Accuracy and Fluency Revisited

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The status of grammar-focused teaching (or as it is currently referred to, *form-focused instruction,* see Doughty & Williams, 1998) has undergone a major reassessment in the past 25 years. The advent of communicative language teaching ostensibly saw the demise of grammar-based instruction: Grammatical syllabi were superseded by communicative ones based on functions or tasks, grammar-based methodologies such as the Presentation-Practice-Production (P-P-P) lesson format underlying the situational approach gave way to function and skill-based teaching, and accuracy activities such as drills and grammar practice were replaced by fluency activities based on interactive small group work. This led to the emergence of a *fluency-first pedagogy* (Brumfit, 1979) in which priority is given to providing opportunities for information sharing and negotiation of meaning in the classroom, and where students' grammar needs are determined on the basis of their performance on fluency tasks rather predetermined by a grammatical syllabus. The present chapter examines the issue of the level of language often used by learners during fluency work and reviews approaches to addressing this problem within a communicative methodology.

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FROM GRAMMAR-FOCUSED TO TASK-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION

The movement away from grammar-focused instruction has been supported by the findings of second language acquisition research. Skehan (1996a, p. 19) observes, "The underlying theory for a P-P-P approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology."

A core component of fluency-based pedagogy is task work. Nunan (1989, p. 10) offers this definition: "the communicative task [is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focussed on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right."

While carrying out communicative tasks, learners are said to receive comprehensible input and modified output, processes believed central to second language acquisition and that ultimately lead to the development of both linguistic and communicative competence (Pica et al., 1989). The belief that successful language learning depends on immersing students in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication is at the heart of much current thinking about language teaching and has lead to a proliferation of teaching materials built around this concept, such as discussion-based materials, communication games, simulations, role-plays, and other group or pair-work activities. Skehan (1996 p. 17) comments optimistically, "the research strand of SLA now underpins neatly the range of classroom activities imaginatively devised by practitioners of CLT."

The differences between traditional grammar-focused activities and communicative task work can be summarized as as in Table 3–1 (Brumfit, 1979; Ellis, 1994; Lubelska & Mathews, 1997; Skehan, 1996a; Tarone, 1983).

In advocating the use of task work in language teaching the assumption is that their use will help learners develop not only communicative skills but also an acceptable standard of linguistic performance. Task work is not intended to promote development of a nonstandard form of English but is seen as part of the process by which linguistic and communicative competence are developed. Skehan (1996a) distinguishes between strong and weak forms of a task-based approach. A strong form sees tasks as the basic unit of teaching and drives the acquisition process. A weak form sees tasks as a vital part of language instruction but is embedded in a more complex pedagogical context. Tasks are necessary, but may be preceded by focused

TABLE 3.1
Summary of Grammar- and Task-Focused Activities

Grammar-Focused Activities
Reflect typical classroom use of language
Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
Produce language for display (i.e., as evidence of learning)
Call on explicit knowledge
Elicit a careful (monitored) speech style
Reflect controlled performance
Practice language out of context
Practice small samples of language
Do not require real authentic communication
Task-Focused Activities
Reflect natural language use
Call on implicit knowledge
Elicit a vernacular speech style
Reflect automatic performance
Require the use of improvising, paraphrasing, repair, and reorganization
Produce language that is not always predictable
Allow students to select the language they use
Require real communication

instruction, and after use, may be followed by focused instruction that is contingent on task performance (Skehan, 1996a, p. 39).

But how is an acceptable level of linguistic performance achieved during task work? The strong form of task-based teaching suggests that form will largely look after itself with incidental support from the teacher. Grammar has a mediating role, rather than serving as an end in itself (Thornbury, 1998, p. 112), something that is said to empower both teachers and learners. "The teacher and the learner have a remarkable degree of flexibility, for they are presented with a set of general learning objectives and problem-solving tasks, and not a list of specific linguistic items" (Kumaravadivelu, 1993, p. 99). As students carry out communicative tasks they engage in the process of negotiation of meaning, employing strategies such as comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests. These strategies lead to a gradual modification of learners' language output, which over time takes on more and more target-like features.

SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT TASK WORK

Despite the claims made for task work and the positive effects of fluency activities on classroom motivation, interest level, and use of authentic language, a number of concerns remain. One relates to claims made for mod-

ification of the learner's linguistic output through the process of negotiation of meaning. In a careful reexamination of negotiation of meaning, Foster (1998) studied intermediate English as a foreign language (EFL) students completing information-gap tasks in dyads and small groups. She found little evidence for negotiated interaction and modified utterances and concludes that "contrary to much SLA theorising, negotiating for meaning is not a strategy that language learners are predisposed to employ when they encounter gaps in their understanding" (p. 1) (see also Musumeci, 1996, for similar findings).

Another concern is the effect of extensive task-work activities on the development of linguistic competence. What is often observed in language classrooms during fluency work is communication marked by low levels of linguistic accuracy. Higgs and Clifford (1982), for example, reporting experience with foreign language teaching programs at the Defence Language Institute, observed:

> In programs that have as curricular goals an early emphasis on unstructured communication activities—minimising, or excluding entirely, considerations of grammatical accuracy—it is possible in a fairly short time . . . to provide students with a relatively large vocabulary and a high degree of fluency. . . . These same data suggest that the premature immersion of a student into an unstructured or "free" conversational setting before certain fundamental linguistic structures are more or less in place is not done without cost. There appears to be a real danger of leading students too rapidly into the "creative aspects of language use", in that if successful communication is encouraged and rewarded for its own sake, the effect seems to be one of rewarding at the same time the incorrect communication strategies seized upon in attempting to deal with the communication strategies presented. (p. 78)

This is the issue of the grammar gap in task work referred to in the title of this chapter. The grammar-gap problem has also been identified by Swain and her colleagues (1988) in Toronto, who have studied the acquisition of French by English-speaking students in French immersion classes. It was found that in spite of the input-rich communicatively oriented classrooms the students participated in, the students did not develop native-like proficiency in French. Although they are fairly well able to get their meanings across in French, even at intermediate and higher grade levels, they often do so with nontarget-like morphology, syntax, and discourse patterns. (pp. 5–6).

An example of the quality of language used by students during task work is seen in the following example, observed during a role-play task in an EFL secondary school English lesson (Lubelski & Mathews, 1997). One student is playing the role of a doctor and the other a patient, and they are discussing a health problem.

Speaker 1: I'm thirty-four . . . thirty-five.
Speaker 2: Thirty . . . five?
Speaker 1: Five.
Speaker 2: Problem?
Speaker 1: I have . . . a pain in my throat.
Speaker 2: [In Spanish: What do you have?]
Speaker 1: A pain.
Speaker 2: [In Spanish. What's that?]
Speaker 1: [In Spanish: A pain.] A pain.
Speaker 2: Ah, pain.
Speaker 1: Yes, and it makes problem to me when I . . . swallow.
Speaker 2: When do you have . . . ?
Speaker 1: Since yesterday morning.
Speaker 2: [In Spanish: No, I mean, where do you have the pain?] It has a pain in . . . ?
Speaker 1: In my throat.
Speaker 2: Ah. Let it . . . getting, er . . . worse. It can be, er . . . very serious problem and you are, you will, go to New York to operate, so . . . operation, er . . . the seventh, the 27th, er May. And treatment, you can't eat, er, big meal.
Speaker 1: Big meal, I er, . . . I don't know? Fish?
Speaker 2: Fish you have to eat, er fish, for example.

This example illustrates the point made by Higgs and Clifford (1982, p. 61) that in task work "communicative competence is [often used as] a term for communication *in spite of* language, rather than communication *through* language." Skehan suggests that the level of communication often observed during task work results from students relying on a lexicalized system of communication that is heavily dependent on vocabulary and memorized chunks of language as well as both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to get meanings across. Accurate use of grammar or phonology is not necessary in such cases. In the example above, for example, one student avoids asking (or does not know how to ask), "What is your problem?" and simply says, "Problem?" Instead of saying, "How long have you had the problem" the students asks, "When do you have . . . ?" Instead of negotiating for the intended question the second student jumps straight in with the expected answer: "Since yesterday morning." There is no recognition of the inappropriateness of "*it makes problem to me when I . . . swallow.*" Skehan (1996a, p. 21) comments:

> This [task-based] approach places a premium on communication strategies linked to lexicalized communication. These strategies provide an effective incentive for learners to make best use of the language they already have. But they do not encourage a focus on form. They do not provide an incentive for structural change towards an interlanguage system with greater complexity. The advantages of such an approach are greater fluency and the capacity to solve communication problems. But these advantages may be bought at too high a price if it compromises continued language growth and interlanguage development. Such learners, in other words, may rely on prefabricated chunks to solve their communication problems. But such solutions do not lead them to longer-term progress, even though they do lead to resourcefulness in solving problems.

This poses the central dilemma of communicative language teaching, namely, how can a communicative orientation to teaching be reconciled with the need to ensure learners achieve acceptable levels of grammatical accuracy? The answer to this question depends on an understanding of the processes of second language learning.

GRAMMAR IN RELATION TO SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESSES

Drawing on VanPatten (1993), Ellis (1994), Skehan (1996a) and others, five stages of the learning process will be distinguished here in order to arrive at a rationale for grammar-focused instruction in teaching and teaching materials: input, intake, acquisition, access, output.

A Model of Second Language Learning and Use

I	II	III	IV	V
Input ——	Intake ——	Acquisition ——	Access ——	Output

I. Input

Input refers to language sources that are used to initiate the language learning process. Textbooks and commercial materials, teacher-made materials, and teacher-initiated classroom discourse all serve as input sources in language classes. Traditionally, teaching materials were planned around or included an explicit linguistic syllabus on the assumption that this determined the learner's acquisition of the target language. Some theorists see no need for any such syllabus, arguing that a syllabus must be meaning-based and that grammar needs can be dealt with incidentally. Krashen (1985) represents this extreme position, arguing that exposure to comprehensible target language input is in itself sufficient to

trigger acquisition. Others would accept the inclusion of some form of a linguistic syllabus, not on the grounds that it represents an acquisition sequence but that it provides a way of simplifying the input. Grammatical simplification is seen as essential in providing input at an appropriate level of difficulty.

At the input stage in language learning an attempt may be made to focus learners' attention on particular linguistic features of the input (sometimes known as "input enhancement") by such means as:

Simplification of input: the language corpus the learners are exposed to (both via textbooks and the teacher's discourse) may contain a restricted set of tenses and structures.

Frequency of exposure: a target form may occur frequently within a source text (such as when a text is written to bring in several occurrences of the past tense or the past continuous).

Explicit instruction: a target form may be presented formally together with information about how it is used, followed by practice.

Implicit instruction: students' attention may be drawn to a target form, and they may have to induce the rule or system underlying its use.

Consciousness raising: activities are provided to make learners aware of certain linguistic features in the input, without necessarily requiring them to produce the features.

From a current perspective (unlike earlier perspectives in which some of these processes were assumed to result in learning) none of these approaches to providing a grammatical focus at the input stage are in themselves assumed to bring about learning; however, they are intended to facilitate the next stage in the learning process, intake.

II. Intake

VanPatten (1993, p. 436) defines intake as "that subset of the input that is comprehended and attended to in some way. It contains the linguistic 'data' that are made available for acquisition." Some portion of the input is assumed to remain in long-term memory and form the data on which the processes of language acquisition are engaged. Factors thought to affect how items pass from input to intake include the following:

Complexity: items should be at an appropriate level of difficulty.

Saliency: items must be noticed or attended to in some way.

Frequency: items must be experienced with sufficient frequency.

Need: the item must fulfill a communicative need.

Generally speaking, we can assume frequency of occurrence in the language learning corpus (the input) to effect intake, but not always. The reason that some grammatical items such as articles, third-person *s*, and certain tense and auxiliary forms are acquired late (or never acquired) may be related to the fact that such forms have low saliency (they are not noticed) or low communicative need (they have no effect on communication), despite their high frequency of occurrence.

III. Acquisition

This refers to the processes by which the learner incorporates new learning item into his or her developing system or interlanguage. SLA researchers have stressed the need for more powerful theories of acquisition than the simplistic "imprinting through practice" theories of the P-P-P approach, and a number of different learning theories are currently available (Ellis, 1994). SLA research has demonstrated that learning is not a mirror image of teaching. Learners do not pass from a state of not knowing a particular target structure to a state of knowing and using it accurately. A number of processes appear to be involved:

Noticing: learners need to recognize differences between forms they are using and target-like forms. A learner will not be motivated to try out a new linguistic structure if he or she is not aware of the differences between his or her current interlanguage system and the target language system (Schmidt, 1990). Schmidt and Frota (1986) found that the new forms a learner incorporated into speech were generally those that had been noticed in the speech people addressed to the learner. Forms that were present but not noticed were not used. However, not all acquisition is prompted by conscious awareness of linguistic features. Unconscious discovery of rules appears also to be involved.

Discovering rules: according to the theory of Universal Grammar (UG), learning also involves identification of the grammatical variables that operate in the target language and account for the specific linguistic characteristics of that language, such as the rules underlying target language word order, clause patterns, nominal groups, phrase structures, and so forth. Currently some researchers believe learners have an innate understanding of grammatical variables. UG theory suggests that "learners are learning aspects of grammar that we are not teaching them" and that "they have unconscious knowledge of grammar systems which we, as teachers, are often unaware of" (Shortall, 1996, p. 38). DeKeyser adds a further clarification of this position (1998):

> If a structure is part of UG, and UG is accessible to the second language learner, then all that is needed is sufficient input to trigger acquisition, unless L2 is a subset of L1. In the latter case, negative evidence is required. . . . If a structure is not part of UG or cannot be acquired without negative evidence [information about what is not possible in the language] then a rather strong variant of focus on form, including rule teaching and error correction, will be required. (p. 43)

Accommodation and restructuring: VanPatten (1993, p. 437) describes these processes as:

> those that mediate the incorporation of intake into the developing system. Since the internalisation of intake is not a mere accumulation of discrete bits of data, data have to "fit in" in some way and sometimes the accommodation of a particular set of data causes changes in the rest of the system. In some cases, the data may not fit in at all and are not accommodated by the system. They simply do not make it into the long-term store.

Skehan (1996a, p. 19) sees restructuring as involving "a willingness and capacity, on the part of the learner, to reorganise their own underlying and developing language system, to frame and try out new hypotheses and then to act upon the feedback which is received from such experimentation." Restructuring is currently viewed as central to the process of interlanguage development, accounting for the way in which learners' grammatical systems show evidence of ongoing revision and expansion rather than progression in a simple linear order.

Experimentation: much of the learner's output in the target language can be described as the result of experimentation as the learner forms hypotheses about the target language and tests them out. The learner draws on whatever has been acquired and uses it in a tentative and uncertain way, constructing what the learner hopes will be target-like utterances. This is seen in much of the discourse produced by the learners in the role-play task cited above. Researchers stress that the trying out of new language forms is essential to the acquisition process and that acquisition is most likely to occur in contexts "where the learner needs to produce output which the current interlanguage system cannot handle . . . [and so] . . . pushes the limits of the interlanguage system to handle that output" (Tarone & Liu, 1995, pp. 120, 121, cited in Swain, 1998, p. 11).

IV. Access

Access refers to the learner's ability to draw on his or her interlanguage system during communication. The context in which the learner is using the language as well as its purpose (in casual conversation, in a formal or

public setting, to tell a story, or give instructions) may affect the extent to which the learner is successful in calling up aspects of the acquired system: ". . . [A]ccess involves making use of the developing system to create output" (Skehan (1966a, p. 47). Skehan refers to this process as "fluency," which concerns "the learner's capacity to mobilise an interlanguage system to communicate meanings in real time." Access may be "totally, partially, or not at all successful, depending on task demand, previous experience (practice) and other factors" (VanPatten, 1993, p. 436). In other words, it may be much easier in some circumstances for the learners to use aspects of the acquired system than in others.

V. Output

Finally, output refers to the observed results of the learners' efforts. Although some theorists have proposed that output (active use of the language resulting in the production of language) is not essential to acquisition—that is, input is sufficient (e.g., Krashen, 1985). Others (e.g., Swain) have proposed that output is essential to acquisition. However, output is more likely to facilitate acquisition when the learners are "pushed," that is, required to reshape their utterances and to use the target language more coherently and accurately. This is confirmed by examples of second language users who speak a language relatively fluently but using a very restricted lexicon and syntax and who show no evidence of improvement in accuracy over time (e.g., taxi drivers and vendors in EFL settings), since the restricted purposes for which they use the language do not push them to expand or restructure their linguistic resources (Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins, 1990; Schmidt, 1983).

ADDRESSING GRAMMAR WITHIN TASK WORK

As the model of second language learning above illustrates, a focus on grammar can be addressed at several different stages of the teaching/learning process, that is, at the stages of Input, Intake, Acquisition, Access, or Output. Skehan proposes the following principles as the basis of a methodology that includes a focus on form as part of an overall communicative approach to teaching:

- Exposure to language at an appropriate level of difficulty
- Engagement in meaning-focused interaction in the language
- Opportunities for learners to notice or attend to linguistic form while using the language
- Opportunities to expand the language resources learners use (both lexical and syntactic) over time

The remaining section of this chapter examines how this can be attempted during the design or implementation phases of classroom tasks.

There are potentially three points at which a focus on grammar can be provided in task work—prior to the task, during the task, and after the task. These will be illustrated with general examples and also with reference to the design of a typical fluency activity—a role-play task. The role-play example is from Richards and Hull (1986), which contains a set of role-play activities that are structured to provide language support at the three intervention points described here.

Addressing Accuracy Prior to the Task

Pretask activities have two goals: (1) to provide language support that can be used in completing a task and (2) to clarify the nature of the task so that students can give less attention to procedural aspects of the task and hence monitor the linguistic accuracy of their performance while carrying out a task. Skehan notes (1996b, p. 53), "Pre-task activities can aim to teach, or mobilise, or make salient language which will be relevant to task performance." This can be accomplished in the following ways.

1. By preteaching certain linguistic forms that can be used while completing a task. For example, prior to a role-play task that practices "calling an apartment owner to discuss renting an apartment" in Richards and Hull (1986), students first read ads for apartments and learn key vocabulary they will use in a role play. They also listen to and practice a dialog in which a prospective tenant calls an apartment owner for information. The dialog serves both to display different questioning strategies as well as model the kind of task the students will perform. Other pretask activities used in the role-plays include brainstorming activities, vocabulary classification tasks, and prediction tasks, all of which serve to generate both language awareness and develop schemata relevant to a task.

2. By reducing the cognitive complexity of the task. If a task is difficult to carry out, learners' attention may be diverted to the structure and management of the task, leaving little opportunity for them to monitor the language they use on the task. One way of reducing the cognitive complexity of a task is to provide students with a chance for prior rehearsal. This is intended to "ease the processing load that learners will encounter when actually doing a task" (Skehan 1996b, p. 4). This could be achieved by watching a video or listening to a cassette of learners doing a task similar to the target task, or could consist of a simplified version of a task similar to the one the learners will carry out. Dialog work prior to carrying out the role-play noted above also serves a similar function.

3. By giving time to plan the task. Time allocated to planning prior to carrying out a task can likewise provide learners with schema, vocabulary,

and language forms that they can call on while completing the task. Planning activities include vocabulary-generating activities such as word classification and organization, information generating activities such as brainstorming, or strategy activities in which learners consider a range of strategies to consider in solving a problem, discuss their pros and cons, and then select one they will apply to the task. In Richards and Hull (1986) some of the planning activities include generating a set of questions that could be asked during an interview, prior to role-playing an interview. Ellis (1987) found that the availability of planning time affects the accuracy with which the learners' use some target language forms but only if planning time is used to focus on form (rather than, say, organization of information).

Addressing Accuracy During the Task

A focus on form can be facilitated during the completion of a task by choosing how the task is to be carried out. The way a task is implemented can determine whether it is carried out fluently and with an acceptable level of linguistic performance, or disfluently with excessive dependence on communication strategies, employment of lexical rather than grammaticalized discourse, and with overuse of ellipsis and nonlinguistic resources. Task implementation factors include the following:

Participation: whether the task is completed individually or with other learners

Procedures: the number of procedures involved in completing the task

Resources: the materials and other resources provided for the learners to use while completing the task

Order: the sequencing of a task in relation to previous tasks

Product: the outcome or outcomes students produce, such as a written product or an oral one

The effect of participation arrangement on task performance has been noted by Brown et al., 1984 (cited in Skehan, 1996a, p. 26): "The greater the number of participants there are in a task the greater the pressure on those transacting a task, and the greater the likelihood that fluency will predominate as a goal over accuracy and complexity/restructuring."

Foster found that dyads rather than groups "coupled with the obligation to exchange information, was the 'best' for language production, negotiations and modified output" (1988, p. 18).

Resources students work from can also affect task performance. The use of pictures in a storytelling task might provide an accessible framework or

schema for the story, clarifying such elements as setting, characters, events, outcomes, and so on, giving the learners more opportunity to focus their planning or performance on other dimensions of the task. Or in conducting a survey task, the design or the resources students use could have a crucial impact on the appropriatness of the language used in carrying out the task. If the survey form or questionnaire the students use provides models of the types of questions they should ask, it may result in a better level of language use during questioning and make other aspects of the task easier to manage, since less planning will need to be devoted to formulating appropriate questions. In the role plays discussed earlier (Richards & Hull, 1986), considerable refinement was needed of the cue sheets students used in carrying out their role plays before a format was found that gave partial language support and guided but did not dominate students' improvisations during each activity.

Procedures used in completing a task can also be used to influence language output. A task that is divided into several shorter subtasks may be more manageable than one without such a structure allowing students to deal with one section of the task at a time. For example, the procedures used in the role-play activities above consisted of

1. preparatory activity designed to provide schema, vocabulary, and language
2. dialog listening task, to model shorter version of target task
3. dialog practice task, to provide further clarification of task
4. first practice, using role-play cues
5. follow-up listening
6. second role-play practice

The order of a task in relation to other tasks may influence use of target structures. For example, if students are to carry out a task that requires the use of sequence markers, a prior activity that explains sequence markers and models how they are used may result in more frequent use of sequence markers during the performance of the target task (see Swain, 1985, 1988).

The product focus of a task will also influence the extent to which students have an opportunity to attend to linguistic form. A task may be completed orally, it may be recorded, or may have to be written. In each case different opportunities for language awareness are involved. Swain (1988) describes how tasks with a written product provide an opportunity for students to focus on form.

> Students, working together in pairs, are each given a different set of numbered pictures that tell a story. Together the pair of students must jointly construct the story line. After they have worked out what the story is, they write it

> down. In doing so, students encounter linguistic problems they need to solve to continue with the task. These problems include how best to say what they want to say; problems of lexical choice; which morphological endings to use; the best syntactic structures to use; and problems about the language need to sequence the story correctly. These problems arise as the students try to "make meaning," that is, as they construct and write out the story, as they understand it. And as they encounter these linguistic problems, they focus on linguistic form—the form that is needed to express the meaning in the way they want to convey it. (p. 3)

Learners can also record their performance of a task and then listen to it and identify aspects of their performance that require modification.

By Addressing Accuracy After the Task

Grammatical appropriateness can also be addressed after a task has been completed (see Willis, 1996). Activities of this type include the following:

Public performance: after completing a task in small groups, students now carry out the task in front of the class or another group. This can have the effect of prompting them to perform the task at a more complex linguistic level. Aspects of their performance that were not initially in focus during in-group performance can become conscious, as there is an increased capacity for self-monitoring during a public performance of a task.

Repeat performance: the same activity might be repeated with some elements modified, such as the amount of time available. Nation (1990), for example, reports improvements in fluency, control of content, and to a lesser extent, accuracy when learners repeated an oral task under time constraints, and argues that this is a way of bringing about long-term improvement in both fluency and, to some extent, accuracy.

Other performance: students might hear more advanced learners (or even native speakers) completing the same task, and focus on some of the linguistic and communicative resources employed in the process (e.g., Richards, 1985).

CONCLUSION

While providing an appealing alternative to grammar-based teaching, the use of communicative language tasks plus ad hoc intervention by the teacher to provide corrective feedback on errors that arise during task completion may not be sufficient to achieve acceptable levels of grammatical accuracy in second language learning. Hence the need to consider how a

greater focus on grammatical form can be achieved during the process of designing and using tasks. Skehan (1996a) sees this as involving "a constant cycle of analysis and synthesis: . . . achieved by manipulating the focus of attention of the learners . . . and there should be a balanced development towards the three goals of restructuring, accuracy, and fluency." In this chapter I have attempted to provide a brief overview of how this can be attempted through advocating what Skehan terms a weak form of a task-based approach. However, a number of substantive issues remain.

To begin with, we need a clear understanding of the goals of grammar-focused intervention, since as we have seen, a number of different processes are involved in SLA as well as various stages in the learning and teaching process. DeKeyser (1998, p. 62) points out that teaching may attempt to address different stages in the learning process: "instilling knowledge about rules, turning this knowledge into something that is qualitatively different through practice, or automatizing such knowledge further in the sense that it can be done faster with fewer errors and less mental effort." In addition, we need a better understanding of which target language structures are most amenable to any of the forms of intervention described above, and which are not. Some things can be worked out implicitly whereas others may benefit from explicit instruction. For example, learning how to use the past tense appropriately during narrative tasks presumably involves different kinds of problems from mastery of the article system. And although it has been assumed that focus on grammar should always be an integral part of a communicative task and not a discrete activity isolated from meaningful communication, this claim requires much further study, since it will depend on which stage in the acquisition process is being targeted. Because of the importance of linguistic form in second language communication and the amount of attention currently being given to the role of form-focused instruction in language teaching, we can expect these issues to continue to be at the forefront of applied linguistic theory and research for the foreseeable future.

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4

Ten Criteria for a Spoken Grammar[1]

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INTRODUCTION

In recent articles and books, we have reported some of the findings of our research into the grammatical characteristics of the five-million-word CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) spoken corpus (Carter & McCarthy, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Carter, Hughes, & McCarthy, 1998; Hughs & McCarthy, 1998; McCarthy, 1998). Although these works have tended to focus on specific aspects of spoken grammars, a common thread unites them: the belief that spoken grammars have uniquely special qualities that distinguish them from written ones, wherever we look in our corpus, at whatever level of grammatical category. In our work, too, we have expressed the view that language pedagogy that claims to support the teaching and learning of speaking skills does itself a disservice if it ignores what we know about the spoken language. Whatever else may be the result of imaginative methodologies for eliciting spoken language in the second-language classroom, there can be little hope for a natural spoken output on the part of language learners if the input is stubbornly rooted in models that owe their origin and shape to the written language. Even much corpus-based grammatical insight (for example, the otherwise excellent

[1]The editors would like to thank Cambridge University Press for permission to cite examples from their corpus.