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GRAMMAR PRACTICE AND CLT: THE QUESTION OF ACCURACY

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Dissertation

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Abstract

Throughout the history of ELT (English Language Teaching), grammar has been assigned different degrees of relevance concerning its teaching and practice in foreign language classes. Furthermore, theoreticians and researchers have delved into the extent to which the form-focused practice of grammar in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes enhances the production of accurate structures in communicative activities. The present research paper explores this crucial issue and assumes that the mechanical practice of form might *hinder* accuracy in communicative output. Subsidiarily, it investigates the importance degree of the amount of mechanical practice and the possible differences between oral and written activities. To this aim, a study was conducted in 7 6th form courses in state-run primary schools in Educational District number 11 in the City of Buenos Aires, located in the neighbourhood of Flores. The methods employed were non-participant class observations, surveys to the teachers and content analysis of the students' work. The results reflected that the form-focused practice of grammar might impede accuracy in communicative practice. Moreover, the amount of mechanical practice might be negatively influential, whereas no significant divergence was found between the oral and written modes of production. Complementarily, more communicative practice seemed to be more useful in enhancing the production of accurate structures, which might carry important pedagogical implications: grammar forms might be successfully attended to within a communicative framework.

KEY WORDS: *grammar forms, meaning, amount of mechanical practice, focus, accuracy, communicative activities, production, oral, written*

Abstract

A través de la historia de la enseñanza del idioma inglés, la gramática ha adquirido diferentes grados de relevancia en relación a su enseñanza y práctica en las clases de lengua extranjera. Además, los teóricos y los investigadores han debatido extensamente sobre la medida en que la práctica basada únicamente en las formas gramaticales propicia la producción de estructuras correctas en actividades comunicativas en las clases de inglés como lengua extranjera. El presente trabajo de investigación explora este tema crucial y supone que la práctica mecánica de las estructuras podría *obstaculizar* la precisión gramatical en la producción comunicativa. En forma subsidiaria, el mismo investiga el grado de importancia de la práctica mecánica y las posibles diferencias entre las actividades orales y escritas. Con este propósito, se realizó un estudio en 7 6tos grados en escuelas estatales en el Distrito Escolar número 11 de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, situado en el barrio de Flores. La metodología empleada se basó en la observación no participante de clases, entrevistas a los docentes y análisis documental de los trabajos de los alumnos. Los resultados reflejaron que la práctica mecánica de la gramática podría impedir la precisión en las estructuras en la práctica comunicativa. Además, la cantidad de esta práctica basada exclusivamente en las formas podría también influir negativamente, mientras que no se encontraron diferencias significativas entre la modalidad oral y la escrita. Complementariamente, la práctica más comunicativa pareció ser más útil para propiciar la producción de estructuras correctas, lo cual podría tener importantes consecuencias pedagógicas: se podría concentrar en las formas

gramaticales dentro de un marco comunicativo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *formas gramaticales, significado, cantidad de práctica mecánica, foco, precisión, actividades comunicativas, producción, oral, escrito*

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1. Introduction

Throughout the history of ELT (English Language Teaching), grammar has been assigned different degrees of importance with respect to its teaching and practice in foreign language classes. Furthermore, theoreticians and researchers have debated extensively about the appropriateness of the inclusion of form-focused practice of grammar in school programmes whose main purpose is to foster students' communicative abilities.

The key issue that seems to arise is the kind of grammar practice provided to students. Several authors (Ellis, 2002; Macaro & Masterman, 2006) agree on the fact that isolated, de-contextualized grammar practice does not guarantee success in the use of accurate structures in communicative situations. Similarly, Sandra Savignon (as cited in Savignon, 1991, p. 268), when describing a study on communicative competence, observes that "…learner performance on tests of discrete morphosyntactic features was not a good predictor of their performance on a series of integrative communicative tasks". Similarly, Hu (as cited in Yang & Lyster, 2010, p. 235), argues against grammar translation methods, as students are unable of accurate and fluent linguistic performance in spite of achieving high scores on isolated grammar tests.

In the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the *Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras* (2000) attaches considerable importance to the knowledge of the rules and regularities of the linguistic system taking into account the context of the teaching of foreign languages. The language that circulates socially is another (pp. 30, 36) and –as Campbell explains, scarcely will EFL students

have the opportunity to access and practise the target language when they leave the classroom. They will shift to their first language immediately afterwards (Campbell, 2004, A Challenge in EFL, ¶ 1). However, the *Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras* (2000) draws attention to the fact that

> …. deberán evitarse actividades que ofrezcan como única opción la repetición mecánica de ejemplos aislados y la memorización vacía de la nomenclatura o de paradigmas morfológicos. Los alumnos se acercarán al conocimiento gramatical a través de actividades contextualizadas que destaquen su valor para explicar el funcionamiento de los elementos de la lengua y contribuyan, de esa manera, a la construcción de los diferentes efectos de sentido en la producción y la comprensión de textos orales y escritos. (p.36) (1)

With respect to the current situation in ELT, Chen (2005) states that "(m)ost learning activities designed for L2 or FL learning focus on rule drilling; learners may learn the rules but not necessarily acquire them or know how to use them in real-life situations" (p. 176). This focus on structures has been called *focus on forms* by Long (2007, p. 121), to distinguish it from sole *focus on meaning*, which he attributes to the views of Krashen and others (2007, p.122). Long tries to reconcile these opposite positions by coining the term *focus on form,* by which he means "drawing students' attention to problematic linguistic

Notes

(1)…. activities which offer as a unique option the mechanical repetition of isolated examples and the empty memorization of nomenclature or morphological paradigms must be avoided. Students will approach grammatical knowledge through contextualized activities which highlight their value to explain the functioning of the elements of the language and contribute, in this way, to construct the different effects of senses in the production and comprehension of oral and written texts.

targets, when certain conditions are met, in context, in an otherwise communicatively oriented lesson" (Long, 2007, p. 122)

Confusion with terminology might further arise if we think of the term *form-focused instruction*, which Rod Elllis (2001) uses to refer to "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (Ellis, 2001, pp.1-2), thus covering both the terms *focus on forms* and *focus on form* used by Long. However, the phrase *form-focused practice* used in the current investigation is related to traditional approaches to grammar instruction, based on the practice of grammar structures without taking meaning into account.

It is the purpose of the present paper to explore the relationship between the mechanical practice of form and students' production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities. In order to delve into this matter, some of the relevant existing body of literature on this issue will be reviewed first, followed by a study conducted in 7 single-shift state-run primary schools in Educational District number 11 in the City of Buenos Aires. The target population was a group of 6th form students in each school and their teachers of English. Classes were observed three times during the year 2010, a survey was administered to the teachers and content analysis of the students' work was done. The basic hypothesis to be considered was that the form-focused practice of grammar might *hinder* the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities.

The focus of this study, then, is informed by the following research question: To what extent does the form-focused practice of grammar in EFL

classes enhance the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities?

Furthermore, and derived from the main research question, the subsidiary questions to be answered in this study examine the following issues:

1. whether the amount of mechanical practice is an important factor in the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities. It is assumed that large amounts of form-focused practice hinder accuracy of structures in communicative practice.
2. whether students are able to produce accurate grammatical structures in oral communicative activities after specific mechanical training on form. It is assumed that they are not.
3. whether the same holds true for written communicative activities.

2. Literature Review

2.01. A Brief History of Grammar Teaching

The teaching and practice of grammar has been viewed differently throughout the history of ELT (English Language Teaching). A great deal has been written about the use of the mechanical practice of form and its effectiveness in the acquisition of English as a foreign language. Teaching approaches such as the Grammar Translation Method and Audiolingualism, for example, based their language programmes on specific focus on form. During the last decades of the 20th Century, however, the advent of CLT

(Communicative Language Teaching) produced a shift of focus towards the development of learners' communicative competence.

From the 17th to the 19th centuries, and until the mid-20th century, the *Grammar-Translation Method* was used in the study of foreign languages in order to analyze the grammar and rhetoric of literary texts. Many authors (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 5-7; Ellis, 2002, p.169; VanPatten, 1996, p.2; Krashen, 2009, pp.127-129) described its procedures, which consisted in analyzing and memorizing rules of morphology and syntax, followed by translation of sentences to practise the target structures. Dictionaries were used to produce bilingual word lists. Accuracy of production in written exercises was paramount. Oral work had very limited or no relevance at all. Reading and writing were the core skills to be developed. This deductive method of grammar teaching did not foster communication skills, and it came into disuse towards the middle part of the 20th century due to the necessity for oral foreign language proficiency among Europeans.

This need for oral communication skills was felt significantly during the Second World War. Richards and Rodgers (2001) refer to army programmes which aimed at providing soldiers with tools to communicate in a foreign country (p. 50). This resulted in the emergence of methods based on naturalistic ways of language learning, attempting to equate second learning to first language learning. The most widely acknowledged one was the *Direct Method,* which included, among other aspects, an inductive approach to grammar teaching, students being taught the rules after practising them in context. In the United States, it was successfully used in commercial language schools by Lambert

Sauveur and MaximilianBerlitz (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp.11-12).

The Direct Method was the basis for later developments leading to Situational Language Teaching or the Oral Approach in Britain and Audiolingualism in the United States. Psychological theories such as *behaviourism* and linguistic theories such as *structuralism* shaped these methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp.38, 54-57). The psychologist B.F.Skinner, in his famous book *Verbal Behaviour*, summarizes his theory of operant conditioning applied to the acquisition of especially a first language, which occurred in three stages: a stimulus followed by a response which was later reinforced, producing habit formation (Skinner, 1957; Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp.57-58; Harmer, 2007, p.52).

Richards and Rogers (2001) describe a typical audiolingual lesson:

1. Students first hear a model dialogue (either read by the teacher or on tape) containing the key structures that are the focus of the lesson. They repeat each line of the dialogue, individually and in chorus. The teacher pays attention to pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Correction of mistakes of pronunciation or grammar is direct and immediate. The dialogue is memorized gradually, line by line. A line may be broken down into several phrases if necessary. The dialogue is read aloud in chorus, one half saying one speaker's part and the other half responding. The students do not consult their book throughout this phase.
2. The dialogue is adapted to the students' interest or situation, through changing certain key words of phrases. This is acted out by the students.
3. Certain key structures from the dialogue are selected and used as the basis for pattern drills of different kinds. These are first practiced in chorus and

then individually. Some grammatical explanation may be offered at this point, but this is kept to an absolute minimum.

4. The students may refer to their textbook, and follow-up reading, writing or vocabulary activities based on the dialogue may be introduced. At the beginning level, writing is purely imitative and consists of little more than copying out sentences that have been practiced. As proficiency increases, students may write out variations of structural items they have practiced or write short compositions on given topics with the help of framing questions, which will guide their use of the language.
5. Follow-up activities may take place in the language laboratory, where further dialogue and drill work is carried out. (pp.64-65)

Even though the terms Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching are not commonly used today, they have had a long lasting effect. Many widely used EFL / ESL textbooks and courses, including many still being used today, were influenced by these methods. One of these is *Streamline English*, by Hartley and Viney, which first appeared in 1978. Other textbooks are *Access to English*, by Coles and Lord in 1975 and *Kernel Lessons Plus*, by O'Neill in 1973 (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 36). Many of these textbooks were used in our country until ten or fifteen years ago, even when the communicative approach was well in vogue.

The mid and late 1960s marked the beginning of criticism of methods like the Audiolingual Method, Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 153) refer to this situation. The American linguist Noam Chomsky strongly attacked Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* and

structuralist views. He rejected the view that language acquisition was a question of habit formation, and explained that language was created according to abstract rules. His theory of *transformational grammar* stated that humans possessed innate abilities that facilitated the production of correct grammar structures in the sentences which they generated (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 65-66, 159).

Partially derived from Chomsky's theory, the psychologist John B. Carroll proposed viewing language learning from a new perspective, which came to be known as Cognitive Code Learning. Grammar was focused on consciously but "practice activities should involve meaningful learning and language use. Learners should be encouraged to use their innate and creative abilities to derive and make explicit the underlying grammatical rules of the language" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 66).

During the 1980s the decline of Audiolingualism seemed to be caused by the advent of more communicative approaches to language teaching such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), in which the focus was on meaning and communication was paramount. As Chen (2005) says:

> Unlike grammar translation or audiolingualism that merely focus on learners' ability to produce accurate language form and structure, the CLT approach emphasizes the learners' ability to efficiently use the target language in different contexts (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). By pairing up learners and involving them in a wide range of meaningful interactive discussion tasks, the teacher expects to promote the learners' ability to achieve the communicative goal, rather than forming grammatical sentences. (p.170)

With respect to grammar specifically, Savignon (1991, pp. 268-269) and Ellis and Lightbown and Spada (as cited in Burke, 2011, p. 2) point out that grammar contributes to communication and that learners' communicative needs and experiences help them focus on structures better. In this way, learners can develop what Canale and Swain (as cited in Burke, 2011, p. 2) call *grammatical competence*.

The preceding discussion reveals that grammar now has a predominant role to play in CLT pedagogy, though not in the same way as it did centuries ago. This relationship between grammar and CLT will be further discussed in section 2.06, *Grammar Practice and CLT*.

2.02. Form and Meaning

Having reviewed the literature on how grammar teaching has changed through history, key concepts related to grammar teaching and practice will be tackled in the following sections. In her discussion about what learning grammar involves, Penny Ur (1988) illustrates the kind of knowledge students should learn in the following chart:

ASPECTS OF THE TEACHING/LEARNING OF STRUCTURES

	Form	*Meaning*
Listening	Perception and recognition of the spoken form of the structure	Comprehension of what the spoken structure means in context
Speaking	Production of well-formed examples in speech	Use of the structure to convey meanings in speech
Reading	Perception and recognition of the written form	Comprehension of what the written structure means in context
Writing	Production of well-formed examples in writing	Use of the structure to convey meanings in writing

(p. 6)

She draws on two basic aspects of structures: form and meaning. If the focus is on form, students are expected to recognize and produce well-formed sentences. Focus on meaning implies that students should additionally understand and use structures accurately in context.

Now the issue seems to arise whether students are able to attend to these two aspects together in communicative activities. It seems a rather difficult task to do, because –as Penny Ur (1988) describes it –it implies that students should "transfer what they know from short-term to long-term memory" (p.7). It is particularly thorny for beginner learners, and only one aspect takes precedence over the other. Form is usually prioritized when they find it easy to understand input, and when they are embarked upon meaning processing they will not turn their attention to forms (VanPatten, as cited in Ellis, 2001, p.8). Similarly, Long (2007) suggests that students' attention may be drawn to difficult linguistic elements as they incidentally appear in a given context, in which the concentration is on communication or meaning (p. 122). His views will be dealt with below.

In his dissertation about second language acquisition practice, Long (2007) makes a distinction between the terms *focus on forms*, *focus on meaning* and *focus on form*. Ellis (2001) further mentions the expression *form-focused instruction*.

Long (2007) states that '*focus on forms'* is the kind of practice associated with traditional approaches to grammar teaching in which students work on the mastery of linguistic items one by one, or in a pre-determined order (p.121). He adds that '*focus on meaning'* entails purely communicative lessons in which

grammar is learnt incidentally from exposure to input (p. 122).This is the kind of practice favoured, for example, by the Natural Approach. Krashen (2009, pp.137-140) and Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp.178-190) describe this approach in detail.

Long (2007) argues against both extreme positions and coins the term *'focus on form'*, which entails "drawing students' attention to problematic linguistic targets, when certain conditions are met, in context, in an otherwise communicatively oriented lesson" (Long, 2007, p.122). This is what Schmidt (2001) calls *noticing*. He considers it "the first step in language learning" (p.31). Indeed, the *Noticing Hypothesis* asserts that a necessary condition for students to learn is attending to details and divergences (Schmidt, as quoted in Doughty, 2001, p. 225). This hypothesis further claims that "output facilitates the noticing of problems in the IL [interlanguage] and the relevant features in the input" (Schmidt, as cited in Izumi and Bigelow, 2000, p.244). The problems that Schmidt mentions seem to refer to what Harmer (2007) calls developmental errors. According to this author, "developmental errors are part of the students' interlanguage, that is the version of the language which a learner has at any one stage of development, and which is continually re-shaped as he or she aims towards full mastery" (p. 138). The noticing hypothesis implies, therefore, that the development of learners' IL system is eased by their own production and in this way their language will progress towards the target language.

Harmer (2007) summarizes these views in the following way:

> The argument, might, then, go something like this: students acquire language best when they have focused on it either because they need it, or have come across it in a meaning-focused communicative task, or because in some other way they have noticed language which is relevant to them in a particular time; this kind of acquisition is intrinsically superior to asking students to focus on a series of pre-determined forms. (p.54)

Furthermore, according to Ellis (2001) *'form-focused instruction'* is a general term that denotes any technique teachers use to induce learners to pay attention to language form. That is, it comprises both Long's focus on form and focus on forms.

Paul Seedhouse (1997, pp.336-339) depicts the long debate in L2 pedagogy regarding the issue of whether classroom activities should focus on form and accuracy or on meaning and fluency. After highlighting the problems related to the adoption of one alternative or the other, he proposes a *dual focus* on both. To emphasize his point, he mentions *communicative grammar activities*, a term used by Widdowson (as quoted in Seedhouse, 1997, p. 339), to refer to activities that "aim to reconcile and combine 'linguistic repetition, with its necessary focus on form, and non-linguistic purpose, with its necessary focus on meaning'" (Seedhouse, 1997, p. 339). Seedhouse takes teachers' correction policy as a parameter that marks the difference between approaches focusing on form or on meaning and he attaches considerable importance to repair work in the combined approach, with its dual focus on both aspects (p.340). But he suggests that this work should be done in an 'unobtrusive', 'incidental', 'camouflaged' way (pp.342-343).

2.03. Acquisition, Learning and Monitoring

For a more thorough understanding of the processes involved in foreign language learners' mastery of structures, Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition provides a valuable insight. It can also be applied to foreign language teaching (Krashen, 2009).

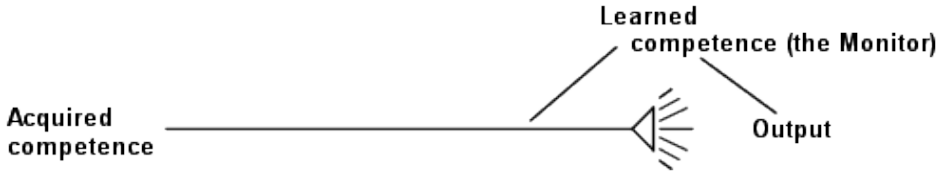
One important theoretical premise mentioned by this renowned author is the *Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis* (Krashen, 2009). According to it, there are two ways to achieve language competence: by *acquisition* and by *learning*. The former is a process in which people develop linguistic ability in a subconscious way, in which they are not necessarily consciously aware of the rules they have internalized but they have implicit knowledge of them. In this way, it is similar to the child's first language acquisition. Error correction and explicit teaching of rules do not play a relevant role (pp.10-11).

Learning, on the other hand, is conscious (Krashen, 2009). Learners know the rules of the language and they are able to talk about them. It is achieved through formal instruction. Error correction is useful here, as it helps learners to induce correct forms (pp.10-11).

Krashen (2009) observes that, of the two systems, acquisition seems to have greater importance for second language teaching, without disregarding the role of conscious learning, grammar (p.83).

Conscious learning is helped by an internal editor that Krashen (2009) calls *Monitor*. The *Monitor Hypothesis* states that acquisition and learning play different roles. When we produce utterances in a second language, the utterance is 'initiated' by acquisition. Learning has the function of an editor or

Monitor. This Monitor can be used before or after actual speech or writing, the latter occurring in self-correction (p.15). He illustrates these distinctions in the following way:



(p.16)

For the Monitor to operate, some conditions must be met, which restricts its use. The first one is that it is necessary for the performer to have enough time, which does not generally happen in normal conversation. The second one is that, during production, the performer must focus on the form of the utterance to decide on its correctness. That is, he or she must attend to how the utterance is produced. Lastly, the performer is required to know the rule (p.16). As Krashen (2009) states, "(u)se of the conscious Monitor thus has the effect of allowing performers to supply items that are not yet acquired" (p.17). He adds that "only certain items can be supplied by most Monitor users" and that "the Monitor does a better job with some parts of grammar than with others", mainly syntactically simple grammar rules (p.17). Scheffler and Cinciata (2011) report a study which seems to indicate that, indirectly, focusing on explicit grammar rules can be positively influential in second language acquisition.

Apart from these aspects, Krashen (2009) mentions individual differences among monitor users. "Overusers" are those performers who do not trust their knowledge of the language and use the Monitor all the time. They may not be able to speak fluently as they are worried about correctness. "Underusers" are those who pay no attention to error correction and depend on

their acquired knowledge. "Optimal users" are those who use the Monitor to complement their knowledge of the language only when it is suitable and when it does not impede communication (pp.18-19).

Thus far, some fundamental aspects involved in language acquisition have been tackled. However, other relevant issues connected with this process await exploration. Therefore, the following sections will examine the concept of input more deeply and they will deal with two other related factors, namely, learners' production of language and the role of practice in the language classroom.

2.04. Input and Output

As pointed out earlier, learner's access to comprehensible input is crucial for language acquisition. Krashen's (2009) *Input Hypothesis* asserts that "(w)e acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence" (p.21). For this to happen, it is necessary for the acquirer to focus on meaning and not on form (pp. 20-21). The hypothesis further states that "(w)hen communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, *i + 1* will be provided automatically" (22). By "i+1" he means the current level of competence (i) plus the next level (pp.20-21).

Furthermore, Krashen (1981) ponders on the kind of classroom activities that may provide optimal, comprehensible input and observes that 'free conversation' does not supply optimal input, as learners may not often understand it. He also argues against mechanical drills, which learners may

understand but trivially, and in which there is no communicative purpose as the focus is on form (p.103). He concludes that “meaningful” and “communicative” drills or exercises can more efficiently make students acquire language (p.104).

The issue of input is also mentioned in the Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras, the theoretical model that guides foreign language teaching in the City of Buenos Aires. Among the guidelines provided is the special importance attached to input, taking into account the impossibility of contact with the target language outside the classroom, and it emphasizes the privileged position of the pedagogical context as the primary place to approach the foreign language (*Diseño Curricular de Lenguas Extranjeras,* 2000, p. 30).

Similarly, Harmer (2007) believes that “the more we see and listen to comprehensible input, the more English we acquire, notice or learn” (p.266). He mentions several sources of input: teacher talk, audio material and written texts, and, interestingly, their own production (p. 266). He explains that “(w)hen a student produces a piece of language and sees how it turns out, that information is fed back into the acquisition process” (p.266).

However important the issue of input might be, Trosborg (1994), drawing from research findings, reveals that “(n)ot all the available input is processed by the learner”, so the term *intake* is used to refer to “the type of input that serves the purpose of language acquisition, i.e. the portion of L2 input which is assimilated and fed into the interlanguage system” (p.68). This view is also shared by other authors (VanPatten, 1996; Richards, 2002; Ellis, 2008).

In the same vein, Harmer (2007) notes that apart from providing students with input for comprehension, it is necessary to provide them with opportunities

for *output*, a notion that he explains in the following way:

> (S)tudents need chances to activate their language knowledge through meaning-focused tasks. This activation is achieved when they try to deploy all or any of the language they know either to produce language (spoken or written) or to read or listen for meaning. (p.79)

This concept of output is also tackled by other authors (Swain, as cited in Izumi & Bigelow, 2000, p.240; Richards, 2002, p.160; VanPatten, 1996, p.7) who have a similar view. Now it seems essential to explore the differences between comprehension and production. According to Tschirner (1998), "output requires much more focused syntactic processing than input" (p.122) and "learners need to use a particular word or grammatical morpheme productively within a communicative context in order to acquire it" (p.123). He thus concludes that "output does not emerge but needs to be acquired too" (p.118). This noticing function of output is explained by Swain in the following way:

> in producing the target language (vocally or subvocally) learners may notice a gap between what they *want* to say and what they *can* say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or know only partially. In other words, under some circumstances, the activity of producing the target language may prompt second language learners to consciously recognize some of their linguistic problems; it may bring to their attention something they need to discover about their L2. (Swain, as quoted in Izumi & Bigelow, 2000, p. 244)

2.05. Practice

The concepts dealt with in the previous section relate to the difference between the presentation and understanding of language as accomplished in the processing of input, and the production of language as accomplished in output. From a pedagogical perspective, this last aspect seems to be important, as students' production of the target language is one of the goals of ELT. To attain this objective in a classroom setting it might be necessary to provide students with *practice* activities. Ur (2009) defines practice in the following way:

> *Practice* may be defined as any kind of engagement with the language on the part of the learner, usually under teacher supervision, whose primary objective is to consolidate learning. During practice the material is absorbed into long-term memory and the learner enabled to understand and produce it with gradually lessening teacher support. (p.6)

Rod Ellis (2002) summarizes the characteristics most methodologists agree on as components of the concept of *practice*. He states:

1. There is an attempt to isolate a specific grammatical feature for focused attention.
2. The learners are required to produce sentences containing the targeted structure.
3. The learners will be provided with opportunities for repetition of the targeted feature.
4. There is an expectancy that the learners will perform the grammatical feature correctly. In general, therefore, practice activities are ´success oriented´ (Ur, 1988, p.13).

5. The learners receive feedback on whether their performance of the grammatical structure is correct or not. This feedback may be immediate or delayed. (p.168)

In addition, Pienemann's *teachability hypothesis* (Ellis, 2002, p.170; Fotos, 1998, p.305; Harmer, 2007, p.59) implies that "teaching can promote acquisition if what we are teaching is close to the next form that would be acquired naturally in the learner's interlanguage" (Harmer, 2007, p.59). The same concept is noticed in Vygostky's *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZDP), in which the learner needs to be in order to learn, with the help of the teacher, for example. Scaffolding –so this help is called –is removed when the learners are ready for self-appropriation of knowledge. This concept has gained renewed interest among teachers in recent years (Harmer, 2007, pp.59-60).

This idea is also supported by Krashen's (2009) *natural order hypothesis*, which states that some structures tend to be acquired later than others, although not all learners will acquire them in the same order (p. 12). This sits comfortably with Pienemann's teachability hypothesis and Vigotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

All these concepts imply that practice plays an important role in the process of helping students to produce accurate grammatical structures in a second or foreign language.

The issue that now seems to arise is the kind of practice provided to students. Ellis (2002), for example, believes that controlled practice of a grammar structure does not enable free use of that structure. However, this fact

does not downplay the significance of grammar practice. Several authors (Ellis, 2002; Paulston & Bruder, 1976; Littlewood, 1981) share the idea that the main purpose of teaching grammar is to help students to use the structures taught to them for communicative purposes .Littlewood (1981) believes that mechanical practice precedes and prepares students for more communicative activities. He calls them *pre-communicative activities*, whose aims are to "equip the learner with some of the skills required for communication, without actually requiring him to perform communicative acts" (p.8). Rivers (1973) also sees this kind of production practice as a preparatory stage, after which mechanical practice is no longer useful unless the student needs further clarification. Subsequent practice must require students to use utterances selected by themselves, as "every extension of linguistic competence is tested out immediately in natural communicative use" (page 30).

Rivers (1973) further states that some instructors prolong the use of mechanical practice as it is less demanding than overall communicative practice, as they "find it an uninteresting but comfortable haven in which to take refuge on the way, and never reach the goal at all" (page 26).

Anyway, traditional language practice makes learners pay attention to structures to attain gains in accuracy (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993). However, as Nunan (1998) suggests, "a learner's mastery of a particular language item is unstable, appearing to increase and decrease at different times during the learning process" (p.101). Communicative language practice might help learners to produce accurate output and acquire new language by 'pushing' them to syntactically process language in communicative activities, as they feel

forced to focus on forms to express messages, according to Swain's *comprehensible output hypothesis* (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000). As Ellis (2008) points out:

> The importance of creating opportunities for output, including what Swain (1985) has called "pushed output" (i.e. output where the learner is stretched to express messages clearly and explicitly), constitutes one of the main reasons for incorporating communicative tasks into a language program. Controlled practice exercises typically result in output that is limited in terms of length and complexity. They do not afford students opportunities for the kind of sustained output that theorists argue is necessary for second language development.
>
> (p.4)

The previously stated ideas suggest that Long's (2007) *focus on form* approach might be useful in fostering students' interlanguage development. Importantly, "learners' attention needs to be drawn to form during otherwise meaning-oriented communication so that they can learn the form, meaning and function of language in an integrated manner" (Izumi & Bigelow, 2000, p. 242).

Thus far, salient aspects connected with grammar practice have been exposed. However, it might be worth exploring possible differences between written and oral practice. According to Tschirner (1998), there are psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic reasons that account for differences in the length of utterances and the words and structures chosen in speaking and writing. For example, "how much language can be in a person's head at one point in time, limit the length, eloquence and smoothness of oral texts" and the fact that "the presence or absence of an interlocutor influences the degree of

explicitness and referential precision required" (p. 114). Accordingly, the frequency with which a specific grammatical structure is used differs in the two modes (p. 114). Moreover, Pawley and Syder (as cited in Tschirner, 1998) hold that "speakers are not free to concentrate on the grammatical content of their production because they must invest considerable energy into making their contributions coherent, sensitive to what has gone on before and what might happen later, and sensitive to audience knowledge and other features of the social situation. In addition, their talk should be native-like and in an appropriate register and meet other requirements such as being accurate, logical, witty or modest" (Tschirner, 1998, p. 116). In view of these distinguishing features, pedagogical implications might be derived according to modality (Tschirner, 1998, p. 114).

Another aspect of practice worth dealing with is variation according to age and to proficiency level. Hakuta and Wong-Fillmore (as cited in Tschirner, 1998) investigated children learning a second language and discovered that they used a large number of prefabricated phrases (p. 117). This might account for Ellis' assertion with respect to the need for large numbers of lexical sequences to be stored before grammar building can occur in the mind (Tschirner, 1998, p.118), drawing Tschirner (1998) to conclude that "the acquisition of the lexicon is primary and lexical acquisition drives grammar acquisition" (p. 117). Moreover, if children are beginner L2 learners, explicit grammar explanations are not suitable as at early levels learners cannot use this knowledge because "(t)hey have not yet stored sufficient examples of grammatical structures in context to be able to start any significant

grammaticalization processes" (Tschirner, 1998, p.124). This situation changes as students advance in proficiency, so that they can profit from explicit understanding of grammar (pp.114, 124).

For these reasons, Tschirner (1998) suggests that practice aiming at the production of correct forms should include "accurate examples of the particular structure to be learned" and ask students "to express their own personal meanings with these preassembled phrases or clauses" (p.124).

2.05.01. Practice types.

Authors like Paulston and Bruder (1976) and Littlewood (1981) have described taxonomies of practice types ranging from controlled to free practice of language. The kinds of practice have received different names according to different teaching methods on how a language is learnt. Thus, for example, audiolingualists use the term *drill* to refer to pattern-practice with the purpose of training students to have accurate pronunciation and grammar, and in this way develop oral fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 58-59). Among the psychological foundations of Audiolingualism is the belief that "(f)oreign language learning is basically a process of mechanical habit formation" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.57), and that verbal behaviour is elicited by a stimulus. The response to this stimulus must be reinforced in order to form good habits (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 56-57).

Rubio, Passey and Campbell (2004) provide definitions for the different kinds of drills. According to these authors "*mechanical drills* are those for which

there is one possible correct response" (p. 163). They further clarify that it is not necessary for students to understand the words in order to successfully complete the drill, and that they could still do so if nonsense words were provided. (p.163)

These authors define *meaningful drills* as "those in which the student needs to pay attention to and comprehend the stimulus in order to provide a correct response" (p.163), but "there is only one correct answer (which is known by all those participating in the exercise) so there is no need for any negotiation of meaning" (p.163).

Lastly, Rubio et al. (2004) mention *communicative drills*, which "allow for more than one correct answer, and they require attention to the stimulus in order to provide a valid response" (p.163). Moreover, "the response is not known by all the participants" (p.163). Still, meaning is not negotiated (p.163). There is real negotiation of meaning in a *communicative activity*, which the ELT bibliography defines as the one in which communication occurs because there is a communicative purpose and an information gap.

Paulston and Bruder (1976) provide a comprehensive sequential classification of controlled, mechanical, structural pattern drills followed by meaningful drills, communicative drills and communicative interaction activities (3-54). This taxonomy provides useful insight because, as Rubio et al. (2004) state "although her [Paulston's] views were expressed almost 30 years ago, most modern foreign language textbooks still follow a similar approach to what she proposed" (p.164).

William Littlewood (1981, pp.8-64) mentions that structural practice

prepares students for more communicatively oriented activities. Thus, he distinguishes *pre-communicative* from *communicative* activities. Purely structural practice such as audiolingual drills can be adapted to relate the structure rehearsed to suit communicative functions. The language used can be related to specific meanings and to social contexts. He groups communicative activities under two main categories: *functional communication activities* and *social interaction activities*. In the former students use the language they possess to get meanings across, in the form of overcoming an information gap or solving a problem. In the latter, in addition to trying to get meanings across, students must pay attention to the social contexts.

Littlewood subdivides functional communication activities into the following categories, with an increase in communicative function from the lowest to the highest number:

1. *Sharing information with restricted cooperation*: one learner has information that another one must discover, but the knower can only cooperate by responding to appropriate clues. Activities of this kind include: identifying pictures, discovering identical pairs, discovering sequences or locations and discovering missing information or features.
2. *Sharing information with unrestricted cooperation*: interaction between learners is greater. For example, communicating models, in which learner B has to construct an identical model to the one learner A has by following A's instructions. Other activities include discovering differences between two pictures or following directions in a map.
3. *Sharing and processing information*: Learners must discuss or evaluate

the information they share with the purpose of solving a problem. For example, reconstructing story-sequences, in which learners must reconstruct a story by putting pictures in a certain order.

4. *Processing information*: There is a need for learners to discuss and evaluate some facts with the aim of solving a problem or coming to a decision. For example, he mentions a game in which learners have to choose from a list to decide what to take to a camping trip and justify their decisions.

Social interaction activities make learners interact in realistic situations in which the language chosen is connected with the social situation. They include simulations, roleplays and improvisation.

Hitherto attention has been directed to the classification of practice types irrespective of mode of production. A distinction needs to be made, though, between oral and written modes. The following paragraphs will deal with classifications that take mode into account. Further, more communicative types of activities will be discussed.

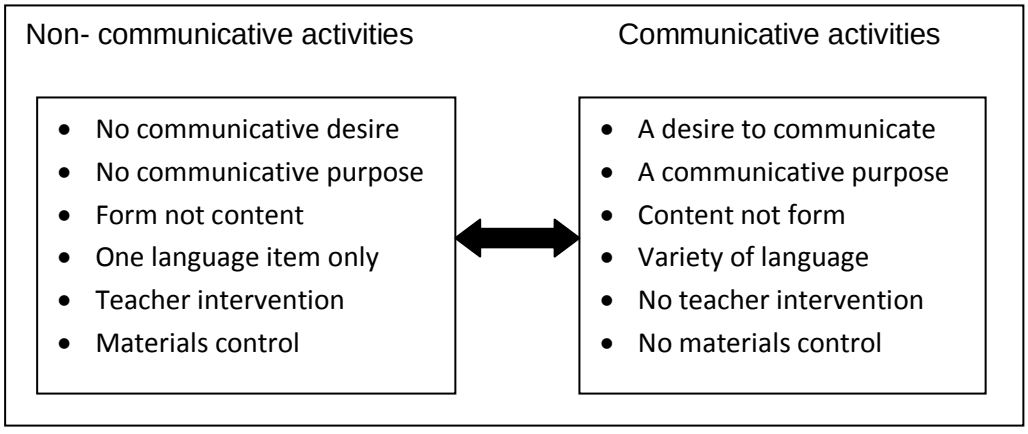
Paulston and Bruder's description of oral activities aiming at developing communicative competence will be dealt with first, followed by their classification of students' written productions.

In the chapter devoted to speaking, Paulston and Bruder (1976, pp. 55-79) describe activities to develop communicative competence. They divide communicative interaction activities into the sub-categories "social formulas and dialogues", "community-oriented tasks", "problem-solving activities" and "role play". *Social Formulas and Dialogues* include greetings, introductions and

excuses. *Community-oriented Tasks* are activities that compel students to participate in “real” situations (Stevick, as quoted in Paulston & Bruder, 1976). *Problem-solving Activities* require students to solve a problem choosing from different possible solutions. In *Role-plays* students improvise a situation after the assignment of an imaginary role.

In the chapter devoted to writing, Paulston and Bruder (1976, pp. 203-249) categorize compositions, first under controlled conditions, then under semicontrolled conditions and then, free compositions. In addition, they mention teaching procedures to work with each of these types of composition writing.

After this by no means exhaustive classification of practice provided by some authors, a final remark needs to be made in view of the pedagogical implications strict distinctions might have. At this stage of the discussion it might be worth noting what Harmer (2007) observes, namely that even in Communicative Language Teaching, not all activities are non-communicative or communicative. He mentions a *communication continuum* which has the following opposite ends:



(p. 70)

To illustrate this point, he explains that

> "(a)n activity in which students have to go round the class asking questions with a communicative purpose, but using certain prescribed structures (e.g. *Have you ever done a bungee jump? Have you ever climbed a mountain? Have you ever been white-water rafting?*) may be edging towards the non-communicative end of the continuum, whereas another, where students have to interview each other about a holiday they went on, might be nearer the communicative end" (p.70)

2.06. Grammar Practice and CLT

In the previous sections about grammar teaching and grammar practice specifically, activities ranging from mechanical to more communicative were presented and discussed according to different theories of language and teaching. The advent of CLT and the shift of attention towards meaning and the use of language for communicative purposes emphasized the belief that grammar had to be disregarded and grammar instruction omitted (Fotos, 1998; Savignon, 1991; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). As Savignon (1991) states:

> Discussions of CLT not infrequently lead to questions of grammatical or formal accuracy. The perceived displacement of attention to morphosyntactic features in learner expression in favor of a focus on meaning has led in some cases to the impression that grammar is not important, or that proponents of CLT favor learner self-expression without regard for form. (p. 268)

This fact is also highlighted by Nassaji & Fotos (2004), which mention the downplaying of the significance of grammar instruction when communicative methodologies started having a prominent role. These authors also refer to the belief during the 1970´s about the detrimental function that grammar teaching might have (p. 126). Nevertheless, "recent research has demonstrated the need for formal instruction for learners to attain high levels of accuracy. This has led to a resurge of grammar teaching" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004, p. 126).

Nunan (2004) describes the scenario grammar was under after the emergence of CLT:

> For some time after the rise of CLT, the status of grammar in the curriculum seemed rather uncertain. Some linguists maintained that an explicit focus on form was unnecessary, that the ability to use a second language ('knowing how') would develop automatically if learners focused on meaning in the process of completing tasks. (See, for example, Krashen 1981, 1982). In recent years, this view has come under challenge (Swain 1985, 1996; Doughty and Williams 1998), and there is now widespread acceptance that a focus on form has a place in making meaning (Halliday 1994; Hammond and Derewianka 2001). At present, debate centres on the extent to which a grammar syllabus should be embedded in the curriculum, some arguing that a focus on form should be an incidental activity in the communicative classroom (Long and Robinson 1998). (p.9)

However, Thornbury (2010) argues that it is a myth that "grammar went away and then came back again" (¶ 1), which he has noticed in classes due to his role of professional teacher-watcher and attributes this myth to serving the

interests of ELT materials developers. He further provides another possible reason for the renewed interest in grammar instruction: higher orderliness in classroom organization and materials and safeness for inexperienced or low linguistically competent teachers. As Thornbury (2010) suggests:

> From the point of view of course design, materials choice, and assessment, a discrete-item, grammatical organisation is a lot less messy than, say, a functional or a procedural or a lexical one. At the level of classroom practice, explicit attention to grammar provides structure, literally, to an otherwise potentially anarchic situation, and is one reason why teachers who lack either classroom experience or confidence in their own linguistic competence, or both, embrace grammar so eagerly. A meaning-driven (as opposed to a form-driven) pedagogy presents seemingly intractable management problems to the novice and non-native teacher, whereas explicit instruction of pre-selected de-contextualised discrete-item linguistic forms offers the teacher safe passage through the minefield. (Class struggle, ¶ 1)

An additional reason for this "grammar revival" (Thornbury, 2010) might be the fact that in textbook exercises and tests there was confusion of form-focused drill with meaning-focused communication (Savignon, 1991, p. 271). Indeed, "(a)n early study of foreign language teacher talk was conducted by Guthrie (1984) who found persistent form/meaning confusion even when teachers felt they were providing an optimal classroom acquisition environment by speaking only in the language being learned" (Savignon, 1991, p. 271). In 1987 Nunan (as cited in Savignon, 1991, p. 271) conducted a study which

showed that real communication in the classroom was infrequent even though the teachers adhered to the tenets of the communicative approach.

Anyway, the role of grammar instruction and practice in language acquisition is a complex issue, and it depends on the way grammar is viewed. Larsen-Freeman (2003) challenges the traditional concept of grammar. She uses the term *grammaring* to refer to "the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately" (p. 143). She considers it a skill to be added to the traditional ones: reading, writing, speaking and listening. As such, it needs to be developed and practised (p.13). So grammar is not only a question of accurate forms, but it also involves meaningfulness and appropriateness (p.14). She sees form as one of the three dimensions included in grammaring: form (syntactic structures, sounds, inflectional morphemes, written symbols, and function words), meaning (denotations) and use (social functions and discourse patterns) (pp.34-35).

Larsen-Freeman adds that "grammar(ing) is one of the dynamic linguistic processes of pattern formation in language, which can be used by humans for making meaning in context-appropriate ways" (p.142). Thornbury (2001) also sees grammar as a dynamic process. He mentions that in the same way as a seed needs nurturing to germinate so grammar needs the right conditions to grow and emerge (p.48). In this way, the traditional teacher's role of "transmitter of grammatical facts" might not be an effective one (p.57). What the teacher can do is *uncover* grammar, that is "let[…]the grammar out (of students), placing one's trust in the emergent properties of the language" (vi). He or she is a mediator between texts and learners, and through the process named *outpull*

he or she converts *input* into *intake* and in doing so the learner's grammar is reorganized (p.69). Thornbury (2001) highlights that "the interaction [between learners] needs to be meaning-driven (not simply the practice of pre-selected forms)" (p.56). He further provides teachers with numerous activities to attain this goal.

These enlightening new concepts about the role of grammar as a tool to foster students' production can be summarized in the following views by Celce-Murcia:

> Grammar is now viewed as but one component in a model of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), and thus it can no longer be viewed as a central, autonomous system to be taught and learned independent of meaning, social function, and discourse structure. Nor can the grammar of adolescent and adult second and foreign language learners be viewed as a system that will simply emerge on its own given sufficient input and practice. Grammar, along with lexis –and also phonology for spoken discourse– are resources for creating meaning through text and for negotiating socially motivated communication. These resources need to be learned and sometimes they also need to be taught; however, when taught, they must be taught in a manner that is consonant with grammar's new role. Finding effective ways to do this is the current challenge. (Celce-Murcia, 1991, pp.476-477)

Nassaji and Fotos (2004) provide some insight into what these effective ways might be:

> Current research clearly indicates that grammar feedback is necessary in order for language learners to attain high levels of proficiency in the target language. However, traditional structure-based grammar teaching approaches have been replaced by treatments which may or may not include an explicit discussion of target forms and the rules for their use, but present the forms in numerous communicative contexts designed to promote learner awareness of meaning–form relationships and to permit processing of the form to occur over time. Although the exact nature of this kind of instruction and the various forms it can take in second language classrooms are still far from clear, it is now suggested that among the essential conditions for acquisition of grammatical forms are (1) learner noticing and continued awareness of target forms, (2) repeated meaning-focused exposure to input containing them, and (3) opportunities for output and practice. It is also recognized that, because the acquisition of grammar is affected by internal processing constraints, spontaneous and accurate production cannot be instantaneous but will naturally require time as learners move toward mastery. (p. 137)

This theoretical discussion on the link established between grammar and communicative abilities needs to be validated by research. How EFL teachers actually implement grammar practice is an issue which awaits exploration.

2.07. Major Studies

The present section explores empirical investigation to compare the mainly theoretical speculations dealt with so far with what really happens in ESL and EFL classes.

Norris and Ortega (2001) carried out a study based on 77 study reports published between 1980 and 1998 about the effectiveness of different L2 instructional treatments. This secondary research on the basis of individual primary research sought to overcome possible errors that might have influenced observations within single studies by means of a meta-analysis of the samples, these being the single studies themselves and –according to the authors – yielding therefore more trustworthy results due to this rectification and to the large number of study subjects involved (pp. 163, 192). In a large number of them (46%) English was the target language (60% of which was EFL and 40% was ESL or occurred in immersion settings (page 173), a great majority being adult learners (79%), 36% of them being low proficient and 65% of them taking place in university settings (p. 172). 49 out of the 77 studies provided sufficient interpretable data for quantitative meta-analysis (p. 176).

The 49 studies were categorized under one of the following treatments using terms mentioned by Long: *Focus on Meaning* (FonM), which means that learners incidentally acquire the L2 system by being exposed to rich input and using the L2 meaningfully; *Focus on Form* (FonF), which refers to making learners concentrate on forms during a meaning-focused activity; or *Focus on Forms* (FonFS), which means that learners concentrate on isolated forms (Norris & Ortega, 2001, pp. 160-161).

No examples of FonM treatment are provided in the article. Under FonF, the following examples are supplied: some studies by Cadierno (1995), VanPatten and Cadierno (1993a, 1993b), VanPatten and Oikkenon (1996), VanPatten and Sanz (1995) focusing on input-processing, "because the comprehension practice activities delivered in these treatments were reportedly designed to integrate learner engagement in meaning with a focus on formal aspects of L2 targets (Cadierno, as cited in Norris & Ortega, 2001). These studies also included traditional practice treatments. In this case, they were classified under the second category "because learners engaged in production activities ranging from mechanical to more communicative drills, and an integration of form and meaning was not built in these activities (Norris & Ortega, 2001, p. 168).

Norris and Ortega mention other studies, such as the ones by DeKeyser and Sokalski (1996), Nagata (1998) and Salaberry (1997), which also used comprehension and production treatments, but in this case both of them entered the category of FonFS, as they provided evidence of forms being manipulated in minimal contexts (Norris & Ortega, 2001, p. 168).

Instructional treatments were further categorized as either *explicit*, "if rule explanation comprised any part of the instruction […] or if learners were directly asked to attend to particular forms and to try to arrive at metalinguistic generalizations on their own […]" (DeKeyser, as cited in Norris & Ortega, 2001), or *implicit*, if neither of these occurred (p. 167).

Norris and Ortega (2001) mention two possible outcomes of instructional treatment*: constrained constructed response* and *free constructed response*.

The former tested the ability to use a particular L2 form in a linguistic context which was highly controlled, and grammatical accuracy occurred if the appropriate form was used. The later measured if participants could produce language with few restrictions and when aimed at meaningful L2 communication (e.g. written compositions, oral interviews) (p.169). In this way, accuracy of grammatical structures in communicative activities could be seen. The study yielded the following results: 1. "…focused L2 instruction results in large target-oriented gains", 2. "explicit types of instruction are more effective than implicit types", and 3. "Focus on Form and Focus on Forms interventions result in equivalent and large effects." (pp. 157-158)

Similarly, in 1990 Allen, Swain, Harley and Cummins used an observation scheme called Communicative Orientation to Language Teaching (COLT) to study the relationship between classroom activities and learning outcomes (Ellis, 2001). This scheme had been designed by Allen, Frölich and Spada in 1983. The results indicated that "both meaning-focused and form-focused aspects of classroom interaction were positively related to learning" (Ellis, 2001, p. 5), thus concluding that "the analytic and the experiential focus may be complementary" (Allen, Swain, Harley and Cummins, as quoted in Ellis, 2001).

However, other empirical studies do not sit comfortably with these results. Ellis (2002) mentions some investigations that examine the relationship between the amount of mechanical practice and proficiency development, for example the ones by Seliger in 1977 and by Day in 1984. The outcomes of some of these studies showed a connection between the amount of practice

and proficiency gains, while others did not (pp. 169-170).

Ellis (2002) also refers to other studies that investigate the relationship between practice of a specific linguistic structure and its acquisition, such as the one he conducted in 1984. He investigated whether learners acquired 'when' questions after specific practice of this structure. After this research, he concluded that "practising a grammatical structure under controlled conditions does not seem to enable the learner to use the structure freely" (p. 170). In 1987 Ellis and Rathbone (as cited in Ellis, 2002, p. 170) examined whether L2 learners of German acquired a difficult word-order rule after its practice. They found that they did not. As Ellis (2002) concludes: "There are (…) doubts that learners are able to transfer knowledge from controlled to communicative practice. Once learners move into a meaning-focused activity, they seem to fall back on their own resources and ignore the linguistic material they have practised previously in form-focused activity" (p. 170).

Likewise, Macaro and Masterman (2006) investigated 12 students who were instructed on French grammar preceding the start of their university studies to establish whether instruction for a short but intensive time was satisfactorily influential for students to improve their knowledge of grammar and perform well in production tasks. They found that some features of grammar tests were positively influenced by explicit instruction but, among other aspects, accuracy was not.

Furthermore, some researchers have detected an additional influential factor that might tip the scales towards teachers' providing more grammar practice than what is suitable in a communicative language classroom: their

beliefs about what is fundamental to teach. Some studies by Burke in 2006, Brooks and Donato in 1994, and Hall in 2004 (as cited in Burke, 2011) reveal that even today "many teachers refrain from planning and implementing meaningful communicative experiences for their students" (Burke, 2011, p. 5). Burke attributes this fact to what she calls *rituals and beliefs*. After conducting research in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary foreign language classrooms (or, as she calls them, world language classrooms) in several districts in the U.S., she concluded that teachers are not experienced enough in CLT (Burke, 2011, pp. 1-2). She also found that "teachers believe that students can *master* the language and therefore enforce grammatical accuracy in instruction and assessment" (p. 5).

As it may be inferred from the preceding paragraphs, on the whole, much of the evidence accumulated in SLA research might seem to indicate that the mechanical practice of form is detrimental for students. Research seemed to show some substantial agreement on the assertion that this kind of practice is not an aid for the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities.

3. The Present Study

3.01. Context and Participants

With the purpose of investigating the extent to which the form-focused practice of grammar enhances the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities, 7 6th form courses and their teachers of English were selected as the target population. The courses had one teacher each, but in one of the schools the teacher went on maternity leave and a substitute teacher took over in May, thus 8 teachers were studied. The 7 courses belonged to 7 out of 9 single-shift state-run primary schools in educational district number 11 in the City of Buenos Aires, located in the neighbourhood of Flores. The sample population was obtained from the courses attending classes in the morning shift. The seven schools were selected using the simple random sampling technique. In each course 50% of the students were also selected using the simple random sampling technique. The average number of students in each form was twenty, thereby encompassing ten students per course as subjects. The children's average age was 11.5. They had three forty-five minute periods per week of English instruction.

3.02. Procedure

The data for the study was obtained using three instruments: non-participant observation of classes when the students were engaged in grammar activities or communicative tasks, content analysis of the students' written and oral work, and a survey administered to teachers. These instruments were

selected because they were considered appropriate for the purposes of the present study and because they allowed for triangulation of the data obtained in order to cross-validate the findings. The class observations aimed at assessing the activities proposed by the teachers and the students' performance in them. In addition, these observations were carried out every three months to see whether time elapse was an important influential factor. The analysis of the students' written and oral work purported to obtain quantitative information in terms of accuracy in the use of grammatical structures. Finally, the survey intended to gather further information related to the kind of activities the teachers proposed in their teaching practices, the modality of these activities – written or oral – and their type: mechanical or communicative.

The information collected was analyzed and the results yielded by the three instruments were cross verified in order to validate the data. This technique was expected to facilitate the provision of an answer to the research question, that is, it tried to elucidate whether the mechanical practice of grammar enhanced or hindered the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities, the latter being the basic hypothesis. The study also aimed at answering the following subsidiary questions:

1. whether the amount of mechanical practice was an important factor in the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities. It was assumed that large amounts of form-focused practice hindered accuracy of structures in communicative practice.
2. whether students were able to produce accurate grammatical structures in oral communicative activities after specific mechanical training on

form. It was assumed that they were not.

3. whether the same held true for written communicative activities.

3.02.01. Non-participant class observations.

Each course was observed three times during the year 2010. The observations were separated by a time span of three months, so that any significant changes in the students' production could be more easily appreciated. They were carried out during the months of April, July and October. The classes were audio-recorded and photocopies of the students' written work were made. The relevant information was recorded on observation guides which were designed borrowing and adapting some of the categories used by the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme developed by Allen, Frölich and Spada in 1983 to describe L2 classroom activities and communicative features of verbal interactions between students and teachers (Allen, Frölich & Spada, 1983). (See Appendix A).

Two open-ended categories were included in the observation guide: *activity type* and *description.* Data that came under the heading of *activity type* included written drills, games, quizzes, roleplays, etc. Information about how the activity was carried out came under the heading of *description*.

Another section in the guide was *participant organization,* which considered classroom interaction of three types: whether the teacher worked with the whole class or if the students worked in groups or individually. Within

each category, the following subsections were used:

A. Whole class:
    1. Teacher to student or class, and vice versa: the teacher leads the activity, interacting with individual students or the whole class.
    2. Student to student or to class and vice versa: students talk to other students or to the whole class who is the audience.
    3. Choral work: students repeat after the teacher or the text.

B. Group work:
    1. Same task: all the students in a group work on the same task
    2. Different task: all the students in a group work on different tasks.

C. Individual work:
    1. Same task: Students work alone on the same task
    2. Different task: Students work alone on different tasks.

In their work, Allen et al. drew attention to the fact that these categories might be the reflection of different theories about language teaching. And, as they clearly pointed out: “highly-controlled, teacher-centered approaches are thought to impose restrictions on the growth of students’ productive ability. In classes dominated by the teacher, students spend most of their time responding to questions and rarely initiate speech” (p. 7).

One of the subsections in the category *participant organization*, namely

group work, is assigned great importance in classes working within a communicative framework. Brown (2000, p. 178) indicates that group work enhances the quantity of possible output and also the quality. He favours specially small groups, as they "provide opportunities for student initiation, for face-to-face give and take, for practice in negotiation of meaning, for extended conversational exchanges, and for student adoption of roles that would otherwise be impossible" (p. 178).

The fourth heading in the guide was *activity modality,* which referred to the mode in which the activity was carried out, that is, oral or written. Lastly, the categories *teacher's target language* and *students' target language* indicated to what extent L1 –in this case Spanish, and L2 –in this case English as a foreign language, were used by the teachers and the students in the classroom activities (p.11).

The rationale for the inclusion of the sub-categories *L1* and *L2* was Krashen's (2009) *input hypothesis* and the importance he attached to the provision of comprehensible input in the target language (pp.20-22). The assessment of the use of Spanish or English further aimed at seeking for the possible connection between the language used by the teachers and the degree of the students' accuracy.

3.02.02. Content analysis.

The students' oral audio-recorded productions were transcribed to facilitate their analysis and to obtain quantitative information in terms of accuracy in the use of grammatical structures. Analysis of the written productions also sought to clarify this issue. Relevant information was entered into grids (see Appendixes B and C).

The grids for the analysis of written and oral content were almost identical. The slight difference and the categories the grid contains will be shown below.

Different headings of classroom activities and interactions were used, once again, borrowing and adapting some of the categories used by the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme developed by Allen et al., and also incorporating some terms borrowed from Lyster and Ranta's (1997) error treatment model.

The category *activity type* was meant to match the category by the same name used in the observation guide.

The next section*, activity focus,* measured the percentage of the activity which was devoted to form and the percentage devoted to meaning. This section, together with *content control* and *form control,* provided insight into who had control over the content and the form and to what extent, whether the teacher (or the text) or the student. This information also facilitated the later categorization of the activities as mechanical or communicative, according to Paulston and Bruder's (1976) classification of activities and practice drills.

Also important in the grids was the category *length of text*, which sought

to measure the length of the text produced by the students. Allen et al (1983, p. 9) classified texts as being of *minimal* length (such as isolated sentences and word lists) or *extended* (such as stories, dialogues, connected paragraphs)" (Allen et al, 1983, p. 9). For the purposes of the present study, these sub-categories were used to classify the students' productions and appreciate how communicative they were.

The heading *accuracy*, although it was a very important one in the light of the present investigation, hardly needs explanation. It simply refers to the percentage of correct grammar structures observed in the total analyzable data. (It will be seen that a portion of the data could not be subjected to analysis and the reasons for this will be explained).

In the grid for the analysis of oral work there was an additional category, *error treatment*. It was included in the present study because the circumstances under which it was carried out made it easier to detect errors in the oral medium. It was possible to perceive how the teachers tackled the students' errors in oral activities, but not in written ones, as at the time when the written material was collected, much of it had not yet been assessed by the teachers. The term *error treatment* was borrowed from Lyster and Ranta's (1997) error treatment model, which they used to describe L2 teachers' reactions to students' mistakes and the effect this feedback caused on students. It was meant to evaluate whether there was correction of mistakes during or after interactions, and whether the teacher's intervention caused students to produce "pushed output of an acceptable form", that is whether there was *learner uptake* (Davies, 2006; Spada & Lyster, 1997). The teacher's reaction to errors might

also result in *elaboration requests*, a term used by Allen et al. (1983) to refer to "requests for further information related to the subject matter of the preceding utterance(s)" (p.242). In the present study the term was used to perceive elaboration in terms of grammar mistakes. This last feature might influence the accuracy percentage of the production.

3.02.03. Survey.

A questionnaire with both open-ended and closed-ended questions was administered to the teachers to gather information related to the activities they proposed in their classes and whether these activities were oral, written, mechanical or communicative. It further provided details of the teachers' perceptions of their students' performance in such activities. The questions were written in Spanish with the intention of making the teachers feel more comfortable and express themselves more freely. Some of them answered the questionnaire at school and some others e-mailed their answers (See Appendix D). The questions contained in the survey were:

1. ¿Qué edad tiene?
2. ¿Es usted graduado/a de una institución terciaria de formación docente en área de inglés? (a. Sí b. No)
3. (Contestar en caso de haber marcado la opción a. en el punto anterior. Caso contrario no contestar) ¿En qué año se graduó?

These questions aimed at determining the teachers' qualifications for their

jobs and –according to their age and their graduation year –try to detect what teaching method was in vogue at the time they graduated and was therefore inculcated in teachers as part of their instruction.

4. ¿Cuánto hace en total que enseña inglés en instituciones? (en escuelas del estado o privadas, culturales inglesas, etc.)
5. ¿Cuánto hace que trabaja en esta escuela?
6. ¿Cuánto hace que conoce al grupo de alumnos que actualmente tiene en 6to grado?

Questions 4, 5 and 6 sought to identify how much teaching experience the teachers had in general and at the school and the 6th form object of the present study in particular. This factor may be thought to influence the way classes are carried out.

7. ¿Qué metodología utiliza en sus clases?
   a. □ método de gramática y traducción
   b. □ método audiolingual o estructural
   c. □ método comunicativo
   d. □ otro (indicar cuál)
8. ¿Por qué utiliza esta metodología?
   a. □ Porque considero que aprender las estructuras gramaticales es lo más importante en el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero
   b. □ Porque creo que la lengua extranjera es un instrumento de comunicación

c. □ Porque los alumnos necesitan aprender las reglas gramaticales y fijar las estructuras mediante ejercicios de traducción.

d. □ Otra razón (indicar cuál)

The seventh and the eighth questions examined the teachers' beliefs about the methodology they used in their classes, which was later compared with the data obtained in the field to try to discover matches and mismatches between what they said and what they actually did in their teaching practices.

9. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes actividades suministra usted a sus alumnos de 6to grado?

a. □ Ejercicios para completar con el tiempo de verbo correcto

b. □ Ejercicios para elegir la opción correcta (multiple choice)

c. □ Actividades de a pares donde cada alumno tiene el mismo texto con diferentes espacios en blanco que deben completar haciendo preguntas a su compañero (information gap)

d. Dramatizaciones de situaciones simulando ser distintas personas (role-play)

e. □ Hablar en inglés sobre situaciones simples de su vida cotidiana

f. □ Pasar oraciones a la forma interrogativa y negativa

g. □ Re-ordenar palabras para formar oraciones correctas

h. □ Escribir textos cortos (descripciones, narraciones, reportes, etc.)

i. □ Otras ¿Cuáles?

10. ¿Con qué frecuencia aproximada usted les suministra las actividades

anteriores? Marque con una cruz

	Todas las clases	2 veces por semana	3 o 4 veces por mes	1 o 2 veces por mes	5 o 6 veces por año	Nunca
a. Ejercicios para completar con el tiempo de verbo correcto						
b. Ejercicios para elegir la opción correcta (multiple choice)						
c. Actividades de a pares donde cada alumno tiene el mismo texto con diferentes espacios en blanco que deben completar haciendo preguntas a su compañero (information gap)						
d. Dramatizaciones de situaciones simulando ser distintas personas (role-play)						
e. Hablar en inglés sobre situaciones simples de su vida cotidiana						
f. Pasar oraciones a la forma interrogativa y negativa						
g. Re-ordenar palabras para formar oraciones correctas						

h. Escribir textos cortos (descripciones, narraciones, reportes, etc.)						
i. Otras						

The answers to these questions were supposed to provide data about the kind of activities the teachers proposed in their daily classes and the frequency with which they provided their students with these activities. This information further assisted in quantifying the amount of mechanical practice in view of the first subsidiary question derived from the basic hypothesis, that is, it sought to explore whether the amount of mechanical practice was an important factor in the production of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities. The percentage of each kind of practice in the total number of approximate classes was calculated. As students generally have 3 classes per week –around 12 classes per month –in 9 months, an estimate 108 classes per year was considered a measurable datum. This yielded the following percentages assigned to each frequency parameter:

Every class: 100 %

Twice a week: 66%

3 or 4 times a month: 29%

1 or 2 times a month: 12.5%

5 or 6 times a year: 0.05%

Never: 0%

11. Dada las opciones que marcó como más frecuentes en el cuadro anterior (todas las clases, 2 veces por semana, o 3 o 4 veces por mes), ¿Cuál es el motivo por el cual usted utiliza estas actividades frecuentemente?

12. Dada las opciones que marcó como menos frecuentes en el cuadro anterior (1 o 2 veces por mes, 5 o 6 veces por año, o nunca), ¿Cuál es el motivo por el cual usted no utiliza estas actividades frecuentemente o no las utiliza nunca?

13. ¿Usted considera que – en líneas generales – sus alumnos producen estructuras gramaticalmente correctas en actividades escritas?

☐ SI ☐ NO

14. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el motivo?

15. ¿Usted considera que – en líneas generales – sus alumnos producen estructuras gramaticalmente correctas en actividades orales?

☐ SI ☐ NO

16. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el motivo?

These last six questions focused on the teachers' opinion about the reasons why they preferred to use some kinds of activities over others, their beliefs about their students' accuracy in oral and written productions and the reasons they attributed this fact to.

The data obtained in the interviews was compared with the one obtained in the field and matches or mismatches were established. This triangulation between the results of the observations, the content analysis and the interviews was carried out to enhance the validation of the findings.

3.03. Results

For practical purposes, the schools visited were assigned numbers, and the teachers in these schools were assigned matching numbers. The same was done with the students' oral and written work. Thus, for example, teacher number 1 worked at school number 1 and the students' work was identified as belonging to school number 1. The following sections analyze the results obtained through each of the data collection methods mentioned earlier.

3.03.01. Analysis of non-participant class observations.

The results of the non-participant observation of classes showed that in all the schools visited both written and oral work was done during the three visits, a three-month period separating each of them. With respect to the type of *participant organization* of the oral activities, in 3 out of 7 schools during the three visits there was oral interaction between the teacher and the students, but there were no interactions among the students themselves, except in two schools (schools number 1 and number 7) in which during one of the three visits students worked in pairs (during the other visits to the field there was interaction between the teacher and the students). In school number 4 the interaction during one of the visits was among the students themselves. Yet in another one (school number 6) all the oral interactions were choral repetitions after the teacher, thus matching the category of *participant organization* called *choral*.

In connection with the written activities, in all but two schools all the students worked *individually* on the *same task*. In schools number 2 and 4, during one of the visits students worked *in groups* on the *same task.*

Concerning the use of the *target language*, both by the *teachers* and the *students*, the percentages of their use of L1 –in this case Spanish – or L2 –in this case English – was measured. In relation to the teachers, the purpose of this calculation was to establish in what language she gave instructions and the possible influence of this fact on students' production. Figures 1 and 2 respectively show the teachers' use of L2 in oral and written activities. The percentage of their use of L1 can be easily deduced as well. (For more detailed data, see Appendix E).

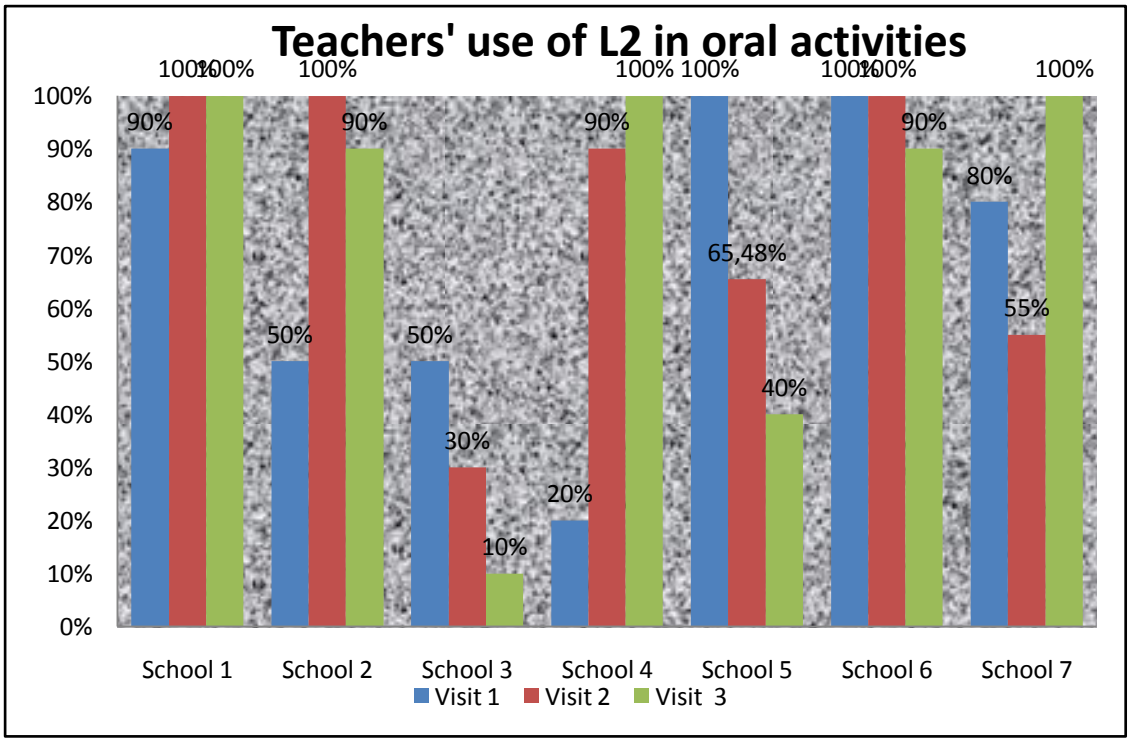


Figure 1. Teachers' use of L2 in oral activities

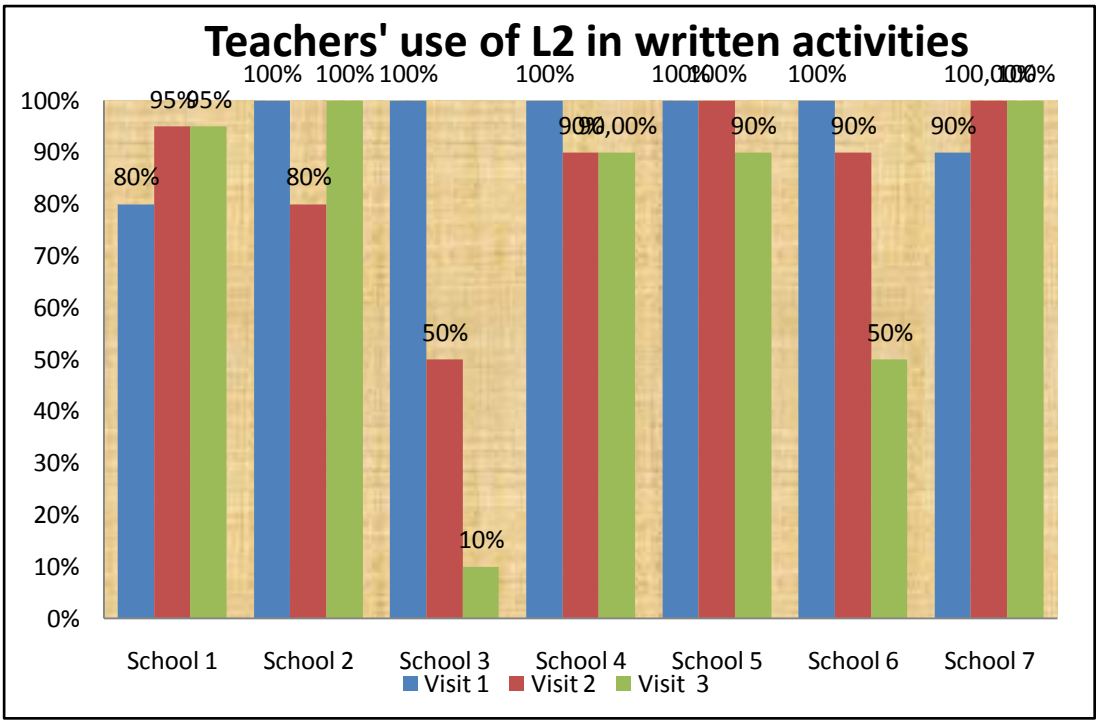


Figure 2. Teachers' use of L2 in written activities

As it can be seen, a higher percentage of English was used by the teachers when they gave instructions for written exercises than when they were involved in oral interactions with their students. In two of the schools (numbers 1 and 4) the teachers' use of English during oral activities increased progressively throughout the year, the latter with a noticeable difference. In schools numbers 2 and 7 this fact was also manifest, but in the former the teacher's use of English was slightly higher in the second visit, and in the latter her use of this language was lower the second time her class was visited. Interestingly, the teachers' use of the foreign language decreased progressively throughout the year in three of the schools (numbers 3, 5 and 6), the first two showing a marked difference.

No similar correlation could be found in the teachers' increase in the use of EFL while giving instructions for written activities, while there was a parallel

decrease in schools numbers 3, 5 and 6, to which school number 4 may well be added, although the percentage of decline was minimal. Once again, school number 3 showed a marked diminution.

With respect to the students' use of the foreign language, in all the written activities the student's exclusive language was English. Figure 3 shows the students' use of L2 in oral activities. Once more, the percentage of their use of L1 can be easily deduced as well. For more detailed data, see Appendix E.

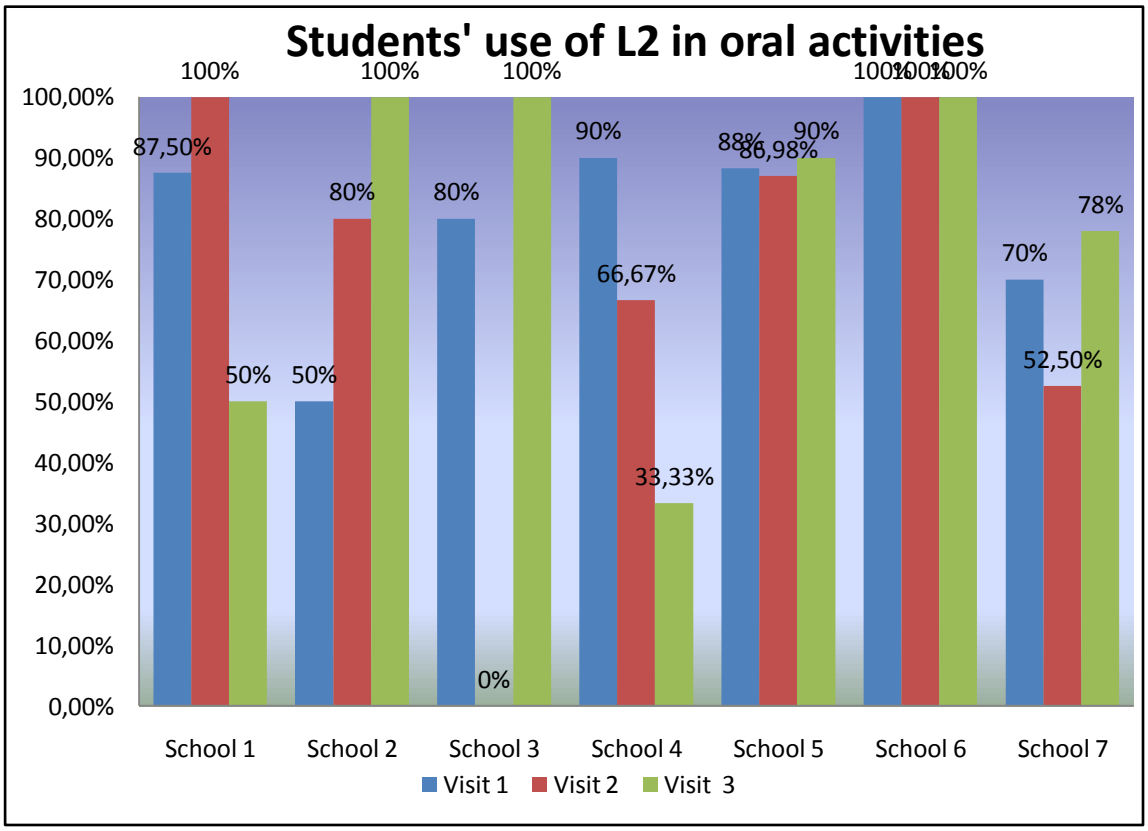


Figure 3. Students' use of L2 in oral activities

The graph shows two tendencies in the use of the foreign language throughout the year. One was a progressive increase in its use, as in the case of schools 2, 5 (although minimal) and 7 (although not progressively, as in the second visit the percentage was lower than in the first one). The other tendency

was a progressive decline in its use, as in schools 4 and 1 (although in the latter the percentage was higher in the second visit than in the first). Worthy of note were the special situations observed in schools 3 and 6. In the former, students used L1 in the second visit but in the others L2 ranged from very high (80%) to complete. In the latter, students used L2 exclusively, although –as noted in section 3.03.01 –all the oral interactions were choral repetitions after the teacher.

3.03.02. Analysis of oral and written work.

Not all the data gathered could be subjected to analysis. An average of 28.06% of all the oral work was excluded, in all cases due to students' use of their L1, Spanish. A lesser percentage - 2.67 % - of the written work was excluded as well; in this case the reason was a breakdown in communication due to incoherent information provided by the students, a fact that was considered important in the light of the focus of the present study. For example, a student wrote "She is walking" under a picture of a girl listening to music. Another student, the correct answer to the question "Does Rita stay in the cemetery?" being in the negative, wrote "Yes, she does". Yet another one wrote the sentence "A lot of birds are snoworing in the sky". In all these examples perfectly accurate utterances were produced –a fact that might attractively have served the purposes of the current investigation – but they were not considered in the analysis for the reasons mentioned above. This left a total of 71.94 % of the observed oral work to study and a total of 97.33 % of the written work. Content analysis of these analyzable data will be carried out next.

In order to see how communicative the classroom activities were, the relationship between this fact and accuracy of grammatical structures, and whether any significant changes occurred throughout the year, different parameters were measured. With respect to the *length of the text* produced by the students –in both oral and written activities –it was mostly minimal, with supremacy of isolated sentences as answers to the teacher's questions or in dialogues with her. The following dialogue between the teachers and the students is an example of a typical oral interaction:

T (*showing a photograph of Hannah Montana*): Who's she?
Ss: Hannah Montana.
T: She's Hannah Montana. OK. And where is she from?
S1, S2, S3, S4 (*some ss talk over the teacher*): Miley Cyrus.
T: OK. (*To the rest of the class*) Do you know her real name? Is this her real name?
Ss: No.
T: What's her real name?
Ss: Miley Cyrus.
T: Miley Cyrus. OK. And where's Miley Cyrus from?
S5: Estados Unidos?
65, S7, S8: England
T: She's from…
S 9: America
T: She's American, very good. She's from the United States. And do you know her profession? What does she do?
S 10: Canta.
T: In English?
S3, S4, S5, S6: singing .
T: OK. She sings. The same as Shakira *(in reference to a previous activity where Shakira was mentioned)*. She sings. Do you like her songs?
Ss: Yes.
S1, S4, S6, S10: No.
T: Who doesn't like her songs? *(Some ss put up their hands. The rest laugh)*
T: Ok. She's got a T.V. programme. She's a singer and she's and actress.

Figure 4. A typical example of an oral activity of minimal length

In this dialogue, the students did not interact with one another. Their intervention was limited to answering the teacher's questions. Something similar occurred in the following written activity, in which the student produced isolated sentences, as shown in figure 5:

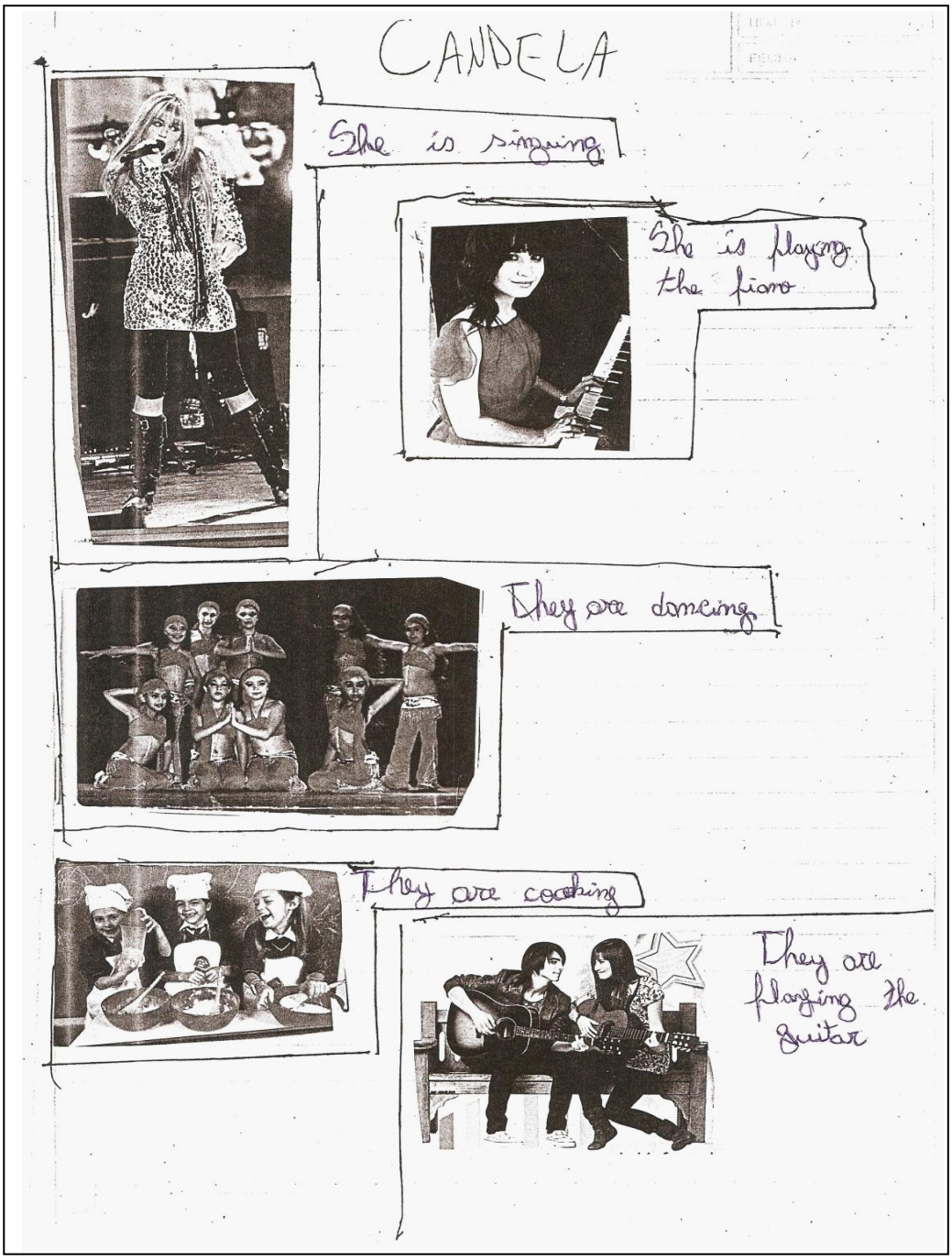


Figure 5. A typical example of a written activity of minimal length

Exceptions to this general finding were perceived in only two schools (1 and 7) in one of the visits in oral activities and in four (2, 4, 5 and 7) in one of the visits in written activities the text produced was extended in length, as when the students interacted among themselves without the teacher's intervention or when they wrote a narrative piece. In the following example, the students were playing a guessing game about animals in pairs:

Pair 1

S1: Does it live in a hot place? (5:40)
S2: Eh?
S1: Does it live in a hot place? Si vive en un lugar cálido
S2: Yes
S1: Does it eat meat? Si come carne!
S2: Ah! Yes.
S1: Lion!

Pair 2

S3: Does it eat meat?
S 4: No. No I don't… eat … meat
S3: Does it fly?
S4: Eh… Creo que sí.
S3: Does it eat fish?
S4: Yes. Yes, he does.
S3: Penguin.
S4: Yes.

Figure 6. A typical example of an oral activity of extended length

Worthy of note is the phenomenon observed in typical interactions like the one exemplified in figure 6: accuracy decreased as communicative intention increased. Moreover, when a student lacked the necessary vocabulary to keep the conversation flowing, he resorted to his mother tongue. (This technique was also used as an aid to comprehension, as when student 1 translated the

questions because student 2 had not understood). The relationship between accuracy and communication will be analyzed further on.

The following is a typical example of a narrative piece in which the text produced was not isolated but connected sentences forming a meaningful paragraph:

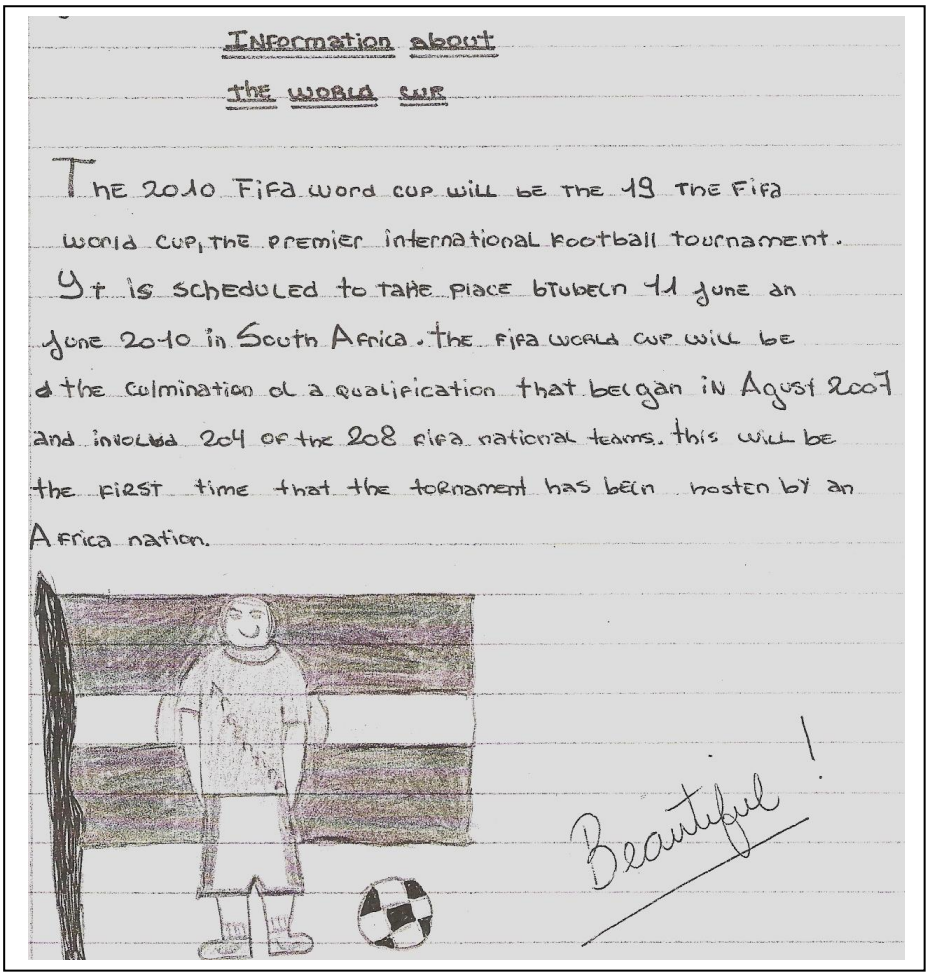


Figure 7. A typical example of a written activity of extended length

In addition to *length of text*, the remaining categories deserve attention. Figures 8 to 10 respectively show the *focus on meaning* in the oral activities

done in class (as opposed to *focus on form*), the degree of *content control* exerted by the student rather than the teacher (or the text), and the degree of *form control* exerted by the student rather than the teacher (or the text). Figures 11 to 13 show these same categories with respect to the written activities. (For more detailed data, see Appendixes F and G). It should be noted that school 3 was excluded from the chart in all the categories of oral activities because –as stated earlier – the students' sole language of interaction in the second visit was Spanish. However, information about the other visits will be provided.

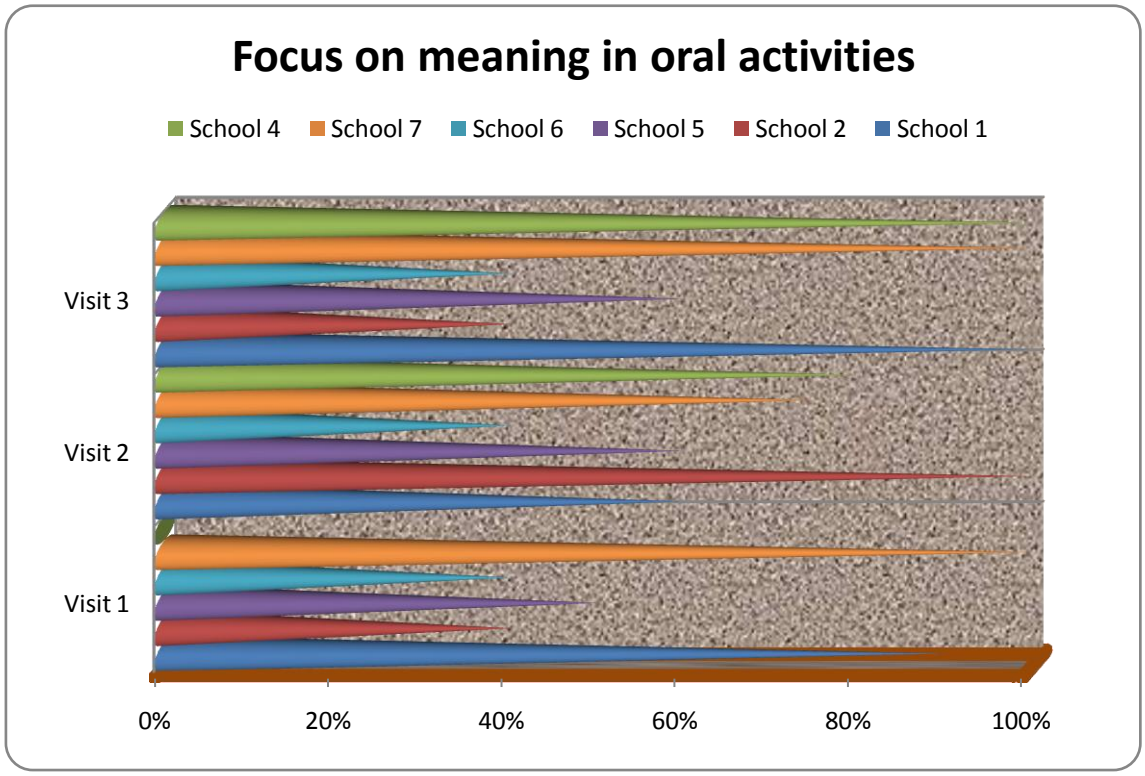


Figure 8. Focus on meaning in oral activities

The graph shows different results with respect to meaning being the main focus of the oral activities. Most schools varied their concentration on

meaning throughout the year, increasing or decreasing with no perceived common pattern. Two exceptions to this phenomenon were school 4 –in which a gradual intensification was observed, and school 6 –where focus on meaning remained constant. In the school excluded from the chart (school 3) although the second visit could not be taken into account, a growth in meaning-centered activities was unearthed. (See Appendix F for more detailed data)

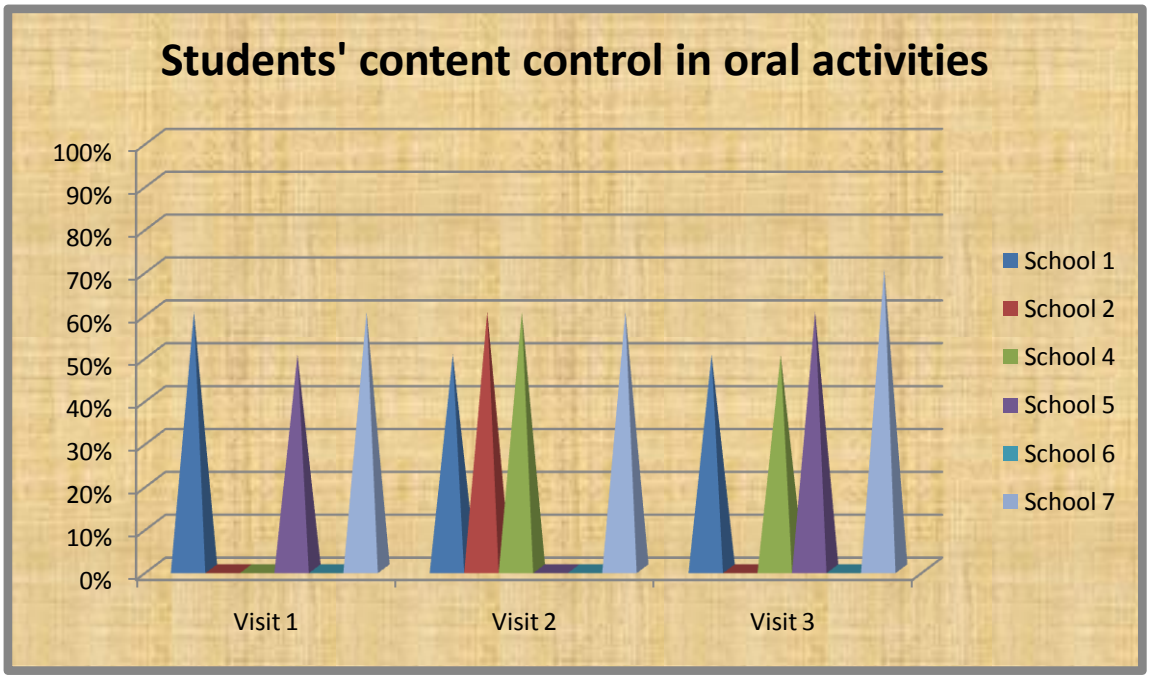


Figure 9. Students' content control in oral activities

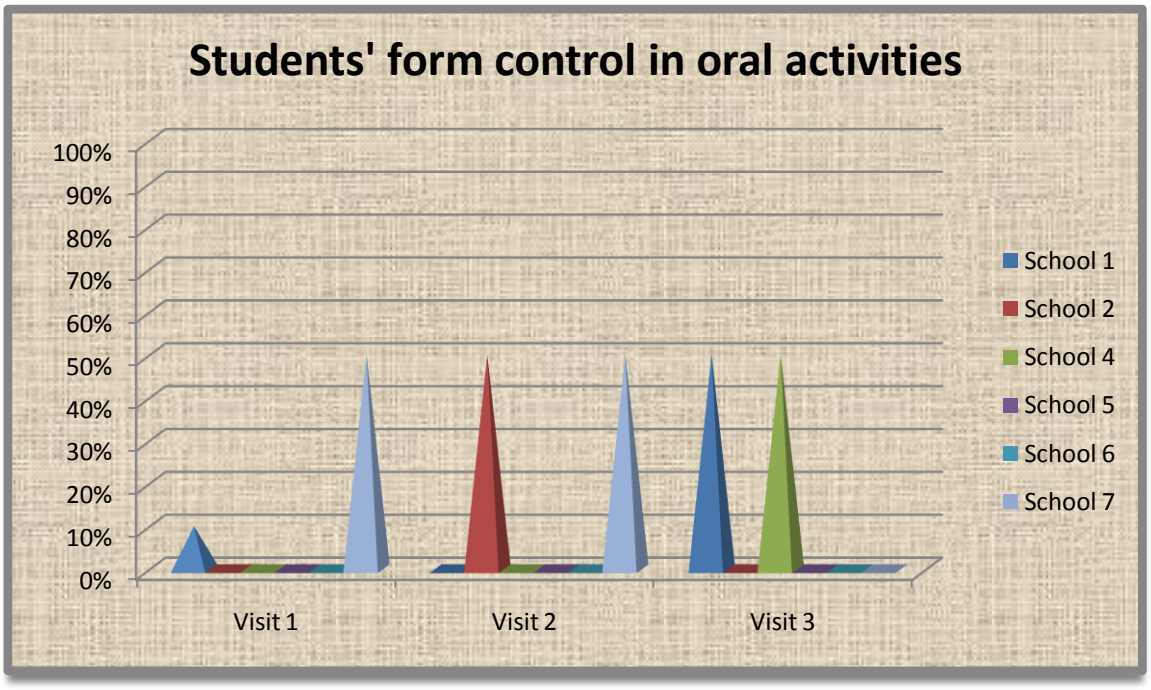


Figure 10. Students' form control in oral activities

Regarding the degree of the students' control of content and form in oral activities, a higher percentage was observed in the former. The three visits yielded no apparent regular pattern of variation throughout the year. Remarkable results were obtained in schools 6 and 7. In the first one, students never had control of either content or form. The second one showed the highest percentage of student control of both content and form compared to the rest of the schools. In school 3 (the one excluded from the chart) there was no control of form in the first visit and 60% of control in the third one. With respect to form, no control of form was observed in the first or third visits.

Written activities will be analyzed next. Figure 11 shows the degree of focus on meaning (as opposed to focus on form).

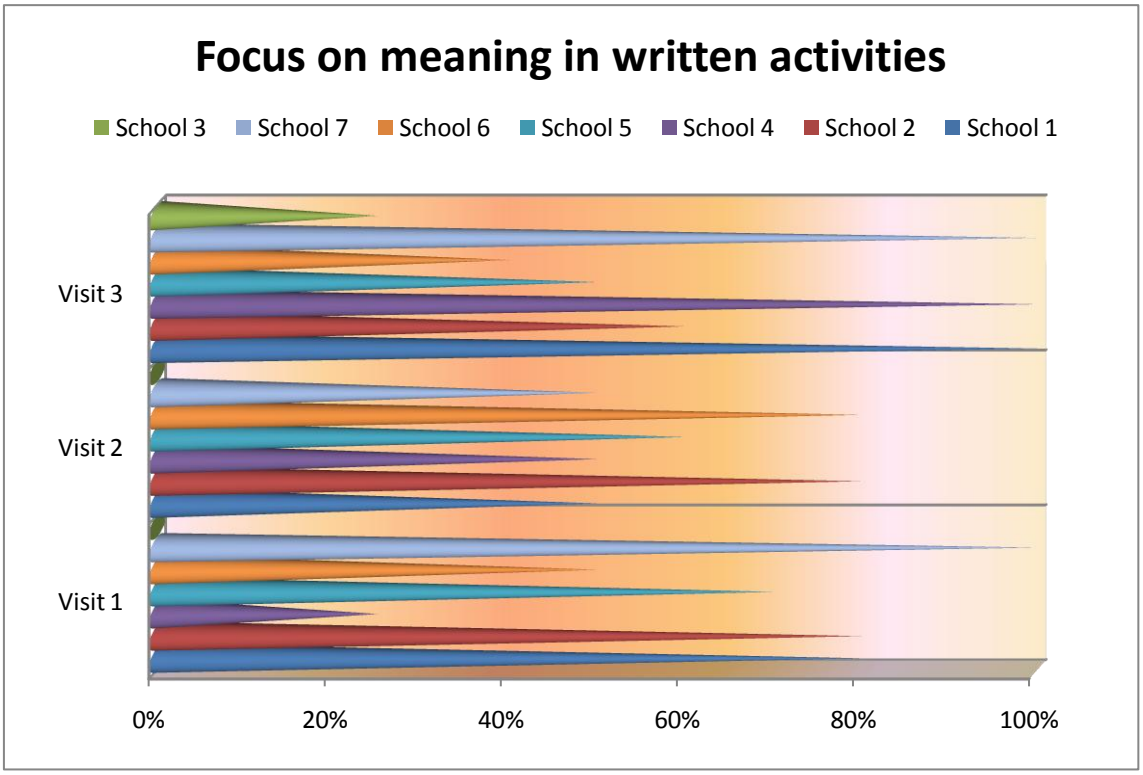


Figure 11. Focus on meaning in written activities

As it can be observed, two opposite tendencies were revealed with respect to focus on meaning in written activities. In four out of seven schools (1, 3, 4 and 7) there was a general increase –although schools 1 and 7 showed a decline in the second visit. A subtle decreasing propensity was observed in the remaining three schools (2, 5 and 6) –although in school 6 there was an increment in the second visit.

Attention will now be directed to the two remaining categories which were taken into account for the analysis: *content* and *form control*. Figures 12 and 13 respectively show the degree of student control of content and of form.

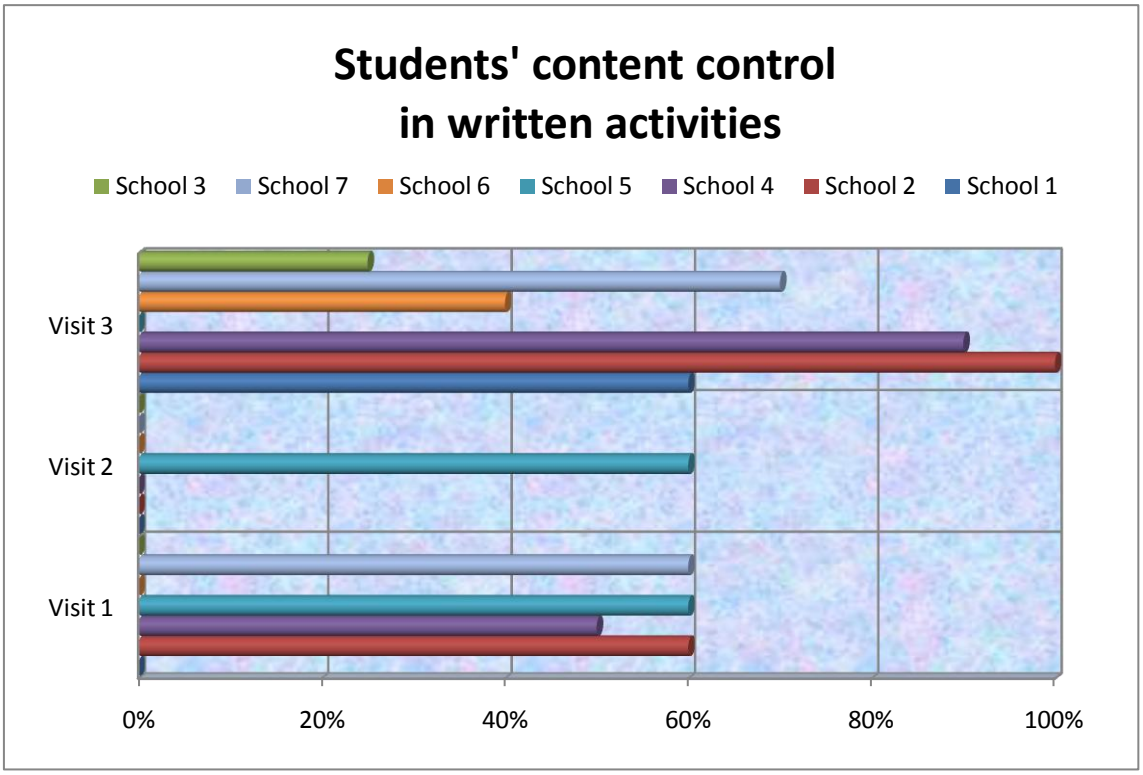


Figure 12. Students' content control in written activities

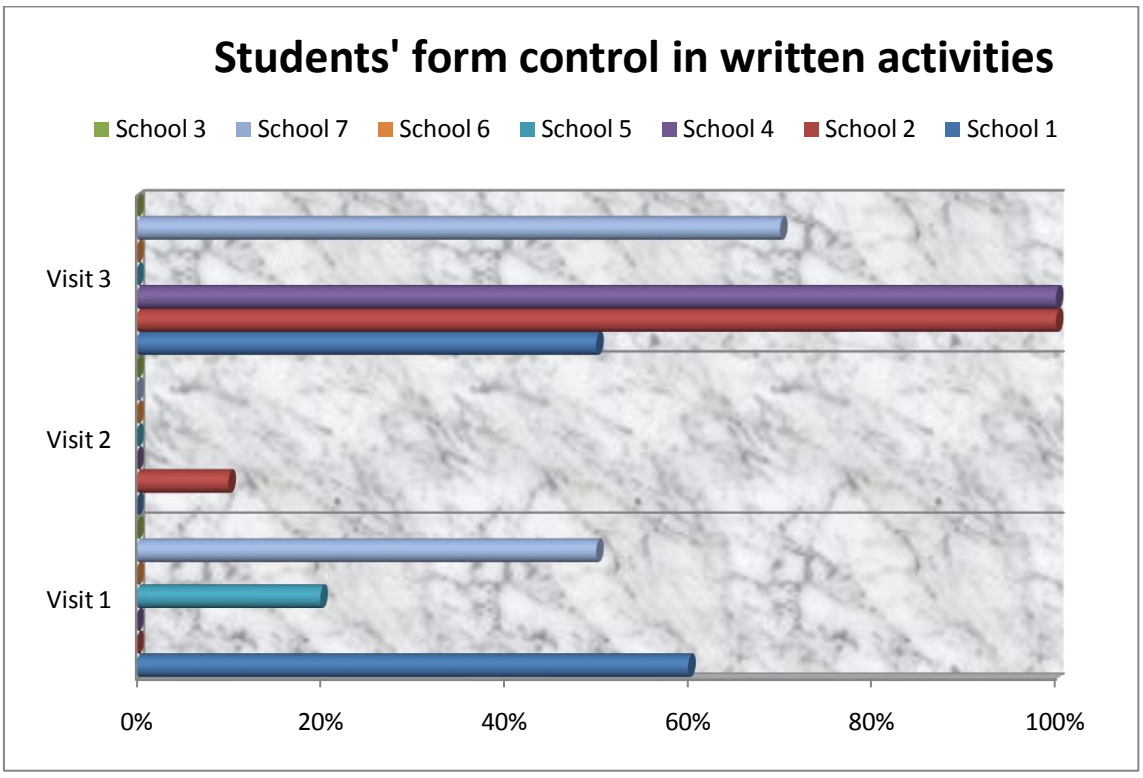


Figure 13. Students' form control in written activities

As in the case of oral activities (see Figures 9 and 10), the degree of the students' control of form was lower than their control of content. Students seemed to have an increasing control of content throughout the year (although in two schools – 2 and 7 –there was a drastic decrease in the second visit). The only exception to this trend was school 5, in which there was a general decay (although in school 1 the second visit showed a drastic drop). Remarkably, in schools 3 and 6 the students never had command of form.

Concerning *accuracy* in written and oral production, figures 14 and 15 show the results of oral and written activities respectively and variations throughout the year:

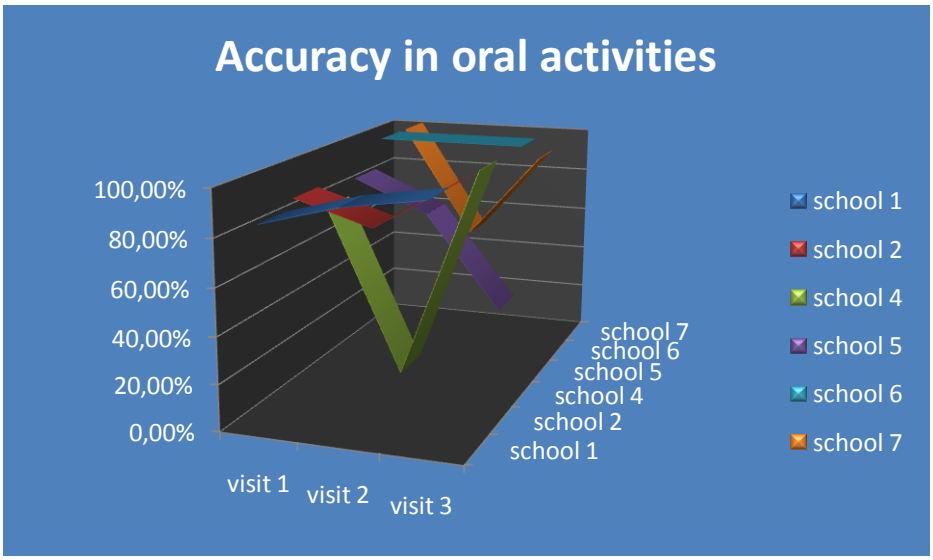


Figure 14. Accuracy in oral activities

School 3 was not included in figure 14 because the students spoke Spanish during the second visit, a fact that leaves production unanalizable. However, during the other visits, the following results were obtained: the students had an 80% of accuracy in the first visit and 70% in the last one.

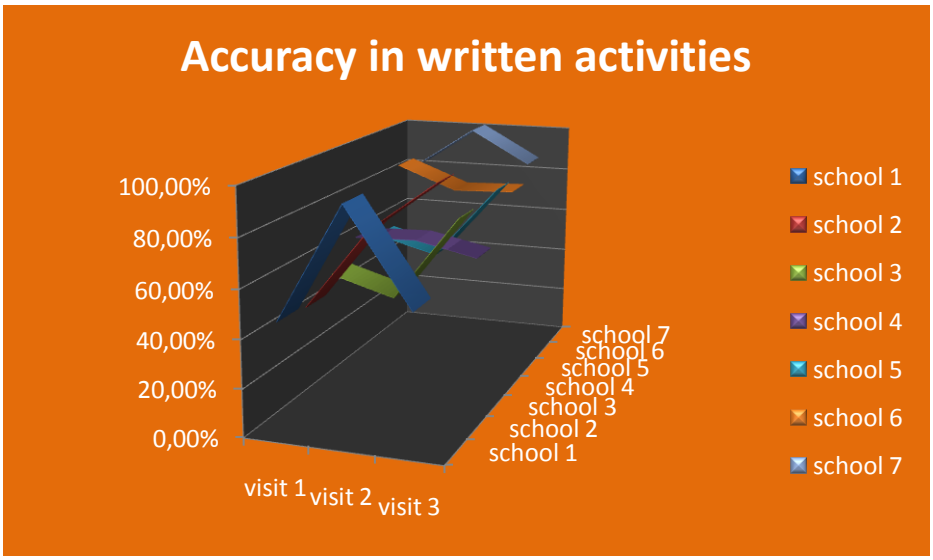


Figure 15. Accuracy in written activities

It can be perceived that oral and written activities showed different results. In the former, two general tendencies can be highlighted (in spite of variations): in some schools (1, 2, and 4) the students tended to produce more accurate structures in oral activities at the end of the observation period than at the beginning. In two schools (3 -in spite of the fact that the second visit was not taken into account, 5, and 7) they produced less accurate structures in October than in April. Surprisingly, in school 6 the students produced 100 % of accurate structures in oral activities. A closer look reveals that this is not so surprising as all the interactions were choral repetitions after the teacher.

Written activities showed the same tendencies: in some schools (1, 2, 3, 5 and 7) the students tended to produce more accurate structures at the end of the observation period than at the beginning (in spite of some variations in the second visit). In other schools (4 and 6), they had a propensity to produce less accurate structures.

With respect to *error treatment* in oral activities, in some schools it was observed that whenever the students made mistakes, the teachers intervened by correcting them at the moment and asking them to repeat the correct version, or by requesting elaboration of their utterances so that they could correct themselves. In most cases, this resulted – in Davies' (2006) and Spada and Lyster's (1997) terms – in *learner uptake*, as learners were able to produce the correct version. Only in a small proportion of the observed oral activities were students not able to produce "pushed output of an acceptable form" (Davies, 2006; Spada & Lyster, 1997) after the teacher's intervention. This being the case, the percentages of accuracy calculated in the present analysis were the ones obtained before the teacher's intervention, so that the results reflected what students had *acquired* – in Krashen's terms – and could therefore produce spontaneously.

3.03.03. Analysis of the surveys.

In the first three questions, the teachers were asked their age, if they had graduated from teacher training college and if so, the year of their graduation. The numbers of the teachers correspond to the schools were they work. As in school 2 the teacher went on maternity leave and a substitute teacher took over in May, letter *a* identifies the first teacher and letter *b* identifies the second one. Table 1 shows the results:

Table 1

Teachers' Age and Qualifications

	T1	T2a	T2b	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
Q1: Age	33	35	46	37	44	48	55	53
Q2: Graduated from T.T.C.?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Q3: Year of graduation	2007/ 2009	2007	2005	2005	1990	1998	2008	2004/ 2009

As it can be seen, most of the teachers had graduated from teacher training college during the last five years, except for teacher 5 –who graduated in 1998, and teacher 4 –who graduated in 1990. Where there are two different years of graduation, it means that first they received their degree as teachers qualified to work at primary school and later at secondary school. These results show that all the teachers were qualified for their jobs, and that most of them were instructed under a communicative orientation to language teaching, as this has been the predominant orientation in teacher training colleges in our country for at least the past fifteen years.

Table 2 shows the results for questions 4, 5 and 6, which sought to identify their general teaching experience and their experience at the school and the students under study in particular.

Table 2

Teachers' Experience

	T1	T2a	T2b	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7
Q4: ¿Cuánto hace en total que enseña inglés en instituciones?	10 años	13 años	10 años	10 años	22 años	14 años	26 años	6 años
Q5: ¿Cuánto hace que trabaja en esta escuela?	Feb. 2010	Feb. 2010	Julio 2010	2 años	10 años	13 años	4 años	Feb. 2010
Q6: ¿Cuánto hace que conoce al grupo de alumnos que actualmente tiene en 6to grado?	Marzo 2010	Marzo 2010	Julio 2010	Marzo 2009	Marzo 2008	Marzo 2008	Marzo 2008	Marzo 2010

It can be noticed that five out of eight teachers had around ten years' experience. Two extremes are teacher 7 –with 6 years –and teachers 4 and 6 – with 22 and 26 years respectively. Four of the teachers (1, 2a, 2b and7) were new at the school under study. The rest had worked there for different numbers of years, ranging from 2 to 13. Four teachers had started working with the 6th form that year; three had been their teachers as from 4th form and one as from 5th form.

Figure 16 illustrates the results for question 7, related to the methodology they used in their classes.

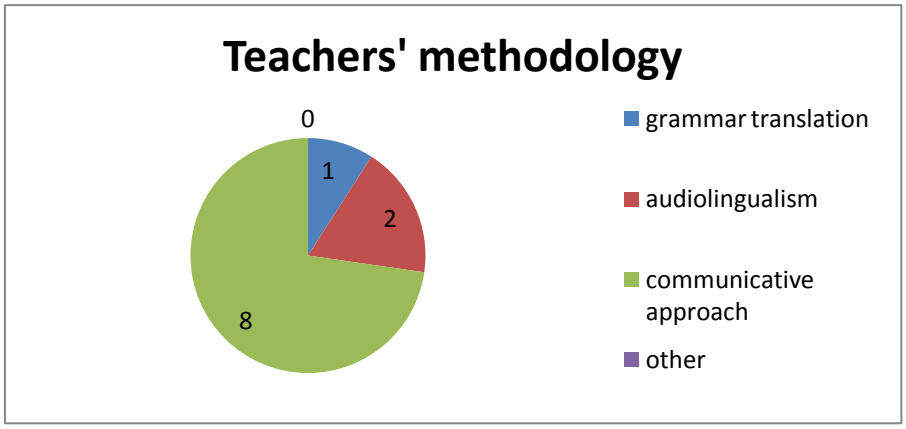


Figure 16. Teachers' methodology

All the teachers advocated the use of the communicative approach in their practices, but some of them admitted using other teaching methods as well: teachers 2b and 5 said they sometimes used audiolingualism, and teacher 2a occasionally used grammar translation. No other methodologies were reported.

Question 8 was related to the reason why they used the methodology. All of them considered that the foreign language was an instrument for communication. Teacher 2b also thought that learning grammar structures was highly important to learn a foreign language.

Questions 9 and 10 provided information about the kind of activities the teachers proposed in their daily routines and the frequency with which they provided their students with these activities. All the teachers stated that they used the kind of activities which were later classified as mechanical, meaningful and communicative, according to Paulston and Bruder's (1976) classification of practice types. (For detailed data on the specific activities mentioned see Appendix H)

Frequency of each kind of activity (question 10) is shown in table 3. The results were calculated as follows: quantification of the teachers who worked with one or more activities which qualified to be included in each category – mechanical, meaningful or communicative (the highest frequency was considered when there was a difference between activities belonging to the same category) - and the consequent calculation of the percentage of teachers for each frequency parameter. (For raw data, see Appendix H)

Table 3

Kinds of Activities

	Every class	Twice a week	3 or 4 times a month	1 or 2 times a month	5 or 6 times a year	Never
Mechanical	37.5% (T2a,2b,5)	37.5% (T3,4,6)	0%	25% (T1,7)	0%	0%
Meaningful	0%	37.5% (T2b,3,4)	12.5% (T6)	37.5% (T1,2a,5)	0%	12.5% (T7)
Communicative	37.5% (T,2b,4,7)	37.5% (T1,3,6,)	25% (T2a,5)	0%	0%	0%

As it can be observed, mechanical and communicative activities seemed to dominate teachers' preferences. 37.5% of them said they provided their students with one of both, although only one teacher (T2b) said she worked with both every class. None of them said they never worked with them, which further seems to emphasize this finding. Meaningful activities, being halfway between the two extremes of the communication continuum, produced diverse results. It

can inferred that although all the teachers advocated the use of a communicative orientation in their classes and they believed that the foreign language was an instrument for communication (question 8), when asked about specific activities, some mismatches were found, as apart from communicative activities, they mentioned activities characterized as mechanical. This might indicate a wrong conception on the part of the teachers about what communicative activities entail. This assumption might be reinforced by the situation perceived in some classes. Teachers 1, 5 and 6 demanded complete sentences from their students. Isolated words or phrases as answers to questions were considered wrong, even non-communicative. Indeed, one of the teachers (T5) overtly manifested that communication entails whole sentences, not just words or phrases. Note the following comment she made to a student when, in answer to the question "What is he doing?", he produced "drinking": "Podés decirme la oración completa? Yo no quiero que me digas palabras sueltas, quiero que me digas frases, oraciones. Uno no se comunica tirando palabras" [sic][2]. She insisted on this and she later added "Me gustaría que el que conteste lo haga con un fundamento, que me conteste con una oración. No pretendo palabras sueltas. "Running" no es una respuesta, y menos que corresponda a chicos de 6to grado" [sic][3]. She truly believed that she was teaching her students to be more communicative, in spite of the fact that communication was perfectly achieved by the student.

Notes

(2) "Can you tell me the complete answer? I don't want you to tell me isolated words. One does not communicate by saying words".
(3) "I'd like the one to answer to do so with some foundation, to answer with a sentence. I don't expect isolated words. "Running" is not an answer, and certainly not for children in 6th form"

Questions 11 and 12 sought to determine the teachers' opinions about the activities (For complete data see Appendix H). The aim here was to enumerate the reasons they gave for the use of the activities they said they used more frequently: to strengthen grammar structures by repetition, so that students communicate their personal experiences, because students are interested and motivated, to expose them to the foreign language and because they have plenty of practice. The motivation for not using the rest of the list of activities provided was: lack of time or study, because they are not necessary or important, disagreement with mechanical practice, because students find it difficult to express themselves orally, and other reasons like group characteristics, the fact that students improve with time and children being in constant progress. That is, factors related to time, personality, methodology or affection.

The remaining four questions -13, 14, 15 and 16 – provided information about the teacher's views on their students' accuracy in productions and about the reasons which they attributed this fact to. Figure 17 illustrates both written and oral activities (questions 13 and 16 respectively).

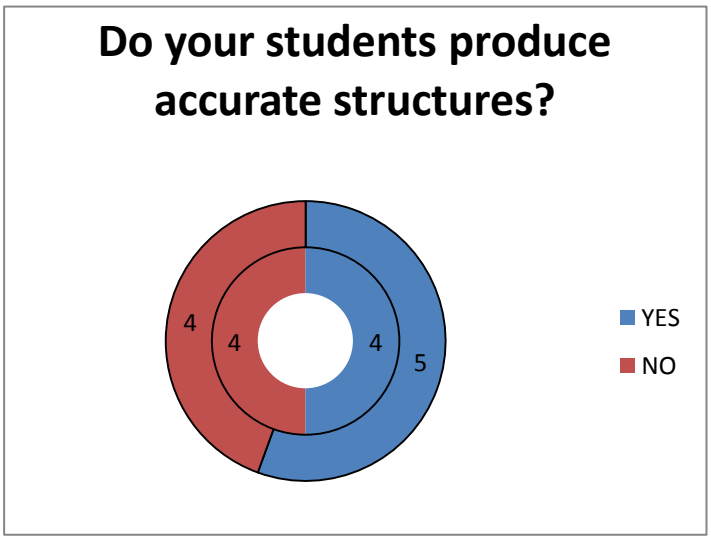


Figure17. Teachers' views on students' accuracy

The inner circle displays the teachers' opinion about their students' accuracy in written activities and the outer one about oral activities. Out of the eight teachers, four considered their students produced accurate written structures (teachers 1, 4, 6 and 7), and five believed they did so in oral activities. (1, 2b, 4, 6 and 7). Teacher number 7 answered both "yes" and "no" to this question, arguing that students are in constant development, at one time they are accurate, the next time they aren't, and this continues during their learning process.

The reasons for their judgment are stated in the following table:

Table 4

Teacher's Opinion about Accuracy

Teachers' opinion about accuracy

T	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
1	Sí	prog T	Sí	pract
T2a	No	F.T. /F.E.	No	dif O
T2b	No	F.T.	Sí	mot int
T3	No	F.T.	No	dif O
T4	Sí	pract	Sí	pract
T5	No	F.E.	No	F.E.
T6	Sí	pract	Si	pract
T7	Sí	mot int	Sí /No	proc

prog T=progresan con el tiempo

pract=tienen mucha practica

dif O=les resulta difícil expresarse oralmente

proc=en constante proceso, con altibajos

F.T=falta de tiempo

F.E.=falta de estudio

mot int=porque están motivados y les interesa

The table presents different reasons for positive answers to question 13 – if they considered their students produced accurate grammar structures in written activities. The main causes (question 14) were: students tend to

progress in time, because they had plenty of practice and because they felt motivated and interested. For negative answers the explanation was lack of time or study.

With respect to question 15 - student's production of accurate grammar structures in oral activities – the rationale for positive answers (question 16) were the same as for written activities, whereas negative answers were explained on the grounds of difficulty of the oral mode and lack of study.

3.03.04. Further analysis and cross-validation of results.

According to the information gathered during the observation periods and the analysis of written and oral activities, the work done during each of these periods was categorized, situating it at one of both ends of what Harmer (2007) calls the *communication continuum*, that is, work was considered either mechanical or communicative. For the purposes of the present analysis, activities were considered *communicative* if they had more than 50 % of at least two of the following communicative components: focus on meaning, student content control and student form control. They were considered *mechanical* if they had more than 50 % of at least two of the opposite parameters: focus on form, teacher (or text) content control and teacher (or text) form control. These categories were considered most representative of a communicative framework to language teaching. In order to see the relationship between activity types and accuracy, the information shown in Figures 10 and 11 (accuracy) was placed next to each kind of practice. Tables 5 and 6 show this relationship for oral and written work respectively at each of the schools:

Table 5

Oral Activity Types and Accuracy

School	Visit number	Type of activity	Accuracy
1	1	commun.	85.91%
1	2	mechan.	95%
1	3	mechan.	100%
2	1	mechan.	90%
2	2	commun.	80%
2	3	mechan.	100%
3	1	mechan.	80%
3	2	*excluded*	------
3	3	commun.	70%
4	1	mechan.	80%
4	2	commun.	8.33%
4	3	mechan.	100%
5	1	mechan.	86.66%
5	2	mechan.	72.50%
5	3	commun.	31%
6	1	mechan.	100%
6	2	mechan.	100%
6	3	mechan.	100%
7	1	commun.	100%
7	2	commun.	50%
7	3	commun.	89%

Table 6

Written Activity Types and Accuracy

School	Visit number	Type of activity	Accuracy
1	1	commun.	47.50%
1	2	mechan.	95.23%
1	3	commun.	56.75%
2	1	commun.	46%
2	2	mechan.	80%
2	3	comm.	100%
3	1	mechan.	53.20%
3	2	mechan.	45.55%
3	3	mechan.	80.76%
4	1	mechan.	63.18%
4	2	mechan.	64%
4	3	commun.	58.33%
5	1	commun.	58.43%
5	2	commun.	51.56%
5	3	mechan.	82.50%
6	1	mechan.	86%
6	2	mechan.	76%
6	3	mechan.	76.92%
7	1	commun.	82.14%
7	2	mechan.	100%
7	3	commun.	85.29%

A first analysis of these charts reveals that in most schools both mechanical and communicative activities were detected, a fact that coincides with the answers to the teachers' surveys on this matter. However, a higher number of mechanical activities was found both in the oral and the written mode. In oral activities, schools 6 and 7 represented exceptions to the general finding. In the former, only mechanical activities were found. In the latter, all the observed activities were communicative. Written activities also showed special cases. In both schools 3 and 6 students worked only with mechanical activities in the three visits.

A closer look at tables 5 and 6 makes it possible to compare accuracy and activity type. It can be perceived that in all schools where comparison was possible, accuracy percentages were higher in mechanical activities.

At the beginning of this section, it was stated that for the activities in this study to be considered communicative they needed to have more than 50 % of at least two of the following communicative components: focus on meaning, student content control and student form control. T It was observed that some of the classes in which communicative activities were found were slightly more communicative than others, that is to say, there were more communicative components and –therefore –they could be considered to approach the furthest end of the *communication continuum.* Students had more opportunities for output, because the activities were organized as group work and they were not merely interactions between the teacher and the students, a fact which reduces the time for student talk, and reduction of student talk is an extremely important situation to avoid in a foreign language teaching situation. Group work is

favoured by CLT practitioners because – as Brown (2000) states, small groups "provide opportunities for student initiation, for face-to-face give and take, for practice in negotiation of meaning, for extended conversational exchanges, and for student adoption of roles that would otherwise be impossible" (p. 178).

These advantages of group work mentioned by Brown might be the cause of the results found in some communicative activities. Concerning oral practice, accuracy percentages were relatively higher (about 66 %) in the activities with more communicative components than in the rest of the communicative activities. Apart from working in groups, these students produced speech which was more extended in length (for example, by producing long dialogues in pairs). Furthermore, all the teachers mentioned they provided their students with a high frequency of oral communicative work and some of them also with written communicative work. For the purposes of the present analysis, these activities were considered highly frequent in use if the teachers said they used at least one of them every class, twice a week or 3 or 4 times a month. (See Appendix H for specific activities and frequencies).

These results were obtained by cross-checking the information obtained through the class observations, the content analysis and the answer to the surveys. Table 7 shows results for oral activities and table 8 for written activities.

Table 7

Oral Communicative Activities

School	Visit number	Group work	Extended length	High frequency of use	Accuracy
1	1	yes	yes	yes	85.91 %
2	2	no	no	yes	80%
3	3	yes	no	yes	70%
4	2	no	no	yes	8.33%
5	3	no	no	yes	31%
7	1	no	no	yes	100%
7	2	no	no		50%
7	3	yes	yes		89%

Table 7 shows that at least 2 of the 3 communicative elements mentioned –use of group work, extended length and high frequency of use – were observed in 3 out of 6 schools. In general, these activities yielded higher accuracy percentages. And in the 2 schools where all the elements were found (1 and 7) the percentages of accuracy were higher than in the school where 2 elements were found (school 3). Interestingly, of these 3 schools the one with the highest accuracy percentage (school 7) was the one where only communicative activities were found.

Table 8

Written Communicative Activities

School	Visit number	Group work	Extended length	High frequency of use	Accuracy
1	1	no	no	yes	47.50 %
1	3	yes	no		56.75%
2	1	no	no	yes	46%
2	3	no	no		100%
4	3	yes	yes	no	58.33%
5	1	no	no	no	58.43%
5	2	no	yes		51.56%
7	1	no	no	yes	82.14%
7	3	no	yes		85.29%

Table 8 reveals that 3 out of 5 schools displayed 2 of the communicative elements mentioned (none of them displayed the three together). Although this situation is similar to the one found in oral communicative activities, no parallel correlation with respect to accuracy could be perceived. Accuracy percentages differed irrespective of the number of communicative elements found.

An interesting secondary finding, although it was not the aim of the present study, was the possible relationship between accuracy and use of the mother tongue by teachers. The percentage of accuracy was compared with the percentage of the teachers' use of L1 during oral and written activities (see

Figures 1 and 2, teachers' use of L2). A direct connection was found between high percentages of teachers' use of L1 in oral activities and low student accuracy or at least lower than in schools where the teachers' use of L2 was more frequent. Communicative activities yielded even lower proportions, as in the case of school 5 during the third visit (the teacher spoke 60% in Spanish and students were 31% accurate). A remarkable correlation was found in school 3 during the second visit, in which the teacher used 70% of L1, and the students' oral work could not be subjected to analysis because of their exclusive use of L1.

With respect to the written communicative activities observed at school 5 (first and second visit), it could be perceived that the teacher gave instructions only in English and that accuracy degrees were higher than in the oral activities: 58.43% and 51.56% vs. 31%). This might further emphasize the possible connection between high percentages of teacher use of L1 and low student accuracy, aided by the fact that the subjects under study were the same.

The association mentioned above might prove Krashen's input hypothesis right, in the sense that not having received enough input might have caused the students to acquire a poorer L2 quality. As the author mentions: "… we are not using enough of the available instruction time for supplying comprehensible input, and (…) we will be able to stimulate more rapid (and more comfortable) second language acquisition if we put greater focus on input" (Krashen, 2009, p.73).

Another secondary finding worthy of note is the discrepancy discovered by comparing the teachers who –according to the answers to the survey – said

they used the communicative approach and assigned a high percentage of their classes (every class, twice a week or 3 or 4 times a month) to the work with communicative activities: teachers 2b (teaching at school 2 as from the second observation), 6 and 7. Inconsistency emerges in the classes of two of these three teachers (T 2b and 6), where mainly mechanical activities were found. (InT 7's class, most of the observed activities were communicative). Although two is a relatively low number compared to the total number of teachers, this mismatch between their beliefs and what actually happened in the classes is an issue worthy of attention.

This issue of beliefs was also observed in the difference found between five of the teachers' perception of their students' accuracy of production in (mainly written) activities – as indicated by their answers to the surveys – and the content analysis of these students' work. The measurable parameter used to classify the activities as accurate for the purposes of the present comparison was more than 60% of correct structures. Two of the teachers believed their students generally produced accurate structures: T1 and T4. However, the analysis of the students' production revealed this was not the case. Surprisingly, the opposite relationship was also found. T 2a, T2b and T3 considered their students did not normally use accurate forms. Nevertheless, the analysis of their work showed they did. (For the comparison of the work and the teachers at school 2, T2a was compared to the work analyzed after observation 1, and T2b to the one analyzed after observations 2 and 3). This divergence might be interpreted in view of their limited knowledge of their students. The surveys disclosed that most of them had worked with these 6th form students for a very

short time (it was the first year for three of the teachers, the second year for one and the third year for the remaining teacher). This fact, together with their being new at the school too (with the exception of T4, who had worked at the school for 10 years) might account for the discrepancy, in spite of their having many years of general teaching experience. The relationship between the knowledge of the group to teach and its effect on students' performance in class might be attention-grabbing for future researchers.

3.04. Limitations of the Present Study

It would be outlandish to assume that the present study provided conclusive results on the issue of grammar practice. Several factors could have affected the outcome obtained.

Firstly, the schools were visited only three times during the year. A longer observation period might have been necessary to reach more definite conclusions.

Secondly, a portion of the data was excluded from the analysis, due to use of Spanish or when the students' language was incoherent, which caused the analyzable information to be reduced.

Finally, individual learning and teaching styles and personality and affective factors were not considered.

3.05. Conclusions

The purpose of the present study of EFL classes was to explore the relationship between the form-focused practice of grammar and the construction of accurate grammatical structures in communicative activities. The main hypothesis was that the mechanical practice of form might hinder the production of accurate grammatical structures when students were engaged in communicative activities. Further, derived subsidiary questions aimed at investigating whether the amount of this de-contextualized kind of practice influenced the presumed result, and whether any difference could be found between oral and written activities with respect to production of accurate grammar structures after specific mechanical training.

The collection of data was carried out by means of non-participant observation of classes, content analysis of the students' oral and written work and surveys to the teachers of the courses.

In connection with oral practice, in 5 out of the 7 schools, the degree of accuracy was greater in mechanical activities. In the remaining 2 schools comparison was not possible. In one of them (school 6) all the activities were mechanical, and in the other (school 7) all of the work was communicative. Concerning written activities, a similar situation was encountered. In 4 schools mechanical practice yielded a larger accuracy percentage. Two schools (3 and 6) were beyond the scope of contrast, as only mechanical activities were found there. School 2 was exceptional, as a high degree of accuracy was found in the communicative activities analyzed after the third visit, even higher than the mechanical activities. In spite of not being statistically significant enough to alter

the results obtained, it would be interesting to conduct further research to try to discover the reasons for this uncommon fact.

In the light of these findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The basic hypothesis might be proved right, in the sense that accuracy was higher in mechanical than in communicative activities, which probably indicates that the form-focused practice of grammar might impede accuracy in communicative practice. Complementarily, in the light of the detailed comparison of the elements involved in communicative activities as shown in tables 7 and 8, it might be concluded that –at least for oral activities –if classroom practice is more communicative, better results will be obtained with respect to the increase of students' accuracy of production. However, and although the scope of the present investigation did not allow for a longer observation period, it would be interesting to continue the observation of these classes over at least an additional school year to perceive if this tendency continues and what results can be observed with prolonged communicative practice. In other words, explore whether more communicative practice enhances accuracy in communicative activities.
2. The first subsidiary question, related to the amount of mechanical practice as an influential factor, might be answered in the positive, as more mechanical than communicative practice was found both in oral and written activities, which might influence the degree of accuracy achieved in each kind of practice. Therefore, the assumptions underlying this question might be accepted.

3. The second and third subsidiary questions, which aimed at finding out whether students were able to produce accurate grammatical structures in oral communicative activities after specific mechanical training on form, may be partially answered in the negative. In general, students were not able to produce accurate grammar forms in communicative activities, or –rather – they were less accurate than in mechanical activities. Both oral and written productions were equally affected by the kind of practice provided.
4. It could not be proved whether time elapse was an important influential factor, hence the conclusion that the second and third subsidiary questions may be *partially* answered in the negative. Further research needs to be conducted to shed light on these matters. However, a possible reason for the impossibility to prove this issue might be related to Nunan's (1998) assertion that "a learner's mastery of a particular language item is unstable, appearing to increase and decrease at different times during the learning process" (p.101).
5. The answers to the three subsidiary questions tended to reinforce the basic hypothesis.

To sum up, traditional grammar practice in the form of mechanical exercises aiming at accuracy might not be beneficial for students if it is the only kind of practice carried occurring in the foreign language classroom. In the present study, when communication was involved, accuracy descended. And more communicative practice seemed to be more useful in enhancing the

production of accurate structures. These by no means conclusive results might carry important pedagogical implications. Communicative practice might be seen from a different perspective. The possibility of adopting an approach in which grammar forms may be attended to within a communicative framework might be advantageous for students.

3.06. Suggestions for Further Research

The results of the current investigation showed that teachers tended to devote a vast part of their attention to ensuring their students produced correct grammar structures through sustained mechanical practice. This finding does not sit comfortably with their claim to the adherence to the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching. Yet the reasons for this disparity remain to be explored. However, some hints might serve as a starting point for initiating research: some of the teachers believed they were teaching their students to be more communicative when in fact they were providing them with form-focused practice. So it might be deemed advisable to delve into this matter. Derived from this, other convictions might be additionally investigated. In this way, credit could be given to Burke (2011) and her discussion on the importance of rituals and beliefs in teachers' instructional practices.

Some of the secondary findings of the present investigation could serve to initiate further research. For example, the relationship between the knowledge teachers have of their groups and how this affects their students' performance in class may be explored. Other variables to consider might be:

how teachers' input and students' output are related, and whether accuracy is enhanced in communicative activities after communicative practice.

Another point to consider is the low proficiency level of the students studied. It would be suitable to investigate if the same results are maintained with students having a higher command of the foreign language. It might be the case that –following Littlewood –structural practice prepares students for more communicative oriented activities. In his terms, they might be at the stage of *pre-communicative* activities. Therefore, when they reach a higher proficiency level they might be better prepared to produce more accurate structures when engaged in communication oriented tasks. Moreover, the question of task complexity might be further explored to see if the results are maintained through different levels of difficulty.

Additionally, it might be interesting to examine the age factor. Children and adults are perceived to have differential ways of learning a foreign language. So they not necessarily benefit from mechanical and communicative activities in the same way as children.

Lastly, this being a small-scale investigation, the study might be replicated on a larger sample of population, and examine diverse geographical areas and private apart from state-run schools, to appreciate whether the main hypothesis might still be proved right. In addition, statistical analysis of different regions and school administrations might provide information for conducting further research on other variables that might affect the presumed outcome.

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Appendix A

Observation Guide

School: Time/School period:

Teacher: Visit No.:

Form: (No. of students present/enrolled):

Date: (Name of textbook -if there is one):

ACTIVITY TYPE	DESCRIPTION	PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION							ACTIVITY MODALITY		T. TARGET LANGUAGE		S. TARGET LANGUAGE	
		whole class			Group work		Individual work							
		T ↕ S / C	S ↕ S / C	choral	Same task	Different task	Same task	Different task	oral	written	L1	L2	L1	L2

Appendix B

Content Analysis of Oral Work

School:

Visit No:

ACTIVITY TYPE	ACTIVITY FOCUS		CONTENT CONTROL		FORM CONTROL		LENGTH OF TEXT			ERROR TREATMENT	
	FORM (%)	MEANING (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	MINIMAL	EXTENDED	ACCURACY (%)	TEACHER CORRECTION / ERROR TREATMENT	LEARNER UPTAKE

Appendix C

Content Analysis of Written Work

School:

Visit No:

ACTIVITY TYPE	ACTIVITY FOCUS		CONTENT CONTROL		FORM CONTROL		LENGTH OF TEXT		ACCURACY (%)
	FORM (%)	MEANING (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	MINIMAL	EXTENDED	

Appendix D

Survey

Todos los encuestados tienen derecho a la privacidad, a no participar, a permanecer anónimos, a la confidencialidad, y a solicitar una explicación total del proceso de investigación al encuestador. La información recolectada será utilizada para elaborar un trabajo de investigación y es totalmente confidencial. Desde ya agradecemos su participación y su tiempo.

Nota: Algunas de las preguntas pueden tener más de una respuesta. Siéntase libre de marcar las que sean necesarias. En caso de requerirse respuestas de desarrollo, por favor escriba sobre las líneas punteadas.

1. ¿Qué edad tiene? ……

2. Es usted graduado/a de una institución terciaria o universitaria de formación docente en el área de inglés?

a. □ Sí b. □ No

3. (Contestar en caso de haber marcado la opción ***a*** en el punto anterior. Caso contrario no contestar) ¿En qué año se graduó?
.....

4. ¿Cuánto hace en total que enseña inglés en instituciones? (en escuelas del estado o privadas, culturales inglesas, etc.?
……

5. ¿Cuánto hace que trabaja en esta escuela?

……

6. ¿Cuánto hace que conoce al grupo de alumnos que actualmente tiene en 6to grado?……

7. ¿Qué metodología de enseñanza utiliza en sus clases?

a. □ método de gramática y traducción
b. □ método audiolingual o estructural
c. □ método comunicativo
d. □ otro (indicar cual) ……..

8. ¿Por qué utiliza esta metodología?

a. □ Porque considero que aprender las estructuras gramaticales es lo más importante en el aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero
b. □ Porque creo que la lengua extranjera es un instrumento de comunicación
c. □ Porque los alumnos necesitan aprender las reglas gramaticales y fijar las estructuras mediante ejercicios de traducción.
d. □ Otra razón (indicar cuál)……..

9. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes actividades suministra usted a sus alumnos de 6to grado?

a. □ Ejercicios para completar con el tiempo de verbo correcto
b. □ Ejercicios para elegir la opción correcta (multiple choice)
c. □ Actividades de a pares donde cada alumno tiene el mismo texto con diferentes espacios en blanco que deben completar haciendo preguntas a su compañero (information gap)
d. □ Dramatizaciones de situaciones simulando ser distintas personas (role-play)
e. □ Hablar en inglés sobre situaciones simples de su vida cotidiana
f. □ Pasar oraciones a la forma interrogativa y negativa
g. □ Re-ordenar palabras para formar oraciones correctas
h. □ Escribir textos cortos (descripciones, narraciones, reportes, etc)
i. □Otras
¿Cuáles?.....

10. ¿Con qué frecuencia aproximada usted les suministra las actividades anteriores? Marque con una cruz

	Todas las clases	2 veces por semana	3 o 4 veces por mes	1 o 2 veces por mes	5 o 6 veces por año	Nunca
a. Ejercicios para completar con el tiempo de verbo correcto						
b. Ejercicios para elegir la opción correcta (multiple choice)						
c. Actividades de a pares donde cada alumno tiene el mismo texto con diferentes espacios en blanco que deben completar haciendo preguntas a su compañero (information gap)						
d. Dramatizaciones de situaciones simulando ser distintas personas (role-play)						
e. Hablar en inglés sobre situaciones simples de su vida cotidiana						
f. Pasar oraciones a la forma interrogativa y negativa						
g. Re-ordenar palabras para formar oraciones correctas						
h. Escribir textos cortos (descripciones, narraciones, reportes, etc.)						
i. Otras						

11. Dada las opciones que marcó como más frecuentes en el cuadro anterior (todas las clases, 2 veces por semana, o 3 o 4 veces por mes), ¿Cuál es el motivo por el cual usted utiliza estas actividades frecuentemente?

……
……
……

12. Dada las opciones que marcó como menos frecuentes en el cuadro anterior (1 o 2 veces por mes, 5 o 6 veces por año, o nunca). ¿Cuál es el motivo por el cual usted no utiliza estas actividades frecuentemente o no las utiliza nunca?

……
……
……

13. ¿Usted considera que – en líneas generales – sus alumnos producen estructuras gramaticalmente correctas en actividades escritas?

□ SI □ NO

14. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el motivo?

……
……
……..

15. ¿Usted considera que – en líneas generales – sus alumnos producen estructuras gramaticalmente correctas en actividades orales?

□ SI □ NO

16. ¿Cuál cree usted que es el motivo?

……
……
……

Muchas gracias por su tiempo y colaboración.

Appendix E

Data Matrix: Non-Participant Class Observations

SCHOOL NUMBER	VISIT NUMBER	PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION							ACTIVITY MODALITY	T. TARGET LANGUAGE %		S. TARGET LANGUAGE %	
		whole class			Group work		Individual work						
		T ↕ S / C	S ↕ S / C	choral	Same task	Different task	Same task	Different task	Oral (O) or written (W)	L1 (Spanish)	L2 (English)	L1 (Spanish)	L2 (English)
1	1				√				O	10	90	12.50	87.50
1	1						√		W	20	80	0	100
1	2	√							O	0	100	0	100
1	2						√		W	5	95	0	100
1	3	√							O	0	100	50	50
1	3				√				W	5	95	0	100
2	1	√							O	50	50	50	50
2	1						√		W	0	100	0	100
2	2	√							O	0	100	20	80
2	2				√				W	20	80	0	100
2	3	√							O	10	90	0	100
2	3						√		W	0	100	0	100
3	1	√							O	50	50	20	80
3	1						√		W	0	100	0	100
3	2	√							O	70	30	100	0
3	2						√		W	50	50	0	100
3	3				√				O	90	10	0	100
3	3						√		W	90	10	0	100
4	1		√						O	80	20	10	90
4	1						√		W	0	100	0	100
4	2	√							O	10	90	33.33	66.67
4	2	√					√		W	10	90	0	100
4	3	√							O	0	100	66.67	33.33
4	3				√				W	10	90	0	100

SCHOOL NUMBER	VISIT NUMBER	PARTICIPANT ORGANIZATION							ACTIVITY MODALITY	T. TARGET LANGUAGE %		S. TARGET LANGUAGE %	
		whole class			Group work		Individual work						
		T ↕ S / C	S ↕ S / C	choral	Same task	Different task	Same task	Different task	Oral (0) or written (W)	L1 (Spanish)	L2 (English)	L1 (Spanish)	L2 (English)
5	1	√							O	0	100	11.76	88.24
5	1						√		W	0	100	0	100
5	2	√							O	34.52	65.48	13.02	86.98
5	2						√		W	0	100	0	100
5	3	√							O	60	40	10	90
5	3	√							W	10	90	0	100
6	1			√					O	0	100	0	100
6	1						√		W	0	100	0	100
6	2			√					O	0	100	0	100
6	2						√		W	10	90	0	100
6	3			√					O	10	90	0	100
6	3						√		W	50	50	0	100
7	1	√							O	20	80	30	70
7	1						√		W	10	90	0	100
7	2	√							O	45	55	47.50	52.50
7	2						√		W	0	100	0	100
7	3				√				O	0	100	22	78
7	3						√		W	0	100	0	100

Appendix F

Data Matrix: Content Analysis of Oral Work

SCHOOL NUMBER	VISIT NUMBER	ACTIVITY FOCUS		CONTENT CONTROL		FORM CONTROL		LENGTH OF TEXT	
		FORM (%)	MEANING (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	MINIMAL	EXTENDED
1	1	10	90	40	60	90	10	√	√
1	2	40	60	50	50	100	0	√	
1	3	0	100	50	50	50	50	√	
2	1	60	40	100	0	100	0	√	
2	2	0	100	40	60	50	50	√	
2	3	60	40	100	0	100	0	√	
3	1	100	0	100	0	100	0	√	
3	2	EXCLUDED FROM THE ANALYSIS							
3	3	40	60	40	60	100	0	√	
4	1	100	0	100	0	100	0	√	
4	2	20	80	40	60	100	0	√	
4	3	0	100	50	50	50	50	√	
5	1	50	50	50	50	100	0	√	
5	2	40	60	100	0	100	0	√	
5	3	40	60	40	60	100	0	√	
6	1	60	40	100	0	100	0	√	
6	2	60	40	100	0	100	0	√	
6	3	60	40	100	0	100	0	√	
7	1	0	100	40	60	50	50	√	
7	2	25	75	40	60	50	50	√	
7	3	0	100	30	70	100	0		√

Appendix G

Data Matrix: Content Analysis of Written Work

SCHOOL NUMBER	VISIT NUMBER	ACTIVITY FOCUS		CONTENT CONTROL		FORM CONTROL		LENGTH OF TEXT	
		FORM (%)	MEANING (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	TEACHER / TEXT (%)	STUDENT (%)	MINIMAL	EXTENDED
1	1	20	80	100	0	40	60	√	
1	2	50	50	100	0	100	0	√	
1	3	0	100	40	60	50	50	√	
2	1	20	80	40	60	100	0	√	
2	2	20	80	100	0	90	10		√
2	3	40	60	0	100	0	100	√	
3	1	100	0	100	0	100	0	√	
3	2	100	0	100	0	100	0	√	
3	3	75	25	75	25	100	0	√	
4	1	75	25	50	50	100	0	√	
4	2	50	50	100	0	100	0	√	
4	3	0	100	10	90	0	100		√
5	1	30	70	40	60	80	20	√	
5	2	40	60	40	60	100	0		√
5	3	50	50	100	0	100	0	√	
6	1	50	50	100	0	100	0	√	
6	2	20	80	100	0	100	0	√	
6	3	60	40	60	40	100	0	√	
7	1	0	100	40	60	50	50	√	
7	2	50	50	100	0	100	0	√	
7	3	0	100	30	70	30	70		√

Appendix H

Data Matrix: Surveys

T Nº	**Q1**	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16
1	**33**	Sí	2007 / 2009	10 años	Feb. 2010	Marzo 2010	C	B	A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I	A4-B5-C5-D2-E4-F4-G4-H3-I2	af estr/ com viv	F. T.	Sí	prog T	Sí	pract
2-a	**35**	Sí	2007	13 años	Feb. 2010	Marzo 2010	A - C	B	A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H	A1-B3-C4-D4-E4-F4-G4-H3-I6	com viv	no imp	No	F.T. /F.E.	No	dif O
2-b	**46**	Sí	2005	10 años	Julio 2010	Julio 2010	B - C	A - B	A-C-D-E-F-G-H -I	A1-B6-C2-D2-E1-F3-G2-H2- I4	mot int	F. T.	No	F.T.	Sí	mot int
3	**37**	Sí	2005	10 años	2 años	Marzo 2009	C	B	A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H	A3-B2-C4-D4-E2-F5-G2-H4-I6	mot int	no imp	No	F.T.	No	dif O
4	**44**	Sí	1990	22 años	10 años	Marzo 2008	C	B	A-B-C-D-E-G-H-I	A2-B2-C3-D3-E1-F6-G4-H4-I2	com viv/exp L2	no mec	Sí	pract	Sí	pract
5	**48**	Sí	1998	14 años	13 años	Marzo 2008	B - C	B	A-B-C-E-F-G-H	A1-B4-C5-D6-E3-F5-G4-H4 I6	com viv/af estr	F. T.	No	F.E.	No	F.E.
6	**55**	Sí	1978 (Trad) 2008 (PDI)	26 años	4 años	Marzo 2008	C	B	A-B-C-D-G-H-I	A2-B2-C3-D3-E2-F2-G3-H3-I4	com viv af estr	grupo	Sí	pract	Si	pract
7	**53**	Sí	2004/ 2009	6 años	Feb 2010	Marzo 2010	C	B	A-B-C-E-H-I	A5-B4-C3-D6-E1-F6-G6-H2-I1	com viv/exp L2	No mec	Sí	mot int	Sí No	proc

af estr= para afianzar estructuras gramaticales por repetición

com viv=para que comuniquen vivencias y experiencias personales

mot int=porque están motivados y les interesa

exp L2=para exponerlos a la lengua extranjera

F.T=falta de tiempo

F.E.=falta de estudio

no imp= no tan necesarias o importantes

no me= no acuerdo con la práctica mecánica

grupo=por las características del grupo

prog T=progresan con el tiempo

pract=tienen mucha practica

dif O=les resulta difícil expresarse oralmente

proc=en constante proceso, con altibajos