

Levels of Understanding of English Grammatical terms among Christchurch Seventh Form Students.

Educ 685
Research Project
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Preamble

Given the increasing numbers of adults embarking on FL study at tertiary level¹, it seemed pertinent to find out current levels of understanding of grammatical terms among seventh formers, any differences between those studying a foreign language (FL) and those who never have, and how they came to acquire their understanding. Written from a perspective which strongly supports the concept of grammatical interlanguage (i.e. the inclusion of grammatical terms, explanations and rules) as an integral part of foreign and second language teaching, this paper presents the results of a survey about knowledge of English grammatical terms, administered to 59 Christchurch secondary school students in August 1994. It highlights the catch 22 situation involving the benefits to FL learners who have already developed a strong understanding of English grammatical terms, against the fact that often it is only via such FL study that a knowledge of grammatical terms can be established.

Introduction

Regardless of the differences or similarities between the structures of one language and another, success at FL learning is likely to be enhanced where learners have a sound knowledge of the grammatical terms used to describe their own language. This belief is supported by Celce-Murcia and Hilles' claim that while language learning is an holistic process, it is enhanced by a set of formal rules which students may fall back on where necessary². This is not dissimilar to a pilot going through pre-take-off cockpit drill, or a mechanic referring to an instruction manual in situations where

¹ Christchurch Polytechnic courses offered tuition for 783 foreign language students in 1994, compared with approximately 186 in 1985.

² Celce-Murcia, M. and Hilles, S. (1988) p145

new material is proving confusing or where previously learned material has been forgotten. Failure to accept a "learn with the aid of the rules" approach is to ignore one particular learning style preferred by many FL students, including myself. After all, are text-books and dictionaries anything other than formal presentations of information, expressed in official terminology? Selinker (1992), in explaining Chomsky's *deep structure and surface structure* theory, criticizes the pragmatic approach of many FL teachers that native language (NL) and target language (TL) are completely discrete. His explanation provides useful insight into the value of including rules and terms as part of a FL acquisition programme:

*"...a central part of the underlying rules of the grammar of any language may not be specific to that language but may instead be rules of human language in general..."*³

In their discussion on interlanguage, Sparks et al (1992) state that students experiencing difficulties in FL learning are those also likely to have NL difficulties, especially within the syntactic codes of their own language⁴. In a FL teaching process where new material is often explained via grammatical terms, those students who do not yet understand such terminology may be seen as similarly disadvantaged. In other words, many students begin their FL experience with a handicap which may inhibit their learning process, although teachers and students are often largely unaware of such a handicap. There is a road map analogy here, akin to explaining a destination to someone when, in spite of being able to trace the journey in our own minds, we don't actually know the names of the streets involved along the way. Speaking one's own language may be likened to knowing the journey but not the street names. In other words, when we use a pronoun or a transitive verb for

³ Selinker, L (1992) p 78

⁴ Sparks, R.L. et al. (1992) pp403-418

example, we do not need to be consciously aware that we are doing so, but when we embark on a journey into a new language, progress is hindered if we can't clearly identify and refer to the structures and patterns (like street names) along the way.

Not everybody wants to be involved in FL study, but this paper illustrates the predicament that unless they do undertake such study, many secondary school leavers are being deprived of those language skills which they may need later in life as travel and employment direct them to FL study. Jeffries (1985) concludes from her investigation into problems faced by students beginning their FL study:

"...a student may have mastered many grammatical concepts without knowing the labels by which they are likely to be identified in second language textbooks..."⁵

The situation Jeffries describes is not incompatible with the skilled use of one's NL. The problem arises when students who are lacking such information take part in FL study methods which presume such knowledge.

Supporters of Audio-Lingual teaching methods may well disagree with the premise that a knowledge of English grammar will likely enhance success in FL learning. Strict audio-lingual processes rely largely on a diet of repetitive drilling for instilling new patterns, rather than on analysing and understanding the structures and terms which govern those patterns. Audio-Lingual methodology, innovative in the 1970s, has now lost much of its popularity⁶, and pro-active FL teachers have progressed to

⁵ Jeffries, S. (1985) p386

⁶ Richards, J. (1989) p 44

communicative teaching styles, a comfortable compromise between earlier Grammar-Translation teaching and Audio-Lingual methodology. Communicative language teaching involves not only pattern repetition, but also linguistic analysis, and is the teaching process recommended in the 1994 Secondary School Draft Japanese Syllabus⁷.

Little or no experience in FL learning often produces the comment that speaking a FL is merely repeating what we already say in our NL, but using 'different' words. This reflects an attitude which ignores structure, nuance, connotation, register, emotion, culture and numerous other differences. On the other hand however, Bollinger concludes that FL teaching is best done "*without recourse to the native language*"⁸, an stance which may leave students bereft of one of their most useful language learning tools, namely being able to consider and compare different approaches to expressing a similar idea. While not supporting FL programmes based uniquely on linguistic analysis, Krashen's process of *learning and acquisition* describes a dual approach involving analysis coupled with a communicative style to enhance spoken competency⁹.

My own conclusions that it is important for FL learners to have a sound knowledge of grammatical terms are reinforced each year when our first-year Japanese syllabus introduces such topics as relative clauses, transitive/intransitive verbs, and passive verbs. These three structures are crucial in Japanese, yet test results and subsequent

⁷ Ministry of Education (1993) p8

⁸ Bollinger, D. in Terrel, T. (1977) p333

⁹ Krashen, S. (1982)

interviews have shown that understanding them causes considerable difficulty. Of the students interviewed in 1993, (all were holders of 7th form English qualifications, A or B Bursaries and or Bachelor's degrees in a variety of disciplines), most had minimal understanding of grammatical definitions in their own language, and secondly, to the fact that their secondary school English study had apparently included negligible grammar instruction. The interviews showed clearly that those students with previous FL study were much more likely to possess these linguistic tools and were therefore more able to transfer the knowledge into learning the TL. While this does not necessarily make them instantly superior users of the TL, it does mean that their learning energy could be concentrated on the TL, rather than being divided up into what almost amounted to two separate spheres of learning, defining the new structures in their NL and once that was done, mastering them in the TL.

For example, of 28 students interviewed, 18 had heard of a *passive verb*, 14 thought they could describe it but only six in fact could. Only ten of the 28 could define a relative pronoun, and only a similar number offered accurate descriptions of indirect objects. This problem is further compounded by the fact that colloquial English and the media often promote grammatically incorrect structures (*real cheap, the list comprised of..., where's the nuts?* etc) which become internalised and difficult to correct. Insisting on correct patterns such as "adverbs modify adjectives" in FL teaching, is a difficult task if students have minimal knowledge about those structures in their NL. This situation reflects a world-wide change in English teaching emphasis, and an overall decline in the number of students in FL classes at our secondary schools. It is difficult to disagree with Jeffries' conclusion that FL teachers can:

*"...no longer fairly expect that students will have mastered the vocabulary of traditional grammar analysis before they begin second language study."*¹⁰

Short of a return to unimaginative audio-lingual methods where language is rote-learned rather than analyzed and understood, there appear to be only two alternatives. One is to allow FL students to express themselves using incorrect patterns which often defy correction when students do not understand the terminology governing such corrections, while the other is to equip students with remedial instruction in grammatical terms. Neither alternative will meet with general approval from FL teachers. Language learning is a cumulative process, requiring constant effort and encouragement. Being better prepared for FL study via a good understanding of English grammatical terms, would ease the despair of many first-year FL students.

Caution is needed here. On one hand, while seeking ways to equip students with a greater understanding of NL syntax, one could hardly support a return to what Richards calls:

*"...rigorous introduction to Latin grammar...a deadening experience..."*¹¹

On the other hand however, it is equally difficult to sympathise with Omaggio's claims that FL students should not need to have recourse to the "*constraints*" of traditional grammar and outmoded terms, and that FL programmes based on such

¹⁰ Jeffries, S (1982) p 385

¹¹ Richards, J. and Rodgers, T. (1986) p2

processes are the least likely to succeed¹². Such philosophies lack recognition of the limitations and practicalities of mainstream classroom teaching, and reflect support for some of the inherent weaknesses within the audio-lingual teaching style.

Methods and Procedures

a) Purpose of The Study

A study was carried out among seventh formers in Christchurch to measure levels of understanding of English grammatical terms, and to identify the various sources of that knowledge.

b) The Secondary School Sample

To ensure a representative cross-section of secondary schools, six schools were chosen by stratified random selection, so that two from each of the three principal provider categories of secondary education in Christchurch (single-sex schools, private schools, state co-educational schools) were included.

c) The Student Sample

The student sample from each of the six schools was made up of five seventh formers studying at least one FL, plus five others who have never studied a FL. Students were randomly selected and the gender balance was such that the final sample contained 28 female students and 31 male students. One student failed to turn up for the questionnaire, so the final number of students in the sample was 59. One school declined our invitation to take part in the research and was replaced by a similar school.

¹² Omaggio, A.C. (1983) pp330-340

Because three of the schools in the sample offer compulsory FL studies for half a year at third form level, even the non-FL group from those schools had done a small amount of FL study at that level. A semester of FL studies at third form level normally involves very simple patterns such as counting, telling the time, asking "where is?" and other such useful but elementary topics.

To safeguard against differences in academic ability between the FL and non-FL students, participating schools were asked to ensure that the academic ability of their non-FL learners matched that of the FL students as far as possible. I did not ask the schools for any academic records so I have no way of knowing whether the overall ability of the FL learners was greater or lesser than that of the non-FL students, nor how well they were performing in their respective seventh form studies.

d) Administration of the Questionnaire

In August 1994, the questionnaire (Appendix 1) about English grammatical terms and various aspects of private study, was administered to the fifty-nine seventh formers at the six Christchurch secondary schools. Rather than asking schools to return completed questionnaires by post, I visited each school and supervised all six groups as they responded to the questionnaire. Two of the sample schools had fewer than five seventh-formers studying a FL, so three seventh formers who had studied a FL to sixth form level and two who were studying a FL by correspondence were accepted into the sample.

No major difficulties were encountered in administering the questionnaire, although assembling ten seventh formers during a time that did not interfere with normal class timetabling proved a difficult task for each school, resulting in much phoning, tentative arranging and subsequent plan changing by all of us. A staff member from one participating school appeared suspicious in his questioning about the whole project. He was concerned about the results, how they would be analyzed and what conclusions would be drawn from them. On the day I visited that particular school, no room had been booked for the survey, and I eventually used the library. Overall however, I was warmly welcomed and courteously treated in all schools.

e) The Questionnaire (Section One)

Section One contained 40 questions concerning English grammatical terms. The 40 questions were categorised into four sections of 10 questions each, with level of difficulty increasing from Section A to Section D. The decision as to which structures were 'least difficult' and which were 'more difficult' was based largely on calculated guesswork, and is supported by data in Table 2. In broad terms however, those expressions which involved single lexical constructions were regarded as 'easier' than those involving longer expressions. Simple definition such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunctions etc were considered to be at the less difficult end of the scale and were therefore placed in the first two sections of the questionnaire. Terminology involving longer words or two or more words (e.g. demonstrative adjectives, indirect objects, personal pronouns) were generally placed around the middle third of the level of difficulty. Finally, expressions involving either multiple structures (passive, subordinate clauses, conjugations etc), or definitions involving vocabulary likely to be less common among everyday, teenage conversation (predicate, infinitive, gerund

etc) were largely kept for the final, most difficult section of the questionnaire. My aim was to measure the existence of what Jeffries calls language "labels", so questions about spelling, punctuation and non-structural areas such as personification and alliteration were excluded, as were highly obscure patterns such as ablative absolutes, litotes or anacoluthon.

The forty questions in Section One were each divided into three parts.

Part (a) Have you heard of (an adjective)? Yes/no/don't know

Part (b) Do you understand the term? Yes/no/don't know

Part (c) Can you recognise an example of the term?

e.g. Underline the adverb in the following sentence etc.

The rationale behind the three parts was to distinguish between a base knowledge which involves merely recognising the term, a more sophisticated level of knowledge through which the students can describe the meanings of terms¹³, and finally the ability to accurately recognise examples of the terms and distinguish them from a range of possibilities. In other words, recognising the word *adjective*, is different from being able to explain what an adjective is and how it functions.

f) The Questionnaire (Section Two)

In order to identify where students gain their knowledge of English grammatical terms, Section Two of the questionnaire asked the participants about their FL study and study habits in general, including questions about whether English classes at primary and secondary school had provided information on grammatical concepts.

¹³ Jeffries concludes that many students use the appropriate patterns, but are unaware of the terminology which defines those patterns. (Jeffries, S (1985) p386)

Keen readers often have a greater command of linguistic structures, vocabulary, logic and comprehension¹⁴, and may therefore, assimilate more easily explanations given in FL learning. Survey participants were therefore asked to identify themselves as keen or indifferent readers.

Remembering my own learning experiences such as being repeatedly cajoled by teachers and others about such patterns as "May/can I borrow a chair?", "who v whom" etc, I asked whether students could remember having their English grammar corrected informally (by parents, sports coach, employers etc). Many parents whose first language is not English encourage their children to use their first language around the home. Explanations involving comparative linguistics may be used as part of this process, so questions about hearing or using a second language in the home were also included.

Results

1) General Observations

The results obtained by the Fl and non-Fl learners are reported in Tables 1,2,3. FL learners scored better than the non-FL learners in all sections of the questionnaire with those studying two or more FL's scoring better than those learning one FL. Students studying Latin and/or French scored more highly than students of German and Japanese (Tables 4,5). A number expressed vague recollections of having been corrected at home by parents etc but the impact of such corrections was not huge¹⁵.

¹⁴ Beck, I. and McKeown, M. (1991) pp 789-814

¹⁵ There are rules and there are rules. Of the eleven students who cited non-classroom corrections, only two recalled the point. One wrote "...say 'Mum and me'...":-This rule is not

Influence from parents for whom English was not a first language was nil.

Table 1 shows the range of scores for FL learners and non-FL learners.

Table 1
Average (a), (b) and (c) Scores from Section One of Questionnaire (max = 40 each)

	(a) scores: Heard of the term	(b) scores: Understand the term	(c) scores: Identify example	Total Max=120	Highest (c) score Max=40	Lowest (c) score Max=40
F/L learners (=30)	34.5	29.6	21.5	75.7	38	14
Non-F/l learners (=29)	19.9	19.5	10.4	39.8	25	3

From Table 1 it can be seen that many students had heard of and understood many of the terms, but were subsequently unable to identify actual examples. Ability to correctly answer the (c) parts of Section One without also being able to answer parts (a) and (b) is unlikely, and from a total of 7,080 total responses, there were over 2,400 instances where either part (a) [*Have you heard of...?*] and/or part (b) [*Do you understand...?*] were answered by *Yes*, but where part (c) [*Can you identify from the following...?*] was incorrectly answered. [Note: (c) scores give the clearest indication of levels of knowledge of grammatical terms, as they involve identification of examples of each term. (c) scores will hereafter be referred to as **identification scores**]. There is no obvious reason for the number of students who answered *Yes* to over 30 out of 40 (a) questions but then only managed fewer than 10 out of 40 identification scores, other than that they answered by guesswork. At one school, a student commented that the exercise had been:

always wrong of course, but nor is it always correct.

"...like an exercise we did in geography...we'd heard of lots of the place names, but nobody could put them in their right places on the map...we guessed a fair few"

Table 2 shows identification scores for FL learners and non-FL learners for each of the four sections of the questionnaire.

Table 2
Average Identification scores for the Four Sections A,B,C,D (Max = 10 each section)

	Section A least difficult	Section B increasing difficulty	Section C increasing difficulty	Section D Most difficult
FL learners	7.9	5.6	4.4	3.6
Non-FL learners	4.4	2.9	3.1	0.5

From Table 2 it can be seen that identification scores decreased in accordance with the increasing difficulty from Section A through to Section D. Notwithstanding a slight overlap in Sections B and C, figures in Table 2 support my earlier expressed criteria for establishing levels of difficulty.

It was not possible to predict an *exact* scale of comparative difficulty for 40 unrelated items, but other factors contributed to the overlap in Sections B and C of Table 2. For example, Question 2 asked for the *subject of a sentence*, rather than for the *subject of a verb*, and over half of the entire sample answered accordingly by selecting *how to get out* as a sentence subject, rather than *people* as the subject of the verb¹⁶. I had obviously miscalculated the relative difficulty of Questions 11 and 17, where only seven students correctly identified an *indirect object* and only 11 were familiar with

¹⁶ If I accept this answer as correct, overall average scores in Section A (Table 1) rise by .3%

an *auxiliary verb*, common structures, but obviously not common terminology. Similarly, in Question 27 I underestimated the number who would correctly recognize a *conditional verb*. Forty-five students answered this question correctly, in spite of twenty-two of them admitting to having never heard of the expression. Obviously, many students had made a reasoned guess linking the concept of *condition* to the would/if pattern. They had arrived at the correct answer without knowing the correct reasons, one exception to my earlier 'street name' analogy.

The highest correct identification score overall was 38 out of 40 (male, below average age, FL learner, single-sex school), while the lowest identification score overall was 3 correct answers out of 40 (male, fifth oldest, non-FL learner, co-educational school). The non-FL learners included several scores over 20 (highest non-FL learner = 25), a further nine with scores over 18, and six more with over 15 correct identification answers. The FL sample included ten students with fewer than 20 correct identification scores, the lowest of which was 10 out of 40¹⁷.

Students studying a FL to seventh form level build up a greater understanding of English grammatical terms than those whose secondary education does not include a FL. The explanation here is not that FL learning is generically creative of English grammatical knowledge, but rather that there are numerous areas of FL teaching which can be best done in terms appropriate to the NL. While other variables such as reading and study at primary/secondary school will to some extent feature in Tables 1 and 2, FL study is the only overall constant which separates the higher

¹⁷ Six of these students were among those studying Japanese as their only foreign language, referred to earlier.

scoring FL students from the lower results of the non-FL sample. It is reasonable therefore to conclude that FL study is the major catalyst in raising awareness of English grammatical terms, so that FL students average almost twice as many correct answers as non-FL students. It is important to keep in mind my earlier comment that schools were asked to provide an academic balance between FL and non-FL students. Within the sample, while there may be some extremely able and also some less able students, I believe that a reasonable academic balance was obtained.

Table 3 shows average identification scores for FL learners and non-FL learners from the three types of school in the sample.

Table 3
The Relationship of Average Identification Scores to Type of School

	Private School	Single Sex School	Co-ed School
FL learners	25.8	21.5	18.6
Non-FL learners	13.2	9.6	8.7

From Table 3 it can be seen that students from the three private schools scored appreciably better than those from state secondary schools. The four single-sex schools scored more highly than the two co-educational schools, and overall, the boys scored in excess of the girls. The FL language teachers at one of the private schools and one of the single-sex schools told me that they encouraged FL learning for as many students as possible, for as long as possible. This explains in part the higher scores of the students from those schools.

Table 4 shows ages and identification scores of FL and non-FL learners.

Table 4
Average Identification Scores and Average Ages of Fl and non-FL learners

	Average Age	Average Identification Score
FL learners	17yrs 3 mnths	21.5
Non-FL learners	17yrs 11 mnths	10.4

Table 4 shows that overall, the youngest students gained the highest scores. Age plays a role, not as a catalyst in creating specific language knowledge, but as a reflection of the fact that brighter students are more likely to be put ahead of their peers at primary school. As more able students they are more likely to include a wide range of subjects including a FL¹⁸ and are therefore likely to feature in FL study statistics.

a) Foreign Language Combinations and Knowledge of Grammatical Terms.

Because of the increase of knowledge of FL learners over non-FL learners (Table 1), it was anticipated that students of more than one FL would score better than students studying only one FL. Students were asked in the questionnaire to indicate if they were studying more than one FL. Four students identified Latin as a FL¹⁹, and while each one of them was also studying either French or German, no student had combined Latin with Japanese²⁰

¹⁸ Pail, R and Batters, J. (1985) pp11-23

¹⁹ There were no students studying Latin as their only foreign language.

²⁰ Four schools informed me that they are introducing Japanese, to replace dwindling numbers of French, Latin and German students, rather than to complement existing language

Table 5 shows the relationship of identification scores to individual languages.

Table 5
Average Identification Scores for Each Language Studied

Language	No. of Students	Ave. Identification Score
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French	12	27.6
German	6	20.4
Japanese	12	16.8
One FL only	15	21.6
Two or more FL's (included above)	15	31.0

It can be seen in Table 5 that students studying two or more FL's (exactly half of all FL learners) scored better than those studying only one FL. Those who were studying Japanese only, scored considerably fewer correct identification answers than students of any other single FL. The average identification scores for learners of a single FL was 21.6, whereas the average for learners of multiple FL's is 31.0. This supports the claim that an understanding of grammatical concepts will be further enhanced at a rate commensurate with increased exposure to FL study.

Five completed questionnaires had notes scribbled on them relating FL concepts to their English equivalents. Two such 'scribbles' involved the conditionals of French verbs (*je donerrais* [sic] and *je mangerais*) with their English meanings. One student of Japanese had noted a Japanese passive (*torareta*) in answering question 31 (passive structure), while another had listed a German verb with an indirect object (*ich sagter* [sic] *es ihm*) against that question. There is no doubt that these students were able to correctly identify some English structures as a *direct result of having learned them during FL studies.*

programmes.

Table 6 shows the relationship of identification scores to multi-FL combinations.

Table 6
Average Identification Scores for Multi-Language Combinations

First FL identified	Second FL identified	Number of students in combination	Average Identification scores
French	German	7	21.0
French	Japanese	3	25.2
French	Latin	3	33.4
Japanese	German	1	23.6
German	Latin	1	22.4

The low identification scores for learners of Japanese only (Table 5), improve among those studying French or German as well as Japanese (Table 6). Given the overall lower scores for those studying Japanese only, it is reasonable to assume that those students studying Japanese plus French or German, understand concepts of English grammar more as a result of their French or German studies than from learning Japanese.

One of the schools where Japanese was being studied employed a Japanese national as its Japanese language teacher²¹, a person far less likely to be explaining FL patterns using specialist English terminology in English. My own experience with Japanese nationals in FL teaching is that they often rely heavily on rote learning, an approach which closely resembles audio-lingual principles of the 1970s. In one of the two schools, Japanese had been taken up at the sixth form, rather than from the third form, so that the overall amount of work being covered would have been less, probably with less conceptual understanding along the way. Conversely, there were

²¹ This school provided eight of the 12 students studying Japanese,

no French or German nationals teaching at any of the sample schools. Furthermore, one school informed me that as a relatively new subject within the school, Japanese is being taken by almost equal numbers of able and less able students, a situation far less common with traditional French and German studies at senior level.

Latin students (Table 6), scored an average of 6 correct answers more than the average scores of the other multi-FL combinations. This is not surprising, given Latin's highly grammatical structure and the way in which it is usually taught. Latin is hardly teachable using an oral/aural method, relying heavily on in-depth linguistic analysis and a sound knowledge of grammatical terminology. It is possible that Latin is taken by more able students who, by some external process linked to their superior ability, attained a high knowledge of English grammar. However, all four Latin students claimed to have learned much of their grammatical knowledge from their FL study and are included in the 'more than half' column of Table 7.

Table 7 shows students' estimation of grammatical terms learned from FL study.

Table 7

FL Learners' Estimation of how many Grammatical Terms Contained the Questionnaire they learned during their FL Study

	Yes, a lot	more than half	fewer than half	fewer than 10
Number of Students	6	14	7	3

It can be seen from Table 7 that two thirds of the FL learners were more informed about English grammatical concepts as a result of their FL study. Those FL learners who identified *fewer than half/fewer than 10*, were mainly those who also achieved significantly fewer correct identification scores. Of the ten students indicating "fewer than half/fewer than 10", four were the Japanese learners alluded to earlier in this

essay as having a Japanese national for their teacher and therefore less likely to be exposed to English grammatical terminology in their FL learning process.

b) Reading Habits and Understanding of Grammatical Terms.

Avid and enthusiastic readers are likely to understand more about English grammatical terms than reluctant readers (Table 8). Beck and McKeown (1991) present the connection between reading habits and language skills including comprehension, word-attack skills and knowledge of language²². It is highly likely therefore, that readers who are already comfortable with complicated structures in English, will be more receptive to firstly having those patterns identified and labelled within their NL, and secondly to equating such structures with their FL equivalents. One of many such examples common to English, German, French and Japanese is the passive voice, where the object of an indicative verb becomes the subject of the passive verb. My claim is not that an English passive is encoded in exactly the same manner as a Japanese or French passive, for there are indeed discrete differences. Rather, in keeping with Chomsky's *deep structure and surface structure* theory, it is a matter of accepting that many structures are not unique to one language, and therefore understanding in one language will help lead to understanding among others.

²² Beck, I. and McKeown, M. (1991)

Table 8 shows the relationship between reading habits and identification scores.

Table 8
The Relationship of Reading Habits to Identification Scores.

	Read a Lot	Regularly but...	Hardly at all/nil
FL Learners' Identification scores	25.5	20.4	20.3
Non-FL learners' Identification scores	16.2	11.8	8.2
Average Identification scores	20.8	16.1	14.9

In compiling Table 8, I reduced the answer options from the original five categories (*Reads avidly through to "only when necessary"*), to a range of three categories (*Reads a lot-regularly but not a great deal-hardly at all/nil*). In general, FL students rated themselves as keener readers than non-FL learners. There was a difference in identification scores among FL learners between those who read a lot and the remaining FL students, with the keen readers averaging 5 correct identification scores more than their peers who read less. Among non-FL students also, there is an average increase of 50% in correct scores across the three levels of reading frequency.

The non-FL learner who reads a lot, still does not have as high an identification score as the FL learner who hardly reads at all (Table 8). Reading does have an effect on knowledge of grammatical terms, but it is not as significant as FL study. Without identifying actual numbers of books read in a year for example, it is not possible to know precisely what students had in mind when they described their own reading habits.

As suggested earlier, it may not be reading per se which augments grammatical knowledge. Rather, the benefit to the reader may be the increased confidence with words and sentences which reading helps create, and subsequently an increased receptiveness to FL concepts. It may be that an interest in words and language manifests itself in reading, or that reading is the catalyst for the linguistic interest. Whichever of the two explanations is seen as more plausible, Table 8 suggests a connection, firstly for FL students, and even more for non-FL learners.

c) Gender and Understanding of Grammatical Terms.

Traditionally, girls are more likely than boys to study FL at secondary school²³. I was interested to discover therefore, the relationship between gender and knowledge of grammatical terminology.

Table 9 compares identification scores with gender/FL/non-FL learners.

Table 9
The Relationship of Gender to Knowledge of Grammatical Terms

	Average scores in Section 1 (a) (b) (c) (Max=120)	Average Identification scores (Max=40)
Female students	39.2	14.9
Male students	61.0	18.3
Female FL learners	69.8	20.2
Male FL learners	80.7	25.6
Female non-FL learners	44.0	9.8
Male non-FL learners	44.2	11.2

²³ Pail and Batters (1985) pp11-23

Gender was evenly balanced in the sample ($f = 28, m = 31$), and from Table 9 it can be seen that male students outscored female students in correct identification scores. The gender differential in overall scores is even more marked when re-divided into gender/FL learner/gender/non-FL learners. Male FL learners averaged about 10% more correct answers for (a),(b) and (c) scores combined, and 25% more for correct identification answers.

The male dominance in identification scores may be explained firstly because one of the boys' schools in the sample drew heavily on two feeder schools with strong FL programmes. Secondly, just as girls have traditionally dominated FL study, those boys who do in fact pursue FL study to the seventh form are likely to be above the average ability of male students in general. Teaching, guidance and timetabling experience at several boys' schools suggests strongly that boys are often under pressure by peers, timetables, parental expectation and career guidance networks to opt for science subjects rather than for humanities. To withstand such pressures, those boys who maintain their FL study to senior level must be committed to the task, all the more likely if they are enjoying some success at it.

On the other hand, the study of French, German and Latin has been traditionally regarded as 'more suitable' for girls, so that local FL associations such as the Alliance Francaise (French), the Goethe Society (German) and the Konnichi Wa Speech Contest (Japanese) regularly make more of their top awards to female students than to male students. What this means is that if the sample in this survey were to be expanded to include, say, 200 randomly selected FL learners at seventh form level, it is likely that the number of girls would exceed the number of boys. Two schools in the

sample indicated that as the study of Japanese language becomes increasingly popular in their schools, it is less dominated by 'above average female students' than French, German and Latin traditionally have been.

d) English Study at School and Understanding of Grammatical Terms.

The teaching of English grammar at Primary and Secondary School may have had an effect on the students' knowledge of grammatical terms.

i) Primary School English: The students were asked if they could recall learning about English grammar, and any points, especially from those asked in the questionnaire, that they could still remember.

Table 10 shows numbers of students who recall learning grammatical terms at Primary School and the terms they remembered learning.

Table 10
Numbers of Students who recall Grammar lessons at Primary School and their corresponding identification Scores.

Grammatica Point Identified	Number who remember learning the point	Rank Order	Corresponding ave.identification scores	Rank Order
nouns	51	-	not asked in survey ²⁴	-
verb	42	3	56	1
adverb	46	1	44	4
pronoun	12	6	29	7
sentence	37	4	55	2
adjective	43	2	23	6
preposition	26	5	30	5
conjunction	0	7	48	3

²⁴ This was a mistake on my part. Nouns should have been included in the survey.

Forty-four students (over 75% of the sample) recalled learning grammar at primary school. With regard to how much of this information is retained, of the 44 students who recall primary school grammar, almost three quarters identified "*nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, pronouns*" as the points they had been taught. Table 10 shows the correlation between those items and their corresponding identification scores and their respective rank orders. Not included in Table 10 are several other points, each identified by only small numbers of students²⁵. The grammatical points identified in Table 10 are by and large those which are most easily taught according to memorisable patterns such as "*a noun is a naming word*" etc, and are all from Groups A and B (see Table 1), again reinforcing my scale of difficulty over the four sections of the questionnaire. This teaching method seems to have worked, for the same words (apart from *adjective* which has a surprisingly low correlation with its identification scores), produced the highest numbers of correct score answers overall. Table 10 does not distinguish between FL learners and non-FL learners, so there is some overlap in the identification scores. Apart from *adjective* however, it illustrates the link between grammar taught at primary school and the ability to apply that knowledge.

No student identified *conjunction* as an item learned at school, yet forty-eight of them (26 FL learners, 22 non-FL learners) answered it correctly in their identification scores. FL learners would have come across this term of course, but the only explanation I can see for non-FL learners is that the question sentence from which the conjunction was to be identified (=we stayed at home although the test was an important one) was

²⁵ These included objects, subjects, sentences etc and various ways of remembering their functions.

overly simple. *Although* was possibly the only 'suspicious' word in the sentence and therefore worthy of selection, even by those who in all probability did not know why they chose it. Calculated guesswork has its place!

ii) Secondary School English: Twenty-eight students (under half the total sample) remembered learning grammar at secondary school. Students were also asked about their secondary school English syllabus. They were not specifically asked to identify *which* items they remembered being taught as part of their English programme, but rather to try and estimate what proportion of the items in the survey questionnaire they could remember learning about in English.

Table 11 shows the number of grammatical terms students remember from secondary school English study.

Table 11

Students' Estimates of how many Grammatical Terms they learned at Secondary School English.

	a lot	more than half	much fewer than half	fewer than 10
FL Learners	-	10	15	5
Non-FL learners	3	9	14	3

It can be seen from Table 11 that 30% of FL learners and 41% of non-FL learners believe they have learned about half of the concepts surveyed in the questionnaire as a result of Secondary School English studies. The explanation for this lies largely in the fact that Senior Secondary school English programmes in particular concentrate on literature study and analytical writing, rather than on specific language and

grammatical instruction. It can be seen by comparing Table 11 with Table 7, that secondary school students are more likely to learn about English grammatical terms from FL study than from formal Secondary School English classes.

Conclusions

In the preamble, reference was made to the "catch 22" situation which exists within the cycle of FL study and a knowledge of English grammatical concepts. While such knowledge should ideally exist as preparation *for* FL study at secondary level, rather than resulting *from* it, data from the questionnaire illustrates that rather than by formal English study at secondary school, it is likely to be principally from FL study, but also including such variables as reading frequency, age, gender and English study at Primary school, that a good knowledge of English grammatical concepts is likely to be established. Teaching styles, preferred learning styles, and the actual structure of the FL being studied have a bearing on the way new material is presented, and therefore on how much new grammatical understanding will likely accrue during the FL study.

Most students in the survey remembered rote learning about the functions of verbs, nouns etc at primary school, suggesting a receptiveness to and memory for, such information at that level. On the other hand, very few students felt that their secondary English tuition had satisfactorily equipped them with what I have called the 'street names' on the 'road map' of language learning. It would not be difficult to do more, for example with Sections A and B of my questionnaire being taught in the last three years at primary and/or intermediate school, and Sections C and D in the first two years at secondary school. Not all such information would be perfectly

learned nor later remembered, but FL initiates who have control of even fifty per cent of the 40 concepts from my questionnaire will be at an enormous advantage over their present circumstances.

FL study at primary and secondary school should be encouraged. I have always believed that much of the criticism aimed at FL study as being "too difficult", owes its origins largely to the fact that far too many FL students at beginner level were linguistically unprepared for what lay ahead, a situation identical to expecting students with no preparation in simple times-tables, to successfully study algebra to an advanced level. The paucity of FL students at senior level (two schools in the survey, each with a total roll of over 1300 students, did not have five seventh-formers still studying a FL) is anomalous in the present climate where New Zealand's official tourism and trade thrusts are creating genuine opportunities for FL speakers²⁶. The increased opportunities in employment and travel, as well as the benefits from a heightened awareness of one's NL or the TL being studied, should never be underestimated.

However, learning the correct usage of grammatical concepts should not be the preserve of FL students alone, as those who never study a FL are equally entitled to an understanding of that material which is currently restricted largely to FL learners. Many employers in Australia and New Zealand are critical of levels of written expression among secondary and tertiary graduates²⁷, frequently complaining of poorly constructed letters, messages, reports and job applications, and supportive

²⁶ Hockley, C.R (1994) p13

²⁷ Illing, D (1994)

data from the survey shows that even at 7th form level, most of the terms from Sections C and D of the questionnaire are not widely understood. While simply *knowing* the concepts presented in the questionnaire is not in itself the same as using language correctly, the latter is more likely to occur once the former has been firmly put in place.

Occupations which require an accurate knowledge of English grammar (library work, teaching (all subjects) journalism, hospitality, clerical, police, advertising, retail, technicians, nursing and medicine, to name but a few) should promote their needs accordingly. Advertisers, signwriters, radio and television personalities (in particular those who are aiming at our younger audiences) and publishers can assist by having their work checked more thoroughly for accuracy, and employers should encourage and expect higher levels of accurate English from their employees. Excuses that accurate grammar is nit-picking, word-gaming and effete are not acceptable.

Whether it be for FL learning purposes or for achieving accuracy in English expression, how much easier it is for teachers and students to deal in terms of structural concepts rather than repeating the same nebulous explanations which obviously didn't suffice on previous occasions. Using an understanding of the concepts in the questionnaire, simple, precise advice like "this verb takes an indirect object" or "you've used the past participle instead of the perfect"²⁸ become actual

²⁸ This particular problem is almost impossible to correct without an understanding of the terminology and the concepts involved. Sorting out "rang and rung", "lay and lie" etc is only likely to be achieved when students accept firstly that there is a difference, secondly that the difference is based on rules and concepts, not mere vagaries, and that thirdly, the meaning can alter embarrassingly with misuse.

steps towards language accuracy as a useful tool, not simply as an academic exercise. There is enormous and undeniable value in raising students' awareness of its value from either perspective.

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