

DESIGNING A REMEDIAL COURSE IN GRAMMAR FOR ENGLISH STUDENTS AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The problem defined

The English department at the University of the North currently has more than four thousand students who are enrolled for English as a second language in the academic undergraduate programme. These students show a general lack of written and spoken proficiency in the English language, especially grammar. This state of affairs is a direct consequence of the poor standard of education that these students receive in secondary schools in the Department of Education and Training. Poorly educated students present a problem in the classroom because their grammatical ability is central to their use of language and this affects their overall performance in all other aspects of language and literature.

Pit Corder (1985:36) contends that error analysis occupies a central position in applied linguistic studies and that it can be used to indicate the route that remedial teaching has to follow. The study of errors made by learners of a second language is, therefore, a fundamental part of Applied Linguistics. Ellis (1987:51) is of the opinion that errors can be used for pedagogic reasons to sequence items for teaching or to devise remedial lessons. Error analysis seems to be a particularly useful tool in

this regard as it is specific in guiding remedial action. The correct identification of errors is of particular importance as the remediation that is to follow will be based on the type of error that occurs.

* Past experience by lecturers in the English department at the University of the North has indicated that first-year students of English as a second language frequently have problems with the following: the use of articles, sentence formation and verb tense. A study conducted by Roos (1990) at Vista University confirms these findings. Roos (1990:105) suggests that an eclectic approach be followed in the remediation of learners' errors. The term 'eclectic' is used here in the positive sense referring to the possibility of using various techniques in methodology. Care should be taken, however, to identify specific problem areas before engaging in remedial teaching.

The problems that arise from this state of affairs are:

- * How to determine the content and success of a remedial syllabus in grammar for first-year students of English at the University of the North?
- * Will a remedial course in grammar significantly affect the grammatical proficiency of these students?

1.2 The purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to:

- * identify major errors occurring in the L2 of first-year students at the University of the North after conducting an error analysis,
- * design a remedial course in grammar based on the findings of the error analysis,
- * conduct a second error analysis which is then compared with the first error analysis after the implementation of the remedial course, in order to determine whether the remedial course is effective or not.

1.3 Hypothesis

This dissertation has as its aim to test the hypothesis that remedial teaching in grammar contributes to the improvement of the grammatical proficiency of first-year university students taking English for academic purposes at the University of the North.

1.4 Method of research

The relevant literature on grammar learning and teaching, error analysis and course design was first surveyed before the diagnostic tests were implemented. All first-year students were subjected to a placement test to identify the weakest students in the class who would be in need of remedial instruction in grammar. This group was randomly split into two groups comprising an experimental and a control group. These groups were invited to write essays and letters on specific topics selected by the researcher to elicit naturally occurring errors in the L2 of these students.

The written compositions were evaluated in order to make a taxonomy of the most frequently occurring error-types. The results of the error analysis (EA1) served as a basis for the design of the remedial course. After the implementation of the remedial course both groups were invited to write subsequent compositions on new topics provided by the researcher in order to test whether the same errors that were made in their first compositions were still occurring. This involved a second error analysis (EA2), of a similar nature to the first.

The comparison of the results of EA1 and EA2, displayed in chapter 6, shows whether any significant improvement in the use of grammar by the experimental group has taken place when the results are compared with those of the control group.

1.5 Programme of study

A brief overview is supplied about current theories on the teaching and learning of grammar in the second chapter. The meaning of the term 'grammar' is spelt out as a correct understanding of the meaning of the term underpins the theories that relate to its learning and teaching. This chapter points out that there are numerous learner-related problems and questions that remain unresolved. It also reflects that teaching practices and techniques are based upon our understanding of the ways in which learners process information relating to second language acquisition.

Chapter three investigates the need for remedial instruction and the use of error analysis in remedial instruction in grammar, concluding with a brief overview of some methods of remedial instruction. Chapter four incorporates a detailed discussion on the procedure of data collection and the steps that were taken to identify errors for remediation in this dissertation.

Chapter five focuses on course design and includes the first taxonomy of errors (EA1). An outline of the remedial course is provided, reflecting the contents of the course as well as reference to the method of presentation used by the researcher. This is followed by a discussion of the results of the second error analysis (EA2) in chapter six, as well as a presentation of the comparative pre-test (EA1) and post-test (EA2). The

statistical and practical significance of the results are pointed out in the subsequent evaluation.

The final chapter of this dissertation contains the conclusion and recommendations for further research and study in this field. An appendix is included in this dissertation containing some examples of learner-errors that were detected in EA1 and EA2.

CHAPTER 2

THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of grammar and how it is learnt and taught. The term 'grammar' is first defined, followed by a discussion on the *learning* of grammar which investigates how a learner acquires grammatical knowledge. It is also of considerable importance to investigate the *teaching* of grammar and the theoretical constraints that underlie it. This chapter will show that there are numerous complexities that surround popular attitudes towards the teaching of grammar in any situation.

2.2 What is meant by the term 'grammar'?

In discussing the teaching of any grammar one has to attempt to reach a better understanding of what is meant by the term grammar. Fowler (1971:1) contends that, to the speaker of the language, the word 'grammar' "comprises the linguistic knowledge speakers possess which enables them to communicate in their language". The notion that grammar is a "knowledge of language" is explored by Van der Walt (1993:5), who explains that this knowledge is "generally known as **linguistic or grammatical competence**" and that this view of grammar as knowledge implies that it is "stored unconsciously in the mind" (ibid.).

To the linguist, a grammar means the scientific study of grammatical forms, structures, and functions of a language. In this context Leech et al. use the term grammar "in reference to the mechanism according to which language works when it is used to communicate with other people" (1982:3). Cook (1991:9) states that "grammar is also the most distinctive aspect of language, having features many claim are unique to language and hence learnt in different ways from anything else that people learn".

In its most rudimentary form grammar is taken to mean "the branch of linguistics that deals with syntax and morphology, sometimes also phonology and semantics" (McLeod, 1985:484). This is essentially the domain of the language teacher who teaches language for the purpose of communication.

In this study the term 'grammar' refers to the written manifestation of students' grammatical competence which forms part of their communicative competence. It is important that students be competent in their use of grammar as this competence is a tangible form of interlanguage which can be tested by the teacher, especially when one is confronted with large grammar classes which drastically reduce the possibility of testing spoken competency. The problem statement in 1.1 refers to the importance of students' grammatical ability which is central to their use of language and which affects other aspects of their performance in language and literature (cf. Cook, 1991).

2.3 The learning of grammar

The learning of grammar is a complex process, as many interrelated factors are involved. This complicates the task of the facilitator of learning in his attempts to encourage students to learn grammar. Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1983:281) provide evidence to the fact that "one single view of the language learning process, attractive though it may be, will not account for the diverse phenomena that exist". Any discussion on the learning of grammar invariably leads to a discussion on the perceived dichotomy that exists between language learning and language acquisition. The influential definitions by Krashen (1977) in this regard hold that the term 'acquisition' refers to the subconscious process by which linguistic competence is developed, and that the term 'learning' refers to the conscious process by which knowledge of a language is developed.

A further claim is made that 'acquired' and 'learnt' knowledge are stored separately and that 'learnt' knowledge cannot be converted into 'acquired' knowledge (Ellis, 1992:57). This is known as the 'non-interface position' (Ellis, 1987:230). The 'interface position' has a strong and weak version (ibid.:234). The strong interface position holds that 'learnt' language can be converted into 'acquired' language, whilst the weak interface position holds that 'learnt' language can be turned into an intuitive part of language (part of the interlanguage, cf. Ellis, 1993a). Several criticisms are raised by Ellis (1987) and

McLaughlin (1978a) against the notion of accepting the "'acquisition/learning' schism", the most important of these being that the comparative methods that are used by Krashen (1982) in illustrating the difference between the two notions are not based on formal grammar teaching.

It is the contention of the writer that 'learning' is an inherent process in language acquisition and, therefore, part of 'acquisition' in any situation. Both of these terms have at the root of their separate meanings the notion of *gaining* knowledge, and it is therefore not justifiable to attempt to sever these two terms when one is referring to language acquisition because both concepts are engaged in any learning or teaching situation.

Tarone and Yule (1989:5) point out that many language teachers do "want to know which view (if any) of the learning process is the most appropriate for language teaching". Cook (1991:116-131) discusses general models of L2 learning which illustrate the results of various attempts that have been made to understand the learning processes involved in second language acquisition. These models comprise: 'knowledge models' which include the *Universal Grammar Model*, proposed by Chomsky; 'processing models' such as the *Competition Model* which focuses on the dynamic processing of language and communication; 'mixed models' such as the *Monitor Model* and *Competence/Control Model* which are essentially mixtures between 'knowledge' and 'processing' models; and social models that stress the social aspects of L2 learning,

such as the *Socio-Educational Model* and the *Acculturation Model* (Cook, 1991:116).

Learners of English as a second language cannot solely rely on the inherent differences between the various models of L2 learning, they also have to look at the processes involved in mastering a language. This begs the question: How is a language mastered? The answer is somewhat discomfoting. Nobody is exactly sure. It is true that there are many theories today that relate to the acquisition and learning of an L2, but none of these theories is without criticism, and none of them can be shown to be absolutely true.

Ellis (1992:3) identifies three basic approaches that have been used to develop a better understanding of classroom language learning and the way in which classroom learners acquire an L2. The first of these operates on the assumption that language learning is just like any other kind of learning and can be explained with reference to a general theory of learning. The second approach to classroom language learning holds that instructed second language learning takes place in the same way as naturalistic language learning, which in turn implies that first and second language acquisition take place in exactly the same way.

Ellis is of the contention that these two approaches are very popular because neither of them involves any research in the

classroom itself (1992:4). The reason for their popularity is also the major point of criticism against these theories as there is no empirical evidence to substantiate their claims.

The third approach is theory-based, involving empirical second language classroom research that is either interpretive and exploratory in nature or experimental, because it sets out to test certain hypotheses (Ellis, 1992:4). The interpretive approach involves the description and understanding of classroom processes rather than testing what has been learnt. Hypothesis-testing researchers claim that this approach reveals the "principal way of understanding cause-effect relations" (ibid.:5) and that this type of research investigates whether instruction actually results in learning.

Second language knowledge is differentiated (cf. Ellis, 1992) as it involves both **explicit** and **implicit** knowledge about language. Ellis (1992:184) suggests that explicit knowledge is conscious and declarative and may be equated to 'learnt' knowledge in accordance with Krashen's monitor model. Explicit knowledge "refers to knowledge that is analyzed (in the sense that it can be described and classified), abstract (in the sense that it takes the form of some underlying generalization of actual linguistic behavior) (sic), and explanatory (in the sense that it can provide a reasonably objective account of how grammar is used in actual communication)" (Ellis, 1993a:93).

Implicit knowledge on the other hand is subconscious and procedural, although not necessarily fully automatic and may be equated to language that has been 'acquired'. Ellis further identifies two kinds of implicit knowledge: *formulaic knowledge* (which consists of "ready-made chunks of language") and *rule-based knowledge* (which consists of "generalized and abstract structures which have been internalized") (1993a:93).

Ellis contends that it is only implicit knowledge which is developmental and it is manifested as acquisitional sequences (1992:185). Ellis further states (ibid.:185) that both explicit and implicit knowledge can be assessed with varying degrees of automaticity. It is not possible to tell at all times whether a learner is drawing on his implicit or explicit knowledge to create language. When the learner is able to exercise control over both his implicit and explicit knowledge he may be able to improve in accuracy in the performance of specific linguistic features.

Lightbown (1985:177) and Van der Walt (1993:9) both state that there is evidence to suggest that language acquisition is not a linear or cumulative progression. Lightbown refers to the U-shaped development (1985:177) which represents the graphic development of the learner on a line graph. Rutherford (1987:159) refers to a 'metamorphic' progression which means that the learner is engaged in a constant process of re-evaluating existing data in the process of acquiring new knowledge.

Van der Walt (1993:9), McLaughlin (1978b:155), Ellis (1987:42), and Lightbown (1985:176) refer to the fact that the learner follows predictable sequences in acquiring a language which means that "certain structures have to be acquired before others can be integrated" (Lightbown, 1985:176). This complicates our understanding of the learning of grammar as there is no syllabus existent to date which structures grammatical items for learning as they naturally occur in the acquisition process.

2.4 The teaching of grammar

2.4.1 How should grammar be taught?

Ellis (1992:125) contends that all kinds of discourse in the classroom can be regarded as interaction of one kind or another. He further states that formal language teaching is included in the term 'instruction' as this term refers to "the interaction that takes place inside the classroom" (ibid.). Ellis also says that classroom language learning can be distinguished from naturalistic language learning on the grounds that it involves planned attempts to intervene in the learning process (ibid.:14).

Teachers of English as a second language at tertiary level are often at a loss as to how much grammar should be included in the ESL syllabus. Normally this is not the concern of the teacher, but at South African universities the practice has been to allow

lecturers to determine their own syllabi based on what they think their students need to learn. There are inherent problems involved in defining the needs as perceived by learners and needs as perceived by teachers. A further problem arises from this dichotomy with regard to the management and treatment of these needs as part of methodology.

This activity of establishing what the needs of both the students and the teachers are (diagnostic testing or error analysis) is of cardinal importance to the success of any intended second language teaching. Linked to this concept is the idea of improving students' grammatical abilities by introducing lessons in grammar. Teachers are of necessity preoccupied with practical questions relating to the issue of whether explicit teaching will have any direct influence on a student's ability to produce certain language structures in a fairly automatic way or not. Tarone and Yule suggest that the theoretical concerns should be put aside and they provide a rather unexpected answer by saying that it largely "depends on the student" (1989:6).

It is suggested by Tarone and Yule (1989:16) that researchers cannot agree upon a single view of the learning process which can be applied to language teaching (cf. Schachter & Celce-Murcia, 1983). The fact is that most methods have advantages and disadvantages inherent in their separate processes. Some learners might benefit by explicit instruction whereas others are better geared towards acquiring certain language structures in a more indirect fashion.

It is also of some importance to take the aims of the learner and his expectations into consideration. These are by nature complex issues that are difficult to assess. Individual learner variables also complicate the teaching of grammar as the teacher is hard-pressed to be aware of the pace of progression that is maintained by each individual. Learners' expectations will by and large determine their attitude in the classroom towards the instructor and the material they are confronted with. These different views on language teaching have given rise to different styles of teaching grammar.

2.4.2 Styles of teaching grammar

Cook (1991:132) presents a convincing argument for talking about teaching 'styles' which is a more neutral term than nomenclatures such as 'method' or 'approach'. Cook further defines a teaching style as "a loosely connected set of teaching techniques believed to share the same goals of language teaching and the same views of language and of L2 learning" (ibid.).

Six teaching styles are described by Cook (ibid.:133-153) that relate to L2 learning research. These styles may be summarised as follows:

- i) The academic teaching style common in academic classrooms,

- ii) the audio-lingual style that emphasizes structural oral practice,
- iii) the social communicative style that aims at interaction between people,
- iv) the informative communicative style that stresses information transfer from one person to another,
- v) the mainstream EFL style which combines aspects of the first three, and
- vi) other styles that look beyond language itself.

The language teacher has to allow himself to be guided by the teaching situation in which he finds himself, as a purely dogmatic approach towards the teaching of grammar according to a preselected model will inevitably result in failure if it is not modified to meet the requirements of the students. Cook (1991:133) states that "it is rare to encounter a classroom that is a pure version of one or other of these teaching styles as none of them fully satisfy all the needs of any real class of students".

2.4.3 Formal instruction in grammar

Formal instruction is one way of teaching grammar which may be related to several of the teaching styles that are mentioned above, or a combination of specific styles. Van der Walt (1993:29-30) says that formal instruction is "... taken to include the instruction that results from deductive methods such as cognitive code, inductive methods such as audiolingualism, and, also, instruction based on notional-functional materials where specific linguistic means for realizing various speech acts ('functions') are introduced and practised".

The most important consideration, however, lies in the question of whether formal instruction has any effect on students' use of grammar in English as a second language. The term 'formal instruction' implies consciousness-raising that is targeted at specific linguistic features that are used by the language-learner. Consciousness-raising means "helping the learner by drawing attention to features of the second language" (Cook, 1991:25), and may be achieved by any of various methods in classroom situations, resulting in a higher awareness of grammatical structures by the learner. Grammatical (language) awareness implies "helping the learner by raising awareness of language itself" (ibid.).

Littlewood (1985:60) comments that "in formal instruction, teachers attempt to affect the course of learning, mainly by such

means as: controlling the learner's exposure to the language; making them become aware of significant features and patterns; providing opportunities for practising the language; ensuring that learners receive feedback about their performance. Within this general framework, an immense variety of teaching approaches is possible, and it is obvious that some teachers have developed more successful approaches than others. However, it is not at all clear what factors determine their success."

Ellis (1987) has undertaken research on the effects of formal instruction on SLA and has come to the following conclusions:

- i) Formal instruction may develop L2 knowledge, but it does not affect the overall sequence of development.
- ii) Studies on the relative utility of formal instruction have produced mixed results, but in general support the hypothesis that instruction aids the rate/success of SLA.
- iii) Formal instruction contributes directly or indirectly to the internalization of different knowledge types and in so doing enables the classroom learner to perform a wider range of linguistic tasks than the naturalistic learner.

Ellis quotes several morpheme studies (1987:223) that substantiate his contention that formal instruction may develop L2 knowledge when the learner is concentrating on the formal aspects

of language learning. It is clear, however, that formal instruction does not affect the natural route of language acquisition, but it does provide more rapid development.

Van der Walt (1993:30-37) provides a review of the most important studies on formal instruction of the last two decades, and concludes that these studies support the claim that "it seems reasonable enough to assume that formal instruction is of value in promoting rapid and higher levels of acquisition".

Allen argues in favour of emphasising "strong habitual associations between the elements in a set of basic sentence patterns" (1979:72) whilst introducing "a traditional grammar-learning approach" at the higher level (ibid.). The rationale underpinning this approach is to vary the technique of presentation as there are some problems that are qualitatively different as the student encounters more complex language structures that cannot be taught with lower-order skills such as pattern drills.

Allen (1979:73) predicts the following results on introducing conscious rule-learning into the more advanced level of the syllabus:

- i) A conscious knowledge of the rules would give the advanced student some degree of conscious insight into material that he has already learned to use without the benefit of grammatical explanation,

- ii) it would help him to predict the behaviour of phenomena not brought under direct observation in the teaching text, and
- iii) to achieve discriminating control over the increasingly large quantities of data that he will be called upon to handle as the course proceeds.

Ellis (1987:215) also supports the view that the acquisition of grammatical knowledge may occur by means of "raising the learner's consciousness about the nature of target language rules". He points out that in previous habit forming methods "the purpose of the practice provided is to focus on specific linguistic forms, which the learner is encouraged to induce and of which ultimately he will form a more or less conscious mental representation" (cf. Sharwood Smith, 1981; McLaughlin, 1987).

Ellis (1993b) contends that grammar has again been elevated in language syllabi. He advocates an approach to grammar that is compatible with the way in which one views SLA. Consciousness raising and practise are regarded as the quintessential elements in grammar teaching, but they should be applied "in the context of communicative activities" (Ellis, 1993b:6). He refers to what he calls "a focussed communication activity, where we provide a focus through the way in which the task is performed" (ibid.:7). Ellis argues that the teacher is "deliberately negotiating, requesting clarification when a particular type of linguistic

error is made" (ibid.). This kind of teaching/learning activity provides the student with the opportunity to improve in grammar accuracy as it deals with error correction under real operating conditions.

The teacher of grammar is thus faced with the arduous task of not only teaching the basic structural principles of grammar, but also showing the student how to put this knowledge to practical use in generating meaningful discourse and communication. It is important to take cognizance of the fact that all discourse is generative in nature. Errors occur naturally because of the generative nature of language. It follows, therefore, that the tertiary teacher of grammar has to correct errors when they are generated by a learner of language.

The grammar teacher of today is privileged in the sense that he is able to draw on a vast field of research that has taken place within this century in the field of grammar and grammar teaching. Much has changed since the advent of Ferdinand de Saussure's synchronic approach to language as an alternative to the diachronic way of studying and teaching language. Language is no longer viewed as item-centered, but as a systemic whole. This means that the study of grammar does not take place in isolation, but within the broader definition of language which encompasses basic structural principles embedded in meaningful discourse.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter shows that enough evidence exists to substantiate the suggestion that the learning and teaching of grammar is an extremely complex task which is still the focus of many researchers today. The discussion above suggests that classroom activities may often lead to the teaching of explicit knowledge about language and linguistic forms. It would appear, though, that limited learning does take place in the classroom, not only because of the practical limitations offered by the classroom environment (cf. Ellis, 1984) but also because the discourse is often teacher initiated and controlled.

If a communicative approach is used, however, the likelihood for the occurrence of natural classroom discourse will be high (cf. Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Richards, 1990; Van der Walt, 1993), creating favourable conditions for the acquisition of implicit knowledge about the language. For the purposes of remedial instruction at the University of the North, however, the author will make use of formal instruction in the classroom environment in the attempt to foster language learning that will result in a lower frequency of errors when the post-test error analysis of errors made by first-year students is compared with the pre-test error analysis of the same group of students. Littlewood (1985:60) contends that the teacher who makes use of formal instruction attempts to "affect the course of learning", and this is exactly what the author is attempting to do by utilizing formal instruction as a teaching technique.

CHAPTER 3

REMEDIAL INSTRUCTION IN GRAMMAR

3.1 Introduction

Remedial instruction should be distinguished from remedial education. With the word 'remedial' is usually meant "putting things right, correcting, rectifying" (Golby & Gulliver, 1989:8). In the case of remedial education the term refers to a field of study in education that is similar to special education for pupils with learning difficulties (Edwards, 1989:34). Remedial instruction does not imply that all pupils or students that encounter problems with certain sections of the syllabus should be regarded as 'slow or retarded'. In certain instances it may be that the work at hand has not been clearly explained, or that the student has failed to grasp certain elementary concepts at an earlier stage in his education and that he does not have a solid base on which to graft his newly-instructed knowledge. Such a student would be in need of 'remedial instruction' with which the author means the post-introductory explanation of certain grammatical features of a language.

According to Corder (1985:45) remedial action becomes necessary when we "detect a *mismatch* or disparity between knowledge, skill, or ability of someone and the demands that are made on him by the situation he finds himself in". He further states that the term

remedial is reserved specifically for those situations which occur "contrary to our plans and expectations" (ibid.).

This chapter has as its aim to discuss the need for remedial teaching in the L2 classroom at tertiary level and to link the idea of remedial teaching to error analysis which is regarded as a particularly useful technique with which to identify problem areas in language acquisition. Several important issues are identified that relate to the various methods that can be employed in remedial instruction.

3.2 The need for remedial instruction at tertiary level

It is the opinion of the author that remedial instruction should be introduced at one or another stage in the acquisition of a second language. McKeating (1985:212) goes so far as saying that "it is your job to help your students to get rid of them (errors) or avoid them". Over-enthusiasm and over-correction are certainly to be avoided in remedial teaching and the correction of errors, but this should not deter any teacher from engaging in such activities.

The complexity of the task at hand in learning a language at tertiary level will of necessity produce errors, especially if the generative nature of language is kept in mind. Whilst errors cannot be avoided, they are particularly useful in the sense that they provide feedback to the teacher who has to control the pro-

gress of the learner in the classroom situation. Teachers at the University of the North have often voiced the need for remedial instruction in grammar because students have failed to master the most elementary grammatical structures that should be well within their range.

The Error Analysis theory is particularly helpful in this regard as language learner errors are potentially important because they contribute to our understanding of exactly how learners acquire a language and it also points to areas that still hold difficulties for the learner. Sharma (1989:76-77) states that "proper remedial measures can be devised and employed both to consolidate the successes and (more importantly) to eliminate the failures as the program progresses". Error analysis can thus provide strong support for remedial teaching.

Many teachers complain about the "inadequacies of earlier teaching" (McKeating, 1985:236) but fail to attempt to set the situation right. McKeating (ibid.) points out that a gradual approach to the target standard should be employed as this avoids the possibility of students becoming excessively demoralized and spares the teacher a great deal of frustration.

This argument stresses the fact that the remedial teacher should take care in selecting errors for remediation. Care should be taken to ensure that the errors are of such a nature that they can be addressed without wasting too much time in remediation.

It will do no good to try to remediate errors that occur because the grammatical structures fall outside of a student's competence and the natural order of L2 acquisition (cf. Lightbown, 1985:176). McKeating states that "you need to assess realistically how likely you are to succeed, how much time it is likely to take, how much time is actually available and how many other, possibly more important things your students could be doing in that time" (1985:241). The issue of errors that fall outside of the natural order of acquisition remains difficult and complicates our understanding of second language acquisition.

A possible approach towards the remediation of errors would be to engage in teaching activities, such as formal instruction, that improve students' explicit knowledge of grammatical structures. It is pointed out in chapter 2 that formal instruction may develop L2 knowledge when the learner is concentrating on the formal aspects of language learning. The errors can be identified by an error analysis of students' written work. A remedial programme which is based on such an error analysis will contribute towards guiding remedial instruction.

3.3 The use of error analysis in remedial instruction

Sharma (1981:76) defines error analysis as follows:

Error analysis is a process based on analysis of learners' errors with one clear objective: evolving a suitable and

effective teaching-learning strategy and remedial measures necessary in certain clearly marked out areas of the foreign language. It is a multidimensional and multifaceted process, which involves much more than simply analyzing errors in the written (or spoken) English of the learners and counting them for frequency.

Ellis (1992:53) contends that the use of error analysis as a basis for remedial teaching is nothing new. He states that the use of error analysis helps the teacher to diagnose areas of continuing difficulty as a basis for later remedial activity, and that when remedial teaching is undertaken with a full understanding of the nature of learners' difficulties it should be successful (ibid.:53). Robinett and Schachter (1983:145) contend that the "collecting of errors made by second language learners is not new. Experienced classroom teachers have long used student errors to guide their teaching emphasis...". The focus here lies on the study of learners and their learning problems as evidenced by their errors. This view is substantiated by Corder (1979:125) who states that we study the errors of individuals for practical and theoretical reasons and that "the study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning". The theoretical function has to do with the language learning process and the practical function lies in the guiding of remedial action (Corder, 1985:45).

Not only does error analysis point out areas of difficulty as part of its practical function, but it also serves as a method of

showing progress made by the learner when the frequency of particular errors that are made by the same learner are measured and compared at regular intervals. Error analysis does not measure a learner's overall achievement in the language, but it defines the failures of the learner in mastering specific features of the language. This feature of EA enables the teacher to engage in specific remedial activities that would rectify the occurrence of these errors. Pit Corder (1985:45) contends that the practical aspect of error analysis lies in "its function in guiding the remedial action we must take to correct an unsatisfactory state of affairs for learner or teacher".

It is a well-known fact that error analysis is a limited tool for investigating SLA because it focuses only on part of the language that L2 learners produce (Ellis, 1987:68). Further, it does not cast much light on the route or rate of SLA because it investigates language-learner language at a single point in time. These shortcomings do not necessarily mean that the theory and practice of EA do not contribute anything towards our understanding of the SLA progress. Most studies in error analysis do show, however, that learners benefit by error correction at some or other stage and that the correction of error cannot entirely be seen in a negative light.

3.3.1 The occurrence and status of error

The occurrence and status of error is a very important issue in the field of Applied Linguistics. Contrary to popular opinion, error should be regarded as a *positive occurrence* in learner-language. Ellis (1987:54) states that "as a result of inter-language theory and the evidence accumulated from error analysis, errors were no longer seen as 'unwanted forms', but as evidence of the learner's active contribution to SLA". Bennet (1974:232) points out that "often an error suggests shortcomings in the teaching strategy". He suggests that it is not necessarily the fault of the learner if an error occurs in his L2.

A number of opinions exist about the correction of error. In this regard van Els et al. (1986:262) say that "the teacher should take a constructive view of learner errors, and as a rule permit rather than correct errors". Oller and Richard-Amato (1983:279) suggest that no correction of errors should be undertaken during acquisition activities as this would focus students on form, thereby making acquisition more difficult. Corder (1978:68) states that "the making of errors is a necessary part of language learning". In this regard Dulay and Burt (1980) wrote an article entitled "You can't learn without goofing", stressing the importance of the occurrence of error.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the occurrence of error is not an unwanted event as errors hold the distinction

that they can guide the teacher in his teaching efforts with regard to progress made by the learner of the language and student competence.

3.3.2 Types of error

Hendrickson (1987:361) identifies three types of errors that are important to L2 learners:

- i) errors that impair communication significantly;
- ii) errors that have highly stigmatizing effects on the listener or reader; and
- iii) errors that occur frequently in students' speech and writing.

The first and last categories of errors that are identified by Hendrickson above are normally of interest to the language teacher. These errors usually impair communication in some or other way. Thus the perceived need arises to have errors corrected in order to avoid possible misunderstanding as a result of grammatical inaccuracies when students communicate with one another.

3.4 Methods of remedial instruction

McKeating is of the opinion that there is very little difference between good remedial work and good initial teaching, but he still identifies three essential stages in remedial teaching (1985:242). They are:

- i) define the problem area and decide on your 'teaching point';
- ii) give the students clear examples of appropriate correct substitutes for the incorrect language they have been using; and
- iii) give adequate opportunity for practising the correct usage, preferably in some meaningful context.

Error analysis helps to 'define the problem area' that is suggested by McKeating in i) above. Formal instruction can be used in ii) and iii) in the classroom situation as is suggested earlier in 2.4.2, with particular emphasis on allowing time for practise (cf. Sharwood Smith, 1981; McLaughlin, 1987).

When the remedial class is in session it is important to use a different approach (if possible) to the one that was used when the material was initially taught because the possibility exists that the initial presentation was not appropriate and students

might also find the work boring and repetitive. This post-introductory explanation of material should be accompanied by exercises and opportunity to practise the correct usage. Unfortunately this area is often neglected in academic syllabi at tertiary level because time is so often limited whilst a vast field of study has to be covered.

Additional stages of remediation may also be introduced, such as discussing the causes of errors with older students. L1 interference here can be accurately defined with the help of feedback from the students as errors are often caused by a direct translation of an L1 structure into the L2. It is the opinion of the author that students should be given ample exercises to do in differentiating between certain features of a language. For example, number and concord could easily be practised in this fashion if students are required to identify singular nouns and plural nouns from a given text and add to the appropriate verb to it. In addition to this the teacher may also provide the rule that governs specific grammatical structures.

Students may also be instructed to proof-read their own work, searching for specific errors in tense, verb forms and articles. McKeating (1985:246) mentions an experiment that he conducted in an attempt to reduce errors wherein he asked students to search for specific errors in their own work. He states that "proof-reading and self-correction can be encouraged by setting aside specific class time for it, and by not correcting errors which students should be able to spot for themselves" (ibid.:246).

3.5 Conclusion

The concept of remedial instruction in grammar should be distinguished from other forms of remedial instruction that take place in classes for students with learning difficulties. Remedial instruction in the grammar classroom approximates good initial teaching providing the teacher with the opportunity of utilising alternative teaching techniques in providing classroom input.

Once the need for remedial teaching has been established, an error analysis should be conducted to isolate areas for remediation, taking cognizance of the fact that errors are good indicators of likely areas for remediation. Care should be taken that the errors that are selected are of such a nature that they can easily be rectified without the resultant loss of too much time. Errors that impair communication are identified by Hendrickson (1987) as errors that are important to L2 learners and teachers alike. McKeating (1985) stresses the importance of following three essential stages in remedial instruction. These stages include the identification of the problem area, providing students with clear examples of appropriate use of language, and adequate opportunity for practising the correct usage in a meaningful context.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains information regarding the research design and language elicitation techniques employed in the research project. The research design includes a pre-test and post-test description of learners' errors as well as the design of a remedial course constructed on the findings of the pre-test description of errors, which is displayed in chapter 5.

The instrumentation that was used in this project included a placement test and written essays that elicited naturally occurring errors in the L2 of the students. The task mode took the form of writing two essays and a letter under the supervision of the researcher, allowing approximately 250 words and thirty minutes per composition. The task focus was to test linguistic form, with regard to grammatical errors in syntax made by the pupils.

4.2 The aims of the project

The aims and hypothesis of this study are stated in chapter 1. They include the identification of major errors occurring in the L2 of first-year students at the University of the North after

conducting an error analysis; designing a remedial course in grammar based on the findings of the error analysis; conducting a second error analysis which is then compared with the first error analysis after the implementation of the remedial course, in order to determine whether the remedial course is effective or not; and testing the hypothesis that remedial teaching in grammar contributes to the improvement of the grammatical proficiency of first-year university students taking English for academic purposes at the University of the North.

4.3 Population and sample

The population comprised approximately 250 students who took English as a second language for academic purposes at the University of the North, who were grouped together in one class. The 50 students who obtained the lowest scores in the placement test took part in this study as a sample group. This sample of fifty students ($n=50$) were randomly assigned to two groups (25 in each) comprising an experimental group and a control group. Only twelve students in the experimental group attended all of the remedial classes and only ten students in the control group were willing to participate in the second error analysis. Students participated on a voluntary basis and their attendance was negatively affected by political violence on campus at the time of conducting the experiment. This low attendance places a question mark over the validity of the findings of this study, but the data will nevertheless be processed in order to determine whether

any patterns of improvement in error occurrence may be detected.

4.4 Data collection procedure

All first-year students were subjected to a placement test that helped to assess students' levels of competence. This test was administered in the beginning of the academic year and enabled the researcher to identify the weakest students in the class who would be in obvious need of remedial instruction. These students were invited to write essays on specific topics that included a narrative, a descriptive and a letter which elicited naturally occurring errors in the L2 of these students. They were then randomly divided into two groups for purposes of establishing an experimental group and a control group.

The errors made in writing these compositions are reflected in the first taxonomy of errors (EA1) in chapter 5. The results of this error analysis were then used to facilitate the design of a remedial course which was implemented after the first error analysis. Subsequent compositions were written by both groups after the remedial course had come to a close and the errors are reflected in a second taxonomy of errors (EA2) in chapter 6, which reflect the post-test results. A comparison of the results of EA1 and EA2 (cf. ch. 6) shows the progress made by both groups.

The remedial course had as its primary aim the elimination of, or reduction in, the frequency of the occurrence of errors in stu-

dents' use of grammar and was taught to the experimental group after hours by means of formal instruction over two weeks, resulting in a minimum of eleven hours of remediation. These lectures comprised theory and practise such as exercises that were moderated in the classroom in order to control the facilitation of learning. The control group was not exposed to any part of the remedial syllabus and attended their regular classes together with the experimental group during the day.

4.5 Error analysis framework

The "pre-select category approach" that is suggested by Etherton (1977:81) was chosen as an error analysis framework as this approach allows the researcher to select errors that are likely to occur in the work of the students. All of the errors that occurred in the students' work were analysed and the seven most frequent ones were selected for focus, i.e. for remediation in this study. The errors that are used for the purpose of this study include errors in the article system, agreement between subject and verb, syntax (word order, incomplete sentences and run-on sentences), prepositions, pronouns, the present tenses, and the past tenses.

4.6 Conclusion

The seven categories of errors mentioned above accommodate major areas of error that occur frequently in the written compositions of students in both the experimental and control groups. These errors are often anticipated by lecturers when they assess written compositions and substantiate the claims made by members of the English department at the University of the North that they occur frequently in the written compositions of students at first-year level. The errors that have been identified by the error analysis have been included in the remedial course which is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

AN OUTLINE OF THE REMEDIAL COURSE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter contains an outline of the remedial course that was used to facilitate learning during the remedial classes. The results that were obtained from the first error analysis¹ provided the information that was used to construct the remedial course.

The writer has taken note of two other studies in the remediation of learner error at predominantly black universities in the Transvaal, viz. Roos (1990) and Jefferies (1990), although it must be pointed out that Roos' study focuses on a syntactic error analysis of written work of students at Vista University, with a chapter on implications for remediation which largely corroborates the findings of the author on which errors to include for remediation. The study of Jefferies (1990) focuses more on contrastive analysis (first language interference) and sociolinguistic problems as determiners for remedial instruction. Jefferies does not motivate the corpus of errors that was selected for remedial treatment, and provides no empirical data for the inclusion of certain errors in the programme, which results in a lack of credibility with regard to the method of error identification for remediation. He also fails to mention whether the remedial programme in question was successful or not.

It is important to note that "the choice of what to teach depends on noting the kinds of mistakes that the learners make" (Howatt, 1979:6), especially when the teacher intends to design a course that is problem-based. Related to this activity of selecting items for inclusion in a remedial course is the act of grading materials "so that they gradually become more demanding" (ibid.). The purpose of grading contents is to make them easy and quick to learn (cf. ch. 5.3).

5.2 The place of remedial instruction in course design

Remedial instruction in the classroom should be regarded by the teacher of any language as part of his approach towards teaching. Norrish (1983:93-97) stresses the importance of remedial instruction as part of the syllabus, with the understanding that remedial instruction is based on the findings of an error analysis or a similar test-situation such as an analysis of written or spoken language. The question is how to fit remedial teaching into the syllabus? Teachers will invariably come up with different answers to this question because it depends largely on one's understanding of the acquisition process.

Current teaching practice seems to concentrate on the thorough teaching of new information that is introduced into the syllabus, while little time is allowed for practise. Howatt (1979:19) contends that each time a new point is introduced "it is presented,

practised, drilled and tested, and then in the next lesson it is forgotten". A further point that is raised by Howatt in this regard is that "the lack of opportunity for constant revision is the most glaring defect in foreign language teaching courses" (ibid.:18). The author contends that revision and remedial instruction are very similar in this regard, with the difference being that with the use of the term 'remedial instruction' the understanding is that the teacher is aware of some mismatch or discrepancy between the expected result and his findings after a diagnostic test of some kind has been administered to the learner.

With the term 'diagnostic test' is meant a test that "does not gauge the learner's general achievement in language; on the contrary, it pinpoints the 'failures' of the learner in achieving his goals in language learning" (Sharma, 1981:77). This means that specific areas of difficulty can be pointed out and subjected to remedial instruction.

Remedial instruction should be ongoing and recurrent, as part of the teaching technique. Once a new point has been introduced it should be used again in a cumulative fashion with more complicated language structures so that the student may exercise his explicit knowledge about the point that has been taught in order to further the automatisisation of the action, as has been pointed out in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4. The greatest danger in remedial instruction lies in the possibility of frustrating the student

with unexciting teaching techniques. A different approach to the one that was used in the initial teaching of the work should be used in order to maintain high levels of interest.

Remedial instruction should be sequenced and planned for in course design. Ample time should be allocated for the re-teaching of new work once a section of work has been dispensed with. In this fashion the main important points that were taught will be repeated and stressed, further enhancing the possibility of contributing towards a student's implicit knowledge about the language structure.

5.3 Course design

Curriculum processes, as described by Richards (1990:8), normally involve curriculum planners who "progress systematically from needs assessment, to goals and objectives, to specification of the instructional content of the program". Curriculum processes in this sense refer to the more general nature of language learning rather than listing specific items for teaching.

Howatt (1979:21) suggests that issues that relate to course design should be kept in mind when a course is designed. Questions that he suggests may be asked are the following:

What sort of learner is the course intended for? How does it reflect his supposed purpose in learning the language? Do

the materials show a concern with general educational values or with more specific and practical objectives? How does the course reflect the learner's age, previous learning experience, aptitude and motivation? What principles can you discern in the grading and organization of the course? If it is a beginner's course, to what extent does the grading in the early stages depend on the choice of teaching method and techniques? How is revision provided for? (ibid.).

Traditionally the term 'syllabus' refers to the selection and organisation of content. Richards (1990:8) refers to the "choice and sequencing of instructional content". Syllabuses, according to Nunan (1988:3), "are more localized and are based on accounts and records of what actually happens at the classroom level as teachers and learners apply a given curriculum to their own situation". This means that syllabus design is "seen as being concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content" (ibid., 1988:5). In this regard Johnson (1981:34) states that "a syllabus is essentially a job specification, and as such it should set out clearly and precisely what is to be done, and the standards or criteria to be met by those who do it".

Richards (1990:9) contends that a well planned syllabus is "believed to assure successful learning, since it represents linguistically and psycholinguistically optimal introduction to the target language". He mentions the following kinds of syllabuses that are often found in ESL teaching today (ibid.):

Structural (organized primarily around grammar and sentence patterns); *functional* (organized around communicative functions, such as identifying, reporting, correcting, describing); *notional* (organized around conceptual categories, such as duration, quantity, location); *topical* (organized around themes or topics, such as health, food, clothing); *situational* (organized around speech settings and the transactions associated with them, such as shopping, at the bank, at the supermarket); *skills* (organized around skills, such as listening for gist, listening for specific information, listening for interferences); and *task or activity-based* (organized around activities, such as drawing maps, following directions, following instructions).

The teacher of grammar is advised by Bell (1981:6) to avoid a *priori* syllabuses in favour of teaching language in an *a posteriori* way which involves short-term syllabuses that are based on his analysis of learners' errors. 'A priori' and 'a posteriori' syllabi refer to predictive and analytical syllabi respectively. Bell states that "the implications of this are that we capitalize on the successive pidgin-like systems (inter language - my brackets) which the learner creates and, by discovering the system the learner is using, provide constructive feedback which allow him to modify his systems in the direction of the norms of the target language" (ibid.:66).

5.3.1 The selection and grading of content

Van der Walt (1993:54) contends that "the specification of grammar in a syllabus has always been an important aspect of syllabus design". The specification of grammatical items in a remedial syllabus will provide a focal point and may thus be regarded as an essential requirement for course design in the remediation of errors. Van der Walt (1993:55) contends that "various criteria can be applied when structures are selected. These include difficulty, contrast with the mother tongue, and frequency. The same criteria have been used for the grading of structures". The selection of content for this remedial course is not based on any psychological considerations but relies on the results of an error analysis which forms part of linguistic considerations.

The grammatical categories that are included in the remedial course have been graded in sequence by the author, starting with the article system and ending with the past tense. The grading of materials was based on what the author perceived to be easy and difficult for the students to learn. Courses should be evaluated during and after teaching to see whether the grading needs to be adjusted.

According to Howatt (1979:6) a special course is a course which can either be problem-based, activity-based, or role-based. This remedial course is problem-based because its design rests on a perceived need for remediation and, specific difficulties that

are experienced by first-year students taking English for academic purposes at the University of the North. The choice of what to teach depends on the results of the first error analysis, as this error analysis shows the way that remediation has to take (cf. 5.4).

5.4 Results of EA1

The results of the first error analysis in this chapter provide the necessary information for the inclusion of grammatical items in the remedial course. The mean percentage of errors of grammatical items and the standard deviations of errors in the grammatical categories are reflected in table 1 as they are necessary to calculate the means of the individual differences between EA1 and EA2, as well as the standard deviation of the individual differences between EA1 and EA2 which are reflected in the paired *t*-tests. Seliger and Shohamy (1990:231) state that the *t*-test is used "to compare the means of two groups". "It helps to determine how confident the researcher can be that the differences found between the two groups (experimental and control) as a result of treatment are not due to chance" (ibid.).

Seliger and Shohamy (1990:232) advise the researcher to precede the *t*-test results with a descriptive statistics table "displaying the mean ($\bar{X}$), standard deviation (S.D.), and the size of sample (N), in order to provide a better insight into the data". This chapter contains the descriptive statistical tables for EA1

for both the experimental and control groups. The next chapter will contain the results of EA2 for both groups, the one-sided paired t-tests between EA1 and EA2 in the same groups as well as the two-group t-test between the experimental and control groups.

Table 1: EA1: experimental group

Category	N	no. occ.	no. cor.	no. incor.	$\bar{X}$ Number errors	$\bar{X}$ Number occurrences	$\bar{X}(\%)$	S.D.
Article	12	316	195	121	10,1	26,3	37,1	18,0
Agreement	12	407	331	76	6,3	33,9	18,7	11,0
Prepositions	12	363	309	54	4,5	30,3	14,2	6,3
Pronouns	12	449	402	47	3,9	37,4	10,9	6,9
Syntax	12	407	367	40	3,3	33,9	11,6	8,9
Present	12	262	214	48	4,0	21,8	20,3	17,5
Past	12	149	71	78	6,5	12,4	59,5	36,0

'Key to the interpretation of table 1

'N' = the number of participants in the group

'no. occ.' = the number of occurrences of a grammatical item

'no. cor.' = the number of correct instances of use of a grammatical item

'no. incor.' = the number of incorrect instances of use of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}$ Number errors' = the mean number of errors per student of a grammatical item per category

' $\bar{X}$ Number occurrences' = the mean number of occurrences per student of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}(\%)$ ' = the mean percentage of errors per student (of a grammatical item per category) ¹

'S.D.' = the standard deviation of the percentage errors

¹ This mean, which appears in tables 1,2,3 and 5, was calculated as follows: A percentage error was determined for each student, and then the mean of all student error percentages was calculated. This is the mean which appears in this column. The data used to calculate this mean do not appear in the tables.

Table 2: EA1: control group

Category	N	no. occ.	no. cor.	no. incor.	$\bar{X}$ Number errors	$\bar{X}$ Number occurrences	$\bar{X}(\%)$	S.D.
Article	10	235	166	69	6,9	23,5	29,7	8,2
Agreement	10	319	273	46	4,6	31,9	14,7	10,1
Prepositions	10	346	295	51	5,1	34,6	15,4	5,6
Pronouns	10	378	327	51	5,1	37,8	14,5	6,9
Syntax	10	319	283	36	3,6	31,9	11,9	6,8
Present	10	205	172	33	3,3	20,5	16,8	13,3
Past	10	104	58	46	4,6	10,4	49,9	27,3

Key to the interpretation of table 2

'N' = the number of participants in the group

'no. occ.' = the number of occurrences of a grammatical item

'no. cor.' = the number of correct instances of use of a grammatical item

'no. incor.' = the number of incorrect instances of use of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}$ Number errors' = the mean number of errors per student of a grammatical item per category

' $\bar{X}$ Number occurrences' = the mean number of occurrences per student of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}(\%)$ ' = the mean percentage of errors per student (of a grammatical item per category)

'S.D.' = the standard deviation of the percentage errors

The results of EA1 indicate that students in both the experimental and control groups (tables 1 and 2) were experiencing a high percentage of errors in the use of the *past tenses*. The experimental group achieved a mean percentage of errors of 59,5 and the control group obtained a mean percentage of errors of 49,9 for the *past tenses*. These figures represent the highest mean percentage of errors for both groups. The *past tenses* appeared to pose serious problems for first-year students of English at the University of the North because of the high mean percentage of errors that were measured.

The second highest mean percentage of errors that were recorded for both groups occurred in the use of the *article system*, 37,1 and 29,7 respectively for the experimental and control groups. This is followed by a mean percentage of 20,3 in the use of the *present tenses* for the experimental group and 16,8 for the control groups. The similarity ends here as this pattern is disrupted by the results of the agreement between subject and verb,

prepositions, syntax and pronouns which differ for both groups. This is probably due to the fact that the groups are so small and that individual differences between learners can affect the calculation of the mean percentages, resulting in a different sequence of mean percentages for these items. The expected result was that EA1 for both groups would be very similar.

The mean number of occurrences of the past tenses for the experimental group is 12,4 and the control group is 10,4. The standard deviations in the experimental group for the past tenses (36,0), articles (18,0), present tenses (17,5), and agreement between subject and verb (11,0) appear to be high. The control group reflects a standard deviation of 27,3 for the past tenses, 13,3 for the present tenses, and 10,1 for agreement between subject and verb.

The results of EA1 indicate that the students are in need of remedial instruction in the use of the seven grammatical categories that are reflected above. It appears that errors in the use of the article system have a high frequency of occurrence, (10,1 and 6,9 for the experimental and control groups), but this is probably due to the fact that the article system is so often used. Indications are that the use of the past tenses, the article system, and the present tenses are problematic to both groups, as they reflect the three categories with the highest mean percentage of errors. The seven grammatical categories are further discussed in the aims and objectives of the course and the chapter on course content.

5.5 The aims and objectives of the course

Aims

The aims of the course were to:

- introduce the student to the theoretical constraints that underlie the grammatical categories of the article, agreement between subject and verb, prepositions, pronouns, syntax (word order, incomplete sentences and run-on sentences), the present tense, and the past tense;
- expose the student to grammatically correct examples of the categories that are mentioned above;
- allow the student to practise his/her grammar in these categories under the supervision of the teacher in the classroom.

Objectives

By the end of the course the student should have been able to:

- recognise any of the seven grammatical categories that were outlined in the syllabus

- reduce the number of errors in his/her written work and produce correct instances of grammar by drawing on his/her knowledge of grammar

5.6 Course contents

The remedial course is based on the findings of the research as displayed above. The results of the error analysis undertaken by the researcher indicates the way that remedial teaching has to follow, and directly account for the inclusion of these items in the remedial syllabus below. The course contents as well as the teaching methodology is included in the outline.

5.6.1 The Indefinite article: a and an

The indefinite article did not present any difficulty in teaching as it is rule-bound and was easily understood by learners of the language when this feature was introduced through formal instruction.

- * The noun acts as a determiner of which article to use in different sentence constructions, e.g.:
- * Countable nouns take *a*, or before vowels, *an*, to show that the noun is singular and that we do not refer to any particular specimen, e.g. *a car* and *an egg*.

- * Uncountable nouns generally do not take the plural form, e.g. *sugar*, but in the plural form of countable nouns the indefinite article is omitted, e.g. *a car* > *cars*.

Methodology: Students were first made aware that the article system functions according to a set of basic rules. They were taught that in instances where the noun starts with a vowel it is normally preceded by the indefinite article *an*. All other nouns that are countable and which do not refer to any particular specimens normally take *a*. The plural forms of countable nouns do not take the indefinite article, and it was pointed out at the same time that uncountable nouns generally do not take the plural form. Students were allowed enough time to practise their ability to change singular countable and uncountable nouns into the plural form, where applicable. The cloze technique was found to be particularly suitable in practising the use of the indefinite article. Students were presented with a list of nouns that began with vowels and consonants and they had to allocate either *a* or *an*.

5.6.2 The definite article

- * When nouns are defined as particular specimens or groups of their kind the definite article *the* is used e.g. *the horse(s)* with the exception of uncountable and abstract nouns when they are not defined in any way, e.g. *water is expensive*, but *the water is cold*.

* The following nouns also take the definite article:

Works of art and historical regions;
geographical names for natural waters and canals;
chains of hills and mountains;
groups of islands;
political titles of countries;
cinemas, hotels and public places;
the names of ships, special trains and aeroplanes.

Suitable examples were given with each of the categories identified above. The outlines in 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 are adapted from G.M. Spankie's book entitled *English in Use* (1986).

Methodology: Students were first made aware of the rule which states that countable nouns which can be defined as particular specimens or groups of their kind take the definite article *the*. It was also pointed out that uncountable and abstract nouns which are not defined in any way do not take the definite article. Opportunity was given to practise this structure independently from the indefinite article before students were exposed to mixed exercises containing both definite and indefinite articles. The cloze technique was used here again.

5.6.3 Agreement between subject and verb

This part of the syllabus had as its aim the formulation of sentences with the subject and verb agreeing. The different rules governing the use of the subject and corresponding verb, substantiated with a number of examples and exercises, formed the basis of this section of the course. Here are some guidelines:

- * Nouns that are connected by 'and' usually take a plural verb. Note exceptions to the rule e.g.: Boesman and Lena *is an interesting play.*
- * Phrases that follow a subject act as enlargements and are often misleading, e.g.: *The computer (with its accessories) has been stolen;* and, *The noise made by the toi-toiing students scares me.* 'Noise' in this example remains singular.
- * Collective nouns may be followed by either a singular or a plural verb, depending on the sense, e.g.: *The council has taken a decision on the matter* or *The council were unable to agree on the subject.*
- * In the cases of 'not only ... but also' and 'either ... or / neither ... nor' the verb agrees with the subject closest to it, e.g.: *Not only the dog but also its owner has taken ill* and *Either Vuzi or her parents are going to do something about it,* and *Neither Tebogo nor Thabo has anything to do with it.*

Methodology: Agreement between subject and verb is not easy to learn because of the number of rules that are involved. Students often confused the rules when they tried to decide which form of the verb to use with the subject. The simpler rules were taught first e.g. nouns that are joined by *and* usually take the plural form of the verb. The rule stating that 'collective nouns are followed by either a singular or plural verb *depending on the sense*' was introduced at a later stage when the learners had more confidence in the application of the verb to cases that are not dependable on the 'sense' of the sentence or phrase. Students practised verb allocation to gain more confidence in recognising the appropriate verb that goes with the subject.

5.6.4 Prepositions

Prepositions may be identified by what they indicate, e.g.: direction of movement, location, time, topics and subjects, materials and ingredients. Students had to complete various exercises in the use of prepositions that were moderated in the classroom. A suitable technique with which to facilitate this exercise is the 'cloze' or 'fill in the missing blanks' technique.

Methodology: There is such a multitude of prepositions that it seems impossible to teach them all at once. Students were taught how to discern between the various functions of prepositions e.g.

do they indicate direction, time or location? etc. This ability to detect the function of the preposition was practised as frequently as possible, allowing time for revision to make sure that students did not 'forget' what they already knew.

5.6.5 Pronouns

Pronouns are words which are substituted for nouns with the purpose of not having to repeat the noun too often. Students were taught how to recognise a pronoun, how to select the correct pronoun, and how to distinguish between the different forms of the pronoun, e.g. nominative forms of the pronoun are: *I, you, he, she, it, we, they*; objective forms of the pronoun are: *me, you, him, her, it, us, them*; reflexive pronouns are: *myself, yourself, itself, ourselves, themselves*.

Methodology: Students were first taught to discern between nouns and pronouns. This is a more advanced activity and was not taught at the beginning of the course. Once they were able to discern between the noun and the pronoun they were introduced to the different kinds of pronouns according to the following nomenclatures: 'nominative forms', 'objective forms', and 'reflexive pronouns'.

5.6.6 Syntax

Features of syntax that were included in the syllabus are: word order, incomplete sentences and run-on sentences. The task of teaching syntax is simplified by stating the rules and providing appropriate examples of simple and compound sentences.

* Simple Sentences:

All simple sentences consist of a subject and predicate where the subject is a noun or any word or group of words that function as a noun and the predicate is one or more words, one of which is a verb, e.g.: *The man walks to town.*

* Compound Sentences:

Compound sentences are formed by joining potentially separate sentences by co-ordinating conjunctions (and, or, nor, yet, so, but, for) or by a semi-colon, e.g.: i) *The man walks to town,* ii) *The dog walks to town.* i and ii > *The man and the dog walks to town.*

Methodology: Teaching students to write sentences that are short and meaningful was the easiest place to start. Exercises in writing simple sentences and paragraphs containing simple sentences as well as the identification of subjects and predicates helped the students to construct short, meaningful sentences. Compound sentences were practised by joining simple sentences, whilst focussing on the retention of clarity. Stu-

dents were cautioned that the length of sentences should not obscure the meaning of the sentences. They had to write shorter sentences to avoid the risk of obscuring or losing the meaning of sentences.

5.6.7 The present tenses

The summaries that are provided by Spankie (1986) were included in the course as they were clearly defined and easy to teach.

- * Present Continuous: This tense usually expresses
 - (a) what is happening at the actual moment of speaking
 - (b) what is happening over a temporary present period
 - (c) what is happening as an exception to usual custom, habit, routine

- * Present Simple: This tense generally expresses actions
 - (a) that happen again and again
 - (b) that are normal routine actions, and habitual or customary
 - (c) that are natural truths

- * Present Perfect: We use this tense
 - (a) whenever the chronologically undefined past has some effect on the present, that is to say, when there is present outcome, result, consequence or interest

(b) when an action has occupied a period which began at a previous time and includes the time of speaking. We use it to express actions which have taken place within the expired part of a period of present time and for actions which have taken place so recently that we think of them as being almost present.

* Present Perfect Continuous:

We use this tense for actions which have occupied a period of time which began in the past, includes the present and may continue after the present into the future. We also use this tense to express repeated actions in the chronologically undefined recent past (*recently, lately, during the last few days, etc.*).

Methodology: The chronological progression of time was first explained to the students in order to focus and train them in the ability to discern between the present and the past. It made good sense to start with the present continuous by asking pointed questions such as: 'What am I doing now?', 'What are you doing now?' etc. The present simple was introduced next, continuing on to the present perfect and the present perfect continuous. Enough examples of each tense were used and time was allowed for students to practise the tenses.

5.6.8 The past tenses

* Simple past: we use this tense when we wish to show:

- (a) that an action occurred *once* at a stated time in the past,
- (b) that it occurred *generally, repeatedly or continually* during a period in past time.

* Past Continuous:

When we wish to speak of an action which was in progress at a particular point or which occupied a temporary period of past time we use the Past Continuous. Note that we do not use this form to denote that the action was complete. We use it simply to show that the action was progressing.

* Past Perfect:

The Past Perfect is used to indicate what had already happened before or by a certain moment of time past. The action at that moment was the result, consequence or outcome of what had already taken place. The previous action is of no particular interest to the speaker by itself. There must be a result, consequence or outcome, either spoken or understood, to complete the significance.

* Past Perfect Continuous

We use this form of the verb when we wish to show that the action took place either *continuously* or *repeatedly* over a period of past time extending up to and usually including the defined moment.

Methodology: The simple past was used as a point of departure. Students were given enough examples and opportunity for practice before progressing on to the past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous. Each tense was accompanied by exercises which developed students' ability to distinguish between various tenses. They were also given exercises which presented them with the opportunity to compose sentences in the particular tenses.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter contains a discussion of the place of remedial instruction in course design, and the selection and grading of content. The results of the first error analysis are used as a basis on which the remedial course is structured. The aims and objectives of the course, as well as course content and methodology are also discussed in this chapter. The students in the experimental group were supplied with photocopies of the material that was discussed in class and practice was facilitated by means of exercises in applying the theoretical concepts that were taught in the classroom. It is very unfortunate that political

unrest on campus at the time of teaching contributed toward a strained and uncertain atmosphere in the classroom, resulting in the premature cessation of lectures. The total number of hours spent in the classroom amounted to eleven hours, spread over a period of two weeks.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS OF THE SECOND ERROR ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the statistical presentation of the results of EA2 as well as a discussion on each of the different categories of error. One-sided paired *t*-tests were calculated to reflect statistically significant changes ($p < 0,05$) between the mean percentages of EA1 and EA2. A comparison of EA1 and EA2 in the two-group *t*-test in this chapter will reflect the effectiveness of the remedial programme.

6.2 Results of EA2

Table 3: EA2: experimental group

Category	N	no. occ.	no. cor.	no. incor.	$\bar{X}$ Number errors	$\bar{X}$ Number occurrences	$\bar{X}(\%)$	S.D.
Article	12	279	203	75	6,3	23,2	27,1	13,0
Agreement	12	326	243	83	6,9	27,2	25,3	15,1
Prepositions	12	340	301	39	3,3	28,3	11,3	6,6
Pronouns	12	294	270	24	2,0	24,5	8,6	6,6
Syntax	12	326	317	9	,8	27,2	3,1	4,1
Present	12	211	186	25	2,1	17,6	12,6	8,7
Past	12	112	86	26	2,2	9,3	27,4	23,3

Key to the interpretation of table 3

'N' = the number of participants in the group

'no. occ.' = the number of occurrences of a grammatical item

'no. cor.' = the number of correct instances of use of a grammatical item

'no. incor.' = the number of incorrect instances of use of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}$ Number errors' = the mean number of errors per student of a grammatical item per category

' $\bar{X}$ Number occurrences' = the mean number of occurrences per student of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}(\%)$ ' = the mean percentage of errors per student (of a grammatical item per category)

'S.D.' = the standard deviation of the percentage errors

The results of EA2 for the experimental group indicate that errors in the use of the past tenses still accounted for the highest mean percentage of errors (27,4). Errors in the article system (27,1) were still high, as were errors in the use of

agreement between subject and verb (25,3). These mean percentages were followed by errors in the present tenses (12,6), prepositions (11,3), pronouns (8,6) and syntax (3,1). The standard deviations for the past tense, articles, agreement between subject and verb, and the present tenses were high as well. The mean number of errors in the article (6,3) seemed to have improved considerably when compared with the results of EA1 (10,1).

The one-sided paired t-tests reflect the calculated changes as well as the statistically significant changes ($p < 0,05$), within the experimental group. Statistically significant changes are expressed as probability values, meaning that these values indicate a less than 5% chance factor. Cohen (1987) calculated the practical significant values for one-sided paired t-tests as small ($d = 0,15$), medium ($d = 0,35$) and large ($d = 0,60$) effects.

Table 4: One-sided paired t-tests within the experimental group

Category	N	E(X-Y) (%)	D(X-Y) (%)	t	p	d
Art2-Art1	12	-10,0	10,7	-3,23	,004 *	,935
Agr2-Agr1	12	6,6	17,8	1,28	,113	
Pre2-Pre1	12	-2,8	9,2	-1,06	,155	
Pro2-Pro1	12	-2,3	6,1	-1,29	,112	
Syn2-Syn2	12	-8,5	9,5	-3,09	,005 *	,895
Pres2-Pres1	12	-7,8	19,7	-1,37	,099	
Past2-Past1	12	-32,2	29,4	-3,79	,001 *	1,098

* = ($p < 0,05$)

Key to the interpretation of table 4

'N' = the number of participants in the group

'E(X-Y) (%)' = the mean of the individual differences in errors between EA1 and EA2 expressed in a percentage value

'D(X-Y) (%)' = the standard deviation of the individual differences in errors between EA1 and EA2 expressed in a percentage value

't' = t-value for one-sided paired t-tests

'p' = probability associated with the t-value

'd' = the practical significance associated with the probability value of 't'

The paired t-tests within the *experimental* group (table 4) show a statistically significant improvement in the use of the past tenses ($p=0,001$), article ($p=0,004$), and syntax ($p=0,005$). These values are also of a large effect in practically significant terms, with the past tenses at $d=1,098$, the article at $d=,935$ and syntax at $d=,895$.

Table 5: EA2: control group

Category	N	no. occ.	no. cor.	no. incor.	$\bar{X}$ Number errors	$\bar{X}$ Number occurrences	$\bar{X}(\%)$	S.D.
Article	10	287	231	56	5,6	28,7	20,7	12,1
Agreement	10	211	166	45	4,5	21,1	19,6	13,4
Prepositions	10	334	295	39	3,9	33,4	10,5	4,7
Pronouns	10	92	62	30	3,0	9,2	34,7	30,6
Syntax	10	211	171	40	4,0	21,1	17,9	14,5
Present	10	186	162	24	1,2	6,1	13,2	14,7
Past	10	54	42	12	6,5	12,4	23,1	12,1

Key to the interpretation of table 5

'N' = the number of participants in the group

'no. occ.' = the number of occurrences of a grammatical item

'no. cor.' = the number of correct instances of use of a grammatical item

'no. incor.' = the number of incorrect instances of use of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}$ Number errors' = the mean number of errors per student of a grammatical item per category

' $\bar{X}$ Number occurrences' = the mean number of occurrences per student of a grammatical item

' $\bar{X}(\%)$ ' = the mean percentage of errors per student (of a grammatical item per category)

'S.D.' = the standard deviation of the percentage errors

The results of EA2 for the control group indicate that the category of pronouns had become the category with the highest mean percentage of errors (34,7). This was followed by errors in the past tenses (23,1) and the article system (20,7). Errors in agreement between subject and verb (19,6) preceded the categories of syntax (17,9), the present tenses (13,2), and prepositions (10,5). The standard deviations were all high, with the exception of prepositions (4,7).

The one-sided paired *t*-test reflects the changes between the means of EA1 and EA2 for the control group, as well as the statistically significant improvements that were calculated for students in this group.

Table 6: One-sided paired t-tests within the control group

Category	N	E(X-Y) (%)	D(X-Y) (%)	t	p	d
Art2-Art1	10	-9,0	15,0	-1,90	,044 *	,60
Agr2-Agr1	10	5,0	15,0	1,05	,161	
Pre2-Pre1	10	-4,9	7,3	-2,11	,031 *	,671
Pro2-Pro1	9	20,9	27,0	2,32	,024 **	
Syn2-Syn2	10	6,0	11,3	1,70	,062 **	
Pres2-Pres1	10	-3,6	4,1	-2,73	,116	
Past2-Past1	5	-32,3	31,8	-2,27	,042 *	1,016
* = (p<0,05)						
** = (p<0,05, but represents a weakening, not an improvement)						

Key to the interpretation of table 6

'N' = the number of participants in the group

'E(X-Y) (%)' = the mean of the individual differences in errors between EA1 and EA2 expressed in a percentage value

'D(X-Y) (%)' = the standard deviation of the individual differences in errors between EA1 and EA2 expressed in a percentage value

't' = t-value for one-sided paired t-tests

'p' = probability associated with the t-value

'd' = the practical significance associated with the probability value of 't'

The one-sided paired t-tests within the control group (table 6) reflect statistically significant levels of improvement in the use of prepositions ($p=0,031$), the past tenses ($p=0,042$), and articles ($p=0,044$). These results are also of practical significance, with the past tenses achieving a large practical significance of $d=1,016$ and prepositions and articles achieving practical significant readings of $d=,671$ and $d=,60$. Errors in syntax ($p=0,062$) and pronouns ($p=0,024$) appeared to be significant, but they reflected instances where students had *weakened in their use of pronouns and syntax*. When the mean of the individual differences was established ($EA2 - EA1$) the resulting answer was positive, meaning that students had made more errors in EA2 than in EA1, indicating that they had weakened. These findings will now be put into proper perspective when the experimental group and control group are compared, which will reflect the advantages (if any) that the experimental group has gained over the control group due to factors that cannot be related to chance alone.

6.3 Comparison of the improvement of the two groups

Table 7: Two-group t-test between the experimental and control groups

Category	$\bar{X}_e$	$\bar{X}_c$	Ne	Nc	t	p	d
Article	-10,0	-9,0	12	10	-,18	,855	
Agreement	6,6	5,0	12	10	,22	,823	
Preposition	-2,8	-4,9	12	10	,56	,567	
Pronoun	-2,3	20,9	12	9	-2,89	,009 *	,858
Syntax	-8,5	6,0	12	10	-3,28	,004 *	,125
Present	-7,8	-3,6	12	10	-,66	,516	
Past	-32,2	-32,3	12	5	,01	,995	

* = (p<0,05)

Key to the interpretation of table 7

' $\bar{X}_e$ ' = the mean of the individual differences between EA1 and EA2 for the experimental group expressed in a percentage value

' $\bar{X}_c$ ' = the mean of the individual differences between EA1 and EA2 for the control group expressed in a percentage value

'Ne' = the number of participants in the experimental group

'Nc' = the number of participants in the control group

't' = the t-value for the two-group t-test between the experimental and control groups

'p' = the probability associated with the t-value

'd' = the practical significance associated with the probability value of 't'

The two-group t-test between the experimental and control groups indicated a highly significant improvement with a value at the 1% level for errors in syntax ($p=0,004$) and errors in the use of the pronoun ($p=0,009$). These results indicate that a measurable level of improvement had taken place in the use of syntax and pronouns within the experimental group, over and above the progress shown by the control group. These figures only remain statistically significant in themselves. Cohen (1987) developed criteria for measuring the practically significant values in effect sizes in two-group t-tests. According to his criteria a variable is of small effect ($d=0,2$), medium effect ($d=0,5$) or large effect ($d=0,8$).

The statistically significant value for syntax, $p=0,004$, calculates out at a practically significant value of $d=0,125$, which indicates a small effect in practically significant terms. The statistically significant value for pronouns, however, $p=0,009$, translates into a practically significant value of $d=0,858$, which indicates a large effect in practically significant terms. The

results indicate that only two grammatical categories differ significantly from the remaining categories. These differences are also practically significant. This difference may be attributed to the weakening in the control group and not to the improvement in the experimental group. The author can no longer claim that there is a 99% probability that improvement has occurred due to factors other than chance.

Other categories that have shown slight improvement are: the present tenses ($p=0,516$), and the use of the article system ($p=0,855$), but these values are not statistically significant values. This means that the experimental group has shown a measurable improvement over the control group in the use of articles, pronouns, syntax and the present tenses.

A brief discussion on the types of error that have occurred within each grammatical category follows.

6.4 Errors in the use of the article system

Errors in the use of articles occur frequently and pose a problem to the language learner. This has been observed in the classroom whilst the article system was practised by the experimental group. Some students responded that they experienced difficulty with the use of articles as they did not have a similar structure in their first language. In spite of this both groups showed a statistically significant improvement ($p<,004$) and ($p<,044$) for

the experimental and control groups respectively, (tables 4 and 6), with the experimental group obtaining a highly significant improvement (less than 0,01). It is the opinion of the author that more exercises should be done in this area and that the use of the article system should improve with more exposure to the language.

One of the easiest uses of the article system that seems to have been mastered by all of the students involved, is the use of the indefinite article instead of the article. All the learners within the experimental group responded very well in this instance and no further errors could be observed. Dusková (1983:232) states that one of the most difficult spheres of error for the Czech speaker of English is that of the article: "The articles remain the last sphere in which Czech (and other Slav) speakers continue to make occasional errors even in the case of near-native command of English". This tendency appears to hold true for first-year students at University of the North who still make frequent errors in the use of articles as the means of the individual differences between EA1 and EA2 for both the experimental (10,0) and control (-9,0) groups testify (tables 4 and 6). The Nguni group of languages does not have a comparable article system and this high number of errors could perhaps be ascribed to L1 interference. Jefferies (1990:37) states that "many languages, Tshivenda being one, lack articles".

From this statement it would perhaps be accurate to state that the English Article system is difficult to learn and that it accounts for a number of errors in learner-language.

6.5 Errors in agreement between subject and verb

Errors in agreement between subject and verb appear to be problematic. The standard deviations of errors within the experimental group (17,8) (table 4) and the control group (15,0) (table 6) indicate a high likelihood of errors occurring. The one-sided paired *t*-tests seem to indicate that this category has not improved at all as is substantiated by the result of the two-group *t*-test in table 7.

6.6 Errors in the use of prepositions

The errors in prepositions appear to be relatively consistent when the results of EA2 for the experimental (table 3) and control groups (table 5) are compared. The experimental group measured a mean number of errors of 3,3 and a mean number of occurrences of 28,3 compared with the mean number of errors for the control group of 3,9 and a mean number of occurrences of 33,4. It is interesting to note, though, that the control group achieved a statistically significant improvement of ($p=0,031$) for errors in prepositions (table 6) whereas the experimental group did not.

6.7 Errors in the use of pronouns

This grammatical category has responded to remedial treatment as is evidenced by the results of the one-sided paired *t*-test within the experimental group (table 4). The control group have weakened in their use of pronouns, and this affects the validity of the finding of the two-group *t*-test (table 7) which reflects a statistically significant improvement of $p=0,009$. Errors in the use of pronouns might be ascribed to interference from the first language as indicated by Roos (1990:71) and substantiated by personal interviews with first language speakers of Northern Sotho, who have indicated that subject repetition, for instance, does indeed occur in the use of some African languages. This type of error may also be regarded as developmental in nature (cf. Robinett and Schachter, 1983; Dulay et al., 1982; Roos, 1990).

6.8 Errors in syntax

Errors in syntax (word order, run-on sentences, and incomplete sentences) appear to have been reduced after remedial treatment with a high statistically significant value of $p=0,004$ (table 7). In spite of the effect of the weakening of the control group the author would nevertheless recommend this category for remediation as it appears that certain irritating errors may be reduced in frequency, as is evidenced by the results of the one-sided *paired t*-test within the experimental group.

The most significant improvement in the use of syntax seems to be the ability of students to limit the number of errors in sentence formation with regard to run-on sentences and incomplete sentences. This statement is not supported by any scientific data, but the occurrence was apparent when marking compositions. Errors of this nature can also be alleviated by the teaching of proper punctuation as this seems to be an area that is sadly neglected by the D.E.T.. Sentences are often started without capital letters, commas are omitted and in some instances the full-stop is completely ignored, giving rise to run-on sentences. Roos (1990:67) records a 15% occurrence of error in sentence formation and a 4.9% occurrence of error in word order. The writer agrees with Roos (1990:60) in her statement that "there are indications of an ignorance of sentence boundaries among the research objects", but would like to add that this appears to be a likely area in which success may be achieved. The practically significant value in the t-test (table 7) is an indication of this.

6.9 Errors in the use of the present tenses

The experimental group (table 4) appears to have improved to within a 10% margin ($p=0,099$) of the statistically significant value $p<0,05$ in the one-way paired t-test. It is recommended that more research be done in this area to determine whether statistically significant improvements can be obtained. The standard deviation (19,7) in table 4 shows that there is still a

high probability of errors occurring in the present tense within the experimental group when compared with the control group (4,1) in table 6 which appears to have a smaller standard deviation, indicating a weaker probability of errors occurring.

6.10 Errors in the use of the past tenses

The paired t-tests of both the experimental (table 4) and control (table 6) groups indicate statistically significant improvements of $p=0,001$ and $p=0,042$ respectively, with the improvements within the experimental group ($p=0,001$) measuring at a high statistically significant value ($p<0,01$). The means of the individual differences between EA1 and EA2 in both groups (tables 4 and 6) indicate that students experienced a number of problems with the past tenses. The standard deviation similarly shows a high likelihood of the occurrence of errors in the past tenses, and this indicates that errors in the use of the past tenses are problematic.

6.11 Evaluation of the remedial course

The statistical analyses reflect the effectiveness of the remedial course. It is apparent that the only advantage that the experimental group has gained over the control group lies in the use of syntax ($p=0,004$) and pronouns ($p=0,009$) (table 7), and then they are questionable at that. The author would also like to point out that the one-way paired t-tests within the groups

indicate that statistically high significant levels of improvement were reached in the use of the article ($p=0,004$), syntax ($p=0,005$), and past tense ($p=0,001$) in the experimental group (table 4) when compared with the control group (table 6).

Upon evaluating the performance of the two groups it would appear that the experimental group has a slight advantage over the control group because of the statistically significant improvements recorded in table 7. Students in the experimental group have shown an improvement in all of the grammatical categories except in agreement between subject and verb (table 4). Students in the control group (table 6) appear to have improved only in four out of the seven categories, articles, prepositions, present and past tenses.

The remedial course suffers from a serious shortcoming in that the grading for the teaching of grammatical items has no scientific basis for its existence. Items were sequenced in the specific order as is set out in the chapter on course contents (5.6), based merely on what the researcher perceived to be a logical progression from easy grammatical items to more complex and difficult items. Indications are that formal instruction in the remedial class is partially effective (cf. 2.4.3) in that certain errors were significantly reduced, while others did not respond well to remedial instruction (cf. agreement, table 4). It remains a question whether the natural order of acquisition has a role to play in this instance and whether this is the

reason for the lack of improvement in this particular grammatical category (cf.2.3).

A statistically significant improvement in two out of seven grammatical categories expressed as a percentage calculates out at 29% in the categories that were selected for remediation. This roughly represents an improvement of 30% of the categories that were taught in the remedial class. In the teaching profession at tertiary level where disadvantaged students are involved any improvement is a blessing, and to the advantage of the learner, but the author is satisfied with the improvement that has been achieved.

Political violence on campus at the time of teaching contributed towards a strained atmosphere in the classroom and on campus in general, and the question remains whether learners were adversely affected by their environment at the time. Students appeared to take a keen interest in the teaching activities and showed a strong desire to improve their grammatical competence, but in spite of this the number of participants in the course dwindled as the course progressed. Students who did not attend all of the lectures were barred from writing compositions for EA2 as they could adversely influence the results of EA2.

More research should be done on syllabus development and the sequencing of items for remediation in the course. This would mean a further diagnostic test with the same groups to test

whether any significant long-term effect or advantage has been gained by the experimental group.

6.12 Conclusion

This chapter shows that remedial instruction appears to be effective, judging by the results of EA2 and the *t*-tests that were calculated within and between the groups. It also shows that formal instruction is an effective style for the teaching of remedial courses as an improvement of 30% has been achieved by the learners, with specific reference to the grammatical categories of pronouns and syntax (table 7). The results of the one-sided paired *t*-test (table 4) appear to indicate that it is worthwhile for the teacher of grammar to spend time remediating learner-error as six out of the seven categories responded to remedial instruction. These responses are not all at the statistically significant level, but indications are that a measurable effect can be achieved by means of remedial teaching. The author takes cognizance of the fact that students in the control group (table 6) have weakened in their use of pronouns and syntax, which might affect the validity of the statistically significant improvements of these two grammatical categories as is reflected in table 7.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the conclusion and recommendations for further research. Comments are made about the literature survey and the implications that it has for research in this field, followed by a discussion of the empirical research and the results that have emanated from this study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research in this field, including general recommendations for the development of the first-year course in the English department.

7.2 Conclusion

Research undertaken by the writer into the learning of grammar points to the fact that the learning of grammar is a complex process which involves many interrelated factors (cf. chapter 2). The teacher of the language needs to familiarize himself with the different theories and notions that exist regarding the learning of grammar, in order to facilitate effective learning. It is important to note that second language knowledge is differentiated as it involves both explicit and implicit knowledge. When the learner is able to control both his implicit and explicit knowledge of his second language he may be able to

improve in accuracy in the performance of specific linguistic features. Our understanding of the grammar acquisition process is complicated by the fact that language is not acquired in a linear or cumulative process. This understanding of the language acquisition process is important as it lies central to any approach employed by the teacher towards the teaching of grammar.

No teaching style is without criticism. The writer suggests that a combination of teaching styles should be practised by teachers of grammar in order to gain a multi-dimensional approach towards the teaching of grammar. The specific teaching situation is of cardinal importance here, as this will determine the type of approach that is to be employed by the teacher. Several approaches towards the teaching of language are possible within the notion of formal instruction. Although it seems impossible to change the order of grammar acquisition it appears that formal instruction aids the rate or success of second language acquisition in certain instances of grammar learning. The findings of the comparative error analysis between the two groups suggest that this is in fact the case.

With the recently elevated importance of grammar and language teaching it does seem that the market is ready for more research in this area of language acquisition. First-year students who have passed through the hands of the D.E.T., and who have suffered from exposure to an inferior 'Bantu education', appear to be in need of remedial education in order to bridge the gap

between the low standards that are maintained at secondary school level and the standards that are maintained at tertiary level. This study suggests that remedial teaching holds the possibility of remedying part of the problem that is outlined above.

Errors that were identified for inclusion in the remedial course, ranging from a high frequency to a low frequency, include the following: The use of the past tenses, present tenses, the article system, agreement between subject and verb, syntax, pronouns, and prepositions. The results of the empirical research appear to indicate that the grammatical categories of syntax (word order, run-on sentences, and incomplete sentences), and pronouns should be included at an early stage in the grammatical syllabus as students are responsive to remedial instruction in these instances. The results also indicate that formal instruction is effective as a teaching style for the remediation of L2 learner errors. Course design is a complex process that demands much research, exposure and testing. A course in grammar should frequently be revised and adapted in order to suit the specific needs of the learners and teachers alike.

The most frequent errors were selected for remediation and of these, errors in syntax and pronouns were statistically significantly affected by remediation (table 7). This could suggest that students are still experiencing problems with the other grammatical categories that were selected for remediation. The author has no substantiated explanation for this, but it is a

possibility that the learners in question (first-year students studying English for academic purposes at the University of the North) are still at an early stage of second language acquisition, which is the combined result of insufficient exposure to the target language and inadequate teaching which have taken place at an early stage of the second language acquisition process. The possibility that students have fossilized in the use of their L2 may also be considered here. Ellis proposes that "...once learners have obtained sufficient L2 knowledge to meet their communicative and emotional needs, they may stop learning" (1987:11).

The results indicate that the aims of this study as set out in chapter 1 have been met. Major errors occurring in the L2 of first-year students at the University of the North have been identified and used to determine the content of the remedial course. This remedial course has been implemented and tested by means of a second error analysis which confirms the hypothesis that remedial instruction in grammar contributes to the improvement of the grammatical proficiency of first-year university students taking English for academic purposes at the University of the North.

Even though the validity of the results are questionable because of the low number of participants in EA2, this study should be regarded as a pilot study for research in remedial instruction in grammar.

7.3 Recommendations for further research

a) This study is by no means extensive or comprehensive. The errors that were selected for remediation are not fully representative of the whole scope of errors that are made by first-year students taking English for academic purposes at the University of the North. It is recommended, therefore, that more errors should be selected for remediation and further research.

b) The number of participants in this study is very low and fluctuations in error frequencies do seem to have significant effects on the statistical processing of the results. Bigger groups should be tested in order to confirm the findings of this study as the results are by no means conclusive and it may also be questioned whether the groups that were used would be recognised as being representative of the class from which they were selected due to the low number of participants that have completed the remedial course, as well as the low number in the control group that have participated in writing compositions for EA2.

c) The topics that are selected for the elicitation of errors occurring in their written work should also be selected with care, as students may not have the opportunity of demonstrating their grammatical competency in certain tense structures, for instance, that may be excluded because of the limitations imposed by the nature of the topics.

d) There are several criticisms that have been made against error analysis theory and interlanguage. The author is aware that error analysis is only one way of testing students' grammatical competence, and that there are other diagnostic tests that may be applied in order to isolate weaknesses in their language usage. The non-linear or metamorphic process in which language acquisition takes place also jeopardises the position of the interlanguage theory, but it is the contention of the author that if students are tested before any teaching programme is implemented, a fairly accurate assessment of their grammatical competence may be made.

7.4 Recommendations for the Department of English at the University of the North

a) In the light of the findings of this study the author would like to suggest that the members of the department develop and establish an academic support programme or 'bridging-course' for first-year and prospective first-year students of English at the University of the North. The lack of such a course is a serious shortcoming that should be rectified in order to aid learners in their L2 competence. The samples of errors in the appendix should leave no doubt that these students are in dire need of better exposure to the language and better teaching. An academic support programme such as the one that is suggested above might just help students to manage their studies with more confidence

and might facilitate a more successful rate of language acquisition in the classroom.

b) It is also recommended that students should enjoy as much exposure to correct instances of the English language as is possible, not only in the classroom but in their social activities as well. Students should be encouraged to listen to English programmes on the radio and to read as much as possible.

c) Developing reading skills and the effect that reading has on language acquisition have not been touched upon in this study, but warrants further research as possible aids to language acquisition. The author would like to point to other possibilities for language learning that are not mentioned in this study, such as following a more integrated approach between the teaching of language and literature, and the application of stylistics to the teaching of literature in order to sensitize the learner to the use of language in as many discoursal contexts as possible. Extracts from prescribed texts could be used in the language class when teaching grammatical items and demonstrating the various discoursal contexts in which these items appear.

d) There appears to be a need to develop a grammar course for first-year students at the University of the North that will address the specific problems that these students have with regard to second language learning. This course should be frequently revised in order to keep pace with developments and syllabus changes at secondary school level that might influence it.

e) It is recommended that the grammatical categories of pronouns and syntax (word order, incomplete sentences, and run-on sentences) be specifically included in the current first-year syllabus for teaching, after more research has been done to verify the findings of this research, as there is a strong possibility that learners will be responsive to the teaching of these items.

APPENDIX

1. Examples of errors made before the implementation of remedial instruction

The examples listed below under the sub-headings are errors that were taken from the pre-test corpus of compositions prior to the implementation of the remedial programme. Only two examples of each type of error will be listed. Examples may contain instances of error in more than one constituent. Errors that are not relevant should be ignored for the purpose of this illustration. Some sentences have been shortened in order to retain clarity.

1.1 Errors in the use of articles

Omission of 'a' or 'an'

- * Even runners have chance to develop themselves.
- * They were not in hurry to begin with their duty.

Omission of 'the'

- * I was in the first coach when killers entered.
- * Three of them died while other disappeared.

'The' instead of 'a' or 'an'

- * Each and everything you wish to find in the university is also there.
- * I can challenge many people to come and receive the good education here.

'A' or 'an' instead of 'the'

- * I thank God because I escaped from a terrible massacre inside a train.
- * They only came in the coach and found that I was an only one surviving.

'A' instead of no article

- * I took my journey by a train.
- * They encourage us to learn and reach a certain goals.

'The' instead of no article

- * South Africa needs good observers, histori journalists and the others.
- * The name of my university is the University of the North.

Incorrect use of determiner

- * I expect to find new freedom after that floating of the blood in that country were stopped by the negotiations.

- * We were travelling from Pretoria to Johannesburg early in the morning to seek that employment.

'Such' instead of 'the'

- * We are ruled by the goverment of such country.

Omission of determiner

- * This is the only university allow more than 14 000 student.
- * There's a large area for residence where students are residing, and also area for academics.

1.2 Errors in verb tenses

Present instead of Present Continuous

- * I write this letter to you and tell you about the new South Africa
- * There are different kinds of courses offered depending whether you do it for the first time.

Present instead of Future or 'would' conditional

- * I was so afraid and amazed of what will happen to us

- * I took the train from Rustenburg station at about 8h00 am so that I can arrive there at 15h00

Past instead of Present

- * Black and whites are going to share one knowledge we thought no objection of the others
- * I would not travelled by train for my whole life

Present Continuous instead of Simple Present

- * It is having 14 000 students
- * A number of courses are being offered in this institution

Past Continuous instead of Simple Past

- * I was having blood all over my body though I have not been hurt
- * The woman was having a child on her back covered with a blanket

Other errors in verb tenses

- * Education will going to take an important part in the new South Africa.
- * When the gun was shoot it kill the driver of the car

Present instead of Past

- * They start shooting as if they were sweeping their floor
- * Do you know what I'm suppose to find in the new South Africa?

Past Perfect instead of Simple Past

- * They started to stone us, we had tried by all means to jumped out in the trains
- * When he was ready to stab me I have brought my stick on his head and he fell down

1.3 Other developmental errors in the verb

Errors in concord

- * What about you and me, the father and mothers of tomorrow?
- * I was travelling with one of my friend when this happened.

Wrong modal

- * One can find that one can do well

Omission of the verb

- * One gate for motor cars and the other for pedestrian crossing
- * In that university, people ought to choose any course that he or she interested of it.

1.4 Errors in sentence formation

Run-on sentences

- * There are different kinds of courses offered in this campus, i.e. English, Afrikaans, Psychology, Criminology, Biblical Studies, Education, etc. depending on whether you do it for the first time (English 100) and when you have passed it and continue with it, it will be English 200 (Eng 200).
- * Many facilities in this university such as sports, athletics, Drum Majorettes etc. are allowed and available for any student who want to take part meaning to participate with his her facility.

Incomplete sentences

- * It is very interesting one because there is more education
- * Trying this I survived

Omission of subject

- * We have various grounds where entertain ourselves
- * Have ever realised that whites and black would be living together?

Omission of object or included unnecessarily

- * I expect only one important which it can promote
- * Without it is going to be the same as people who fight the war

'That' incorrectly used

- * In that university, people ought to choose any course that he or she interested of it

'And' in initial position

- * And fun is also there for you
- * And we also use lecture rooms for reading and attending lectures

1.5 Errors in word order

- * If we are going to the parliament, all of us we are going there
- * The day I experienced, was not sure that it can be in this way things were

1.6 Errors in the use of pronouns

Errors in Pronoun agreement

- * Some people take the advantage that people who are married are one who know the real life
- * Their provide use with knowledge and references

Subject repetition

- * Football it is one of greater value
- * He tries to stab me but unfortunately he miss me and I kick him on his breast

1.7 Errors in the use of prepositions

- * Why God is so cruel for us?
- * According my own perspective I expect that my friend in new South Africa we are going to live harmonious life

2 Examples of errors made after the remedial instruction had been implemented

The examples listed below were drawn from the post-test compositions after remedial instruction based on the results of the pre-test error analysis had been implemented

2.1 The use of articles

Omission of 'a' or 'an'

- * The doctors and witch-doctors are assisting each other, to find solution in fighting this diseases
- * That is hundred percent correct because this problems are happening before ourselves

Omission of 'the'

- * Even government will be supplying us with everything we use in education
- * The police were harassing most predominant people because they were biased

'The' instead of 'a' or 'an'

- * As the result you lose weight
- * Things reach up to the point (where) blacks living on the locations got electricity

'A' or 'an' instead of 'the' (no errors)

'A' instead of no article

- * The body needs a special care to stay alive
- * To fight against this enemy is to have a safe sex

'The' instead of no article

- * There was the very great problems concerning the electricity
- * Many people view our tribal dancers the one which promote the spirit of patriotism

Incorrect use of determiner

- * I know if we can fight for our right we are going to get those
- * By doing that, we can uplift the standard of living in our country

'Such' instead of 'the' (no errors)

Omission of determiner

- * Of course it is true those who are seriously affected by this threat are dead
- * The political events last years have played a considerable size but without any progress

2.2 Verb tense

Present instead of Present Continuous

- * I write this letter to you my friend, stating what I expect to find at future universities in the new South Africa
- * I write this letter to tell you about things which I expecting to find in the universities in the new South Africa

Present instead of Future or 'would' conditional

- * I will like to tell you about my expectations in future universities in our country

Past instead of Present

- * Aids is a dangerous diseases and it is difficult to cured
- * We need to practiced and apply the democracy in our universities

Present Continuous instead of Simple Present

- * It is too dangerous because you won't see that the person whom you do sex is having aids or not
- * My friend, I am sure that you will going to understand my aim to be a librarian and I will have a good future

Past Continuous instead of Simple Past (no errors)

Other errors in verb tense

- * This are apeared in 1980's
- * Those polices of separation development base on the social sphere political economical

Present instead of Past

- * In 1980's things are changes
- * Even our doctors and experience nurses even scientist from abroad failed to cure such disease

Past Perfect instead of Simple Past

- * Even the children who are not knew what they done and what had happened are killed
- * All is just because of poltical situations which was taken place

2.3 Other developmental errors in the verb

Errors in Concord

- * Others lost their propeties such as house as it was burned down
- * There was the very great problems concerning the electricity

Wrong modal (no errors)

Omission of the verb

- * I think you'll also allowed to drive a train or an aeroplane
- * There is health centre, where students who sick is going to asks some medicines

2.4 Errors in sentence formation

Run-on sentences

- * Contemporarily there is no longer exiles in the country lack of security and economic problem are part of this but probably they are not yet solved
- * We play with those who want to play we are not choose any culture because is our university not some other culture's university

Incomplete sentences

- * The more organisation established
- * There are many activities being held in the university, e.g. volley ball, foot ball, basket ball, tennis and to mention

Omission of subject

- * My friend I am telling you the honest truth that we going to get free bursaries
- * The people were imprisoned for the mere fact that they the truth about the system of apartheid

Omission of object or included unnecessarily

- * My university residence is one residence which is full of many people with different cultures and languages
- * Pass regards to all at home

'That' incorrectly used (no errors)

'And' in initial position (no errors)

2.5 Errors in word order

- * The killing of the people are more
- * I think the system of apartheid will be no longer in operation in future

2.6 Errors in the use of prepositions

- * After the released student were active of fighting equal education for all freedom was the most important fact that black man want
- * The O.A.U. imposed sanction in South Africa

2.7 Errors in the use of pronouns

Errors in pronoun agreement

- * The arrestment of the political prisoners also led to current situation in the country, because people were protesting

against the government and all those were protesting were arrested.

* They were many people who were arrested by the state

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ABSTRACT

This mini-dissertation identifies the grammatical categories in which first-year students of English as a second language at the University of the North make errors. The purpose of this identification is to design a remedial syllabus that is based on the results of diagnostic tests that are implemented early in the academic year. This syllabus will test the hypothesis that first-year university students taking English for academic purposes at the University of the North will improve as a result of the implementation of remedial teaching in grammar.

The learning and teaching of grammar is discussed with specific reference to various models of language learning and teaching, leading on to a discussion investigating the need for remedial instruction at tertiary level. The use of error analysis in remedial instruction as a diagnostic test leads on to a discussion of the empirical research and the results of the error analysis which indicate the route that remedial instruction must take. An outline of the remedial syllabus is presented as well as a discussion of the results of the error analysis implemented after remediation and the effectiveness of formal instruction. The evaluation of the syllabus and remedial teaching in grammar lead to recommendations for English students at the University of the North. An appendix containing examples of errors made by students both before and after remediation takes place concludes this study.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie skripsie identifiseer die grammatikale kategorieë waarin eerstejaar studente aan die Universiteit van die Noorde fouteer. Die doel van hierdie identifikasie is om 'n remediërende sillabus daar te stel wat op die resultate van diagnostiese toetse geskoei is. Hierdie sillabus toets die hipotese dat eerstejaar studente wat Engels as 'n akademiese vak aan die Universiteit van die Noorde neem, 'n verbetering toon as gevolg van die implimentering van remediërende onderrig.

Verskeie modelle rakende die aanleer en onderrig van grammatika word genoem en in die algemeen bespreek, asook die behoefte aan remediërende onderrig in grammatika op tersiêre vlak. Die gebruik van foute-analise as 'n diagnostiese toets in remediërende onderrig gee aanleiding tot 'n bespreking oor empiriese navorsing en die resultate van die foute-analise wat die weg aandui wat remediërende onderrig moet neem. Die beskrywing van die remediërende sillabus word gevolg deur 'n bespreking rakende die resultate van die foute-analise wat gedoen is na die implimentering van remediërende onderrig. Aanbevelings van 'n algemene aard, asook spesifieke aanbevelings, word gemaak vir studente wat Engels neem aan die Universiteit van die Noorde, nadat die sillabus en remediërende onderrig geëvalueer is. 'n Bylaag wat foute bevat wat deur die studente gemaak is voor en na remediërende onderrig sluit hierdie studie af.