CHAPTER TWO

GRAMMAR AS A MAJOR COMPONENT OF LANGUAGE STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

Among the components of language structure practised during the process of learning a foreign language, grammar is inherent to the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, most learners assert that the difficulty is more significant in the writing component because of the large number of errors easily identified in this skill, which is required in most of the topics taught at the University such as written expression, linguistics, literature, civilization and psychology. Most of the students are unable to use the English forms appropriately; it is evident that the basic formation rules of English have not been internalised by these students. Therefore, they do not constitute a part of their linguistic competence. This may be due to the previous teaching-learning, including intralingual interference, to the native language interference or to other factors worth investigating in another research.

If we refer to the history of foreign language teaching, we find that specialists in the field hold different views concerning the teaching of grammar, and whether to teach it deductively or inductively. Their views are generally influenced by the kind of psychology prevailing in each period of time, the theories concerning the nature of language and those concerning learning as well as learners' needs. Their insights have mainly come from the behaviourist and cognitive psychology, both of which gave rise to associated methodologies such as the Audio-Lingual Method and the Cognitive-Code Learning Method. Besides, structuralism, functionalism and transformational generative grammar had a great effect on syllabus design. Many specialists have recently rejected the need to teach grammar. Among them is Krashen (1981) who claims that:

> " *Second language teaching should focus on encouraging acquisition, on providing input that stimulates the subconscious language acquisition potential all normal human beings have.*

This does not mean, however, that there is no room at all for conscious learning…Conscious learning does have a role, but it is no longer an actor leader in the play".

<div align="right">(P. 6)</div>

And the same author adds:

" However, there is a place for grammar, or the conscious learning of rules of a language. Its major role is in the use of the Monitor, which allows Monitor users to produce more correct output when they are given the right conditions, as in some planned speech or writing.

<div align="right">(p.7)</div>

However, it seems that many applied linguists are now reacting against Krashen and many others who de-emphasize accuracy. This means that grammar teaching is making a come back. For example, Leech (Forum July, 1995) asserts that: *"Teaching grammar is not necessarily non-communicative and learning rules can be related to their communicative potential" . (p.21)*

The questions which arise concerning the significant number of errors made by learners in grammar are : Where does the problem lie? In the approaches adopted in our schools? In the methods and techniques used? In the lack of training of teachers in the applied approach? Is it due to other factors related to the socio-cultural environment? To the native language interference or to intralingual interference. My study is not likely to answer all these questions, but to investigate the two last ones as significant contributory factors. To answer such questions, I first need to define grammar, give an account of linguistic description and the different approaches to learning. Moreover, I shall present an overview of the most widely used approaches and methods in teaching a foreign language.

II.1. Definition of Grammar

Grammar is one of the different levels of analysis recognized in studying how a language works in addition to phonology and semantics. It is an analysis of the structure of language, either encountered in a corpus of speech or writing. Penny Ur (1996) defined grammar as " *Grammar may be roughly defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words (or bits of words) in order to form longer units of meaning*". (p. 7)

She adds (ibid) :

> " *There is a set of rules which governs how units of meaning may be constructed in any language: we may say a learner who knows grammar is one who has mastered and can apply these rules to express him or herself in what would be considered as acceptable forms*".

In fact, there is no doubt that a knowledge of grammar – implicit or explicit – is essential for the mastery of a language: you cannot use words unless you know how they should be put together. But is it not better for learners to absorb the rules intuitively through communicative activities than to be taught through special exercises explicitly aimed at teaching grammar ? The issue is worth investigating.

II.2. Components of Grammar

Before dealing with the subdivisions recognized in grammar , we need to have a clear idea about what is included under the heading of grammar. If we consider the English language, we find an enormous variety of structures, some of which have parallels with the native language and are easy to master; others are quite different but have simple forms, therefore, easy to master; while others

are still totally different and sometimes difficult to grasp. What is noticeable is that some have simple forms, requiring single choices like the 'definite article ' the' and prepositions, but may be difficult where to use them and where not; this can be illustrated by the following examples selected from my students' exam papers:

" The speech is a group of the sounds produced by a very
 complicated approach or way and with the contect of the all
organs"

"Speech it is a important way of communication"

It is clear that these students are not able to use articles appropriately.

When teaching these structures, we lead our learners to recognize the examples of the structures when spoken, how to identify their written forms, how to produce their spoken and written form, how to understand their meaning in context, and produce meaningful sentences as shown in this table:

Aspects of the Teaching/ Learning of Structures

	Form	**Meaning**
listening	Perception and recognition of the Spoken form of the structure	Comprehension of what the spoken structure means in context
speaking	Production of well- formed examples in speech	Use of the structure to Convey meaning in speech
reading	Perception and recognition of the Written form	Comprehension of what the written structure means in context
writing	Production of well- formed examples in writing	Use of the structure to convey meaning in writing

(p.6)

Source : Ur, Penny. (1988), "Grammar Practice Activities:
A Practical Guide For Teachers", Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

But in my study, I am going to deal only with the written aspect for the identification and analysis of learners' errors, for the simple fact that it is easier to detect errors in this skill which represents a real problem for our learners and to avoid slips which can appear in the spoken form.

Grammar is traditionally subdivided into two different but interrelated areas of study - syntax and morphology as it is defined by Genevieve Petiot (2000):

> *" Les grammaires visent à dècrire les fonctionnements de la langue : syntax et morphology figurent dans toute grammaire. Au-delà, l'interet accordé à d'autres aspects (oral/écrit, semantique, pragmatique,…) fondent   des grammaires distinctes »* [1]   *(p.8)*

II.2.1. Syntax :

In this aspect we concentrate on the structure and ordering of the components within a sentence. For instance, in a sentence like : He played football, we may be interested in how the words combine to form a meaningful sentence. If we change the order : played he football, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, thus, meaningless. This aspect is called syntax.

II.2.2. Morphology :

Morphology is concerned with the internal structure of words or how words are made of small units called morphemes. The changes in words forms are generally the result of :

- Inflections : plural, verb tense, aspect, possession, etc…
- Derivation : prefixes, suffixes.

In analysing a language, we also take into account the organization of grammar.

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[1] Grammars aim at describing the functions of language: syntax and morphology figure in any grammar. Besides, the interest accorded to other aspects (oral / writing, semantic , pragmatic,…) establish distinctive grammars.

II.3. Organization of Grammar

In learning a second as well as a foreign language , we are concerned with two important concepts in the organization of grammar : rank and class

Rank refers to the different levels within the group. Four ranks can be organized : word, phrase, clause, and sentence. The sentence is the highest rank of organization in both spoken and written English.

- **Class** refers to the structures realizing sentence elements, which are composed of units called word classes or traditionally known as parts of speech. This can be exemplified in English as follows :

(a) : nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs.

(b) : articles, demonstratives, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections.

As mentioned above the English language consists of a large number of structures, some of which are complex, others appear to be simple but not really so, as they require special care to be mastered by learners. This is why we find it impossible to study the different areas of grammar, but my focus will be on the most recurring errors occurring in morphology, tense including aspect and voice, articles and prepositions, in addition to the most recurrent errors in syntax such as errors in word-order, pronouns and conjunctions.

In spite of the advocation of the communicative approach in our schools since the 1980s, students are generally trained through pattern practice and structural drills. However, most of them show a clear lack of mastery as to the basic linguistic rudiments necessary to start a university degree in acceptable conditions. They meet difficulties in all areas of grammar. This may be

explained in terms of inadequate previous teaching, in addition to other variables involved in the complex process of learning a foreign language.

Being limited to the class, students have no other way of practising their English in real life , thus improving it; they may need to explore the cultural link between language and thought as this quotation shows, (Pickett, 1978):

> " One of the things I seek to find out most from the syntax of a language is its basic thought system, which I often find exhibited more clearly in syntax than in any other respect. I feel that unless I grasp this way of thinking, I shall never be able to handle the language efficiently".
>
> (p.62)

This confirms the fact that grammar holds its place in the learning process; hence, it should be enhanced to enable students to develop their language. This does not mean that the focus is on the form alone; meaning is also contextual.

Habit- formation and cognitive code theories should be given importance in foreign language learning. The former fosters habit forming and arranging words, the latter favours awareness of the structure. An overview of these theories will be given after the presentation of the linguistic theories available as well as the approaches to learning, necessary for the teacher to know to get better insights of the learning process.

II.4. Language Description

After having defined the nature of grammar, we find it necessary to give a brief outline of the most linguistic descriptions and the most widely used approaches and methods in foreign language teaching. I believe this will shed light on the practical part in which I intend to analyse the learners errors and try to find out where the problem lies.

II.4.1. Classical or Traditional Grammar

According to this type of grammar, descriptions of English and other languages were based on the grammar of the classical languages, Greek and Latin . These descriptions were based on an analysis of the role played by each word in the sentences. The function of words was made apparent by the use of appropriate inflections. Thus, the form of the word would change according to whether it was a subject, object, …etc.

This form of description has been largely abandoned; nevertheless, it has continued to provide teachers with a useful source of guidance.

II.4.2. Structural Grammar

The real challenge to the traditional grammar came in the 1930s with the advent of structuralism, associated with linguists such as De Saussure and Bloomfield. Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters (1987) described structural linguistics as follows :*" In a structural description of the grammar the language is described in terms of syntactic structures which carry the fundamental propositions (statement, interrogative, negative, imperative, etc…). (P .8)*

This method of linguistic analysis led in English language teaching to the development of the substitution table as a means of explaining grammatical patterns.

The structural syllabus has been widely used throughout the world, including schools in our country. In such a syllabus, items are selected and graded from the simplest to the more complex structures. The structural syllabus

provides the learner with a systematic description of the generative core of the language. For this reason the structural syllabus continues to be widely used in spite of criticism from advocates of functional notional or use- based descriptions of language (Wilkins 1976, and Widdowson 1979) because it fails to provide the learner with an understanding of the communicative use of the structure.

II.4.3. Transformational - Generative Grammar

Noam Chomsky in his <u>Syntactic Structures</u> (1957) argued that the structural description was too superficial because it describes the surface structure and fails to describe the deep structure, it could not explain   the relationship of meaning.

Example: (quoted in : Neil, Smith & Deirdr,Wilson (1979):

-      John is easy to please.
-      John is eager to please.

In these sentences there is the same relationship between the words. however, they are not the same. Similarly the difference between an active sentence and a passive one would not be shown.

Chomsky proposed two levels of meaning : A deep structure, which is concerned with the organization of thoughts and a surface structure where these thoughts are expressed through the syntax of the language .

He widened the view of language to incorporate the relation between meaning and form. The most important lesson we can draw from his work is the distinction between competence and performance.

So far language has been described from the point of view of form. But language does not exist for its own sake; but it exists because people do things with it. Hence, it can also be looked at in terms of functions.

II.4.5. Functional/ Notional Grammar

Functionalism became an important movement in linguistics with the development of the concept of communicative competence. Hymes (1972) proposed that grammar consists not just of a set of rules for formulating grammatically correct sentences, but with whom, where , when and in what manner. Thus functional/notional grammar came as an alternative which advocates that functions represent the communicative acts that are carried out by language : warning, advising, describing,…, notions , on the other hand refer to the way in which the human mind thinks. In other words, its focus is on the appropriateness of a form for a particular purpose in a particular context.
Functional language is, then, based on language in use, in contrast to the structural syllabus which is concerned with the formal properties of language.

II.5. Approaches to language Learning

Learning language may be the biggest, most complex and most difficult task any learner will consciously undertake. Because it combines explicit learning of vocabulary and language rules with unconscious skill development, learning a language is quite different from any other subject in the curriculum. We are still far from fully understanding the process of learning, as the following brief summary will show.

II.5.1. Behaviourist and Cognitive Theories

There are two basic approaches to the understanding of how language is learned. On the one hand, there is a behaviourist approach which holds that language is essentially a habit related activity which can be learned explicitly through repetition, pattern drills and accompanied by positive reinforcement by the teacher. Errors were to be avoided; a way to anticipate errors was to conduct a contrastive analysis, comparing and contrasting the students' native language with the target language. Through this means, potential trouble spots could be identified. If an error was committed, quick correction was desirable in order to prevent the establishment of bad habits. Overlearning leading to automaticity was the goal.   In contrast, the cognitive approach sees language learning as far more complex than this. Language is gradually acquired through experience and practice, in a fashion which is not completely understood, until it becomes automatic. It is a building up of knowledge systems rather than simple learning . According to this approach errors were not something to be avoided, but rather were regarded as welcome signs that learners were actively testing hypotheses.

  While the behaviourist approach has been largely discredited , it would be a mistake to discard it entirely. Certain elements of language such as vocabulary, may respond well to explicit teaching   and repetition. This is supported by Schmidt (1983) who does not deny that language acquisition takes place at least in part through rule formation. He also believes a great deal of acquisition of language is brought about by learners having memorized sentences and phrases (e.g., How are you? Fine thanks, I beg your pardon…) The successful employment   of these memorized formulae contributes greatly to learner fluency. Moreover, researchers like Hatch (1983), while not denying that grammatical competence is achieved through linguistic hypothesis testing, nevertheless believes that non-linguistic processes may be critical to the learners' success in this endeavour. He means that foreign-talk adjustments " help promote communication, help establish an affective bond and can serve as either an explicit or implicit teaching mode" .

The development of structural accuracy and fluency, however, is not easy and requires meaningful interaction with the foreign language and lengthy exposure before it may be acquired.

II.5.2. The critical period in language learning

There has been common acceptance that there is a critical period in language learning, that is to say, there is a particular time in a child's development when it is especially geared to language learning. Language learning outside this period may be slower and more difficult, or less successful. Examples of adults gaining complete fluency in a foreign language are rare while the development of fluency in a foreign language among children is commonplace.

II.5.3. Natural order theories

There is some evidence that some elements of foreign language are systematically learned before others. Krashen (1987), in particular, advances this theory. Therefore, language rules that are easy to explain may not always be internalised and used earliest. This implies that learners may optimally be presented with items in the correct learning sequence. Thus material designers and teachers should be aware of this so that new elements are presented in the order in which learners appear predisposed to learn. Realistically, these sequences are still piecemeal and incomplete.

For a more effective learning to occur, the teacher should be aware of the various learning theories as well as the teaching approaches, methods and techniques to be able to make the appropriate choice . Therefore, the pre-service training and in-service training are necessary for the 'licence' students, instead

of recruiting them before they get previous knowledge about both the processes of learning and teaching.

II.6. Approaches and Methods to Language Teaching

In the century spanning the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s the language teaching profession was involved in a search for a single, ideal method. More than three decades ago, Edward Anthony's concept of method was that the second of three hierarchical elements, namely, approach, method and technique.(1963)

Before dealing with the most widely used approaches and methods, I shall first define these terms.

- **Approach** refers to 'theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as a source of practice and principles in language teaching (Richards and Rogers 1986, p.16). An approach describes how language is used and how people acquire their knowledge and makes statement about the conditions which will promote successful language learning.

- **Method** refers to the practical realisation of an approach. A method is procedural.

- **Technique** refers to what actually takes place in the classroom. It is used to carry out a method which is consistent with an approach. It is implemental.

- **Procedure** is a sequence of techniques.

The search for the appropriate method might have begun around 1880 with François Gouin's publication of " The Art of Teaching and Learning foreign languages (1880)", in which his Series Method was advocated. This was followed by the Direct Method by Charles Berlitz. The Audio-Lingual Method of the late 1940s and the so-called Code- Cognitive Learning Method of the early 1960s followed. Then in a burst of innovation, the "spirited seventies" as

they have been called, brought up what David Nunan (1989) termed " the designer methods": Communicative Language Learning, the Silent Way, Total-used will be briefly listed below.

II.6.1. The Grammar Translation Method

This is usually seen as a nineteenth century method but it continues to be used widely, particularly in situations where learners will only want or need to handle written texts in the foreign language, usually literary texts. It focuses on the learning of vocabulary relevant to the texts being studied, and the learning and application of language rules in translating these texts into and out of the target language. Grammar is, then, taught deductively through the presentation and study of explicit rules.

The strength of this approach is that it can provide a foundation of lexis and structural knowledge, however, its weaknesses are perceived to be its narrow focus on the reading and translation of texts and its lack of a means of dealing with language where speaking and other forms of communication are required.

II.6.2. Approaches And Methods Based On The Structural View

II.6.2.1. The Situational Language Teaching

Situational language teaching is a term not commonly used today, but it is an approach developed by British applied linguists in the 1930s to the 1960s, and which had an impact on language courses and is still used today. Speech was viewed as the basis of language and structure as being at the heart of the speaking ability. This was a view similar to that of the American structuralists, such as Fries, but the notion of the British applied linguists, such as Fries and Halliday, is that structure must be presented in situations in which they can be used, and it gave its distinctiveness to the Situational Language Teaching.

The theory of learning underlying this approach is behaviourism. It includes the following principles (Richards and Rogers, 1986,p.16):

- Language learning is habit formation
- Mistakes are bad and should be avoided, as they are bad habits
- language skills are learned more effectively if they are presented orally first, then in written form
- Analogy is a better foundation for language learning than analysis
- The meaning of words can be learned only in a linguistic context

This approach to language teaching stresses accuracy in both grammar and pronunciation, and the automatic control of basic structures and sentence patterns. Procedures move from controlled to freer practice of structures.

II.6.2.2. The Audio-Lingual Method

The audio- lingual method was widely used in the United States and other countries in the 1950s and 1960s. It is still used today in some programmes. It is also based on the structural view of language. It owed its existence to the behaviourist model of learning that uses stimulus-response-reinforcement model, through a continuous process of such a positive reinforcement model to engender good habits in language learning. Particular emphasis was laid on mastering the building blocks of language and learning the rules for combining them. Since the learning theory underlying this method is behaviourism, it includes the same principles and has the same objectives as the Situational Method. The types of learning techniques and activities used are dialogues and drills memorised through repetitions and the use of substitutions. Like the previous method, grammar is taught inductively.

The most used procedure in these methods is PPP (presentation, practice, production), in which the teacher introduces a situation, the students practice the language, using techniques such as choral repetition, individual repetitions, and cue- response drills.

II.6.3. Approaches And Methods Based On The Communicative View

II.6.3.1. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching began in the 1960s as a replacement to the earlier structural method, called Situational Language Teaching. This was partly in response to Chomsky's criticism of structural theories of language and partly based on the theories of British functional linguists, such as Firth and Halliday, as well as American sociolinguists, such as Hymes, Gumperz and Labov and the writings of Austin and Searl on speech acts.

The functional view of language is the primary one behind the communicative method. Students will use language as a means of expressing values and judgments; almost any activity that engages learners in authentic communication is used. Grammar in this approach is taught inductively.

II.6.3.2. The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach was developed by Tracy Terrel and Stephen Krashen, starting in 1977. It came to have a wide influence in language teaching in the United States and around the world. The communicative view is behind this approach. Particular emphasis is laid on language as a set of messages that can be understood. The principles of the Natural Approach are that language acquisition is different from language learning, and that language acquisition is the only way competence in a second language occurs.

Task- based activities and problem- solving are among the activities required by this approach.

II.6.4. The Eclectic Approach/ Method

None of the methods has dominated language-teaching practice to the same extent as the audio-lingual method once did. Therefore, today most teachers tend to adapt the techniques of more than one method to their own teaching situation and according to the learners' needs. River (1981) asserts: " *The best type of eclectic teacher is imaginative, energetic and willing to experiment. As a result, his lessons are varied and interesting". (p.6)*
The whole concept of a separate method is no longer a central issue in language practice. In fact, in the mid-1980s, Stern (1985) lamented our "*century-old obsession*", our prolonged preoccupation (with methods) that has been increasingly unproductive and misguided, as we as teachers vainly searched for the ultimate method that would serve as a final answer. (p. 251)

Nunan (1991, p. 228) summed it up as follows:

> *" It has been realised that there never was and probably never will be a method for all. In recent years there has been work on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself".*
>
> *(p.228)*

The science of language teaching has not reached the point of being able to consistently demonstrate the superiority of one methodology over another for all teachers and all students and all settings, and perhaps it never will, for teaching is a combination of science and art. Science helps us to be informed in

contributing to our understanding of learning and of language, but it is the artistic aspect of teaching that requires us to uniquely interpret and apply the scientific information in making the choices for any given situation among the methodological options that exist .

In other words, language teaching is a cumulative knowledge that underlies everything that happens in the classroom and that enables the teacher to diagnose the needs of students, to treat students with successful pedagogical techniques, and to assess the outcome of those treatment (Richards and Remandya, p. 11). Brown (1994a) suggested that current approaches to language are principled. Thus he suggested twelve principles which he asserted to be widely accepted assumptions about second language acquisition: automaticity, meaningful learning, the anticipation of reward, intrinsic motivation, strategic investment, language ego, self-confidence, risk taking, the language-culture connection, the native language effect, interlanguage, and communicative competence
(ibid, p.12).

II.7. Grammar Teaching

Two major questions need to be considered with regard to grammar teaching in second or foreign language pedagogy:

1.   Should we teach grammar at all?
2.   If we should teach grammar, how should we teach it?

The first question has been answered negatively by some linguists. Krashen (1982) and Prahbu (1987) argue that learners can acquire language naturalistically by being engaged in meaning-focused activities. Others, such as Ellis (1990) have argued that grammar teaching does aid L2 acquisition. Two

approaches to the teaching of grammar have generally been adopted: **Practice or Conscious-Raising.**

II.7.1. Definition of Practice and Consciousness- raising

Most teachers tend to help learners internalise the structures so that they can be used in real communication. In this respect the activities they use are of different types, including **mechanical practice** through drills and substitutions, **Contextualised practice** which is also controlled, but involves an attempt to encourage learners to relate form to meaning using structures in real- life situations, **communicative practice entails various kinds of gap filling activities which require the learners to engage in authentic co**mmunication while at the same time keeping an eye, as it were on the structures that are manipulated in the process (Ur, 1988, p.9). According to this approach, grammar is taught implicitly, as it is the case of the Audio-lingual Method based on the repetition of the grammatical structure, whether it is correct or not. This feedback may be immediate or delayed.

Conscious raising develops explicit knowledge of grammar, i.e., it develops understanding of how a grammatical structure works . Grammar can be explained and understood in everyday language. These types of grammar are not   exclusive, however, practice can include a formal explanation of the rule whereas consciousness raising may occur without practice.

II.8. From Grammar- Focused to Task-Based Instruction

The status of grammar-focused teaching or, as it is referred to, form-focused instruction has undergone a major reassessment since the 1970s. The

advent of communicative language teaching saw the demise of grammar-based instruction: grammatical syllabuses were superseded by communicative ones based on functions or tasks; grammar-based methodologies such as the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) lesson format underlying the Situational Approach gave way to function-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 students' grammar needs are determined on the basis of their performance on fluency tasks rather than predetermined by a grammatical syllabus.

The movement away from grammar- focused instruction has been supported by the findings of second language acquisition research. Skehan (1996b) observes:

> *" The underlying theory for a P.P.P approach has now been*
> *discredited. The belief that a precise focus on 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.*
>
> *(p.18)*

Nunan (1989) defines the communicative task as an activity which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while focusing on meaning rather than form. (p.10)

The difference between traditional-grammar-focused activities and communicative task work can be summarized as follows (Richards and Renandya (2000, p. 154):

II.8.1. Grammar-Focused Activities

- reflect typical classroom use of language
- focus on the formation of correct examples of language
- produce language for display (as evidence for 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 authentic communication

II.8.2. Task-Focused Activities

- reflect natural use of language

- call on implicit knowledge

- elicit a vernacular speech style

- reflect automatic performance

- require the use of improvising, paraphrasing, repair and organisation

- produce language that is not always predictable

- allow students to select the language they use

- require real communication

However, teachers in general do not focus on one way, but most of them, as we said above, tend to combine the two approaches in order to make the learner develop communicative as well as linguistic competence. To be successful, teachers should also be aware of how the acquisition of the target language structures takes place. In this respect five stages have been identified: input, intake, acquisition, access and output.

II.9. Grammar in Relation to Second Language Acquisition processes

According to Van Patten (1993), Ellis (1994a, 1996) and others, five stages will be distinguished to arrive at a rationale grammar focused instruction.

I	II	III	IV	V
Input	Intake	Acquisition	access	Output

Figure 2: A Model of Second Language Learning and Use

Source: Richards, J. C, and Renandya (2000), Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.(p.157)

This figure shows how acquisition occurs passing through different stages mentioned in case everything is proceeding normally.

II.9.1. Input: This concerns the various sources which can be used to initiate the learning process such as text-books and the teacher-made materials, either explicit or meaning-based; this depends on the approach adopted.

II.9.2. Intake: Van Patten (1993) defines intake as " that subset of the input that is comprehended and attended to in some way". The factors which are supposed to affect how items pass from input to intake include are:

- 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 fulfil a communicative need.

II.9.3. Acquisition: According to Richards and Renandya (2000), this refers to the process of incorporating a new learning item into his or her developing system or interlanguage. A number of processes appear to be involved: noticing, discovering rules, accommodation and restructuring and experimentation. (p. 158- 59).

II.9.4. Access: In this stage the learner is supposed to be able to use the language in communication; we may refer to this as fluency.

II.9.5. Output: This refers to the observed results of the learners efforts in producing the language structures presented in the input, but this is not considered as essential for those who do not emphasized accuracy.

An overview of what concerns the teaching and learning of a foreign language, and grammar in particular, considered as the skeleton of language, might shed light obscure areas that cause students to make so many errors.

CONCLUSION

The importance of grammar is undeniable. If we provide our learners with the appropriate training, we should be aware of all the process involved in foreign language learning , in addition to the different methods available in order to be able to make the appropriate choice whenever necessary. Moreover, a diagnosis of the learners' knowledge should be established to be used as a starting point for remedial work before passing to another learning task.

From my experience in teaching and the students' productions during this year, it is evident that the sentence structure is not mastered; producing well-structured sentences is not within the reach of most of the students. Difficulties are also apparent in the use of tense, morphology, as well as in the use of articles, prepositions word-order and connectors. These are used randomly; it is clear that the appropriate rules have not been assimilated or only partly. This may reflect the inadequacy of previous teaching; we may also consider this to be due either to native language interference, or to intralingual interference. If we take the example of prepositions or articles in English, we find that their use is not as simple as it appears to be, but they are complex and require a lot of practice to be acquired. On the contrary, they are not really taught or just superficially in the secondary school. Focus is on the passive form and indirect speech, i.e., the structures given in the Baccalaureate exam.

However, students are not really able to use these forms in their free writings because they have been trained to transform individual sentences. As I have mentioned above, the English language consists of a large number of structures which need to be practised sufficiently enough to be acquired. We

should bear in mind that simple forms such as articles or prepositions are not so easy to master and may present real difficulty for students.

Identifying the learner' errors, then, is a necessary task in foreign language learning in order to find out where the problem lies, and to select the appropriate remedy. Therefore, the next chapter will be devoted to the error analysis approach .