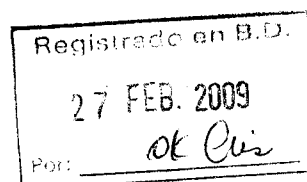


Informe Final de Proyecto de Investigación
2 de febrero de 2009

1. TITULO DEL PROYECTO: **Errores gramaticales más frecuentes en la producción escrita de los estudiantes de inglés de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas y la percepción que profesores y aprendices tienen de ellos.**
2. CODIGO DEL PROYECTO: No. 023-A7-149
3. VIGENCIA DEL PROYECTO: del 01-03-2007 hasta el 01-03-2009
4. INVESTIGADORA PARTICIPANTE: Leyla Hasbún Hasbún, cédula de identidad 3-0193-0747, Profesora Catedrática de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas, con jornada de 1/8 de tiempo durante el período de vigencia del proyecto.



01-03-2009

Objetivo Específico	Meta	Logro	Actividades	Limitaciones Soluciones
1. Identificar las expectativas de los profesores acerca de los conocimientos mínimos de gramática que los estudiantes de cada nivel deben tener.	a. Un cuestionario b. 12 entrevistas c. Listado de errores	100%	a. Se diseñó un cuestionario y se entrevistó a los 8 profesores cuyos estudiantes participaron en el estudio. Sin embargo, se consideró que la opinión de otros profesores con experiencia enriquecería la visión general de las expectativas de los profesores por lo que se conversó con 5 profesores adicionales. b. Se hizo una lista de las expectativas del grupo de profesores. (Anexo 1)	Este objetivo fue alcanzado sin mayor contratiempo. Sin embargo, al no haberse dado a los profesores una lista de errores, la conversación se tornó muy abierta. Los profesores mencionaron no solamente errores gramaticales sino también de otros tipos e hicieron valiosos comentarios sobre otros problemas relacionados con la educación. Para evitar este tipo de situaciones, se tomó la decisión de entregar a los profesores una tipología de errores durante la segunda entrevista.
2. Determinar cuáles creen los estudiantes que son sus errores más frecuentes y qué piensan ellos acerca de la gravedad de los mismos.	a. Un cuestionario b. 18 entrevistas c. Resumen	100%	a. Se diseñó un cuestionario abierto como guía para la entrevista. Se entrevistaron dos estudiantes por nivel, es decir, 16 estudiantes. Estas entrevistas se grabaron ya que los estudiantes no llenaron ningún documento escrito. <i>Nota:</i> En la propuesta de investigación, se mencionan 18 entrevistas lo que obviamente es un error mecanográfico ya que participaron 8 grupos. (8x2 = 16)	El mayor problema encontrado fue la falta de precisión de los estudiantes a la hora de identificar sus propios errores. Creo que esto se debe a la falta de conocimiento del metalenguaje. Por lo tanto, a partir de la segunda entrevista, se decidió mencionarle a los estudiantes posibles áreas. Sin embargo, esto tiene la desventaja de que las alternativas

			Se resumió la información en un cuadro. (Anexo 2)	dadas pudieron haber inducido a los entrevistados a mencionar categorías que en realidad no le eran las más difíciles. Debo anotar que creo necesario volver a escuchar estas cintas a la luz de la información recabada. Creo que hay datos interesantes sobre temas variados que puedo utilizar en el futuro. Esta información no ha sido suficientemente analizada.
3. En una muestra aleatoria de 3 composiciones, determinar en qué áreas gramaticales los estudiantes de cada nivel cometen más errores.	a. 18 composiciones b. Un listado de errores por nivel	100%+	a. En la propuesta de investigación, se había planeado recoger las composiciones de todos los estudiantes de cada uno de los grupos seleccionados. De ahí se iban a sacar al azar 16 composiciones, dos por nivel, (no 18 como aparece en el documento) para hacerles un análisis exhaustivo. Sin embargo, después de conversar con algunos de los profesores y examinar en forma preliminar la muestra recogida, se decidió analizar todo el corpus. En otras palabras, se hizo un análisis de los errores gramaticales de 159 composiciones en vez de 16. Además, para cada uno de los niveles, se hizo una lista que contenía cada uno de los errores en contexto y se identificó al	Creo que el mayor problema que se presentó durante la investigación se originó como resultado del cambio en el número de composiciones que se analizó. La investigadora temió que algunos de los errores más "interesantes" no iban a aparecer en la muestra, por lo que decidió incluir todas las composiciones recogidas. Esto generó un aumento muy grande en el volumen de trabajo requerido. Para solucionar este problema, la investigadora dedicó los meses de enero y febrero del 2008 para terminar de evaluar las composiciones. Durante mes y medio trabajó a tiempo completo

			<p>individuo que los había cometido por medio de un número. (Anexo 3: Resumen de uno de los grupos)</p>	<p>en la consecución de este objetivo. Otro gran problema fue el diseño de una taxonomía de errores que fuera completa y se adaptara a la muestra. Se probó con varias taxonomías existentes y ninguna funcionó bien. La solución fue la creación / adaptación de una taxonomía. (Anexo 4) Este trabajo, que también resulto muy laborioso, no había sido tomado en cuenta a la hora de formular el proyecto. Debo decir que en esta fase del trabajo conté con la generosa colaboración de las profesoras Sonya Kozicki y Mayra Solís, quienes me ayudaron a validar el instrumento y me brindaron valiosas sugerencias.</p>
<p>4. Determinar cuáles son los errores que los profesores consideran más graves.</p>	<p>a. Segundo instrumento para los profesores b. Resumen de la información</p>	<p>100%</p>	<p>a. Después de haber recogido el corpus, a los profesores se les entregó copia de la taxonomía utilizada para clasificar los errores gramaticales junto con un cuestionario para que explicaran cuáles eran los errores más graves y los más frecuentes. b. Se resumió esa información. (Anexo 5)</p>	<p>Con la experiencia obtenida en la entrevista preliminar, se diseñó un instrumento más preciso y que incluía otras 3 preguntas que contemplan información general relevante. Hasta el momento, se ha resumido solamente la información directamente relacionada a las preguntas de investigación de este proyecto.</p>

				El resto de la información se guardará para el siguiente.
5. Verificar si los estudiantes cometen errores que son inaceptables para su nivel.	Cuadro comparativo	100%	Se realizó la comparación de los datos. Ver Anexo 6	En vista de que este objetivo no se alcanzó en su totalidad durante el período establecido inicialmente, se solicitó una prórroga al proyecto.
6. Determinar los puntos gramaticales que los estudiantes aún no pueden producir correctamente en una composición.	Listado de áreas problemáticas	100%	Después de realizar el análisis de frecuencias y el análisis estadístico, se concluye que hay tres grandes áreas de la gramática comunes a todos los estudiantes de la Escuela.	Este análisis es el producto "concreto" de esta investigación. Debo mencionar que visité al personal de USES en la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas para buscar formas de analizar los datos de la manera más científica posible. Se realizó un análisis con un modelo producto multinomial para datos categóricos. Este análisis validó el análisis de frecuencias que yo había realizado. (Ver Anexo 7)
7. Diseminar los resultados de este proyecto de investigación.	1 Artículo 1 presentación o taller	100% +	a. Se han escrito 3 artículos: Hasbún, Leyla. 2007. Evaluación de un curso de gramática del inglés: Insumo para la investigación. <i>Revista Electrónica "Actualidades Investigativas en Educación," 7</i>	Debido a la riqueza de los datos recogidos, se escribieron dos artículos. Aún así, no toda la información no pudo ser incluida. Durante el período de prórroga, se procedió a escribir un tercer artículo donde se discutieron las percepciones de los profesores y alumnos acerca de las debilidades en el campo de

		<p>(1) pp. 1-20.</p> <p>Hasbún, Leyla. Fossilization and acquisition: A study of learner language. <i>Revista de Filología y Lingüística</i>, 33 (1), 113-129.</p> <p>Hasbún, Leyla Teacher and learner perceptions of language learning problem areas. (Se presentó a la consideración de la Revista Lenguas Modernas)</p> <p>Se incluye copia de los tres artículos</p> <p>b. Se realizó un conversatorio el día 25 de junio de 2008 al que asistieron 12 profesores de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas. Se discutieron los resultados de la investigación.</p> <p>c. Los resultados de esta investigación también fueron presentados en el Primer Congreso Internacional de Lenguas Modernas que se realizó en el mes de diciembre.</p>	<p>la gramática.</p>
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Beneficios Académicos

Creo que el proyecto ha tenido importantes logros académicos.

- En primero lugar, se realizaron un conversatorio y una ponencia donde se discutieron los hallazgos de la investigación. Esto permitió el intercambio de ideas entre la investigadora y estudiantes de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas (de grado y postgrado) así como con profesores de la Universidad de Costa Rica y de otras universidades nacionales e internacionales.
- Cinco personas solicitaron y le fueron entregadas separatas de los artículos escritos.
- Consideré de gran valor la presencia de profesores de otras lenguas en la ponencia (francés y portugués). Ellos manifestaron su interés por llevar a cabo una investigación similar en sus especialidades.
- Los resultados señalan áreas de dificultad en el aprendizaje de la gramática del inglés. Esto me impulsa a seguir estudiando estos problemas con mayor especificidad para así buscar intervenciones pedagógicas apropiadas a las necesidades de nuestros estudiantes.

Anexo 1: Entrevista Preliminar (Objetivo 1)

Think about the language problems your students have at this level.

In your opinion, what grammar rules / patterns should you students know /master before they take your course / so that they can take full advantage of the course?

What problems have you found?

List of Teacher Beliefs

First Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although LM-1001 assumes no previous knowledge, most teachers expect some basic mastery of the language since they have taken courses in High School.• Other teachers do not expect any knowledge of the language; they expect some language <i>aptitude</i>.• Main problems come from bad study habits, bad attitudes, not enough motivation, lack of time• Ss who barely pass LM-1001 have a hard time catching up in LM-1002• Groups are very heterogeneous• There are discipline problems
Second Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers believe students haven't been able to grasp the concept of mass noun• Ss have serious subject verb agreement problems when they speak spontaneously,• Ss can't use relative clauses• Ss have a hard time in question formation and indirect questions• Ss cannot use the grammar they study in class spontaneously.• Teachers acknowledge the fact that although many of the grammar rules have been studied in first year, Ss can't really use them in real communication
Third Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students translate from Spanish• Too many fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices• Ss still have many subject verb agreement problems• Ss have problems with prepositions• Ss don't know the passive voice• subject verb agreement and verb f
Fourth Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subject-verb agreement, verb tenses• Subject deletion• Pronoun – antecedent• They don't read in English• They don't edit / proofread• No self-monitoring

Anexo 2: Entrevista Preliminar Objetivo 2

Summary of students' beliefs

First Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No tengo ninguna dificultad. Yo no me acordaba nada del colegio pero yo estudio.• Cuando escribo lo que más me cuesta son las comas. También las palabras como and y so.• Todo es muy fácil solo tengo que aprenderme los verbos.• Yo hago uno o dos borradores de las composiciones, por eso no tengo problemas.• El vocabulario es más difícil que la gramática porque hay muchas palabras que uno no sabe cuales son. Las reglas me las explica el profesor. Estudiante está repitiendo.• El inglés no es difícil en comparación con otros idiomas.• En el colegio yo asistía a un taller de inglés.• Yo quiero aprender inglés porque quiero estudiar una ingeniería y se necesita hablar inglés.• Hay cosas que hay que practicarlas pero otras son por habilidad. A mi me cuesta entender el audio.• Yo tengo las ideas de cómo se escribe en español pero no se como enfocar esa idea en inglés.• Yo tengo el problema de que veo las cosas como si fueran en español. El orden en español, como a mi me suena en español.• A mi me va mal en las composiciones porque desconozco cierto vocabulario. Hay mucho vocabulario.• Tengo errores de conjugación. También los connectors. No se cómo darle continuidad a la idea. Siempre digo also. Es muy monótono. Al estudiante le cuesta mucho y falta a clase.• El inglés es fácil pero ocupa dedicación.• Las formas se acomodan diferente. A mi me cuesta la pronunciación porque la gramática es de memorización.• La nota más baja fue en oral. Fue por nervios. En oral no puede borrar nada.• Son cosas que yo ya debería saber de LM1001 como los verb tenses.• Yo trato de hablar en inglés pero los compañeros no me ayudan.• A mi me cuesta el inglés oral y la composición.• El orden de las palabras, el vocabulario, las preposiciones• Yo traduzco al inglés• En el examen me faltó hablar bastante y el vocabulario también. Casi siempre es cuando es cosas como people.• Me da vergüenza hablar.
Second Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I memorize the verbs but I don't know how to use them (BSP)• We don't have time to practice. We go to fast.• I can use what I have learned.• I don't like the book. I need more practice.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many rules.
Third Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't like to write. It is difficult. • Sometimes I make mistakes with agreement. I don't pay attention. • We need more feedback. Teachers sometimes don't explain problems well / clearly. They change their minds. • Punctuation. • Word choice is difficult. I don't have a good dictionary. I don't have a computer.
Fourth Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The literature courses are very hard. • Sometimes the tenses. • Run-on sentences. • Sometimes I make mistakes in agreement. • How to organize ideas. • Also the word choice. Words look alike. • When I teach I don't know how to teach prepositions. Most of them are really similar. We try to translate. I'm always looking for examples on the Internet. • I make a lot of mistakes in punctuation. I never understood how is a comma splice. • this and these. When I write fast. • Also missing subject. We start to think in Spanish with the verb. • You write fast and you make like beginning mistakes. • You mix sentences. You forget what you were talking about. • I noticed that 2 people said people is. Even a professor said that. She corrected it but she said it. • Many professors use people is and they don't realize that. • What is more difficult, grammar or word choice? I would say word choice.

Anexo 3

LM-1001 Resumen de errores en número y porcentaje

Número de estudiantes: 18

General Category	Sub-categories	Raw Score	Percentage
Nouns	number or irregular plural	3	1.46
	mass / countable nouns	1	0.48
	subject omission	11	5.36
	double subject	0	0
	possessive noun	2	0.97
	Noun + Noun	2	0.97
Pronouns	pronoun / antecedent	1	0.48
	reference unclear	1	0.48
	wrong pronoun	5	2.43
Articles	missing article	8	3.90
	unnecessary article	15	7.31
	wrong article	5	2.43
Demonstratives		5	2.43
Quantifiers		3	1.46
Possessives		1	0.48
Verbs	subject verb agreement	23	11.21
	wrong verb form	34	16.58
	wrong verb tense	10	4.87
	modal auxiliary	6	2.92
	verb missing	1	0.48
	direct object missing	5	2.43
Adjectives and adverbs	wrong part of speech	5	2.43
	plural adjectives	6	2.92
	comparatives and superlatives	5	2.43
Prepositions	missing preposition	3	1.46
	wrong preposition	12	5.85
	unnecessary preposition	8	3.9
Subordination		4	1.95
Expletive		3	1.46
Word order	general word order	2	0.97
	order of adjectives	0	0
	order of adverbs	5	2.43
Question formation		0	0
Negative forms		7	3.41
Unclear meaning		3	1.46
Conditional forms		0	0
TOTAL		205	100%

Resumen de los Errores (identificados por categoría y por individuo)

Noun	number or irregular plural	*different kind 3 *a good vacations 8 *Their life's quality 9
	mass/ countable	*My advices 16
	subject omission	*in the dry season is very hot 1 *sometimes is hot too 1 *because is very dangerous 2 *is important that you enjoy it 3 *in that season is difficult 4 *so is a really clean beach 6 *because is a reef 6 *in the middle of the day was about 13 degrees 7 *For us was very cold. 7 *Also have a few problems 13 *Is pretty easy getting lost
	possessive noun	*Their life's quality 9 *And their families (possessive missing) 9
	Noun +Noun	*Juice of orange 8 *Habits to eat (eating habits) 9
	DO missing	*You can share with your relatives (DO?) 5 *I enjoy a lot. 8 *You can enjoy a lot 8 *I enjoy a lot with my family 8 *Young people enjoy because 13
Pronoun	pronoun/ antecedent	*(products) it could 9
	reference unclear	*We have here things that not all the countries have and that's why they are visiting ours 18
	wrong class	*You can't forget any about this place 8 *Their starts to 10 *(animals) its could dead 12 *(animals) its could bit your hands 12 *It has it's problems 14 (spelling?)
Articles	missing	*in dry season 4 *for diet be healthy 9 *three times at week 9 *solution to pollution problem 11 *in dry season 12 *in rainy season 12 *pollution is product of traffic jams 13 *important for all community 13
	unnecessary	*my favorite part are the vacations with a warm weather 6 *the most important activity is the surf 6

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *the tourist came 6 *a very good weather 8 *in the nights 8 *a good pictures 8 *a good weather 8 *the people must learn 9 *The UCR 11 *The pollution 11 *The drugs 11 *A young people 13 *The crime 14 *The junk food 16 *You will be on a healthy shape 16
	wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *three times at day 2 *three times at week 2 *Many times on the week 9 *A easy solution 11 *An special place 12
Demonstratives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *that things 3 *All this products 9 *This animals 12 *This animals 12 *This problems 13
Quantifieres		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Another persons 8 *In a few time 13 (wrong use of quantifier although what is needed is an adjective) %%*The ground is plenty of wild animals 15
Possessives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *People... in your food (their) 9
Verb	subject verb agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *it have white sand 1 *the people who lives there 1 *our body are not used3 *your body have to do 3 *if you or someone else prepare 3 *it taste good 3 *there are a lot of vegetation 4 *nature that are there 4 *My favorite part are the vacations 6 *the people that is on vacations 6 *the people is very friendly 8 *this products isn't very healthy 9 *doctors says 9 *that person feel good and have 9 *that people knows 10 *products that makes 10 *their starts to 10 *An instructor that make a routine 10

		<p>*The drugs is 11</p> <p>*My community have 13</p> <p>*(community) have a few problems 13</p> <p>*This problem need a solution 13</p> <p>*There is a lot of activities 18</p>
	wrong verb form	<p>*one call Varadero 1</p> <p>%%I recommend you to go 1</p> <p>*They are get weight 2</p> <p>*You can start eaten 2</p> <p>*thinking on change 3</p> <p>*loves stay at home 3</p> <p>*our body are not used to process 3</p> <p>*the problem with be overweight 3</p> <p>*they could lost (get) 4</p> <p>*And we can be rober 7</p> <p>*Go to swim in the beach 8</p> <p>*Go to surf 8</p> <p>*Go to shopping 8</p> <p>*Go to walk 8</p> <p>*Go to dancing 8</p> <p>*You can't to return home 8</p> <p>%%*You can choise many places 8</p> <p>*For diet be healthy 9</p> <p>*Do diets no is bad 9</p> <p>*Be healthy not mean 9</p> <p>*A good way is go to 10</p> <p>*Makes your organism to stay healthy 10</p> <p>*Could to stay tired 10</p> <p>*Anything relationship to drugs 11</p> <p>*(animals) could dead 12</p> <p>*Its could bit your hands 12 (spelling?)</p> <p>*It is important take an umbrella 15</p> <p>*Chance to rain 15 (part of speech??)</p> <p>*If you want avoid problems 15</p> <p>*People are worry about 16</p> <p>*Can gave you 16</p> <p>*Needs to be respect 17</p> <p>*All the good things that God has been done for us 18</p> <p>*for example, ride in a banana 18</p>
	verb tense	<p>*I had been (have) 1</p> <p>*if you prepare a good salad you feel motivated (will) 3</p> <p>*the last time that I visit 6</p> <p>*the tourists came all around the world</p> <p>*we can be (past) 7</p> <p>*we only eat fast food (past) 7</p>

		<p>*I go with (went) 7</p> <p>*I enjoy a lot. (past) 8</p> <p>*I enjoy a lot with my family 8</p> <p>*Make sure you are going to follow them 16 (follow)</p>
	wrong modal auxiliary	<p>*You don't have to eat junk food (shouldn't) 2</p> <p>*You never have to try a diet (shouldn't) 2</p> <p>*they cannot throught garbage 5 (shouldn't)</p> <p>*they do not fire (shouldn't light fires?) 5</p> <p>*you can't forget (shouldn't) 8</p> <p>*people could do there a lot of (can, may) 12</p>
	verb missing	*and rocks really near from there 6
Adjective Adverb	wrong part of speech	<p>%%They are get weight fastly. 2</p> <p>*A very usually problem too 11</p> <p>*is the most usually problem 11</p> <p>%%And humidity and warm in 12 (lexicon)</p> <p>*Doesn't work very good 13</p>
	plural adjective	<p>*Organics products 10</p> <p>*Exercises routine 10</p> <p>*Drugs traffic 11</p> <p>*Drugs problems 11</p> <p>*Tourists destination</p> <p>*Be really smarts 18 (corrected another)</p>
	comparative superlative	<p>*just like the same when you find it. 1</p> <p>*have to do an extra effort than others 3</p> <p>*what I most like about that beach is 6</p> <p>*my older son (oldest) 7</p> <p>*more healthy 9</p>
Preposition	missing	<p>*take care yourself 2 (of)</p> <p>*came all around the world 6 (from)</p> <p>*Look the amazing sunset 18 (at)</p>
	wrong	<p>*at the airplane (on) 1</p> <p>*three times at day for eat (to) 2</p> <p>*thinking on change 3</p> <p>*I recommend it for everyone 4</p> <p>*In the nights 8</p> <p>*on the week 9</p> <p>*during thirty minutes 9</p> <p>*think in their appearance 10</p> <p>*The UCR is at San Pedro 11</p> <p>*In the Pacific coast 12</p> <p>*They go in a diet 16</p> <p>*You will be on a healthy shape 16</p>
	unnecessary	<p>*go to camping 4</p> <p>*the temperature was at 0 degrees 7</p> <p>* for to take a 8 (or under infinitives??)</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *When I went to there 8 *in the nights 8 *Three times at week 9 *Near to my house 13 *Ride in a banana on the beach 18
Subordination		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *is one of the most beautiful places that I had been 1 *just like the same when you find it (as) 1 *the people live around it 5 *places what you can find 15
Expletive		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *There is a wonderful place (it) 8 *They are 99 chance to rain *Because there is a national park (it is) 17
General Word Order		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *More healthy is to do exercise 9 *Knows which are the requirements 10
	order of adjectives	
	order of adverbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *to know better Puerto Viejo 6 *always could to stay tired 10 *People could do there a lot of activities 12 *if you get to late at night to your house 14 *We have here things that 18
Negative		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Do diets no is bad 9 *Diet not is balanced 9 *Be healthy not mean 9 *If not that person feel good 9 *Your body haven't the same requirements 10 *If you haven't a good diet 10 *It doesn't needs garbage 17
Meaning?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *It could sick to customer 9 *In conclusion, this problems don't make that a very good lifestyle in my neighborhood change. (aren't serious enough? or too serious?) 13 *Thus to keep the natural equilibrium the Park needs to be respect itself. 17 (for what it is?)

Anexo 4: Taxonomy of grammar errors

General Category	Sub-categories	Examples of Errors
Nouns	number or irregular plural	several <i>kind</i> / a key data
	mass / countable nouns	newer equipments
	subject omission	In private universities is faster
	double subject	It appears to be inevitable the signing of this treaty
	possessive noun	indicate that <i>Costa Rican's</i> lack freedom of speech
	Noun + Noun	juice of orange / he is driver of a truck
Pronouns	pronoun / antecedent	person . . . <i>they</i>
	reference unclear	body modifications help to express who <i>they</i> are
	wrong pronoun	<i>theirs</i> objective is
Articles	missing article	my life as (ϕ)adult
	unnecessary article	the fountain of <i>the</i> youth
	wrong article	<i>an</i> special place
Demonstratives		<i>that</i> things
Quantifiers		<i>another</i> persons
Possessives		<i>people</i> . . . in <i>your</i> food
Verbs	subject verb agreement	most people <i>is</i> bored with
	wrong verb form	have forgotten <i>of bringing</i>
	wrong verb tense	I <i>was working</i> there for a year
	modal auxiliary	I <i>will</i> like to thank you
	verb missing	they see their lives still the same (<i>are</i>)
	direct object missing	People like to spend their free time purchasing. You should ask some questions (<i>yourself</i>)
Adjectives and adverbs	wrong part of speech	a <i>good paid</i> job
	plural adjectives	they call their teachers <i>obsoletes</i>
	comparative and superlative forms	the mortality rate would be <i>smallest</i>
Prepositions	missing preposition	to operate the patients
	wrong preposition	when they arrived <i>to</i> the place
	unnecessary preposition	they must attend <i>to</i> seminars to change
Subordination		and find someone is required a worker (someone who requires a worker)
Expletive		(Monteverde) There is a wonderful place (<i>it is</i>)
Word order	general word order	More healthy is to do exercise has an idea of how beautiful is nature
	order of adjectives	contact color lenses
	order of adverbs	People could do there a lot of activities
Negative forms		Do diets no is bad. Your body haven't the same requirements.
Unclear meaning		In conclusion, this problems don't make that a very good lifestyle in my neighborhood change.
Conditional forms		If all people had money to afford an organ transplant, they <i>will</i> also find space and organs.

**Anexo 5: Opinión de los profesores sobre los errores más frecuentes
(objetivo 4)**

LM-1033
subject omission
unnecessary article
general word order
wrong verb form
double subject

LM-1001
subject verb agreement
subject omission
verb form
articles
prepositions

LM-1001
subject verb agreement
wrong verb tense
wrong preposition
wrong part of speech
general word order

LM-1002
subject omission
verb form
subject verb agreement
word order
articles

LM-1234
subject omission
double subject
wrong pronoun
subject verb agreement
missing / unnecessary article

LM-1235
subject verb agreement, verb forms, modals, word order
sentence errors (fragments, run-on sentences, C.S. , parallelism)
word choice, collocations
Topic sentence, transitions and connectors
Interference from Spanish, incomplete ideas, vague sentences, wordy ideas

LM-1235
subject verb agreement, pronoun antecedent
subject omission
word order
wrong preposition
verb tense, verb form

LM-1244
word choice
wrong verb tense, verb form
wrong prepositions
word order
run-on sentences, comma splices

LM-1245
general word order
double subject
subject verb agreement
wrong verb tense
wrong preposition

LM-1352
subject omission
pronoun antecedent
subject verb agreement
wrong verb form
wrong preposition

LM-1353 LM-1363
subject omission
double subject
subject verb agreement
subordination
wrong verb tense

LM-1362
pronoun antecedent
reference unclear
wrong verb form
unclear meaning
conditionals

LM-1472
unclear meaning
wrong verb form (to+verb / prep+ing patterns, for instance)
word order, particularly order of adverbs but also general
pronouns: all kinds
wrong preposition and occasionally unnecessary preposition

LM-1472
wrong verb form
double subject
general word order
number plural
wrong preposition

LM-1482
subject verb agreement
wrong preposition
wrong verb form
order of adverbs
missing or unnecessary article

LM-1482
general word order
reference unclear
direct object missing
order of adverbs
unclear meaning

LM-1482
double subject
Noun + Noun
subject verb agreement
wrong verb tense
subject omission

Anexo 6

Errores que los profesores no identificaron

Group	Errors correctly identified	Errors not identified
LM-1001	5	0
LM-1002	3	prepositions, N + N, quantifiers, modal auxiliaries
LM-1235	3	pronouns, number
LM-1245	1	articles, verb forms, possessive nouns, pronouns
LM-1352	2	articles, word order, order of adjectives
LM-1362	1	prepositions, articles, modal auxiliaries, agreement
LM-1472	2	articles, possessive nouns, agreement
LM-1482	4	meaning

Anexo 7

servados

	LM1001	LM1002	LM1235	LM1245	LM1352	LM1362	LM1472	LM1482	Total
Form	34	24	34	29	9	51	31	6	218
icles	28	42	37	33	19	35	33	15	242
ositions	23	58	42	51	33	52	33	31	323
al	85	124	113	113	61	138	97	52	783

perados

	LM1001	LM1002	LM1235	LM1245	LM1352	LM1362	LM1472	LM1482	Total
Form	23.67	34.52	31.46	31.46	16.98	38.42	27.01	14.48	218.00
icles	26.27	38.32	34.92	34.92	18.85	42.65	29.98	16.07	242.00
ositions	35.06	51.15	46.61	46.61	25.16	56.93	40.01	21.45	323.00
abilidad	0.11	0.16	0.14	0.14	0.08	0.18	0.12	0.07	783.00

Modelo Producto Multinomial

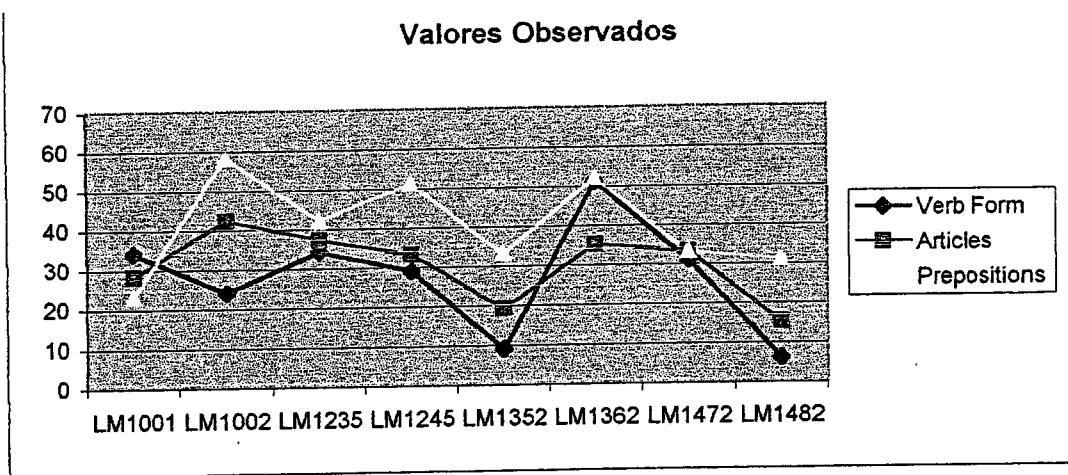
varian	4.5130959	3.2078532	0.2048972	0.192516	3.752761	4.1180056	0.5905624	4.9642415	X2
	0.1138259	0.3525192	0.123325	0.1060647	0.0011442	1.372595	0.304308	0.0714403	gl
	4.1506171	0.9167853	0.4567654	0.4126272	2.4404875	0.4264627	1.2294901	4.2509611	
rosimilitud	12.319795	-8.726162	2.6387515	-2.362176	-5.715105	14.443689	4.2753296	-5.28508	G2
	1.7849503	3.8464869	2.1358274	-1.870614	0.1474416	-6.919873	3.1677212	-1.034978	gl
	-9.698563	7.2872254	-4.377989	4.5858275	8.9467643	-4.707539	-6.35986	11.41494	p

Hipotesis: $p_{ij} = p_j^*$: la probabilidad de cometer cada error es la misma para todos los cursos (homogeneidad)
: el error cometido no depende del curso (independencia)

Decisión: rechazar H0 al 5% de significancia

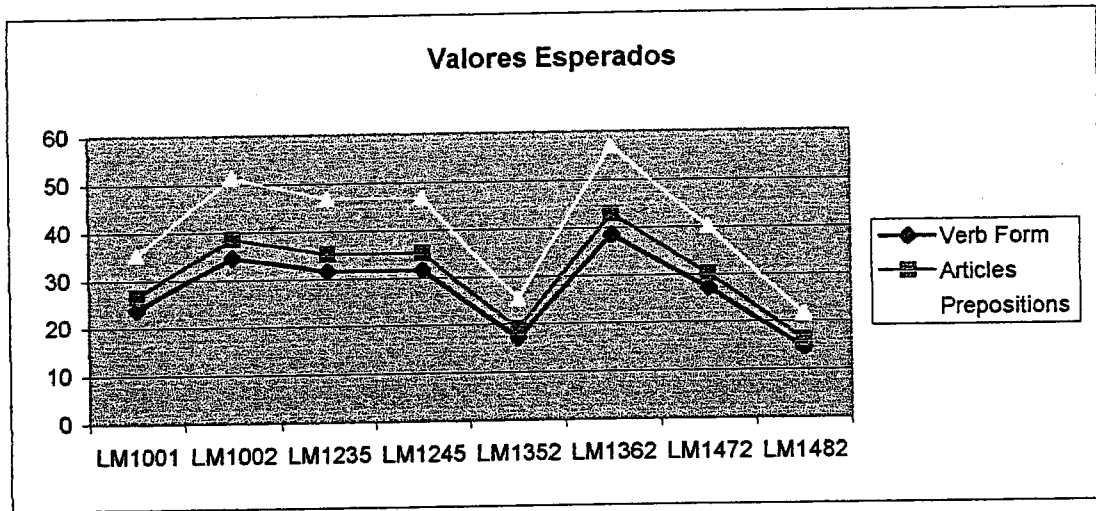
Residuos	2.3221048	-1.791048	0.4526557	-0.438766	-1.937204	2.0292871	0.7684806	-2.228058
standariz	0.337381	0.5937333	0.3511766	-0.325676	0.0338255	-1.171578	0.5516412	-0.267283
	-2.087886	0.9574891	-0.675844	0.6423606	1.562206	-0.653041	-1.108824	2.0617859
Residuos	2.16487875	-2.298275	0.5760606	-0.558385	2.374896	2.6528925	0.9665145	2.744597
ustados	0.4298887	0.7785953	0.4567213	-0.423556	0.0423778	-1.552939	0.7090189	-0.332795
	2.815214	1.3616766	-0.953218	0.905992	2.1225237	-0.938736	-1.545551	2.153998

abilidad
 .28 X2
 .31 0.00047189
 .41



.2734
 14
 047 9

 736167
 14
 026696



de ajuste si $|z| > 2,0$



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COSTA RICA

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INSUMO PARA LA INVESTIGACIÓN**

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EVALUACIÓN DE UN CURSO DE GRAMÁTICA DEL INGLÉS: INSUMO PARA LA INVESTIGACIÓN

EVALUATION OF AN ENGLISH GRAMMAR COURSE: SPRINGBOARD FOR RESEARCH

Leyla Hasbún Hasbún¹

Resumen: El siguiente artículo sintetiza la primera fase de un proyecto de investigación sobre la adquisición de la gramática del inglés como lengua extranjera en la Universidad de Costa Rica. A través de un cuestionario dirigido a un grupo de estudiantes, se encontró un alto grado de satisfacción general con el curso que acababan de terminar y con el libro de texto que utilizaron. Sin embargo, manifestaron que les hubiera gustado tener más tiempo para practicar los diferentes puntos gramaticales. A los estudiantes también se les preguntó si podían utilizar lo aprendido para hablar o escribir. La gran mayoría opinó que sí. Cuando se compararon esas opiniones con las de un grupo de sus profesores, se encontraron diferencias importantes ya que ellos señalaron falta de adquisición en varias áreas.

Palabras claves: GRAMÁTICA INGLESA, ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS, AUTOEVALUACIÓN, ADQUISICIÓN DE LA GRAMÁTICA

Abstract: This article summarizes the first part of a research project on the acquisition of L2 grammar at a university. A survey was used to collect data concerning the learners' degree of satisfaction with the grammar course they had just taken and with the textbook used. Results show that the students were very satisfied with both the course and the textbook but added that they needed more time to practice the grammar points. The students were also asked their opinions about whether they could use the grammar they were taught to communicate. Most of them stated that they could. When their opinions were compared to those of a group of their professors, important differences were found since instructors pointed out lack of acquisition in several areas.

Key words: ENGLISH GRAMMAR, FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING, SELF-EVALUATION, ACQUISITION OF GRAMMAR

1. Introducción

Cuando hablamos de la adquisición de lenguas extranjeras, la definición del concepto de dificultad para la adquisición, por ejemplo, en el campo de la gramática, no es simple ya que son muchas las variables involucradas. Para simplificar esta definición, optaremos por concentrarnos únicamente en las características morfosintácticas de la lengua meta. Para esto es preciso empezar por identificar aquellas características de la lengua que se consideran "difíciles" por ser de adquisición tardía. DeKeyser (2005) definió tres grandes áreas de dificultad para el aprendizaje: problemas de significado, problemas de forma y

¹ Doctora en Lingüística Aplicada de la Universidad de Indiana y Licenciada en Literatura Inglesa de la Universidad de Costa Rica. Profesora Catedrática de la Universidad de Costa Rica y Directora del Programa de Posgrado en la Enseñanza del Inglés. Imparte cursos de grado y posgrado en la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas. Ha publicado en el área de la adquisición del inglés y del español como segundo idioma, la sociolingüística y la formación de profesores.

Correo electrónico: lhasbun@cariari.ucr.ac.cr

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problemas de mapeo entre la forma y el significado. Explica que los problemas de significado ocurren cuando los aprendices se enfrentan a elementos de la gramática que expresan un concepto abstracto cuyo significado es difícil de inferir utilizando únicamente el material lingüístico al que están expuestos. En estos casos, se ha observado que las intervenciones pedagógicas tienden a ser poco efectivas (p. 5). Un ejemplo de este fenómeno es el uso de los artículos. Por ejemplo, aunque el español tiene artículos, un hispanohablante que aprende inglés tendrá dificultad ya que el español marca el uso genérico de un sustantivo abstracto con el artículo definido (*El tiempo es oro*), mientras que en inglés se marca con la ausencia de artículo (\emptyset *Time is money*). En segundo lugar, los problemas de forma son en realidad problemas de complejidad. Esta complejidad se mide por el número de alternativas que tenemos tanto al escoger un morfema o un alomorfo con el fin de expresar el significado deseado como al colocarlo en la posición correcta en una oración (p. 6). Un ejemplo documentado en la literatura para el inglés como segunda lengua es determinar la concordancia entre el sujeto y el verbo cuando la frase nominal es muy compleja (*Tommy, not his parents and siblings, is sick with the flu*). Finalmente, DeKeyser afirma que los problemas de mapeo entre el significado y la forma se presentan por falta de transparencia, la cual depende de la redundancia, la opcionalidad y la opacidad (p. 8). Por redundancia entendemos el fenómeno que se da cuando una forma gramatical no es esencial desde el punto de vista semántico ya que su significado está también expresado por al menos otro elemento en la oración. La opcionalidad también contribuye a la dificultad. Los aprendices se desubican cuando un elemento gramatical aparece en algunas ocasiones pero no en otras y no son capaces de percibir ninguna diferencia de significado. El caso de la opacidad se da cuando un morfema tiene diferentes alomorfos, y al mismo tiempo, es homófono con otros morfemas. El caso típico es el morfema *-s* en el inglés. Este puede representar la tercera persona singular de un verbo, el plural de un sustantivo o la forma genitiva de un sustantivo. En cada uno de los casos, el morfema tiene los mismos tres alomorfos.

La explicación anterior es de gran utilidad para los profesores ya que les permite poner en perspectiva el concepto de dificultad y les ayuda a diseñar tareas que faciliten y aceleren la adquisición de la lengua meta. Sin embargo, es probable que al estudiante promedio lo que verdaderamente le interesa no sea entender por qué algo le resulta difícil sino qué puede hacer para superar tal dificultad. En otras palabras, quiere apropiarse del conocimiento y tener la posibilidad de utilizarlo. Si se conforma con poco, quiere emplear el conocimiento para contestar un examen correctamente. Si su meta es ser bilingüe, desea

hacerlo cuando habla o cuando escribe. Intuitivamente, muchos de los estudiantes saben lo que saben los buenos maestros. En las palabras de Diane Laresen-Freeman (2003, p. 13), "La gramática **es** un área del conocimiento que los lingüistas y los profesores estudian. Sin embargo, si mis estudiantes alcanzan el conocimiento gramatical correspondiente a los contenidos que estoy enseñando pero no pueden usarlo, yo no estaría haciendo mi trabajo" (traducción de la autora, énfasis agregado).

2. Referente Teórico

La gramática del inglés es relativamente simple comparada con la de otras lenguas donde abundan las inflexiones. Este hecho nos podría llevar a pensar que es muy fácil de adquirir. Otro factor interesante es que para el inglés no existe un ente semejante a la Real Academia Española, cuyas opiniones tengan carácter normativo. Esto ha llevado a muchos a concluir que el inglés carece de reglas gramaticales y que es difícil definir a ciencia cierta qué es "correcto" y qué no lo es. Obviamente, esta es una idea falsa. Close (1992, p. 1), por ejemplo, explica que muchos estudiosos de la gramática del inglés a través del tiempo han documentado sus opiniones y preferencias con respecto a la lengua y han creado conjuntos de reglas aceptadas por los hablantes nativos, sobre todo, por aquellos que han recibido una educación formal. No obstante, si seguimos las corrientes de pensamiento actuales, se puede afirmar que las reglas que rigen cualquier punto gramatical pueden ser formuladas con precisión si analizamos cuidadosamente un amplio número de ejemplos de uso de la lengua que contengan tal punto gramatical. Si se le muestra a un número considerable de personas estos ejemplos y la gran mayoría los acepta como gramaticales, entonces podemos inferir la regla de uso. Este tipo de gramáticas, llamadas descriptivas, es muy valioso. Un ejemplo de ellas es el libro *The Grammar Book*, cuya segunda edición fue publicada en 1999. Ellis (2006, p. 87) explica que esta obra da una descripción clara y global de la lengua la cual es muy apropiada para la enseñanza. Además, identifica y discute los tipos de errores que tienden a cometer los aprendices del inglés como lengua extranjera. Esta información le permite al profesor de inglés como segunda lengua determinar cuáles estructuras y cuáles aspectos de ellas requieren atención especial. Finalmente, libros como el antes mencionado proveen información acerca de no solamente la forma lingüística sino que también sobre aspectos semánticos y del discurso que se manifiestan en cada forma gramatical.

Purpura (2004, p. 89) argumenta que es de vital importancia determinar qué es lo que una persona debe saber en términos de gramática para que pueda usarla al hablar o escribir

en la vida cotidiana. Añade que se debe hacer una clara distinción entre dos conceptos claves: por un lado, el **conocimiento** gramatical, es decir, el grupo de representaciones mentales que tenemos a nuestra disposición en la memoria a largo plazo y, por otro, la **habilidad** gramatical. Esta última incluye no solo la información que se tiene en la memoria a largo plazo sino también la capacidad para utilizarla. En otras palabras, la habilidad gramatical incluye el conocimiento de la gramática y la competencia estratégica. Esta última es la capacidad de poner en práctica el conocimiento gramatical con precisión y con sentido (p. 86).

De forma similar, Wong y VanPatten (2003) describen estos dos aspectos del aprendizaje de una lengua con propósitos comunicativos. El primero es la creación de un sistema lingüístico implícito subyacente el cual incluye la fonología, la sintaxis, el léxico, la pragmática, la sociolingüística, y el discurso. Este es un sistema que ha sido internalizado. El segundo aspecto es el desarrollo de una destreza productiva la cual tiene que ver con la adquisición de la precisión y la fluidez. De las afirmaciones anteriores se puede deducir que para determinar la habilidad gramatical de un grupo de aprendices, un investigador debe analizar el uso que estos aprendices hagan de esa gramática en tareas que requieran producción y no solamente reconocimiento de una regla dada. Esto lleva necesariamente al estudio de los errores que cometen los aprendices durante los actos comunicativos, ya que son estos errores los que nos muestran la brecha que pueda existir entre el sistema internalizado y el uso que se haga de este sistema.

Byrd y Reid (1998, p. 128) afirman que el análisis sistemático de los errores le brinda al profesor información muy valiosa. Este análisis le permite hacer muchas cosas tales como discutir con los aprendices los errores más graves, sugerir recursos como libros de referencia o de ejercicios disponibles en las bibliotecas o en la Internet, guiar al estudiante en el proceso de revisión de lo que ha escrito o de monitoreo de lo que dice, planear actividades para el desarrollo de la lengua que propicien la adquisición de estructuras gramaticales importantes y determinar qué cambios son necesarios en los cursos que imparte.

Con el objetivo de disipar algunos mitos sobre la naturaleza de los errores y su rol en la adquisición de una lengua extranjera, Bolitho y Tomlinson (1998, p. 113) resumen sus creencias sobre el tema de la siguiente manera:

1. Los buenos aprendices de una lengua extranjera tratan de usarla lo más frecuentemente posible por lo que cometen muchos errores. Por el contrario, los malos aprendices muchas veces evitan usar la lengua, y cuando se ven forzados a

hacerlo, se limitan a producir oraciones cortas y simples por lo que tienden a cometer menos errores.

2. Existen dos explicaciones para la producción incorrecta de la lengua. En primer lugar, puede tratarse de un "error" el cual es el resultado de haber internalizado algún aspecto de la lengua incorrectamente. La otra posibilidad es que se trate de una "falta" que se comete cuando el aprendiz es víctima de factores tales como el cansancio, la tensión, o la presión del tiempo.
3. La adquisición no resulta automáticamente de la memorización de una regla. La adquisición requiere que el aprendiz entre en contacto con muchos ejemplos de la aplicación de esta regla en situaciones auténticas de comunicación.
4. Es importante que el profesor no haga que los estudiantes se sientan culpables o incómodos cuando cometen un error. Lo que sí los ayuda es, en primer lugar, la paciencia y el estímulo del profesor y, en segundo lugar, el contacto con la lengua en situaciones significativas.
5. Muchos errores que cometen los estudiantes son de "desarrollo," es decir, son similares a aquellos que cometen los niños mientras aprenden su lengua materna. Estos errores no se superan con la corrección del profesor. Por el contrario, los errores que son producto de la interferencia de la lengua materna sí pueden superarse de esta forma.
6. Algunos investigadores creen que son muy pocos los errores gramaticales que resultan de la interferencia de la lengua materna.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) ha dado un gran aporte a nuestro entendimiento de lo que es la gramática y del por qué se enseña. Ella insiste que "en vez de promover la asociación que los estudiantes hacen entre el fracaso gramatical y las repercusiones punitivas (la tinta roja), los profesores debemos tratar de promover una asociación positiva entre la gramática y el empoderamiento" (traducción de la autora, p. 142). La gramática le da al aprendiz la libertad de expresarse.

3. Metodología

3.1 Objetivos

1. Determinar cuáles son las formas gramaticales de más difícil adquisición así como aquellas que pueden ser utilizadas con mayor facilidad al escribir o al hablar según la opinión de estudiantes hispanohablantes intermedios en un curso de gramática inglesa.

2. Determinar cuáles son los principales problemas gramaticales observados por profesores de segundo año en la producción oral y escrita de sus estudiantes.
3. Determinar el grado de satisfacción respecto al curso y la utilidad del texto empleado según el criterio de los estudiantes hispanohablantes intermedios de gramática inglesa.
4. Identificar posibles temas de interés para futuras investigaciones.

3. 2 Participantes

Se establecieron dos grupos de participantes. El primero está constituido por 21 de los 27 estudiantes matriculados en un curso de gramática del inglés. El día que se administró el cuestionario, 6 de los estudiantes estuvieron ausentes. Para estos estudiantes el español es su lengua materna y todos están empadronados en las carreras de Bachillerato en Inglés o en la Enseñanza del Inglés. Sus edades oscilan entre los 18 y 20 años con la excepción de un estudiante mayor de 40 años. De acuerdo con la descripción que aparece en el programa del curso, estos estudiantes son de nivel intermedio. Esta selección fue una muestra de conveniencia ya que la investigadora era la profesora del curso. Sin embargo, se consideró que la selección era apropiada por ser éste un estudio piloto cuyo objetivo es determinar tendencias de comportamiento en la adquisición de las estructuras gramaticales así como posibles temas de interés para futuras investigaciones.

El segundo grupo de participantes está conformado por tres profesores de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas, un hombre y dos mujeres, todos con una Maestría en la Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera y con amplia experiencia en la enseñanza de cursos de segundo año. Al momento de la recolección de los datos, los tres estaban dando el curso LM-1230 Comunicación Oral I, el cual es correquisito del curso de gramática de donde se recogieron los datos de los estudiantes.

3. 3 El curso

Se seleccionó un grupo de LM-1234 Gramática Inglesa I que ofrece la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad de Costa Rica. De acuerdo con el Plan de Estudios, éste corresponde al primer semestre del segundo año de los Bachilleratos en Inglés y en la Enseñanza del Inglés. Es el primer curso en el plan donde se estudia la gramática del inglés en forma exclusiva e intensiva. Durante el año anterior, los estudiantes ya habían aprendido las bases de la gramática en dos cursos semestrales integrados. En ellos se le da similar importancia a la comprensión oral, la comunicación oral, la lectura, la escritura y la

gramática. En el segundo año, se les ofrece este curso de gramática donde el foco de atención son las formas gramaticales. Se utiliza el libro de texto *Basic English Syntax* (Flores, Alfaro y Flores, 2002). De acuerdo con los autores, el libro les proporciona a los estudiantes explicaciones detalladas de los fundamentos de la sintaxis que son indispensables para el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés y también puede ser utilizado como libro de referencia.

3. 4 Instrumentos

Debido a que el presente es un estudio exploratorio y se pretendía ser lo más eficiente posible en términos de tiempo, esfuerzo y recursos financieros, se diseñaron dos instrumentos tipo cuestionario siguiendo las recomendaciones de Dörnyei (2003). El primero era un cuestionario administrado a los estudiantes el cual contenía dos partes. La primera consistía de un listado de los temas cubiertos durante el semestre el cual estaba seguido de una serie de preguntas de escogencia. Con ellas se deseaba averiguar qué pensaban los estudiantes acerca de la cantidad de tiempo dedicado a cada tema, el número de ejercicios por cada tema que el libro de texto ofrecía, si habían aprendido algo nuevo sobre los temas tratados, y si los estudiantes consideraban que podían utilizar el conocimiento adquirido tanto a la hora de escribir en inglés como al hablar. La segunda parte era de respuesta abierta. Los estudiantes podían hacer comentarios, aclaraciones o adiciones a sus respuestas anteriores. Este cuestionario se llenó en forma anónima el último día de clases y se les recordó a los participantes que no se trataba de una evaluación del trabajo del profesor o de ellos mismos sino de conocer sus apreciaciones sobre el curso en general y del libro de texto en particular. En las instrucciones escritas se les instó a considerar sus respuestas cuidadosamente ya que esa información podía ser de gran utilidad para la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas la cual se encuentra en período de auto evaluación.

El segundo instrumento fue diseñado para los profesores y también incluía un listado de los temas cubiertos en el curso. A diferencia del anterior, en éste todos los patrones básicos correspondientes a los temas del 8 al 12 en el primer cuestionario fueron agrupados en una sola categoría. Esto se debió a que este cuestionario fue distribuido a mediados de semestre, antes que el de los estudiantes. Al notar que algunos profesores expresaron que había diferencias de importancia y de dificultad entre los patrones, se decidió modificar el instrumento diseñado para los estudiantes el cual aún no había sido administrado. Es importante recalcar que fue posible entrevistar a los profesores antes de terminar el semestre ya que ellos habían dictado el curso de comunicación oral en al menos cinco ocasiones cada

uno, y además, estaban familiarizados con los contenidos del curso de gramática. Las respuestas que ellos dieron en la entrevista se basaron no solamente en sus experiencias durante el semestre cuando se hizo la investigación, sino que también en las experiencias acumuladas a través de los años. Es más, las dos mujeres del grupo habían impartido también el curso de gramática, y una de ellas es especialista en gramática pedagógica. Todo lo anterior faculta al grupo a emitir juicios sobre el desempeño de los estudiantes de segundo año.

A los docentes se les preguntó sobre la relevancia de los temas para los estudiantes de segundo año. Se les solicitó que los calificaran de "absolutamente necesarios", "importantes" o "no importantes" para completar las tareas que ellos asignan. La segunda parte era de respuesta abierta y se les hicieron preguntas sobre la enseñanza de la gramática en general: la enseñanza de reglas prescriptivas a estudiantes de segundo año, los mayores problemas que habían observado en la producción oral y escrita de los estudiantes, técnicas para la superación de esos problemas, y sugerencias para el mejoramiento de los cursos de gramática. En este estudio se incluye únicamente aquella información directamente relacionada con las preguntas de investigación propuestas.

4. Resultados y Discusión

4.1 Cuestionario para los estudiantes

El Cuadro 1 resume las respuestas brindadas por los estudiantes al aplicárseles el instrumento correspondiente. La primera columna contiene los temas cubiertos en el curso, enumerados del 1 al 12. La segunda columna muestra la distribución, tanto absoluta como relativa, de las opiniones de los estudiantes respecto al tiempo dedicado a cada tema desarrollado en el curso. Para esto se establecieron tres niveles: poco, suficiente y demasiado. La tercera columna muestra, igualmente, la distribución absoluta y relativa de las opiniones del grupo respecto a si la cantidad de ejercicios que ofrece el libro de texto sobre los temas estudiados es poca suficiente o demasiada. La cuarta columna contiene las respuestas de los estudiantes a la pregunta de si habían aprendido puntos gramaticales nuevos durante el curso. Finalmente, la quinta y la sexta columnas resumen sus opiniones sobre su capacidad para emplear lo aprendido al escribir y al hablar inglés.

Cuadro 1: Resumen de las respuestas dadas por los estudiantes.

Temas	Tiempo dedicado al tema			Cantidad de ejercicios en el libro			Aprendí algo nuevo		Puedo usar este conocimiento cuando escribo.		Puedo usar este conocimiento cuando hablo.	
	Poco	Suficiente	Demasiado	Poco	Suficiente	Demasiado	Sí	No	Sí	No	Sí	No
1. Sustantivos	1 4.76%	15 71.42%	5 23.80%	6 28.57%	14 66.66%	1 4.76%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	21 100%	0 0%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%
2. Concordancia	5 23.80%	12 57.14%	4 19.04%	5 23.80%	13 61.90%	3 14.28%	21 100%	0 0%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	16 76.19%	5 23.80%
3. Pronombres	3 14.28%	15 71.42%	3 14.28%	7 33.33%	10 47.61%	4 19.04%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	21 100%	0 0%	17 80.95%	4 19.04%
4. Determinantes	0 0%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%	7 33.33%	12 57.14%	2 9.52%	21 100%	0 0%	21 100%	0 0%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%
5. Modificadores del sustantivo (pre)	5 23.80%	16 76.19%	0 0%	9 42.85%	8 38.09%	4 19.04%	21 100%	0 0%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%
6. Modificadores del sustantivo (post)	7 33.33%	11 52.38%	3 14.28%	12 57.14%	6 28.57%	3 14.28%	21 100%	0 0%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%
7. Expresiones Adverbiales	5 23.80%	12 57.14%	4 19.04%	10 47.61%	11 52.38%	0 0%	21 100%	0 0%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%	16 76.19%	5 23.80%
8. Patrón Básico 1	5 23.80%	15 76.19%	1 4.76%	11 52.38%	10 47.61%	0 0%	17 80.95%	4 19.04%	21 100%	0 0%	17 80.95%	4 19.04%
9. Patrón Básico 2	5 23.80%	15 76.19%	1 4.76%	11 52.38%	10 47.61%	0 0%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%	21 100%	0 0%	17 80.95%	4 19.04%
10. Patrón Básico 3	5 23.80%	15 71.42%	1 4.76%	12 57.14%	9 42.85%	0 0%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	17 80.95%	4 19.04%
11. Patrón Básico 4	9 42.85%	11 52.38%	1 4.76%	12 57.14%	9 42.85%	0 0%	21 100%	0 0%	21 100%	0 0%	18 85.71%	3 14.28%
12. Patrón Básico 5	10 47.61%	10 47.61%	1 4.76%	13 61.90%	8 38.09%	0 0%	21 100%	0 0%	20 95.23%	1 4.76%	15 71.42%	6 28.57%

Como se puede observar en la segunda columna del Cuadro 1, para 7 de los temas, más del 70% de los estudiantes opinaron que se había dedicado suficiente tiempo. No obstante, al hacer un análisis más detallado se ve que el 23.80% de los estudiantes consideró que no hubo suficiente tiempo para 6 de los temas, 33.33% tuvo esta opinión para 1 de los temas, el 42.85% para 1 tema y 47.61% para otro tema. En otras palabras, de los 12 grandes temas cubiertos en el curso, entre el 23.80% y el 47.61% de los estudiantes consideró que necesitaban disponer de mayor tiempo para poder adquirir ese conocimiento gramatical. Es importante destacar que los dos temas donde más estudiantes, 9 y 10 respectivamente, indicaron falta de tiempo fueron los dos últimos que se cubrieron en el semestre. También es necesario resaltar que para uno de los temas, el 23.80% de los estudiantes consideró que se había dedicado demasiado tiempo. De la información anterior se desprende, en primer lugar, la conveniencia de que la Sección de Gramática reconsidere la relación entre los temas gramaticales y el tiempo asignado a cada uno de ellos, y en segundo lugar, la necesidad de mayor investigación.

La tercera columna recoge información sobre la cantidad de ejercicios que ofrece el libro de texto sobre cada uno de los grandes temas. Aquí la disconformidad es un poco mayor. Para cada uno de los 12 temas, al menos el 23.80% consideró que no eran suficientes. Cabe destacar que para la mitad de los temas más el 50% sintió la necesidad de más práctica. No obstante, estas respuestas deben ser analizadas a la luz de la información que ofrece el Cuadro 2, donde se reporta el número de ejercicios que el libro de texto ofrece para cada uno de los 12 temas cubiertos en el curso.

Cuadro 2: Cantidad de ejercicios por cada tema.

Tema	Ejercicios en texto	Ejercicios de repaso*
1	0	0
2	1	0
3	8	0
4	20	0
5	10	7
6	2	7
7	19	3
8	1	5
9	1	5
10	1	5
11	2	5
12	2	5

*Repasan varios temas.

El cuadro 2 muestra que los temas 3, 4, 5 y 7 son practicados con 8, 20, 10 y 19 ejercicios respectivamente mientras que para los 8 temas restantes se ofrecen 1 o 2 ejercicios, y en el caso del tema 1, ninguno específico. Como resultado, los estudiantes se quejan de que para los temas del 6 al 12 no se les ofreció suficiente práctica. Estos resultados son comprensibles. Sin embargo, llama la atención que al menos 1 estudiante afirmara que el libro de texto tenía demasiados ejercicios para el tema 1 cuando en realidad no había ninguno. Igualmente llama la atención que 14 estudiantes (67%) señalaran que había suficientes ejercicios. Lo esperado es que todos dijeran que había pocos. Esto hace pensar sobre la posibilidad de que, a la hora de llenar el cuestionario, algunos estudiantes hayan confundido los ejercicios incluidos en el libro de texto con las prácticas adicionales que utilizó la profesora. Esto debe considerarse a la hora de volver a utilizar el instrumento. Sin lugar a duda, las instrucciones deben ser modificadas para evitar confusiones.

La información de la cuarta columna, donde se pregunta a los estudiantes si aprendieron algo nuevo en el curso, es de gran relevancia por dos razones. En primer lugar, la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas se encuentra en un período de auto evaluación y necesita toda la retroalimentación posible de parte de estudiantes y profesores sobre la calidad de los cursos y el grado de satisfacción de los usuarios. En segundo lugar, desde hace algún tiempo, se empezaron a efectuar cambios en los programas de los cursos LM-1001 y LM-1002 de primer año de la carrera y muchos profesores han expresado su preocupación por un posible traslape de temas gramaticales entre el primer y el segundo año.

Las respuestas de los estudiantes reflejan que, en su opinión, sí han aprendido algo nuevo en cada tema. En 10 de los temas entre el 95.23% y el 100% de los estudiantes manifiestan que han adquirido nuevos conocimientos. Los dos temas restantes corresponden a dos patrones gramaticales de poca complejidad que se estudian desde primer año, sin embargo entre el 80 y el 85% de los estudiantes contestaron que sí habían aprendido, lo que estaría indicando que el reciclaje de esos temas es necesario ya que ha sido de utilidad para la gran mayoría.

Las dos últimas columnas del Cuadro 1 se relacionan con el primer objetivo: la capacidad que los estudiantes creen tener para utilizar el conocimiento gramatical adquirido al escribir y al hablar. Los resultados son algo inesperados ya que, en cuanto a la habilidad para escribir, el 100% de los estudiantes afirman que pueden utilizar 6 de los temas y el 95.23% 5 de ellos. Finalmente, el 85.71% afirma que puede emplear el tema restante. En resumen, la gran mayoría de los estudiantes perciben no tener problemas para producir los

conocimientos adquiridos cuando escriben en inglés. Por otro lado, el concepto que tienen los estudiantes de su capacidad para hablar usando correctamente las formas gramaticales estudiadas es un poco más bajo. Para ninguno de los temas el 100% de los estudiantes consideró que podía utilizarlo oralmente y solamente para uno de ellos el 95.23% afirmó poder hacerlo. El 85.71% lo hizo para 4 temas, el 80.95% para otros 4 temas, el 76.19% para 2 temas y el 71.42% para el tema restante. Estos resultados indican que para este grupo de estudiantes es más difícil incorporar material lingüístico nuevo al hablar que al escribir. No obstante, la gran mayoría cree no tener dificultades en ambos casos.

Los comentarios que escribieron los estudiantes en la última sección del instrumento se resumen a continuación. A pesar de que se les pidió concentrarse en la evaluación del curso y del libro de texto, ellos expresaron opiniones de diversa índole. Además, como se puede observar, el número de comentarios es mayor que el número de participantes ya que algunos incluyeron varias ideas.

- Tres personas (14.28%) no hicieron ningún comentario.
- Una persona (4.76%) dijo que le gustó el curso, pero no hizo mención del libro de texto empleado.
- Una persona (4.76%) afirmó que le gustó el libro y el curso y que no cambiaría nada.
- Tres personas (14.28%) manifestaron que el libro les parece bien y añadieron que no tuvieron ningún problema con él.
- Tres personas (14.28%) indicaron que a pesar de que les gustó mucho el curso, lamentaban que no se hubiera contado con suficiente tiempo para desarrollar todos los temas establecidos en el programa.
- Diez estudiantes (47.61%) mencionaron que al libro le hacía falta más ejemplos y ejercicios que los ayudaran a comprender los conceptos y a practicar los usos. Algunos indicaron que mientras algunos temas sí incluían suficientes ejercicios, otros tenían muy pocos.
- Cinco estudiantes (23.80%) afirmaron que no hubieran aprovechado o entendido tan bien el libro de no ser por las explicaciones de la profesora y los materiales de apoyo que les facilitó.
- Dos estudiantes (9.52%) dijeron que casi todos los ejercicios del libro eran de completar y que necesitan "más maneras de aplicar vocabulario y normas gramaticales, prácticas diferentes o más especializadas".
- Dos personas (9.52%) opinan que el libro es muy monótono. Una de ellas explica que le gustaría que los temas tratados fueran de actualidad.

- Un estudiante (4.76%), el único que contestó esta sección en inglés, comentó que el libro no siempre mostraba la diferencia entre la sintaxis y la semántica pero que, sin embargo, era muy interesante y exigente.
- Seis estudiantes (28.57%) opinaron que aprendieron mucho en el curso y que lo que aprendieron les había sido y les iba a ser de gran utilidad para hablar y escribir correctamente.

Todos estos comentarios refuerzan lo expresado en las secciones anteriores. En primer lugar, en general, a los estudiantes les gustó el curso y el libro de texto, pero hubiera deseado tener más tiempo para cada tema y mayor cantidad y variedad de prácticas. A pesar de no poseer una formación pedagógica, los estudiantes intuyen que una de las claves del éxito en la adquisición de una lengua extranjera es maximizar la cantidad de tiempo invertido en la utilización del material lingüístico, o sea, en la práctica de la lengua en clase. Nunan (2005) afirma que *"en vez de gastar una gran cantidad de tiempo en hablar acerca de la lengua, el profesor debe diseñar oportunidades de práctica en las cuales los aprendices realmente utilicen la lengua"* (p. 21 traducción de la autora). Más tarde señala que *"la práctica distribuida en el tiempo y el reciclaje son importantes ya que los aprendices no alcanzarán el dominio de un tema con una sola exposición a él"* (p. 22 traducción de la autora). Por ejemplo, si se desea enseñar los adverbios de modo, se debe tener cuidado que los aprendices comprendan su forma gramatical y su significado, por ejemplo, que los adverbios de modo se pueden formar a partir de un adjetivo agregando el sufijo "ly", que pueden aparecer en varias posiciones en la oración pero que, cuando hay un complemento directo, el adverbio de modo debe ir después de éste y que este tipo de adverbio contesta la pregunta "¿Cómo?". Igualmente, deben familiarizarse con las reglas ortográficas que se aplican cuando el adjetivo correspondiente termina en "y" "ic" o "le". Pero esto no es suficiente. Además, deben aprender a usarlos correctamente. Cuando se quiere decir algo acerca de una persona, un lugar o una cosa se emplea un adjetivo, pero cuando se desea decir algo acerca de una acción, entonces se usa un adverbio.

Si en una clase de gramática solamente hay tiempo para identificar los adverbios de modo en una lista de oraciones o en un párrafo, esta experiencia tan limitada no es suficiente para que los aprendices adquieran esta parte del idioma. Los ejercicios que se deben emplear deben reflejar no sólo la forma gramatical de los adverbios sino también su significado y su uso en diversos tipos de texto. Para este tema, por ejemplo, Badalamenti y Henner-Stanchina (1997, pp. 179-86) utilizan primeramente un ejercicio para practicar la forma. En él se presenta a los aprendices una serie de aseveraciones y se les pregunta con

qué tono creen ellos que habló la persona. Para contestar, deben utilizar un adverbio de modo. Más tarde en la unidad, para practicar el uso, las autoras emplean un ejercicio donde los aprendices leen una serie de oraciones y deben dar 3 razones por las que cada oración es verdadera. Para poder hacerlo, se ven forzados a utilizar nuevamente adverbios de modo con los cuales explican sus razones. Finalmente, para practicar la forma, el significado y el uso, se les presenta una actividad grupal en la que deben pensar si ellos son buenos estudiantes, padres o madres de familia, amigos, o trabajadores. Deben escoger una de las situaciones antes mencionadas y contarle a sus compañeros cómo es que ellos estudian, atienden a sus hijos o se relacionan con sus amigos. Una vez más, se ven en la necesidad de utilizar los adverbios de modo pero en una situación comunicativa donde se demuestra su manejo de la forma, el significado y el uso.

En segundo lugar, los estudiantes creen que en este curso tuvieron la oportunidad de adquirir conocimientos nuevos. Podemos concluir entonces que no hay traslape con los temas que se discuten en primer año. Además, afirmaron que ellos tenían la habilidad de aplicar esos conocimientos cuando hablan y cuando escriben en la lengua extranjera. De esta última aseveración se desprende la necesidad de investigar más profundamente qué entienden los estudiantes por utilizar alguna forma gramatical. Como se verá luego, los profesores de estos estudiantes no se sienten tan optimistas.

4. 2 Cuestionario para los profesores

El Cuadro 3 presenta la valoración que hicieron los profesores, identificados como A, B y C, de los temas tratados en el curso. Los temas se identifican por números del 1 al 8 y las valoraciones posibles son "muy importante", "importante" y "sin importancia". Además, se resumen los comentarios que hicieron los profesores sobre los problemas más frecuentes que habían notado en la producción de sus estudiantes cuando utilizaban las formas gramaticales discutidas.

Cuadro No. 3: Opinión de los profesores sobre la importancia para los estudiantes de segundo año de los temas enseñados.

Tema	Profesor A		Profesor B		Profesor C	
	V	Comentario	V	Comentario	V	Comentario
1	M I	Uso muy frecuente.	I	Muchos no comprenden el concepto de sustantivo no contable.	MI	Muchos problemas con el uso de sustantivos no contables cuando hablaban.
2	M I	Deben aprender las reglas que rigen la concordancia. Cometen muchos errores en esta área.	MI	Los problemas de concordancia son los más comunes a este nivel.	MI	No usan la concordancia correctamente cuando hablan en forma espontánea.
3	M I	Uso muy frecuente.	SI	Deben aprender a usarlos en el discurso.	MI	
4	M I	Uso muy frecuente.	SI	Deben aprender a usarlos en el discurso.	I	
5	M I	Uso muy frecuente.	I		I	
6	M I	Uso muy frecuente.	I		MI	Tienen problemas con el uso de las subordinadas adjetivas.
7	M I	Necesitan aprender el significado, el orden y la posición en la oración.	I		I	
8	I	Necesitan aprender a usar los patrones, no simplemente a identificarlos. Se puede hablar correctamente sin saber qué patrón se está usando. Deben aprender las formas verbales y sus significados.	SI	No es útil si se enseña únicamente a identificar los patrones. Es complicado y esta información no sirve para comunicarse. Deben practicar mucho su uso, de preferencia no en oraciones aisladas.	I	Los estudiantes tienen serios problemas con la formación de oraciones interrogativas, con los tiempos verbales y con las preguntas indirectas. Eso es más importante que saber identificar los patrones básicos.

Valoraciones (V): MI = muy importante I = importante SI = sin importancia

Los resultados que se presentan en el Cuadro 3 muestran gran acuerdo entre los profesores en relación con cada tema consultado. En síntesis, a pesar de algunas diferencias en la escogencia del calificador, los profesores consideran que todos los temas, a excepción del último, son de gran importancia para el desarrollo lingüístico de los aprendices

de segundo año. Sin embargo, es preciso aclarar esto último. Los comentarios posteriores de los profesores indican que aquellos temas que marcaron como poco o menos importantes en realidad sí lo consideran necesarios. Lo que en realidad los preocupa es que los temas señalados se han enseñando bajo un enfoque que no es el más apropiado para estudiantes de ese nivel. En otras palabras, los profesores creen que algunos temas se han desarrollado en forma incompleta ya que tradicionalmente los ejercicios y las evaluaciones se han diseñado en el ámbito del reconocimiento únicamente y ha habido poca producción. Ellis (2006: 88-9) cree que la escogencia de los contenidos de un curso de gramática se puede abordar desde varias perspectivas. En primer lugar, se pueden enseñar absolutamente todos los puntos gramaticales lo cual conlleva un proceso demasiado largo que frecuentemente resulta innecesario. En segundo lugar, se pueden enseñar aquellas formas que son diferentes de las de la lengua materna. Este sistema fue el que se adoptó en muchos cursos de gramática estructuralista cuando el análisis contrastivo estaba en boga. Otra alternativa es privilegiar aquellas formas que son lingüísticamente marcadas, es decir, aquellas que poseen características lingüísticas que son infrecuentes, poco naturales o, de alguna forma, se apartan de la norma. Obviamente, este tipo de escogencia no es la preocupación del grupo de profesores encuestados. Ellos no están en posición de seleccionar qué es lo que van a enseñar ya que los contenidos han sido determinados por el programa e indirectamente por el libro de texto. Además, a través de los años, los contenidos de los cursos de gramática se han mantenido con muy poco cambio, posiblemente porque es parte de la naturaleza humana sentirse seguro haciendo lo que siempre se ha hecho. Sin embargo, los profesores que participaron en este estudio creen que la verdadera evidencia de la adquisición de la gramática se refleja no en el reconocimiento de un patrón gramatical que pueda hacer un aprendiz sino en su habilidad para utilizarlo correcta y apropiadamente en el discurso oral y escrito.

Cuando se les preguntó a los profesores sobre las áreas de dificultad que habían observado en el desempeño de sus estudiantes de segundo año, hicieron tres comentarios que se repiten. En primer lugar, los profesores opinan que "muchos" o "la mayoría" de los aprendices tienen serios problemas para distinguir los sustantivos contables de los no contables. Esto obviamente es importante ya que incide en el uso de los artículos y en la concordancia (Tema 1). Sorprendentemente, los estudiantes afirmaron que podían utilizar los sustantivos correctamente al escribir y al hablar. Una segunda área que es problemática según los profesores participantes es la concordancia entre el sujeto y el verbo (Tema 2). A pesar de que los estudiantes sí aceptaron mayores limitaciones en esta área, los profesores

señalan que el problema es demasiado frecuente y difícil de auto corregir. Cualquier profesor que haya dado clases de inglés estaría de acuerdo. Además, en la literatura especializada abundan las referencias que atestiguan el fenómeno de la adquisición tardía del morfema "-s" el cual especifica la tercera persona singular en el tiempo presente. (Ver, por ejemplo, el trabajo pionero de Dulay y Burt 1973; 1974)

El tercer punto que mencionan los profesores es que la eventual utilidad de cualquier tema gramatical que se enseñe está directamente relacionada con la forma en que este tema sea trabajado en clase y evaluado. Esta es una reformulación del problema mencionado en la primera pregunta. Si el profesor se limita a describir la forma gramatical, la adquisición no se lleva a cabo. Esto es un ejemplo de lo que Larsen-Freeman (2003) llama el conocimiento inerte. Ella explica que "lo que los estudiantes son capaces de hacer en la parte *formal* de una clase con frecuencia no se traduce en su *uso* en otras actividades más comunicativas de esa clase. La transferencia es aun menos probable en situaciones no estructuradas que se presentan una vez que ellos abandonan el aula. Aun cuando los estudiantes sepan una regla, su uso puede resultar incorrecto, poco fluido, o ambos" (p. 7 traducción de la autora, énfasis agregado). Este tipo de acotación fue más frecuente cuando los profesores describieron los problemas observados con el uso de los patrones básicos. Ellos han notado que los estudiantes se ven forzados a memorizar las listas de los verbos que ocurren en cada patrón, pero no cuentan con el tiempo necesario para discutir, por ejemplo, los significados de dichos verbos y practicar su uso. El meollo del asunto es que la memorización de listas de palabras para un examen de ninguna manera garantiza la habilidad de utilizar esos verbos correcta y apropiadamente. Aquí es importante recordar que los estudiantes también comentaron que los patrones básicos son de gran utilidad pero que ellos no habían tenido suficiente tiempo para practicarlos.

5. Conclusiones

Los hallazgos de esta investigación exploratoria indican que los estudiantes del curso LM-1234 Gramática Inglesa I donde se llevó a cabo el estudio estaban satisfechos con el curso y que ellos consideraban que el libro de texto empleado les había sido de mucha utilidad. A pesar de que no podemos generalizar estos hallazgos a todos los grupos ni a todos los semestres, los resultados pueden ser agrupados alrededor de tres ideas principales de las cuales se desprende un posible grupo de acciones tendientes al mejoramiento de dicho curso. En primer lugar, pareciera que el número de lecciones dedicadas a algunos de los temas es insuficiente por lo que convendría reconsiderar la

distribución de temas y de tiempo. Vale la pena reflexionar sobre la siguiente disyuntiva: ¿Qué será más provechoso para los aprendices, "cubrir" un mayor número de contenidos o practicar con mayor profundidad un número más reducido? En la literatura hay suficiente evidencia que indica que el proceso de adquisición toma tiempo y se beneficia con el reciclaje. Existen entonces dos alternativas para optimizar la adquisición: se podría reducir el número de contenidos o, en su defecto, aumentar el número de lecciones de gramática por semana.

En segundo lugar, en los resultados se observa una situación que está estrechamente ligada al punto anterior. En algunas de las unidades, el libro de texto no ofrece suficiente cantidad y variedad de actividades de aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, es preciso que el profesor diseñe tareas complementarias del tipo recomendado por Hernández (2006). Ellis (2006, p.102) cree que "el enfoque llamado *focus-on-forms* (sistema de instrucción que se caracteriza tanto por la concentración en una sola forma gramatical a la vez como por el uso de actividades dirigidas a practicar dicha forma intensivamente) es válido siempre y cuando incluya oportunidades para que los aprendices practiquen mediante tareas comunicativas" (traducción de la autora). Por lo tanto, el profesor no debe limitarse al método tradicional de la enseñanza de la gramática. Este tiene varias limitaciones ya que analiza la lengua en el ámbito de la oración y no estudia la influencia que puedan tener unas oraciones sobre las otras en contexto. Estas dos características disminuyen las posibilidades de que dicha lengua sea considerada lo que es: un instrumento para la comunicación.

En tercer lugar, hay diferencias de percepción entre los profesores y los estudiantes en cuanto a la calidad del desempeño de estos últimos. Mientras que los aprendices sienten que pueden aplicar todo lo aprendido en el curso, los profesores argumentan que aun comenten muchos errores graves, especialmente en lo que se refiere al uso de los sustantivos no contables, la concordancia entre el sujeto y el verbo y la producción de los patrones básicos. Esta situación evidencia la necesidad de investigar sistemáticamente la producción oral y escrita de los estudiantes con el fin de determinar hasta qué punto ellos han adquirido y pueden emplear la gramática que se cubrió en el curso. La gran mayoría de los miembros de la comunidad docente probablemente están de acuerdo sobre dos asuntos claves: la adquisición no es el resultado automático de la memorización de una regla y el aprendiz no puede avanzar en su desarrollo si no es capaz de percibir las discrepancias entre su interlengua y la lengua producida por los hablantes nativos. Por consiguiente, si se desea dilucidar estas discrepancias y determinar el verdadero grado de competencia comunicativa, es inapropiado hacerlo mediante el uso de pruebas gramaticales tradicionales

donde se le pida al estudiante identificar una estructura. Mas bien se deberá analizar la producción oral y escrita de los aprendices en situaciones donde el objetivo sea comunicativo y no gramatical. Esta metodología tiene dos ventajas. En primer lugar, es un procedimiento más confiable y apropiado si se desea averiguar si los estudiantes no están concientes de sus limitaciones lingüísticas. Otra posible explicación es que ellos tal vez tengan una concepción inexacta de lo que significa *utilizar la gramática para la comunicación* y, por lo tanto, hagan una auto evaluación muy optimista o poco realista. En segundo lugar, este tipo de tareas también permite establecer si los profesores, en su afán de ver a los estudiantes progresar, en realidad hayan reportado un número desproporcionado de errores en la producción de los aprendices. Todas estas posibilidades requieren ser investigadas durante un proceso de auto evaluación.

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FOSSILIZATION AND ACQUISITION: A STUDY OF LEARNER LANGUAGE

Leyla Hasbún Hasbún

RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia los errores gramaticales más frecuentes de 159 estudiantes universitarios de inglés como lengua extranjera. Los datos se tomaron de 8 grupos de composiciones que fueron escritas en clase o de tarea, como parte de las actividades del curso. Estas fueron evaluadas y los errores se clasificaron de acuerdo con una taxonomía y se calculó su frecuencia. Los resultados muestran que a pesar de que la frecuencia de ciertos errores aumenta y disminuye en forma aparentemente impredecible, los errores relacionados con la omisión del sujeto, la concordancia entre sujeto y verbo y las formas negativas son más comunes en los principiantes. Además, se observó que los errores en el uso de los artículos, las preposiciones y las formas verbales fueron los más frecuentes en todos los niveles.

Palabras clave: análisis de errores, fosilización, adquisición de una lengua, artículos, preposiciones.

ABSTRACT

This cross-sectional study examined the most frequent grammar errors made by 159 EFL college students. The data consisted of eight sets of writing samples produced either in class or out of class as part of the regular course activities. They were evaluated, and the errors were classified according to an error taxonomy. Results indicate that although the frequency of certain errors increases and decreases unpredictably across levels, errors pertaining to subject omission, subject verb agreement and negative forms tend to be more common in beginners. Furthermore, errors related to the use of articles and prepositions and incorrect verb forms were the most frequent categories across levels.

Key words: error analysis, fossilization, language acquisition, articles, prepositions.

0. Introduction

The primary goal of this cross-sectional study is to determine the main areas of difficulty in the acquisition of English grammar by EFL college students who are native speakers of Spanish. For this purpose, an analysis of students' errors was selected since errors

Leyla Hasbún Hasbún. Profesora de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas. Programa de Posgrado en la Enseñanza del Inglés. Universidad de Costa Rica. San Pedro, San José, Costa Rica.

Correo electrónico: leyla.hasbun@ucr.ac.cr

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provide evidence of the processes involved in interlanguage development. However, it is important to bear in mind that, as Cook (1993: 22) points out, Error Analysis is “a methodology for dealing with data, rather than a theory of acquisition,” and therefore, it does not explain the sources of these errors nor does it provide insight into possible remediation.

A cross-sectional analysis of the errors college students make along the eight semesters that a bachelor’s degree program takes was deemed to be appropriate. The intention of this analysis is to shed light on the types of errors that occur only in the earlier stages of acquisition, those that take much longer to be corrected, and those that are persistent over time, and thus, tend to become fossilized in spite of pedagogic interventions. Hopefully, these data will enable grammar teachers to determine which language problems must be tackled in the classroom early on. Teachers need to know which grammar items need to be constantly recycled until awareness is raised and the learners are ready for them, which might reduce the risk of fossilization. In addition, an understanding of the results of this study will make teachers’ expectations about what students can acquire in one semester more realistic, and it will also guide teachers to provide grammar-teaching options that are more fruitful in terms of pedagogical success.

1. Review of the Literature

1.1. Error Analysis

In his discussion of interlanguage, Cook (1993: 17) argues that it is over-simplistic to see “L2 learning only as a relationship between the L1 and the L2. A learner at a particular point in time is in fact using a language system that is neither the L1 nor the L2. Describing it in terms of the L1 and the L2 misses the distinctive features of L2 learning: “a *third* language system is involved –that of the L2 learner– which also needs to be described.” He concedes that the identification of errors and the reconstruction of the learners’ intended meaning are subjective processes since errors are not objective facts. In fact, they are established by a process of analysis and deduction (1993: 21).

In his influential book *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, Corder (1981) discusses the importance of paying close attention to the learners’ interlanguage and to the role of interpretation in the study of learners’ errors. He says that we identify errors “by comparing what [the learner] actually said with what he ought to have said to express what he intended to express” (1981: 37). The problem is that quite often teachers are simply wrong about their interpretations or are not sure about them. In his opinion, the best alternative is to ask the learners themselves. This he calls an authoritative reconstruction; however, for obvious reasons, this is not always possible. The next best thing is for the teacher to attempt an interpretation of the intended meaning by paying careful attention to the form of the language and the context in which it was used. He calls this a plausible interpretation. He adds that, in such a situation, it is helpful to know both the learners and their L1

There have been many valid criticisms against Error Analysis. In a recent study, Hamid (2007) argues that plausible interpretations are the product of “intuition and experience, not empiricism,” (2007: 108) and consequently, “absolutely correct reconstruction of an idiosyncratic utterance is not always attainable because a complete thought or meaning is actually divided into different segments and the teacher may not be able to guess correctly

all those fragmented meanings” (2007: 114). In order to determine whether a group of native speakers (NS) and non-native English as a foreign language (NNS EFL) teachers were able to guess learner intention by using the context and the form of the language, Hamid compared their plausible interpretations to those of the student-writers. He found that only 36.7% of the reconstructions had the exact same meaning as the speaker’s intended utterance while the rest exhibited different degrees of correspondence.

Linguists have identified other potential shortcomings in Error Analysis. For example, Schachter (1974) first discussed the problem of avoidance. The author points out that language learners sometimes keep away from using certain features of the language that they perceive to be difficult. This avoidance, which in fact may be part of the learners’ systematic second language performance, leads to the absence of certain errors in their output. Consequently, teachers or researchers find themselves unable to obtain vital evidence that would show that a particular language item has not been acquired yet. For example, many students avoid using the subjunctive in *that-noun* clauses. Instead of saying “They advised *that she buy a new laptop*,” they tend to use the alternative structure “They advised her to buy a new laptop.” They also choose modal auxiliaries. For instance, instead of writing “It is important *that this homeless child receive love and respect*,” they are likely to write, “That homeless child should receive love and respect.” If learners studiously avoid the use of the subjunctive, then researchers are not able to assess whether or not they can use it correctly.

Another problem is the fact that while some errors are easily observable or overt, others are covert. Brown (2000: 220) explains that utterances containing covert errors are “grammatically well-formed at the sentence level but are not interpretable within the context of communication.” For example, “I am a secretary” is a perfectly well formed English sentence; however, this same sentence would be erroneous as a reply to the question “How do you do?” What this situation highlights is the fact that the accuracy of an utterance needs to be established by looking at the context. Not doing so would produce misleading information about the learners’ interlanguage in much the same way that avoidance, as Schachter (1974) points out, does. In the words of Hamid (2007: 115), “any error analysis which simply focuses on forms or isolated sentences without reference to the wider context may produce questionable findings.”

In the study of errors, it is also important to consider the concept of fossilization. In her analysis of over 30 years of research in the field, Han (2004: 23) concludes that there is no single definition of fossilization. However, she explains that most researchers seem to agree that it “involves premature cessation of development in defiance of optimal learning conditions” and that “fossilizable structures are persistent over time, against any environmental influences, including consistent natural exposure to the target language and pedagogic interventions.” She believes that fossilization occurs locally, that is, only in parts of the interlanguage system as opposed to globally, that is, to the entire interlanguage system. Moreover, it is an observable process rather than a product.

Han adds that, for adult learners, the major causes of fossilization are maturational constraints and the influence of the learner’s native language. However, the degree of lack of success may vary from learner to learner due to the fact that other variables intervene (2004: 125). Since many of the students in the BA in English program at the University of Costa Rica have come into contact with English at an age that is considered to be beyond a critical or sensitive period for language acquisition, it is necessary to take into account the

possible effects of maturational constraints in order to determine what can realistically be expected from their output. Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) summarize recent research on maturational constraints in second language acquisition and state that findings indicate that, on average, the ultimate attainment of learners who begin at a very early age is native-like. On the other hand, after a certain age, this ultimate attainment correlates negatively with higher age of onset of language acquisition, that is, the older the students are when they begin the process of second language acquisition, the more difficult it is for them to acquire native-like proficiency. The authors report that while some researchers attribute this difference to the effects of a biological critical period, others offer alternative interpretations such as various types of changes that happen at a certain age, such as those related to identity, motivation, cognition, input and formal training (2003: 567).

If in fact there are serious constraints as to what learners can acquire, it is important to find out whether formal instruction can foster or facilitate acquisition. Han (2004: 126) claims that the significant role of instruction in SLA is undisputed; however, she takes a balanced view of the situation and cites Bley-Vroman (1989: 47- 48) who asserts that “a whole industry is built on the consensus that instruction matters in foreign language learning,” but “not all instruction is expected to be equally successful, and some actually impede success.” DeKeyser (2003: 332) hypothesizes different degrees of usefulness of explicit teaching for different levels of difficulty as follows.

Table 1. Degrees of Usefulness of Explicit Teaching (DeKeyser 2003)

Rule Difficulty	Role of Instruction
Very easy	Not useful. Not necessary.
Easy	Speeds up explicit learning process.
Moderate	Stretches the ultimate attainment.
Difficult	Enhances later implicit acquisition by increasing chances of noticing.
Very difficult	Not useful. Not effective.

DeKeyser (2003: 331) explains that “rule difficulty is an individual issue that can be described as the ratio of the rule’s inherent linguistic complexity to the student’s ability to handle such a rule.” Consequently, the degree of difficulty of any given rule varies depending on the individual student’s aptitude or experience. In this respect, difficulty is subjective since what is easy for one student might be difficult for another. Furthermore, the objective difficulty of the rule itself—its complexity— may be compounded by other factors such as the novelty or abstractness of semantic categories, semantic redundancy, scope and reliability of the rule, or salience.

1.2. Studies in Error Gravity

Hughes and Lascaratou (1982) conducted a study of judgments of error gravity. They used three groups of judges: NNS EFL teachers, NS EFL teachers and educated NS not in the field of EFL. The student errors they selected for the study fell into eight very general categories: vocabulary, prepositions, pronouns, plurals, word order, agreement, verb forms

other than agreement, and spelling. The researchers found that, except for spelling, the NNS teachers were significantly stricter than their NS counterparts and the NS non-teachers when judging the students' errors. One of the explanations they offered for this mismatch is the fact that native speakers have a more comprehensive knowledge of the language, which enables them to readily accept a wider variety of possible structures. Hasbún (2001: 257) reported similar findings. Using a grammatical and pragmatic judgment task based on a series of messages written by university students, she found that NNS teachers were stricter in both accuracy and appropriateness more frequently than NS teachers.

Another important difference highlighted in Hughes and Lascaratou's research study is that the three groups of judges differed in the criteria they used to establish the seriousness of the errors. While the NNS teachers argued that the most serious errors were those that infringed grammar rules that they considered basic or that were taught early on, the NS non-teachers were more concerned about whether the error in question made the sentence difficult to understand or not. As might be expected, the NS teachers used both criteria but valued intelligibility the most. In addition, Hughes and Lascaratou found that some language samples that were perfectly grammatical such as "Neither of us feels quite happy" were judged ungrammatical by members of the three groups.

1.3. Studies in Error Frequency

To investigate the most common errors that a group of ESL students with different L1s made, Dalgish (1991) conducted a research project at a US university. He also wanted to determine whether, within a particular error type, there were differences in the kinds of errors produced by speakers of different languages. He employed an error typology that included grammar and lexis. He called them grammatical and semantic categories. Some of the categories he discussed were the article system, subject-verb agreement, vocabulary and idiom, confused part of speech, verb tense, verb forms, word order, prepositions, sentence boundary, and pronouns. Spelling errors were excluded. He found that the most common error type was vocabulary and idiom. Dalgish explains that "vocabulary errors are errors in idiom or word choice that are semantically based, and not easily determinable as grammatically based, like subject-verb agreement, verb tense" (1991: 41). The rest of the error types ranked as follows: agreement, prepositions, articles, and verb forms. He compared his results to those obtained by Stenstrom (1975) who worked with Swedish learners of English but who did not include the category vocabulary in her study. The ranking she obtained was different: verb tense, article, prepositions, agreement and pronouns (1975: 46).

Chodorow, Tetreault and Han (2007) claim that preposition errors account for a substantial proportion of all grammatical errors made by ESL students. They cite a study by Bitchener *et al.* (2005) who reported that 29% of all the errors made by 53 intermediate to advanced ESL students were preposition errors. Likewise, they mention a study by Murata and Ishara (2004) who found that 18% of all the errors detected in the analysis of the written production of a Japanese learner of English were related to preposition misuse.

1.4. Grammar and Lexis Errors

In a study of learner errors and the interrelationship between grammar and lexis, Salem (2007: 215) found that most of the mistakes made by a group of advanced learners of English as a foreign language could not be clearly categorized as either grammatical or lexical. To solve this problem, the author proposed modifying this binary distinction. Instead

of two, she used three categories, which she called lexical, word-dependent, and pure-grammar errors. She grounded her distinction on the concept of word-sensitivity, that is, “the extent of generalizability of a rule that has been infringed” (2007: 213).

The first category, lexical errors, includes incorrect word choice, word form or word collocation. She claims that these errors are word-sensitive to varying degrees. Lexical collocations, for example, are at the strong end of the word sensitivity continuum while word form seems to be closer to the pure-grammar end. The second category refers to situations where a word-intrinsic grammatical requirement is not applied, that is, the problem is caused by a violation of a rule that depends on the lexical items involved. For example, the verb “enjoy” belongs to a limited group of verbs that, when followed by another verb, the latter will be a gerund. This is an inherent characteristic of the verb “enjoy.” The final category includes errors produced by the misapplication of a widely applicable grammar or syntax rule. In a grammaticality judgment task, she found that NS and NNS teachers judged errors attributed to the violation of generalizable grammar rules more severely than word-sensitive errors, that is, those caused by disregarding a word-intrinsic requirement.

Salem claims that the understanding of these differences might contribute to the development of linguistic awareness. Based on this type of error analysis, teachers might want to provide different kinds of feedback, depending on the specific error. When faced with a case of a highly word-sensitive error, the teacher might simply tell the learners that this is how the word is used. However, if there is space for a grammatical generalization, then the teacher might respond in a different way and lead the learners to discover that generalization by themselves.

To summarize, Dalgish’s, and especially Salem’s study, show the importance of being aware of the fact that, quite frequently, it is difficult to categorize an error as either purely grammatical or purely lexical. Therefore, when deciding on an error taxonomy, researchers need to describe the general categories as fully as possible to avoid confusion.

Barcroft (2007: 317) believes that a great deal of syntactic information is contained at the word level, a premise that is consistent with the connectionist view of language learning as espoused by Rumelhart and McClelland (1986). In other words, the ability to use grammatical items correctly and fluently depends on repeated associations between individual words or word combinations that take place in multiple contexts. Obviously, to build close associations takes a long time because they are based on repeated input processing as well as on associative learning.

1.5. Research Questions

The primary goal of this cross-sectional study is to determine the main areas of difficulty in the acquisition of English grammar by EFL college students who are native speakers of Spanish and answer the following research questions:

- What types of grammar errors tend to occur only in the earlier stages of acquisition?
- What types of grammar errors tend to take much longer to be corrected?
- What types of grammar errors are persistent over time, and thus, tend to become fossilized in spite of pedagogic interventions?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The present study was conducted in the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica. Eight groups of students ranging from beginners to advanced learners of English were randomly selected. They were enrolled either in the B.A. in English or the B. A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Most were between the ages of 18 and 22. Table 2 briefly describes the courses that the students were taking at the time. These descriptions are based on those provided by the course syllabi. Table 2 also gives the number of students that were present on the days when the data were collected.

Table 2. General Information about the courses where the data were collected

Course	Description of the Course	Number of students
LM-1001 English I	This is an introductory English course where the four basic skills are taught in an integrated fashion. Similar amounts of time are devoted to listening, speaking, reading and writing. No specific prior knowledge is required although students have supposedly taken at least five years of English in high school.	18
LM-1002 English II	This course is closely related to the preceding one and is designed for high beginners. The macro-skills are integrated. The general approach is eclectic.	26
LM-1235 English Composition I	In this first composition class, the principles of writing are discussed. Students are expected to write coherent and well-structured paragraphs. Reading materials are meant to contribute to the students' syntactical and lexical development. Like in the other composition courses, writing is taught as a process rather than a product; therefore, students are encouraged to revise drafts systematically.	22
LM-1245 English Composition II	This course introduces the principles of rhetoric. Initially, students write single paragraphs; then they progress to three-paragraph essays. Finally, they move on to five paragraphs.	18
LM-1352 Rhetoric I	Students are introduced to different genres. They write academic essays and <i>résumés</i> . In addition, they practice answering essay questions and using the MLA style sheet.	13
LM-1362 Rhetoric II	This course is devoted to argumentative writing. Students discuss controversial issues orally and practice defending their opinions by providing clear facts. Then they write formal argumentative essays. They use the APA style sheet.	22
LM-1472 Rhetoric III	This course is devoted to the writing of formal essays about topics in literature in preparation for the literature courses in the program as well as for graduate courses in the field.	23
LM-1482 Rhetoric IV	This course is devoted to the writing of research papers in preparation for graduate school. During the semester, the students develop skills in designing and reporting research.	17
TOTAL		159

2.2. The Data

The data used in this cross-sectional study consisted of eight sets of writing samples produced by EFL students either in class or out of class as part of the regular course activities. These samples were written during, or shortly after, the eighth week of the sixteen-week term. Compositions rather than discrete-item exercises such as fill-in-the-blanks exercises were used because it is an accepted fact that a researcher needs enough context in order to make an accurate analysis of the students' errors. In the absence of context, it is very difficult to recover intended meaning. Unlike sentence-level exercises, compositions provide coherent texts. In addition, the topic of the composition as well as the instructions given by the professor further illuminates the intended meaning. Finally, the context also highlights possible covert errors. Table 3 describes the type of writing tasks.

Table 3. Types of Writing Samples

Course	Type of Writing Sample
LM-1001	This was an in-class composition. The students were given 3 possible written tasks to choose from. The topics were related to those in the textbook; therefore, they had been previously practiced.
LM-1002	This was an in-class composition. The students were given 4 possible written tasks to choose from. The topics were related to those in the textbook; therefore, they had been previously practiced.
LM-1235	This was an out-of-class composition. Students had read an article about the topic. Students were asked to write a short paragraph, and it was the first version of the paper.
LM-1245	This was an out-of-class composition about topics dealt with in the oral communication class. It was a long paragraph, and it was the first version of the paper.
LM-1352	The students read a journal article about teaching. In class, they wrote a reaction paper. This was the first version of the essay.
LM-1362	This was an argumentative paper about health care issues in Costa Rica. The students wrote the outline at home but wrote the essay in class.
LM-1472	This was the second draft of a paper in which the learners analyzed a poem written by William Wordsworth.
LM-1482	In class, students read a newspaper article about a current issue, and they wrote a reaction paper.

2.3. Procedure

In order to trace the students' progress through the eight semesters of the program, writing samples from learners in each of the semesters were collected. Since first-year students do not take a separate writing course, samples were taken in the two Basic English courses. In addition, because there were at least two sections for each of the courses, one of the sections was selected at random. Finally, to guarantee confidentiality, the compositions were given an identification number.

The next step was to classify the errors. The focus of the analysis was grammatical; therefore, errors concerning organization (i.e., thesis statement, conclusion or transition, etc.), content (i.e., whether the issue was addressed or whether irrelevant material was included, etc.), and mechanics (i.e., punctuation, capitalization, spelling, etc.) were disregarded. Furthermore, errors that were clearly the product of poor or incorrect word choice or word collocation were saved for future research. Table 4 shows the taxonomy of grammar errors employed in the present study. Examples are provided to illustrate each category. Errors under the category “unclear meaning” are those sentences or phrases for which the researcher could not find a plausible interpretation in spite of the fact that she is a native speaker of the students’ L1, was familiar with the topic dealt with in the assignment, and had a set of instructions for the assignment.

Table 4. Taxonomy of grammar errors

General Category	Sub-categories	Examples of Errors
Nouns	number or irregular plural	several <i>kind</i> / <i>a key data</i>
	mass / countable nouns	newer equipments
	subject omission	In private universities is faster
	double subject	It appears to be inevitable the signing of this treaty
	possessive noun	indicate that <i>Costa Rican's</i> lack freedom of speech
	Noun + Noun	juice of orange
Pronouns	wrong antecedent, reference	person . . . <i>they</i> ;body modifications help to express who <i>they</i> are; <i>theirs</i> objective is
Articles	missing, unnecessary, wrong	my life as \emptyset adult; the fountain of <i>the</i> youth; <i>an</i> special place
Demonstratives		<i>that</i> things
Quantifiers		<i>another</i> persons
Possessives		<i>people</i> . . . in <i>your</i> food
Verbs	subject verb agreement	most <i>people is</i> more than bored
	wrong verb form	have forgotten <i>of bringing</i>
	wrong verb tense	I <i>was working</i> there for a year
	modal auxiliary	I <i>will</i> like to thank you
	verb missing	they see their lives still the same (are)
	direct object missing	Young people like to spend their free time purchasing.
Adjectives and adverbs	wrong part of speech	a <i>good paid</i> job
	plural adjectives	call their teachers <i>obsoletes</i>
	comparative and superlative forms	the mortality rate would be <i>smallest</i>
Prepositions	missing preposition	to operate the patients
	wrong preposition	when they arrived <i>to</i> the place
	unnecessary preposition	they must attend <i>to</i> seminars to change

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General Category	Sub-categories	Examples of Errors
Subordination		and find someone is required a worker (someone who requires a worker)
Expletive		There is a wonderful place (it is)
Word order	general word order	More healthy is to do exercise. ...an idea of how beautiful is nature
	order of adjectives	contact color lenses
	order of adverbs	People could do there a lot of activities
Negative forms		Do diets no is bad. Your body haven't the same requirements.
Unclear meaning		In conclusion, this problems don't make that a very good lifestyle in my neighborhood change.
Conditional forms		If all people had money to afford an organ transplant, they <i>will</i> also find space and organs.

After the analysis, the grammar errors were systematically recorded with sufficient context, that is, sentence length or slightly longer when needed. The student's identification number was also recorded. For each of the groups of students, a master list was compiled.

3. Results

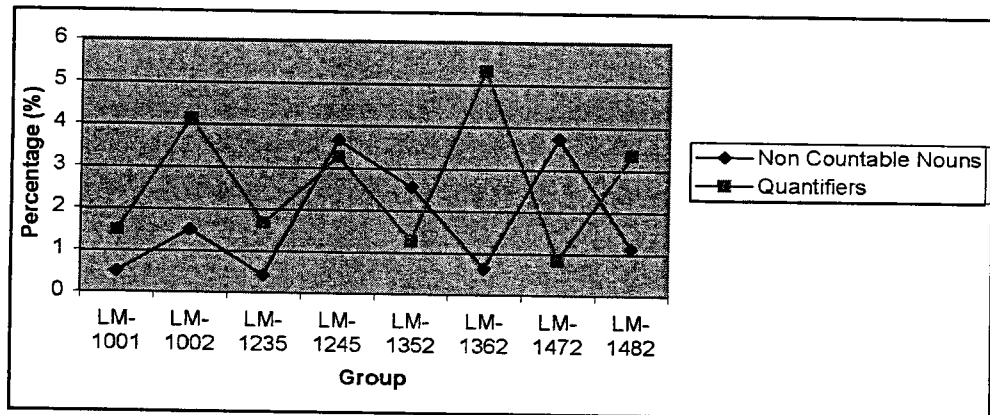
Table 5 presents all the grammar errors marked in the students' compositions. The first column lists the error categories, and the rest of the columns, two for each group, show the actual number of errors under each category (raw scores) and the percentage of the total number of errors per group that each raw score represents.

Table 5. Errors in compositions by group raw scores and percentage

Categories	LM-1001 n=18		LM-1002 n=26		LM-1235 n=22		LM-1245 n=18		LM-1352 n=13		LM-1362 n=22		LM-1472 n=23		LM-1482 n=17	
		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%
number/ irregular plural	3	1.46	9	3.37	18	7.43	12	4.87	7	4.43	17	5.31	7	2.89	3	3.33
count noncount	1	0.48	4	1.49	1	0.41	9	3.65	4	2.53	2	0.62	9	3.71	1	1.11
subject omission	11	5.36	6	2.24	5	2.06	4	1.62	5	3.16	5	1.56	6	2.47	0	0
double subject	0	0	0	0	1	0.41	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.11
possessive noun	2	0.97	6	2.24	11	4.54	18	7.31	7	4.43	4	1.25	29	11.98	2	2.22
Noun + Noun	2	0.97	12	4.49	0	0	5	2.03	3	1.89	1	0.31	2	0.82	1	1.11
pronouns	7	3.39	13	4.85	20	8.24	16	6.49	5	3.15	16	4.99	15	6.18	1	1.11
articles	28	13.64	42	15.71	37	15.28	33	13.39	19	12.01	35	10.93	33	13.82	15	16.65
demonstratives	5	2.43	3	1.12	1	0.41	1	0.40	4	2.53	6	1.87	5	2.06	0	0
quantifiers	3	1.46	11	4.11	4	1.65	8	3.25	2	1.26	17	5.31	2	0.82	3	3.33
possessives	1	0.48	2	0.74	10	4.13	1	0.40	2	1.26	0	0	1	0.41	0	0
agreement	23	11.21	11	4.11	7	2.89	10	4.06	6	3.79	19	5.93	21	8.67	6	6.66
verb form	34	16.58	24	8.98	34	14.04	29	11.78	9	5.69	51	15.93	31	12.80	6	6.66
verb tense	10	4.87	8	2.99	10	4.13	4	1.62	6	3.79	3	0.93	6	2.47	1	1.11
modal auxiliary	6	2.92	11	4.11	4	1.65	3	1.21	1	0.63	26	8.12	3	1.23	0	0
verb missing	1	0.48	0	0	3	1.23	0	0	2	1.26	0	0	7	2.89	0	0
DO missing	5	2.43	3	1.12	1	0.41	1	0.40	3	1.89	2	0.62	4	1.65	0	0
double DO	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.40	0	0	0	0	1	0.41	0	0
part of speech	5	2.43	2	0.74	4	1.65	7	2.84	4	2.53	3	0.93	10	4.13	2	2.22
plural adjectives	6	2.92	3	1.12	0	0	3	1.21	6	3.79	1	0.31	1	0.41	0	0
comp / super	5	2.43	7	2.62	5	2.06	2	0.81	2	1.26	6	1.87	5	2.06	3	3.33
prepositions	23	11.21	58	21.72	42	17.34	51	20.71	33	20.87	52	16.24	25	10.31	31	34.43
subordination	4	1.95	2	0.74	9	3.71	3	1.21	6	3.79	0	0	2	0.82	1	1.11
coordination	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.11
expletives	3	1.46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.11
word order	2	0.97	3	1.12	4	1.65	6	2.43	8	5.06	8	2.50	4	1.65	2	2.22
order adjectives	0	0	7	2.62	1	0.41	2	0.81	1	0.63	2	0.62	0	0	0	0
order adverbs	5	2.43	4	1.49	2	0.82	11	4.47	8	5.06	14	4.37	5	2.06	2	2.22
questions	0	0	6	2.29	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1.25	0	0	0	0
negatives	7	3.41	0	0	0	0	1	0.40	0	0	3	0.93	4	1.65	0	0
meaning	3	1.46	10	3.74	8	3.30	6	2.43	5	3.16	8	2.50	2	0.82	6	6.66
conditionals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	4.68	0	0	2	2.22
TOTAL	205		267		242		246		158		320		242		90	
Grand Total																1770

Table 5 shows no neat patterns of behavior that might suggest that some types of errors are exclusive to certain stages of acquisition. In fact, a preliminary examination of the data reveals that the frequency of certain errors increases and decreases unpredictably across levels, which seems to indicate that variables other than level might be responsible for these changes. Two examples are errors concerning the use of noncountable nouns and the misuse of quantifiers as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1. Noncountable nouns and quantifiers



Although Table 5 does not provide a definite answer to the first two research questions, that is, it is not possible to identify a group of errors that is characteristic of the first stages of acquisition, a closer examination of the data shows trends or interesting behaviors. First of all, errors pertaining to subject omission, subject verb agreement and negative forms tend to be more common in the compositions of first semester students than in the writing samples of the rest of the population. Figure 2 helps to visualize the pattern.

Figure 2. Subject omission, agreement and negative forms

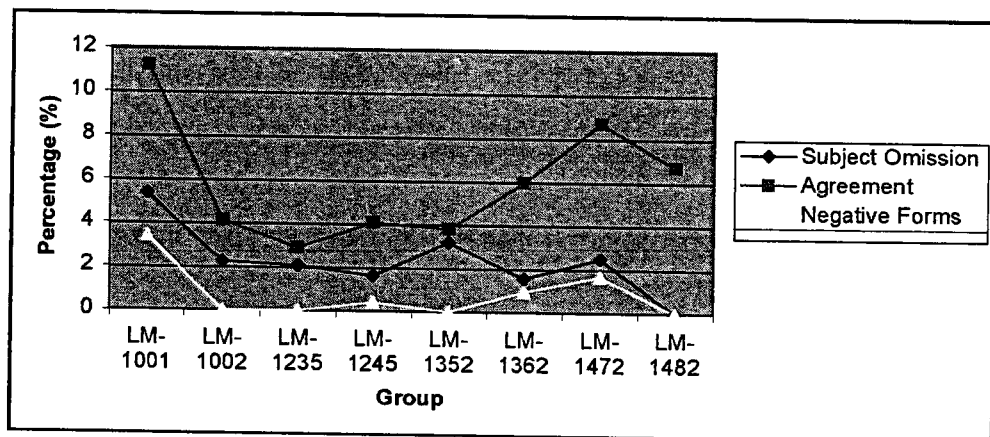


Figure 2 shows that although these mistakes, especially subject verb agreement problems which peak during the seventh semester, are still present in later stages, they seem to be more troublesome for beginners.

Second, Table 5 also shows that the data for first semester students include only 9 categories of errors with a raw score of 1 or 0 while the data for last semester students include the highest number, that is, 19 categories where 0 or only 1 error was recorded. In other words, beginners seem to have trouble with more types of grammar items than the most advanced students do. In all likelihood, this is another sign of development.

Third, the highest number of possessive noun problems is found in LM-1472, a fourth-year course. There is no obvious explanation for this situation, but a plausible one is that the nature of the assignment might have called for an unusually high number of instances where the structure was required, making the problem especially evident. In other words, the students in general might not feel confident about the use of possessive nouns and, therefore, avoid using this grammar form, but when they are forced to use it, then they make numerous mistakes.

Fourth, other remarkable changes in frequency can only be explained when the behavior of individual students is analyzed. For instance, on occasion a single student is responsible for most instances of a "stigmatized" error. A case in point is student number 3 in LM-1352, who made three of the five mistakes concerning subject omission and three of the six errors where adjectives were given plural forms, quite possibly two of the grammar mistakes ESL teachers would rank among the most serious. In fact, this same student is responsible for 24 of the 158 errors recorded for a group of 13 students, in other words, for 15.18% of the total number of errors. Had the errors been evenly distributed among all the students, this person would have made only 12.1 errors, not 24. Conceivably, this student has passed the previous courses without being really prepared, a situation that is possible given some of the university evaluation norms.

Another way of looking at the data is to focus only on those errors that are the most frequent. This type of analysis addresses the last research question. Table 6 presents the five most numerous error types by level.

Table 6. Most frequent errors by group: Raw scores and percentages

LM-1001 n=18	LM-1002 n=26	LM-1235 n=22	LM-1245 n=18	LM-1352 n=13	LM-1362 n=22	LM-1472 n=23	LM-1482 n=17
verb form 34 16.58%	preposition 58 21.72%	preposition 42 17.34%	preposition 51 20.71%	preposition 33 20.87%	preposition 52 16.24%	articles 33 13.82%	preposition 31 34.43%
articles 28 13.64%	articles 42 15.71%	articles 37 15.28%	articles 33 13.39%	articles 19 12.01%	verb form 51 15.93%	verb form 31 12.80%	article 15 16.65%
preposition 23 11.21%	verb form 24 8.98%	verb form 34 14.04%	verb form 29 11.78%	verb form 9 5.69%	article 35 10.93%	possessive noun 29 11.98%	verb form 6 6.66%

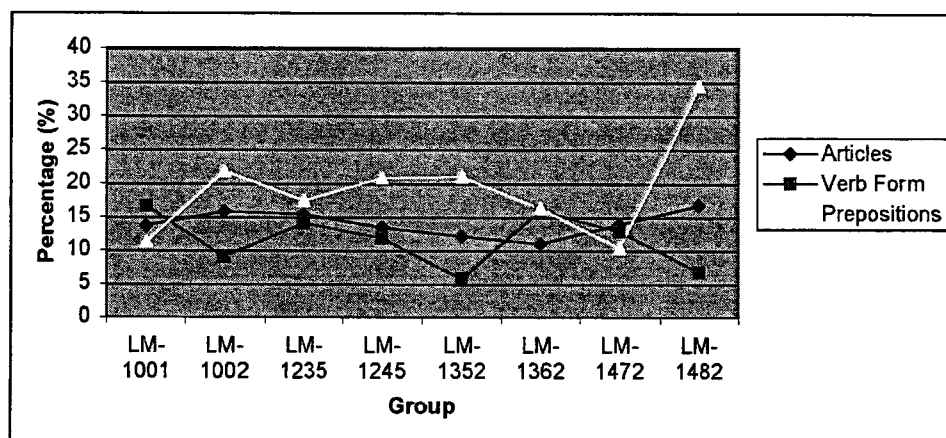
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	LM-1001 n=18	LM-1002 n=26	LM-1235 n=22	LM-1245 n=18	LM-1352 n=13	LM-1362 n=22	LM-1472 n=23	LM-1482 n=17
agreement	N + N	pronouns	possessive	word order	modal	preposition	agreement	
23	12	20	noun	8	auxiliaries	25	6	
11.21%	4.49%	8.24%	18	5.06%	26	10.31%	6.66%	
			7.31%		8.12%			
subject	agreement,	number	pronoun	order of	agreement	agreement	meaning	
omission	quantifiers,	18	16	adverbs	19	21	6	
11	modals	7.43%	6.49%	8	5.93%	8.67%	6.66%	
5.36%	11			5.06%				
	4.11%							

Except for the students in LM-1472, the three most frequent categories are prepositions, articles and verb forms. For them, prepositions came in fourth place, right after errors concerning possessive nouns, which, as pointed out earlier, were unexpectedly high. These errors are also common in previous studies. Prepositions, articles and verb forms were among the most recurrent in Dalgish (1991). Furthermore, articles and prepositions were also among the most common in Stenstrom (1975). Figure 3 displays the frequencies.

Figure 3. Articles, verb forms, and prepositions



In conclusion, the answer to the last research question is that errors concerning the use of prepositions and articles as well as the utilization of verb forms seem to be persistent over time, and thus, tend to become fossilized in spite of pedagogic interventions. This claim is grounded on the fact that not only are these errors still present in the written work of students in the most advanced composition courses, but they are also the most frequent. This interpretation seems to be supported by the data in Table 7, which shows the five most common error types for all the eight groups. This time the analysis does not focus on the individual groups but on the whole sample.

**Table 7. Most common errors in the entire sample:
Raw scores and percentages**

Category	Raw Scores	Percentages
prepositions	315	17.79%
articles	242	13.67%
verb form	218	12.31%
agreement	103	5.81%
pronouns	93	5.25%
TOTAL	971/1770	54.83%

n =159

total number of errors = 1770

First of all, it is important to note that errors in these five categories constitute more than half of the total number of errors the students in all levels made. This in itself is quite telling because it provides evidence of possible fossilization in specific language areas.

Another interesting finding is the fact that the highest percentages of errors (not the raw scores) regarding preposition and article use are the ones found for the students in LM-1482, the last writing course in the program. Obviously, this does not mean that the most advanced students make more mistakes in these areas than the beginners. What this actually seems to indicate is the fact that advanced students tend to make fewer types of mistakes than beginners because some of these types have probably been eradicated or have become sporadic. However, mistakes concerning the use of prepositions and articles still persist, and since at this point there are fewer mistakes, they stand out, becoming more noticeable. In most likelihood, neither the acquisition of articles and prepositions nor its teaching has been as successful as the acquisition or teaching of other grammar items.

4. Conclusions

If teachers accept DeKeyser's (2003:332) claim that there are different degrees of usefulness of explicit teaching of grammar for the acquisition of rules of various levels of difficulty, perhaps the teaching of articles and prepositions is a case where the rule is difficult or very difficult, and consequently, what instruction can accomplish is only to enhance "later implicit acquisition by increasing chances of noticing" or simply nothing at all because instruction is "not useful." In such a case, teachers would have to provide students with negative evidence, recycle grammar as necessary, and wait until learners are ready for acquisition.

This study and several others have shown that the use of prepositions is one of the main problems in mastering English. Perhaps the reason why this is true is that teachers are not presenting prepositions properly. Lewis (1994: 143) argues that, contrary to popular belief, *de-lexicalized* words such as prepositions are very powerful pattern generators; therefore, "collecting some of their most important patterns and arranging them in an arresting, non-

linear format, where words which occur together are recorded together, is more likely to be pedagogically effective.” It is absolutely crucial to reconsider the way prepositions have traditionally been taught. Instead of teaching prepositions as isolated words they must be considered integral parts of larger discourse.

On the other hand, although compositions are excellent instruments that allow for accurate meaning reconstruction, and they usually provide a wide range of sentence types, the students are free to choose the language they want to use, which might encourage learners to stay away from those sentence patterns that they do not master yet. Therefore, to better understand the process of language acquisition, students’ performance should be further investigated using other tasks such as a grammaticality judgment or a completion task. These tasks would help tease out avoidance problems because the researcher can lead the learners to use target structures that are often absent from compositions.

Finally, when foreign language teachers see little progress, they often agonize over the fact that their students’ performance is a sign of the kind and quality of teaching that takes place in their classes. However, they seem to forget that there are other equally important factors that need to be present for successful language acquisition besides teaching methods such as quality input, suitable teaching materials, motivation, linguistic intelligence, aptitude and, of course, time.

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Teacher and Learner Perceptions of Language Learning Problem Areas

Leyla Hasbún Hasbún

Abstract

The goal of this study was to examine teacher and learner beliefs about grammar difficulties and compare them to a study of error frequency (Hasbún, 2007b). Results indicate that teachers underestimate the frequency of errors. Half failed to identify articles as one of the most common categories. Moreover, first-year students believe that learning grammar implies memorizing patterns. Second-year learners feel that memorization does not guarantee accurate use of a rule. Advanced learners seem more concerned about the acquisition of vocabulary than grammar. Finally, beginners lack metalinguistic awareness to describe language difficulties; most were vague when describing problems.

Key words: teacher beliefs, student beliefs, error gravity, error frequency, metalinguistic awareness, taxonomy of errors

Resumen

Este estudio analiza creencias de profesores y estudiantes sobre los errores gramaticales más comunes y compara los resultados con un estudio sobre errores (Hasbún, 2007b). Se concluyó que los profesores no están concientes de la frecuencia de algunos errores. La mitad no identificó los artículos como difíciles. Además, los estudiantes de primer año creen que aprender gramática es memorizar reglas. A partir de segundo, saben que la memorización no garantiza el uso correcto. Los de cuarto se preocupan más por el vocabulario que la gramática. Finalmente, los principiantes no tienen mucha conciencia metalingüística y usan lenguaje vago para describir sus problemas.

Palabras claves: creencias del profesor, creencias del estudiante, gravedad de errores, frecuencia de errores, conciencia metalingüística, taxonomía de errores

Introduction

When English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers need to assess their learners' language development, they examine their students' oral and written production, searching for clues that might point toward progress. Although there are many possibilities, the most common type of

evidence teachers use, without a doubt, is the presence or absence of grammar errors since errors give teachers essential information concerning the process of language acquisition. In the introduction to the book *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*, Swan and Smith (1987: ix) explain that the goal of their work is "to help teachers to anticipate the characteristic difficulties of learners of English who speak particular mother tongues, and to understand how these difficulties arise." In this same book, Coe (1987: 98-109) discusses the specific problems encountered by Spanish and Catalan speakers. What follows is a summary of the difficulties that Coe predicts Spanish speakers will face, specifically in the area of grammar.

Table 1: Characteristic difficulties of learners of English (E.) who are native speakers of Spanish (S.) (Coe, 1987: 98-109)

Category	Description of problem
Word order	It is freer in Spanish (S.). S. frequency adverbs appear at various points, but not at mid-sentence position. Adjectives and nouns post-modify head nouns, and DOs and IOs can go in either order. Adverbials and OCs are usually placed before a DO, and IOs require a preposition.
Questions	S. does not have a fixed word order, and auxiliaries play no part.
Tag questions	S. uses the word <i>no</i> and rising intonation to urge agreement.
Negatives	In S. auxiliaries are not used, and negative word goes before the VP. In short answers, negative goes after the pronoun, adjective or adverb. Double negatives are grammatical in S.
Verbs	S. does not have modal auxiliaries. Other problems are related to the lexicon, such as the use of phrasal verbs and collocations.
Ellipsis	Where English (E.) uses <i>it</i> , <i>so</i> or <i>any</i> to stand for a complement that can be understood from context, S. allows complete ellipsis.
Time, tense, aspect	S. distinguishes between simple and progressive tenses and has a perfective aspect, but they do not represent similar meanings. Most subordinate clauses referring to future time have the subjunctive.
Passives	Although passives are similar, where E. uses passives without an agent, S. tends to use the <i>se</i> form.
Infinitives	S. often uses infinitives rather than gerunds as abstract nouns. The distribution of infinitive marker <i>a</i> is different from E. <i>to</i> .
Articles	S. marks generic use of abstract and plural nouns with definite article. Definite article is used with possessive pronouns. There is no distinction between indefinite article and numeral <i>one</i> , and in expressions where distinction between <i>one</i> and <i>many</i> is irrelevant, singular count nouns need no article. Indefinite article has a plural form, roughly corresponding to <i>some</i> .
Gender	Unlike E., S. has grammatical gender.

Number	S. shows number agreement with articles, adjectives and possessives. Some words that are mass nouns in E are countable in S.
Adjectives	Adjectives in S can stand by themselves. Comparatives and superlatives are expressed with equivalent of <i>more</i> and <i>most</i> , but there's one word.
Pronouns	Personal pronouns are often unnecessary in S. Most personal pronouns have same form for subject and object pronoun. S. has equivalent to impersonal pronoun <i>it</i> and dummy <i>there</i> but with different distribution. There is no equivalent for structure <i>it is</i> + <i>pronoun</i> as used to identify oneself. Reflexives do not correspond. S. does not normally express distinction between reflexive and reciprocal pronouns.
Possessives	S. expresses with an of-phrase possession and related concepts that in E. are expressed by possessive case nouns.
Relative pronouns	S does not distinguish between personal and non-personal relative pronouns, and relative pronouns can never be deleted.
Clauses	In S purpose clauses are expressed with a preposition and the infinitive. Distribution of non-finite forms is different. Some verbs require an IO after the verb. In E this is understood or requires different structure.
Indirect speech	Structure used to report imperatives and requests is different. S. uses subjunctive in the reported clause. Learners interpret reported questions as needing question word order.
Prepositions	S. uses preposition <i>a</i> when there is a TV and DO is human. Prepositions must go with their NPs, so EFL learners find it difficult to interpret preposition stranding. In S. a preposition can be followed by an infinitive. Central meaning of prepositions is similar in both languages, but there are exceptions.

Coe's analysis (1987: 98-109) is very helpful for EFL teachers whose students are native speakers of Spanish. Although interference from the mother tongue is obviously not the only source of difficulty since errors also need to be analyzed from a developmental perspective, this information is essential in understanding why some of these errors are so frequent and how some seem not to be susceptible to pedagogic intervention even when provided for extended periods of time. However, since there are so many variables that intervene in foreign language acquisition, a general list of possible mistakes is not enough. Teachers need to know the specific problems their learners are facing so that they can plan their lessons and courses accordingly. Teachers need to do research in the field and become familiar with the research of others to find out whether their beliefs about difficult grammar points are verified by research. That is why two studies have been conducted at the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica (Hasbún, 2007a; Hasbún, 2007b). Since the School

is immersed in a process of self-evaluation, the present study aims at answering some of the many questions that have arisen as a result of such process.

In a study of the written production of 159 students at different levels in the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica, Hasbún (2007b) found that, for these EFL college learners, the three most frequent categories of errors across levels concerned the use of prepositions, articles and verb forms. Not surprisingly, other studies of EFL and English as a second language (ESL) students with different first languages have identified these same grammar points as troublesome. For example, Dalgish (1991) investigated the most common errors made by a group of ESL students with different L1s at a US university. He found that the most frequent type was vocabulary and idiom. The rest ranked as follows: agreement, prepositions, articles, and verb forms. He compared his results to those obtained by Stenstrom (1975) who worked with Swedish learners of English. Her ranking was: verb tense, article, prepositions, agreement and pronouns (p. 46). Dušková (as cited in Schmitt, 2000) analyzed the compositions of Czech learners of English and reported that the highest number of errors concerned the use of articles. Chuang (2005) found that mismanagement of the article system was the most frequent cause of grammatical error in the writing of his ESL students whose native language was Chinese. Chodorow, Tetreault and Han (2007) argue that preposition usage is one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar for non-native speakers to master. They ground their assertion in the analysis of research studies. For example, they cite one by Bitchener *et al.* (2005) who reported that 29% of all the errors made by 53 intermediate to advanced ESL students were preposition errors. Likewise, they mention a paper by Murata and Ishara (2004) who found that 18% of all the errors detected in the analysis of the written production of a Japanese learner of English were related to preposition misuse. Angwatamakul (as cited in Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007) reported that verb form, articles and prepositions were the most frequent errors of Thai learners. To sum up, the

findings in the above-mentioned studies suggest that prepositions, articles and verb forms are difficult for learners regardless of their mother tongue.

In conclusion, for successful language acquisition to take place, especially at the university level, it is important for teachers to be fully aware of the errors that their *own* students make the most frequently at different stages of development in order to design pedagogic interventions that would "drive forward learning processes and so help to liberate the learner from the shackles of the intermediate plateau" (Cullen, 2008:223). Moreover, many EFL college students are eventually going to become English teachers, and their subject-matter knowledge is going to play an important role in shaping what they do in the classroom (Borg, 2001). Obviously, these learners need to be aware of their mistakes as well. They must be able to notice the gaps in their knowledge of the target language. Only then shall they make progress. This ability should be an important goal for language programs.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- In the opinion of a group of EFL teachers, what are the most frequent grammar errors their students make?
- Which errors do teachers find unacceptable considering the students' level?
- In the opinion of a group of EFL students, which are the most frequent grammar mistakes they make?
- Are their opinions validated by research?

Methodology

Participants

There were two groups of participants in this study. The first one was composed of 8 teachers of English as a Foreign Language, 7 of which were Costa Rican and 1 was a US citizen. Seven teachers were female and the other was male. In the second group, there were

16 students randomly selected from 8 classes taught by the teachers in the first group. These 8 classes were also chosen at random, and they represented the 8 semesters in the BA in English Program offered by the university. There were 10 female and 8 male students. To keep the data confidential in the discussion of the results, all the teachers and students are referred to as *she* and identified with numbers as follows.

Table 2: Code name for participants in the study

	LM 1001	LM 1002	LM 1235	LM 1245	LM 1352	LM 1362	LM 1472	LM 1482
Teachers	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Students	S1, S2	S3, S4	S5, S6	S7, S8	S9, S10	S11, S12	S13, S14	S15, S16

Procedures and Instruments

In the first part of the data collection procedure, each teacher was given a taxonomy of grammar errors and a survey to complete (see Appendixes A and B). The taxonomy was provided in an attempt to make the data more easily comparable. It was hoped that the participants would use a common language; that is, they would describe language errors using the same terminology. This would make the drawing of generalizations more straightforward. In the survey, the teachers were asked to do 3 things. First, they had to rank five types of general writing problems according to their gravity, depending on the language proficiency level they expected from the students. Second, they had to list the five most frequent error categories in their learners' written production. Finally, they were invited to discuss whether they believed that any of the errors their students were still making should have been eradicated in previous courses. The teachers took the surveys home to complete. When they were ready, the researcher collected them and briefly talked to the teachers to make sure the instrument was clear and the questions were interpreted the way they had been intended. In the second part of the data collection procedure, the researcher explained the purpose and nature of the interview to the 16 students. She told them that participation was not mandatory. The interview was semi-structured since the researcher had a general idea of what type of

information she wanted to obtain, but she did not have a list of pre-determined questions. This data-collection technique was selected because, as Johnson (1992: 1115) points out, in an interview "respondents are more likely to answer all the questions presented because of their personal involvement with the interviewer." In addition, interviewers can obtain more meaningful information because they "can rephrase questions that are not clear to the respondent, probe for additional relevant information, and follow leads."

The participants were asked whether they wanted to carry out the interview in Spanish or English. Only 3 of the first-year students chose Spanish. The rest of the interviews were held in English. Interviews were conducted in private and with assurance of confidentiality. All of them were tape-recorded and lasted from 5 to 15 minutes. Later, the tapes were rated by the researcher. An abbreviated transcript was prepared, noting only the problems (or lack thereof) in language acquisition that the students mentioned. For those first-year participants who chose to speak in Spanish, the information was translated into English by the researcher. The data collected in the teacher surveys as well as in the student interviews were summarized in tables and later compared to the results of the previous study (Hasbún, 2007b).

Results

The teachers

Table 3 presents how the teachers ranked five general types of errors according to their gravity, depending on the language proficiency level they expected from the students. They used 1 for the most and 5 for the least serious. It is important to point out that these five areas are considered in the grading scales and rubrics that teachers at the School of Modern Languages have traditionally used to grade writing.

Table 3: Ranking of error gravity according to the students' level

	Organization	Content	Mechanics	Lexicon	Grammar
T1 (1001)	2	4	5	3	1
T2 (1002)	3	4	5	2	1
T3 (1235)	3	4	5	2	1

T4 (1245)	4	5	3	1	2
T5 (1352)	3	4	5	2	1
T6 (1362)	2	1	5	4	3
T7 (1472)	2	1	5	4	3
T8 (1482)	1	2	3	5	4

Although there is no perfect agreement among the teachers' ranking of the gravity of the five general types of errors, there is a rather clear pattern. For first and second-year students, teachers consider that grammar and lexical errors are the most serious. Beginning in the fifth semester, there is a fundamental change. Content and organization issues become more important. Finally, all the teachers, except for T4 and T8, consider that the least serious problems are those related to mechanics. Quite likely, T8 believes that last-semester students are expected to apply the rules of punctuation, capitalization and spelling correctly after having taken 6 composition courses.

Tables 4 through 11 summarize the data provided by the teachers regarding the error taxonomy. The first column includes the teachers' beliefs about what they consider to be the most common types of errors. The second column lists the grammar problems which, in the teachers' opinion, should have been overcome in previous courses and, therefore, are unacceptable. The third column presents the percentage of occurrence of the actual 5 most frequent errors found when the compositions written by these same students were analyzed in a previous investigation (Hasbún, 2007b).

Table 4: Teacher 1's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1001 Integrated English I		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
subject verb agreement	Nothing since learners are beginners	verb form (16.58%)
subject omission		articles (13.64%)
verb form		prepositions (11.21%)
articles		s/v agreement (11.21%)

prepositions		subject omission (5.36%)
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The perceptions of T1 were remarkably accurate. The five types of errors she reported as the most frequent in her students' output were exactly the same as the ones found in the analysis of the compositions. Although the ranking of the errors is different, the categories are exactly identical. In addition, T1 claims that, in spite of the fact that most students had at least five years of English in high school, all their errors are understandable since the learners are beginners.

Table 5: Teacher 2's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1002 Integrated English II		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
subject omission	subject omission	prepositions (21.72%)
verb form	agreement in simple sentences	Articles (15.71%)
subject verb agreement		verb form (8.98%)
word order		N + N (4.99%)
articles		agreement, quantifiers and modals (4.11%)

The choice of grammar difficulties by T2 matches 3 of the 7 categories found for this group. It is necessary to explain that for this group there are 7 categories rather than 5 since there was a three-way tie for fifth place. As to the errors she found to be unacceptable at this level, only subject verb agreement (4.11% of the actual mistakes) was among the most frequent.

Table 6: Teacher 3's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1235 English Composition I		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
verb tenses	subject verb agreement	prepositions (17.34%)
verb forms, agreement	verb forms	articles (15.28%)
unnecessary articles	wrong verb tenses	verb form (14.04%)

wrong prepositions	wrong word choice	pronouns (8.24%)
wrong word order		number (7.43%)

Of the 6 choices by T3, 3 (verb form, articles, prepositions) were among the five most common. With regard to unacceptable forms, only verb form (14.04%) was found among the most frequent.

Table 7: Teacher 4's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1245 English Composition II		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
general word order	direct translation from Spanish	prepositions (20.71%)
double subject	wrong tenses	articles (13.39%)
subject verb agreement	subject verb agreement in basic sentences	verb form (11.78%)
wrong verb tense	run-ons, fragments and comma splices	possessive nouns (7.31%)
wrong preposition		pronouns (6.49%)

Of the 5 errors reported by T4, only 1 (prepositions) was among the most common in the previous study. As to what she considered unacceptable, it is important to notice that 2 of the problems mentioned (translation and punctuation) were not in the typology provided and, consequently, were not considered in the previous study. The other errors did not correspond to any of the most frequent errors found for this group.

Table 8: Teacher 5's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1352 Rhetoric I		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
subject omission	fragments	prepositions (20.78%)
pronoun antecedent	subject omission	articles (12.01%)
subject verb agreement	pronoun agreement	verb form (5.69%)
wrong verb form	subject verb agreement	word order (5.06%)
wrong preposition	missing article	order of adverbs (5.06%)

Two of the errors mentioned by T5 are among the most frequent: prepositions and verb form. In addition, problems dealing with articles, which she found unacceptable, were among the most common (12.01%).

Table 9: Teacher 6's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1362 English Rhetoric II		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
pronoun antecedent	fragments, run-ons, comma splices	Prepositions (16.24%)
reference unclear	problems with passive voice	verb forms (15.93%)
wrong verb form		articles (10.93%)
unclear meaning		modal auxiliaries (8.12%)
conditionals		agreement (5.93%)

Of the 5 problems mentioned by T6 only 1 (verb form 15.93%) was among the actual most frequent errors. She described two types of unacceptable errors: one was not dealt with in the analysis (punctuation), and the other was not among the most frequent.

Table 10: Teacher 7's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1472 English Rhetoric III		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
wrong verb form	subject verb agreement	articles (13.82%)
double subject	number -plural	verb forms (12.80%)
general word order	wrong verb tense	possessive nouns (11.98%)
number plural	subject omission	prepositions (10.31%)
wrong preposition	pronoun antecedent	agreement (8.67%)

Two of the problems mentioned by T7 (verb form and prepositions) were also among the most common. In regard to unacceptable errors, only one (subject verb agreement) was one of the most frequent.

Table 11: Teacher 8's beliefs about most frequent errors, errors unacceptable for the students' level, and actual most common errors

LM-1482 English Rhetoric IV		
Teacher's beliefs about most common errors	Teacher's beliefs about what is unacceptable	Actual errors (Hasbún, 2007)
subject verb agreement	wrong verb form	prepositions (34.43%)
wrong preposition	subject verb agreement	articles (16.65%)
wrong verb form		verb forms (6.66%)
order of adverbs		agreement (6.66%)
missing/unnecessary article		meaning (6.66%)

T8 was quite accurate in the identification of errors. Of the 5 categories she mentioned, 4 were among the most frequent in her students' writing samples. Furthermore, the two errors that she pointed out as unacceptable (verb form and subject verb agreement) were among the most frequent. Table 12 presents the errors that the teachers were not able to identify among the most frequent.

Table 12: Common errors not identified by the teachers

Group	Errors correctly identified	Errors not identified
LM-1001	5	0
LM-1002	3	prepositions, N + N, quantifiers, modal auxiliaries
LM-1235	3	pronouns, number
LM-1245	1	articles, verb forms, possessive nouns, pronouns
LM-1352	2	articles, word order, order of adjectives
LM-1362	1	prepositions, articles, modal auxiliaries, agreement
LM-1472	2	articles, possessive nouns, agreement
LM-1482	4	meaning

Table 12 highlights the fact that some teachers are not aware of the pervasiveness of some of the errors. Prepositions, modals, possessive nouns, pronouns and agreement were missed by 25% of the teachers, and the category articles was not mentioned by 50%.

The students

Table 13 presents the explicit beliefs about grammar difficulties expressed by the students during the interview. Since the learners frequently wandered off the topic, some comments

pertaining other areas of language besides grammar such as vocabulary, punctuation or language acquisition in general were also kept because they were considered revealing. It is a fact that some people's beliefs remain implicit.

Table 13: Students' beliefs about their problems in grammar

S1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I write, I have difficulty using commas and words such as <i>and</i> and <i>so</i>. • Everything is very easy. I only need to memorize the verbs. • It is easy because in high school I attended the English club, and I practiced a lot. • When I write a composition, I always take the time to write 1 or 2 drafts. I have no trouble. • Vocabulary is more difficult than grammar. Too many unfamiliar words. I get the grammar rules from the teacher. She explains them in class. • English is easier than other foreign languages. I can practice English with friends. • English is not difficult. I study hard. I am an engineering major, and English is required.
S2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have no problem learning English. When I entered college, I didn't remember anything I had studied in high school, but now I study hard and that's it. • Many things require practice, like the verbs. Other things are more related to one's natural abilities. I have a lot of trouble understanding tapes in the lab. • I know what I want to say, but I don't know how. I don't know how or where to begin. • I see things like in Spanish. Words are organized differently. • I translate too much. • I get low grades in writing because I don't know the vocabulary. There are too many words. • I make mistakes with verbs. I don't understand connectors. I don't know how to connect my ideas and shape them. I always use the word <i>also</i>. My compositions are very dull. • Learning English takes a lot of dedication. • Pronunciation is hard. Grammar is not. I memorize. • The mistakes I make in LM-1002 are things I already studied in LM-1001. • I try to speak English, but my classmates don't help me. They make fun of me. • I have a hard time with the order of words, the vocabulary, and prepositions. • During the oral midterm, I didn't speak enough. I didn't have vocabulary. My mistakes are always the same, like when I use the word "people." • I get the lowest grades in oral exams. I get nervous. I cannot "erase" mistakes. • I feel embarrassed when I have to speak in front of the class.
S3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I memorize the verbs, but I don't know how to use them when I speak or write. • We don't have time to practice. We go too fast. • I can use what I have learned except for the tenses. The subjunctive is difficult.
S4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't like the book. I need more practice. Reported speech is very difficult. • Most of the mistakes are careless mistakes. • Prepositions are difficult. There are too many. Teachers don't give us rules.
S5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't like to write. It is difficult. • Sometimes I make mistakes with agreement. I don't pay attention. • We need feedback. Teachers sometimes don't explain problems well. They aren't consistent. • Punctuation is difficult. I make mistakes.
S6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word choice is difficult. I don't have a good dictionary or a computer. • I confuse infinitives with gerunds. I don't know when to use them. • My vocabulary is still very limited. I don't like to read. • I cannot apply the rules.

S7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The literature courses are very hard. Grammar is easy. • Sometimes verb tenses are difficult to use. • Run-on sentences. • Sometimes I make mistakes in agreement. • I don't know how to organize my ideas. • Word choice. Words look alike.
S8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a teacher now, but I don't know how to teach prepositions. They are really similar. We translate prepositions. I look for examples on the Internet. • I make mistakes in punctuation. I have never understood what a comma splice is. • When I write fast, I confuse <i>this</i> with <i>these</i>. • Sometimes I omit the subject. I think in Spanish and what comes to mind is the verb. • I write fast so I make beginner mistakes. • I mix sentences. I forget what I started talking about. • I have noticed that 2 classmates say "people is." Even a professor said that once. • Word choice is more difficult than grammar.

The information in Table 13 allows for some generalizations regarding learners' beliefs. First of all, in general terms, while some students consider that learning grammar, especially some of the rules, is a matter of memorization, others express their frustration at their inability to put those rules into practice when speaking and writing. Larsen-Freeman (2003: 8) explains this type of inability, which has been aptly called *the inert knowledge problem* by citing Alfred North Whitehead who in 1929 addressed the issue.

Knowledge gained in (formal lessons in) the classroom remains inactive or inert when put into service (in communication within and) outside the classroom. Students can recall the grammar rules when they are asked to do so but will not use them spontaneously in communication, even when they are relevant. Besides the frustration that this engenders in students and teachers, I would imagine that it contributes to a great deal of attrition from language study. Students become discouraged when they cannot do anything useful with what they are learning.

This is the exact same frustration that students, especially those in second year, manifested during the interview. They argue that they study and memorize the rules that the professor or the textbook has explained, but when it comes to using them in speaking or writing either in the grammar course or in others, they do

not know when or how those rules apply; that is, they know the form and probably the meaning, but the function is still beyond their reach.

Second, with the use of a semi-structured interview, it was not possible to collect enough specific information about the learners' beliefs about what was difficult for them in the area of grammar. The students frequently digressed and, for the most part, were able to pinpoint just a few areas of continuing difficulty. Under these circumstances, the researcher decided not to pursue the matter further in order not to bias the results of the study. After reading the abbreviated transcript of the interviews, at least two explanations for the learners' behavior emerged: either they cannot explain the difficulties they encounter in learning English, or they are not fully aware of them. For example, some of the students' answers seem to indicate that they are not prepared to verbalize their language problems. Many of them do not seem to have enough metalinguistic awareness, or conscious knowledge of the formal aspects of English grammar, in order to describe what is difficult. The following is an example:

- Researcher: Tell me about the most difficult aspects of grammar.
- S5: I think we need feedback. Teachers sometimes don't explain well. Some teachers say something, and another teacher doesn't agree.
- Researcher: I see. Ok. Give me an example of something that is difficult.
- S5: I don't know! Many things!

The descriptions they provided were rather vague. In fact, there are very few references to concrete grammar problems such as the ones described in the typology that the teachers used. For example, first-year students mentioned *verbs* twice and *word order* and *prepositions* once. Second-year students talked

about *verb tenses* twice and *the subjunctive mood, reported speech* and *prepositions* once. Third-year students mentioned *subject verb agreement* and the difference between *infinitives* and *gerunds* once. Finally, fourth-year students referred to *verb tenses, subject verb agreement, prepositions, demonstratives* and *subject omission* once. In addition, many of their remarks refer to vocabulary and punctuation rather than grammar points. On the other hand, perhaps many of these learners are not aware of their limitations. This explanation is less plausible since these are classroom learners who receive negative evidence on a regular basis.

Third, although this is not a study in personality and affective factors that shape language acquisition, after analyzing the learners' comments, it can be concluded that most students seem to be satisfied with their attributes and abilities as a language learner; that is, they experience a high degree of self-efficacy in that area. Mercer (2008: 182) defines self-efficacy as "cognitive in nature and . . . concerned with expectancy beliefs about one's perceived capability to perform a certain task in a very specific domain, for example, to carry out a particular type of reading or writing activity." In other words, self-efficacy is an assessment of one's competence to perform a specific task in specific situations. This high degree of self-efficacy is significant since research has shown that "the amount and kind of positive or negative feedback that learners receive... from both their teacher and their peers will affect ... the establishment of their self-efficacy in that area" (Williams & Burden, 1997: 98). Therefore, for these learners, there seems to be a positive type of classroom interaction that facilitates language acquisition. In addition, the learners' behavior hints a healthy, flexible language ego for which the second language does not pose a substantial threat or inhibition (Brown, 2000).

Conclusions

There are five important findings in this study. To begin with, first and second-year teachers consider that the most serious mistakes in their students' compositions are grammatical and lexical in nature. In contrast, third and fourth-year teachers believe that the worst offenders are the organization and the quality of the content of the writing piece. This is logical since, in the early stages of acquisition, more grammatical and lexical problems are expected. After a while, learners write more accurately and fluently, so teachers concentrate their efforts on the students' ideas and their organization. Second, some of the teachers are not fully aware of the frequency of occurrence of specific grammar problems in the students' writing. This is reflected on the fact that some of them under or overestimated the presence of certain errors. In this respect, the most significant finding was the failure of half of the teachers to identify the use of articles as one of the most common errors. Third, first-year students believe that learning grammar is a matter of memorizing patterns. However, second-year students acknowledge the fact that the memorization of a rule does not guarantee its accurate use in real life. Fourth, advanced learners, especially those in fourth year, seem to be more concerned about the acquisition of vocabulary and push the acquisition of grammar into the background. Fifth, beginners seem to lack metalinguistic awareness. It is not easy for them to talk about their language difficulties, and most of the learners in the sample were vague when describing problems.

In summary, both teachers and students must be aware of the grammar mistakes learners at different levels of acquisition are prone to making. Teachers need to do something about those grammar features that their learners have demonstrably failed to master. In order to address these issues of linguistic accuracy systematically, they ought to develop a plan that includes enough time for the teaching and recycling of these difficult grammar points. As Ferris (2005: 107) correctly points out, "With few exceptions, it is unlikely that [learners] will be able to achieve the high levels of accuracy demanded and expected without teacher

intervention and training." To this end, teachers should promote what Larsen-Freeman (2003) calls grammaring. In her opinion, "Grammaring is the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. To help our students cultivate this ability requires a shift in the way grammar is traditionally viewed. It requires acknowledging that grammar can be productively regarded as a fifth skill, not only as an area of knowledge" (143).

Not only teachers but also students need to acknowledge the fact that some language items are typically acquired late. Learners need to reflect on and articulate what it is that they are having trouble with, why they are having difficulty, and what they can do to overcome the problems. If the students are aware of their limitations, they are more likely to pay attention to the form of the language, so they will benefit from what has been called *noticing*. Schmidt (1994: 179) has pointed out that "the target language forms will not be acquired unless they are noticed and that one important way that instruction works is by increasing the salience of the target language forms in input so that they are more likely to be noticed by learners."

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Appendix A: Taxonomy of grammar errors

General Category	Sub-categories	Examples of Errors
Nouns	number or irregular plural	several <i>kind</i> / <i>a</i> key data
	mass / countable nouns	newer equipments
	subject omission	In private universities is faster
	double subject	It appears to be inevitable the signing of this treaty
	possessive noun	indicate that <i>Costa Rican's</i> lack freedom of speech
Pronouns	Noun + Noun	juice of orange / he is driver of a truck
	pronoun / antecedent	person . . . <i>they</i>
	reference unclear	body modifications help to express who <i>they</i> are
Articles	wrong pronoun	<i>theirs</i> objective is
	missing article	my life as (\emptyset)adult
	unnecessary article	the fountain of <i>the</i> youth
Demonstratives	wrong article	<i>an</i> special place
		<i>that</i> things
Quantifiers		<i>another</i> persons
Possessives		<i>people</i> . . . in <i>your</i> food
Verbs	subject verb agreement	most people <i>is</i> bored with
	wrong verb form	have forgotten <i>of bringing</i>
	wrong verb tense	I <i>was working</i> there for a year
	modal auxiliary	I <i>will</i> like to thank you
	verb missing	they see their lives still the same (are)
	direct object missing	People like to spend their free time purchasing. You should ask some questions (yourself)
Adjectives and adverbs	wrong part of speech	<i>a good paid</i> job
	plural adjectives	they call their teachers <i>obsoletes</i>
	comparative and superlative forms	the mortality rate would be <i>smallest</i>
Prepositions	missing preposition	to operate the patients
	wrong preposition	when they arrived <i>to</i> the place
	unnecessary preposition	they must attend <i>to</i> seminars to change
Subordination		and find someone is required a worker (someone who requires a worker)
Expletive		(Monteverde) There is a wonderful place (it is)
Word order	general word order	More healthy is to do exercise has an idea of how beautiful is nature
	order of adjectives	contact color lenses
	order of adverbs	People could do there a lot of activities
Negative forms		Do diets no is bad. Your body haven't the same requirements.
Unclear meaning		In conclusion, this problems don't make that a very good lifestyle in my neighborhood change.
Conditional forms		If all people had money to afford an organ transplant, they <i>will</i> also find space and organs.

Appendix B: Teacher Survey

Dear _____,

I would like to thank you for helping me collect the students' writing samples last semester. Your support has been invaluable to me. During the past few months, I have been reading the compositions and trying to classify the students' errors. I want to find out which types of errors tend to disappear early on and whether there are errors that tend to remain or become fossilized in spite of pedagogic intervention. For the second part of my project, once again, I need your help. I am including the following short survey, and I would deeply appreciate your input.

1. Which errors seem to be the most **serious** at this level? Rank them from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most serious.

- errors concerning organization (i.e., thesis statement, conclusion or transition, etc.) _____
- errors concerning content (i.e., whether the issue was addressed or whether irrelevant material was included, etc.) _____
- errors concerning mechanics (i.e., punctuation, capitalization, spelling, etc.) _____
- lexical errors (i.e. those that are the product of poor or incorrect word choice, etc.) _____
- grammar errors (i.e. verb tenses, agreement, use of articles, etc.) _____

2. In your opinion, which are the five most **frequent** types of errors that students make at this level? Please refer to the table on the following page for error types. Use the error types under "sub-categories."

Frequency	Error Type
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

3. Do your students (or some of them) still make grammar mistakes that you find **unacceptable**, that is, mistakes that in your opinion should have been eradicated before they took your course?

- Yes _____ No _____
- If your answer is yes, please list the unacceptable errors. For this question, it is not necessary to use the typology provided.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

• Are these mistakes frequent?

- Yes _____ No _____

• Why do you think these students still make those mistakes?
