion of Lyster (1998). In fact, Lyster and Ranta do not give any evidence to support a claim that repetition only occurred in the case of recasts. If any intended confirmations or requests for further information were repeated by students, this would cast doubt upon whether repetitions invariably equate with the recognition that an error had been made.

Lyster and Ranta conclude that the recast technique precludes student-generated repair, as students are already being given correct forms. Indeed, as recasts lead to repetitions of the correct form without any effort on the part of the learner to achieve correctness, there is less chance that learners will 'notice the gap', and even less chance that they will acquire knowledge necessary to produce a correct form. As Pica points out, recasts "required only the NNS acknowledgement and no need to adjust their linguistic output" (Pica et al., 1989: 66).

This conclusion is supported by observational data from Netten (1991). Netten conducted a large scale study of language behavior of 23 Grade 1, 2, and 3 immersion classrooms, and concluded that recasts do not constitute "a sufficient way of indicating to pupils, particularly low achievers, that modification of their utterance is of some significance in order to communicate in the target language" (Netten 1991: 304). In fact, recasts can be considered an indication of successful message decoding despite certain errors in the form of the message. As was discussed earlier, such feedback can lead to persistent errors in linguistic performance as communicatively redundant features fail to become intake (Harley 1994).

Lyster (1998) further investigated the nature and effectiveness of recasts basing on the data reported in Lyster and Ranta (1997). It was found that in classroom settings recasts fulfilled a number of discourse functions in addition to implicit error correction. These functions included providing or seeking confirmation or additional information related to content of the message. On the basis of data analysis

Teacher: Oh. Someone who just wants the heat for himself.

investigating instances of recasts and subsequent learner responses Lyster concluded that "in meaning-oriented classrooms... the corrective function of recasts may be less salient than their various discourse functions".

In other words, learners may fail to notice that a particular recast is, in fact, a corrective feedback related to some error in the form of their message. Lyster also claims that the saliency of recasts may be further reduced by noncorrective repetition. The analysis of his data reveals that teachers often repeat learners' utterances, and that noncorrective repetitions fulfil the same discourse functions as recasts by providing or seeking confirmation or additional information related to the content of learner's message. 11% of student utterances entailed corrective recasts and 18% were followed by noncorrective repetition, with striking similarity in the distribution of functions in both types of feedback. The similarity between noncorrective repetitions and recasts is further accentuated by the fact that teachers often incorporated noncorrective formal changes in their repetitions of students' utterances. Thus, learners may be hard put to distinguish between noncorrective and corrective repetitions and between corrective and discourse functions of recasts. Therefore, a repetition following a recast does not mean that the student recognized and repaired his or her error(s). In view of these arguments, Lyster claims that more explicit corrective feedback that results in negotiation of form (Lyster and Ranta 1997) should be more effective than implicit negative feedback in the form of recasts.

Doughty and Varela (1998) conducted a study with thirty-four intermediate ESL students aged 11 to 14, investigating the effects of recasting in classroom settings. A pretest-posttest design was employed. The recast treatment targeted errors in past tense and conditional mood, both in written and oral mode. Twenty-one students in the experimental group received immediate feedback in the form of recasts whenever they made errors while engaged in group content-oriented tasks. In the control group, comprising thirteen students, any reference to past tense or grammar in general was purposely excluded from the classroom activities. While providing feedback, the teacher in the experimental group drew learners' attention to the error via repetition of the idiosyncratic utterance with rising intonation, and followed immediately with the correct form. In this manner, the erroneous elements of the learner's utterance were localized, which reduced the chances of the learner misinterpreting the feedback.

Doughty and Varela term such double-step technique "corrective recasting", and note that while it is "slightly more explicit" than simple recasts, its application did not interfere with the flow of communication (p. 124).

Doughty and Varela report that recasting treatment resulted in substantial and significant gains made by the experimental group, both in the frequency of attempted past and conditional use and in its accuracy in both oral and written mode. It is doubtful, however, that recasts in the form used in their study can be equated with implicit negative feedback following Long and Robinson (1998). First of all, "corrective" or "focused" recast implemented by Doughty and Varela represents a combination of two feedback techniques distinguished by Lyster and Ranta (1997): repetition and recast. Lyster and Ranta report that repetition resulted in 78% of uptake and 31% of repair, compared to 31% of uptake and 18% of repair in students' utterances following recasts. In addition, all repair after repetitions was student-generated, while repair following recasts represented simple repetition of forms provided by the teacher. It may be that repetition included in "corrective" recasting engaged students' cognitive processes more than recasts themselves.

Secondly, it seems that the application of recasts in Doughty and Varela's study encouraged students to provide uptake in the form of the correct utterance. Doughty and Varela report that when the teacher noticed an error in the targeted category, "she not only used the above procedure [corrective recasting] with the student making the error, but also allowed other students in the class to repeat the phrase containing the correct form" (p. 124). In another task, students were required to watch a videotape of their oral presentations. "As the students watched the tape, the teacher paused it at places where an error of the past was noticed and asked the students in the class to repeat the correct form simultaneously" (p. 124). In this manner, the implicitness of recasts was undermined by preceding repetition and identification of the error, and by the explicit elicitation of student uptake.

One must also take into account the semantic "weight" of linguistic features targeted by corrective feedback. All examples of recasts provided by Long (1996), Long and Robinson (1998), Lyster and Ranta (1997) target semantically important features, such as tense, mood and vocabulary. A recast of present tense or infinitive of a verb

into past tense or conditional is a salient enough change of form (and meaning) to warrant notice. It is unlikely, however, that learners would notice minor changes in form such as number and gender markings, and even if they do, they may fail to identify the recast as corrective feedback targeting the intended formal feature. In view of these arguments we must agree with Lyster (1998) that the effectiveness of implicit negative feedback in the form of recasts alone has not been demonstrated by empirical studies to date, and that Doughty and Varela's results are better interpreted as a clear support for negative corrective feedback in SLA.

6.4.3 Explicit negative feedback.

Negative feedback does not necessarily have to include a complete correction of learners' errors, nor provide learners with any additional linguistic or metalinguistic information. Given that one of the purposes of language teaching is to enhance learners' capacity for self-correction (Calvé 1992), it would suffice to offer to students only such information as may be needed to initiate self-correction. Lalande (1982) investigated the effects of instructional feedback and the guided-learning and problem-solving strategies on the written performance of university students of German. Lalande's study is especially interesting because his subjects, research design and tests are comparable to those used in Mogilevski and Burston (1999). His results are, however, in contradiction with those obtained by a study with similar design carried out by Semke (1984). The following discussion investigates the difference between Semke's and Lalande's studies and its consequences for the choice of the particular instructional treatment in this thesis.

In a study with a pretest-posttest design, sixty students were divided into experimental and control groups. The pretest consisted of a 250-word composition written within 45 minutes. An error count did not find any significant differences between two groups. The compositions written by the students in the control group were corrected in the traditional fashion: all corrections were entered into the text and students were required to rewrite them, incorporating the corrections offered by the teacher. Students in the experimental group were required to make corrections themselves, being guided only by code marks indicating the location and the nature of their errors. The problem-solving and correcting activity took place in the classroom, and had to

be completed within fifty minutes. Another treatment of the experimental group consisted in an Error Awareness Sheet that students were required to maintain, noting the types and the quantity of their individual errors in each composition. The purpose of the treatment was to make students aware of the potential pitfalls shortly before the next composition. Lalande reports that this treatment resulted in a significant improvement in grammar and orthography across all non-lexical error categories.

Semke (1984) also investigated students' reaction to different forms of explicit negative feedback. Her subjects, 141 first year German students, were divided into four groups according to the feedback: comments on content, comments and corrections, corrections only and error code. The task was an informal diary, and the marking emphasized the amount of intelligible German in the first group (e.g. 200 words for an A). Other students' writing was marked on the basis of error/number of words ratios, with a minimal amount of 100 words. The fourth group had to rewrite their texts over the week following the code marking. The tests included a 10-minute free writing exercise and a cloze test. In the first test, students received the following instructions:

Just write whatever comes to your mind. Use complete sentences and write in paragraphs, but the paragraphs do not have to relate to each other. You may write on as many different topics as you wish. Write as accurately as you can, but the primary emphasis is on the *amount* of intelligible communication in German that you can produce in this limited time. (Semke 1984:197).

Semke did not find any significant differences in writing accuracy between the four groups, but reported that the comments only group outperformed all others in terms of the amount of produced text. She concluded that corrections did not improve writing accuracy, and that "student progress is enhanced by writing practice alone" (p.195). In addition, students in error correction groups appeared to adopt a less positive attitude to the study of German language.

At first glance, these two studies seem comparable, yet their results are strikingly different. First of all, Lalande defends the value of corrective feedback while Semke denies it. However, Semke acknowledges that her comments also included corrections: "Whenever possible, without being unnatural, items or forms which the

student had used incorrectly were included in the responses." (p.198). Therefore, the correction variable was not sufficiently isolated in Semke's research design to permit unequivocal conclusions concerning its utility. Moreover, it can be argued that the difference between Lalande's and Semke's findings is determined by students' treatment of the feedback and by the nature of tests. In the study conducted by Lalande (1982), students had to attend to the error code feedback in class, guided by the teacher, while in Semke's study students were left to cope alone, lacking sometimes the competence and strategies necessary to find the correct forms. This, of course, had a negative impact on their motivation to undertake the tasks set by the feedback. In addition, the instructions for the writing test given to Semke's subjects emphasized fluency over accuracy, i.e. they were specifically tailored to follow the training received by the first group. These instructions reinforced the natural tendency of language learners to ignore non-lexical features (VanPatten 1996), and resulted in the absence of focus on form for the duration of the task. Semke's claim that writing practice alone leads to improvement also does not stand to inspection, as no differences were found on accuracy measures between the error correction groups and the comments only group, while the latter had twice as much writing practice. Thus the guided-learning and problem-solving techniques proposed by Lalande (1982) could result in a significant improvement of writing accuracy, but only when students are motivated to attend to the feedback, possess the strategies that enable them to use it efficiently, and are primed to focus on form not only in training, but also at the moment of production and during the self-correction stage.

There are two ways of promoting student self-correction. One, such as used in Lalande's study, is to make students develop their own monitoring strategies via self-correction activities based on teacher-generated error detection. Students are then expected to apply the problem-solving skills developed during the revision activity to their linguistic production. It can be argued, however, that students may benefit from explicit teaching of revision strategies, rather than having to develop them on their own. Jing-Hua Yin (1995) conducted an interesting study in this area, investigating the effect of revising strategies on the performance of ESL students. The students in the experimental group, apart from taking the composition course, attended a workshop to receive instruction in global, local and generic revising strategies; whereas the students in the control group, while taking the same course, attended a

different workshop in which they were engaged in the same revising tasks for the same amount of time as their counterparts in the experimental group, but received no explicit instruction in revising strategies. It was found that, in comparison with the control group, the instructional treatment resulted in a significant improvement of learners' performance and revision capacity in the experimental group. Yin concluded that it may be insufficient to provide students with revision opportunities and feedback, and claimed that an explicit instruction in revision strategies could make a valuable contribution to the improvement of learners' writing abilities, adopting a position that is also advocated in this thesis.

It has been argued that focus on content is natural for learners, while focus on form needs to be expressly and explicitly taught. The findings of the study conducted by Fathman and Whalley (1990) lend support to this hypothesis. Fathman and Whalley investigated the effect of different kinds of feedback on their students' ability to rewrite compositions in ESL. 72 students were divided into four groups, receiving respectively no feedback, grammar feedback, content feedback and a combined grammar and content feedback. Grammar feedback consisted solely in underlining the errors, thus using the technique applied by Lalande (1982) and Semke (1984). The analysis of rewritten compositions showed that students made significant improvement in grammatical accuracy in the revisions only after receiving grammar feedback. It was found, however, that all groups significantly improved the content of their original compositions, even in the absence of any feedback. It seems unlikely at the first glance, yet it can be suggested that students had considered a request to rewrite their compositions as a negative feedback. Not surprisingly, in the absence of grammar-related feedback their attention was naturally directed at the content of their writing. It was also found that students produced longer texts in the absence of feedback, thus supporting Semke's argument that corrections inhibit writing fluency, but, as the author notes, "this is not an indication of quality of writing" (p.185). Moreover, the relationship between feedback and writing fluency evidenced in the behavior of Semke's subjects can be interpreted in another manner: if students are told to rewrite a composition with no indication of what is wrong with it, what else are they going to do but continue writing, i.e. make it longer? It can be concluded, therefore, that learners need to confront their errors with help of the teacher's feedback to improve their writing accuracy, while the improvement of content is a

more "natural" process and does not require as much teacher-generated attention in the teaching/learning process.

6.5. Suggestions for a practical focus on form treatment of the learners under study.

It can be said so far that negative explicit feedback on formal elements of the TL seems the most fruitful approach to the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy experienced by our students. However, several important questions remain to be answered. First of all, negative explicit feedback and purely form-focused activities have been an integral part of grammar and translation approach, which has failed to produce satisfactory results as far as overall interlanguage development is concerned. It has been postulated that the main driving force behind SLA is focus on meaning, i.e. attempts to use language as a communicational tool, and therefore learners would focus on form only when their attentional resources are not engaged in the negotiation of meaning (VanPatten 1994). Focus on form in Long's definition tries to draw learners' attention precisely to those features that are necessitated by communicative demand, and, therefore, provide cognitive support for the acquisition of formal features targeted by the feedback. Yet semantically 'redundant' features are not necessitated by communicative demand. It is therefore necessary to invest them with some other meaning in the eyes of the learner.

6.5.1 Pragmatic cognitive support for focus on redundant features.

The meaning of a given linguistic feature is not necessarily just lexical or grammatical. It has been demonstrated in Chapter 1 that even the most semantically redundant elements of the French language can have a significant sociopragmatic value in the French socio-cultural environment. The understanding of this fact can indeed provide a cognitive support for the acquisition of redundant features, as they become meaningful to learners. Moreover, in this case learners would understand why teachers give such importance to what must otherwise seem to be trifles, and participate in the learning process instead of being passive targets for teaching strategies.

Perhaps less effectively, learners may be given to understand via negative feedback that correct use of a given linguistic feature is important to the teacher, even though errors in this area do not influence the teacher's understanding of learners' messages. This would also invest such features with pragmatic meaning and provide cognitive support for their successful acquisition, although learners would not know the motives behind teachers' behavior. Positive results reported by Lightbown and Spada (1990) for the acquisition of *you have/there is* rule can be a good example supporting this hypothesis. The Doughty and Varela (1998) results can also be interpreted in this manner, as learners in this study could not fail to understand that correct use of past tense and conditional mood was for some reason important to their teacher.

Finally, semantically redundant linguistic features can be made pragmatically meaningful via changes in the marking system. It can be hypothesized that when 50% of the mark depends on morphosyntactic accuracy, learners would pay more attention to form both in the input and in their output, although semantic meaning can still attract more attentional resources than pragmatic meaning at the moment of production. After all, focus on meaning is a natural attitude, while focus on form and self-correction are skills that need to be specifically developed, even in native speakers.

6.5.2 Learner-generated focus on form.

Focus on form, or form-focused instruction as it is defined by most leading researchers in the area (Long 1991, 1996, Long and Robinson 1998, VanPatten 1994, Doughty and Williams 1998, Ellis 1994, 1997, 1998) is a teaching strategy whereby learners' attentional resources are diverted towards a particular formal linguistic feature at the moment of input processing. Form-focused instruction can also prompt learners to pay attention to the selected feature(s) in their output, whereby the output becomes input. It is claimed that if learners pay attention to particular features in the input, they will acquire them more efficiently (Schmidt 1990, 1995, Tomlin and Villa 1994, Lyster 1998). It is also assumed that this acquisition will translate into more accurate linguistic performance. This assumption, however, merits a closer inspection.

It was suggested in Chapter 3 that learners' focus on a particular item or structure at the moment of input processing may facilitate its storage in the learner's interlanguage. However, the presence of this information in the competence pool does not guarantee accurate performance, because of various factors affecting the work of the mechanism of linguistic proficiency or capability, which serves as a link between competence and performance. Given that this mechanism is naturally tuned to perform better in the domain of semantically significant items or structures, learners must maintain focus on form at the moment of production to insure correct use of fragile, non-salient and redundant linguistic features. We must therefore distinguish between teacher-generated and learner-generated focus on form. The implementation of the latter is, of course, the ultimate goal of the former, as students must be able to focus on form independently when the demands set by a given task emphasize linguistic accuracy.

The first type of focus on form allows the teacher to manipulate the allocation of learners' attentional resources and thus facilitate the processing of the targeted feature. Learner-generated focus on form, or monitoring, promotes the allocation of attentional resources to form at the moment of production and, in writing, at the editing stage. The transition between teacher-generated and learner-generated focus on form can be implemented via a constant feedback aiming at making students understand the sociopragmatic importance of morphosyntactic accuracy as part of an on-going process of composition writing. The aim of the teacher-generated focus on form activities and comments should be to invest formal features with pragmatic significance and thus provide learners with motivation to pay attention to them. Unless learners understand the pragmatic value of the targeted features, the attention they pay to them due to visual enhancement or teacher feedback is likely to be too shallow to insure durable intake (Hulstijn 1989, 1992, Alanen 1995). Investing fragile, non-salient and redundant features with sociopragmatic meaning would promote both a more accurate performance on the immediate task and a more efficient intake of formal features in a long term as the learners' output becomes input.

Nevertheless, a general motivation to focus on form is not sufficient, as it does not guarantee a significant improvement in accuracy. A focus on forms commonly affected by competence-related errors would either be completely inefficient, as

learners cannot correct what they do not know, or result in avoidance of hazily remembered forms. Areas that abound in second order errors should therefore be prime targets for learner-generated focus on form, as learners' interlanguages contain the information necessary to eliminate such errors.

6.5.3 Structured focus on form.

Second order errors appear when learners' natural focus on meaning engages their attentional resources to the detriment of focus on form. In this tug of war between meaning and form the former is bound to win at times, even though a careful priming session may promote focus on form. Of course, one can write a comprehensible text relying only on focus on meaning and previously automatized functions of the linguistic proficiency mechanism whereas total mobilization of attention to focus on form would be useful only in a discrete-point test. One cannot produce a text without focus on meaning. Neither, however, can one produce a correct text without focus on form. Therefore learners must alternate between the two poles, focusing on form is most affected by second order errors and paying attention to meaning the rest of the time.

In some instances learners may succeed in combining focus on meaning and focus on form at the moment of production, avoiding both first and second order errors. At other times focus on meaning may win out, as learners experience cognitive overload. It can be avoided by conceptual chunking (Halford 1998, 2000), a technique that combines several variables into one, that can be easily processed. This is essentially a psychological mechanism that explains the "cognitive support" (Doughty and Williams 1998) behind focus on form in communicative context: when attention to form is required by communicative constraints, learners attend to form and content, incorporating two variables – form and content – into one, that is easier to process. However, as previously argued, not all formal elements can be chunked in this manner.

Another technique that reduces cognitive overload is segmentation, whereby a task is divided into less complex steps, that can be processed serially. This technique can be taught (Halford 2000), and enables the learner to attend to all features of his or her

output without placing undue strain on the attentional resources. It is therefore necessary to separate these processes and devote some time entirely to focus on form. This may happen at the post-enunciation stage, resulting in self-correction, and, of course, unhurried writing offers conditions that are most conducive to this activity. As Calvé (1992) points out, teacher-generated focus on form should promote learners' ability to self-correct. Nevertheless, although many learners re-read their written production in order to edit it, a natural, unprimed self-correction strategy is also likely to be dominated by focus on meaning. Learners would wonder about the correct choice of vocabulary and macrodiscursive structure rather than about agreement and accentuation. They must therefore be primed to attend to these features at the editing stage.

An attempt to correct elision, negation, accentuation, verbal and adjectival agreement at once, i.e. an attempt to keep in mind several variables at a time can also cause cognitive overload. It would be advisable, therefore, to focus on different forms step by step, seeking occasions to apply a particular known rule. Given that similar operations would be required at every stage, this approach would make the mechanism of linguistic proficiency/capability work in a conveyer belt fashion.

These operations should be aimed at the elimination of second order errors in a given error category using the most efficient rule available. One can equate rule teaching with focus on form, as "rules describe the realization, distribution and use of forms" (Doughty and Williams 1998:211). Hulstijn (1995) argues that rules with greater scope, reliability and frequency should be given priority in explicit instruction. The rule concerning the relationship between pronunciation and spelling of [e] and [ɛ] would be a good example of a rule that qualifies for priority under Hulstijn's criteria. Thus post-enunciation monitoring should include a stage where learners can read aloud their text focusing on pronunciation of [e] and [ɛ]. It remains, however, to investigate the exact scope of this rule in our students' output and to determine the effects of its application.

The validity of the above recommendations was tested in the course of experimental studies reported in the following two chapters.

Chapter 7. Research and Methodology.

7.1. Error Analysis.

Error analysis (EA) was chosen as the principal research instrument in this study. One may question this choice, since EA has been out of favor in SLA research for some 20 years. It had its heyday in the seventies, when researchers judged it more appropriate and greater in scope than contrastive analysis (CA), based on the comparison between learners' native and target languages. CA, consistent with the behaviorist approach to language learning, treated all errors as results of lingering native language habits of production transferred to the target language. EA enabled scholars to take into account numerous errors that could not be traced to any mother tongue antecedents. In this manner, EA represents a research tool of a great scope, enabling one to cover all aspects of idiosyncratic learner output, or concentrate on one specific area. In addition, the EA movement validated the status of an error as an object of research rather than a nuisance to eliminate rather than investigate. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of EA have been discussed by a number of scholars. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 141) in particular point out three major weaknesses of EA: confusion of error description with error explanation, the lack of precision and specificity in the definitions of error categories and simplistic categorization of the errors' causes. It is worthwhile to consider the validity of such claims.

In respect to the first alleged default of EA, it is claimed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen that in many EA studies the description of an error often substitutes for its explanation in terms of mental processes resulting in specific language behavior. While this criticism is perfectly justifiable, it begs the question of whether such a weakness constitutes an inherent part of EA or is merely a limitation exhibited by certain EA studies. To the extent that EA can be demonstrated to provide explanations for the causes of learners' errors, there in fact is no basis for rejecting it on these grounds. Moreover, it can be claimed that even in 1982, Dulay, Burt and Krashen were setting a straw man to knock down: ten years earlier, H. V. George published a remarkably up-to-date account of major types and causes of errors in English (George 1972). In

this work, he anticipated the current discussion on noticing (George 1972: 99-109), and discussed redundancy of the code, unsuitable presentation in class and various types of inference as principal causes of learners' errors.

The second shortcoming of EA according to Dulay, Burt and Krashen is its lack of rigor in defining error categories. They provide as an example two different definitions of intralingual error given by Richards (1974) and LoCoco (1976). True, broad definitions like transfer or intralingual errors may lack reliability and tend to overlap, making impossible eventual duplication of studies. In fact, this second weakness ties in with the first, as lack of precision in error classification is caused by the confusion between error description and error explanation. Error description must be detailed, precise and reliable, and inter-rater reliability must be ascertained as an integral part of error analysis. Furthermore, error description and error explanation must be dissociated because errors classified under a given description are not necessarily caused by the same factor. For example, both beginner and advanced learners of French may produce an accentuation error, but it would be caused by insufficient competence in one case and inadequate attention in the other. Finally, recent developments in computer spell checkers show that lack of rigor in error taxonomy is not inherent to EA; it may occur in theoretical debate between people, but computers need rigorous instructions to provide a detailed error analysis in such a morphologically complex language as French. The fact that modern third generation checkers, such as Antidote or Le Correcteur, can do it, shows that an error taxonomy can be so detailed, precise, unequivocal and rigorous, that even computers would understand it.

The third default of EA according to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) is the inappropriate use of simplistic classifications to explain learners' errors. This critique is in fact a reiteration of the previous two, as authors discuss in detail why taxonomies based on assumptions pertaining to the error's source are inappropriate in error analysis. They point out that such causal classifications assume a single source behind a particular error, while an agglomeration of different factors may be responsible for it.

To summarize, all defaults of EA pointed out by Dulay, Burt and Krashen are procedural rather than theoretical: EA should not necessarily confuse error description and error explanation; EA can be based on accurate error taxonomy; EA can also provide comprehensive and insightful explanation for learners' errors. The fact that certain studies in the area of EA do not achieve this does not signify that the whole approach is at fault. In this thesis, the problem of error explanation has been addressed in chapters 2 and 4. It remains to justify the error taxonomy used here and in previous work (Mogilevski and Burston 1998).

Dulay, Burt and Krashen suggest that "taxonomies might more appropriately be used to organize errors according to directly observable characteristics" and that "the accurate description of errors is a separate activity from the task of inferring the sources of these errors (1982: 144-145). They distinguish four types of descriptive taxonomies: linguistic category, surface strategy, comparative, and communicative effect taxonomies. The first has been extensively used in early EA studies (Politzer and Ramirez 1973, Burt and Kiparsky 1972), and consists in classifying errors "according to either or both the language component or the particular linguistic constituent the error affects." (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 146). Surface strategy³² describes the way in which the surface structures are changed: items may be omitted, added, misformed or misordered. In other words, it is based on the ways in which the learner language is different from the presumed TL norm. Comparative taxonomy "is based on comparison between the structure of L2 errors and certain other types of constructions". (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 163). One may compare, for example, errors made by an L2 learner and those committed by a child learning his or her native language. Finally, a communicative effect taxonomy would classify errors according to their impact on communication. Thus *global* errors would affect overall sentence organization and severely hinder communication, while *local* errors would affect single elements in the sentence (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 191).

Descriptive taxonomy with linguistic categorization was selected for this study as it yields most information about error location and concentration (P. Corder 1973, 1981; I. Ruin 1996; C. Polio 1997), is most reliable and objective and enables the researcher

³² James (1998) criticizes this term, and with justification, as there is no "deep structure taxonomy", and thus the reference to surface structure is meaningless.

to analyze large quantities of data. Moreover, linguistic categorization provides a baseline for other taxonomies: for example, the absence of verbal agreement can be considered a local error in communicative effect taxonomy, developmental error in comparative taxonomy or omission in surface classification, but in essence it would always be an error in verbal agreement.

Bley-Vroman (1983) accuses EA and other forms of TL based analyses of 'comparative fallacy'. This means that learners' IIs, being unique and individual linguistic systems, cannot be satisfactorily described in terms of their proximity to the TL norm. This is true, but EA is not used in this study to describe the development of our learners' IIs; it is used as a diagnostic tool that enables us to investigate the extent to which our subjects can approximate the TL norm at a given moment. The analysis of the data does not seek to establish and describe the developmental stage(s) of our students. In fact, EA is employed here to investigate a problem that transcends developmental stages, because the persistent low morphosyntactic accuracy has been reported as characteristic of school immersion learners (Lyster 1987, Harley and Swain 1994) as well as of advanced university graduates (Ruin 1996). Of course, similar error rates evidenced by different students do not mean that these learners possess similar IIs or even pass through similar developmental stages. It does however indicate that they experience the same problem, most likely caused by the same factors, which may be related to their competence or to their linguistic capability (Tarone 1990). With the help of EA it is possible to define the weakest areas in students' competence or capability, which can lead to the development of relevant and efficient remediation strategies. EA can also be a precise testing tool to determine the effect of such strategies, thus using the same methodology for research and its evaluation. As previously indicated, this research is output-oriented, and aims to reduce the gap between the standard TL norm and our subjects' performance. Of course, our learners' IIs can change in a manner that would be untraceable by EA, but this method of performance analysis is adequate to develop and test the hypotheses in the restricted area of morphosyntactic accuracy.

7.2. Error classification.

Error description with linguistic categorization is used in this study as a diagnostic tool, in order to ascertain the rate of progress, if any, that our subjects would make in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy following the implementation of focus on form technique proposed in the previous chapter. Given that the starting point of this research was provided by the Mogilevski and Burston (1999) study described in the second chapter, errors were classified in the same way to provide continuity and overall validity of research. Nevertheless, several modifications were introduced: idiosyncrasies that could be classified as global errors under communicative effect taxonomy (Burt and Kiparsky 1974, Burt 1975, Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982) were excluded from the present research, both because they were comparatively rare in the production of advanced learners, and because this study concentrates on redundant, fragile and non-salient features (Ellis 1994, 1997). Prepositions and determiners, despite being major error categories, were also excluded from the present study, as the students repeatedly demonstrated that they could not correct such errors even after relevant feedback (see Chapter 2). Thus these categories were not targeted, as they predominantly included first order errors. The following table presents error categories and examples of errors investigated in this study.

Table 1
Error Categories & Examples.

Error Class	Error Type	Examples
<u>Noun Group</u>	noun gender	<u>un</u> université
	noun plural	travails
<u>Adjectives:</u>	gender agreement	une <u>joli</u> fille
	number agreement	les gens <u>pressé</u>
	form	une histoire <u>oublier</u>
<u>Verbal group:</u>	conjugation	je devo <u>is</u>
	past participle	j'ai <u>devé</u>
	subject agreement/ person	nous <u>connaissez</u>
	subject agreement/ number	ils <u>arrive</u>

negation

personne n'est pas venu

Orthography:

accent

ecrire

character

telement

approximation

particuliaire

elision

que il

capitalization

les français

In this manner, the scope of investigation has been narrowed down to local errors being made in those linguistic features that do not significantly affect communication. As has been repeatedly argued, these kinds of mistakes are most resistant both to traditional instruction and to acquisition through exposure, and therefore represent a appealing target for focus on form strategies. Three error categories – capitalization, noun plural and past participle - were added to the chart in comparison with the one employed in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) in order to describe errors in more detail. Overall, the error types represented in the chart still covered the major part of errors made by our students. This point is illustrated in the table below.

Table 2

Error analysis of 1995-1997 results by linguistic category.

Error Class	Error Type	Number	Percentage
<u>Noun Group</u>	noun gender	610	9.7
<u>Adjectives:</u>	gender agreement	398	6.3
	number agreement	223	3.5
	form	96	1.5
<u>Verbal group:</u>	conjugation	618	9.8
	subject agreement/ person	66	1
	subject agreement/ number	86	1.4

	negation	56	0.9
<u>Orthography:</u>	accent	830	13.2
	character	767	12.2
	approximation	189	3
	elision	116	1.8

Therefore, the error categories included in the classification used in this study covered 64.3% of all errors made by our students in Mogilevski and Burston data.³³ Despite the reduction in error categories for reasons explained above, the errors analyzed in this study represented still a significant part of the whole error count.

7.3. Error calculation

Given the surface level features of the errors under study, their tabulation was relatively straightforward. Analysis, however, did on occasion require interpretative evaluation owing to a number of complicating factors. In decreasing order of frequency these were: legibility; ambiguous intended meaning; questionable native-like usage and, finally, debatable prescriptive rule. Notwithstanding, since such complications affected only about 2% of decisions, they were not significant enough to influence the overall analysis.

In addition to the above factors, three other practical considerations also affected error calculation: repetition, inconsistency and error flow-on. Inasmuch as repeated occurrences of the same mistake in a composition merely attest to the entrenchment of the problem, they were not counted for purposes of evaluation. Likewise, variants of a basic error (e.g. *particulier* misspelled once as *particuliair* and again as *particuliare*), were treated as a single error representing a particular hazy area in the learner's interlanguage. There were instances where two (or more) spellings of a

³³ Vocabulary and register errors were not included in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) classification, although they accounted for 12% of the total number of errors. Nevertheless, morphosyntactic errors still represent the majority of all deviations from TL norm that could be found in the corpus analyzed by Mogilevski and Burston.

Lastly, the problem of consequential agreement errors had to be addressed. In instances of the type "une jolie petite lac" only the underlying gender misassignment was counted. Whereas in cases like "une joli petit lac", two errors were counted, that of gender and that of agreement. With regard to spelling, where one letter in a word was misspelled or absent, the error was classified under "character". Where two or more letters were misspelled (e.g. "particuliare" for *particulier*), the mistake was considered to be a single "approximation".

Table 3 illustrates error tabulation in an extract from a composition discussing the problem of racism.

Table 3.

NG	Ch	Ch	PP		Neg
D'un part, le racisme est toujours associé avec les gens qui ne sont					
GA					
très riche.					
NG			Ch	Cap	Ch
Voici la crise économique et social. Par exemple au sud des Etats-Unis,					
	GA	VN		FV	
pendant la guerre civile, c'était les Maghrébins qui étaient l'objet du					
FV					
racisme.					

Abbreviations:

NG – noun gender;

CH – character misspelling;
A – accent;
Cap – capitalisation;
GA – adjective gender agreement;
VN – verbal agreement in number;
FV – free variation.

As can be seen, error tabulation is fairly straightforward and unequivocal. Unmarked masculine agreement in *social* was not counted as it is a flow-on error determined by a gender misassignment in *le crise*. Prepositional error – *au sud* instead of *dans le Sud* – also was not counted as it arguably constitutes a first order error, whose remediation requires further learning/acquisition. Also, the passage contains two typical examples of free variation: one character spelling error was counted in *racism* whereas the second occurrence of this word is error-free; in another case one verb with the same plural object was conjugated in singular, and followed by its plural form.

Inter-rater reliability was ascertained in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) to be 95%. Of the 5% discrepancy, 2% were due to differences in interpretive evaluations (legibility; ambiguous intended meaning; questionable native-like usage; debatable prescriptive rule) and the remainder consisted mostly of overlooked errors. Additional tests were not run on the new corpus of compositions, as simplified and restricted error classification was expected to make for even more reliable count. In fact, an analysis of all cases of dubious error classification in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) data revealed that ambiguous intended meaning, questionable native-like usage and debatable prescriptive rule could not affect any errors analyzed in this study.

7.4. Data and procedure.

A preliminary analysis of the data provided by 49 students in the first semester 1999 examination was conducted to establish the baseline for further research, and to investigate in more detail the major morphosyntactic error categories. The examination consisted of two tests: a 300 word essay and an error correction exercise. In the latter, students were asked to detect and correct errors in a standard size essay. An authentic essay written by one of the weakest students from a previous class

(1997) was used (anonymously, of course), although more morphosyntactic errors were added. Data was collected and analyzed following the procedure described above. For the correction exercise, individual rates of corrected errors were determined. It was found that students often erroneously altered correct utterances; individual rates of such overcorrections were also calculated.

The results of the error count in the essay were compared to the results of the analysis of 1997 first semester examination in order to verify the representativeness of the data. In addition, an analysis was carried out to investigate the effect of the use of an on-line grammar checker (*Antidote*) in respect to the students' written performance. During the semester students had to write two homework essays with optional use of *Antidote*. Two sets of 40 compositions written by the same students comprised the data. The error rate in compositions written with the help of *Antidote* was compared to that found in essays that did not evidence *Antidote* use. It was easy to determine whether the student had, or had not used the grammar checker: the tell-tale signs included a much lower morphosyntactic error rate, an absence of spelling errors including accentuation (except for homophones), and the use of accents on capital letters. In addition, individual error rates found in examination data were analyzed to determine whether students who had used *Antidote* with their homework assignments made less errors under examination conditions. The impact of *Antidote* use on students' capacity to detect and correct errors in the correction exercise was also investigated. Namely, the following questions had been asked: firstly, can the simple availability/use of a grammar checker improve the accuracy of homework assignments and secondly, does such usage transpose to more accurate unassisted writing?

An additional analysis of errors in noun gender and accentuation was undertaken in order to establish more precisely the sources of these errors in order to develop efficient remediation strategies. The choice of these two categories was motivated firstly by the fact that they number among the greatest in the error count, and secondly, by the observation of the likely sources of errors in our data. A preliminary observation of 1995-99 data revealed that competence related errors in character misspelling or conjugation were caused by so many different deviations from the TL norm that it was impossible to find a single rule that would fill these gaps in learner

competence. On the other hand, it was observed that many errors in noun gender involved nouns with gender-specific endings, such as *le combinaison*, *un version* or *le société*. It was also quite obvious that gender misassignment in nouns ending in an orthographic "e" was caused by the overgeneralization of a rule asserting that nouns that end in -e are feminine. As for accentuation, a large number of errors in this category involved the lack or improper use of an acute or a grave accent over "e", as in *etudiant* or *problème*, mistakes with clear phonological correlates. A preliminary analysis was carried out to quantify these observations and to provide a basis for the development of appropriate remediation strategies.

7.5. Results.

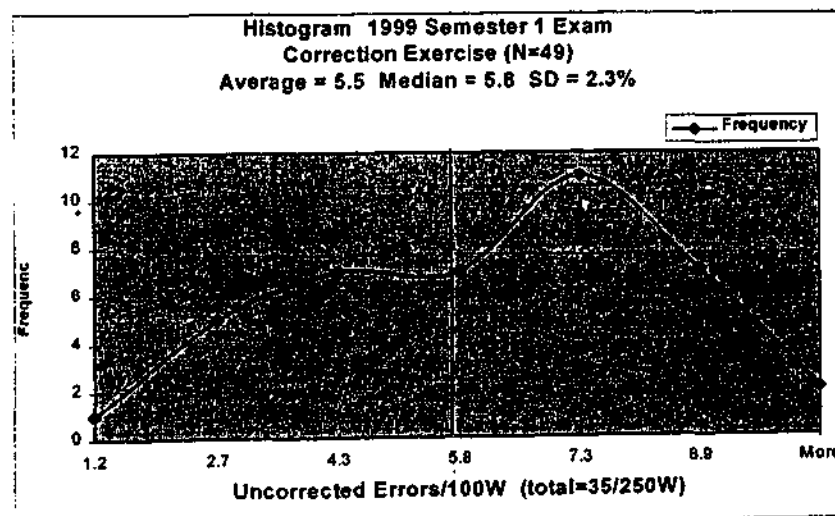
The table below lists the group rates of corrected, uncorrected and overcorrected errors in the correction exercise of the first semester 1999.

Table 4.

N	Err/text	Words/text	Err/100 words	Corrected	% of total	Over	% of total corrected	Over/100words Average
49	35	245	14.3	1046	61%	345	33%	2.87

The individual correction rates are represented by the following histogram:

Histogram 1.



The vertical line marks the average ratio of uncorrected errors per hundred words.

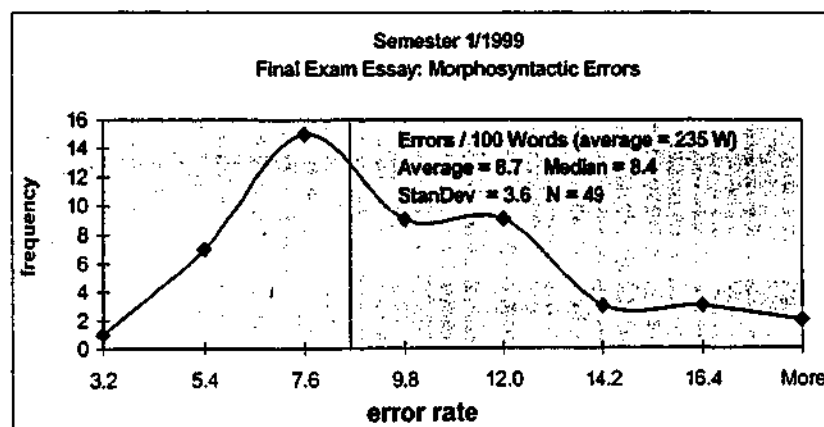
The error analysis of 49 first semester 1999 examination compositions produced the following results:

Table 5.

Students	Errors	Words	Err/100w Average	Err/100w Median	Standard Deviation
49	967	11515	8.7	8.4	3.6

The individual ratios of the number of morphosyntactic errors divided by one hundred words (Err/100w) provided the source data for the following histogram, representing the distribution of scores among subjects:

Histogram 2.



The vertical line marks the average ratio of morphosyntactic errors per hundred words in the 1st semester 1999 examination compositions.

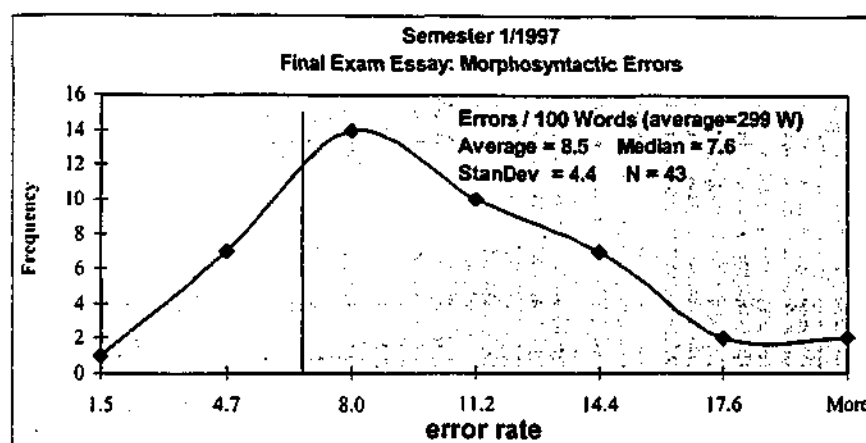
The comparison with the results of first semester 1997 examination is illustrated in the next table:

Table 6.

First semester, advanced French	N	MS errors	Words	Err/100w Average	Err/100w Median	Standard Deviation
1999	49	967	11515	8.7	8.4	3.6
1997	43	977	12859	8.5	7.6	4.4

The distribution of Err/100w ratios in the 1997 data is represented by the following histogram:

Histogram 3.



Just 40 of the 1999 student cohort wrote both homework compositions, so only this data was retained for the analysis. The analysis of group error rates in the two homework compositions, with subgroups being defined with respect to use/non-use of *Antidote*, revealed the following figures:

Table 7.

	Comp1 Antidote	Comp1 non-Antidote	Comp2 Antidote	Comp2 non-Antidote
Students	23	17	36	4
Errors	149	234	150	27

Average/composition	5.7	13.8	4	6.75
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The examination error rate of students who used *Antidote* throughout the semester was subsequently compared to that evidenced by students who failed to use the checker at least once while doing their homework. The results are reported in the table below:

Table 8.

	Antidote	Non-Antidote
Students	22	18
MS Errors/100 words (Average)	8.2	9.3

The error analysis of the first semester 1999 examination data (N=49) revealed the following distribution of errors:

Table 9.

Error category	Number of errors	Percentage of total morphosyntactic (MS) errors
Number agreement	57	6%
Gender agreement	105	11%
Noun gender	143	15%
Approximation	67	7%
Character misspelling/Capitalization	192	20%
Accentuation	258	27%

A comparison between error distribution rates in major error categories in the first semester 1999 and in 1995-97 comparable data revealed the following results:

Table 10.

Error category	Percentage of total MS errors 1999	Percentage of total MS errors 1995-97
Number agreement	6%	5.5%
Gender agreement	11%	9.8%
Noun gender	15%	15%
Approximation	7%	4.6%
Character misspelling/Capitalization	20%	18.9%
Accentuation	27%	20.4%

A closer look at the error location in noun gender and accentuation categories in 1999 data revealed the following distribution:

Table 11.

Error category	Error type	Percentage of total in the category
Accentuation	é missing	68%
	é wrong	6%
	è missing	10%
	Other missing accents	6%
	Other superfluous accents	10%
Noun gender	-sion, -tion	13%
	Other gender-specific endings	16%
	Common feminine nouns	19%
	Common masculine nouns	6%
	Masculine ending in -e	21%
	Other	25%

7.6. Findings.

A detailed statistical analysis was carried out on the data, using SPSS. Kruskal-Wallis rank sum tests showed that the use of *Antidote* in the first homework essay resulted in a significant progress in morphosyntactic accuracy ($p = 0$). No significant difference was found on the second essay, probably due to a small number of students who did not use the computer grammar checker ($N = 4$). Nevertheless, a significant difference ($p = 0.0115$) was found in a comparison between four groups defined by use/non-use of *Antidote* in both compositions (yy, yn, ny and nn). These findings were expected, as *Antidote*, is most reliable especially in the area of morphology and simple syntax³⁴.

It had been hypothesized that regular use of the program would promote learners' awareness of formal features of French, and specifically of those features that are most affected by errors in their written production, as learners process the negative feedback offered by *Antidote*. This hypothesis was not supported by the findings, as students who regularly used *Antidote* throughout the semester did not perform significantly better on the essay than students who used the program only sporadically ($p = 0.4394$). In addition, the analysis of the individual rates of error correction/overcorrection in the correction exercise did not show any significant differences between *Antidote* users and non-users. Moreover, the comparison between the error rates found in first semester 1997 and first semester 1999 examination compositions did not reveal any significant differences in morphosyntactic accuracy: (p -value was 0.8113 on Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test). An assumption of normality only reinforced this conclusion, as a standard two-sample t -test showed a p -value of 0.9233. The absence of difference between first semester 1997 and first semester 1999 data validated the comparison between error distribution rates in 1999 and in 1995-97 data reported in Mogilevski and Burston (1999), given that no difference was found between 1995 and 1997 data in that study. No statistical evidence was found in the error distribution rates in all major error categories.

³⁴ This is true for all computer spell checkers, even for the third generation programs such as *Antidote* or *Le Correcteur*: although they provide tools for a rather sophisticated text analysis, their innate inability to perceive semantic differences is a considerable limiting factor. (See Mogilevski 1998 for data on *Le Correcteur*).

7.7. Discussion.

It is reasonable to exclude the variable of *Antidote* use from the analysis, as no significant differences were observed in the data produced by users and non-users of a computer grammar checker, both in comparison of individual error rates in the 1999 group and in comparison between 1997 and 1999 groups. Nevertheless, the histograms representing the individual distribution of Err/100w ratios in 1997 and in 1999 suggest that at least some changes were taking place. The 1997 histogram shows that the number of students producing below average error rates is smaller than the number of students exhibiting above average error rates, as the median line is placed to the left of the apex of the curve. In other respects it can be considered a nearly normal bell curve distribution. The 1999 histogram is markedly different on both counts. It shows that the number of strong students is greater, as the median line is right skewed. The overall distribution is far from normal, with a two-humped curve instead of the bell-shaped one. It appears that the whole group of the 1999 students became divided into two distinct groups, one with the average of 7.6 errors per hundred words, and another with the average of 12, defined by the apexes of the two humps. It can be suggested on the basis of this observation that some students did modify their linguistic behavior under the influence of the changes in the curriculum that emphasized morphosyntactic accuracy, whereas others remained indifferent to these changes.

The histogram representing individual ratios of uncorrected errors per hundred words in the first semester correction exercise gives further evidence in support of this explanation. Just as in the writing exercise, the subject pool appears divided into two groups, represented by the two humps of the graph, where the first had, on average, four uncorrected errors left in the text while the other had missed over seven errors on average. Of course, some students would be "naturally" better at spotting errors, but a normal distribution curve would still be expected in this case. It is therefore likely that some other factor is responsible for this unorthodox distribution; the use of *Antidote* may be this factor.

It is interesting, however, that a large amount of explicit negative feedback provided by a grammar checker did not make a difference in the students' output in terms of

group error rates. Such results could be expected in the area of prepositional usage or vocabulary, as feedback from *Antidote* in this domain suffers from limitations on semantic differentiation shared by all contemporary computer checkers. However, it is precisely in the categories of noun gender marking, orthography, conjugation, verbal and adjectival agreement that present generation computer checkers are most reliable (Mogilevski 1998, Burston 1996). A likely explanation for the failure to internalize grammar checker corrections, supported by students' responses to a questionnaire investigating their use, is that many learners tended to trust the computer on these matters, pressing the accept button without allocating any attentional resources to the feedback, i.e. they in effect "jumped the gap" without taking note of it. Thus the program's reliability backfired, reducing its pedagogical efficiency.

As the results of the first semester 1999 cohort demonstrate, the undirected use of a grammar checker alone does not automatically lead to significant improvement in underlying writing accuracy. This is not to say that computer-based grammar checking does not have the potential to become a useful tool for the improvement of morphosyntactic precision. Traditionally, error feedback is provided only after the student has finished writing, thus dissociating focus on form and focus on meaning writing stages. In comparison, the major advantage of a grammar checker lies in the fact that, at least in the area of surface level morphosyntax, it provides immediate, clear, error-specific and personal feedback for nearly every error and every student. To realize the potential benefit of grammar checker usage, however, learners must be trained to notice the feedback and process it, paying attention to the areas most affected by errors and to the most common corrections. The computer grammar checker is not an efficient pedagogical tool for any students in any conditions: it must be integrated into curriculum by application of teaching strategies aiming to prompt learners to focus on form. It remains to apply such strategies to the student body and investigate their effectiveness in reducing the error count in the targeted morphosyntactic error categories.

One of the ways to promote this attention to morphological and syntactical features is to make their correct use one of major evaluation parameters in the language subject. This was done in the first semester 1999, where 20% of the mark for homework compositions written with optional help of *Antidote* depended on morphosyntactic

accuracy. Given that the number of *Antidote* users grew significantly from the first homework essay to the second (23/17 compared to 36/4), it can be accepted that students realized the importance of morphosyntactic accuracy as well as the fact that *Antidote* can be very helpful in this respect. However, as the preceding discussion suggests, students tended to focus on the end product rather than on the strategies of its production, using the grammar checker as a correction tool rather than a learning tool. This attitude proved to be counter-productive in examination conditions, when *Antidote* was unavailable. To rectify this problem, more essay writing under examination conditions, as well as error detection exercises without *Antidote* were included in the curriculum from the second semester 1999 onwards. Students were urged to attend to grammar checker feedback and develop error detection skills they would be able to transfer to independent production of correct writing.

The findings concerning error correction rates in the correction exercise in the first semester 1999 also show that students were unable to learn error detection skills from *Antidote* to the extent that would lead to significant differences in the group error rates. Another interesting fact is that a third of all changes introduced in the text by students consisted of unwarranted corrections of TL norm. It is possible to suggest that some corrections were not motivated by informed decisions, but were rather applied in a haphazard manner influenced by student awareness of the binary nature of many of their own errors: if the preposition is not *de*, it must be *à*, if the article is not *le*, it must be *la*, if it is not *accent aiguë*, it must be *accent grave*, etc. It is thus an open question what number of the correct changes were based on heuristic guesswork rather than on learners' error detection capacity and their linguistic competence. The high percentage of false corrections, however, gives reason to believe that a significant proportion of correct changes were the result of chance rather than applied knowledge.

The absence of statistically significant differences in individual and group error rates in 1995-1st semester 1999 data, as well as the absence of such differences in the error distribution per category lends further support to the claim that low morphosyntactic accuracy in non-salient and redundant features is a persistent problem that is not affected by such variables as teacher personality or changes in the student body. The extent of the phenomenon, documented in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) as well as

in the present set of studies, can be considered unacceptable in the written production of students majoring in French for reasons described in Chapter 1. The problem thus cannot be ignored, and is not likely to disappear by itself. The comparison between the 1997 and 1999 histograms lends support to the hypothesis that some students can modify their attitude to morphosyntactic accuracy by themselves, once they are provided with feedback and are motivated to improve their performance in this area. Nevertheless, these encouraging changes do not affect all learners, nor are they significant enough to affect group error ratings. Therefore new remediation techniques based on the understanding of the error sources are called for to help students improve their morphosyntactic accuracy in a more efficient manner and to assure that this improvement would affect a larger proportion of student population.

The analysis of noun gender and accentuation errors is informative in this respect. In the first category, gender misidentification in common masculine nouns (e.g. *dîner*, *magasin*, *menu*, *mur*, *temps*) accounted for 6% of all mistakes, while errors in common feminine nouns (e.g. *chanson*, *chose*, *cuisine*, *fin*, *table*, *ville*, *plante*, *guerre*, *soupe*, *boutique*, *boîte*, *époque*, *année*, *pièce*) added another 19%. The fact that students overgeneralized masculine gender markings has also been reported in Harley's (1998) study of child French L2 learners. Moreover, practical classroom teaching experience certainly confirms that this tendency is common in French as second/foreign language acquisition. It is surprising, however, that so many common nouns used by advanced level students with, on average, seven years of exposure and instruction, were affected by gender misassignment. It can only be concluded that the tendency to ignore redundant features, in particular gender markings in French, can be considered even more entrenched than previously hypothesized.

It remains unclear, though, whether students ignored this feature at the moment of uptake, making first order errors as a result, or whether they did not attend to it at the moment of production and at the self-correction stage, if any, resulting in a second order error. In the first case, the allocation of greater attentional resources to this feature in the input can be promoted by enhanced motivation to attend to form. This is a long-term solution, however, because several instances of noticing are sometimes needed for input to become intake (Schmidt 1990, 1995, Robinson 1996). Some cases of gender misassignment in common nouns can also be second order errors. If these

errors are not competence related, as would be expected of advanced students, greater attention to form at the moment of production and at the self-correction stage should provide the solution. Students must be motivated to determine gender markings to the best of their ability, and trained to detect and correct errors in this category in written texts.

Another interesting fact is that 29% of errors in noun gender are comprised of cases of gender misassignment in nouns with gender-specific endings, e.g. *chapeau*, *mechanisme*, *problème* in the masculine and *société*, *terminaison*, *solution* in the feminine. Gender specific endings are not numerous and constitute a learnable rule in Krashen's terms (Krashen 1982). They are also much more reliable than the general rule that says that nouns ending in -e are feminine (the data shows that 21% of gender errors are caused by the overgeneralization of this rule).³⁵ In addition, the gender-specific endings cover 29% of all cases of erroneous gender marking, representing therefore a set of rules of considerable scope. It can be suggested that the implementation of these rules at the moment of production and at the moment of self-correction can result in considerable improvement of accuracy in this category.

The analysis of error location and distribution in the category of accentuation also suggests a potentially effective remediation strategy. Accentuation errors account for 27% of the total in our 1999 data, and this category numbers among the most common error types in all the data considered so far.³⁶ Unlike character misspellings, that can be caused by an infinite number of idiosyncrasies in learners' individual IIs, the majority of accentuation errors could be prevented by the application of a single and reliable rule that would cover 84% of errors in this category in the 1st semester 1999 data. Accents over the letter e in French depend almost entirely on the difference in pronunciation between [ɛ̃], [e], and [ɛ], transcribed, respectively, as e, é and è. The most common exception is that no accent is required over e when it represents [E] occurring before two consonants or x. Students should be trained to apply this rule at both the production and correction stages. A pre-enunciation and a post-enunciation

³⁵ Of course, the statistical probability may be that more nouns ending in -e would be feminine, yet for the rule to have any practical value, the exceptions to it must be either learnable (i.e. not numerous) or rare and obsolete, which is not the case with the rule in question.

³⁶ The error count in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) included more error categories, therefore accentuation errors represented only 20% of the total.

monitoring where both the target error type and the relevant rule are clear and simple, would reduce considerably the overall error count.

Chapter 8. Latest experiments: hypotheses and results.

The findings of the study reported in chapter 6, together with the previous discussion, comprise the rationale for another experiment of a sufficiently large scale to enable valid statistical analysis. The latter represents the crucial part of this thesis, because in this experiment the aim of the research was not merely to provide a valid and objective description of the problem, but also to test new remediation strategies based on the previous analyses of 1995-1999 data.

The study adopted the same quasi-experimental design³⁷ as the previous ones: an entire class of second year advanced level students of French constituted the subject pool. Two classes participated in the experiments: the 1999 group included students left in the course after the first semester, and the 2000 group comprised all students in this cohort. The aim of the experiments was to test several hypotheses, formulated on the basis of the SLA theory review and previous classroom-based experiments. Also, the study was carried out in order to test the techniques of target-specific and structured pre-enunciation and post-enunciation monitoring, that were elaborated on the basis of both theoretical claims and empirical local research.

8.1. Hypotheses.

1. It is hypothesized that low morphosyntactic accuracy is a global and pervasive phenomenon, unaffected by such variables as teacher personality and changes in the student body from year to year. Therefore, no significant difference is expected between 1995-1997 scores and the 1999 and 2000 pretests.³⁸

³⁷ In a standard experimental study the subjects are chosen at random in a more or less vast subject pool. In this study, as in many others in the area of classroom SLA research, an entire class participated in the experiments. For this reason, and despite the fact that the quality of students' writing does not change from year to year – for example, the class of 1997 showed the same results as the same level class of 1999 (see also Mogilevski and Burston 1999), this study is said to follow a quasi-experimental design.

³⁸ This naturally presupposes that no significant changes have taken place in the curriculum of the feeder course (FRN108), or more globally in the VCE (secondary school) curriculum, which would impact on the results. Recent changes in the VCE structure, implemented in 2000, did not affect any subjects.

2. It is hypothesized that the pre-enunciation and the post-enunciation monitoring techniques, as well as the error detection skills and the error awareness resulting from the focus-on-form treatment will result in a significant improvement in individual and group error rates from pretest to posttest 1999.
3. It is hypothesized that the treatment will prove efficient in terms of group scores, irrespective of individual differences. Therefore, similar improvement is expected to be confirmed between the pretest and the posttest 2000.³⁹
4. It is hypothesized that focus-on-form treatment used in the study will have a long term effect, i.e. that students will maintain at least some gains resulting from the treatment.
5. It is hypothesized that the error awareness treatment targeting particular error categories will affect the error distribution, reducing the proportion of the targeted error types in the overall error count of the 1999 and 2000 experiments.
6. It is hypothesized that the instructional treatment will enhance students' performance on the correction exercise by improving their error detection skills. This should lead to an increase in error correction rate. Improved monitoring skills should also translate to a decrease in the rate of overcorrections, as students would no longer look for mistakes everywhere in the text, but rather focus on specific structures.

8.2. Subjects.

The subjects of the study were second year advanced level students of French at Monash University. Thirty-nine students participated in the first study that took place in the second semester 1999. The results of the study were confirmed in the second semester 2000 by the second study with thirty-four participants, using the same design and instructional materials, with an additional delayed posttest. Both studies were

³⁹ Again, with no other intervening influences from FRN108/VCE.

conducted in the second semester, to test student performance at a more advanced level and to ensure subject homogeneity. Therefore, the main data was provided by seventy-three students, mainly anglophone students ranging in age from seventeen to thirty-nine. Most students were in their late teens or early twenties, however, with only two mature age subjects participating in the study. Two students, of Maurician background, reported speaking French in their families. However, since their writing was even weaker than average as far as morphosyntactic accuracy is concerned, their data was retained in the study. Moreover, the assumption of normalcy for the whole data set was subsequently validated, as individual comparison of results was undertaken.

8.3. Curriculum Innovations.

It is sometimes difficult to establish precise cause and effect relationships between different variable factors inherent to SLA and the subjects' results. However, the analysis of 1995-97 data, as well as the preliminary analysis of 1999 data reported below permit the rejection of several variables as irrelevant to our subjects' performance. In that study, all subjects were advanced level second year students undertaking a French language course targeting sophisticated vocabulary acquisition and macrodiscursive skills such as argument presentation both in oral and in written mode. Students engaged in oral debates and wrote several essays arguing for or against a given thesis. In addition, the curriculum featured *focus on forms* in Long's (1991) definition, targeting passive voice, subjunctive and other notoriously difficult elements of French.

The only major difference between the 1997-1st semester 1999 courses and the 2nd semester 1999-2000 curricula was that while students were still urged to use a grammar checker whenever possible, in the latter period they were given more in-class written assignments under examination conditions, of which the relative weighting for morphosyntactic accuracy was increased to 40% of the mark. These essays themselves counted for 30% of the mark for the subject, so grammatical precision accounted for a substantial 12% of the total results. Moreover, error detection exercises were made part of the curriculum and featured as well in the end-of the year examination. In this manner, students were pragmatically motivated to

improve their morphosyntactic accuracy via a) focusing on form in the input at the moment of input-to-intake processing, b) focusing on form at the moment of production and c) focusing on form at the post-enunciation monitoring stage.

8.4. Procedure

In both the second semester 1999 and second semester 2000 studies, students underwent a one hour orientation session. During this time, they received information pertaining to the sociopragmatic importance of morphosyntactic accuracy, following by a detailed treatment of each error type, as described below.

8.4.1 Noun gender.

Noun gender can be classified as a lexical rule (Hulstijn 1995), since features that determine it are often inherent to the lexical item. Nevertheless, it was chosen as one of the target categories as, on one hand, noun gender markings are not usually semantically salient, and, on the other hand, erroneous gender assignment can lead to flow-on errors in adjectival and past participle agreement. Moreover, noun gender can be considered a fragile feature, as errors of this type accounted for 9.7% of all morphosyntactic errors in the written production of advanced students (Mogilevski and Burston 1999).

The most important study for us in the area of focus on noun gender in French is Harley (1998). In her experiment, six French immersion Grade 2 classes, ranging in size from 19 to 26, were subjected to focus on form treatment targeting gender assignment. Over the first two weeks of treatment, children were involved in games designed to make them notice the difference between gender determiners (*le*, *la*, *un*, *une*), and "the fact that gender is an integral part of every noun in French" (p.163). The subsequent three weeks were devoted to teaching children to determine the noun gender according to the gender-specific phonological endings (masculine [o], [ø], [ã] and [ɛ], and feminine [ɛt], [ɛl], [ɛz], [as], and [Oz]).

Harley reports that her subjects showed significant improvement on the immediate posttests which was retained and even magnified six months later, as evidenced by the delayed posttests. Four tests were developed: aural gender discrimination, gender assignment to groups of words with gender-specific endings, gender assignment to unfamiliar words according to endings and an oral description of a picture. Only the third test did not show any significant progress between pre- and posttests.

Nevertheless, Harley reports that her subjects' responses on the posttest revealed that they were consciously aware of the relevance of noun endings to gender assignment, even though their performance did not reflect it. In this respect Harley suggests that the learners "were preoccupied with remembering the new words for objects featured in the activities and were thus not able to devote full attention to the formal aspects that were the intended focus of the activities" (1998:169). This explanation is consistent with VanPatten's principles of processing instruction (VanPatten 1996, see Chapter 1), as learners processed unfamiliar items focusing on meaning rather than on form. This should not occur in the case of our students, because firstly they are more advanced than Harley's subjects, and secondly, they were asked to focus on their own output, that mostly consisted of familiar items. In addition, unlike Harley's child subjects, our students should be better able to use their conscious knowledge to good effect due to their more mature cognitive abilities. Therefore the subjects of this study received instruction concerning gender-specific endings in French, and were urged to focus on this aspect of morphosyntactic accuracy at the moment of production. They were also primed to make focus on noun endings the first step in the process of post-enunciation monitoring.

Gender-specific endings were chosen according to Hulstijn's (1995) guidelines, with the emphasis on their scope and reliability. In addition to endings specified in Harley's study, students were instructed to check for feminine [i], [sjø], [ezø] and [ite], and for masculine [izm]. Although these endings do not cover all possible items, it was hypothesized that the application of this strategy would nonetheless substantially reduce gender errors.

8.4.2 Adjectival and past participle agreement in gender and number.

Once the noun gender was dealt with to the best of students' ability, they were instructed to attend to adjectival and past participle agreement. These contextual inflections represent a most fragile feature that accounted for 9.8% of the overall error count in Mogilevski and Burston (1999). Yet students possess conscious knowledge of the relevant rules and the ability to produce correct agreement when their attention is not allocated to other concerns (see the study described in Chapter 2). Therefore students were made aware of the pragmatic significance of this feature, both with respect to their immediate course results and their eventual success integrating into a French socio-cultural environment. They were also instructed to attend to this feature separately at the self-correction stage via determining links between nouns on one hand and adjectives and past participles on the other.

8.4.3 Verbal group.

Errors in conjugation, subject-verb agreement and negation represent a major error category that accounted for 14.1% of errors in Mogilevski and Burston (1999). Although some conjugation errors may be considered competence related (e.g. errors of the type *vous disez* and *ils tenissent* tended to escape correction in our second order errors study, even after they had been underlined by the teacher), subject person and number agreement could be classified as second order errors with some justification, as second year advanced level students should easily distinguish between singular and plural verbal endings. This has been demonstrated in the SOE study, as errors of the type *tu va* were all corrected in a post-correction session. Students were thus urged to check for verbal agreement sentence by sentence as a third separate step in self-correction.

Negation, while a minor category (0.9%), was worthwhile targeting for correction because it was quite easy to rectify. It almost exclusively contained second order errors in our 1995-97 data, the most common being the omission of *ne* before verbs. This error is most likely a reflection of oral mode, where *ne* tends to be omitted much more often than in writing. Students were asked to check for the *pas* particle and assure that it is accompanied by *ne* before the verb.

8.4.4 Orthography.

Character misspelling, including approximation, i.e. misspelling of two and more letters (excluding accentuation), was one of the major error categories in our 1995-97 data, accounting for 15.3% of the global count. One can suggest, following VanPatten (1996) and Lyster (1998), that this type of error is caused by insufficient attention to form at the moment of intake; thus, they may be considered first order errors, being representations of hazy areas of learners' IIs. In the long term this problem may be rectified as learners pay more attention to form at the moment of intake, being aware of its sociopragmatic importance. At the moment of production, such awareness may also prompt learners to distinguish between correct and incorrect forms, i.e. to clarify hazy areas of their IIs via cross-referencing, pronunciation check and other conscious activities. Post-enunciation monitoring, however, is only likely to help in the case of spelling in free variation, e.g. *racism/racisme* in Table 10. Students were therefore urged to find repeated words in their text and make sure of the correct spelling to the best of their ability. Nevertheless, subjects were not expected to make much progress in this area, because spelling is an extremely variable domain, not subject to any rules that would have considerable scope and reliability.

Accentuation errors is also a major error type, appearing in 13.2% of all error occurrences in Mogilevski and Burston study, and accounting for 27% of morphosyntactic errors in our 1999 data used for preliminary analysis. Unlike character misspelling, however, this category is subject to a rule that has both great scope and reliability. The analysis of 1999 data reported above revealed that 84% of errors in this category involved the misassignment of accent aiguë or accent grave over the letter e. As students were questioned over this issue, it was revealed that the overwhelming majority did not know that the accent over e is the reflection of the pronunciation distinction between [ɛ̃], [ɛ] and [e], although most advanced students could well hear it in oral mode. Therefore students were instructed to read their texts *sotto voce* as the final step of the monitoring process, paying close attention to pronunciation of these vowels and rectifying their spelling accordingly.

8.5. Tests.

The second semester 1999 group of students (=39) underwent one pretest and one posttest⁴⁰ undertaken immediately after treatment as part of their normal assignments for the subject. The time interval between the pretest and the posttest was one month. The pretest task was a 250 word essay in French written under examination conditions with a 1 hour time limit. The time limit was deemed sufficient for production and monitoring uninhibited by a 'need for speed', as the study reported in Chapter 2 revealed that students could write a text of this size and monitor it under instructions within an hour. The texts were analyzed and the errors counted following the procedures previously described, establishing both group and individual error rates per hundred words.

On the posttest, students were required to write a similar essay, both in terms of the text size and the discourse type: both compositions had to be written in argumentative mode. All students received instructional treatment two days before the test. All texts were analyzed by the researcher, and the error rates per hundred words counted following the established procedure.

In addition, all subjects undertook an error detection and correction exercise similar to that first introduced in the 1st semester 1999, as part of their 2nd semester 1999 examination. Individual and group rates of error corrections and overcorrections were determined and compared to those found in the first semester data.

The second group (=33) participated in the experiment in the second semester 2000. They wrote two essays in examination conditions, one before and one after the treatment (TST 1 and 2), similar to those written by their 1999 counterparts. They also undertook an error correction exercise as part of the end-of-the year examinations. Data from the similar exercise being part of the first semester 2000 examination was used to provide a point of comparison. An additional delayed posttest (TST 3) in the form of a 250 word essay written in examination conditions was introduced in order to judge whether the treatment left any lasting effects. It took place three months after the immediate posttest. Students did not receive any treatment-specific instructions in the meantime, although they did follow the curriculum. This step was guided by the

⁴⁰ Here and below, "pretest" refers to the test undertaken before instructional treatment, and "posttest" refers to the test carried out after treatment.

discussion of the durability of form-focused instruction in Ellis (1997:67-68). In this review of research, several studies attested to short duration of the effects of instruction (Lightbown et al 1980, Pienemann 1985, White 1991), while other studies (Harley 1989, Day and Snapson 1991, Lyster 1994, White et al 1991) showed that their subjects retained the immediate posttest level and, in some cases, even improved on delayed posttests. Ellis suggests that the duration of the effects of form-focused instruction may be determined by the nature and the semantic weight of the targeted feature. Thus, instruction targeting developmental features that have a significant impact on communication will be durable, while the same strategy applied to variational, non-salient and redundant features would only result in a short-term ephemeral improvement. Ellis argues that an enhancement of learners' motivation to permanently acquire features of the latter type may be crucial:

Only if learners are motivated to acquire native speaker norms, as a result perhaps of a desire to become integrated into the target language culture or as a result of an instrumental need to pass an examination that places a premium on grammatical accuracy, will they retain features that from a purely communicative view are redundant. (Ellis 1997: 69).

Ellis concludes his review with a call for more studies with delayed posttests, which motivated the inclusion of this feature in the design of the second study.

8.6. Results.

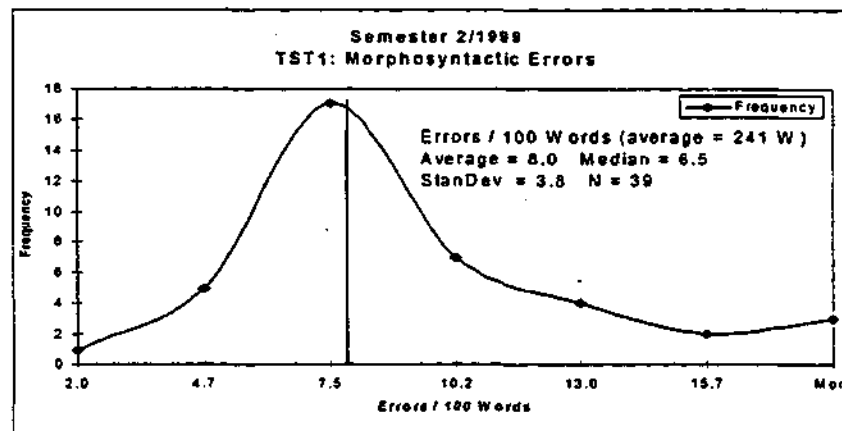
The results of the comparison between morphosyntactic error rates found in pre- and posttest essays written in the second semester 1999 are summarized in the table below:

Table 1.

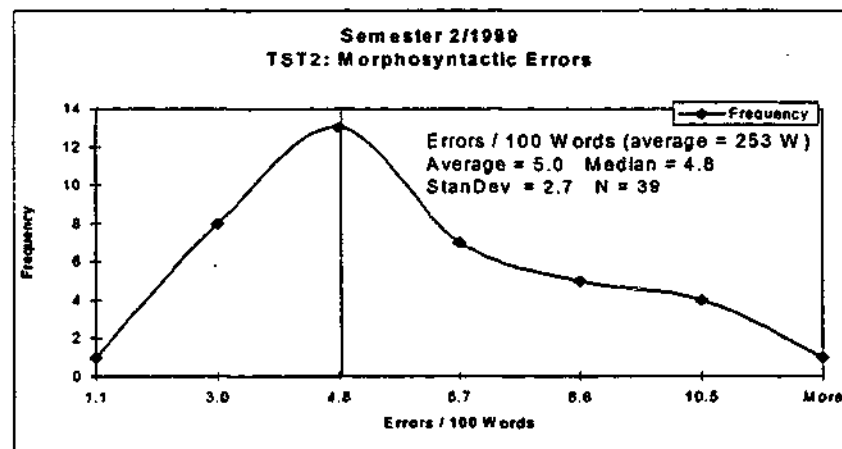
Students	Nerr	Err/100w average	Err/100w median	Std deviation
Pretest 39	746	8.0	6.5	3.8
Posttest 39	490	5.0	4.8	2.7

Individual rates of Err/100w ratios provided the source data for the histograms representing the pretest (TST 1) and the posttest (TST 2):

Histogram 1.



Histogram 2.



The red line marks the average ratio of errors per hundred words.

Both the pretest essay (TST1) and posttest essay (TST2) were written under examination conditions, the only difference in comparison with the first semester 1999 examination being that students were given one and a half hours to write 300 words in the first semester exam and one hour to produce 250 words in the second semester tests. It was thus possible to compare the individual and group error rates found in the first semester- and second semester essays. Although 49 students comprised the subject pool in the 1st semester 1999, only 39 were left to participate in the 2nd semester experiments. Thus only the data provided by these students was used for this comparison, to ensure the continuity and the normality of the data. The results of the three tests are listed in the table below.

Table 2.

Semester	Students	Nerr	Err/100w average	Err/100w median	Std deviation
1 - 1999exam	39	770	8.7	8.4	3.7
2 - 1999 pretest	39	746	8.0	6.5	3.8
2 - 1999 posttest	39	490	5.0	4.8	2.7

The proportions of error categories in the total error count in the second semester 1999 pretest are displayed in the table below:

Table 3.

Error category	Number of errors	Percentage of total MS errors
Noun gender	59	7.8
Adj. Gender agreement	82	10.9
Form	18	2.4
Adj. Number agreement	96	12.8
Conjugation	64	8.5
Verb subject agreement	10	1.3
Verb number agreement	37	4.9
Approximation	34	4.5
Character misspelling/Capitalization	112	14.9
Accentuation	188	25
Elision/Contraction	30	4
Negation	12	1.6
Capitalization	4	0.5

The error distribution across categories in the second semester 1999 posttest is displayed in the following table:

Table 4.

Error category	Number of errors	Percentage of total MS errors
Noun gender	63	12.8
Adj. Gender agreement	30	6.1
Form	4	0.6

Adj. Number agreement	49	10
Conjugation	49	10
Verb subject agreement	5	1
Verb number agreement	29	5.9
Approximation	39	8
Character misspelling/Capitalization	85	17.3
Accentuation	119	24
Elision/Contraction	12	2.4
Negation	5	1
Capitalization	1	0.2

Table 5 displays Err/100w ratios for each category in the second semester 1999 pretest and posttest, as well as the difference between the two.

Table 5.

Error category	Err/100w Pretest	Err/100w Posttest	Difference %
Noun gender	0.63	0.54	-14.3
Adj. Gender agreement	0.87	0.3	-65.5
Form	0.19	0.03	-82.2
Adj. Number agreement	1.02	0.49	-52
Conjugation	0.68	0.49	-27.9
Verb subject agreement	0.1	0.05	-50
Verb number agreement	0.39	0.29	-25.6
Approximation	0.36	0.39	+8.3
Character misspelling	1.19	0.86	-27.7
Accentuation	2	1.2	-40
Elision/Contraction	0.32	0.12	-62.5
Negation	0.13	0.1	-23
Capitalization	0.04	0	-100

An investigation of the error subtypes within the categories of noun gender and accentuation revealed the following figures:

Table 6.

Error category	Error type	%Pretest	%Posttest
Accentuation	é missing	66%	43%
	é wrong	7%	12%
	è missing	8%	10%
	Other missing accents	8%	12%
	Other superfluous accents	11%	23%
Noun gender	-sion, -tion	13%	8%
	Other gender-specific endings	16%	11%
	Common feminine nouns	19%	16%
	Common masculine nouns	6%	10%
	Masculine ending in -e	21%	25%
	Other	25%	38%

The overall error count shows a 40% overall improvement of morphosyntactic accuracy on the posttest. Yet the proportion of several error subcategories actually increased in the posttest. There is no contradiction here, however, because with fewer missing é, all the other categories automatically would have to account for a greater part of the error pie. The same reasoning applies as well to noun gender statistics.

The group results for the correction exercises written in the first and the second semester 1999 by the same 39 subjects are presented in the table below:

Table 7.

St	Err/text	Words/text	Err/100 words	Corr	%corr of total Nerr	Over	Over/100words Average	%Over of total corrected
39	35	245	14.3	849	61%	249	2.6	33%
39	45	212	21.2	1033	59%	121	1.5	13%

The improvement in the ratio of corrected errors per hundred words is calculated at 2%. The improvement in the ratio of overcorrections is calculated at 42%. The experiment was repeated in the second semester 2000. The study design incorporated an additional delayed posttest and went as follows: correction exercise (first semester

examination), pretest (TST 1), treatment, posttest (TST 2), and delayed posttest (TST 3).

Listed below are the group error rates found in the pretest essay (TST 1) in the second semester 2000.

Table 8.

Students	Nw	Nerr	Err/100w average	Err/100w median	Std deviation
33	6910	674	9.5	7.9	5.8

The posttest essay (TST 2) written in the second semester 2000 produced the following results:

Table 9.

Students	Nw	Nerr	Err/100w average	Err/100w median	Std deviation
33	6165	325	5.1	3.9	4.1

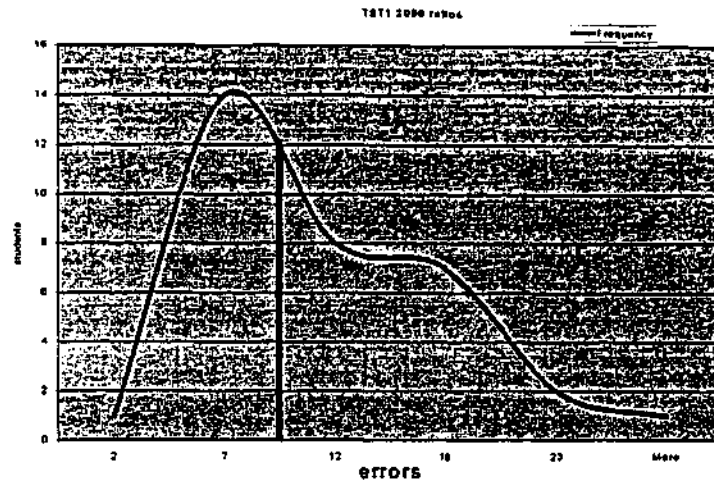
The same group results for the delayed posttest essay (Test 3) are displayed below:

Table 10.

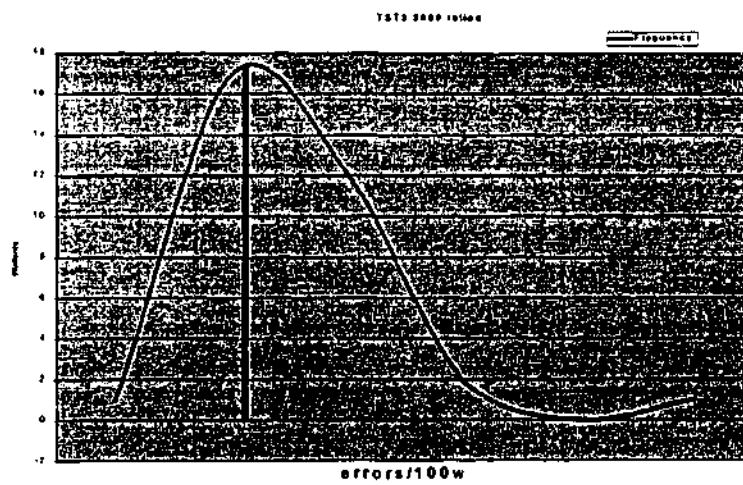
Students	Nw	Nerr	Err/100w average	Err/100w median	Std deviation
33	8975	533	5.9	5.3	3.8

The individual distribution of Err/100w ratios in the three tests is represented by the following histograms (the vertical line marks the average of Err/100w ratios in the group):

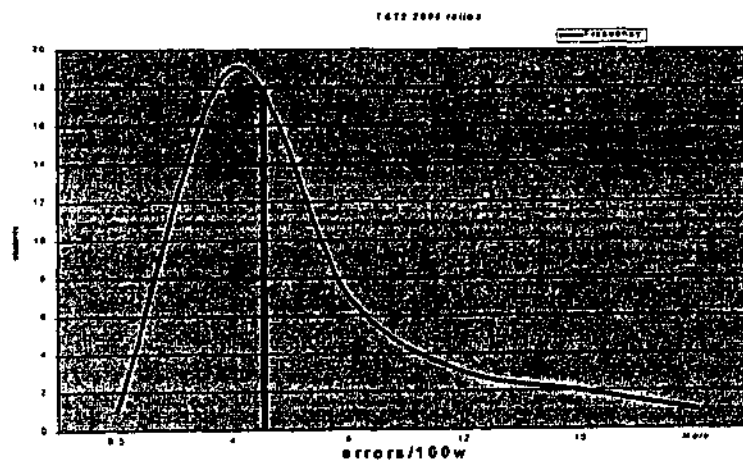
Histogram 3.



Histogram 4.



Histogram 5.



The analysis of error distribution across the error categories in the pretest 2000 showed the following proportions:

Table 11.

Error category	Number of errors	Percentage of total MS errors
Noun gender	67	8.9
Adj. Gender agreement	87	12.7
Form	14	2.0
Adj. Number agreement	67	9.9
Conjugation	54	8.0
Verb subject agreement	20	2.9
Verb number agreement	41	6.0
Approximation	42	6.2
Character misspelling	85	12.6
Accentuation	146	21.6
Elision/Contraction	23	3.4
Negation	8	1.2
Capitalization	9	1.3

The next table displays Err/100w ratios for each error category in the pretest 2000 and in the posttests 2000, as well as the difference between the pretest (TST 1) and the posttest (TST 2), and between the pretest and the delayed posttest (TST 3).

Table 12.

Category	NG	GA	NA	C	SP	SN	A
tst1	0.7465181058	0.9582172702	0.7465181058	0.6016713092	0.2228412256	0.4568245125	1.6267409471
tst2	0.4122562674	0.2116991643	0.3454038997	0.3454038997	0.1114206128	0.1894150418	0.6796657382
%diff	-44.8	-77.9	-53.7	-42.6	-50.0	-58.5	-58.2
tst3	0.7688022284	0.5682451253	0.6350974930	0.5905292479	0.0111420613	0.2228412256	1.3147632312
%diff	3.0	-40.7	-14.9	-1.9	-95.0	-51.2	-19.2

Category	N	PP	PL	CAP	E	CH	AP
tst1	0.0891364903	0.1337047354	0.1559888579	0.1002785515	0.2562674095	0.9470752089	0.4679665738
tst2	0.0111420613	0.0779944290	0.1225626741	0.0557103064	0.0445682451	0.8245125348	0.1894150418

%diff	-87.5	-41.7	-21.4	-44.4	-82.6	-12.9	-59.5
tst3	0.0557103064	0.1337047354	0.1782729805	0.0557103064	0.1002785515	0.8022284123	0.4679665738
%diff	-37.5	0.0	14.3	-44.4	-60.9	-15.3	0.0

An analysis of the distribution of error subtypes in the categories of accentuation and noun gender, based on the data provided by the pretest and the posttests carried out in the second semester 2000 revealed the following figures:

Table 13.

Error category	Error type	%TST 1	%TST 2	%TST 3
Accentuation	é missing	67%	42%	52%
	é wrong	7%	19%	16%
	è missing	9%	8%	12%
	Other missing accents	9%	10%	7%
	Other superfluous accents	10%	21%	13%
Noun gender	-sion, -tion	13%	6%	9%
	Other gender-specific endings	16%	10%	13%
	Common feminine nouns	19%	17%	18%
	Common masculine nouns	6%	11%	10%
	Masculine ending in -e	21%	25%	25%
	Other	25%	39%	34%

The following table presents a comparison between correction and overcorrection rates evidenced by the same 33 students in correction exercises undertaken in the first and second semester 2000.

Table 14.

St	Err/text	Words/text	Err/100 words	Corr	%corr of total Nerr	Over	Over/100words Average	%Over of total corrected
33	53	273	19.4	1044	58%	286	3.1	27.4%
33	46	246	18.7	970	63%	149	1.6	15.4%

8.7. Findings.

A detailed statistical analysis of the above data was undertaken. As the Anderson-Darling tests for data normality were satisfactory, it was possible to carry out a parametric analysis of the data.

8.7.1 Hypothesis 1.

A Mann-Whitney Confidence Interval and Test did not show any statistical difference between the individual and group error rates in the first semester 1999 examination and in the pretest (TST 1) undertaken in the second semester 1999, although there was a slight reduction in the average error ratios (8.7 versus 8.0). Furthermore, no statistical evidence was found to validate a significant difference between the first semester 1999 examination, second semester 1999 pretest and the error rates found in Mogilevski and Burston (1999) data collected in 1995-1997. Likewise, no significant difference in the error distribution per categories was found between Mogilevski and Burston (1999) data, the first semester 1999 examination and the second semester 1999 pretest. These findings support our first hypothesis that morphosyntactic accuracy in the written output of our students is not affected by such variables as the personality of the teacher⁴¹ and changes in the student body. Bearing in mind that there was a two month interval between the first semester 1999 examination and the second semester 1999 pretest and that students both had the opportunity and were encouraged to seek input in French over this period, the results can be interpreted in favor of the hypothesis that morphosyntactic accuracy is unlikely to be improved by means of exposure to the target language.

8.7.2 Hypothesis 2.

A significant difference was found between the second semester pretest and immediate posttest 1999 results ($p = 0.000$ on Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, $p = 0.0000$ on t-test of the mean), with a considerable reduction in the number of morphosyntactic errors per hundred words. The standard deviation also significantly

⁴¹ Four teachers were carrying out advanced French classes over this period (1997-2000).

decreased, as the tests showed greater improvement for weaker students. The findings thus support the hypothesis that focus on form at the moment of production, as well as the techniques of post-enunciation monitoring, would improve the morphosyntactic accuracy of the subjects of this experiment. The histograms made on the basis of this data showed some evidence that subjects became divided into two groups: the larger group with the average of 4.8 errors per hundred words, and a smaller group with the average of 9. It can be suggested on the basis of this evidence that some students are less amenable to the treatment used in the study, possibly because of motivational factors.

8.7.3 Hypothesis 3.

Strong statistical evidence ($p = 0.000$ on Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, $p = 0.0000$ on t-test of the mean) was found to support the hypothesis that the treatment used in the experiment resulted in a significant improvement of morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' written output. Although students in 2000 made a greater improvement than their counterparts in the 1999 experiment, the difference between the group scores in 1999 and 2000 on the posttests did not reach the level of statistical significance, while both groups made a statistically significant progress. The findings show that the instructional treatment used in the study was equally valid for two different groups of students, and sufficiently efficient to account for a 38% reduction in the morphosyntactic error count in 1999 and a 46% improvement in 2000.

8.7.4 Hypothesis 4.

The findings partly support this hypothesis, as students still produced significantly fewer errors on the delayed posttest in comparison with the pretest ($p = 0.023$ on Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test, $p = 0.029$ on t-test of the mean). Nevertheless, the difference between the pretest and the delayed posttest is not as clearly pronounced as between the pretest and the immediate posttest. The backsliding evidenced by the delayed posttest further supports the view that a large number of errors made by our students are not caused by lack of linguistic competence. It is possible to suggest that

students allocated less attention to form on the delayed posttest, thus making more second order errors.

8.7.5 Hypothesis 5.

The analysis of error distribution per category in the second semester 1999 experiment revealed that the treatment resulted in a statistically significant improvement of morphosyntactic accuracy across all targeted error categories. The best results were obtained in the categories of elision, verbal and adjectival agreement, accentuation and capitalization. The detailed analysis of the error subtypes in the 1999 data supports the hypothesis that the treatment specifically reduced the noun gender misassignment in words with gender-specific endings and the number of errors involving a missing *accent aiguë* over *e*, which comprise the greatest subtype in the category of accentuation.

The results of the 2000 experiment lend further support to the hypothesis that error awareness treatment targeting particular error categories will affect the error distribution, reducing the proportion of the targeted error types in the overall error count. The analysis of error subtypes revealed a significant reduction in the proportion of errors in noun gender misassignment in words with gender-specific endings and of errors involving a missing *accent aiguë* over *e*.

8.7.6 Hypothesis 6.

No statistical difference was found between correction rates in the error correction exercises in 1999 first semester and second semester examinations and 2000 first semester and second semester examinations, although in both cases a slight progress was evident (2% and 5% respectively, see tables 7 and 14). Nevertheless, the comparison between overcorrection ratios per hundred words showed a statistically significant improvement (42% and 48% reduction respectively, $p = 0.000$ on Wilcoxon rank sum test). These findings partially support the hypothesis, as improved monitoring skills enabled students to target common errors with better accuracy. It may be suggested that insufficient linguistic competence can be blamed for students'

failure to correct many errors: unlike in their own writing, where they could monitor the extent of their competence and avoid using structures they did not know, in the correction exercise students were faced with errors whose correction necessitated knowledge of a large number of specific rules.

8.8. Discussion.

Overall, the results are very encouraging, as the subjects of both 1999 and 2000 experiments achieved a significant progress in morphosyntactic accuracy. The findings lend weight to the suggestion that morphosyntactic accuracy in the writing of the intermediate-to-advanced learners depends on the allocation of attention to form at the moment of production, and also on the efficiency of the post-enunciation monitoring. The results also support the view that learners must be aware of the pragmatic importance of morphosyntactic accuracy to motivate them to engage in the process of pre- and post-enunciation monitoring.

The experiments show that it is possible to significantly reduce the error rate by helping learners to activate and apply their linguistic competence, rather than by attempting to add to it. It is noteworthy that most improvement occurred in the categories that were hypothesized to contain a large percentage of second order errors, such as verbal and adjectival agreement. Therefore, learners' performance in the TL can be improved via the enhancement of their linguistic capability.

It is possible to suggest that the improvement in our students' written output is due to the fact that they were motivated to focus on form and, more importantly, knew on which forms to focus. Thus many second order errors could be avoided right at the moment of production as learners were aware of their tendency to make errors in these categories. Learners' willingness to engage in post-enunciation monitoring also helped, as, for example, with errors in verbal and adjectival agreement error detection led almost effortlessly to error correction. Many first order errors in such areas as noun gender and accentuation were also avoided or corrected due to the application of simple rules of considerable scope and reliability.

In respect to the noun gender errors, the data provided by 1999 and 2000 posttests still contained numerous examples of gender misassignment in common masculine and feminine nouns. It was hypothesized that these errors were competence-related. In an attempt to establish the degree to which students knew the gender of most common nouns in French, a brief experiment was carried out in the second semester 2000 with 58 subjects, including the 33 who participated in the main study. The experiment was undertaken prior to the posttests. Students were asked to indicate the gender of sixteen most common French nouns. They were not limited in time and urged to consider their responses carefully. The students produced the following numbers of errors:

Table 15.

nouns	Number of errors	percentage	nouns	Number of errors	percentage
Minuit (midnight)	21	36	Ville (city)	9	16
Jour (day)	5	9	Fin (end)	19	33
Nuit (night)	6	10	Fête (party)	4	7
Chose (thing)	9	16	Soir (evening)	4	7
Fois (time)	7	12	Soirée (party night)	2	3
Heure (hour)	10	17	Centre (center)	5	9
Année (year)	1	2	Université (university)	2	3
Village (village)	6	10	Tradition (tradition)	0	0

On average, students made errors in gender assignment in twelve percent of all cases. These results are somewhat surprising, as second year advanced level students who have studied French for seven years on average would be expected to show better accuracy on these very common nouns. Yet here is further proof that communicationally redundant elements of the input, such as gender markings in French, will not always become intake despite years of exposure. This experiment supports the earlier suggestion that students' failure to correct a greater proportion of errors in the correction exercises may be due to gaps in their linguistic competence. Some of these nouns - *année*, *village*, *soirée*, *université* and *tradition* - can be assigned the correct gender in agreement on the basis of their gender-specific endings.

As for the others, the understanding of pragmatic importance of correct gender markings should prompt students to notice and acquire these elements in future.

8.9. Limitations of the study.

Certain limitations are placed on the generalizability of the findings of this study. One limitation involved selection of the subjects. All the data collected was produced by the second year advanced level students of one university. Although a preliminary analysis of a representative sample of six compositions produced by students of another university in 1996 produced comparable results in terms of error rates and distribution per categories, no data sufficient for a valid statistical analysis was collected outside of the researcher's institution. Therefore it would be improper to claim categorically that the treatment used in this study would be just as relevant and just as efficient elsewhere, and/or when applied to other languages.

Another limitation is imposed by the relatively small number of students participating in the 1999 and 2000 experiments (39 and 33 respectively). Although sufficient for a valid statistical analysis, the numbers impose caution about the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, in view of the impressive improvement achieved by the subjects under study, and particularly since statistically significant data was obtained despite the class sizes, it is maintained that the techniques proposed in this study are worthy of implementation elsewhere, and for study of other languages as well, although they may be modified to suit local requirements⁴².

It may also be felt that the research design did not lend itself to a more fine-tuned evaluation of the efficiency of different focus-on-form techniques. Indeed, it may be that error awareness alone would result in a significant improvement, or that strategy training would be more efficient than post-enunciation monitoring. One study in this area was carried out by Detres (1994) who analyzed the efficiency of strategy training and self-monitoring in college students' writing in their native language. Detres found that self-monitoring and strategy training are each significant treatment interventions on self-regulation efforts and spelling achievement with adults. His study indicated,

⁴² See the discussion of Davidson (2001) study below.

however, that strategy training effects are stronger than self-monitoring effects overall. In our case, however, we were more interested in the end result of the combined treatment rather than in respective effects of its components. Clearly, more studies would be needed to evaluate separately each of these techniques in the context of second language acquisition.

Finally, there may be a limit to the efficiency of the proposed treatment. It may be easier to reduce the error rate from nine per hundred words to five, than from five to nil. It should be kept in mind that the proposed treatment aimed at the enhancement of linguistic capability rather than of linguistic competence, and that it would prove inefficient in many cases involving first order errors. In the longer term, as learners process the input while being aware of the sociopragmatic importance of formal features, their IIs may incorporate enough relevant information to approach faultless writing. Errors are, after all, a normal part of interlanguage development (Hendrickson 1978, Ellis 1994); it is important, however, that learners continue to acquire formal features, and be able to activate and apply the knowledge they already possess.

Chapter 9. Conclusions and recommendations.

9.1. Conclusions.

This study started as an analysis of morphosyntactic accuracy in the examination compositions written by second year advanced level university students of French as a foreign language. This analysis was motivated by personal teaching experience and further anecdotal evidence, that our students experienced fundamental difficulties with morphosyntactic accuracy. It was found that second year advanced level students made, on average, ten errors per hundred words excluding vocabulary and macrodiscursive errors (Mogilevski and Burston 1999). It was also found that the rate of progress in this area evidenced by students from one semester to another was negligible. The next question was to what extent this could be considered a problem in the context of a French sociocultural environment. This question was discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

It was argued that the ability to comply with the standard linguistic norm, including morphology and syntax, is traditionally highly valued in the French sociocultural environment. This tradition has deep historical roots, as the bearers of the Parisian dialect, that later became the standard French, were invested with both symbolic and pragmatic power. Linguistic correctness, tested in schools by means of frequent dictations and written compositions, was a mark of a high achiever in the competitive system of French education, and entailed annual awards and a respect from one's peers. Doctors, lawyers and military officers were often judged on the basis of their linguistic performance. Therefore, a mastery of the language norm was a pathway to the acquisition of a high social status, and a prerequisite for participation in the shaping of the society.

It was further claimed in Chapter 1 that a high regard for linguistic correctness is still an important feature of the modern French culture. This is evidenced by the popularity of Bernard Pivot's annual dictations, which have almost achieved the status of a national sport. On the governmental level, considerable support is given to the preservation of standard French, both through the activities of the Académie Française

and via legislation. All this leads to the obvious conclusion that a high standard of linguistic correctness is expected of the members of the French society, and especially so of its educated members.

It was subsequently claimed that the level of morphosyntactic accuracy evidenced by students under study here would not allow their integration into the French sociocultural environment. This is unacceptable for three reasons. Firstly, if students know *a priori* that their competence at the graduate level will not allow them to function normally in French society, this will adversely affect their motivation to study, resulting in a vicious circle as weaker motivation would lead to even worse results in terms of linguistic performance. Secondly, insufficient competence of our graduates in the area of morphosyntactic accuracy can entail another vicious circle: as some of them will become insufficiently competent teachers, at least as far as linguistic correctness is concerned, their students will be poorly trained in this area, and likely to struggle when they, in turn, enter the university. Finally, it is the institution's responsibility to equip the students with knowledge and skills they need to ensure their success in their chosen careers.

It was concluded therefore that the low level of morphosyntactic accuracy evidenced by our students is indeed a serious and pervasive problem. A more detailed analysis of the nature and causes of the learners' errors was provided in Chapter 3, as a basis for a search for efficient remediation strategies. It was claimed that a significant proportion of learners' errors was not caused by lack of knowledge, thus falling outside of the proper *error* category as it was originally defined by Corder (1967). Yet these errors occurred systematically, and therefore could not be ignored as random *mistakes*. Although elsewhere (Corder 1973:272) Corder gives the definition of *post-systematic errors*, that occur despite the learner's knowledge of the relevant rule, neither he, nor any other scholar made an effort to further explore this concept. It was suggested in Chapter 2 that when learners are able to self-correct their errors without receiving any additional linguistic information in the feedback, these errors could not be caused by insufficient linguistic competence. A review of the literature demonstrated that a significant proportion of learners' errors was amenable to self-correction in the absence of feedback that would add any information to the learners' linguistic competence.

An empirical investigation showed that 24% of all morphosyntactic errors in our students' writing could be avoided if only the students were able to realize the full potential of their linguistic knowledge. These *second order errors* were chosen as the primary target for remediation for several reasons. Firstly, a significant improvement of learners' competence would require time that is not available under the constraints imposed by the university curriculum. Secondly, even if this could be achieved, learners would still make errors despite their knowledge of the relevant rules. Moreover, an attempt to use the traditional instruction techniques aimed at the improvement of learners' competence would not be effective in dealing with second order errors, as it would be futile to try to teach students what they already know. Besides, such a strategy would lower students' motivation to study, as they will have the impression, as one of them put it, of chewing the same old gum.

It was also claimed in Chapter 3 that the phenomenon of *second order errors* is closely linked to that of free variability. Indeed, second order errors in our students' writing often appear alongside of the correct forms. It was suggested that linguistic features most affected by free variability represent the site of most common second order errors in our students' writing. Unlike mistakes, these errors cannot be explained by communicative pressure, or "need for speed": firstly, time pressure is not a very important factor in a written production with a generous time limit, and secondly, the "need for speed" does not explain why these particular features are especially prone to idiosyncratic use. It was suggested that the explanation may lie in the principles of processed instruction, proposed by VanPatten (1996): learners process the input for meaning before they process it for form, and the non-meaningful formal elements will not become intake unless significant attentional resources are allocated for this purpose.

The crucial question of how learners process input was addressed in Chapter 4, together with the discussion of various factors that may affect, or contribute to successful language acquisition. The Monitor Theory, most commonly associated with Krashen (1981, 1982, 1989), was chosen as the primary object of discussion in the third chapter. This choice was motivated both by the relevance of this theoretical framework to the problem at hand, and by the fact that Krashen's views sparked one

of the most heated debates in the history of SLA theory. The Monitor Theory has two aspects: one describes the process of turning input into intake, (the acquisition/learning distinction, the input hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis), while another deals with language performance (the monitor hypothesis). A discussion of each hypothesis, together with a review of literature on the subject, was provided. In respect to the first aspect of Krashen's theoretical framework, it was argued that the acquisition/learning hypothesis is untenable and unnecessary, while the other three do not offer much help in dealing with the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy in our students' writing, and especially with the phenomenon of *second order errors*. The concept of the monitor, however, was deemed extremely relevant to our research purpose, although it was argued that monitoring can significantly improve our students' performance, while in Krashen's view it is nothing more than a feeble prop to unconscious language acquisition.

Following the discussion of the output processes described by the monitor hypothesis, our fourth chapter deals with the variability theories and the concept of linguistic capability. Following Anderson (1983, 1990), Taylor (1988) and Tarone (1990), it was hypothesized that second order errors in our students' written output are caused by insufficient linguistic capability, as opposed to competence or performance. Linguistic capability is thus viewed as a device responsible for the activation of available linguistic knowledge, cross-referencing of items and structures and choosing of the appropriate rules. These operations may be automatic, yet in the case of fragile, non-salient and communicationally redundant linguistic features they must be controlled until complete acquisition is achieved. To improve morphosyntactic accuracy, students' capability device must be primed to attend to form, trained in cross-referencing strategies, and able to retrieve and determine the relevant rules. A development of linguistic capability rather than competence was considered a fruitful path to follow in order to eradicate, or at least significantly alleviate the problem of low morphosyntactic accuracy experienced by our students. Given that the necessary linguistic knowledge already forms part of their IIs, a teaching strategy aimed at the improvement of linguistic capability was hypothesized to succeed in the short term, and avoid the complications inherent in an attempt to teach students what they already know.

Teaching strategies aimed at the improvement of linguistic capability in respect to the linguistic features most affected by errors in our students' writing were investigated in Chapter 6, that dealt with the theoretical concepts and practical applications grouped under the umbrella term "focus on form". The review of the literature on this subject demonstrated that focus on form attracted the attention of numerous scholars in recent decades, as a result of their negative reaction to the Monitor Theory, where the importance of conscious attention to form was severely underemphasized. An evaluation of various focus on form techniques proposed in the literature led to a qualified judgment in favor of the explicit negative feedback, that does not necessarily include any additional linguistic information. In the case of second order errors, for example, error detection, be it done by the teacher or by the learner, would almost immediately lead to error correction.

The studies in the area of focus on form investigate the role of conscious attention to formal linguistic features in language processing, on one hand, and in language performance, on the other hand. In respect to the first aspect of focus on form, it is argued that contrary to Krashen's claim, explicit teaching and learning of formal features may lead to the automatization of their application, or, in Krashen's terms, learning can lead to acquisition. In this view, focus on form is a teaching strategy aimed at the enhancement of learners' competence in the area of formal aspects of the target language. This strategy promotes the allocation of learners' attention to formal features at the moment of language processing. Yet attention to form is also a crucial factor at the moment of language production. In this respect, focus on form must ultimately be learner-generated, and the role of the teacher is to provide learners with effective monitoring strategies and to make them understand the importance of their application. If learners understand the pragmatic value of the features they tended to ignore due to their low communicative value and saliency, the acquisition of such elements will receive a beneficial cognitive support. In addition, attention to form at the moment of production also reflects on the language learning process as learners' output becomes input. When learners improve their performance via focus on form, they are also exposed to more correct language forms and stand a better chance to automatize their activation. Moreover, when a correct form is produced by the

application of monitoring strategies, it is far more likely to be noticed and subsequently fully acquired.

It is claimed in Chapter 6 that efficient monitoring in writing is subject to several conditions. Firstly, learners must understand the pragmatic importance of monitoring, both in the immediate classroom situation and in the general context of the expectations of the target language society. Secondly, they must learn to recognize the areas of their written output that are most affected by errors. Thirdly, learners must concentrate on the error categories that mostly comprise second order errors, as these are amenable to self-correction. Finally, they must know easily applicable rules of considerable scope and reliability that would be relevant for major error types.

The efficiency of the proposed instructional treatment, aimed at the enhancement of learner-generated focus on form in their writing was tested in an experiment carried out in 1999. Error analysis was chosen as the primary diagnostic tool, and the data consisted in a corpus of examination compositions and correction exercises written by the subjects of the study, second year advanced level students of French as a foreign language. A pretest-posttest design was used, and the data was analyzed using error taxonomy with linguistic classification. The same design, with slight modifications including the introduction of a delayed posttest was used in the repeat study conducted in 2000. It was found that the allocation of greater attentional resources to form coupled with the use of the proposed monitoring techniques resulted in a statistically significant improvement of morphosyntactic accuracy. The group error count declined by 37.5% from the pretest to the immediate posttest in the 1999 experiment, and by 46% from the pretest to the immediate posttest in the 2000 experiment. The students maintained these gains to the level of statistical significance on the delayed posttest, although a slight reduction in the morphosyntactic accuracy took place as the improvement was by only 38% in comparison with the pretest.

It can be concluded that the primary goal of this study has been successfully achieved, as the efficiency of the proposed focus on form treatment was demonstrated with strong statistical evidence. However, several questions were left unanswered, or only briefly investigated under the constraints imposed by the primarily pragmatic focus of the study on the immediate improvement of our students' morphosyntactic accuracy,

the limited number of students under study and by the cross-sectional design of the study.

9.2. Recommendations for further research.

First of all, the impact of the computer grammar checker on the students' writing was left on the fringes of the present study, although it is a very interesting question, and eminently worthy of further study. True, the analysis of group scores did not show any significant difference between the output of *Antidote* users and non-users in 1999. Nevertheless, a slight improvement (12%) was evidenced by students who used *Antidote* constantly throughout the year. In addition, it can be suggested that the analysis of group scores does not reveal the full picture. The histogram based on individual scores (Histogram 2, Chapter 7, p.171) showed that the subjects became divided into two groups with markedly different error rates. It was hypothesized that some students were able to develop efficient monitoring strategies on the basis of the feedback provided by *Antidote*. The same two-humped curve was observed in the histogram based on the 2000 data (Histogram 3, Chapter 8, p.196), showing that unsupervised use of the computer grammar checker was beneficial for some students.

As Brian McCarthy points out (McCarthy 1994), one of the advantages offered by computer aided language learning (CALL) is that computer applications can deliver a constant and personal feedback. Yet, as previously argued, the quality of the feedback is not the only important factor in language processing: attention to the feedback is also crucial. It is possible that the instructional treatment proposed in this study enhanced students' awareness of the pragmatic importance of morphosyntactic accuracy and made them pay more attention to the feedback offered by the program. It can be suggested, therefore, that students need to treat a computer application as an educational tool rather than a quick performance fix, and that a successful integration of CALL into the curriculum depends on this attitude. Once this is achieved, sophisticated computer grammar checkers such as *Antidote* can offer a valuable contribution to the learning process because of their ability to provide feedback on an individual basis. Individual error feedback can improve students' awareness of the weak areas in their particular writing outputs, and help them develop more personalized monitoring strategies.

Secondly, the decline in morphosyntactic accuracy evidenced by our 2000 subjects on the delayed posttest in comparison with the immediate posttest, even though it does not attain the level of statistical significance, can be interpreted as a worrying sign, lending weight to Krashen's latest claim that the effects of formal instruction are fragile and peripheral (Krashen 1993). Although there is strong support for the alternative view (Lightbown and Pienemann 1993), a longitudinal study using the same treatment might contribute to the eventual solution of this controversy.

Thirdly, it is not clear to what extent several focus on form strategies combined in the treatment have individually contributed to the overall improvement. Although the respective impact of strategy training and post-enunciation monitoring have been assessed in the area of first language performance (Detres 1994), it is possible that a study in this area would be a worthwhile endeavor in the field of SLA.

As it was previously argued, one of the limitations of the present study is the fact that the proposed teaching strategies and monitoring techniques were tested on a limited number of students. Moreover, the study targeted the acquisition of French, and although theoretically its conclusions should apply to the study of other languages, it has not been empirically tested until recently. Following the AFMLTA⁴³ conference presentation (Mogilevski 2001) Davidson (2001) conducted a small scale study in a class of 12 adult ESL learners, applying the structured monitoring techniques and raising her students' awareness of second order errors, that she called *avoidable errors* (AE). In a one hour session, Davidson explained to her students the sociopragmatic value of writing accuracy, introduced the concept of avoidable errors, and proceeded to note the AE/No words ratio in the students' written exercises. She specifically targeted errors committed despite the knowledge of relevant rules, and discussed most common avoidable errors with students. Davidson reports that students were enthusiastic and even competitive in their attempts to drag the AE quotient down. Also, her data shows a 53% reduction in AE ratios over one week in comparison with the first test, with a further 13% and 2% reduction over the subsequent two weeks.

⁴³ Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers' Associations.

It is very encouraging that the present research had such a positive spin-off in ESL. Nevertheless, given the limited scope of Davidson's study, it is too early to draw any definitive conclusions. Yet, as a pilot study, it may lead to a cross-sectional study with a bigger subject pool, conducted over a longer period of time, which would provide more information on the effectiveness of the proposed treatment for adult ESL learners. It may also be worthwhile to conduct a longitudinal study of a limited number of treated subjects to see whether, and how, their awareness of the value and causes of morphosyntactic accuracy affects their language acquisition.

Finally, it can be argued on the basis of the literature reviewed in this thesis that applied linguists cannot ignore language production, focusing entirely on language processing. Yet very few studies to date have investigated learner behavior at the moment of production. It can be suggested that such study would further clarify the interplay between linguistic competence, capability and performance, and interest both the applied linguists and the teachers, whose main concern is their students' performance.

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APPENDICES

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Error correction exercise: second order errors experiment 1998/1999.

A: Detect all errors in the following text.

Est-ce que la France pourrait tirer profit de l'expérience multiculturelle australienne
pour lutter contre le racisme?

A mes yeux la situation des deux pays - la France et l'Australie n'est pas trop
différente. Donc pour que un pouve constituer une source d'inspiration pour l'autre
est possible. En France comme Australie il y a les banlieux chauds ou les bagarres, le
racisme et la danger sont partout.

En France la violence est lié au racisme parce que les imigrés comme les magrèbins et
les pieds noirs. Certaines personnes françaises font les rapproches aux imigrés surtout
les magrèbins pour les crimes etc., parce que les magrèbins sont noirs. Il y a donc un
atmosphère d'agressivité dans les banlieux et le racisme devien de plus en plus fort..
En Australie la situation est different parce qu'il y a beaucoup de nationalités qui
habitent là. Le racisme n'est pas evident, mais malheureusement ça existe toujours.
Cependant, aujourd'hui cet attitude mauvais change.

A mon avis la France pourrait tirer profit de l'expèrience multiculturelle australienne
car le racisme il s'agit d'ignorance. Des gens deteste ceux qui sont différent pour pas
de raison. Mais quand (surtout dans une société multiculturelle) on peut apprendre
d'une nouvelle culture, d'une nouvelle langue, d'une nouvelle manière de penser
qu'est quand on peut changer. Et qu'est quand le racisme n'existerait plus.

**B: Correct all underlined errors (write corrections in the space provided). Note:
there may be more than one error in the underlined section of the text.**

Est-ce que la France pourrait tirer profit de l'expérience multiculturelle australienne
pour lutter contre le racisme?

A mes yeux le _____ situation _____ des deux pays - _____ la France et l'Australie n'est _____ pas trop différente _____. Donc pour que _____ un pouver _____ constituer une source d'inspiration pour l'autre est possible. Rewrite the whole sentence

En France comme _____ Australie il y a les _____ banlieux _____ chauds ou _____ les bagarres, le racisme et la _____ danger sont partout. En France la violence est lié _____ au racisme parce que les immigrés _____ comme les magrébins _____ et les pieds noirs. Certaines personnes françaises font les rapproches aux immigrés _____ surtout les _____ magrébins _____ pour les crimes etc., parce que les magrébins _____ sont noirs. Il y a donc un _____ atmosphere _____ d'agressivité dans les banlieux _____ et le racisme devien _____ de plus en plus fort..

En Australie la situation est different _____ parce qu'il y a beaucoup de nationalités qui habitent là. Le racisme n'est pas évident _____, mais malheureusement ça _____ existe toujours. Cependant, aujourd'hui cet attitude mauvais _____ change.

A mon avis la France pourrait tirer profit de l'expérience _____ multiculturelle australienne car le racisme il s'agit _____ d'ignorance. Des gens deteste _____ ceux qui sont different _____ pour pas de raison. Mais quand (surtout dans une société multiculturelle) on peut apprendre _____ d'une nouvelle culture, d'une nouvelle langue, d'une nouvelle manière de penser qu'est _____ là que on peut changer. Et qu'est là que le racisme n'existerait _____ plus.

Error correction exercise: Semester One Examination 1999.

A. Correction du texte (50 points)

Corrigez toutes les fautes (orthographe, conjugaison, mode, etc.) que vous trouverez dans ce texte qui décrit un objet imaginaire: le caveçon. Ne changez ni le vocabulaire ni la structure des phrases.

Quelque chose qui permet à quelqu'un à faire beaucoup de choses au même temps. D'abord, il est une system, très moderne et très chic, qui est composer de une radio, de un télévision, de un stéreo et de une téléphone. C'est merveilleux pour quelqu'un qui est épuiser après avoir travailler très dur pendant la journée. A cause de son belle forme on doit décrire le caveçon. Premièrement, il est assez petit et arrondie: la couleur la plus populeure est noire, mais on peut acheter le caveçon en bleu, en blanc et même en rouge!! Il faut dire que le caveçon est très populaire de nos jours, surtout en Europe, en Asie et en Australie.

En dépit du fait que ce object est un produit qui est relativement nouveaux, il n'est pas très chere. Pour acheté le système entier, il coute environ cinq cent dollars. Beaucoup des gens dit que le prix est très bon marché parce que quand on achète un télévision on dépense habituellement plus de cinq cent dollars.

Par la suite, il faut expliqué de quoi le caveçon est fait: la plupart de l'objet est fait du bois, mais il y a aussi de petits pièces de metale.

Le caveçon n'est pas aussi grand qu'on penserait. On constate que les dimensions de l'object ne dépassent pas celles d'un ordinateur. Finalement, le poids de ce objet formidable: c'est seulement dix kilogrammes qui est très léger! Par conséquent, cet objet est assez facile à transporté.

Error correction exercise: Semester Two Examination 1999.

B. Correction du texte (50 points)

Corrigez toutes les fautes (orthographe, conjugaison, mode, etc.) que vous trouverez dans ce texte. Ne changez ni le vocabulaire ni la structure des phrases.

Je crois que le franglais, langue duquel on parle beaucoup aujourd'hui, menace de plus en plus la langue française. Bien sûr, chaque langue change, parfois lentement, parfois plus rapidement, mais le franglais est un vrai danger. On l'entend partout, à la radio, à la télévision, dans les films américains qui sont traduits en français. Les jeunes, en particulier, sont beaucoup influencés par cette mélange de anglais et de français. Bien sûr, l'Académie Française surveille la pureté du français, mais dans la vie de tous les jours beaucoup de mots anglais est employé. Je pense que c'est une évolution inévitable. Après tout, l'anglais est un mélange de normand et de l'Anglo-Saxon, alors si les mots anglais reviendront en français, ce sera normal.

Il existe plusieurs raisons qui expliquent la popularité du franglais. D'abord, c'est la présence des grandes sociétés américaines sur le marché français. Les entreprises comme McDonald ou Coca-Cola contribuent au développement de la problématique du franglais par leurs campagnes publicitaires, les slogans en anglais et les noms anglais de leurs produits. Finalement, la croissance des liens entre les pays, surtout entre les pays européens, crée des points communs entre les langues.

Aussi mon conclusion est-elle simple: il est inévitable que le franglais sera de plus en plus présent dans le français.

Error correction exercise: Semester One Examination 2000.

C. Correction du texte (50 points)

Corrigez toutes les fautes (orthographe, conjugaison, mode, etc.) que vous trouverez dans ce texte. Ne changez ni le vocabulaire ni la structure des phrases.

C'est vrai qu'en France aujourd'hui et dans la société francophonique le franglais est de plus en plus présent. La présence de la langue anglaise est évident à la radio, à la télévision, au cinéma, dans le monde des affaires, dans publicité, dans des magazines et même dans l'enseignement de la jeunesse. A mon avis c'est pas nécessaire de mettre un terme à ce phénomène, au contraire, il s'agit d'une évolution inévitable.

Cette évolution est causée par beaucoup de raisons. La première est l'influence des Etats Unis d'Amerique. La publicité et les images de boire américain, en particulier Coca-Cola, et la cuisine américaine, comme le hot-dog, le pop-corn et les types certaines du chocolat, est responsable pour l'introduction de plusieurs mots anglais dans la vocabulaire française. L'inclusion de chansons de rock américain à la radio et leur présentation, c'est très souvent ce qu'on écoute au "TOP TEN" les samedi soirs à la stations populaire de radio, est aussi responsables pour l'établissement du franglais dans la société française.

Les images de la société anglo-saxon qui viens avec des films américains et bien sur anglais, australiens, etc., qui sortir au cinéma et les émissions américaines à la télévision, apportent un certain style qui n'est pas définement français.

Il existe aussi un type de culture américaine qui a été apporté en France avec le couture porté par la jeunesse d'Amerique. En particulier la mode du monde de baseball et la style de mode de musique noire ont beaucoup d'influence sur la parôle des jeunes français.

C'est vrai qu'il y a des autres raisons pour la création du franglais, mais à mon avis l'influence d'Etats-Unis est la plus fort.

Error correction exercise: Semester Two Examination 2000

D. Correction du texte (50 points)

Corrigez toutes les fautes (orthographe, conjugaison, mode, etc.) que vous trouverez dans ce texte. Ne changez ni le vocabulaire ni la structure des phrases.

Malgré les apparences, M. Baudelot et M. Roger ne sont pas d'incorrigible optimiste. Déjà en 1989 alors que se multipliait les livres pour dénoncé la faillite de la système éducatif français, ils avait publier *Le niveau monte*. Aujourd'hui, ils récidivent avec un nouveau ouvrage et démontre qu'une institution scolaire jugé archaïque par certains, inadapté au monde du travail par d'autre, a réussi un exploit: permettre le mixité et l'égalité entre garçons et filles, quelque chose qui a toujours été tres difficile. Certes, rien n'est gagné, car l'école apparaît décalé par rapport à la société civil où l'égalité n'est toujours pas assuré tant sur le plan de l'emploi que sur celui de mentalité.

Cet evolution n'est pas particulier à la France. L'inegalité entre les sexes est repandue partout dans le monde, et la lutte pour ameliorer la situation est loin d'être fini. Le phénomène est mondial, apparaissant dans des pays avec un niveau de développement comparable. De plus, les statistiques ne portent pas trace de differences culturels.

Cependant, la suprématie féminine, evident dans l'access à l'enseignement supérieure, n'a pas supprimé l'hégemony des garçons sur le plan de l'avenir professionnel. Meme dans les pays où l'égalité est assuré, les écarts d'orientation ont pas disparu. Pour les auteurs de ce livre interessant, les idées et les comportements n'ont pas suivi les transformations institutionnels. En France, maintenant comme jadis, les filles n'osent pas s'inscrire en filiere scientifique et la traditionnelle opposition entre littéraires et scientifiques s'incarne dans un match filles-garçons.