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A TENTATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INITIAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF ENGLISH SYNTAX IN UFSC STUDENTS

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A G R A D E C I M E N T O S

- À Fundação Universidade Federal do Piauí
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- Aos Professores do Curso de Pós-Graduação
- Ao meu Orientador Prof. Arturo Ugalde

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DISSERTATION

L1	( first language )
L2	( second language )
2nd	( second language )
MT	( mother tongue )
TL	( target language )
IL	( interlanguage )
EA	( error analysis )
C1	( composition 1 )
C2	( composition 2 )
C3	( composition 3 )
T1	( test 1 )
T2	( test 2 )
T3	( test 3 )
A	( article )
Ag.	( agreement )
O	( omission )
W.C.	( wrong choice )
S.	( subject )
V.	( verb )
W.F.	( wrong form )
I.F.	( incorrect form )
W.O.	( word order )
EFL	( English foreign language )

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## A B S T R A C T

This dissertation proposes the analysis of problems that often affect the foreign language learner achievement at the sentence structure level, especially in his initial syntactic development.

The work presents two approaches: one theoretical and the other practical. The theoretical approach emphasizes the importance of linguistic models in the study of sentence structure and a reevaluation of the psycholinguistic perspective. The practical aspect is centred around the analysis of errors taken from the written work of a group of thirteen students from the Federal University of Santa Catarina in their first level of English studies. The observations are made during a semester and divided into three stages with a total of thirty class hours in each stage. The material analysed comprises six compositions and three tests.

The most frequent errors found in the material analysed are in the areas of article usage, the use of the subject pronoun, verb forms and agreement of the subject with its verb.

After evaluating the results of this research we conclude that syntax constitutes a serious problem in the acquisition of a foreign language, and that the problems manifested in the students' syntactic development may be overcome if both teacher and student are willing to remedy the difficulties found.



## R E S U M O

Esta dissertação se propõe analisar os problemas que freqüentemente afetam o nível frasal do estudante de língua estrangeira, especialmente em seu desenvolvimento sintático inicial.

O trabalho apresenta duas abordagens: uma teórica e prática e a outra, prática. A abordagem teórica enfatiza a importância dos modelos linguísticos no estudo da estrutura da sentença e uma reavaliação da perspectiva psicolinguística. A prática é centrada na análise de erros de trabalhos escritos de um grupo de treze alunos da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em sua primeira fase de estudos do Inglês. As observações são feitas durante um semestre e divididas em três estágios com um total de trinta horas aula para cada estágio. O material analisado compreende seis composições e três testes.

Os erros mais freqüentes no material analisado se encontram nas áreas do artigo, pronome sujeito, formas verbais e concordância do sujeito com o verbo.

Após avaliar os resultados da pesquisa, concluímos que a sintaxe constitui sério problema na aquisição de uma língua estrangeira, e que os problemas manifestos no desenvolvivimento sintático dos alunos podem ser superados se o professor e aluno em conjunto decidirem recuperar as dificuldades encontradas.

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

In the last twenty years the development of linguistic studies has achieved wide dimensions and the lines of theoretical postulations as well as the terminology have contributed toward complicating the clearness of a global vision for the non specialist and the language teacher. With the intention of sharing my experience in teaching undergraduate students, I took advantage of most of the bibliography selected for this research and included it in the first theoretical chapters. Probably some readers will consider that the two chapters should be reduced in length for a theoretical discussion. But I find the material worthwhile reading as it is. I hope that it will help other language teachers who often deal with problems similar to the ones presented here.

The acquisition of syntax is usually an important step in the development of linguistic competence in a foreign language. Teachers constantly deal with these problems in the classroom. These problems often surface both in oral and written form. Students, in general, are unaware of the difficulties involved in syntactic development. As a consequence of their lack of awareness, they go through a series of courses repeating the same kind of mistakes.

This study is a tentative analysis of some of the most common errors in English Syntax made by the beginning Brazilian student. For this purpose, we have organized this research in the following way:

In Chapter I we comment on language models and psy

cholinguistic background in EFL and their incidence in foreign language teaching, together with insights about the most current trends in language acquisition problems. In Chapter II the study of Syntax, Syntactic Problems and Error Analysis presents views about the role of syntax in the perspective of language use and the criteria for an adequate approach in Error Analysis to account for syntactic difficulties. In Chapter III we have the scope of the Research which provides a hierarchical selection of errors through the application of Error Analysis and a typology of errors on the basis of frequency. Chapter IV presents the hypothetical sources of Errors. Chapter V includes some methodological implications of the findings and an evaluation of the research in the scope of its pedagogical implications.

One crucial procedure aspect in this research relates to the selected corpus. The data relative to the students' difficulties are obtained from written performance through the analysis of compositions and tests. We justify this choice by the facility of detecting errors in written production. Oral material is very hard to work with because transcriptions provide an additional complication of subjective interpretation when the vocalized versions are unclear. The data were obtained during three major stages of the learning experience. These three stages will show the initial or starting point of the syllabus, the intermediate stage of its development, and the final point of the learning process after one academic term of fifteen weeks.

The present research is an attempt to shed some light on one of very basic problems of foreign language acquisition, which is the initial development of basic structures in Brazilian students.

## C H A P T E R I

### LANGUAGE MODELS AND PSYCHOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND IN EFL

This chapter is concerned with Language Models and Psycholinguistic Background in EFL. It includes an analysis of different models of language and their incidence in foreign language learning. The appearance and development of language models have contributed to the achievement of new perspectives in the field of language acquisition. As a result of this constant development some concepts have received a new dimension such as "competence" and "performance". Intending to concentrate on these concepts we will make a brief study of the reevaluation of their importance and contribution to language acquisition, following up with some important aspects concerning language functions for communicative purposes.

In the Psycholinguistic Background we deal especially with the problem of language acquisition, stressing both native and foreign languages. Finally, we compare the acquisition of L1 and TL in order to observe some similarities and differences in the process of acquisition.

Language has to do with mental operations in the constructing of sentences. This implies not only the internal rules for sentence formation but also the inclusion of the speaker's intention for using the utterances in appropriate contexts. This reality is reflected in the formal and the pragmatic aspects of the system. The communicative intentions

of the speaker can be realized in the appropriate language form.

From another perspective, Applied Linguists try to make a synthesis of different disciplines such as language learning, language acquisition and language teaching, integrating them with the general aspects of language description provided by language models.

#### 1.0. LANGUAGE MODELS

Linguistic models are in constant development. The models developed by linguists before the appearance of transformational theory were partly circumscribed by phonological and morphological problems. In spite of their limitations these models have, throughout the years, contributed toward clarifying some important questions in the field.

The first attempts made by De Saussure to delimit the scope of language description were of great importance for future developments. Gradually, linguists perceived the importance of incorporating other perspectives concerning language which came from related sciences, such as psychology. (This was the case of Behaviorism, which provided some insights for structural description). After Chomsky's publication of 'Syntactic Structures' the appearance of transformational generative grammar represented a revolution in the aims of linguistic study: Chomsky's model (TG Theory) gave special emphasis on psychological studies. He argued that the main concern of linguistic theory should be the competence of the speaker.

*Competence is defined as the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language which is the prime concern of linguistic theory.* <sup>(1)</sup>

He accepted the independence of grammar upon meaning and was more interested in form than in meaning.

*I think that we are forced to conclude that grammar is autonomous and independent of meaning, and that probabilistic models give no particular insight into some of the basic problems of syntactic structure.* <sup>(2)</sup>

But transformational grammar fitted with the same concept of structural linguistics, giving extraordinary importance to the study of language structure. Further linguistic developments which gave major importance to meaning led to a reappraisal of the Chomskian model. One of the first concrete manifestations of the new proposals is found in Hymes' article "On Communicative Competence". Hymes felt the necessity of redefining competence and performance. According to Chomsky, competence was due to simple grammatical knowledge. Hymes also viewed competence as the ability to use the language. For him this ability involved far more than grammatical knowledge. According to Hymes, competence circumscribes concepts of appropriateness and acceptability, notions that in Chomsky were associated with performance. This communicative competence is con

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(1) Chomsky, N.. Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, M.I.T. Press, 1965, : 3

(2) Allen, J.P.B.. and Buren, Paul Van Chomsky: Selected Readings, Oxford University Press, London, 1970: 21

trusted with the more narrow notion of grammatical competence.

*Attention to the social dimension is thus not restricted to occasions on which social factors seem to interfere with or restrict the grammatical. The engagement of language in social life has a positive, productive aspect. There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Just as rules of syntax can control aspects of phonology, and just as semantic rules perhaps control aspects of syntax, so rules of speech acts enter as a controlling factor for linguistic form as a whole.<sup>(3)</sup>*

Both psychology and philosophy have been concerned with linguistic models. Coulthard (1976) asserts that while a whole generation of linguists was devoted to form (the relation between meanings and sounds being necessary to set up various levels of description such as syntax and morphology, phonology and phonetics, lexis and semantics) some philosophers were concerned with the analysis of illocutionary acts, that is, the intention of the speaker in communication and the judgements that a speaker of a language can make concerning sentences. These circumstances led to a reappraisal of the notions of "competence" and "performance".

### 1.1. A REEVALUATION OF "GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE" AND "COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE"

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(3) Hymes, D. The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching, Oxford University Press, 1979: 15.

In a reevaluation of De Saussure's famous dichotomy, "langue-parole" Chomsky developed two notions: linguistic competence and linguistic performance. Linguistic competence is concerned with the knowledge of language structure that is implicit in the speaker when he uses language. This knowledge makes it possible for the production and understanding of an infinite set of sentences. Linguistic performance is concerned with actual use of language.

Hymes regards competence in general terms as the capabilities of a person and assumes that it is dependent upon both knowledge and use. For him knowledge comprises the four parameters of communication which are 'whether or not something is formally possible'; 'feasibility'; 'appropriateness to context' and 'accepted usage'. Ability for use may also be related to the four parameters and it indicates individual differences with regard to ability to use knowledge, to interpret, to differentiate, etc. <sup>(4)</sup>

The first parameter is equivalent to Chomsky's notion of competence as simple grammatical knowledge. It indicates when a structure is grammatical or ungrammatical. The second parameter is concerned with pshychological factors such as memory limitation, the third suggests the required sense of relation to contextual features, and the fourth indicates the ways in which things are possible, feasible, and appropriate in order to produce and interpret cultural behavior.

Halliday is, perhaps, the most influential linguist

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(4) *Ibid.*, : 14.



who has placed emphasis on meaning and use. In his paper 'Towards a sociological semantics' he is concerned with the way linguistics can be used to help the sociologist in his study of social phenomena. He argues that if we regard language in relation to the context in which it is used, we learn something about the way language operates as a system. He says,

*The more we are able to relate the options in grammatical systems to meaning potential in the social contexts and behavioural settings, the more insight we shall gain into the nature of the language system, since it is in the service of such contexts and settings that language has evolved.*<sup>(5)</sup>

Halliday is concerned with three levels of analysis and the relationship between them, which are: the behavioural, the semantic and the grammatical. The level of behavior proposes to the individual several choices of action and this level is termed 'behaviour potential'. These choices can be expressed by a person in speaking or writing something. In performing something orally or in writing he is faced with a set of choices on the level of semantics. In selecting what he wants, he is faced with more choices at the grammatical level which contribute toward pointing out several ways in which the language system provides for the expression of his meaning.

The acquisition of grammar must be understood psycho

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(5) Halliday, M.A.K. in Brumfit C.J.. and K. Johnson "Towards a Sociological Semantics" The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching, Oxford University Press, 1979: 38.

logically as enabling the learner to understand utterances which would be called acceptable in the "native" sense. When one acquires a language one does not only need to know how to comprehend sentences but also how to use sentences appropriately in order to achieve communication. To comprehend and compose sentences the speaker needs knowledge of the rules of the language. When this knowledge is expressed by the use of sentences then judgement can be made of correct English usage. The use is recognized as the meaningful realization of communicative behavior.

The achievement of language usage requires two abilities. One is known as the ability to choose which form of sentence is appropriate for a particular linguistic context. The other is the ability to know which function is fulfilled by a sentence in a communicative situation. The notion of appropriateness must be applied to the form and function of sentence as instance of use. According to Hymes (1971) appropriateness includes "whether and to what extent something is in some context suitable". (6)

When we project this problem of the acquisition of grammar to the language classroom, we may see that these principles should be validly applied when considering the types of knowledge that a language learner must possess in order to achieve communicative competence. Traditional language teaching is severely criticized because it insists on the necessity of

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(6) Hymes, D.. 'Sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking', in Ardener, E. (ed.) Social Anthropology and Linguistics, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph 10, London, Tavistock, 1971: 47.

emphasizing correctness and the rules of the grammar. It assumes that a language is a linguistic concept. Little importance is given to the contextual use of language. Many educators have expressed dissatisfaction with the results of teaching based principally on the concepts of pattern drill and mechanical manipulation of language structures. They argue that students do not automatically make the transition from structures learned in pattern drills to realistic language communication.

In the last decade, studies in sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics have shown the importance of context in the language-teaching and language-learning process. The works of Gregory and Joos (1967) have sensitized us to the need for teaching appropriate language. Other linguists and psycholinguists have stimulated us toward making an accurate examination of the notions concerning the nature of language and how it should be learned. Thus, as can be seen, appropriateness has received a great deal of attention in recent years. It has been broadly considered in terms of acceptability from formal to informal language, and it has involved choices of structure and vocabulary.

The teaching of languages should be concerned with 'correctness' and 'appropriateness'. Learners also make mistakes in the use of the code. The teacher should be concerned with teaching the learner not just to produce grammatically acceptable strings of words, but also to use language for some communicative purpose.

By analogy with the language acquisition process in the mother-tongue, we know that it takes quite a long time for a child to learn to control linguistic features appropriately. He

begins by using simple words and as he increases his vocabulary he broadens his experiences in manipulating the language for communicative purposes. Later on, he acquires knowledge of the rules of grammar which enables him to improve his language. For this reason, we should not expect of foreigners that they be able to use language appropriately and with the same skill and control as the native speaker does. A foreign language learner needs to go through varied and extensive experience before he becomes an expert in the selection of appropriate grammatical features.

When we reevaluate "grammatical competence" and "communicative competence" we need to keep in mind some important aspects which are concerned with this matter. Grammatical competence has to do with correctness of forms or the knowledge of how to form correct utterances. For anyone to be able to understand verbal communication he needs to internalize rules that relate sounds to meaning or one word to another. Communicative competence has to do with the speaker's ability to use the language appropriately in order to communicate his intentions and respond to someone's inquiries. Grammatical competence and communicative competence require both comprehension and production. Either comprehension as production can be either partial or complete. One can understand and produce correct forms in the target language either partially, or almost completely. Competence is the sum of two aspects: grammatical competence and communicative competence, and these two aspects have a receptive level and a productive level. One can see this in the samples given as illustration taken from the students compositions and tests in the chapter reserved for the

research.

## 1.2. THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND.

In the previous section of this dissertation we discussed the importance of linguistic models. Language models try to explain the code and the situations connected with the use of the code. Psychological models, in the acquisition of the code, deal with skills of comprehension and production.

Psycholinguistics appeared as an attempt to explain psychological theories concerning the acquisition of language. The first most important theory to appear was the behavioristic position, supported by Skinner, whose empirical tendencies dominated half of the twentieth century. This theory, which is basically expressed in Skinner's "Verbal Behavior", regarded language acquisition as the formation of habits, or as the result of the individual's learning of a large number of elements in order to manipulate these elements in a fast and automatic way. This was possible through the sequential process of stimulus-response re-inforcement.

The first attack on Behaviorism was made by Chomsky in his well documented "Review of B. F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior", 1959, in which he claimed that language is not simply a set of "habits" and its use is very different from animal communication. Chomsky's convictions of the difference between human beings and animals made him adopt the mentalistic theory which reinforces the existence of a faculty of language innate to the child which facilitates the acquisition of his mother-tongue.

Further analysis of these questions throughout the development of psycholinguistic studies have shown that in realistic terms language acquisition cannot be regarded within either of these extreme positions.

Combalb, Helec and Hiley (1977), after examining the hypotheses concerning language acquisition concluded that neither the behavioristic nor the mentalistic approach satisfies absolutely our expectations concerning language acquisition.

The behavioristic approach does not account for the fact revealed through recent psycholinguistic studies that only one part of the individual's verbal behavior is assimilated to the automatic behavior from which every creativity is excluded, the rest remaining for the order of problem-solving and for the creative manipulation of knowledge acquired. The mentalistic approach does not account for the fact that part of an individual's verbal behavior is reflex-behavior. It does not consider either the fact that individuals elaborate their own grammars of a language in different ways according to the conditions to which they are exposed.

The implication of these facts in terms of language teaching, as the result of a research by Combalb et al, in a course for beginners, is that teachers need to be attentive to the two approaches - the behavioristic and mentalistic - and also be alert to the fact that for the acquisition of comprehension, the mentalistic model is dominant, while for the acquisition of expression, both models are represented in equal parts. Another consideration is related to the technique of repetition

as essential to the first stage of acquisition of the rules of the sentence (behavioristic approach) and the production of sentences involving errors as essential for the process of grammatical acquisition (mentalistic approach).

Adult learners do not like to acquire a new behavior without a complete explanation of the mechanisms involved in the new situation. These mechanisms can be regarded as a theoretical description of behavior, and they are useful to conduct each stage of learning within a general scheme and to solve problems of learning difficulties.

Combalb, et al, propose as an alternative the differentialistic approach which emphasizes within language acquisition the ability of comprehension (receptive skills) dissociated from the ability of expression (productive skill).

Diller provides a good description of language acquisition. Language acquisition, he states, is not a conditioning process in which a person says some things in certain situations. Most likely

*it is a process in which the learner actively goes about trying to organize his perception of the world in terms of linguistic concepts. (?)*

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(?) Diller, Conrad Karl; Generative Grammar, Structural Linguistics and Language Teaching, Newbury House Publishers, Rowley, Massachusetts, 1971: 54.

Corder (1973) states that learning a new language is not a question of acquiring a new set of names for the same things; it is not just the learning of automatic devices, the internalizing of a bilingual dictionary. Language learning consists of acquiring command of a language on a level which is adequate for the communicative purposes of the individual. Thus, the learner is obliged to understand and be understood. By doing so, his performance will be acceptable to the other members of the speech community.

Ausubel, et al (1968) approach linguistics and psychological views of language acquisition in these terms:

From a linguistic point of view language comprehension requires the knowledge of 'inflecting words', to combine words into sentences, and the syntactic code consists in:

- (1) connecting words (prepositions, conjunctions);
- (2) designative words (articles, demonstrative adjectives);
- (3) inflections indicating number, gender, person, case, tense, mode, and mood; and
- (4) word-order rules adding relational meaning to connected discourse. <sup>(8)</sup>

From a psychological point of view, the rules of syntax have the function of relating ideas and the purpose of

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(8) Ausubel, David; Novak Joseph D; Hanesian Helen Educational Psychology A Cognitive View, Second Edition, Holt Rihart and Winston, 1968: 69.



generating and understanding new ideas. Two important problems are related to grammar. One is concerned with the cognitive processes involved in generating and understanding sentences, and the other is concerned with discovering how children learn to use appropriately different syntactic categories. In the case of our research, the subjects were adults and not children, although the processes of acquisition between L1 and TL are similar. When words in a group are appropriately inflected and combined according to the rules, the result is satisfactory because it not only shows grammatical correction, but also communicates the idea that the speaker or writer wants to convey.

Ausubel, et al., reinforce their former comments by regarding three important ways in which language contributes toward concept formation and problem-solving.

*First the representational properties of words facilitate the transformational processes involved in thought. Second, verbalization of the emerging subverbal products of these operations, prior to naming them, refines and enhances their meanings and thereby increases their transfer power. Last, the kinds of concepts individuals learn in a particular culture are profoundly influenced by the vocabulary and structure of the language to which they are exposed in that culture. (9)*

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(9) *Ibid.*, : 84-85.

According to the ideas presented, the postulates of first language acquisition are applicable in helping foreign language learners to discover and develop concepts and principles they could not discover alone. This is possible because humans have the capacity to discover and to verbalize ideas. With this perspective in mind we will take into account two types of language acquisition processes; that of the first and that of a foreign language acquisition. It should be stressed in advance that in the comments about foreign language we will notice the use of the term L2. This term is used in this work to refer to the foreign language learning instead of second language acquisition. As English is not a second language in Brazil the comments and research were based on a foreign language.

#### 1.2.1. FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The child in the acquisition of his first language must learn what language is in itself. According to Halliday a child learning his first language is learning how to mean. In this phase the emphasis is on the semantic rather than the syntactic aspect of language. When adults use language with small children they do so by modifying the language to include communicative strategies which differ from their own experience in the management of language. For this reason, language addressed to children is often referred to as being in a simplified register.

Wilkins (1974) asserts that in child language acquisition, the first thing to be regarded should be the quantity

of language in which the child is involved. The child's contact with the language is observed in different forms. In one, the language is directed to him by other people. In another the language is produced in his presence but not addressed to him. It is also important to notice that the language heard by the child is not made up of perfect samples of grammatical speech. Lastly, there is the language that the child himself produces. Thus, when the child makes an error he does so, because he does not know how the rules of the grammar operate. However, within a short period of time he will discover his limitations and become alerted to the fact that he has made a mistake. It takes some time for errors to disappear in a child's language. In general, these persist in spite of correction. They diminish and disappear when the child is capable of mastering the grammar of the language.

The child, in the acquisition of his native language, learns how interactions are made. He learns certain basic assumptions which are significant for communication. One of these relates to whether what the speaker says is relevant to what has been said before. Another is that meanings are not explicitly stated in sentences but have to be inferred. Later the child is exposed to simple narrative sentences and he is taught during school how to write experiments.

Children apply some strategies in order to learn the systems of grammar, namely phonology, syntax and semantics. This is done by breaking each system down into the smallest combinable parts and by developing rules for combining the parts. This task is performed in their first years of life. This basic process continues to be improved and the production

of sounds and words increases considerably. The development of rules for combining the parts is carried out in a very methodical way. First, the most general rules are hypothesized and later on these rules are restricted to other sets of sentences.

McNeill (1966) states that in the study of first language acquisition, the child, by the age of three-and-a half, has achieved linguistic competence. However, as he explains, grammatical rules are discovered by the child through the inductive process. This means that a child does not repeat a grammatical form that is not already in his repertoire as evidenced by his own spontaneous utterances.

The child passes through different stages in his progress towards adult competence, and in each stage has a grammatical system of his own that does not need to be explained by reference to the adult system. The child makes a series of hypotheses about the structure of the language which he tests, preserves or abandons. This work takes a certain amount of time in order to achieve the final adult grammar of competence in the language.

#### 1.2.2. FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Compared to first language acquisition the foreign language learner is more aware of learning a language and more able to answer questions about what he knows. He is actively involved in the learning process: he listens carefully and

checks what he says himself; he is anxious to participate and communicate with another person. Thus, he is stimulated to practice the language he is acquiring.

All learning requires the use of practice. The study of a language depends in great part on practice. In learning a language there are numerous links to be acquired, and for this reason practice is essential in order to maintain words and patterns readily available to us.

According to Vivian Cook (1978), one important element in the learner's situation is the language he hears. In the acquisition of a foreign language the learner's primary need is derived from his communicative needs. Thus, the learner's language is a consequence of his interactions. The intention of the learner to communicate through the language leads him to use it for communicative purpose.

Another approach made by Guiora, Brannon and Dull (1972) reveals that the person who already has developed a reasonable command of the mother tongue brings to the learning of a foreign language a set of habits from his first linguistic code which may generate either assistance or confusion. This problem is manifested throughout this dissertation, in the production of our subjects. However, further comment about this will be given in the next chapters.

On the other hand, Guiora, Brannon and Dull comment that a person in the stage of acquiring a new language is cognitively mature enough to grasp more easily the new factors of the unknown grammar. His maturity and his previous experi

ence facilitate the learning of the new code.

According to James' hypothesis a foreign language learner, from the beginning of his study, gives special attention to the sentences that he wants to produce. He affirms that any L2 learner has a propensity for constructing his "interlingua" which is used by him in the context in which he is learning. James describes the learner's interlanguage in these terms

*The learner of any L2 has a propensity to construct for himself this interlingua, an act of linguistic creativity so natural that it would be unrealistic to expect learners to circumvent it and proceed directly from his L1 to the native speaker's version of the L2. A further reason for allowing the learner to construct the interlingua is that it is immediately usable by him in the context in which he is learning; his classmates have the L1 in common so will converge in tacit agreement on the form of the interlingua. With this they will be able to communicate while they are learning, while the conventional approach, which prescribes the interlingua as a "corpus of error" either stifles the learner's communication drives altogether, or requires that the linguistically mature student becomes as a little child, practicing perfectly well-formed*

*native-speaker's sentences, which are, however, often idealized and usually trivial. Accepting the interlingua, like accepting a child's non-standard speech, avoids the necessity to halt the communication process for the sake of the learning process.* (10)

James' conception of interlanguage is later reinforced by Selinker (1972), Richards (1973) and Corder (1973). In the view of this framework the foreign language learner constructs his interlingua by comparing the features of the language he is acquiring with the ones of his native tongue. This procedure is made naturally in order to facilitate the learner's interaction with other in the new language environment.

Usually the language simplified by the learner is very similar to the child's early speech and thus accepted by the native speaker. It is a way of enabling the learner to communicate while he is learning. In this aspect we can notice similarity between the adult and the child's behavior in the acquisition of a foreign language.

The study of interlingua phenomena in language learning leads to a concentration on the central processes of second language acquisition and to a study of the circumstances which give these processes significance.

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(10) James, Carl 1970 in Selinker, Larry "Interlanguage" IRAL, Volume X/3, August 1972: 214.

Interlingua features may be characterized by communication strategies. This happens when the learner is exposed to difficult communication in another language and has to express in that language what he has assimilated. When the learner isolates himself from interaction with speakers of the target language, he has the tendency to simplify the syntax of the language with the aim of transforming the language into an instrument of his own intentions. Simplification is one way which speakers of different languages utilize to facilitate the learning and use of the language they wish to acquire.

Selinker (1972) agrees with James concerning the notion of interlanguage. He explains this term in the following words:

*... a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL norm. (11)*

The author suggests that studies made in the psychology of foreign-language learning should begin by regarding the psycholinguistic processes which establish the knowledge of interlingual behaviour. These processes are: a) language transfer, b) transfer-of-training, c) strategies of foreign-language communication and d) overgeneralization of Target language linguistic material.

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(11) *Ibid.*, : 214.



Language transfer occurs when the linguistic features which appear in the interlanguage are a result of the native language. Transfer-of-training occurs when linguistic features are a result of items that can be identified in repeated training procedures. Strategies of foreign language communication are the result of ways employed by the learner in order to communicate with speakers of the target language. Overgeneralization of Target Language linguistic material is a result of target language rules and semantic features.

Selinker also comments that Interlanguage linguistic structures often persist in most target language learners. Their manifestation is generally noticed in Interlanguage productive performance, in situations where the speaker is under conditions of anxiety or when he faces a new experience in the language.

Other factors also influence and characterize the learner's foreign language system which are: intralingual interference, modality of exposure and production, age, successions of approximative systems and universal hierarchy of difficulty. The term "Intralingual Interference" was coined by Richards (1973) with the purpose of explaining that the items produced by the learner do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue, but rather generalizations based on his exposure to the target language.

Richard's research reviewed that *"systematic intralingual errors involve overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and*

*semantic errors*"<sup>(12)</sup>. The result of these studies contributed to the agreement that many intralingual errors represent the learning difficulty in the target language. When the learner acquires basic rules in the target language, other sources of difficulties may be attributed to surface structure and contextual rules of the language. This confirms the traditional belief that "previous learning may influence later learning".

Language learning may vary according to the modality of exposure to the target language and the modality of production. Nemser (1971) believes that two different linguistic systems may be internalized in the target language, depending on the modality. As an example of modality we have spelling, pronunciation and confusion between written and spoken styles.

Some scholars believe that age may affect the system of the second language learner. They claim that while adults have better memories and greater ability to form new concepts, nevertheless, children are better imitators of speech sounds. Lenneberg (1967) comments on the stages the child goes through when he first begins to walk and that continue until puberty. However, adults in general are better prepared for language learning than children. This is due to several factors such as a better memory, a store of abstract concepts that can be used in learning, and the ability to form new concepts.

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(12) Richards, Jack C. Error Analysis Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition, Longman, 1973: 6.

Language learning is never identical and that is why the acquisition of new lexical, phonological and syntactic items varies from one person to another. The rules that characterize the approximative system may cover data which has no source in either native or target language. Early studies have indicated that many phonological replacements found in the speech of foreign language learners are unique to approximative systems. The learner hears and understands standard English but produces a series of deviant structures. Here we can notice a distinction between his receptive competence, which imply the rules for understanding (decoding processes) and his productive competence, which involve rules for language use (encoding processes).

The foreign language learner acts as if he were learning the first language. In attempting to understand the rules to which he is exposed, he develops hypotheses that do not correspond to his mother-tongue nor to the target language. Corder (1974) suggests three main factors for the learner's hypotheses. First, the experience that the learner brings to foreign-language learning. Second, the data to which the learner is exposed in all languages. Third, the learner's language-acquisition strategies. He also asserts that those factors comprise the learner's interlanguage background, his previous experience, his repertoire and his proficiency in his own native language. The learner's strategies include strategies for second language learning and strategies for communication.

AND TL

First language acquisition is regarded as a natural learning situation in the sense that the strategies employed are determined by the learner and not imposed by a teacher. However, the circumstances in which first language acquisition takes place differ from those of foreign language learning. First language acquisition takes place in an informal context.

Foreign language learning is, in general, accepted by linguists as a creative process, similar in many ways to first language acquisition, in which the learner formulates, tests and modifies hypotheses based on experience with the second language. They regard the role of input in language learning as fruitful for two reasons. First, they recognize the necessity of describing the phonological, syntactic, lexical and extra linguistic features of language addressed to second language learners. Secondly, they emphasize the need for studying the function of language input in foreign language learning.

The study of language input supplies the characteristics of the language that teachers in general use for communication with second language learners. The importance of the teachers' language usage in the classroom is significant because it shows different ways in which teachers modify their language when they are communicating in a foreign language.

Some experiments have been made to verify the relationship between production of second language structures and

of research and added that the order of functions was the same in foreign children and foreign adults. Politzer (1974) used a developmental score test to prove that the syntactic structures of foreign children did not develop in the same way as those of native children. Boyd (1975) found some similarities between native children and foreign children in acquiring Spanish but some specific grammatical differences.

Henning (1973) explored the parallels between first and foreign language acquisition by comparing the development of vocabulary. He began with the principle that native children progressed from acoustic storage of words in a secondary memory to semantic storage. The same experiment with foreign adults showed a similar development; the beginners had a greater proportion of acoustic errors, while the advanced learners made more semantic errors.

*... Henning's results show that foreign language learning may be accompanied by the same kind of coding as first language acquisition... (13)*

Other parallels should be considered in relation to first language acquisition in order to come to an understanding of both foreign language learning and teaching. First, the individual's conceptual framework is present in a

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(13) Henning (1973) IRAL, Vol. XV/1, February 1977: 11-12.

later and more advanced stage. Second, his possession of the grammatical structure of a language which may facilitate the acquisition of a second one through transfer.

The differences between first and second language can be characterized by several features. One of them is the situational feature. Native children and foreign learners are found in different situations. Native children acquire their language in a natural way, without being specifically taught. Foreign learners acquire a foreign language in a very formal teaching-situation.

Another way of explaining the differences between first and second language is not of a linguistic but rather of a psychological nature. This framework suggests that cognitive processes in the foreign language learner are different from those of the native child. These differences may be linked to the foreign language learner's greater memory capacity, his more advanced stage of conceptual development, and the larger range of the communicative function for which he uses language. He has passed through the normal stages of conceptual development and thinks in a different manner from the child. However, R. Cromer (1974) concluded that cognition precedes language in development. This might not be applicable to all language. Not all the aspects of a language system are determined by cognition; parts of the system can follow a purely linguistic development. Although there are links between language learning and other mental processes, language learning has specific properties.

There are other ways of regarding how language is learned. Vivian Cook (1971), for example, postulates that the foreign-language learner is not supposed to make interim hypotheses about the language he is learning. He is assumed to learn the rules of native competence one by one. A child, on the other hand, constructs and modifies his hypotheses. The native language is learned by a series of evolving hypotheses, whereas the foreign language is acquired through a role-by-rule build up. In the theory of native language acquisition errors are an integral part of the learning process, while in foreign language learning errors show that an item has been incorrectly learned.

My position concerning the subject discussed is that native language is acquired in an informal situation while foreign language is learned in a formal teaching-situation. In the case of the students in our research they were in a formal situation which was the classroom environment. I also agree with the ones who think that the foreign language learner is cognitively better prepared for the learning of a foreign language and he is in a more advanced stage of conceptual development.

### 1.3. CONCLUSIONS

The attempt to explain both Language Models and Psycholinguistic Background was primarily undertaken with the intention of helping those who have interest in the learning and

teaching of a foreign language. Language Models and Psychological Models are more significant for teachers than for learners. This is justified by the fact that teachers normally deal with these models in their teaching practices. They not only need to be up to date with language and psychological models, but also to be alerted to the choice of an appropriate model to follow in the development of their foreign language courses. Usually learners do not worry about models but with the process of their foreign language acquisition. They sometimes complain of the teacher's methodology but they are rarely aware of the model responsible for the methodology. Thus, it is advisable for the teacher to inform his students about the model adopted by him which will be developed during the course.

While language models are engaged in the explanation of the code and the situations connected with its use, psychological models are centred in the acquisition of the code with skills of comprehension and production. Thus, the major concern of psychological models concerns the theories related to the acquisition of language. In summary, the theories discussed in this Chapter were the following:

- a) The Behaviouristic supported by Skinner
- b) The Mentalistic accepted by Chomsky
- c) The Differentialistic proposed by Combalb et al

Some authors approached language acquisition within other perspectives:

- a) Diller - language acquisition is not a conditioning process



but a process in which the learner is an active participant.

- b) Corder - language acquisition is a process in which the learner acquires command of a language for communicative purposes.
- c) Ausubel - foreign language acquisition is greatly helped by first language. This is understood by the great capacity that humans have to discover and verbalize ideas.

In order to present the importance of language acquisition we regarded two types of acquisition: first and foreign languages. After commenting on each one, we compared them in order to observe their similarities and contrasts. From the analysis made it was concluded that first and foreign language acquisition are similar processes but differ in other ways. The situation in which a child learns his first language is different from that of the foreign language learner. Another difference is concerned with the cognitive processes in both first and foreign language acquisition.

## CHAPTER II

### SYNTAX, SYNTACTIC PROBLEMS AND ERROR ANALYSIS

#### INTRODUCTION

In the former Chapter we discussed Linguistic and Psychological Models as well as their implication to the study of language acquisition. This Chapter has as its main objective the analysis of the role of Syntax in the perspective of language use and the provision of an Error Analysis approach to account for Syntactic problems.

In order to systematize the work we intend first of all, to present some important points concerning the structure of language. Linked to this presentation we also note the process of communication which is called Encoding and Decoding. As communication requires the production and understanding of sentences we also reserve a section of this chapter for the study of language on the Sentence level and on the Textual level. Finally, we come to the crucial part of this chapter, in which some comments will be made concerning syntactic problems in foreign language learning and the contribution of Error Analysis toward a further study of the learner's errors. Following this part, we will concentrate on the study of the role of errors in foreign language acquisition, for our main concern in this dissertation is to deal with students' errors in their basic syntactic development.

## 2.0. THE ROLE OF SYNTAX IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

First, we deal with the hypothesis that all speakers possess a syntactic intuition called 'language awareness', something which in linguistic terms implies a metalinguistic knowledge. Ryan (1971) stresses that "*linguistic awareness or metalinguistic knowledge is defined as part of the general cognitive ability to utilize knowledge deliberately and consciously*".<sup>(14)</sup> As has been analysed in the previous Chapter there are some similarities between children's first language acquisition and adults' foreign language learning. Therefore, when a person is in the process of a foreign language acquisition, the need of metalinguistic knowledge becomes even more evident. The learner tends to integrate his knowledge of the structure of L1 into L2. When adults learn a foreign language they resort to some kind of syntactic framework and construct the model they need in order to be able to communicate. This model is equivalent to the creation of an interlanguage. But the adult learner already has some syntactic background. Taking this into consideration there arise the following questions: (a) Where does the adult learner obtain his information concerning the model he wishes to acquire? and (b) How can he acquire this model? The answer to the former question is given in the classroom environment;

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(14) Ryan, Ellen Bouchard Language Awareness and Reading, International Reading Association Newark, Delaware, 1971: 39.

the answer to the latter is connected with the tasks the learner has to face such as the acquisition of a partial vocabulary and the development of some idea of sentence level. This can be done through the reading of texts, the training of listening through pre-recorded texts in the target language, and from the learners' exchange of information in class with classmates and with his teacher.

In the study of grammar, not only the dogmatic parts should be taken into account, but also the insights that the hearer develops concerning the structure of the language to which he has been exposed. The interchange between recipient and speaker creates what is known as a 'message'. It is structured in propositions which in turn are structured in constituents. For a message to achieve the objective of communication, it needs to be comprehensively interpreted. Clark (1977) regards comprehension as the process by which listeners interpret the speech, and this is called the construction process. In the construction process, listeners take in the natural speech, isolate and identify the constituents of surface structure, and build each proposition, they add it to the interpretation they have made of the sentence, and the proposition taken together constitute the finished interpretation.

For a model of language comprehension the most important problem is how one understands sentences, not how one produces them. At this point it is relevant to distinguish between the production of language and the understanding of language produced by others. The speaker of a sentence begins

with a single meaning or intention which he wants to commu  
nicate. This intention must be coded into a sentence. The  
recipient of this sentence is then faced with the problem of  
reducing the number of meanings the sentence might convey, to  
a single alternative. The differences between these processes  
make us assume that speaking and hearing are not mirror image  
processes, although both utilize the same syntactic and  
semantic data.

## 2.1. ENCODING/DECODING

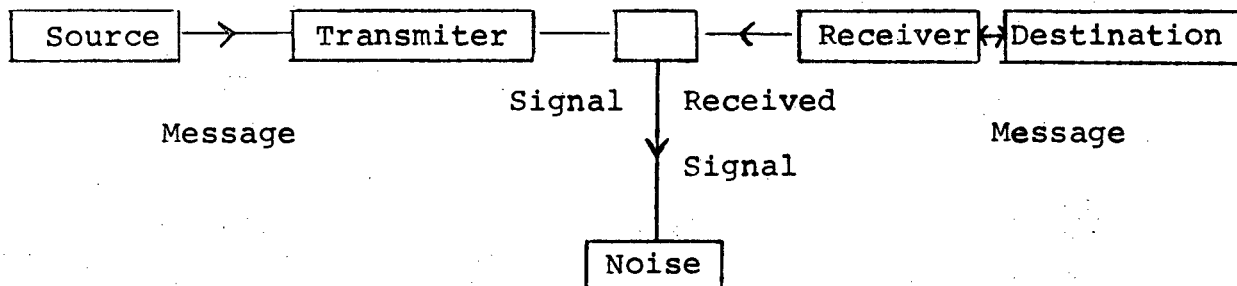
Languages differ in the way in which they categorize  
or codify the experience of the speakers. These differences  
reflect the interests, needs and concerns of the community  
which the language serves. This is most clearly seen in the  
lexical encoding of experience. For this reason, we find  
differences in the vocabularies of different languages. Lang  
uages vary in the way in which they permit codification.  
Thus, what is lexically coded in one language may require  
lexical and grammatical changes in another.

Speaking appears to be divided into two types of  
activity which are known as planning and execution. Speakers  
first plan, then execute the plan which is done through the  
uttering of segments, words, phrases and sentences. This  
process is termed encoding.

Warren Weaver's diagram of the communication process

is a very important version of the input-output model. <sup>(15)</sup>

Information



The aim of communication is to conduct unaltered information from the source to the destination. To achieve this aim, English, which appears as a learner's output, should be the English of both the learner's and the course designer's input.

A message consists of information which has been transmitted and received. The process of encoding is one of putting information into messages, and the process of decoding is one of extracting information from messages. For encoding and decoding to take place, it is necessary to have a common code and reciprocal knowledge of the same.

The functions of communication for adult and for children differ in one important aspect. Communication among

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(15) Weaver, W. The Mathematical Theory of Communication,  
The University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1964: 7.

adults exploits knowledge of the code, while communication among children transmits messages and confirms knowledge of the code.

Communication requires the use of redundancy in various aspects. First, redundancy is introduced at the information source. The teacher might be redundant when he repeats an explanation or an order. This kind of redundancy is generally tolerated by the learners. Secondly, redundancy is used in the code itself. Usually the native speaker is not conscious of redundancy in the code unless he is producing a reduced message such as a telegram. Third, redundancy consists in information which is already at the destination before a particular message is sent. This kind of redundancy refers to the knowledge of the code beyond that required for the decoding of a particular message.

It is a well fact known that most English courses for foreigners develop knowledge of the code rather than communication of real messages. Teachers always find situations for the occurrence of features of the code or contextualize them. This may be successful in terms of immediate motivation. But the application of motivation in this situation is restricted with respect to any particular message, and the knowledge of the code is necessarily redundant in respect to any particular message.

Motivation to learn the code is distinct from motivation to communicate and understand messages. When a learner initiates some sort of communication in English he does so by repeating as output what he has experienced as input. But

the teacher requires more than mere repetition. Consequently, the learner's encoding uses knowledge of the code previously acquired as redundancy.

## 2.2. SENTENCE LEVEL AND TEXTUAL LEVEL

The ability to understand and generate sentences implies, even in children, a meaningful learning process which includes some awareness of syntactical contributions of component words to the total meaning of the sentence. In second language learning this awareness exists on a much more explicit and abstract basis and in this situation meaningful learning plays a more important role in teaching adults than in teaching children. The use of "pattern practice" drills and memorized dialogues do not offer awareness of phrase meaning. As a consequence of this, the learner understands neither the syntactic functions of the component words nor the denotative and syntactical contributions of the individual words to the total meaning of the phrase. When an individual hears a sentence, his knowledge of grammar must be applied to speech data stored in some form of memory, and when that individual produces a sentence, such a sentence must originate in some prelinguistic representation of the idea the speaker wishes to express.

Clark (1977) in his article, "The Nature of Language", stresses that structurally the sentence is the basic unit of language. It has two levels: a surface structure and an underlying representation. Functionally, he is co-incident with



Halliday in conceiving sentences as having three aspects: speech acts, propositional content, and thematic structure. Speakers utter sentences in order to perform speech acts - to ask questions, assert facts, make promises, make bets, etc. The speech act that a sentence transmits is reflected directly and indirectly in its structure. In performing speech acts, speakers also convey propositional content in order to indicate the objects, states, events and facts which their speech acts convey. Speakers also use sentences in cooperation with their listener.

The engagement of language in social life has a productive aspect. There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Rules of syntax are able to control aspects of phonology, and semantic rules may control aspects of grammar. This helps one to conclude that rules of speech acts enter as a controlling factor for the linguistic form as a whole. Apparently speech is a succession of ideas expressed in words, phrases, and clauses. But how these ideas are expressed is an important question for the psychology of language. Linguists have also been concerned with this question, and have reached the following conclusion in their analysis of language structure: a sentence can be divided into parts that reveal the elementary ideas being expressed and their conceptual relations to one another. Some linguists believe that surface structure and deep structure dichotomy are irrelevant for language teaching, and that only surface structure should be used for meaning representation.

Languages have ways of combining propositions to

form complex surface structures, as well as methods for condensing complicated surface structures without any alteration in meaning. Propositions combine in different ways, technically referred to as coordination, relativization, and complementation. They have different functions. Coordination links ideas, relativization qualifies ideas, and complementation fills in ideas.

Clark (1977) comments that sentences can be used to inform people of something, ask them about something, warn them about something, or request them to do something. A very important function of sentences is to specify the ideas around which a speech act is built. These ideas are conveyed by the propositional content, sometimes called the ideational content of a sentence. The study of propositional content is important because it reveals the fundamental nature of human ideas, especially those ideas that can be communicated.

The understanding and production of sentences in a language requires from someone not only the knowledge of meanings of individual words but also the combination of words into sentences that make sense. Usually the fundamentals of grammatical usage are taught in school and we seem to learn them as a natural consequence of learning to use a language. When contemporary linguists speak about a 'grammar' they are referring to a theory that can account for all of the sequences of words in a language that forms grammatically correct sentences. It is assumed by T - Generativists that a grammar should consist of a finite set of rules which can be

applied to generate these sentences. Although our cognitive capacities are finite we are in fact capable of generating an infinite number of different sentences. There is a very large number of sentence types used in a language, and a good theory of grammar must account for all of them with a finite number of rules. However it is not assumed that a language user will be able to state formally all these rules. A child of 6 is certainly able to form grammatically correct sentences, even though he cannot tell how he knows which sentences are grammatical and which are not. But linguists assume that any linguistic utterance including the speech of a 6-year-old, implies an underlying linguistic knowledge that is reflected in a set of grammatical rules for generating and understanding sentences. This set is the one that the learner should hypothetically develop in his learning experience.

Parisi and Antinucci (1976) state that the configurations associated with a given sentence can be of two types, corresponding to the two different functions that noun modifiers can serve and which are presupposed and added. When a modifier is used to help the listener identify what the speaker is referring to, then that associated configuration is presupposed by that sentence. When the modifier merely serves to give additional information about something already identified, then the associated configuration is added to the sentence. Added configurations are very common in the sense that we do not speak in isolated sentences but rather in discourse, adding one sentence to another.

According to Clark (1977) the speaker carries out

two types of mental activity when he produces a sentence: one that can be represented as the proposition and another as the performative. The proposition represents the particular content of the speaker's linguistic act which the speaker wants to carry out in uttering the sentence. When a speaker uses a sentence, this sentence can be said to contain one or more propositions. An utterance may fail to encode or have a proposition, but the speaker still has the proposition as part of the meaning of that utterance. He may fail to communicate but he still intends that proposition.

Although a presupposition is not contained in the primary configuration of a sentence, it is necessary for the linguistic act to permit adequate function of the sentence. The performative act also has its presuppositions. When information is requested, it is presupposed that the listener may know the response. But speakers often violate the presuppositions in order to achieve certain stylistic effects.

Halliday describes the way in which speakers of English organize what they have to say as a message or text. 'Text' in English is organized into informational units. We recognize informational units according to the point of prominence placed on one part of each unit in an utterance. Information structure is not the same as grammatical structure although the informational unit corresponds to the clause. In informational units, the speaker treats one part of the unit as 'new information'. This contrasts with what the speaker treats as recoverable by the hearer which is called 'given

information', and functions by linking an information unit to the rest of the discourse.

When we hear or read a series of sentences we are usually able to determine whether they form a text. A text is a passage of spoken or written discourse that forms a unified whole. Texts have properties which create textual cohesion and the presence of these properties in a text distinguishes a text from a set of disconnected sentences. There are several means of forming cohesion within a text. Reference is one means e. g. John saw Mary at the party - Two days later he married her. The other means are: substitution e. g. She won't come - but she did so the last time; ellipsis - did she invite him? - no, she didn't; conjunction; it doesn't rain here - yet I wouldn't live anywhere else; lexical cohesion - I like to eat - I ate some sandwiches the other day.

It is in the integration of the rules of the system with the instrumental aspect of language (communication goal) that the speaker reaches communicative competence.

### 2.3. SYNTACTIC PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Foreign language learners face several problems in their acquisition and development of grammatical and communicative competence. Some of these problems are clearly noticed in the chapter reserved for the research. It is evident that all speakers possess 'language awareness', some sort of

implicit grammar which allow them to express themselves in the native language. In his acquisition of the target language the language learner has to acquire another grammar that in many aspects is similar to his native one. Then the problems appear. He might not understand what he hears, causing difficulty to his listening comprehension. He may be unable to assimilate what he reads, causing problems in his reading comprehension. If he does not have listening and reading comprehension problems he might have difficulties in the productive skills, either in speaking or in writing. In writing, especially, the following shortcomings generally occur: lack of appropriate words to express ideas; limitations to link ideas to make sense; misplacement of words and problems in expressing grammatical relationships.

According to Richards (1973) difficulty has been defined by certain psycholinguists in terms of sentence length, processing time required, derivational complexity, types of embedding, number of transformations and semantic complexity.

Although the universal hierarchy of difficulty has received little attention in the literature of second language acquisition, it must be regarded in this work because it may affect the learner's perception and his production. What the learner finds difficult also depends on the degree and nature of what he has acquired of the second language.

Some linguists like R. P. Stockwell and J. D. Bowen have established a kind of linguistic logic of the hierarchy

of difficulties. Their principle is based on the concept of transfer. They deal with the problem by focusing their attention on the kinds of choices that exist in any given point of a language.

Stockwell claims that the concept of difficulties, applied to syntax, becomes more problematic as one can observe in the following assumptions:

*The construction of the hierarchy of difficulty depends on the assumption that some correspondences are more difficult to master than others including, as correspondences, those instances where a rule in one language finds no corresponding rule in the other, or where a category in one is unmatched by a category in the other. (16)*

Other authors believe that apart from the hierarchy of difficulty often discussed, there are other factors that need to be taken into account such as functional load, potential mishearing and pattern congruity.

Another source of difficulty is caused by generalizations due to the chronological priority given to certain lex

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(16) Stockwell, R.P.; Bowen, J.D.; Martin, J.W. The Grammatical Structure of English and Spanish, Chicago, 1965: 282.

ical items and structures. In general, one accepts the fact that patterns learned first have priority over patterns learned at a later date in consequence of the simplicity of the first basic structures.

In dealing with the problem of difficulty one must be aware of the principle that a greater number of mistakes are made in oral usage than in written usage because in oral usage time for checking and reflecting is often very limited.

The problem of difficulty cannot be solved from an exclusive point of view, but only in its complete context of linguistic presentation and pedagogical embedding.

Burt and Kiparsky (1974) claim that one area of syntax which causes trouble is the skeleton of the English sentence: the subject, verb and object. They stress two simple facts about these major constituents and their role in declarative English sentences that cause some difficulty in learning English. First, these constituents appear in a fixed order; subject-verb-object. Second, with transitive verbs, none of these constituents is optional. The mistakes that result from not learning these principles lead to incoherent grammatical relations in the first case, and ellipsis of major constituents in the second. Most ESL books do not expose such problems. Discussion is often restricted to an announcement like "English word order is subject-verb-object", which is not enough for certain student. If word order is a problem, it must be given high priority when determining what to correct in student speech.



The authors above suggest that in order to determine what kinds of mistakes make sentence comprehension more difficult, we should take a sentence or paragraph and correct one mistake at a time, leaving the rest of the sentence constant. The next step should be to compare sentences where one mistake or combination of mistakes was corrected with the same sentence in which another mistake was corrected. Then we should try to determine which correction made the sentence sound the best, by asking several native speakers with no interest in the outcome.

Despite the fact that grammatical accuracy is not always required for a foreign language learner, teachers have insisted for many years upon grammatical accuracy in student performance. We can notice this fact in some authors' assertion: "*Foreign language teachers have been trained to correct faulty student responses quickly and consistently for grammatical and pronunciation errors assuming that correct learning result*".<sup>(17)</sup> Moreover Holley and King claim that "*student communication in the foreign language may be actively discouraged by the instructor who insists upon grammatical accuracy*".<sup>(18)</sup>

According to Tomiyana (1980) students generally have

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(17) Holley, Freda A. and Janet E. King Imitation and correction in foreign language learning, John Schumann and Nancy Stenson (Eds.) Rowley-Mass. 1974: 81.

(18) *Ibid.*,: 81.

problems in the use of articles and connectors. A grammatical error consists of two parts: the grammatical item and type of error. In order to determine the hierarchy of errors in terms of communication breakdown, it is necessary to consider not only the grammatical items themselves but also the way in which the students err. In fact, the variable type of error, is more important than the grammatical item.

#### 2.4. ERROR ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS: DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

As analysis of errors plays an important role in this dissertation, it is necessary to give a general background of this analysis, and the fruitful contribution it will have in the approach to difficulties experienced by undergraduate students in the acquisition of initial syntactic development.

There are two main reasons to engage in error analysis. First, to elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language. This is a theoretical objective. Secondly, to enable the student to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes.

##### 2.4.1. AN APPRAISAL OF RICHARDS' MODEL

This section will concentrate on an appraisal of Error Analysis and Developmental Analysis according to

Richards' model. Both analyses are representative. The former is a more traditional type of analysis while the latter is more oriented towards psycholinguistic facts. The other approaches given are used as background information. We will adopt Richards' model in this research. The comments made on Error Analysis are longer than the comments made on Developmental Analysis. However, the brief comment on Developmental Analysis will be both informative and applicable in our work.

According to Richards, Error Analysis is defined as... *"dealing with the differences between the way adult native speakers of the language use the language"*.<sup>(19)</sup>

Error Analysis is concerned with the description and explanation of errors made by speakers of a foreign language, as they progress from zero competence to native speaker competence in the target language. The main objective of error analysis is to analyse the learner's errors in order to obtain valuable information concerning his competence in the foreign language. This information is relevant for the teacher in his plan of courses and selection of teaching materials.

Error Analysis is carried out by using language material produced by the learner spontaneously in essays, compo

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(19) Richards, Jack C., "Error Analysis and Second Language Strategies" in Schumann and Stenson New Frontiers in Second Language Learning, N.Y. Inc., 1974: 32.

sitions, stories, free oral composition, etc. Error Analysis is capable of revealing learners' difficulties. It also alerts teachers as to deal with the areas that need a more exhaustive study. In order to achieve this objective it is necessary to apply appropriate procedures. First it is important to delimit the corpus to which the analysis will be applied. After collecting the data which represent the errors made by the learners, the researcher should classify these errors stating their frequency. Secondly it should explain the errors in the light of their frequency.

The corpus may consist of oral or written samples in the foreign language. The amount of material depends on the intuition of the researcher and on the nature of the research. However, it is important to remember that in delimitating the corpus great care should be taken to include all information about the learners which might be relevant to explain the occurrence and the differences in the frequency of errors made by different learners.

In order to carry out a systematic work the group of learners chosen for the analysis should be as homogeneous as possible. The classification has to be well organized to facilitate the comparison of the occurrence and frequency of different types of errors. The frequency of errors has to be stated in relation to the number of mistakes. One problem in stating the frequency of errors is that of counting recurrent errors. When an error occurs in the same lexical item in a learner's production, it should be counted as a single error.

But if more infringements of the same grammatical rule are pertinent in the same production then they should be counted separately.

Error analysis is useful to show the teacher areas in which his teaching has not been effective. A systematic study of errors contributes toward improving teaching methods through a greater awareness of the nature and causes of the mistakes which students make. Another contribution of error analysis refers to intellectual rewards because the person who undertakes this work finds himself thinking of the nature of the errors and the reasons why they are made. It is obvious that error analysis can provide valuable data for the preparation of teaching materials, textbooks and examinations.

Error Analysis contributes to linguistic theory formation in two ways which are inseparable one from the other. It can lead to the discovery of new aspects of language use and it can also be used as a method for the verification of hypotheses developed within the framework of a linguistic theory.

The study of error analysis is significant in its relevance to reconstructing the learner's approximative system' at any particular stage in his learning career. Error analysis is capable of serving two related but distinct functions-pedagogical and theoretical. The former is applied in its objective and the latter leads to a better understanding of foreign-language learning processes and strategies.

Svartvik (1973) distinguishes error analysis from

performance analysis. He believes that error analysis should be concerned with the study of erroneous utterances produced by groups of learners at some stage of their learning career, and performance analysis for the study of the whole performance data. Error analysis emphasizes that a careful study of a large corpus of errors committed by speakers of the source language attempting to express themselves in the target language, provides factual empirical data for developing a syllabus or a model of second language acquisition. The analysis of production errors shows quite clearly that not all systematic errors produced by the learner can be attributed to interference from the source language. Such errors provide evidence for a much more complex view of the learning process in which the learner is seen as an active participant in the formation and revision of hypotheses regarding the rules of the target language.

Two different types of linguistic analysis are relevant in error analysis: monosystematic and diasystematic language analysis. Monosystematic analysis is concerned with the errors that can be located within a single system of language. Typical errors of performance such as the slips in speaking, reading and writing belong to this type of analysis. Diasystematic analysis is concerned with errors that are caused by interference between several language systems, as in foreign language learning. From this linguistic error analysis didactic consequences of error can be derived such as error evaluation and error therapy.

Trained and experienced teachers have applied EA

for decades. They have studied their students' recurring mistakes, classified them into categories, and used them as a basis for preparing lessons and materials designed to overcome such errors.

Etherton claims that error analysis based on adequate data will show:

- (a) *common weaknesses with which pupils need help: either through remedial teaching or by the introduction of new material.*
- (b) *words, structures, or verb forms which prove to be too difficult at a particular stage and which should be deferred.*
- (c) *weakness shown by the total absence of a particular item, such as relative pronouns.*
- (d) *which parts of a prescribed syllabus are vital for communication and which can be regarded as less important at a particular stage.*
- (e) *materials not in the syllabus but necessary for a certain stage of learning.*
- (f) *inadequacies in an official syllabus; too many materials, a faulty sequence of units, or the omission of essential materials.*
- (g) *weaknesses or error which may be entirely new to the teacher or of which he may be only dimly aware. (20)*

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(20) Etherton, A.R.B. "Error Analysis: Problems and Procedures",  
English Language Teaching Journal Vol. XXXII, 1977:  
67-77.

Error analysis deals with the learner's output, and this includes his correct and incorrect utterances. Error analysis has several implications for the handling of errors in the classroom. Generally teachers emphasize grammar and take content for granted. This tendency is reversed in natural L1 acquisition. Usually the grammatical errors are ignored when children speak, while on the other hand, semantic errors are almost always corrected.

The study of error analysis can be divided into three stages logically dependent upon each other which are: recognition, description and learner's intentions. This stage provides us with important data: pairs of sentences which by definition have the same meaning, or are translation equivalents of each other; one in the learner's dialect, the other in the target language. The recognition of error depends upon the analyst making a correct interpretation of the learner's intended meaning in the context. The learner's utterances can be overtly erroneous, but not meaning what the learner intended.

The description of errors is a comparative process and it is valid only when it shows the respects in which the realization rules of the target language differ from those of the learner's dialect. In order to undertake such a task we need adequate data. Description can only start when recognition has taken place.

Explanation can be regarded as the field of psycholinguistics. It is concerned with accounting for the why and



how of errors committed.

The theoretical use of error analysis interests descriptive linguistics and psycholinguistics. These can not be regarded separately. The psycholinguistic aspect infers some thing of the acquisition process by collecting and analysing the utterances of the infant. This is called longitudinal studies. After making longitudinal studies it is interesting to compare them. One of the theoretical objectives in error analysis is the explanation of how errors come about. This is a psychological explanation in terms of the learner's strategies and the process of learning.

The practical use of the analysis of errors depends on the teacher. The result of the analysis alerts the teacher to the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques, and also shows him what parts of the syllabus have been inadequately learned and need further attention. Furthermore, the errors provide feedback and tell the teacher to move on to the next item in the syllabus or to devote more attention to an item that is causing a problem to his students. The result of this research will provide the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a program of re-teaching.

From the comments made on Error Analysis we have come to the following conclusions:

- 1) Error Analysis describes and explains errors made by for eign language learners in their development from zero

competence to native speaker competence in the foreign language.

- 2) The material used for the analysis is obtained from the learner's essays, compositions, etc.
- 3) The analysis reveals the learner's difficulties and alerts teachers as to how they should deal with the areas that need a more exhaustive study.
- 4) Error analysis is concerned not only with the description and explanation of errors but also with the overcoming of these errors which can be made through remedial work.

#### 2.4.2. AN APPRAISAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL ERROR ANALYSIS

According to Richards, Jack., (1973) developmental errors illustrate the learner's attempts to build up a hypothesis in relation to the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or through textbooks.

On the same subject Zolb (1980) distinguishes some feature of Developmental Errors which are described below:

##### *Product Level*

- Errors which are identical to those made by native learners (Mougeon and Hebrard 1975)
- Errors which result from the creation of rules similar to those of native learner (Dulay and Burt 1974a)
- Errors which reflect the learner's competence at a particu

lar developmental stage (Richards 1971a)

- Errors which illustrate learner's attempt to build up hypotheses about the L2 (Richards 1971a)

#### Process Level

- Origins of errors which are within the L2 (Richards 1971a)
- Errors which reflect general characteristics of rule learning and language acquisition (Richards 1976)
- Main strategies which are simplification, generalization and reduction of grammatical redundancy (Dulay and Burt 1972) (21)

Zolb also claims that "a developmental error/stage in the L2 is compatible with an L1 structure and the L1 structure conforms closely to a general acquisition regularity. It is this correspondence that triggers transfer from the L1". (22)

#### 2.5. ERRORS ROLE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

When the learner is in the process of acquiring a second language he produces utterances which are judged as

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(21) Zolb, Helmut "Developmental and Transfer Errors: Their Common Bases and (Possible) Differential Effects on Subsequent Learning", *Tesol Quarterly* Vol. XIV, No.4 December 1980: 472.

(22) *Ibid.*,: 477.

erroneous both in speech and writing. In earlier times, errors were considered as a sign that the learner had broken the rules taught to him and that he needed more explanations until the errors disappeared. Errors were due to the inefficiency of teaching. Later on, errors served as an indication of the learner's difficulties with certain aspects of the language which could be explained by habits of the mother tongue and their transference to the target language. The idea of repeating the rules of the target language in order to overcome the errors was substituted by intensive drilling of the sound patterns and sentence structure of the language.

In general, linguistic errors motivate an interest and awareness of structures of the language system. Linguistic analysis and theory formation start from the point of this awareness of problems posed by language behaviour. Errors and linguistic theory depend on each other. The relevance of errors to linguistic theory is based on the model of linguistics in which errors are regarded as part of a linguistic control system. In this system, errors represent, negatively, a disturbance of language behavior and, positively, a function of feedback. Errors also represent the restrictions underlying normal language use and the rules of the language system.

The application of linguistic and psychological theory to the study of language contributed to a new dimension of the discussion of errors. There are two schools of thought in the field of methodology in respect to the learners' errors. First we have the school which claims that a perfect teaching

method is able to avoid errors, and the occurrence of errors is due to the inadequacy of teaching techniques. The second school follows the philosophy that we live in an imperfect world, thus errors will always occur in spite of our best efforts. So errors are due to students' approximative strategies to the standard form.

The judgements made of a foreigner's knowledge of the unknown language is based on the number and kind of mistakes he makes. Usually we think that he knows the language well when he does not make many mistakes. Although the mistakes a learner makes do not provide a direct measure of his knowledge of the language, they provide a very important source of information about the nature of the student's knowledge. From the study of his errors we may infer what he knows and what he still has to learn. By describing and classifying his errors in linguistic terms we can build a picture of the features of the language which are causing him problems in learning.

The language of some poets often shows breaches of the code. But we do not refer to these breaches as errors. We accept them as a way in which the poet expresses what he thinks and which may be difficult to express in the standard code. Thorne (1965) has suggested that the language of the poet should be regarded as an idiosyncratic dialect. In the same way we can also regard the language of a learner as an idiosyncratic dialect also.

### 2.5.1. CAUSES

Errors are valid insofar as they show the ways in which the use of the rules of the target language differ from those of the learner's dialect. A single instance of error is insufficient to make a description of that error. We need to observe the regularity of the same error in order to attempt to make an accurate description.

The origin of errors of L2 learner-language has worried some researches. The problem concerns the division of the learners' errors according to whether they originate from an L1 structure or L2 dependent rule construction. Perhaps the most important result is whether or not L2 acquisition draws on the same cognitive mechanisms and language strategies required for L1 acquisition.

### 2.5.2. CLASSIFICATION

Richards (1971) proposes a three-way classification of errors: interlingua interference errors, intralingual errors and developmental errors. The interference errors are those caused by the influence of the learner's mother tongue on his production of the target language in those areas where the languages clearly differ. These errors can be found at the level of pronunciation, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and meaning. The intralingual errors are those originating within the structure of English itself. These errors reflect the learner's competence and illustrate some of the general characteristics

of language acquisition. These errors may represent for some learners final grammatical competence and for others indication of transitional competence. Richards makes the following comment about intralingua errors:

*Intralingual errors reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply.* (23)

The developmental errors reflect the strategies by which the learner acquires the language. These errors show that the learner is making false hypotheses about the target language based on limited exposure to it. In Richards' words:

*Developmental errors illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom.* (24)

A major justification for labeling an error as developmental comes from noting similarities to errors produced by children who are acquiring the target language as their mother tongue.

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(23) Richards, Jack Error Analysis Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition, Longman, 1973: 174.

(24) *Ibid.*, : 174.

There are four types of intralingual and developmental errors: overgeneralization of rules, deviant structures, incomplete application of rules and false hypothesis. Overgeneralization deals with the creation of 'ill-formed' structures based on the speaker's knowledge of other structures in the foreign language. An example of overgeneralization is the omission of the third person singular ending in verbs. Deviant structures are the result of the wrong application of grammatical rules, for example, The girl whom I saw her is my cousin. The learner has been taught to use an object after the verb to see and in a situation where there is a restriction to the general rule he does the same.

Incomplete application of rules, as shown by Richards, is evident in the use of questions and the answer given by students, such as, Did she work yesterday? Yes, she work yesterday. A false hypothesis is generalization. Errors like She is teaches English and it was happened may be due to the interpretation that 'is' is a marker of present tense, and 'was', a marker of past tense.

There are other kinds of errors attributed to general learning strategies which are observable in the first as well as in the second language learner. Analogy helps a learner to predict that certain already perceived relations will be paralleled by further relations. Generally such predictions result in the production of both wanted and unwanted forms.

Analogy underlies language production and language



learning at all levels. The learner selects his learning strategies by analogy also. The learner should be encouraged not to be frustrated by the rejection of the language forms which are analogically rational. If the teacher convinces the learner that analogy cannot be trusted as a process, the learner may depend on memory and come to unfruitful conclusions.

Analogous inflections occur in English both in native speakers and in foreign learners. One example is the verb goed as an analogy to talked. This error occurs especially with the foreign learner. The learner learns that the marker -ed indicates the past tense and by analogy, he uses the same marker with other verbs. If he does this with irregular verbs, then the result is similar to the example given.

Cross-association is an appropriate term to designate the phenomenon of mutual interference between partially learned items affected by the other. The simplest association occurs when associated words are presented in succession. George, H.V. establishes favoring circumstances for cross-association:

1. *The shorter the time between the presentation of the items, the greater the chance of cross-association.*
2. *The smaller the degree of familiarity with the first item before the second is introduced, the greater the chance*

of cross-association.

3. A third favoring circumstance is shown in the long X short example, namely a constant presentation order or repetition order.
4. Any degree of homophony (or homography) in the forms favors cross-association.
5. A common presentation "situation" favors cross-association. (25)

Mother-tongue speakers of English commit occasional errors which can be attributed to cross-association. Generally they occur when use is made of less familiar vocabulary. Native speakers' errors based on cross-association are less frequent than those of foreign learners. This is justified by the fact that English courses for foreign learners offer more favorable circumstances for cross association than does uncontrolled contact with the language.

A good way to make a classification of errors is by distinguishing between mistakes and errors in order to determine if an error is in fact present. Errors are systematic as mistakes are slips of the tongue. The identification of the presence and nature of an error should be done through the

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(25) George, H.V. "A Commentary on Errors Attributable to Interference" *Common Errors in Language Learning*, Newbury House Publishers/Rowley, Massachusetts, 1969: 153.

interpretation of the learner's utterance. It is not an easy task, because we do not always know what the learner is trying to say. Usually we discover the learner's communicative intent by asking him what he means.

According to Marina Burt and Carol Kiparsky mistakes fall into two major classes: Global and local. Global mistakes violate rules involving the overall structure of a sentence, the relations among constituent clauses, and the relations among major constituents. Local mistakes cause trouble in a particular constituent, or in a clause of a complex sentence. Marina Burt and Carol Kiparsky in their article "Global and Local Mistakes" describe certain mistakes made by foreign students from a variety of countries. These mistakes were made in and out of class and were observed orally and in written form. The authors' main objective in their research was to present a hierarchy of errors which can be used by the teacher in order to determine which errors are most important to correct. The errors reveal areas in English grammar in which difficulties often arise. According to a study of these errors the syntactical problems felt by students from different backgrounds in general appear to be the same as those already mentioned.

The study of mistakes corrected hierarchically resulted in the classification of two major classes of mistakes designated as global and local by Burt et al. Usually global mistakes are higher on the hierarchical scale than local ones. The most typical global mistakes are those which confuse the relationship among clauses, as in the following cases:

- 1) use of connectors, especially meaningful ones
- 2) distinctions between co-ordinate and relative clause constructions
- 3) parallel structure in reduced co-ordinate clauses
- 4) tense continuity within clauses

The reason for pointing out global and local errors is to help the students learn to correct them. Burt et al. at the end of their article, assert that we can extend the distinction between global and local mistakes to a distinction between first and second language.

An example of local mistake is provided in the sentence below following the same analysis made by Burt et al:

We didn't study the lesson, but our teacher said that if not study it we are fail in the test.

Local Mistakes	Correction	Correct Result
Subject missing	Supply <u>we</u>	If we not study
Auxiliary missing	Supply <u>do</u>	If we do not study
Wrong tense	Eliminate <u>are</u> And supply <u>will</u>	We will fail

Burt et al., stress that one can not predict which student will make global mistakes, but we can predict that all learners of language will make local ones. In general people are not used to hearing speakers of their own language make global mistakes. But local mistakes are made by children

learning their mother tongue as well as by adults.

### 2.5.3. SIGNIFICANCE

It is important to consider the significance of students' errors. Sometimes it is more effective to tolerate than to correct them. Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges of teaching a language is to determine when and when not to ignore errors. The teacher must become aware of the effectiveness of his own corrective techniques.

The significance of students' errors seems to receive great attention in psycholinguistic literature. Corder (1967) proposed the hypothesis that errors are evidence of the learners' strategies and the study of errors is relevant to the discovery of the learners' built-in syllabus. Důsková (1969) investigated the source of errors made by Czech students in an English course and attempted to evaluate the importance of native interference in the learning of a second language. Wilkins (1968) suggested that students' errors are due not only to mother tongue patterns but also to confusions between forms and functions of the language being learnt.

There are at least three different ways of regarding the significance of the learner's errors. First, they are significant to the teacher because they tell him the progress of the learner and what remains for him to learn. Secondly, the errors provide the researcher with evidence of how language is acquired and what strategies or procedures the

learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, the errors are of great importance to the learner, because they serve as a device for him to test his hypothesis about the nature of the language he is learning. Thus, the making of errors is a strategy employed by children acquiring their first language, as well as by those learning a foreign language. Errors should not be considered as signs of inhibition, but as evidence of strategies of learning.

We agree with the ones who consider errors as evidence of strategies of learning. So the errors committed by the students in our research are signalled either as evidence of the learners' strategies in their initial syntactic development or their transition from zero competence to some degree of competence in the target language.

## 2.6. CONCLUSIONS

Intending to give a general view of the learner's involvement in the foreign language, we have approached some important aspects concerning the structure of language that he develops in his language acquisition. First he resorts to some kind of syntactic framework and constructs the model he needs in order to communicate, and this model is equivalent to the creation of an interlanguage. But the learner is also faced with the problem of how to acquire a new model in the target language. In this case he needs to acquire some vocabulary and he must develop some ideas of sentence level.

In the process of communication, the learner needs to be aware of the activities of planning and execution. In both speaking and writing someone has to plan first what he wants to communicate then execute his communication. Therefore, the information to be transmitted is put into the form of a message which is decoded by the receiver of the message. When the code does not transmit reciprocal knowledge in the environment in which it is used, then problems are created.

Among the authors who comment on the organization of ideas expressed in messages, Halliday seems to be the most significant. He emphasizes the process of organizing ideas into informational units, in which the speaker treats one part of the unit as 'new information'. Thus, a message is defined as a passage of spoken or written discourse that forms a unified whole. This unification is characterized by coherence, which distinguishes a text from a set of disconnected sentences.

We also notice that the skeleton of the English sentence-subject, verb, and object - is one area in syntax which causes great difficulty to learners. This is due to the fact that these constituents appear in a fixed order: subject - verb - object. Therefore, when the student is not aware of these principles he is likely to misuse them or omit them altogether from the sentence structure, in both his oral and written communications.

Usually students learn from their teachers the prin

principle that the predominant word order in English are the subject, the verb and the object. Most of the time, however, students are not sufficiently motivated through the exercise of the practice of this principle. Consequently, the comprehension of the sentence is affected and the oral or written message is misunderstood. Therefore, a certain priority should be given in determining what to correct in the student's production in order to avoid further complex problems.

Concerning the approach to errors, we arrived at the following conclusions:

- 1) Errors are evidence of the learner's difficulty in the foreign language learning.
- 2) Errors are significant for the teacher, the researcher and the learner. Their importance to the teacher is concerned with the learner's progress and the areas in which he needs improvement. To the researcher errors enlarge his vision of how language is acquired and what strategies the learner employs in his study of the language. To the learner errors serve as a device for testing his hypotheses concerning the language he is acquiring.



## CHAPTER III

### SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH AND TYPOLOGY OF ERRORS

#### INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is a follow-up of the development of students' strategies in coping with the acquisition of language structure. With this objective in mind we begin with some comments about the subjects, the course, the corpus under analysis, the method under analysis and some statistical results.

#### 3.0. THE SUBJECTS

Thirteen students were selected from a group of twenty-six. The selection was made after analysing a questionnaire in which these 13 students appeared to be the ones who came closer to zero competence in knowledge and use of the English language. The reason for these criteria was that there were students in this group who had had previous training or experience in language courses which thus classified them as intermediate or advanced. Consequently they had surpassed an initial stage of syntactic development. (The students who were eliminated from the experimental group

were repeating the course or had already spent some time in an English speaking country).

The selection of the group was made on the basis of a previous observation of the students' performance in the first two weeks of classes, together with the students' personal appraisal of their language abilities through the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained items related to the students' experiences in the study of a foreign language, the kinds of courses taken (in private or public schools, or abroad), the number of sections into which classes were distributed as well as various questions related to their perception of the problems they had in terms of receptive and productive skills.

In the first two weeks of class-observation we detected a very elementary stage of mastery of the language. This state of affairs was confirmed, later on, after the analysis of the questionnaire in which the thirteen students showed their limited experience in the use of the target language. One important piece of information about the group is the fact that not all of them were taking the course with the idea of specializing in a foreign language. Some were there in order to fulfill a language requirement.

### 3.1. THE COURSE

The course had as its main objective the development of a basic vocabulary and the practice of basic structures in

English, presented through authentic texts for reading which contained graded difficulty. The students were also exposed to tapes in the language laboratory in order to help them develop some listening comprehension. Among the productive tasks they were put in situations where they had to produce some basic oral English and they were also required to write brief summaries using basic structures.

The activities mentioned above were planned with two basic ideas in mind:

- a) to provide the students with sufficient exposure in the for foreign language in order to develop receptive skills (listening and reading comprehension)
- b) to develop very basic productive skills in order to be able to express themselves in the foreign language through language interaction (giving instructions, asking for information, making suggestions, etc) and through elementary written expression, reaching the paragraph level.

The information concerning the course was obtained from the regular program established by the teachers responsible for the group.

### 3.2. THE CORPUS UNDER ANALYSIS

In order to evaluate the students' performance in

logical progression throughout the course, we decided to analyse their production in three stages: the Initial Stage, which included approximately thirty class hours, the Middle Stage which amounted to approximately sixty class periods, and the Final Stage which marked the last part of the course. At each Stage the students were given two different types of written assignments: compositions and achievement tests. The compositions were based on readings previously given to the students by their regular teachers. The structure of the sentences found in the readings was not a simplified syntactic version. In spite of the syntactic complexity the students were able to grasp their meaning. This situation forced the students to reproduce ideas in their own simple grammar instead of providing a literal version of the matter under discussion.

On the other hand, the tests presented specific sections of structural problems. These sections included questions of the cloze type (cfr. p. 208-211 Appendix) which provided some insights regarding syntactic relations and problem-solving questions (cfr. p. 207 Appendix) involving non-linear information which had to be interpreted by the students within their own grammatical resources.

The students' performance in all of these tasks was the result of a gradual build-up of vocabulary, controlled structural drills, reading comprehension strategies, development of skills for utilizing cohesive devices and organization of ideas. The compositions and the tests thus became a reconstruction process which reviewed the actual stage of

mastery of the language achieved at the three successive stages in the course.

### 3.2.1. INITIAL STAGE

The compositions analysed in the initial stage aimed at descriptive phrases. The typical structure of description implied the use of forms of the verb to be, present tense verb forms, basic structures in the passive voice, adjective forms and prepositional phrases. The vocabulary used implied references to physical location, frontiers, population and geographical descriptions (special characteristics of a country or places).

The first composition analysed had "Brazil" as its main topic. The students' writing varied in extension from one to five paragraphs. This situation made the task longer than expected in some places that is why there were more instances of errors and less control over the extension.

The second composition entitled "The Blue Mosque" was more restricted in form and did not exceed the length of a paragraph. For this purpose very specific information led the students to use simple sentences in a more cohesive way within the paragraph framework:

- located in Istanbul
- religious place

- popular
- much tourism around the place

The advantage of using this framework was that by omitting conjugated verb forms and eliminating sentential information the students were left with no syntactical framework to build on. Thus the compositions showed the students' ability to cope with the syntax and their skills in organizing their ideas in a cohesive manner.

The first achievement test, in its grammatical section, presented an Airline Timetable of this type:

Porto Alegre - Santiago (Chile)

Mond.	9:50	11:50	Varig 500
Mond.	18:00	20:00	Iberia 301
Wed.	17:45	19:45	Lufthansa 212
Frid.	9:50	12:00	Varig 501

This drill patterned after the drills suggested by Harkess and Eastwood (1979,14), induced the students to produce language of their own and to answer questions which could be inferred by retrieving information from the chart.

The second grammatical section of the test was of the gap-filling type (cloze test). This required the correct usage of three definite articles, two subject pronouns, seventeen verbs and eighteen agreements of the subject with its verb. The main syntactic problems observed were related

with the article usage and omission of the subject pronoun. Next to these problems came the agreement of both number and person in action verbs as well as in the verbs "to be" and "there be".

### 3.2.2. MIDDLE STAGE

The compositions analysed in the middle stage were of a descriptive type. Besides the use of forms of the verb "to be", very little emphasis was given to the use of present tense forms in verbs. Instead, we emphasized the past tense and perfect forms of verbs. The vocabulary used implied references to location, population, eating habits and descriptions.

The first composition analysed at this stage was called "Vilcabamba". The text referred to the living habits of a community in the Andean region. The extension of this writing varied from two to five paragraphs.

The second composition dealt with a nuclear power accident. The length of this task was similar to the first one.

In both compositions the students had previous information about the assigned topics and were free to write as much as they wished. Some expanded on the topics more than others. The length of the compositions revealed to a certain extent the students' capacity for expression in the foreign

language.

The second achievement test presented three sections of the gap-filling type (cloze test) and these required the use of three articles, eighteen verbs and twelve agreements of the subject with its verb. Although the test included blanks to be filled in with adjectives and prepositions, the errors manifested in these aspects were not taken into consideration in our analysis. The main syntactic problems detected in this test were concerned with the article usage and the appropriate choice of verbs to fit into the right blank in order to make sense out of the context.

### 3.2.3. FINAL STAGE

The final stage comprised the final point of the learning process after one academic term. At this stage the students were observed through different types of written assignments: two compositions and a test. The topics assigned for the first compositions were "James Craig", "The Optacon", and "Two Supertalents". The students were familiar with the topics through previous reading material which dealt with the same problem in extended fashion. This provided them with the necessary familiarity of vocabulary and sufficient ideas about the subject in question in order to be able to cope with the composition even though their grammar was limited.

At this point of the course, the grammatical strucu



tures found in the texts were slightly more sophisticated than the type of writing which the students could be expected to produce. At the end of the reading task the students were questioned about the main points in the comprehension of what they had read. In the next period the students were asked to write about the ideas discussed in the text. Since they did not possess the competence to reproduce the kind of complex sentences found in the text, they could only reproduce the ideas within the framework of their own grammar model. In order to facilitate the use of grammatical structures they were asked to concentrate on specific items of information. For this purpose, three points of view were suggested; "James Craig" (the experimentalist psychologist), "The Optacon" (a reading device) "Two Supertalented Fellows" (the subjects of Craig's experiment). The extension of the compositions varied from one to three paragraphs.

The topic for the last composition was "Nuclear Energy" and it was included in the third achievement test. The students received the following outline as a point of reference:

Topic : Nuclear Energy

Problem : Positive aspects: - only alternative today for energy crisis  
- abundance and cheapness of power  
- perfectly controlled

Negative aspects: - radiation risks  
- nuclear reactors not so safe  
- accidents in the past

- better alternatives in nature:  
solar, wave and wind power

Case of Brazil: (a) for some people - (Brazil)  
needs it  
(b) for others - (Brasil)  
does not  
need it

The task imposed on the students in this composition was to expand the information required in the outline. Special attention had to be given to sentential organization and then to paragraph level. The students' difficulties manifested in this composition were probably due to the fact that this work was performed in the classroom and inserted in a test. The students were not allowed to change ideas with their colleagues and teacher and the time set to answer the test and write the composition was limited.

The third achievement test included a section of the gap-filling type (cloze test) which required the use of an article, two subject pronouns, nine verbs and eight agreements of the subject with its verb. Adjectives and prepositions were omitted in the counting of errors. In this test again article usage had the highest number of errors. Next to it we have omission of the subject pronoun and verb usage. Although the errors in agreement have increased they are not so representative.

At the end of the course we applied an evaluation

questionnaire in order to collect data concerning the course itself. This questionnaire contained items related to the students' perspectives in connection with the course, the method used, their own participation and the difficulty they felt in writing the compositions and completing the tests. They were also required to evaluate their own individual performance and to present suggestions which might help to improve the course.

### 3.3. PROCEDURAL STAGES

#### 1) Selection of the subjects

- a - observation of class performance during the first weeks of class
- b - application of questionnaire in order to make an appraisal of the students' language ability.

#### 2) Selection of the corpus for the analysis

- written performance: compositions and tests

#### 3) Error Analysis I - Taxonomy of most frequent errors listed

After selecting the subjects according to their background in English, our major concern was that of concentrating on the students' performance, and on the selection and preparation of compositions and tests. It was not our intention to deal with all of the syntactic errors found in the samples, but rather with the most recurrent ones. Thus, the criterion of frequency of errors was the most

pertinent in our case. The most recurrent types of errors found were the following:

1. Omission and wrong choice of article
2. Omission of subject pronoun in third person singular and plural forms
3. Omission and Incorrect use of verb form
4. Agreement errors
5. Word Order errors

Based on other studies of a similar kind we adopted the following criteria:

- 1) The research under analysis was to be based on written work;
- 2) The correction of the students' compositions and tests would demand that special attention be given to the most recurrent syntactic errors;
- 3) The number of errors listed should correspond to the most recurrent types;
- 4) The results of this analysis would be presented statistically in Tables and Diagrams;
- 5) The comments for each Table and Diagram would follow the hierarchy of errors presented in the students' work.

#### 3.4. STATISTICAL RESULTS AND COMMENTS

The following statistics indicate that the errors

were of five distinct types: (a) Errors of omission and wrong choice in the use of articles; (b) Errors in relation to the subject pronoun including its omission; (c) Errors in relation to the use of verb forms including both omission and incorrect form; (d) Errors of agreement between the subject and its verb and (e) Errors of Word Order.

The errors that appear in the following tables are specified under C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, signifying student compositions and their respective numbers and T1, T2 and T3, which signify tests and the order in which they were applied.

With the objective of following up the students' performance in our research, we prepared six Tables in order to present in more detail the difficulties experienced by the students in the tasks required of them. Among the Tables presented three refer to the analysis of compositions and one to the analysis of tests applied in the stages of observation. The various stages are conjoined in one Table in order to present a general picture of the recurrent types of errors. We also present a Table with the percentage of errors committed by each informant.

As a matter of organization we will first proceed by presenting Table I in which all the compositions analysed are conjoined. Then we will present two separate Tables which compare C1 and C6 as well as C2, C3, C4 and C5 in order to arrive at some conclusions concerning the difficulties and facilities found in these tasks. The same picture can be

observed through the presentation of two Figures. Table IV will present the results of the tests applied. Table V will be concerned with the results of the stages of observation. The final Table will present the percentage of errors committed by each informant in the various stages of observation.

T A B L E I

Total of errors in the Six Compositions analysed

N = 13

O.	=	Omission
W.C.	=	Wrong choice
W.F.	=	Wrong form

SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	TOTAL	%
1. Article O.	6	0	0	1	2	1	10	8.5
W.C.	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	2.5
2. Subject O.	15	0	0	1	0	13	29	24.6
3. Verb O.	13	2	2	2	1	2	22	18.6
W.F.	4	0	0	0	0	1	5	4.2
4. Agreement	8	8	8	3	1	12	40	33.9
5. Word Order	4	1	0	2	1	1	9	7.6
T O T A L	53	11	10	9	5	30	118	

This Table presents the results achieved in six compositions written by the students under our observation. Most of these compositions were based on readings previously distributed to the students in the classroom. The topics were generally discussed in class in order to provide some orientation for the students.

As can be seen, the main concern in the compositions analysed was in the agreement of the subject with its verb. According to the results, 33,9% of the total number of errors were committed in this area. This indicates that the students had great difficulty in the correct use of subject - verb - agreement. Besides this obvious difficulty with subject - verb - agreement, we also notice problems in the correct use of the subject pronoun. This is an aspect of grammar often neglected by Brazilian students in their writing of the English language. According to the analysis made, 24,6% of the total number of errors made were concerned with the omission of the subject pronoun. The incorrect use of verb forms was to be expected in the compositions. The next result of 22,8% of errors in this area proves that the use of verb forms constituted a problem for these students in their syntactic development. One can conclude that the problems manifested in these student tests appeared within the grammatical categories of subject - verb - agreement, the correct use of the subject pronoun and of verbal forms.

The problems manifested in the use of the article were mainly seen in omissions. It seems that the students

were somewhat confused as to the correct position of the article. In some cases, when attempting to use the article they committed mistakes by using it in a place where it was not required or else the definite article was used instead of the indefinite and vice versa.

Few problems appeared in Word Order. Apparently, this grammatical category did not cause much difficulty for the students. Only 7,6% of the total number of errors were committed in this area.

The figures in Table I show that C1 had the most significant number of errors, with C6 coming in second place. By comparing these results we notice a considerable improvement in the students' writing as it appears in C2, C3, C4 and C5. In order to verify which compositions were most difficult for the students and which presented some facility for them, we will present two separate tables which attempt to analyse both difficulties and facilities.



T A B L E II

Total of errors in C1 and C6

N = 13

SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES		C1	C6	TOTAL	%
1. Article	O.	6	1	7	8,4
	W.C.	3	0	3	3,6
2. Subject	O.	15	13	28	37,7
3. Verb	O.	13	2	15	18,
	W.F.	4	1	5	6,
4. Agreement		8	12	20	24,
5. Word Order		4	1	5	6,
T O T A L		53	30	83	

By observing the number of errors in C1 we can make some assumptions concerning the students' written performance. Usually students do not pay much attention to the first task required in the course. After they receive the corrected work back, they are generally surprised at the large number of errors which they committed. Sometimes the first task seems to be the hardest one, because the students are not

accustomed to writing with as much care as is required in the course. In the case of our students, they were required to read a text about Venezuela before writing their first composition. Then they were asked to write about "Brazil" using the same references which were found in the previous reading such as location, frontiers, population, etc. Some students could expand on this topic with a certain facility, but others had great difficulty in expressing their ideas in the English language.

The teacher's expectations for C1 is another fact that should be taken into account. The student could not know that he was supposed to pay special attention to verb forms, subject pronoun, article usage and subject - verb - agreement. But, by observing the large number of errors committed by the students, we can notice that these areas caused serious problems for them.

Although the number of errors in C6 were not the same as in C1 they were also representative. These compositions have peculiar characteristics, C1 was based on a text previously read, discussed and written outside the classroom. Thus, the students had plenty of time to organize their ideas and to consult a native speaker, their teacher or even their colleagues in order to perform their task in a cohesive manner. On the other side, C6 was based on information given in class and inserted in a test in which the students had to develop ideas on their own, within a time limit set by the teacher. This limitation of time contributed toward a poorer

students' performance in the last composition.

The grammatical errors expected in C6 were mainly related to the use of the subject pronoun and subject - verb agreement. The students' main problems can be noticed in these areas. They have a tendency to omit the subject pronoun and to use a verb form which is not in agreement with its subject. This tendency led them to commit many errors, as is shown in Table II. Another problem observed in this composition is concerned with development of the topic by the students. In general, they followed the outline as given without developing their own ideas. This attitude reveals a certain difficulty in expanding their own ideas in an appropriate way in the foreign language.

In order to illustrate the students' errors we have extracted some examples from their written work. The examples given will be grouped under the various syntactic categories in which the problems appear, according to the work presented in the Tables. As a matter of organization we have labelled asterisked versions as erroneous and put corrections inside the parentheses. The first samples are related to C1 and the last ones to C6. C1 manifested problems in all syntactic categories. The problems are listed below in the increasing hierarchy of difficulty.

C1

1. Verb usage - 17 errors
2. Subject - 15 errors

- 3. Article - 9 errors
- 4. Agreement - 8 errors
- 5. Word Order - 4 errors

1. Verb: The use of verbs caused some problems to our students, as seen in the omission of the third person singular and the choice of inadequate verbs in sentences.

#### Omission

- \* Brazil in the heart of South America.  
(Brazil is in the heart of South America).
- \* Brasilia the capital.  
(Brasilia is the capital).

#### Errors with verb form

Brazil is the biggest country in South America.

\*It is 23 states.

(Brazil is the biggest country in South America. It has 23 states).

\* We are the biggest river in the world.

(We have the biggest river in the world).

2. Subject: Omission of the subject pronoun appeared to be a difficulty for our students especially in the

third person singular.

\* Is bounded by the Venezuela.

(It is bounded by the Venezuela).

\* Is a Federal Republic.

(It is a Federal Republic).

3. Article: Omission of the definite article, and the wrong use of the definite or indefinite article, appeared quite frequently in Cl. By wrong use we mean the use of a definite article where the indefinite article is required or the use of the indefinite article instead of the definite article.

#### Omission

\* Official language is Portuguese.

(The official language is Portuguese).

\* Most important religion is Catholicism.

(The most important religion is Catholicism).

#### Wrong Choice a/the the/a

\* Brazil is a largest country in South America.

(Brazil is the largest country in South America).

\* Brazil is the very beautiful country.

(Brazil is a very beautiful country).

4. Agreement problems: Subject - verb agreement presented some difficulty in both third persons singular and plural.

\* Brazil occupy a big area.

(Brazil occupies a big area).

\* Several people forms the country.

(Several people form the country).

5. Word Order: Few problems were observed in Word Order. Only four errors were detected. The following are examples of the incorrect ordering of words.

\* Brazil possesses largest the park industrial.

(Brazil possesses the largest industrial park).

\* Is Catholicism Roman the main religion of the country.

(Roman Catholicism is the main religion of the country).

The problems in C6 are listed according to their order of difficulty.

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Subject    | - 13 errors |
| 2. Agreement  | - 12 errors |
| 3. Verb usage | - 3 errors  |
| 4. Article    | - 1 error   |
| 5. Word Order | - 1 error   |

1. Subject: The omission of the subject pronoun in the third person singular and in the first person plural were frequently manifested in C6 as the samples illustrate.

3rd. person singular

- \* Many countries use it because is inexpensive.  
(Many countries use it because it is unexpensive).

1st. person plural

- \* You might say that have better alternatives in nature such as solar, water and wind power.  
(You might say that we have better alternatives in nature such as solar, water and wind power).
- \* Believe that the nature provides better alternatives for the energy crisis.  
(We believe that the nature provides better alternatives for the energy crisis).

2. Agreement: The difficulty felt by the students in subject - verb agreement was manifested in the use of three personal pronouns: (a) the third person singular; (b) the first person plural and (c) the third person plural. By studying the examples we conclude that the students were not aware of the fact that the subject must agree with the main verb of the sentence.

Third person singular

- \* The nature have better alternatives of energy crisis.  
(Nature has better alternatives for the energy crisis).
- \* It give to people cheaper condition to live.  
(It gives people cheaper living conditions).

First person plural

- \* From the point of view of some people in Brazil, we needs it.  
(From the point of view of some people we need it in Brazil).

Third person plural

- \* People knows that nuclear power is not so safe.  
(People know that nuclear power is not so safe).
- \* Some people needs it.  
(Some people need it).

3. Verb Usage: In reference to the omission of the verb in the third person singular, the students committed only three errors. In the wrong choice of verb forms we observed one error in this composition. These problems are clearly shown in the following sentences.



Omission

- \* Today, this problem more or less controlled.  
(Today, this problem is more or less controlled).

Incorrect Form

- \* Power perfectly controlled doesn't happen.  
(Perfectly controlled nuclear power is impossible today).
4. Article: The only problem manifested in the use of the article was the omission of the definite article.
- \* Accidents in \_\_\_\_\_ past showed that Nuclear Power can be dangerous.  
(Accidents in the past showed that Nuclear Power can be dangerous).
5. Word Order: Incorrect arrangement of words in the formation of sentences appeared only once in the following sentence:

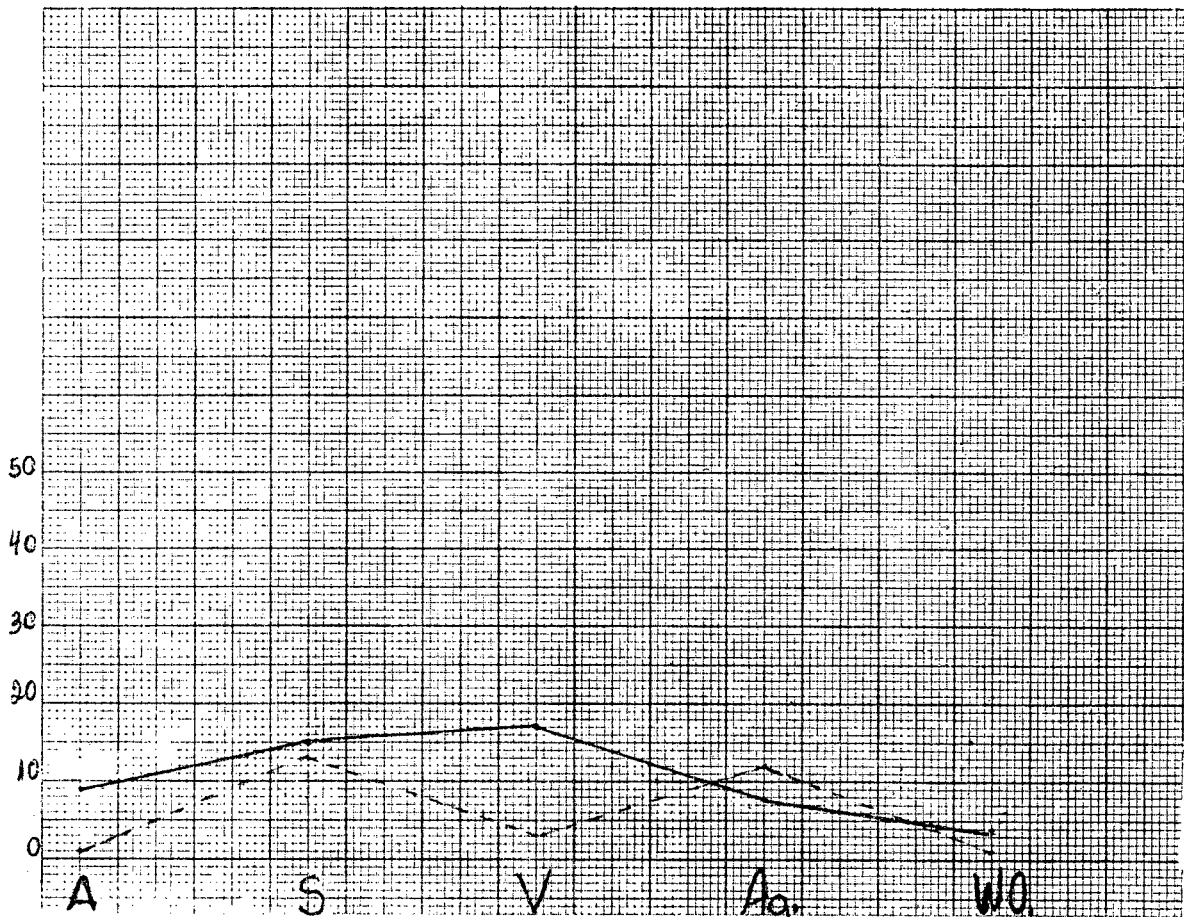
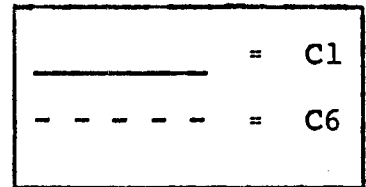
- \* Better alternatives can it bring.  
(It can bring better alternatives).

The students' performance in C1 and C6 can be evaluated in the Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Errors committed in C1 and C6

N = 13



As the figure indicates, C1 and C6 show serious difficulties in the students' writing performance. Although these compositions were written under different circumstances

the problems were similar. This fact reveals that a similar cause must have contributed to these problems. Possible causes which may have contributed to a poor performance by these students have already been mentioned in description of previous tables.

As has been stressed, the students made considerable improvement from C2 to C5. This can clearly be seen in Table III, from which we can get a general picture of the situation. After examining this table we can contrast it with the previous one in order to verify which syntactic categories were most improved and which ones continued to present difficulties for the students.

T A B L E III

Total of errors in C2, C3, C4 and C5

N = 13

SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES		C2	C3	C4	C5	TOTAL	%
1. Article	O.	0	0	1	2	3	8,5
	W.C.	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Subject	O.	0	0	1	0	1	2,8
3. Verb	O.	2	2	2	1	7	20,
	W.F.	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. Agreement		8	8	3	1	20	57,
5. Word Order		1	0	2	1	4	11,4
T O T A L		11	10	9	5	35	

Taking into consideration the fact that these four compositions were written outside the classroom, after an intensive preparation of reading and discussion, and after the experience of writing C1, it is easy to understand why the errors decreased hierarchically as demonstrated in Table III.

The grammatical aspects most closely observed in these compositions were related to subject - verb agreement and the use of verb forms. It seems, however, that the students did not pay close attention to these areas, and as result they were led to commit errors.

According to the number of errors committed it seems that C5 was the easiest composition for the students. The problems manifested in the different syntactic categories were not representative. This indicates a certain progress in the students' command of the foreign language.

Table III also reveals an absence of errors in some syntactic categories. In C3, for example, we notice that the correct usage of the article and of the subject pronoun, as well as the correct use of the verb and word order did not present any difficulty for the students. In C4 no problems appeared in the choice of the article and in the use of the verbal form. In C5 there are no errors in the choice of the article, the use of the subject pronoun and of the verbal form.

As it is difficult to give concrete reasons for the

absence of errors in some syntactic categories, we prefer to present some assumptions which we believe may justify the results presented. After writing C1 the students were alerted by the number of corrections made in their work. This most likely led them to realize the importance of being attentive to the use of the article, the subject pronoun and verbal forms. The students were also helped by readings and discussions based on the topics given for each composition. The readings, specially, provided the students with sufficient samples of syntactic categories. The sum of these resources contributed towards helping the students to achieve a fair level of proficiency in the foreign language.

As a matter of organisation, we will take each composition from Table III in order to present what each one reveals in terms of difficulties and illustrations.

## C2

C2 reveals an improvement in the subjects' competence. Only eleven errors were registered and these were distributed in the following areas:

1. Agreement - 8 errors
2. Verb usage - 2 errors
3. Word Order - 1 error

The examples given below were extracted from the composition "The Blue Mosque".

1. Agreement: The biggest problem in C2 was related to subject - verb agreement in the third person singular. The problem is illustrated in the following sentences:

\* The Blue Mosque are beautiful  
(The Blue Mosque is beautiful).

\* When the tourists visits Turkey they want to see it.  
(When the tourists visit Turkey they want to see it).

2. Verb: Omission of the verb caused very few problems, and was present only in the third person singular.

\* It very beautiful  
(It is very beautiful).

\* The Blue Mosque in Istambul.  
(The Blue Mosque is in Istambul).

3. Word Order: There was one error in which the prepositional phrase was displaced in the sentence:

\* In Istambul the Blue Mosque beautiful is.  
(The beautiful Blue Mosque is in Istambul).

C3

The topic given for C3 was "Vilcabamba". The students received an adapted test which was one paragraph in

length. (cfr. p. 204 on Appendix). They were then asked to read this text and write about it in their own words, making use of the grammatical structures they had learned up to this point in the course. The difficulties in C3 were very few and were distributed as follows:

1. Subject - verb agreement - 8 errors
2. Verb usage - 2 errors

1. Subject - verb agreement: This area seemed to represent the most difficult aspect in this composition.

\* The people of Vilcabamba is healthy people.  
(The people of Vilcabamba are healthy people).

\* Men and woman works in the fields.  
(Men and women work in the fields).

2. Verb usage: Omission of the verb form appeared only in two compositions.

\* They don't have signs of obesity or subnutrition, but they a low calorie consumption.  
(They don't have signs of obesity or subnutrition, but they have a low calorie consumption).

\* Vilcabamba an isolated community in the Andes.  
(Vilcabamba is an isolated community in the Andes).

C4

The main topic for C4 was "A Nuclear Power Accident". This topic was also based on a previous reading, which the students had done in class. (cfr. p. 204). The problems manifested are listed in the following order:

1. Subject - verb agreement - 3 errors
2. Verb usage - 2 errors
3. Word Order - 2 errors

1. Subject - verb agreement: Very few problems were manifested in this area.

\* The small children and women was evacuated within five miles of the accident.

(The small children and women were evacuated within five miles of the accident).

\* Preventive measures was used in the accident.

(Preventive measures were used in the accident).

2. Verb usage: The omission of the verb form in the third person singular of the past tense is manifested in the following sentence:

\* This evacuation necessary within five miles of the accident.

(The evacuation was necessary within five miles of the accident).



3. Word Order: In Word Order we observed the following error:

\* When happened an accident nuclear in a power station nuclear the officials took a providence immediate.

(The officials took immediate preventive measures when the nuclear accident happened).

C5

C5 was based on the reading of the topics " James Craig, The Optacon and the Two Supertalents". According to results obtained, C5 had the least number of errors. As a matter of fact, only 5 errors occurred, and these were distributed within four grammatical categories:

- |                       |            |
|-----------------------|------------|
| 1. Article            | - 2 errors |
| 2. Verb usage         | - 1 error  |
| 3. Subject - verb ag. | - 1 error  |
| 4. Word Order         | - 1 error  |

1. Article: Omission of the article can be seen in the following sentences:

\* James Craig is \_\_\_\_\_ psychologist.

(James Craig is a psychologist).

\* When they read directly from a visual monitor \_\_\_\_\_ extraordinary subjects were not better at reading than normal sighted subjects.

(When they read directly from a visual monitor the extraordinary subjects were not better at reading than normal

sighted subjects).

2. Verb: The only case of omission of the verb in C5 was felt in the third person singular.

\* James Craig \_\_\_\_\_ a member of the Indiana University Psychology Department.

(James Craig was a member of the Indiana University Psychology Department).

3. Agreement: The error in subject - verb agreement was made in the third person plural.

\* Nearly 2000 blind people, during two years of experience uses the optacon.

(Nearly 2000 blind people, during two years of experience use the optacon).

4. Word Order: The problem in Word Order was mainly felt in the displacement of the elements of the Noun Phrase.

\* Experiment the new was made right after its invention.

(The new experiment was made right after its invention).

The correct order of the Noun Phrase should be article + adjective + noun, as in the phrase "The new experiment".

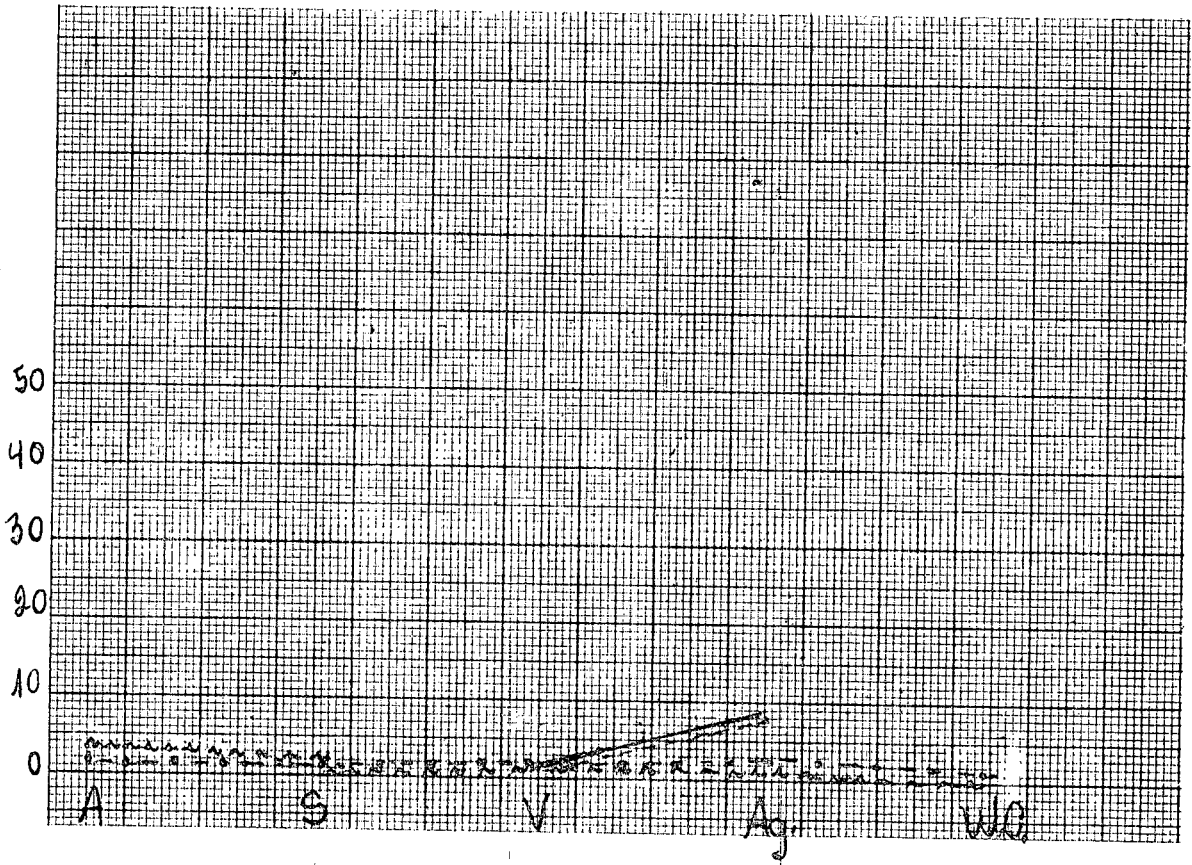
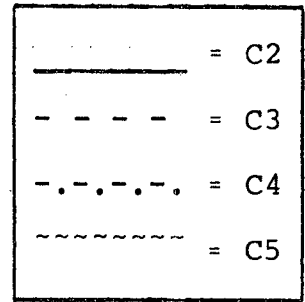
With the intent of summarizing our comments concerning the students' syntactic errors in the four compositions

analysed we will present Figure 2 in which a whole picture of the students' problems can be observed.

FIGURE 2

Errors committed in C2, C3, C4 and C5

N = 13



According to the picture delineated in Figure 2 we notice a reduced number of errors. It indicates some progress in the students' syntactic development. This progress may be due to opportunity which they had of consulting some one who was able to help them in the difficulties which appeared as they were writing each composition. They also had time to check their writing in order to correct the errors found throughout the reading.

In order to conclude the comments on compositions we must stress the following aspects:

- 1) Six compositions were analysed during an academic term which was divided into three different stages with two compositions written during each stage.
- 2) C1 seemed to be the hardest composition for the students because in it, errors were manifested in all syntactic categories.
- 3) C6 also caused problems for the students. The number of errors was not as great as in C1 but was also representative.
- 4) C2, C3, C4 and C5 showed real improvement in the students' performance. Most likely the discussions carried out in class as well as the reading of other related texts contributed toward this improvement.
- 5) The errors observed in the compositions analysed can be placed in the following hierarchy:

- a- Agreement
  - b- Subject (omission)
  - c- Verb usage
  - d- Article usage
  - e- Word Order
- 6) Most of the errors manifested in the syntactic categories above were made in C1 and C6.
- 7) The students committed 118 errors in six compositions. By joining the results of C1 and C6 we have a total of 83 errors. This means that these compositions represented 70% of the total of errors committed, while the other compositions, only 30%.
- 8) The students should have more practice in reading and writing. Through reading they can acquire an expanded vocabulary and review what they already know. By continuing to write they will improve their ability to organize their ideas in a cohesive manner.

T A B L E IV

Total of errors in the test

- = no occurrence  
0 = absence of error

N = 13	TEST 1		TEST 2		TEST 3	
	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%
1. Article	9	23, %	15	38,4%	11	84,6%
2. Subject (omission)	6	23, %	-	-	14	53,8%
3. Verb	15	6,7%	78	33,3%	46	39,3%
4. Agreement	26	11,1%	5	3,2%	11	10,5%
5. Word Order	0		0	0	0	0

Table IV presents the results of the tests given to thirteen students in the three stages of observation. According to the figures, the main difficulties felt were manifested in article usage and verb forms. The errors were calculated, taking into account the number of occurrences required in each grammatical category. In article usage, for example, there were three occurrences in Test 1 and the stu

dents committed a total of nine errors. Thus, the percentage of errors corresponds to 23. This percentage was achieved through the application of the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Errors} \times 100}{\text{Occurrences} \times \text{Students}}$$

Since the number of errors in article usage showed a total of 9, the result for the first operation was 900. The number of occurrences times the number of students provided a result of 39. Dividing the first result by the second we obtain a percentage of 23. The same procedure was followed with the other syntactic categories.

By examining the other results we notice that omission of the subject pronoun also constituted some difficulty for the students. Fewest problems occurred in the use of subject - verb agreement.

The same procedure followed in the analysis of compositions will be carried out in the analysis of the test. In order to illustrate the students errors some samples will be presented from each test applied in the research.

T1

On examining the results on T1 we found the following errors which are listed according to their order of difficulty:

1. Article - 23%
2. Subject - 23%
3. Agreement - 11,1%
4. Verb - 6,7%

1. Article: The most difficult problem in the use of the article was related to the incorrect use of the definite and indefinite articles. Omission caused few problems in the definite form.

#### Wrong Choice

\* On Saturdays a flights are few.

(On Saturdays the flights are few).

\* There are two flights between Porto Alegre and Santiago on Mondays. A first one leaves at 9.50 and a second one, at 18:00.

(There are two flights between Porto Alegre and Santiago on Mondays. The first one leaves at 9.50 and the second one, at 18:00)

#### Omission

\* Varig 500 flight leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50.

(The Varig 500 flight leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50).

\* Iberia flight 301 flight arrives in Santiago at 20:00.

(The Iberia flight 301 arrives in Santiago at 20.00).

2. Subject: The omission of the subject caused more difficulty



in the third person singular than in the third person plural.

- \* Leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50.  
(It leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50).
- \* Operates every morning.  
(She operates every morning).

The only omission made in the third person plural is observed in this sentence:

- \* On Saturdays don't have flights.  
(On Saturdays they don't have flights).

3. Subject - verb agreement: The results revealed that subject - verb agreement constituted some problem in Test 1. This problem can be observed in the following sentences:

- \* The Varig 501 flight leave Porto Alegre at 9.50 and arrive in Santiago at 12.00.  
(The Varig 501 flight leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50 and arrives in Santiago at 12.00).
- \* The hospital have 135 beds for patients.  
(The hospital has 135 beds for patients).

4. Verb usage: The problems noticed in verbs were related to omission and incorrect use of verb forms. The omission of the verb was present in both the

third person singular and plural as, for example:

Omission

\* Only Varig Airlines \_\_\_\_\_ flights on Mondays and Fridays.  
(Only Varig Airlines have flights on Mondays and Fridays).

\* Dr. Anne Harris \_\_\_\_\_ in Western General Hospital.  
(Dr. Anne Harris works in Western General Hospital).

Incorrect Form

The incorrect form of the verb used to complete the sentence caused some difficulty to our students. The following errors illustrate this fact:

\* On Saturdays don't aren't flights to Porto Alegre.  
(On Saturdays there aren't flights to Porto Alegre).

\* The Varig 501 flight lives Porto Alegre at 9.50.  
(The Varig 501 flight leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50).

The questions included in Test 1 required answers of a more structured type, for example, complete phrases or complete sentences. In order to answer these questions the students received a copy of an Airline Timetable (cfr. p. on Appendix) in order to encourage them to consult it and to provide the missing information with appropriate verbs, nouns, prepositions, etc.

Although these questions were not included in Table

I some comments need to be made to clarify our approach to the analysis of errors. Each questions was considered separately in order to give a better idea of the students' performance and in consideration of the fact that different problems could appear in the analysis.

Question 1: When does the Varig 500 flight leave Porto Alegre on Monday?

Of the answers given to question 1 only one did not correspond to the expected answer.

\* Is and 9.50.

This answer revealed a lack of knowledge concerning the structure of the sentence.

Question 2: What flights are there between Porto Alegre and Santiago on Monday?

Only three out of thirteen students did not provide an answer to this question. One student gave the following answer,

\* Is Varig 500 and Iberia 301.

This student was not aware of the fact that affirmative declarative sentences in English do not begin with the verb form.

Question 3: Are there any flights on Tuesdays?

The answers presented by four students were the

following:

- \* Dodn't flights on Tuesdays. (Incorrect verb form)
- \* No, it's doesn't. (Redundant apostrophe's and lack of correspondence between verb elicited in the question form and the verb chosen to answer)
- \* Zero.
- \* Is Iberia and Lufthansa. (Wrong interpretation of the chart Agreement problem in the answer)

Question 4: What time does the Iberia 301 flight arrive?

This question presented only two problems and these may be attributed to a misunderstanding of what was required. The problems can be illustrated by the following sentences:

- \* He go to arrive at 18:00 and 20:00 hours.
- \* Is an 20:00.

Question 5: How many airlines fly twice a week?

This question was left unanswered by one student and was incorrectly answered by three others. The answers given were:

- \* No.
- \* Anything.

\* Is an 17:45.

Conclusion: Considering the problems which appeared it seems that some of our subjects still have difficulty in the arrangement of sentences. They might have understood the questions but they evidently did not know how to build up the correct structure.

### Test 2

The number of errors presented in T2 increased in comparison with the results of T1 in the initial stage, although in the subject pronoun there were no occurrence of errors. The errors were noticeable in the following aspects:

- |                  |   |       |
|------------------|---|-------|
| 1. Article usage | - | 38,4% |
| 2. Verb          | - | 33,3% |
| 3. Agreement     | - | 3,2%  |

1. Article usage: The omission of the article was a major or problem. This difficulty can easily be seen in these sentences:

\* Icebergs are enormous masses of ice found \_\_\_\_\_ antartic region.

(Icebergs are enormous masses of ice found in the antartic region).

\* Once \_\_\_\_\_ transatlantic ship called the "Titanic" was struck by a gigantic iceberg.

(Once a transatlantic ship called the "Titanic" was struck by a gigantic iceberg).

2. Verb usage: It seems that verb usage also constitutes a serious problem for the students. The omission of the verb form was quite frequent in the students' second test. Besides the problem of omission, the students also revealed difficulty in the choice of the correct form of the verb. Probably the lack of knowledge of the verb forms was the main cause of the errors in their choice of the appropriate form needed to make sense out the context. These problems are manifested in the following sentences:

Omission

- \* Some universities \_\_\_\_ accomodation for students.  
(Some universities offer accomodation for students).
- \* This is something we \_\_\_\_ in the Federal University of Santa Catarina.  
(This is something we need in the Federal University of Santa Catarina).

Incorrect Form

- \* Some universities does accomodation for students.  
(Some universities offer accomodation for students).

\* This is something we are in the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

(This is something we need in the Federal University of Santa Catarina).

3. Subject - Verb Agreement: The agreement of the subject with the verb caused some problems to the students as is manifested in the following samples:

\* Some universities has accomodation for students.

(Some universities have accomodation for students).

\* The towers is very near the main University building.

(The towers are very near the main University).

### Test 3

Comparing the results of Test 3 with the other tests, we can verify that the number of errors increased. Some errors were manifested in some other syntactic categories which did not appear to be difficult in Test 2. The problems in Test 3 were as follows:

1. Article usage	-	84,6%
2. Subject (omission)	-	53,8%
3. Verb usage	-	39,3%
4. Agreement	-	10,5%

1. Article usage: The students had difficulty in the use of the article form. Probably for this reason they committed the error of omission which is clearly noticed in the examples below:

\* Plastic surgery is a special kind of surgery that can be used to change \_\_\_\_ shape of the body with which we are born, especially \_\_\_\_ face.

(Plastic surgery is a special kind of surgery that can be used to change the shape of the body with which we are born).

\* Sometimes \_\_\_\_ nose, the mouth or even \_\_\_\_ hand and foot must be rebuilt because \_\_\_\_ injury is so severe.

(Sometimes the nose, the mouth or even the hand and foot must be rebuilt because the injury is so severe).

2. Subject: The students had difficulty with the use of the subject pronoun as the following examples illustrate:

\* If they think their nose or chin is rather big or plain \_\_\_\_ can get it changed with a plastic surgeon.

(If they think their nose or chin is rather big or plain they can get it changed with a plastic surgeon).

\* \_\_\_\_ is not done merely to make the person who is to be operated on look more beautiful.

(It is not done merely to make the person who is to be operated on look more beautiful).



3. Verb usage: The students had difficulty in verb usage in Test 3. These errors were manifested in omissions and incorrect usage as well. These problems can be seen in the following sentences:

Omission

- \* Plastic surgery \_\_\_\_ a special kind of surgery that \_\_\_\_ used to change the shape of the body with which we are born.

(Plastic surgery is a special kind of surgery that can be used to change the shape of the body with which we are born).

- \* It is used to \_\_\_\_ the body.  
(It is used to recuperate the body).

Wrong Form

- \* Sometimes, the nose, the mouth or even the hand and foot must can rebuilt because the injury is so severe.

(Sometimes, the nose, the mouth or even the hand and foot must be rebuilt because the injury is so severe).

- \* It is done to recuperate the body so that it have function normally again.

(It is done to recuperate the body so that it can function normally again).

4. Subject - Verb Agreement: The difficulty in the use of subject - verb agreement was manifested in the students' performance in relation to the task required in Test 3. This problem can be observed in the following examples:

\* Plastic surgery are a special kind of surgery that people used to change the shape of the body.

(Plastic surgery is a special kind of surgery that people used to change the shape of the body).

\* Some people wants plastic surgery to make themselves look more beautiful.

(Some people want plastic surgery to make themselves look more beautiful).

The comments made on tests can be joined by stressing the following aspects:

- 1) Three tests were analysed during the stages of observation.
- 2) The tests required the use of 7 articles, 4 subject pronouns, 44 verbs and 38 agreements of the subject with its verb.
- 3) The syntactic categories mostly required were verb forms and subject - verb agreement.
- 4) The students had difficulty in most of the syntactic

categories analysed.

- 5) Article usage and Subject pronoun presented the highest number of errors in Test 1.
- 6) The main problem detected in Test 2 was concerning with article usage.
- 7) Subject pronoun was not required in Test 2.
- 8) The syntactic categories that presented more problems in Test 3 were article usage and subject pronoun.
- 9) From the analysis made we achieved the following results:
  - Article usage - 48,6%
  - Verb - 26,4%
  - Subject pronoun - 25,6%
  - Agreement - 8,2%
- 10) The highest number of errors were made in Test 3.

In order to have an overall view of the various stages of learning, we will present Table V in which one can observe the results achieved in Compositions and Tests for each syntactic category and notice the difficulties experienced by the students in each stage of their syntactic development.

T A B L E V

Total of errors in the stages of observation

N = 13

O = absence of errors
- = no occurrence in the test
C = compositions
T = tests

SYNT. CATEGORIES	STAGES OF OBSERVATION					
	INITIAL		MIDDLE		FINAL	
	C	T	C	T	C	T
1. Article	14%	23%	5,2%	38,4%	8,5%	84,6%
2. Subject	23,4%	23%	5,2%	-	37,1%	53,8%
3. Verb Usage	29,6%	6,7%	21%	33,3%	11,4%	39,3%
4. Sub. V. Agr.	25%	11,1%	57,8%	3,2%	37,1%	10,5%
5. Worder Order	7,8%	0	10%	0	5,7%	0

By observing the figures which refer to compositions we notice some improvement in several syntactic categories such as article usage, verb usage and word order. The students' progress in these categories from one stage to another one was significant. On the other hand, subject pronoun and subject - verb agreement need more practice.

By examining the results on the Tests we notice that article usage, subject pronoun and verb usage caused great difficulties for the students. Thus, these categories should be emphasized in class work through reading material and practice in writing in order that the students may overcome their difficulties.

We mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that thirteen informants were chosen to participate in the research we proposed to carry out with a group of undergraduate students. With a view to giving the percentage of errors made by each informant in the three stages of observation we will present Table VI so that one can get a clear general picture of the problems manifested.

T A B L E VI

Percentage of errors in the various stages of obser  
vation.

0 = absence of error

INFORMANTS	STAGES OF OBSERVATION								
	INITIAL			MIDDLE			FINAL		
	C1	C2	T1	C3	C4	T2	C5	C6	T3
1.	30.8%	7.6%	53.8%	7.6%	0	61.5%	0	30.8%	38.4%
2.	15.3%	0	7.6%	23%	0	53.8%	0	23%	30.8%
3.	23%	0	61.5%	7.6%	15.3%	69.2%	15.3%	23%	46.1%
4.	0	7.6%	0	7.6%	0	53.8%	0	15.3%	38.4%
5.	76.9%	7.6%	23%	0	15.3%	69.2%	7.6%	46.1%	53.8%
6.	0	0	53.8%	0	23%	46.1%	0	0	46.1%
7.	23%	7.6%	30.8%	0	0	38.4%	0	30.8%	46.1%
8.	0	0	15.3%	7.6%	7.6%	53.8%	0	0	61.5%
9.	46.1%	0	46.1%	0	0	38.4%	0	7.6%	69.2%
10.	61.5%	23%	15.3%	7.6%	0	61.5%	0	23%	69.2%
11.	69.2%	7.6%	46.1%	0	0	69.2%	7.6%	0	61.5%
12.	38.4%	15.3%	23%	15.3%	7.6%	76.9%	7.6%	23%	53.8%
13.	23%	7.6%	53.8%	0	0	61.5%	0	7.6%	38.4%
T O T A L	31.3%	6.4%	33.1%	5.8%	5.2%	57.9%	2.9%	17.7%	50.2%

Analysing the figures presented in each stage we

arrive at the following conclusions:

- 1) In the Initial Stage it seems that Composition 1 was the hardest task for the students. 31,3% of errors are made in the syntactic categories observed. In Composition 2 we have only 6,4% of errors. By comparing the two compositions we notice some progress in the students' writing. The percentage of errors in Test 1 was almost the same as in C1. Here we observe a percentage of 33,1%.
- 2) The most difficult problem for the students in the Middle Stage was experienced in Test 2 where 57,9% of errors were committed. In Composition 3 we observe only 5,8% of errors and in Composition 4, 5,2%. Thus, compositions in this stage did not cause great difficulty for the students.
- 3) In the Final Stage, Test 3 seemed to be the most difficult for the students. According to the figures, we have 50,2% of errors in the execution of this task. Together with this problem, but not in the same proportion of difficulty, we can notice composition 6 where only 17,7% of errors were committed. The least difficult task seems to have been C5. Here only 2,9% of errors were manifested.
- 4) In each stage the most difficult task for the students seems to have been related to tests.

### 3.5. Conclusions

Interpreting the figures presented in the previous Tables, we arrived at the following conclusions:

- 1) The students' difficulties in their initial syntactic development were mainly felt in four grammatical categories: article usage, correct employment of the subject pronoun, verb forms and subject - verb agreement.
- 2) The greatest difficulty experienced in the use of the definite and indefinite article was mostly related to its omission.
- 3) Omission of the subject pronoun occurred a significant number of times.
- 4) As for correct verb usage, omission was again the major problem.
- 5) Subject - verb agreement caused some difficulty for the students.
- 6) The most difficult composition was C1
- 7) The greatest difficulty was manifested in Tests.
- 8) Some of the answers given to the questions in Test 1 revealed a lack of knowledge concerning sentence structure.



9) The students need to improve their knowledge of the grammar of the target language.

The difficulty felt in the Tests may be due to a lack of adequate vocabulary for understanding the context. According to the answers given we conclude that the students did not fully understand what they were asked to do as to the supplying of verbs, articles and subject pronouns. Thus, they either made omissions or substitutions of words in the blanks that, within the context, made no sense.

We presume that C1 was difficult for the students because it was the first written task required of them in the course. Perhaps the students were not used to the kind of assignment in which they had to reproduce in their own words what had been previously read.

The students made considerable improvement in C2, C3, C4 and C5. But in C6 the number of errors increased considerably.

The students also revealed problems related the sentence structure. This is clearly noticed in some of the answers given:

\* Is Varig 500 and Iberia.

\* No, it's doesn't.

The first sentence presents a verb as the beginning

of an affirmative sentence, and the second is a mixture of auxiliary verbs. Neither case is allowed in the English grammar.

From the information required in the Evaluation Questionnaire we obtained the following results:

- 1) Most of the students answered that the course corresponded with their expectations.
- 2) The students in general agreed that the method applied in the course was well chosen.
- 3) In reference to participation, the answers varied considerably. Most students recognized that they were very passive and a few regarded their participation as being very active.
- 4) The difficulty felt in the writing of compositions was related to structured topics.
- 5) The students complained about the use of cloze tests.

## CHAPTER IV

### HYPOTHETICAL SOURCES OF ERRORS

From the statistical analysis applied in Chapter III we may conclude that four out of the five recurrent syntactic problems were manifested in the students' writing: article usage, subject pronoun, as well as verb forms and subject-verb agreement. In this Chapter we intend to focus the possible sources for the infringements which occurred in the performance of these students.

Earlier, errors were regarded as a sign that the learner had broken the rules taught to him. In recent years the approach to errors has received a different emphasis. This emphasis has regarded the committment of errors as an indication of the learner's difficulties in the process of learning a foreign language.

The study of errors has also contributed towards warning teachers to improve their methods of teaching in order to help the students to overcome their difficulties in the various stages of learning.

Thus, this chapter has as its major aim not only the explanation of the sources of errors that have caused Brazilian students to commit errors in their acquisition of English syntax, but also the explanation of some strategies employed

by the students and the consequence of these strategies for the students' initial syntactic development.

#### 4.0. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

In order to evaluate the data the following criteria were adopted:

- 1) The errors identified in the students' compositions and tests were grouped under interlingual and intralingual errors. This classification made by Richards (1971) was adopted in this analysis as a source of errors.
- 2) In both compositions and tests we detected errors caused by (1) mother-tongue interference; (2) overgeneralization; (3) incomplete application of rules; (4) cross-association and (5) omission and substitution.
- 3) The approach of each type of error was made following Richards' model.

##### a- Mother Tongue Interference

By native language interference or mother tongue interference, we mean those errors caused by the influence of the learner's mother tongue in his production of the target language in those areas where the grammar clearly differs. These errors were identified when we noticed a literal transference from the Portuguese structure to the English structure. The attempt to express ideas in the target language following the same criterion used in Portuguese language led the students to commit errors labeled as interlingual.

b- Overgeneralization

This type of error generally occurs when the learner creates some forms in the target language based on the knowledge of other structures. So the learner has the tendency to overgeneralize a rule and use it in a context where it is not appropriate. This error was identified by observing the students' erroneous sentences and the occurrence in which the error appeared in the contexts analysed.

c- Incomplete Application of Rules

This error is due, in the majority of the cases, to an attempt to simplify the structure of the sentence or the tendency to apply a known rule in a context where there is a restriction to this rule. The identification of this error was noticed in the use of articles, subject pronoun and verbs in compositions and tests.

d- Cross Association

This error occurs when the learner confuses forms within the English structure. This confusion can be caused either by similarity between the forms or by their use in the same context expressing the same function. This error was identified by observing the elements confused in similar environments in order to verify if any difficulty was perceived.

e- Omission and Substitution

The students made an average of 20.5% of errors labelled as "Omission and Substitution Errors". It seems that the major reason for such omissions and substitutions was due to lack of knowledge of the suitable word to fit in the blank in order to make sense out of the context. For instance, in a blank where a verb was required, the students simply ignored it or in attempting to fill in the blank they were subjected to committing errors by using a noun, an adjective or a preposition.

- 4) The figures for each type of errors should be examined separately.
- 5) The examples for each type of error should be given after the presentation of the data following some comments on the results achieved.

It is worthwhile to say here that some types of the errors listed could be grouped under "overgeneralization" such as Deviant Structure, Incomplete Application of Rules and False Hypothesis. Nevertheless, they were listed separately with the intention of showing how this type of error can be manifested in several situations.

4.1. RESULTS AND COMMENTS

T A B L E I

Source of Errors	Compositions	Tests	Total
1. Mother Tongue	24.2%	25.5%	24.8%
2. Overgeneralization	45.4%	30.7%	38.8%
3. Incomplete Application of Rules	8.5%	6.9%	7.7%
4. Cross Association	10.6%	7.4%	9.8%
5. Omission and Substitution	18.4%	22.6%	20.5%

Observing the figures in Table I above, we conclude that mother tongue interference was not the most significant source of error for the students, although the structure of the Portuguese language differs in several ways from the English structure. On the contrary, it can be perceived that their major problem was manifested within the Intralingual source. A good example for this statement is found in the area of "Overgeneralization" where the students committed an average of 38% of errors. Thus we can assert that the students had great difficulty with the structure of the target

language. Most likely, this difficulty was due to the students' limited experience in the target language and lack of previous learning experience.

Our major concern in this chapter is to present the source of the students' errors. The next section will discuss each source of errors with corresponding examples.

#### 1. Mother tongue interference

In general foreign language learners are tempted to transfer elements from the mother tongue to the target language. This transference is based on the false assumption of similarity between the two structures. Whenever this transference occurs the learner may commit errors. The following examples illustrate this point:

\* Brazil is a wonderful country. Is the largest country and has one of the largest forests too.

\* Is bounded with the Venezuela.

\* The capital is Brazilia. Is a beautiful city.

In Portuguese the subject may or may not be expressed in the sentence. When the subject is not expressed in the sentence we may identify it by looking at the verb. Thus, in the sentence "Is the largest country and has one of the largest forest too", the verb indicates that the subject is in the



third person singular. Since the subject is expressed in the beginning of the sentence it is not necessary to repeat the subject pronoun in the next sentence.

But in English the subject must always be expressed in the sentence. As we know, the pattern required for the sentence is S + V + O (Subject + verb + object). When Brazilian students are not aware of this fact, they are apt to transfer their native structure to the one of the foreign language.

Other examples of mother-tongue interference were manifested in several of the syntactic categories such as subject - verb - agreement and word order.

\* There was many people there.

The verb 'there be' in English corresponds in Portuguese to existir. The past tense havia or existia which corresponds to 'there was' in English is used with nouns either in the singular or in the plural. But in English a singular subject has to be followed by a singular verb, and a plural subject by a plural verb. So the form of the verb 'There was' must be used with a singular subject and 'There were' with a plural subject.

There are similar examples of incorrect agreement in the following sentences:

\* Brazil occupy a big area.

- \* The country have many beaches.
- \* This city have a beautiful blue Mosque.
- \* Dr. Anne Harris work in Western General Hospital.
- \* The people of Vilcabamba is healthy people.
- \* There is six residential towers, housing in all about 1.100 students.
- \* There is tourists to visit it everyday.

Word Order also caused problems of mother-tongue interference. When students are not aware of the principle that the constituents of a sentence appear in a fixed order they may tend to disorder these constituents and commit errors such as the following:

- \* When happened an accident nuclear in a power station nuclear the officials took a providence immediate.

The English words here were arranged in the same order as they would be in Portuguese. This problem is due to the fact that in the majority of cases the students first write their sentences in Portuguese and then transfer them to English.

Other examples of mother-tongue interference may be observed in these sentences:

- \* Is Catholicism Roman the main religion of the country.
- \* In the station nuclear power there was an accident.

## 2. Overgeneralization

Within intralingual errors, overgeneralization had the highest percentage of occurrence in both compositions and tests. These errors were caused by interference within the English system. A typical example of overgeneralization may be observed in this sentence:

\* The Varig 501 flight leave Porto Alegre at 9.50 and arrive in Santiago at 12.00.

Verbs in English in the present tense require the s form only in the third person singular. Based on the absence of inflection endings that do not use the s form, the Brazilian student has the tendency to omit it. In a similar fashion, the following sentence restates the problems from a different perspective:

\* James Craig when was using the optacon to test tactile pattern perception in sighted people discover two subjects extraordinarily talented.

The ed marker appears to carry no meaning for the learner and for this reason he omits it. Because of their lack of recognition of the various uses which the "ed" marker may have, the students may easily tend to write sentences as the one above. In this sentence,

\* Portuguese people bringed many human races to Brazil.

it seems that the hypothesis here made by the learner has to do with the - ed marker used with verbs in the past tense.

This hypothesis is another kind of overgeneralization. Even with irregular verbs he applies the same rule.

### 3. INCOMPLETE APPLICATION OF RULES

Observing the aspects which contributed to student errors, we can assert that Incomplete Application of Rules had the lowest percentage of occurrence. The following sentence illustrates this kind of problem:

\* Brazil is a largest country in South America.

The limited knowledge of the target language leads the learner to use the indefinite instead of the definite article to modify adjectives in the superlative form. The rule allows article + superlative + noun, but the rule has a constraint. The article must be the definite instead of the indefinite.

Another example demonstrates the same problem.

\* Brazil is a first largest country in South America.

In the sentence "Brazil is the very beautiful country" we notice another example of the incorrect application of rules. It would seem that the students erroneously believe that before an adverb modifying an adjective the definite, rather than the indefinite article should be used.

Other examples of incorrect application of rules may be cited:

\* Dr. Harris goes at work at about a quarter to nine.

\* Dr. Harris begins at work at about a quarter to nine.

In these sentences we notice incorrect use of the preposition at. The students are not aware of the principle that both the verbs go and begin in this context express movement. Therefore, the correct preposition should be "to".

In the sentence \*Dr. Harris leaves at work at about a quarter to nine" the preposition at should be substituted for "from". These examples illustrate how the wrong application of a rule results in erroneous sentences. Possibly, the rule applied was that the preposition "at" may be used in any context, which, of course, is not possible.

#### 4. CROSS ASSOCIATION

According to the figures presented, Cross Association was responsible for 9% of the student errors, which does not constitute a very significant number. The following sentence illustrates an error caused by cross association. \*On Saturdays don't aren't flights for Porto Alegre". The problem manifested in this sentence is due to a similarity between the negative forms don't and aren't.

Other examples which may be included in this same case are:

\* All South America countries except Chile and Equador bounds

with Brazil.

- \* Several people forms the country.
- \* When the tourists visits Turkey they want to know it.
- \* About 150 people works in Western General Hospital.

It would seem that the problem which occurred in the sentences above was due to a similarity of forms between the subject and the verb of each sentence. Once the subject is in the plural (in general -s is the marker for plural) the students' attempt to make the subject and verb agree led them to commit errors such as the ones mentioned. This error is an indication to the teacher that the student is not aware of the fact that the s marker in verbs indicate the third person singular.

#### 5. OMISSION AND SUBSTITUTION

A significant number of errors seem to be connected with intralingual errors. These are errors of omission and substitution. Possibly these errors were due to lack of understanding of which syntactic category the missing word belonged to. For example, the students did not know whether the word "to be" was being used as subject pronoun, verb or article. Their limited grammatical knowledge thus led the students to commit errors of omission and substitution. These problems can be verified in the examples cited below:

#### Omissions

OMISSIONS

a) Definite Article

\* Brazil is Earth of "Samba and Choro".

(Brazil is the Earth of "Samba and Choro")

\* Icebergs are enormous masses of ice found in Antartic region.

(Icebergs are enormous masses of ice found in the Antartic region.)

\* Accidents in past showed that Nuclear Power can be dangerous.

(Accidents in the past showed that Nuclear Power can be dangerous).

\* Plastic surgery is a special kind of surgery that can be used to change shape of the body with which we are born, especially face.

(Plastic surgery is a special kind of surgery that can be used to change the shape of the body with which we are born, especially the face).

b) Subject Pronoun (3rd person singular)

\* Brazil is a wonderful country. Is the largest country and has one of the largest forests too.

(Brazil is a wonderful country. It is the largest country and it has one of the largest forests too).

\* Leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50. Brazil has many resources in the nature and doesn't need Nuclear.

(It leaves Porto Alegre at 9.50. Brazil has many resources in the nature and it doesn't need Nuclear Energy).

- \* It not done merely to make the person who is to be operated on look more beautiful.

(It is not done merely to make the person who is to be operated on look more beautiful).

(1<sup>st</sup> person plural)

- \* In the past had many accidents with work of radiation.

(In the past we had many accidents with work of radiation).

- \* Believe that the nature has better alternatives of energy crisis.

(We believe that the nature has better alternatives of energy crisis).

- \* In Brazil some people believe that need Nuclear Energy.

(In Brazil some people believe that we need Nuclear Energy).

c) Verb

- \* Brazil located in South America.

(Brazil is located in South America).

- \* The Blue Mosque in Istambul.

(The Blue Mosque is in Istambul).

- \* Only Varig Airlines flights on Mondays and Fridays.

(Only Varig Airlines have flights on Mondays and Fridays).

- \* Some universities accomodation for students.

(Some universities offer accomodation for students).



\* This is something we in the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

(This is something we need in the Federal University of Santa Catarina).

### Substitutions

The problems concerned with substitutions were identified in the use of articles, subject pronouns and verbs. As can be noticed, the student, in attempting to use syntactic categories already mentioned, committed the errors described below:

- \* Once big transatlantic called the "Titanic" was struck by a gigantic iceberg". In this sentence we notice that the in definite article "a" was substituted by the adjective "big" or rather once was interpreted as "one".
- \* As a result tragic ship sank and several people died.
- \* As a result was ship sank and several people died.
- \* Icebergs are enormous masses of ice found in sea Antartic re gion. In the three sentences cited above other word cate gories were used instead of the definite article.
- \* Make operates every morning". The problem here is due to the substitution of the subject pronoun "she" by the verb "make".
- \* Luxury is not done merely to make the person who is to be operated on look more beautiful". Here we can notice the noun "luxury" substituting the subject pronoun "it".

\* If they think their nose or chin is rather big or plain that can get it changed with a plastic surgeon".

In this case we notice the substitution of the subject pronoun "they" by the relative pronoun "that".

\* Some universities no accomodation for students". The negative "no" should be substituted by the verb "offer".

\* This is something we teachers in the Federal University of Santa Catarina". Possibly the noun "teachers" was used as a verb equivalent. However it should be substituted by the verb "need".

To conclude this section we should like to stress that the most significant errors which we found in the students' compositions and tests were not due to interference of the mother-tongue, although the figures have indicated a total of 24.8% of errors in this category, but rather to the English grammatical system which led the students to commit errors such as overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, cross association, omission and substitution.

As was stated at the beginning of this Chapter, our purpose in presenting the sources for the errors committed by the students who participated in our research is not merely to explain sources, but also to present some of the strategies apparently used by the students in their written work as well as the implications of such strategies for their development in English syntax. Thus the next section will approach these strategies with their respective implications.

#### 4.2. STUDENTS STRATEGIES IN THE USE OF SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES

The Clarks in their book "Psychology and Language an Introduction to Psycholinguistics" point out that learners of a foreign language use a number of strategies to infer what they wish to communicate. It is also stressed that these strategies can be classified under two aspects: the syntactic and the semantic. In the syntactic aspect some clues are used with the purpose of identifying constituents which are employed in order to build propositions. These clues are constituted by function words, suffixes, prefixes and grammatical categories of content words. In the semantic aspect the strategies put emphasis on the relation of sentences in a real situation and their important role in the development of the discourse. Both syntactic and semantic strategies contribute to resolve ambiguities. In the case of our research, we concentrated on syntactic strategies. This does not mean that syntax is more important than semantics. Both are of great importance, but on the basis of the samples we feel that syntactic recognition and development imply a very serious problem for the students.

Widdowson (1978) states that when someone wants to communicate with another person he varies his sentences in order to achieve his purpose. This variation is made with the purpose of providing clues to the hearer concerning that which he wants to convey. The author stresses that part of this ability, on the part of the person who wants to communicate, is due to interpretative strategies. But these strategies are

not only applied to oral communication. They can also be used in written communication. When incoherent clues are given from the source to the receiver, the message transmitted suffers alteration and communication is blocked. This problem was clearly manifested in the students' written work.

As was stressed at the beginning of this Chapter, the students had problems which seem to have been based mainly on two sources of errors: interlingual and intralingual. While we cannot make any categorical statements, we can certainly assume that the students resorted to various strategies in their approach to the TL. Among the study of these strategies we may list the following:

- 1) Correlation between English structure and Portuguese structure
- 2) Simplification of the English structure
- 3) Application of false hypotheses
- 4) Attempt to guess forms
- 5) Tendency to preserve the structure given by the teacher
- 6) Frequency in the use of omissions and substitutions

As can be seen the students resorted to six strategies in their syntactic development, the first one was due to the correlation between English and Portuguese grammatical structures. This correlation was made by transferring forms from the mother-tongue to the target language. Possibly this transference was based on the principle of similarities between the two structures. The following examples illustrate

this point:

- \* Dr. Anne Harris work in Western General Hospital.
- \* The people of Vilcabamba is healthy people.
- \* There is six residential towers, housing in all about 1.100 students.
- \* When happened an accident nuclear in a power station nuclear the officials took a providence immediate.

These examples reveal the influence that the mother tongue has upon the target language. As in Portuguese the "s" is a marker of plural form, the Brazilian student omits it with verbs in the third person singular, as the first example shows. Other problems are due to agreement and word order. When student is not sure of the correct use of the grammatical structure in the target language he transfers the structure from his mother-tongue to the target language. This tendency was manifested in 24.8% of the errors. The strategy of correlation between English and Portuguese structure was frequently employed.

A second source of error was simplification of the English grammatical structure. We believe that the students had the concept of the structure in their minds, but the lack of vocabulary and knowledge of sentence arrangement made them simplify the structure. This simplification, in general, contributed to the production of incomplete and incorrect grammatical sequences. This can be noticed in some of the answers in Test 1:

- When does the Varig 500 flight leave Porto Alegre on Monday?

\* Is and 9.50.

- Are there any flights on Tuesdays?

\* Zero.

- What time does the Iberia 301 flight arrive?

\* Is an 20.00.

- How many airlines fly twice a week?

\* Is an 17.45.

These answers remind one of the first stages of first language acquisition called "telegraphic speech". Such answers from children in the initial stages of acquisition of their mother tongue are acceptable since they are still in the process of formation of their own grammar. A similar strategy seems to be applied by the foreign language learner. This simplification reveals an accommodation of this limited knowledge of the structures of the target language. Grammatically speaking, such sentences are considered as erroneous, but quite obviously, simplification is a strategy used by the learner which is very similar to the one applied in the acquisition of his native language. The attempt to respond to the questions presented, even under circumstances of uncertainty, led the students to oversimplify their answers.

The third circumstance was related to application of false hypotheses concerning the ideas the students intended to develop. Possibly, as they were writing, they tried to apply some hypotheses based on knowledge acquired in the classroom,

but even by doing so, they made mistakes. Errors such as "All South America countries except Chile and Equador bounds with Brazil"; Several people forms the country" and "About 150 people works in Western General Hospital" may be due to the interpretation that 's' is always a marker of the plural. Once the subject is in the plural the student, intending to put the verb also in the plural, adds an 's' at the end of the main verb of the sentence.

The fourth circumstance seems to be connected with the attempt of the students to guess grammatical forms. This is a strategy commonly used by foreign language learners. In this case, the students seemed to try to guess the arrangement of the English grammatical structure in their written work. This can be clearly noticed in the following examples:

\* Experiment the new was made right after its invention.

As the student was not sure of the position of the words in the sentence he applied the strategy of guessing and as result he produced an incorrect sentence.

Brazil is the biggest country in South America. \* It is 23 states.

In trying to guess the verb form which should be used after the subject "it", the student was led to repeat the same verb used in the first sentence. Another example can be noticed in the following sentence \*On Saturdays don't aren't flights for Porto Alegre". It seems that the student was here trying to

apply a wrong analogy by using the auxiliary Do with the verb Be.

The fifth circumstance has to do with the students' tendency to preserve the structure presented by the teacher. This attitude reveals a certain insecurity concerning the use of the target language. In general, students are used to repeating what their teachers do or say. Thus, when they are exposed to situations in which they have to create or paraphrase ideas, they feel embarrassed and fall easily into errors. Thus, the tendency to preserve structures is a very common strategy and one which frees the student from the obligation of developing structures of his own, which in the majority of cases, cause great difficulty for him. This can be noticed in the third test in the section where the students were to write a composition. An outline was given to them as a guide for the work required.

Topic: Nuclear Energy

Problem: Positive aspects: - only alternative today for energy crisis  
- power perfectly controlled

Negative aspects: - Radiation risks  
- Nuclear reactors not so safe accidents in the past  
- Better alternatives in nature: solar, wave and wind power

Case of Brazil: - (a) for some people - needs it



(b) for others - does not  
need it

In one of the compositions we got the following results:

"The Nuclear Energy has positive aspects and neg  
ative aspects. First, alternative today for energy crisis,  
abundance, cheapness and power perfectly controlled. But,  
unfortunately, the aspects second, provocation radiation  
risks, accidents in the past and better alternatives in nature:  
solar, wave and wind power.

There is in Brazil, case for some people needs it:  
others does not need it". This section of the composition  
proves what we mentioned before about the student's attempt to  
follow the model as given by his teacher. By doing this we  
can suppose that either the student did not want to think how  
he could adequately use the structure received, or else he  
did not know how to use it in order to write correct sentences.

Lastly, we observed another strategy labelled "Fre  
quency in the use of omissions and substitutions". This strat  
egy was very frequently applied in the achievement tests where  
a very significant number of omissions and substitutions oc  
curred in the use of the article, the subject pronoun and the  
verbs. As examples of omissions we have the following sen  
tences:

\* Brazil in the heart of South America.

(Brazil is in the heart of South America).

- \* The capital is Brasilia. Is a beautiful city.  
(The capital is Brasilia. It is a beautiful city).
- \* Brazil is Earth of "Samba and Choro".  
(Brazil is the Earth of "Samba and Choro").
- \* They don't have signs of obesity or subnutrition, but they  
a low calorie consumption.  
(They don't have signs of obesity of subnutrition, but they  
have a low calorie consumption).
- \* Damage to various parts of the left hemisphere of the brain  
can various linguistic disabilities.  
(Damage to various parts of the left hemisphere of the brain  
can cause various linguistic disabilities).

Substitutions were mostly observed in the use of verbs:

- \* Some universities does accomodation for students.  
(Some universities offer accomodation for students).
- \* This is something we are in the Federal University of Santa  
Catarina.  
(This is something we need in the Federal University of  
Santa Catarina).
- \* ... so that residents goes return to their rooms between  
lectures and take a meal or drink a cup of coffee.  
(... so that residents can return to their rooms between  
lectures and make a meal or drink a cup of coffee).
- \* They reach at a speed of  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  knots and sometimes they cause  
serious problem.  
(They move at a speed of  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  knots and sometimes they cause

serious problem).

Omissions and substitutions can also be attributed to the students' fear of making errors. In general, foreign learners apply this strategy in order to avoid errors. In part, this tendency is due to their basic training in the study of a target language. As we know, errors in the past were regarded as a sign of incapacity. Nowadays, however, errors have achieved a new dimension. They are regarded as the transitional competence of the learner in the process of acquisition of the target language. Another fact that often causes omissions and substitutions is the application of cloze tests. The students' apprehension is due to the filling in of spaces with words previously elaborated by their teacher and that, many times, are unknown to them. Thus, the student finds himself in a position in which he must guess the words in order to fill in the spaces required. With very little experience in the target language, he either applies the strategy of omission or of substitution. Substitutions are usually made with the intention of fulfilling a requirement. When the student is not sure of the appropriate word he should use, he usually substitutes it for another one. The application of this technique is not always satisfactory.

#### 4.3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF STRATEGIES

In the last section we commented on possible strategies used by the students in their initial syntactic develop

ment. In this section we will try to discover some of the implications that result from the use of these strategies.

According to the analysis made during our research, six strategies were used by the students in their productive work. Each strategy accounts for a percentage of errors in the students' work. For example, the correlation between English grammatical structure and Portuguese grammatical structure led the students to commit 24.8% of errors. This correlation is almost inevitable for the foreign language learner. The main implication of this strategy shows a necessity to relate the elements of the structure of the target language to the elements of the mother-tongue structure. As we know, such a relationship is not always possible.

Another strategy observed was simplification. The major implication of this strategy was a limited vocabulary and a lack of knowledge as to how to proceed in arranging the elements of the sentence in an appropriate way. This is illustrated in the following answer type:

- Are there any flights on Tuesday?

\* Zero.

The oversimplification of the answer reveals that the student does not have a basic vocabulary to answer the question. However, limited vocabulary was not the only difficulty manifested in the strategy under discussion. An inability to arrange elements in the sentence was noticed in some of the students' sentences as in: \*The Blue Mosque beautiful in

Istambul is". This sentence reveals the student's difficulty in recognizing the appropriate place for each word in the sentence. Thus, simplification of the structure, caused by either limitation of vocabulary or lack of knowledge of the appropriate arrangement of the elements of the sentence was also present.

Another strategy used was the application of false hypotheses. These hypotheses were based on grammatical information the students had received in class. The implications of this strategy show a misinterpretation concerning the information given by the teacher during the class period as the following example illustrates:

\* All South America countries except Chile and Equador bounds with Brazil.

The student has overgeneralized the rule that words in the plural should end in 's'. In attempting to pluralize the verb "bound" the student erred. As can be seen, the application of false hypotheses can bring serious consequences to the student's learning. He needs to be aware of the correct application of his hypotheses in order to improve in syntactic development.

Another common strategy was the attempt to guess at grammatical forms. The use of this strategy has certain implications: He may commit both syntactic and semantic errors which contribute to a blocking of the message which he intends to convey. This problem was noticed in some of the stutu

dents' sentences. \*Brazil was uncovered 22 april of 1.500". This sentence reveals the student's attempt to guess at the form of the verb required. Thus, instead of using the correct verb "discovered" he used "uncovered".

The preservation of structures presented by the teacher may reflect the students' inability to develop their own ideas, using only the clues provided by the teacher as orientation for the work required. The example given in the third achievement test of the composition "Nuclear Energy" (cfr. p. 204), proves the application of the strategy under discussion and the consequences of such application.

Finally, we have observed that the strategy labelled "use of omissions and substitutions" was frequently employed by our students. This strategy, as has already been mentioned, was chiefly manifested in the achievement tests. The application of this strategy had two major consequences: (a) incomplete sentences caused by omissions, and (b) ill-formed sentences caused by substitutions of words which did not fit into the context presented. This kind of problem reveals a certain immaturity in the students syntactic performance. Such a factor can be attributed to the students' lack of exposure to the target language. This involvement implies a previous experience known as "background knowledge". When a student begins his undergraduate course with very little experience in the study of a target language, he may commit frequent errors of omission and substitution. An example of omission can be seen in this sentence:

\* Sometimes, the nose, the mouth or even the hand and foot  
\_\_\_\_\_ rebuilt because the injury \_\_\_\_\_ so  
severe.

The blanks required the use of the verb must, the infinitive be and the verb is. Uncertainty or lack of knowledge of the appropriate forms contributed toward these errors of omission. As an example of substitution we cite the following:

\* Luxury is not merely to make the person but is to be operated on look more beautiful; it is done for have the body so that it is function normally again". Upon reading this sentence, one immediately notices that some words are not used appropriately. Thus, it is easy to conclude that some words were substituted by others. The reconstruction of the sentence not only facilitates the integration of each word in the whole context, but also helps in the understanding of the idea which the writer wishes to convey. This can be noticed in the following sentences:

It is not done merely to make the person, who is to be operated on, look more beautiful; it is done to recuperate the body so that it can function normally again.

#### 4.4. CONCLUSIONS

The study made throughout this chapter had two main objectives in mind. One was concerned with the sources of

errors that led our students to commit so many errors in their compositions and tests. The other is related to the strategies used by the students in their study of the target language and the implications of these strategies for the students' syntactic development.

From the research conducted we may conclude that the students' errors came from two main sources: interlingual and intralingual. This classification was first made by Richards (1971) and adopted in our own work. The errors under interlingual source were classified as errors caused by mother tongue interference. As mentioned in Table I, these errors came to a total of 24.8%. But the most significant number of errors were not caused by interlingual interference. In examining the results presented in Table I we notice that 75.2% of the students' errors were intralingual. This source was mainly manifested in two types of errors which appeared with a certain frequency in the students' written performance: overgeneralization, with a total of 38% of occurrence, and omission and substitutions, with a total of 20.5%. Thus, the students' major problem was located within the system of the target language and not within the system of the mother-tongue.

As has been mentioned, the strategies used by the students have some implications. In summing up these implications we came to the following conclusions:

- 1) Ill-formed sentences frequently result by the correlation of grammatical structures of the mother-tongue and the



target language.

- 2) Oversimplification of sentences is often caused by a limitation of vocabulary and little knowledge of the proper arrangement of words in a sentence.
- 3) Frequently, there is a misinterpretation of the information received by the student.
- 4) The occurrence of errors is often caused by guessing.
- 5) The students frequently have limitation in expanding the structures given by their teacher.
- 6) Incomplete sentences are often caused by omissions and ill-formed sentences by substitutions.

With the intention of helping teachers who face problems such as the ones presented in this work, we will now present some suggestions which may be helpful to guide students toward an improvement in the learning of the target language.

## CHAPTER V

### METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

#### 5.0. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will briefly comment on syntactic development, giving special emphasis to the situations in which the students are exposed in their basic course of English as a foreign language. We also intend to stress some of the perspectives of errors regarded as relevant for the purpose of this work, as well as some implications concerned with teaching which might contribute toward broadening the students' perspectives of their problems in syntax. Lastly, we will deal with Remedial Work. This teaching strategy which may be one of the solutions for the students' problems is also one of the resources readily available for English teachers.

#### 5.1. SYNTACTIC DEVELOPMENT

Syntactic development plays an important role in learning, due to the fact that for someone to acquire competence in a target language he needs a point of reference: 'some sort of model to follow'. The type of model he follows is provided by the samples of language he is exposed to in class, either in oral or written form. These samples of language

guage are almost unconsciously organized into a very primitive grammar by the beginning student. This grammar is structured on the basis of a comparison and contrast with his own implicit native grammar. In the case of our students, methodological circumstances led them to use certain pre-organized structures.

Syntactic development may be processed in several situations. We mention only two of these for pedagogical purposes, which are: the real situation and the artificial situation. In a real situation of language acquisition the development of communicative competence appears motivated in the real need of communication. Such is the case of a foreign who lives in a country where the language spoken is not his native tongue. In an artificial situation, in which the learner is exposed to the target language only for a short period of time in order to fulfil certain tasks, (as it happens in a classroom situation), communication has to be motivated by real matters such as the reading of authentic texts with interesting information followed by the presentation of problems which must be analyzed to find adequate solutions (problem - solving - situation).

Oral exposition helps the student to become familiar with the spoken language and also allows him to recognize words in their contextual meaning. The integration of reading with listening helps the student to associate the written code with the oral code. Hence the importance of integrating the vocabulary of reading material with the units to which the stu

dent is orally exposed. The students in this research project were exposed to both oral and written language.

## 5.2. ERROR PERSPECTIVES

Based on the results of the research, we concluded that errors which in the past were regarded as the result of unremedied grammatical problems constitute an integrative part of the students' syntactic development. Within this new perspective error acquires pedagogical value and becomes the transitional competence from L1 to TL. Thus, error is an integral part of the approximative process that leads the student from his initial grammatical framework to the 'standard' model of competence which the native speaker possesses.

Although errors have acquired a new dimension we still notice a great deal of preoccupation on the part of classroom teachers to avoid student errors either in oral production or in written work. Also we find teachers attempting to remedy their students' errors through the practice of receptive and productive skills. Within these perspectives, errors seem to be regarded with two objectives in mind: (a) how to avoid them and (b) how to remedy them. Our main concern in this chapter is with remedial work to help students in dealing with syntactic problems.

We justify our choice of adopting the perspective of remedial work because of the sheer impossibility of total

ly avoiding errors. As we commented in the first chapter of this dissertation, the acquisition of a second language is in many ways similar to the acquisition of the native language. In the process of language acquisition the child is subject to errors, which are gradually overcome in the development of his experiences in the grammar of the language. As we can not divorce the acquisition of both native and target languages, the idea of avoiding errors should not be considered in a foreign language course, because it is out of the teacher's control. Errors always appear and our worry should not be the avoidance of errors but rather the application of techniques in order to remedy them.

### 5.3. TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1968) claim that there is a close relationship between knowing how a pupil learns and understanding the variables which influence his learning in order to help him learn more easily. In this sense teaching and learning are closely related; however, there is a subtle difference between the two. Teaching does not necessarily lead to learning if the pupils concerned are inattentive, unmotivated or cognitively unprepared. The learning process in itself does not tell us how to teach in an effective way but it may offer us an opportunity to discover general principles of teaching.

According to Vivian Cook (1978) success in learning

is a result of many different factors in the learner. The teacher should be aware of the learner's participation in order to know to what extent he can call upon the maturer cognitive processes of the second language learner. Teaching techniques then lead the learner to participate in activities which encourage him to communicate and interact using the language in situations which vitally concerns him.

#### 5.3.1. TEACHER'S ROLE

Since the teacher is the mediator between the teaching and the learning process, he should be aware of his performance before the group for which he is responsible.

In planning the activities for the course the teacher should remember to center these activities around the students so that together they may begin to build up their language skills. By proceeding this way the teacher will ensure group interaction which is essential in the development of a language course and especially an English language course.

The teacher should not forget that he is working with individuals and in respecting this individuality he must offer different kinds of exercises with a varied number of possibilities in order to help those students who have little experience in the language and thus experience difficulty in finding the correct answer for the problem raised.

The teacher should also be open to questions and helpful to his students in the search for solutions to problems concerning the structure of the target language. This open attitude on the part of the teacher should be very encouraging to the students in the process of acquiring skills in a new language.

### 5.3.2. STUDENT'S ROLE

The student should be an active participant in the process of learning. He needs to be aware of his possibilities and limitations in the follow up of his syntactic development in the foreign language. He should not face alone the problematic of errors in which he is involved, especially in the beginning of his studies. He should engage himself in all of the activities provided in the classroom by both teacher and colleagues in order to improve his grammatical and communication competence.

There are several steps which might be taken by the beginning foreign language learner in his syntactic development. The student may make a list of the language, and discuss these with his teacher and colleagues for the searching of possible solutions. Such discussions may remove his doubts and provide him with more self confidence in the use of the grammatical aspects studied.

The student should examine carefully the material

used in the course, such as the textbook, mimeographed sheets and other papers given to him by his teacher, in order to become attentive to the content and exercises emphasized in each unit of study. He should develop the ability of adapting the materials received to his own academic necessities. If he finds it difficult to express his ideas through writing, and the lesson requires the practice of oral drills, he should talk to his teacher about his personal necessity so that the teacher may provide him with useful material to work with. The integration between the student and his teacher and the student and his course work will facilitate the student's learning of the foreign language. It will help the teacher to understand the student's particular difficulties and will make the course both interesting and profitable.

### 5.3.3. TECHNIQUES OF CORRECTION

Corder (1973) asserts that correction of errors should be applied by the teacher not only to learning achievement but also to the recognition of the source of errors which in turn may provide him with appropriate data helpful to the understanding of the learner's problems as well as to the finding of possible solutions. The author suggests as a possible technique for the correction of errors, the comparison of a reconstructed form in the target language with its equivalent translation in the learner's mother tongue. He believes that this method is valid in order to help the students perceive what the teacher intends to correct.



Nancy Stenson (1974) emphasizes the fact that a teacher may mislead students by the way he explains a lexical item. She gives the example of the verb to worship. If the teacher explains this word with the general meaning of to pray, the students may tend to use to worship with the same preposition that they use for to pray, as in the phrase "worship to God". The author asserts that grammatical errors may be induced through a misunderstanding of meaning or usage, or through faulty explanation. She then gives two further examples in order to illustrate what she means by faulty explanation. One has reference with the word any. Usually students are taught to use the word any in negative sentences. If they hear the sentence After the class begins any student can enter they may misinterpret its meaning. Another example refers to as if used as synonymous with like. If the teacher asks the students to transform sentences with like into sentences with as if he may get answer that are grammatically incorrect. For instance, given the sentence She cries like a baby a student's response may be: \*She cries as if the baby cries". The author also states if routine drills are not corrected they may lead students to forget that the sentences being produced have semantic content. Often, in reducing textbook exercises to mechanical repetition, students produce semantic violations that would rarely appear in real speech.

Palmer (1975) states that:

*When a student makes a mistake, the teacher will have to explain what the error is. There may be*

a simple grammatical explanation. When there isn't, the teacher may make use of a paraphrase of the sentence in the student's own language that is incorrect in the same way that the student's English sentence is incorrect. Then the student will understand intuitively why his response was wrong, and class time will not be wasted while the teacher gets involved in linguistics, semantics, and general confusion. (26)

Palmer's suggestion is valid for both teacher and student. For the teacher, this is very helpful because this technique is simple and available to him. By using it he does not need to give exhaustive explanation concerning the students' errors. He can go directly to the point through a brief comment on the errors without grasping the details that many times are not assimilated by the students. For the student, the apprehension of his errors obtained intuitively is very significant, and makes him feel comfortable in the classroom environment because the teacher does not blame him for the occurrence of the error but rather helps him to correct it in a clear and concise way.

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(26) Palmer, Adrian, "Communication Practice vs. Pattern Practice", FORUM, Volume XIII, Numbers 1 and 2, 1975:137

Haycraft (1978) emphasizes the necessity of giving grades for the students' exercises. He claims that teachers often neglect to make the mistakes found in the exercises because they do not want to lose their popularity with the students. The author in his corrections adopts the same technique suggested by H. A. Cartledge, which consists in "dividing up mistakes into categories and using abbreviations in the margin to indicate them. Grammar: G; Spelling: SP; Word Order: WO; Punctuation: P; Vocabulary: V; Prepositions: PR; Verb: VB".<sup>(27)</sup>

Haycraft also suggests that the teacher underline errors in order to help the students recall what they originally wrote. After doing that, the teacher might group the errors according to their categories. The author believes that this technique is very helpful for the students to evaluate the aspects in which they are weak and to make some effort to improve future written work.

#### 5.4. REMEDIAL WORK

The practical function of error analysis is with the application of remedial teaching which includes both learner and teacher. Corder (1981) recognizes that remedial

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(27) Haycraft, John An Introduction to English Language Teaching, Longman, 1978: 121.

work is useful but that it has its limitations. He believes that the term 'remedial' should be reserved for "those situations which occur contrary to our plans and expectations, where the demands of the situation could not have been foreseen or, if foreseen, could not have been avoided - that is, where they lie outside the control of the language teaching planners, or the normal curriculum in an educational system". (28)

Corder insists that effective remedial teaching requires the teacher's understanding of the students' difficulties. This understanding includes not only the classification of errors, but also a deeper analysis in order to detect the source of the error. When he understands the cause of student errors, the teacher will be more able to plan a remedial teaching. This is what we have tried to do in the development of this dissertation. First, we commented on the need for linguistic models and the psycholinguistic aspects of the process of language acquisition. Then we classified the errors found in the students written production. Then, we tried to find the sources of errors. Lastly we decided to deal with remedial work, giving some methodological suggestions in order to help teachers in the correction of student errors.

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(28) Corder, S. *Pit Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, Oxford University Press, 1981: 45.

As has been stressed throughout this work, the students who participated in this research had very serious problems with certain grammatical structures which were manifested in their three stages of our research, or during what we have called their syntactic development. We are conscious of the fact that errors cannot be avoided, but we are also very confident that they can be remedied. When we speak of remedial work, questions invariably arise as to the when and how of its effective use.

King (1973) claims that *"remedial work must begin after the first few minutes of the very first lesson. Remedial English is of particular importance where English is not simply a skill to be learned in English periods but a means of teaching and learning other subjects, although it is not the native language"*.<sup>(29)</sup> Concerning remedial English on the university level he stresses the following: *"... the task of remedial English at a university level is for the most part to be tackled at a more elementary level than most teachers are prepared to admit. Remedial work is necessary for a large proportion of students throughout the whole of their university career, and does not cease at the point at which they are about to write a doctoral treatise"*.<sup>(30)</sup>

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(29) King, Arthur H.. "Notes on Remedial English at Higher Education Level" English Language Teaching Journal, Volume XXVII, Number 3, June 1973: 245.

(30) *Ibid.*,: 245.

Bathia (1974) believes that remedial materials should include model compositions or outlines of model compositions. He stresses the students' need to study these model compositions and then perform substitution drills with them. Lastly, the students should develop their own outlines in order to write compositions.

Hamayan and Tucker (1980) claim that reaction to students' errors constitute two distinct types of behaviour in teachers and that this behavior affects to distinct domains of learning by students. They present as examples of one type of teacher for behavior, the following techniques: repetition, commanding, questioning with open - ended responses, questioning with guided responses, modeling, and reinforcement. The second type of behavior includes : ignoring the error, implicit correction of the error, and explicit correction of the error.

H. V. George (1969) in his book Common Errors in Language Learning comments that we use the words "remedial work" but in fact he questions whether errors are "remedied". He states that the function of "remedy" is to cure or restore something satisfactorily, but he also comments on how difficult it is to remedy certain kinds of errors. He criticizes teachers who think of remedial work in terms of drills, and particularly the mechanical tables which require only substitution. For him remedial work should awaken the student to his need to work for himself, not for the teacher. According to the author the essential steps in remedial work are:

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- 1) Identifying and listing unwanted forms.
- 2) Selecting from the list a limited number of unwanted forms for remedial work, taking into account the time available, the likelihood of success within that time, the motivation of the learner, the frequency of occurrence of the error, the severity of impairment of communication, the consequence for the learner of having his English characterized by error.
- 3) Studying each error selected for remedial action in order to isolate the reasons for its occurrence, and, if and where necessary and possible, preparing material for re-teaching, with a different approach to the grammatical and / or conceptual basis of the wanted form.
- 4) Deciding organization and classroom strategy, especially and in the first instance, deciding whether to direct remedial work to spoken and/or written English.
- 5) Choosing or constructing remedial material for the specific errors.
- 6) Fitting into the teaching program and classroom work sustained attention to the errors. (31)

We agree with George that it is really difficult to remedy some kinds of errors. Possibly, the most difficult

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(31) H. V. George Common Errors in Language Learning, Newbury House Publishers/Rowley/Massachusetts, 1969: 83.

problem is not concerned with when to start a remedial work but how to proceed in the remedying errors. The procedure implies a very accurate study of methods available to teachers which might be applied according to the students' needs. In attempting to choose methods the teacher may be tempted toward the wrong choice and this can bring about serious consequences in his performance as a teacher. He may distort the major aim of remedial work by applying exhaustive practice drills and substitutions. The steps suggested by George in proceeding with remedial work are very significant if followed conscientiously by the teacher.

As has been repeatedly expressed in this work, the data relative to the difficulties of the students who participated in our research, was basically obtained from written work, through the analysis of compositions and tests. According to the analysis made, we concluded that the students experienced problems in their compositions in relation to the expression of ideas, the choice of vocabulary, the use of articles, the use of the subject pronoun and verbs, and in the arrangement of words in order to make sense out the context. We recognize that writing is a difficult task which involves the whole person. Petter Abbs (1969) defines creative writing in these terms:

*... creative writing is primarily expressive of the individual who writes it and is effective in terms of its word energy, its penetration and freshness of*



*perception. Creative writing is concerned with the expression of the whole person.* (32)

The improvement of writing requires a certain amount of time from the student. He needs much practice in reading and writing. When he achieves the ability to produce spontaneously written compositions then we can say that he has achieved a high level of competence in the use of language. This stage involves individual selection of vocabulary and structures for the expression of personal meanings. Thus, it indicates that the student has gained control over all the basic aspects of writing skills. Rivers (1968) recommends that the teacher be attentive to the students who achieve this level ... *"The teacher will need to exercise great care to see that the pupils are not plunged abruptly from guided writing into a limitless sea of free expression. The transition has to be gradual"*. (33) But the students in our research program did not achieve this level in their initial syntactic development. This is not surprising because they were only at the beginning of their undergraduate course. However, this does not mean that they do not have the possibility of achieving a high level of writing.

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(32) Abbs, Peter English for Diversity, Hainemann, London, 1969: 51.

(33) Rivers, Wilga Teaching Foreign Language Skills, The University of Chicago Press, 1968: 253.

In their further studies, many opportunities will appear and they will certainly have the chance to progress in their syntactic development.

Students should be advised from the beginning of their practice in writing to check what they write in order to develop the abilities of discovering and correcting their own errors. White (1980) remarks that "*the student should check the sentences he writes in order to make sure about the use of verbs, the presence or absence of articles before singular countable nouns, the correct use of backward pointing the, the use of preposition in adverbials of location, etc*".<sup>(34)</sup> The author believes that this procedure of checking can be simplified during the early stages of teaching writing by having students write a first draft using Subject + Verb + Complement. This procedure is helpful for false beginners because it trains them to write simple and accurate sentences.

Another suggestion given by the same author refers to the checking of students' work as it is being done. This can be done by circulating around the classroom looking over students' shoulders as they write. This procedure has two advantages: it relieves the teacher of taking home a great amount of papers to correct, and also enables him to identify

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(34) White, Ronald O. Teaching Written English, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1980: 106.

any common areas of difficulty so that he can take remedial action with the whole group.

As can be seen, remedial work is of particular importance for the student's development in the study of a foreign language. As stressed by some authors, remedial materials should include model compositions in order to help the students develop their ability in writing. Other authors think that repetition and substitution exercises are the solution for the correction of the students' errors. George (1969) emphasizes the need for deciding where and how to remediate. This means that the teacher should decide whether the remedial work should be directed to spoken or written language. White (1980) recommends the need of helping the student learn how to check what he writes.

Taking into consideration the difficulties manifested in compositions and tests in our research, we believe that a possible solution to the overcoming of certain difficulties may well be the application of remedial work. Since our students' main problem was concerned with the use of verbs, we suggest the reading of texts whose content explores the use of rhetorical functions. These texts should be selected according to the emphasis given in the course. If the teacher wishes to teach the use of verbs in the past tense, he should give his students texts whose rhetorical function explores narration of facts or events. If he intends to emphasize the use of verbs in the present tense, he should apply texts which explore descriptions of

facts or happenings. After the reading of texts and an exploration of each rhetorical function, the teacher should give outlines for the students to develop in the form of compositions. In such exercises the teacher should call the students' attention to the use of verbs. He should correct the errors concerned with verbs and ignore the other errors. As George (1969) comments, concerning the method of correction, the teacher should deal with a certain type of error in order to facilitate the recuperation of that error. This technique directs the student to recognize his shortcomings and helps him to overcome his problems.

Another problem manifested in our students' writing was concerned with the use of the subject pronoun. The large number of omissions of this item in their writing causes us to suppose that it is an aspect in syntax that needs to be remedied. As has been shown in the analysis, this is a type of error that is due largely to the interference of the mother tongue. Because in Portuguese the subject pronoun does not need to be repeated, the Brazilian student applies the same rule to the English language. The teacher may help his students to overcome this error by emphasizing the subject pronoun in oral exercises and in written sentences. He may utilize the chalkboard to write sentences in which the subject pronoun can be clearly noticed, as in the following examples:

① study English.

② He is a good teacher.

Brazil is a good country. It is  
located in South America.

If the teacher feels that his students need even more practice he may introduce texts and ask his students to underline the subject pronoun. He may also give the assignment of compositions in order to verify some improvement in the students' use of the subject pronoun.

The agreement of the subject with the main verb of the sentence caused difficulty to the students of the research program. This problem can be overcome giving practice in the positioning of the subject and the verb in phrases and sentences as well as by emphasizing their relationship. The student should learn from the beginning of his course that in English the subject must agree with the main verb of the sentence. Thus, the teacher should associate each pronoun with its respective verb form. We can take the verb "to eat" as an example:

I eat

You eat

He eats

She eats (eats)

It eats

We eat

You eat

They eat

The teacher should emphasize the s form in the third singular person. This can be done by the use of sentence written on the chalkboard, of texts previously selected and by applying written exercises in which the student might practice. After the teaching of this grammatical aspect, the students may be challenged by their teachers to write sentences of their own, taking care that the subject agrees with the verb form used. The students may also be asked to write compositions based on previous reading or on topics suggested by their teachers, following the same procedure adopted for the students in our research project.

Our students also experienced difficulties in the use of the definite and indefinite article in English. This problem was manifested through omissions and wrong choice of the article. This means that in situations where article usage was required the students either omitted it altogether or else made substitutions of the definite for the indefinite article and vice versa. McEldowney, (1977) in her article "A Teaching Grammar of the English Article System", gives some advice to teachers, for the correcting of their students' difficulties in the use of the article in English. She first advises the teacher of the necessity of being aware of the type of description of the article system and informs him that such description can be researched in a good grammar. Once he finds the information required he should generalize it to a certain extent. Secondly, the teacher should be aware of general difficulties caused by the article system and the possible errors which may occur if these difficulties

are not remedied. In the third place, the teacher should be prepared to minimize the students' difficulties. This preparation involves selection and awareness of what occurs within the article system. To achieve this aim the teacher should work in the rearrangement of material be presented to his students. Finally, the teacher should know how to conduct his later teaching which should be done by correlating the article system to its function in the context.

As a suggestion for minimizing the students' tendency to omit the article, McEldowney stresses the following:

*If a number of bags, books and pens of different shapes, sizes, colours and types are present, the learner can be invited to choose 'a bag', 'a book', 'a bag' and so on. In this way as well as the association of the label 'bag' with its designatum, an association of "a" with 'any' is being made. The presence of a is the cue for free choice. Later the can be presented as the cue for taking "the special one".*

*If a course begins with naming in this manner the learner will first perceive a + N as a whole unit. Though it will eventually be interpreted as such, the first experience of a is not so much an independent, meaningless item, but an integral part of*

*the noun with which it occurs.  
The learner is less likely to  
omit it. (35)*

Another way of minimizing the problem is through the reading of texts in which the use of the article appears quite frequently. The recognition of the article as well as its correct use might be done in pair work under the supervision of the teacher. Another way of correcting this problem is by the application of exercises of the gap type, in which the students have to fill in the blanks with the appropriate article, either definite or indefinite. After this practice the students should be asked by their teacher to write compositions based on a determined topic in which the use of the article can be explored. In correcting these compositions the teacher should take note of the most recurrent errors in the use of the article. The comments on the errors should be made in class in a global manner. In order to improve the students' performance in this regard, the teacher should plan more reteaching on the subject and provide more exercises in order for the students to put into practice what they have learned. We believe that such conscientious work will produce rewarding results in the students learning process.

Lastly, we dealt with the problem of Word Order in

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(35) McEldowney, Patricia L. "A Teaching Grammar of the English Article System", *IRAL*, Vol. XV/2, May 1977: 104-105.



our research. Although this problem was not significant in the project we understand that many Brazilian people have trouble in the arrangement of words to form sentences in English. In part this problem is caused by interference of the mother-tongue. Once we recognize the possibility of this problem being manifest in the learner's foreign language we, as teachers, should provide some kind of remedial work. Possibly, we would begin by stressing the basic structure of the sentence in English, which is S + V + C (subject + verb + complement). After calling the students' attention to this pattern, the teacher should require that they write short sentences in which these elements are used. As the sentences are being written the teacher should supervise this work in order to note the errors committed. He may decide if the sentences should be read aloud by each student or if he should correct them himself. It is advisable to correct the errors in a global manner. This helps the students to discover their errors without allowing their classmates to notice who made the errors commented on by the teacher. After commenting on these errors the teacher may assign composition exercises in which the students are challenged to develop their own ideas through the arrangement of words which should make sense in their context. All of these exercises are helpful in the development of confidence and in the improvement of writing skills.

## 5.5. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude this chapter we should like to re-stress the aspects commented on throughout it and which we regard as very pertinent to the purposes of this dissertation. The chapter stressed the following points:

- 1) Syntactic development plays an important role in a foreign language acquisition, and it may be processed in several different situations. With the students who participated in our research, the syntactic development was processed in the classroom. Hence the reason for labelling this situation as artificial.
- 2) Errors constitute an integral part of the students' syntactic development. This new conception first appeared with the advent of Error Analysis, in which the perspective of errors achieved another dimension.
- 3) The major concern as to errors should be that of discovering how to remedy them rather than how to avoid them. As has been commented, the teacher cannot prevent his students from making errors, but he can help in the overcoming of these errors.
- 4) Teaching and learning can not be separated from one another. They are very closely related. No method is profitable if the learner is not cognitively prepared, or he is not willing to learn.
- 5) The teacher should be involved in his role of teaching. Besides being secure in the content matter, he is

responsible for the teaching of that content. Thus, he should plan his course having the students in mind and recognizing that he will become a model for them throughout the learning process. He should be careful in correcting his students' errors in order to not frustrate them, but rather to encourage them in the development of their learning.

- 6) The student also needs to engage himself in the learning process in order to improve his knowledge of the foreign language and remediate the problems which appear in the follow-up of his course.
- 7) Remedial work is a hard task but it seems to be the best solution in overcoming the students' errors.

All of the points listed above are very significant for a foreign language course and especially for a course designed for beginners. Remedial work should be stressed as one of the best resources available to the teacher in the development of his students' learning. As has been previously emphasized, remedial work is a very hard task for teachers. The major worry is how to remedy errors. Some methods are applicable for one group but not useful for another group. Thus, the teacher needs to know the expectations and limitations of his students before he adopts any method of remedial work. This type of work is rarely adopted during the first few weeks of classes. The teacher should observe which problems are most evident before applying techniques of correction. It is advisable for the teacher to make constant

reviews of the content given in class so that he may plan his reteaching on the basis of his students' needs.

The errors committed by our students in the research project can also appear in other groups in a beginning language course. Therefore, the suggestions presented in this Chapter may be helpful to the teachers who must deal with students' errors. There is no one methodological remedy which can be prescribed for all groups in order to overcome errors. Each teacher must take advantage of the methods available to him and apply them according to the needs of his students. Corrections are necessary and may be very fruitful if appropriately applied.

## C O N C L U S I O N

As the theme of the dissertation suggests, we have attempted a tentative analysis of the initial syntactic development of undergraduate students in English. We recognize the complexity of this theme and our limitations in the development of it. However, the attempt made was in order to approach and analyse some aspects in this field of research which might help us in further studies. Thus, we regard our work as the beginning of a phase that will require deeper research and more accurate study.

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## A P P E N D I X

In this section we list the elements used in our research:

- 1) An initial questionnaire to provide some information regarding the students' background in English.
- 2) The texts used for each composition.
- 3) The structures for the tests.
- 4) An evaluation questionnaire to collect opinions concerning the English course.

Este questionário se propõe apenas servir como instrumento de pesquisa. Não hesite em escrever o seu nome pois isto não irá comprometê-lo. Pedimos também a sua gentileza em ler com atenção o que é requerido e assinalar com um X dentro do parêntese que melhor convier a sua resposta.

A sua colaboração no preenchimento deste questionário é de suma importância, para a qual antecipo a minha gratição em reconhecimento a sua presteza.

NOME: \_\_\_\_\_ FASE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Você é só estudante?

sim ( ) não ( )

2. Tem experiência de estudo em línguas estrangeiras

sim ( ) não ( )

3. Estuda Inglês atualmente

porque gosta ( )

porque é imposto pelo curso ( )

porque necessita para estudos posteriores ( )

4. Seus estudos básicos em Inglês foram realizados

em Escolas Públicas ( )

em Cursos Particulares ( )

por Iniciativa Própria ( )



5. Seu curso de Inglês foi ministrado

por professor brasileiro ( )

por professor americano ( )

por professor de outra nacionalidade ( )

6. A sua turma variava

entre 10 a 20 alunos ( )

entre 21 a 30 alunos ( )

entre 31 a 50 alunos ( )

7a. As aulas eram distribuídas

uma vez por semana ( )

duas vezes por semana ( )

7b.

1 hora ( )

2 horas ( )

3 horas ( )

4 horas ou mais ( )

8. O curso prolongou-se

menos de um semestre ( )

um semestre ( )

um ano ( )

dois anos ( )

três anos ou mais ( )

9. O método empregado enfatizava

conversação ( )

leitura ( )  
escrita ( )  
tradução ( )

10. As aulas eram dadas

totalmente em Inglês ( )  
parcialmente em Inglês ( )  
principalmente em Português ( )

11. Seus colegas de curso

eram bastante interessados em aprender Inglês ( )  
pouco interessados em aprender Inglês ( )  
desinteressados em aprender Inglês ( )

12. Seu maior interesse no estudo de Inglês se refere

a conversação ( )  
a leitura ( )  
a escrita ( )

13. Você sente mais problema com a língua Inglesa

para entender a língua falada ( )  
para entender a língua escrita ( )  
para falar a língua ( )  
para escrever a língua ( )

14. Seu aproveitamento em cursos de Inglês efetuados foi

muito bom ( ) bom ( ) regular ( ) fraco ( )

01 - VENEZUELA

Venezuela, known as the "Gateway to South America", is a republic located at the northern extremity of the South American continent. It is bounded by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean to the north, Guyana to the East, Brazil to the south, and Colombia to the southwest and west. Venezuela also possesses some islands in the Caribbean, of which the largest is the offshore Margarita Island, and most northerly is Aves Island, about 250 miles north of Margarita. Venezuela also claims an additional 58,000 square miles of territory now located in north western Guyana.

Venezuela, the sixth largest country in South America, has a population of about 10,800,000. The name Venezuela, or "Little Venice", was given to the country by the first Spanish explorers who, on seeing the native Indian houses built over the water on stilts, were reminded of the Italian city of Venice. Venezuela's north coast on the Caribbean was the first part of South America to be explored and settled by Europeans. The present-day composition of the country's population is the result of many centuries of mixing of whites, blacks, and American Indians. Spanish is the official language and Roman Catholicism the main religion of the country. Venezuela is a federal republic with a democratic and representative form

of government. Caracas is the national capital.

Encyclopaedia Britannica

03 - VILCABAMBA

Vilcabamba is an isolated community high in the Andes mountains. Both men and women work in the fields all their lives and travel many miles on foot every day. There are no signs of obesity or of under nutrition. There is a very low calorie consumption and the protein and fat consumed are almost entirely of vegetable origin. All the elderly inhabitants remain active and all are, or have been married. Some have smoked cigarettes for most of their lives. Many had parents or relatives who lived to a very old age.

(Adapted from Reading and Thinking in English Discourse in Action, Moore John, Oxford University Press, 1980: 23).

04 - NUCLEAR POWER ACCIDENT

Children under school age and pregnant women living within five miles of the crippled Pennsylvania

nuclear power station at Three Mile Island were advised to evacuate the area yesterday following the uncontrolled release of new and more serious radioactivity.

Mr. Dick Thornburgh, Pennsylvania's Governor, said: "This and other contingency measures are based on my belief that an excess of caution is best".

Earlier, however, Federal and State officials were so alarmed about the new threat that plans to evacuate 950,000 people were under consideration.

(Moore, John Reading and Thinking in English in Action, Oxford University Press, 1980: 98).

05 - JAMES GRAIG, THE OPTACON, THE TWO SUPERTALENTS

Blind people have been enabled "to see" with a variety of devices that convert visual information to some other form of stimulation. One such device is the Optacon, a small camera connected to a set of light detectors, which are, in turn, connected to an identical set of vibrating tactile pins. The Optacon is primarily a reading aid: a letter beneath the camera excites a corresponding pattern of vibration the tactile set, which the user can feel with the index finger. Nearly 2000 blind people use the Optacon and after a year or two of

experience they can read 30 to 60 words per minute (wpm).

James Graig, of the Indiana University Psychology Department, was using the Optacon to test tactile pattern perception in sighted people when he discovered two subjects who were extraordinarily talented. After a very limited period of training, they could read 70 to 90 wpm with 100% comprehension. By contrast other sighted subjects could only pick out short words like "and" or "the", and only scored about 10 wpm. And of the 2000 blind Optacon users only one reads as fast as the two supertalented people.

Graig does not know what makes these subjects "super".

It is not just superior cognitive ability because when they read directly from a visual monitor (like the travelling signs we read sometimes on television) the extraordinary subjects were not better at reading than normal sighted subjects.

T1 - STRUCTURE AND GRAMMAR:

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AIR TIMETABLE

PORTO ALEGRE - SANTIAGO (CHILE)

MON	9.50	11.50	Varig 500
MON	18.00	20.00	Iberia 301
WED.	17.45	19.45	Lufthansa 212
FRI.	9.50	12.00	Varig 501

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A. Answer the following questions:

1. When does the Varig 500 flight leave P. Alegre on Monday?
2. What flights are there between P. Alegre and Santiago on Mondays?
3. Are there any flights on Tuesdays?
4. What time does the Iberia 301 flight arrive?
5. How many airlines fly twice a week?

B. Complete the following structures to make complete sentences, according to the information in the timetable.

1. The Varig 501 flight .....
2. Varig and Iberia .....
3. Lufthansa and Iberia .....
4. Only VARIG Airlines .....
5. On Saturdays .....

STRUCTURE TEST 1 (b)

Fill in the empty spaces in the following text with a suitable word:

Dr. Anne Harris \_\_\_\_\_ in Western General Hospital. The hospital \_\_\_\_\_ in the west \_\_\_\_\_ England. It is one of \_\_\_\_\_ group of five hospitals. About 150 people \_\_\_\_\_ in Western General Hospital. There \_\_\_\_\_ about 50 nurses, 35 doctors and 50 other hospital workers.

Dr. Harris \_\_\_\_\_ at work at about a quarter to nine. \_\_\_\_\_ operates every morning.



T2 - SENSE COMPLETION

Fill in the missing words to make sense out the context.

A. Some universities \_\_\_\_\_ accomodation for students. This is something we \_\_\_\_\_ in the Federal University of Santa Catarina \_\_\_\_\_ many students come from other states and they \_\_\_\_\_ a place where to live.

For example, in Wivenhoe Park, \_\_\_\_\_ six residential towers, housing in all \_\_\_\_\_ 1.100 students. The towers very near the main University \_\_\_\_\_ so that residents \_\_\_\_\_ return to their rooms between lectures and \_\_\_\_\_ a meal or \_\_\_\_\_ a cup of coffee.

A similar project \_\_\_\_\_ be started at this University with the \_\_\_\_\_ help of the Ministry of Education \_\_\_\_\_ flats or houses in the area.

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B. Icebergs \_\_\_\_\_ enormous masses of \_\_\_\_\_ found in \_\_\_\_\_ Antarctic region. They \_\_\_\_\_ at a speed of  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  knots, and sometimes they have caused serious \_\_\_\_\_ in navigation. Once \_\_\_\_\_ transatlantic called the

"Titanic" \_\_\_\_\_ struck by a gigantic \_\_\_\_\_. As a result \_\_\_\_\_ ship sank and several people \_\_\_\_\_.

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C. Damage to various parts of the left hemisphere \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ can \_\_\_\_\_ various linguistic disabilities. Joseph Dejerine, a \_\_\_\_\_ neurologist, \_\_\_\_\_ two such disabilities at the turn of the century. The first \_\_\_\_\_ these disorders (alexia) \_\_\_\_\_ it difficult \_\_\_\_\_ patients to read; the second one (agraphia) seriously affects their \_\_\_\_\_.

T3

B. Fill in the missing blanks to make this text complete in sense. Each blank corresponds to ONE WORD.

Plastic surgery \_\_\_\_\_ a special kind \_\_\_\_\_ surgery that \_\_\_\_\_ used to change \_\_\_\_\_ shape of the body with which we are born, especially \_\_\_\_\_ face. Some people \_\_\_\_\_ plastic surgery to make themselves look more \_\_\_\_\_. If they think their nose or chin is rather big or plain \_\_\_\_\_ can get it changed \_\_\_\_\_ a plastic surgeon. A more \_\_\_\_\_ nose, though, is a luxury which few \_\_\_\_\_ are able to pay for. Frequently, however, \_\_\_\_\_ are asked to operate on a person whose body has been badly injured in an \_\_\_\_\_ accident. Sometimes, \_\_\_\_\_ nose, \_\_\_\_\_ mouth or \_\_\_\_\_ hand and foot \_\_\_\_\_ rebuilt because \_\_\_\_\_ injury \_\_\_\_\_ so severe. \_\_\_\_\_ is not done merely to make the person \_\_\_\_\_ is to be operated on look more beautiful; it is done \_\_\_\_\_ the body so that it \_\_\_\_\_ function normally again.

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C. WRITE A SHORT COMPOSITION USING THIS OUTLINE AS A REFERENCE.

TOPIC: Nuclear Energy

PROBLEM: Positive aspects: only alternative today for energy crisis.

Abundance and cheapness  
power perfectly controlled

Negative aspects: Radiation risks.

Nuclear reactors not so safe -  
accidents in the past

Better alternatives in nature:  
solar, wave and wind power

Case of Brazil : (a) for some people - needs it  
(b) for others - does not  
need it

## QUESTIONÁRIO DE AVALIAÇÃO

Este questionário tem como objetivo colher algumas informações concernente as suas impressões do curso de Inglês oferecido nesta primeira fase dos seus estudos. Por gentileza leia as alternativas, assinale as que achar conveniente e nas lacunas onde pedimos a sua opinião sobre o curso, bondade preencher com clareza e honestidade. As suas sugestões serão muito valiosas para o desempenho de futuros cursos.

1. O curso correspondeu às suas necessidades de

leitura	sim ( )	não ( )
prática oral	sim ( )	não ( )
aumento de vocabulário	sim ( )	não ( )
esclarecimento de dúvidas quanto a estrutura da língua	sim ( )	não ( )

2. O método empregado no Curso foi

Excelente	( )
Bom	( )
Regular	( )

3. A sua participação no curso foi

Ativa	( )
Passiva	( )

Seja qual fôr sua resposta, justifique:

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4. Quais as composições que você sentiu mais dificuldade em escrever

As de tópicos livres ( )

As de tópicos estruturados ( )

5. Qual a sua maior dificuldade nos testes?

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6. Que conceito você daria para o seu aproveitamento no Curso  
so

Excelente ( )                      Bom ( )                      Regular ( )

7. Quais as suas sugestões para o aprimoramento do Curso

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