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Error Correction in Second-Year Students' Compositions: A Comparative Study of Native and Non-Native Speakers/Instructors of French.

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Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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ERROR CORRECTION IN SECOND YEAR STUDENTS' COMPOSITIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS/INSTRUCTORS OF FRENCH

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy
in
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by
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Licence, Université d'Angers, France, 1982
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1988
December 1994
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Jo, the light and love of my life for now six years, and without whom I can truly say I wouldn’t be here today.

To my parents: Jean-Pierre and Françoise Jolivet.

To my two sisters: Isabelle and Florence and their children: Romain, Violette, Antoine and Camille.

To my grandmother, Nicole Jolivet, whose intellect I have always admired.

To L. Kathy Heilenman who first introduced me to this profession.

To Fatima Chajia. I couldn’t have done it without you.

To Beatrice Tillman, a true friend.

Finally to my wonderful (and so patient) major professor Dr. Robert C. Lafayette.
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FOREWORD

Prends des Oranges

Prends des oranges
Surtout ne regarde pas leur peau
Epluche-les de leur richesse éphémère
Porte à ta bouche une à une
Toutes ces tranches que tes yeux dévorent
Elles sont sucrées juteuses sans pépins
Elles sont mi-figue mi-raisin
Elles sont acides sèches perlées de pépins
Tous ces fruits cueillis sur le même oranger
A la même saison n'ont pas le même goût
Si tu veux comprendre les hommes
Prends des oranges.

Georges Elisée
La Vague A l’Ame, 1980
Interdit Aux Adultes Non Accompagnés d’Enfants
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine whether or not there are differences between native and non-native speakers/instructors of French when they correct second year students' compositions. The research questions this study set forth to answer are: 1. Are there any differences in the number of corrections performed by native and non-native speakers/instructors of university intermediate French classes when they evaluate compositions? 2. Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers/instructors in the categories (verb, noun, spelling, other) where error correction was performed? 3. Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers/instructors when and if they paid attention to content?

The data for analysis consisted in the students' compositions already corrected and returned to the students. The subjects of the study were Teaching Assistants at a large university. The methods used were both quantitative and qualitative. In order to answer research questions one and two, a MANOVA was run. The results indicate that there are no significant differences between native and non-native speakers in the number of errors corrected. There were also no significant differences between native and non-native speakers in the error categories where corrections were
No difference was found between native and non-native speakers in their interest for the content of the compositions. The lack of instructor comment pertaining to content was common to both the native and the non-native groups.

Conclusions to be drawn from the results of this study are that native speakers of French correct as many mistakes as do non-native speakers. Moreover, it follows that non-native speakers of French are as capable of identifying and correcting students accuracy mistakes. Native and non-native speakers alike show very little interest for compositions’ contents.

Implications from this research reach several areas such as TA preparation, error correction, the teaching of grammar, classroom instruction and the teaching of writing in the foreign language classroom.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

It is a well-known and much publicized fact that one acquires one's first language by engaging in communicative activities. Therefore, the process of communication rather than the formal teaching of grammatical rules plays a crucial role in the acquisition of the first language.

According to Freed (1991), much attention has been devoted to second language learning and acquisition research\(^1\) while foreign language acquisition has suffered from neglect. The two fields have been divorced for a number of reasons - i.e. lack of trained foreign language researchers, focus on literature in foreign language departments -, and have been associated with distinct areas. In general, second language acquisition research has been very learner-centered and process-oriented. It has investigated such questions as learner processes and strategies, the development of interlanguage, and the role of the native language. Foreign language research has dealt more with manipulation of methods and materials and has been associated with the field of education, focusing on

\(^1\)In first and second language acquisition as well as in English as a second language, a distinction has been made between learning and acquisition. In this research, they will be treated as synonymous for the sake of simplicity and clarity. For a complete definition, the reader can turn to page 27 of this chapter.
teaching methods, curriculum design, materials, testing and technology (Freed, 1991).

Foreign language research has had to rely heavily on second language research or theory due to the lack of such research or theory in the field of foreign languages. This research has shown that for students in second and foreign language classes, the optimal situation is to have them be in conditions as close as possible to a natural acquisition situation (Krashen, 1977). Some of the numerous possible ways to achieve this would be to allow students a "period of silence" before they feel comfortable enough to start speaking in the foreign language, to have students engage in negotiation of meaning in the classroom, and to have students use real language for real purposes. It has also been shown that engaging in meaningful and/or communicative activities promotes the acquisition of a second language (Krashen, 1977; Scardemaglia, Bereiter & Goelman, 1982).

In a foreign language classroom, students engage in the practice of the target language in the four skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading. The attention given to the written language in foreign language instruction has reflected the changing trends of second language and foreign language methodologies. In the past, writing was viewed mainly as a product-centered, solitary, and purely mechanical activity. It consisted mostly of assignments designed for the sole purpose of verifying the acquisition of
certain grammatical structures. In recent years, there has been a shift from a product-centered vision of writing to a process-centered activity (Barnett, 1989). Writing is now viewed more as an interactive activity, a means of communicating a message contained in the written assignment.

Compositions have typically been the most common type of assignment given to students of foreign language. Instructors have usually corrected compositions for their grammatical content, commonly called form, ignoring the ideas, the creativity and originality of their more individual and personal content, usually referred to as content or meaning. Moreover, instructors have also typically offered systematic formats for correcting grammatical errors. For example, a student turns in a composition about last summer's vacation - in order to verify the use of the past tenses in French -, the instructor corrects the grammatical aspects of the composition, gives it back to the student who reads his grade and puts the composition away for good, never to look at it again. Given what is now known about and recognized as being the best possible situation for learning a foreign language, it does not make much sense to teach writing as an isolated act. Yet, this represents the bulk of writing instruction in the country today.

For the most part, beginning and intermediate level college language classes are taught by teaching assistants, the majority of whom are not
native speakers of the target language. Some research shows that corrections performed by non-native instructors differ from corrections performed by native speakers (Heilenman, 1991; Chastain, 1980; Davies, 1983; Piazza-Gaylord, 1980). It appears that non-natives feel more comfortable correcting grammar than they do meaningful content. They also tend to correct more grammatical mistakes than natives do. The present dissertation proposes to examine the differences that exist between native and non-native speakers of French when correcting intermediate students' compositions. Three aspects will be examined:

1. the differences between natives and non-natives in the number of errors corrected.
2. the types of errors where the differences are to be found.
3. the extent to which all instructors corrected and commented on grammatical content only.

The results of the above findings will be compared to other studies involving native and non-native speakers. A valid correction grid for written grammatical mistakes could emerge from this study. If the results are as expected, implications from this study could reinforce current research discouraging the systematic correction of grammatical mistakes in students' written production.
The remainder of this chapter will focus in greater detail on each of the three aspects of this research. It is divided into five sections. First is a brief history of foreign language teaching methodologies. Second, a history of the areas of writing and error correction in foreign language will enable the reader to understand better the many changes that have characterized the teaching of this particular skill. The third section will provide an overview of the recent developments in the area of writing and the current trends in foreign language teaching methodologies as far as evaluation formats of written assignments are concerned. The fourth section will provide evidence of the need for this study in that it brings about new and much needed research in the areas of writing and error correction. The fifth and last section gives definitions of some key terms used in this research.

A HISTORICAL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

Historically, there have been many shifts in the attention given to written and spoken language in first language (L1) as well as in second language and foreign language teaching methodologies. While the shifts were related to psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics in second language acquisition, they were attributed to changes in teaching and testing methods in foreign language acquisition (Freed, 1991). Moreover, as Schultz (1991) says:
Cognitive Theory - with a sprinkling of Discourse Theory and behaviorist conditioning - seems to account most closely for what language teachers and current textbooks try to accomplish in classroom instruction. (p. 19)

Omaggio (1993) echoes Schultz's position and adds that theorists and practitioners have consistently tried to convince one another that their position is the right one and their theory the best one.

Grittner (1990) is one writer who gives a rather exhaustive list of the various bandwagons that second language teaching methods have adopted. Among those listed is the "Grammar bandwagon" which, according to Grittner, has been "the most persistent and durable element in the history of American foreign language teaching." Several teaching methods followed this particular trend, its most infamous representative being the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The GTM was based mostly on written and literary language. Class time was devoted primarily to the reading of texts in the target language and to translating them into the native language. The skills exercised were reading and writing to the complete detriment of listening and speaking. Error correction was systematic: no faulty answer was ever allowed to pass.

As a reaction to and main challenger of the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method advocated learning by hearing the spoken
language. The major changes resided in the teaching of the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, with much of the emphasis placed on oral/aural skills. Error correction in the Direct Method stressed correct pronunciation. The "Audio-Lingual bandwagon" encouraged the memorization of models and learning through grammatical patterns and dialog memorization. Errors were systematically corrected since they were not to be tolerated. As Mings (1993) puts it: "Errors were to be avoided as if they were sinful." (p.171) Again, teaching with the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) focused on the four skills, but with an emphasis on speaking and listening.

In reaction to the behavioristic stimulus-answer character of the Audio-Lingual Method and with the realization that it was not producing satisfactory results, foreign language educators turned to Chomsky's cognitive psychology and Universal Grammar. This theory proposes that "language learning is governed by innate abilities to learn language." (Mings, 1993, p. 172) Thus, even though a cognitive approach toward methodology encourages the use of corrective feedback, the ALM’s obsession for error correction is no longer justified.

In parallel to the advent of cognitive psychology, Krashen's input hypothesis (1977) was another factor contributing to the fall of the audiolingual method. The Natural Approach developed by Krashen and
Terrell (1983), proposes that language be acquired through comprehensible input in a low-anxiety situation (Dulay and Burt, 1977) where grammatical accuracy has little importance, and error correction, especially of oral errors, is to be avoided.

The shifts to a more cognitive view of language learning and a natural approach to language acquisition were soon to be followed by new trends concerning communication (Savignon, 1983) and proficiency (Omaggio, 1986). Theoretically, in a communicative approach to teaching a foreign language, students are to learn to communicate by communicating and it is believed that foreign language competence is best acquired in learning environments and contexts which promote communication and meaning as central to the learning experience. This is a direct application of the basic tenets of discourse theory. Because the structure of the language is itself a reflection of the functions it serves, it can be learned through learning to communicate (Savignon, 1983). In this setting, errors are to be treated "gently," that is to say not systematically. Selinker's interlanguage theory (1974) is at the foundation of the belief that errors are part of the learning process and that some errors are even teacher-resistant. However, some feel that communicative approaches have neglected grammatical accuracy. In order to remedy possible fossilization of frequent grammatical mistakes, Higgs and Clifford (1981) propose an approach in which all four skills of
language acquisition are stressed and it is recommended that most grammatical inaccuracies be corrected. The move toward communication and proficiency also brought about a standardized measuring instrument for oral proficiency: the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), an instrument developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), based on prior work done by the Foreign Service Institute. However, whereas there exists an instrument for assessing oral proficiency, there is still a lack of standardized instrument for measuring writing competence.

It is now clearer to the reader that foreign language teaching methodologies have come a long way: from the grammar-translation method, via the behaviorists' belief that learning is a process of changing behavior through the use of external reinforcement, to the advent of the communicative approach and the proficiency movement. It has been acknowledged that learning is a mental process, that the mind is the center of learning and that different learners have different learning styles and strategies. However, according to Ellis (1988) some elements of behaviorist theory remain in present theories and practices in the form of what he calls "controlled practice." The way error correction has evolved does not escape Ellis's criticism and, as we have discussed above, there is to this day no real consensus as to what makes a perfect foreign language acquisition theory
or practice. Few changes have occurred in the area of writing and this is what the next section proposes to examine.

A HISTORY OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING AND ERROR CORRECTION

Writing differs from speech in several fundamental ways. Many of the differences lie in the context and nature of the composing process. As opposed to speech, writing is a solitary, private, and personal activity. The purpose of writing is to communicate a message to someone who is not present. Written texts are durable, permanent and one can go back and re-read a written text at one's convenience. This is why the evaluation of written texts cannot be treated in the same way as the evaluation of the spoken language. Only recently has the importance of writing in the foreign language classroom and throughout the curriculum been recognized (Nystrand, 1982; Gaudiani, 1981; Kern & Schultz, 1992). The shifts in the teaching of foreign language writing have reflected the shifts occurring in foreign language teaching methodologies. The relatively small number of articles and studies in the area of writing, be it in foreign language or second language acquisition, shows how this particular skill has been considered primarily as a support skill and, more important, as a means of verifying the acquisition of a given language's grammatical structures (Heilenman, 1991).
Assessment of written language production and error analysis of texts written in the target language has been viewed, as have all areas of language, as a strictly product-oriented, linear, sequenced, form-driven act. Therefore, students' written productions have been treated as objects to be evaluated by the omniscient instructor. Nystrand (1982) indicates that:

Writing assessment involved examination of texts for strengths and weaknesses in the text. It did not concern us at first that we were acting simultaneously as readers and assessors, failing, in effect, to note that the meaning of any text results as much from the act of reading as from the text that is read.

Many of the salient features of written communication lie not in the interaction of reader and text, but rather in the interaction between reader and writer by way of the text. (p.70)

Indeed, writing is a communicative and interactive act and as Cooper (1982) states:

The only chance writers have of communicating their meaning is by assuming that potential readers have largely the same knowledge of those facts about the world relevant for their meanings as they themselves do. (p.106)

The above statements are valid for both first (L1) and second language (L2) written texts. However, if one considers the writing skills that
a foreign language student has at his disposal, the following statements become clear:

1. the reader/instructor of a composition written by a foreign language student is far more knowledgeable of the language than its writer (Raimes, 1985). There lies an important difference that should be remembered when dealing with error correction and assessment of a written text.

2. There is a high level of frustration among students when they attempt to express their ideas, and convey their messages in the target language. It is quite safe to assume that students who write in their native language will be proficient at the mechanics of it, whereas it is certainly not the case for students in a foreign language class (Gaudiani, 1981).

3. There is, for both L1 and L2 students, a lack of experience at composing techniques and overall organization of a text. This lack of experience will be even more visible in a foreign language composition and this is the reason why L2 written assignments require more consistent corrections than L1 compositions.

In the past ten years or so, questions have been raised about language taught as a product rather than as a process (Heilenman, 1991). Research concerning Dialogue Journal writing with native English speakers
(Staton, Shuy, Kreeft & Reed, 1982), English as a Second Language (ESL) students and now foreign language learners (Baudrand, 1992), has shown that keeping a journal and exchanging information with one’s instructor promote the development of communicative competence. There have also been questions and changes about teaching and evaluating writing as a process-oriented act as opposed to a product-oriented act (Gaudiani, 1981; Heilenman, 1991). The advent of communicative approaches to foreign language teaching has made it possible for students to use language for a purpose and to learn the functions of language. Therefore, the act of writing is viewed more as a process than as a product.

Even though this development has been taking place, little has changed in the ways instructors are teaching and evaluating written assignments. Grammatical accuracy still represents the bulk of the corrections. The teacher plays the part of the grammar referee, deciding on whether or not the language created by the students is grammatically accurate. The grades students receive are almost solely based on grammatical inaccuracies because this is the one segment of the written assignment where teachers feel the most comfortable and the most proficient. This is probably even more striking in the case of an instructor who is not a native speaker. It is always more comfortable to evaluate a text for its grammar components than it is for its creative aspects, and a non-
native speaker may be more uneasy when evaluating a text for its message and meaningful content than a native speaker. Grammar is either right or wrong; content is more subjective. As Heilenman (1991) puts it:

It is easy to sympathize, then, with the agonies of other non-native teachers of writing who ask themselves if they are indeed competent to correct, much less teach, free composition and who answer that question in the negative. (p.276)

This is why teachers have opted to spend long hours correcting faulty grammar, to the detriment of all other components that make a "good composition". As Gaudiani (1981) states:

Teachers of composition often spend a crushing number of hours correcting students' work. These efforts amount to a rewriting task that students would really profit from by doing themselves. Alas, despite teachers' fine work, students often look over corrections quickly and file the composition, or, if they come to a conference, they may listen /.../ while teachers review the corrected composition. If, indeed, it is true that one learns to write by writing and that writing is an isolated task, I think it is wise to let students do revising alone. (p.19)

So, not only are there problems of competence on the part of the teacher, but also in the area of correction and evaluation formats. The next section
of this chapter proposes to examine recent developments in error correction and evaluation formats for compositions.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ERROR CORRECTION AND EVALUATION FORMATS

Johnson (1988) makes a distinction between a mistake and an error. A mistake is when a student has faulty knowledge, while an error is when a student does not have the appropriate knowledge. For example, a student using the French definite articles in front of all nouns, even in cases where an indefinite article is required, makes a mistake if the indefinite articles have been taught in class. The same student would be making an error if the indefinite articles have not yet been taught in class, and therefore should not be penalized. Johnson (1988) also points out that teachers have been paying more attention to errors than to mistakes. In all fairness, errors should not carry the consequence of points being deducted. Only mistakes should.

Several formats for composition evaluation are available to instructors. The two formats presented here take into account both mechanical and creative aspects of compositions. The Gaudiani (1981) format was developed more than ten years ago and it evaluates students' compositions in four areas:
1. Grammar/vocabulary:

A = fluent with moments of elegance, few errors
B = comprehensible, some errors
C = substantial and significant errors
D = one or more blocks of communication
F = unintelligible

2. Stylistic technique:

A = skilled use of syntax in terms of content, variation in syntax
B = clear, appropriate, and sophisticated syntax
C = errors, but attempts at sophistication and appropriateness
D = errors or inappropriate syntax
F = garbled syntax

3. Organization:

A = well-organized paragraphs, use of clear topic and summary sentences, convincing, easy to follow
B = good evidence of structuring of paragraphs (perhaps an unwieldy use of patterns of organization)
C = some attempts at organization, but few topic, development, summary sequences
D = hard to follow, organization undermines intelligibility
F = no evidence of planning in structure of paragraphs

4. Content:

A = significant, interesting, appropriate, well thought out, appropriate to assignment
B = generally good work, but facts may be unsupported, or repetitions or cliches may be apparent
C = careless development of data relevant to content
D = no effort to make content significant to composition
F = incoherent or wildly inappropriate content

Henning (1987) developed a composition evaluation format with fairness to the student in mind. As he points out:
Some examinees write longer passages than others and so produce more errors as a function of their greater effort. This suggests that rate of errors per specified passage length is more useful than an actual frequency tally of errors. Some examinees avoid all complex structures and sophisticated vocabulary for fear of mistakes, while others attempt more creative use of language and thus generate comparatively more errors. Such problems suggest that an element of subjective judgment on the part of the person scoring the test may be necessary. (p.33)

Henning (1987) goes on to suggest four different ways to minimize this element of subjectivity. First, he proposes the following rating schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanics</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar usage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Relevance to topic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Creativity/interest</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthography</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Range and sophistication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraphing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>of syntax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Richness of vocabulary/express.</td>
<td>1</td>
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5 5
Then, Henning (1987) suggests employing multiple independent raters in order to achieve rater reliability. He also advocates the elicitation of multiple writing samples from the examinee. In addition, Henning (1987) also proposes the use of the following global behavior-specific rating schedule:

1. Writing is indistinguishable from that of a competent native speaker: rated 5
2. Writing is grammatically correct but employs non-native usages: rated 4
3. Writing contains infrequent errors of grammar, lexis, spelling, or punctuation: rated 3
4. Writing contains numerous errors of grammar, lexis, spelling, and punctuation: rated 2
5. Writing is incomprehensible. Orthography is illegible: rated 1

Whereas these schedules may sometimes seem tedious, time-consuming and perhaps difficult to keep up with in a realistic situation, certainly instructors can at the very least select aspects of these that they deem useful, helpful and actually practical. Regardless of their flaws, the above formats and schedules show alternatives to previous rating scales and systems in which teachers tended to "count off" for each grammar mistake or to use formulas such as this one described by Gaudiani (1981):
5 errors = A, 6-10 errors = B, 11-14 errors = C, etc. As we know, there is far more to a good composition than its mechanical and grammatical aspects. Therefore, using the above schedules and formats gives students a new message stating that not only is it important how well they write, but WHAT they write is also evaluated and taken into account. This encourages students to write to communicate, for a purpose and because they have something to say on a particular topic; it also shows them and reinforces the elements of good writing.

Encouraging the students to rewrite is another aspect of composition evaluation consistently found in the literature. Gaudiani (1981) states that: "Rewriting all assignments is an important facet of learning to write well." (p.22) Indeed, how else are teachers going to have students look at and examine their mistakes if not by having them rewrite the assignment for another grade? Among the advocates of rewriting are Gaudiani (1981), and Chenoweth (1987). Chenoweth (1987) starts with the observation that in L1, unskilled writers do not rewrite, they simply edit, correct surface errors (such as grammatical mistakes, choice of words and punctuation). On the other hand, skilled writers do rewrite and spend considerable time working on the overall content to ensure that their readers will understand the meaning they want to convey. This is why she believes that by having students rewrite assignments, not only do they acquire better grammar
skills, but they are also given the chance to improve the content of their work. Since unskilled writers lack strategies for handling the content of their writing, Chenoweth (1987) suggests that teachers devise writing tasks that enable students to rewrite drafts in ways that will improve the content of their essays. Otherwise, by correcting only surface level errors without commenting on content, teachers simply reinforce the students' tendency to focus on sentence-level problems, and therefore participate in making grammar - not communication - the primary area of their instruction.

Over the years, several ways to generate rewriting have been proposed. One of the most popular one is "coding" or "hinting" at errors in the text, leading the students to self-correct. Self-correction and feedback seem to be the most efficient way in which students can better their skills and acquire language competence (Herron & Tomasello, 1988; Herron, 1981). Although Herron's work is mainly in the area of oral production, it certainly can be applied to feedback in writing. What Herron and Tomasello (1988) found out is, first of all, that not all errors need to be corrected at all times because this procedure shatters students' confidence (see also Krashen, 1977). Secondly, they discovered that material taught through the feedback-self-correction method - as compared to modelling - was retained better.
One way to use this feedback-self-correction method in the area of writing is "coding". "Coding", according to Hendrickson (1980), encourages discovery learning. Generally, error correction in compositions written by both L1 and L2 students consists in simply providing the correct forms and structures in students' faulty sentences. Editing is therefore the most common technique used by instructors today. Hendrickson (1980) suggests having a system for coding errors in students' papers. Then, returning the essays to the students and, using the codes, having the students self-correct their work. There are basically two ways to do this, according to Hendrickson (1980): "indirect correction treatment" and "direct correction treatment". Indirect correction may indicate either the presence or location of errors. Direct correction consists in indicating the presence and location of errors in a sentence, but also provides clues or tips for students on how to correct their own errors. Lalande (1984) is also an advocate of coding. His system proposes a list of the most common mistakes in German grammar and uses twenty "codes" to point out to the student the nature of the error. For example, the code "WO" means that something is wrong with word order in a sentence. A "T" points out an inappropriate tense selection. This discovery technique on the part of the student represents one the best ways to attract students' attention to their mistakes. Used in combination with a schedule of evaluation such as the ones described above, the
Coding of errors may well be the best tool FL instructors have at their disposal. However, still missing from this picture is the all important personalized comment on content. Cohen (1987) analyzed students' reactions to teacher correction of compositions in second language acquisition and found out that students were more interested in comments instructors had made about content and organization. Teachers, on the other hand, were more concerned with grammatical accuracy and form of the composition. It is a fact that instructors in foreign language classes usually are so busy correcting for grammar and general accuracy, that they rarely have time for or even think about commenting on the actual ideas and the original content of their students' writings. However, as we now know, it has been shown that when teachers correct every mistake, students may be forced to deal with too many changes, more than they may be able to handle and absorb (Zamel, 1983). As Omaggio (1993) states:

Research evidence on the effectiveness of error correction in second language writing is conflicting, as is research on the attitudes of students toward correction of their work. (p.314)

Some researchers suggest that instructors should evaluate content and not form (Semke, 1984); others say both content and form should be taken into account (Fathman and Whalley, 1985); and yet others suggest
that grading students' compositions may be a total waste of time, for whether or not students wrote a composition for a grade does not seem to affect the number of errors or the quality of writing (Chastain, 1990).

It is now widely accepted that the responsibility of foreign language teachers is to teach students how to use language as a tool that will enable them to accomplish communicative purposes (= functions) in specific settings (= situations) on particular subjects (= topics). It is equally generally accepted that, in a communicative approach, teaching a foreign language has for its main goal to enable students to eventually communicate with native speakers of the target language and to understand better a culture other than their own. Therefore, in written communication with native speakers of a language, it would only be logical that the important components of the text would be its message and meaning, not its form or grammatical accuracy.

THE NEED FOR THE STUDY

It is common practice in large universities to have teaching assistants (TAs) teach beginning and intermediate foreign language classes. As previously mentioned, the majority of these teaching assistants are American graduate students enrolled in Master's or Ph.D programs in foreign languages and literatures, and are not native speakers of the target
language. Many of the other TAs are native speakers who have come to the United States to study other subjects. Their native ability in the language is what makes them "marketable" to teach their own language.

Although there have been studies conducted comparing error correction performed by native speakers and non-native speakers in student composition, none has compared the two groups to find out specifically where the differences lie: types of errors corrected, presence or absence of comment on content, use or non-use of a correction format, use or non-use of an evaluation schedule.

Moreover, whereas there exists a standardized instrument for measuring proficiency in speaking (the OPI), we have seen that no such tool exists for evaluating proficiency in writing. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986) describe nine levels of proficiency in writing: novice-low, novice-mid, novice-high, intermediate-low, intermediate-mid, intermediate-high, advanced, advanced-high and superior. These levels do not describe a particular course of study, but rather the range of ability of writers in a foreign language classroom. Writing tasks at each level must be designed according to the ability level of students. At the novice level, writers may be asked to list items (grocery list, things to do today, etc.); at a more proficient level, students may be assigned a particular topic and asked to write a composition in the target language. At an advanced level, students
may have to write term papers, or even doctoral dissertations. However, whereas the guidelines provide information as to what type of task is appropriate at each level, there is no information presented as to how to evaluate students' production. Obviously, beginning and intermediate L2 learners make a lot of mistakes when they write (or speak) in the target language. The question is then: should all mistakes be corrected? In light of the previous discussion, the answer is no. In a communicative approach to teaching a foreign language, it seems only fair to assume that only errors deemed "troublesome" and unacceptable by native speakers should be corrected (Chastain, 1980). The terms "troublesome" and unacceptable are vague and need further exploration. They could mean: prevents comprehension, makes natives laugh, "hurts a native's ear", irritates a native speaker, etc.

The underlying rationale for conducting this study is multi-faceted. First, few studies have been done in L2 writing and L2 error correction. Even fewer studies have been conducted comparing native and non-native speakers teaching a language. Secondly, since writing is now regarded as a process rather than a product, the present study proposes to examine if, aside from the grammatical corrections, instructors evaluated the compositions' content. Thirdly, if it is true that one learns to write through writing, this study will also attempt to see if writing a first draft and a final
draft helped the students "weed out" some of their most obvious mistakes. Lastly, there exist evaluation standards for measuring oral proficiency, but none for written proficiency.

The purpose of the present dissertation is to examine the differences between error correction performed by native speakers and non-native speakers of French. The researcher's hypothesis is that there exists a difference and that native speakers correct fewer mistakes than non-natives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions this study proposes to address are:

1. Are there any differences in the number of corrections performed by native and non-native speakers/instructors of university intermediate French classes when they evaluate compositions?

2. Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers in the categories (verb-clause, noun-clause, spelling, pronouns) where error correction was performed?

3. Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers when and if they paid attention to content?
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following terms are key expressions in this research and must be defined from the beginning. They will be used and referred to often in this study.

Accuracy: in a foreign language, accuracy can have different aspects. It includes discourse structure, syntax, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. However, accuracy in the foreign language classroom typically stands for "grammatical accuracy", that is, is usage of grammar correct or faulty? This issue will be explored further in chapter II of this dissertation.

Acquisition: is the process through which learners of a foreign language internalize its rules and formulas. (Rivers, 1983). "Acquisition" is therefore equivalent to "learning". However, Krashen (1981) makes a distinction between "learning" and "acquisition". An advocate of the Natural Approach, Krashen believes that acquisition is the unconscious and natural process through which children acquire and use their native language. "Learning", on the other hand, is the conscious and directed internalization of the rules of a target language through formal study.

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: compiled by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the guidelines describe four levels of proficiency (novice, intermediate, advanced and superior) for all four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The guidelines
enable the creation of instruments to assess the performance of a person communicating in a foreign language. There are nine proficiency levels in the area of writing: novice-low, novice-mid, novice-high, intermediate-low, intermediate-mid, intermediate-high, advanced, advanced-plus, and superior. To each level of proficiency correspond writing tasks adapted to the students’ ability.

O.P.I.: or Oral Proficiency Interview. It was developed in order to measure the oral proficiency level of a learner. The OPI follows three criteria of evaluation: functions, content and accuracy. Functions are the tasks or purposes of why a person would communicate orally with another. Content represents what the person says, the topic or the subject matter. Accuracy deals with the degree of correctness of the utterance, especially its morphological and syntactic features.

Feedback: it is the nature, the amount, the quality of teacher’s reaction and response to student’s work. Feedback can take many forms: oral or written, it is either positive or negative. On a composition, feedback can simply be a grade; or it can also take the form of more content-oriented comments from the instructor to the student. Feedback is also associated with motivation. When in the form of encouragements, positive feedback may promote students’ positive attitude toward the language, and consequently aid learning.
**Target language**: the target language is the foreign or second language that the learner is in the process of learning. There is a distinction between second and foreign language. A second language is a language which is not native to the learner but which is present in his environment. A foreign language is a language other than the learner's mother tongue and it is not spoken or used for communication in the learner's environment.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into four sections. In order to have a better understanding of the problems existing in the areas of error correction and writing in a foreign language, the researcher believes that several issues should be examined. The debate over the issue of accuracy occupies a central place in the lack of consensus over the teaching of grammar plaguing the profession today. It will be presented and discussed in the first section of this chapter.

Students' writing in a foreign language class typically and systematically swarms with mistakes of all kinds. Indeed, their minimal knowledge and their lack of mastery of the target language are responsible for faulty usages. Students' writing is an example of interlanguage at work. This is the reason why the second section of this chapter presents and explains the theory of interlanguage.

Since the present dissertation is concerned with a comparison between native and nonnative speakers when they correct second year students' compositions, the third section of this chapter details and presents various studies involving comparisons between native speakers and nonnative speakers' reactions toward learners' errors, and corrections as performed by native speakers and non-native speakers.
Lastly, the researcher deemed necessary to examine some theoretical positions and studies in writing and the writing process. Current positions in the area of writing need to be presented as a justification of the present study.

THE ACCURACY DEBATE

In his introduction to *Learning another language through actions: The complete teacher's guidebook*, James Asher (1986) reveals startling statistics about the dropout rate among second language students. He states that about 85% of students who start with the acquisition of another language drop out after the third year of instruction. About 95% of the same students drop out after the fourth year of instruction. In other words, according to Asher (1986), only about 5% of students who start a second language continue to proficiency. Asher (1986) identifies the cause of the problem as the stressful nature of formal school training in languages. In his opinion, only a small number of students are able to deal successfully with the stressful environment of the second language classroom. He believes that the solution would be to develop instructional strategies that could reduce stress and persuade about 75% of students to continue to proficiency. VanPatten (1986) identifies the same problem when he says that students who don't want to learn in the first place will most likely not learn
much at all. This is true of all components of a language, including linguistic
accuracy and communicative skills. Current second language acquisition
researchers agree to say that attitudes and motivation are key factors
toward the successful acquisition of a second language (Dulay, Burt &
Krashen, 1982). Therefore, knowing the characteristics of the learner
population should help curriculum and syllabus designers develop concepts
and ideas making second language acquisition more attractive and
essentially more relevant to the students. Moreover, current research on the
effectiveness of formal grammatical instruction indicates that it may be
advisable to move away from the grammar-based syllabus and to design a
more functional and proficiency-oriented course of study in the second
language classroom. However, this particular position on the effectiveness
of formal grammatical instruction is challenged by many. The ongoing
debate over the role of accuracy in second language acquisition is far from
being resolved or even settled. As was mentioned in chapter one of this
work, accuracy in second or foreign language acquisition is generally
understood to mean linguistic, morphosyntactic or grammatical accuracy.
The current debate revolves around the following questions: Should there
be any grammar instruction at all? If so, what kind? Should it be explicit and
formal? Should it be contextualized?
Advocates of a communicative approach to language teaching (Savignon, 1983, 1991; VanPatten, 1991) have denounced the ineffectiveness and artificial character of traditional formal grammar instruction. Second language acquisition studies show that teaching the code of a given language is less significant than was initially thought. The route of acquisition remains largely unaffected by the formal teaching of rules (Pienemann, 1984; Ellis, 1985). As defined by Savignon (1983), communication is: "the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning in a given context" (p. 54). In a communicative approach to language learning, students are to learn to communicate in the target language by communicating. "Real" communication in the classroom occurs when students are given opportunities to use the target language to exchange meaning with one another for a purpose on a particular topic. Therefore, it does not make much sense to have students practice newly learned grammatical structures in the typical and very mechanical substitution drills. It makes even less sense to have the instructor "present" each new grammatical structure to the students in a vacuum, out of context, unrelated to any meaningful situation and totally void of communicative potential. The situation described above is an example of second language classes where one talks about the target language instead of talking in the target language.
However, the communicative approach has been criticized for neglecting linguistic accuracy (Omaggio, 1986; 1993) and because it lacks grammatical instruction. This criticism has also been directed toward Krashen's input hypothesis (1985) and Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach (1982). It is Krashen's belief that an individual acquires a second language through exposure to comprehensible input in a low-anxiety setting. Therefore, in a natural approach to language learning, the teaching of grammatical rules and the use of error correction are largely discouraged.

Omaggio (1986; 1993) helped develop the concept of contextualization. Teaching language in context appeared to be the solution to all past ills. Thus, teaching grammar in context and the use of what VanPatten (1991) calls "structured output" gives students the opportunity to be exposed to new structures in a given context or situation and to immediately start using the newly learned structure for communicating about a given topic and performing a given function. As VanPatten (1991) points out, those who favor a communicative approach to language teaching are often accused of being "antigrammar". He further explains that to each of the stages of acquisition he outlined (early, intermediate, and advanced), there corresponds an appropriate kind of grammar instruction (language notes, language appreciation, comprehension facilitators, structured input,
and grammar in context or structured output). The point is that grammatical features should never be separate from their meaningful use and that

Grammar instruction in a communicative curriculum should always try to support the idea that meaning is encoded in grammatical features.

(p. 69)

Garrett (1991) joins the debate when she points out:

The pervasive belief that in classroom language acquisition one of the major issues is the continuing debate that pits a focus on form against a focus on meaning. (p.74)

Garrett (1991) also indicates that the reason why the debate has lasted so long is that there is no solution to it. More importantly perhaps, she also notes that many of the studies investigating the relative value of a focus on meaning and a focus on form are flawed in one way or another. Some of the problems she indicates are the presence of too many uncontrollable variables, the existence of problems with the data itself, and a tendency to overgeneralize the results yielded by a study. However, Garrett (1991) supports some form of grammar instruction in the language classroom. She states:

We cannot assume that when grammar is not mentioned in class learners will automatically, successfully, induce the foreign language's
grammatical concepts from the input; we have to investigate what they actually induce and why. (p. 83)

Therefore, Garrett (1991) believes that the debate over accuracy should be more learner-centered rather than focused on methodologies.

Higgs (1991) examines two aspects of the role of grammar and accuracy in classroom-based foreign language acquisition. The first one is the importance of linguistic accuracy in oral communication and the second is the credibility and attainability of linguistic accuracy as a goal of instruction in a foreign language classroom. The examination of the first aspect reveals the importance of linguistic accuracy: the more accurate the message, the better the communication. However, the analysis of the second aspect yields very different results. After numerous calculations dealing with exactly how much exposure students get to the target language, and how much they use it in a classroom setting, even in the best of cases, the end result is depressingly low. Therefore, Higgs (1991) concludes that:

Viewed in this light, our position as foreign language educators seems desperate. That is, it would seem that no method, no set of materials, no pedagogical or curricular revolution can even theoretically make it possible for us to produce fluent, virtually bilingual adult users of other languages on the strength of instructional programs alone. I believe, however, that our position is
desperate only when we myopically, and perhaps egocentrically, assume that producing functioning bilinguals is a legitimate and realizable goal of classroom instruction. (p. 51)

Joining Higgs in this position is Savignon (1991). Echoing Higgs's belief that the debate over accuracy is not about methods, - which only serve as a pretext to obscure the real issue - , but rather about the goals of instruction themselves, Savignon (1991) asks:

Given present resources and commitment, should the goals of useful second language communicative skill development be abandoned as utopian? Should more traditional, general educational goals of linguistic awareness be reaffirmed in their stead? Herein lies the real debate. (p. 42)

Mitchell and Redmond (1993) researched several recent views on the role of grammar in the communicative classroom. The method they used included reviewing secondary and higher education French textbooks. Although the textbooks all claimed to emphasize communication, Mitchell and Redmond (1993) found out that they were all grammatically oriented and that the chapter sequencing was organized around grammatical structures. The authors then conclude that it appears we must teach grammar one way or another. This is also the position adopted by VanPatten (1991). Although VanPatten disagrees with the common
expectation for grammatical accuracy and is against teaching formal
grammar in the early and mid-stages of language learning, he acknowledges
the fact that few researchers advocate totally abandoning the teaching of
grammar. Even Terrell (1991) reconsidered his stand in this matter. Along
with Krashen, Terrell was famous for his firm belief in the natural acquisition
process. The distinction made between learning and acquisition had pitted
grammar against communication. Advocates of a natural approach
discouraged the use of explicit grammar instruction, and instead provided
large amounts of comprehensible input through which the learner was to
acquire grammatical knowledge communicatively.

However, Terrell (1991) recently changed his views on explicit
grammar instruction. The evolution in Terrell’s position does not in any way,
shape or form imply a return to the grammar-based syllabus and instruction,
but expands the role of grammar instruction in the language acquisition
process. What he suggests is the use of "advance organizers": the instructor
deliberately calls the students’ attention to a particular structure and exposes
the students to many instances of the same form. Then, the students
engage in communicative activities in order to focus on meaning.

Perhaps the reader now has a better understanding of the accuracy
debate. As Savignon (1991) puts it:
Today, discussions focus not so much on whether or not learners should be given the opportunity to communicate, but on whether explicit attention to rules of usage is of help in the acquisition of functional, that is, communicative, skills. (p. 35)

One of the reasons why some researchers have changed their views on the role of explicit grammar instruction in the second language classroom is based on current developments in the research concerning the interlanguage theory. Garrett (1991) does away with much of the current accuracy debate when she says:

We should focus our attention on research paradigms exploring interlanguage mappings of all kinds of meanings, and for the moment at least abandon standard attempts to evaluate methodology. (p. 84)

This move away from systematic analyses of teaching methodologies echoes Freed's position (1991) presented in chapter 1 of this dissertation. More studies examining the nature and inner workings of interlanguage are needed if we want to be able to understand how someone learns a foreign language. Perhaps once the profession discovers more about interlanguage, there will be better teachers. The following section proposes to explore the interlanguage theory.
THE INTERLANGUAGE THEORY

Several present major theoretical positions stress the importance of contextualized input and output in the language acquisition process (Glisan & Shrum, 1994). Among those existing is the Interlanguage Theory. Also known as language-learner language (Corder, 1978), interlanguage as defined in Omaggio (1986) is:

An intermediate system located on a continuum stretching from the mother tongue to the target language - a system that is governed by its own rules and that rarely becomes totally congruent with the system of the second language unless language acquisition begins very early in life. (p. 274)

This definition is largely borrowed from Selinker's work on the Interlanguage Hypothesis (1974). Selinker (1974) believes that the incongruence characterizing a learner's interlanguage is inevitable and is a consequence of error fossilization. He further explains that fossilization occurs when items, rules and subsystems from the native language are adopted in the interlanguage of a second language learner. These aspects of the interlanguage are permanent and will never disappear for most second language learners. Fossilization is what has occurred when inaccurate forms have been integrated into learner language that are resistant to any amount of correction and/or instruction. Selinker (1974)
believes that interlanguage is created by language learners as a result of five cognitive processes: (1) interference from the native language; (2) effect of instruction (the method, the teacher, the activities performed in class, etc.); (3) overgeneralization of target language rules; (4) strategies used in second language learning (memorization, formal instruction, guessing, etc.); (5) strategies involved in second language communication (circumlocution, gestures, getting help, etc.).

Recent research seems to indicate that we may be able to predict the order in which certain structures are acquired both in first and second language acquisition (Lightbown, 1985). Secondly, VanPatten (1986) found evidence that not only are certain sequences of acquisition predictable, but the order in which they are acquired is different from the order in which they are taught. Hence the inadequacy of textbooks and chapter sequencing. Once again the unsatisfactory grammar-based character of today's second language instruction is demonstrated. As Freed (1991) indicates, second language acquisition research has focused on learner processes, strategies, interlanguage and transfer in hopes of discovering the source of learner errors and so as to avoid them in the future. Foreign language acquisition researchers have for their part examined methods, curriculum, testing, materials and technology in an attempt to arrive at better results. Freed (1991), Garrett (1991) and Savignon (1991) all agree to say that foreign
language acquisition research needs to change its emphasis on methods and, like second language acquisition research, needs to become learner-centered. Examining the nature of learner errors in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, may lead to an investigation of learners' cognitive processes, and help determine which learner strategies and/or processes could be sources for production errors in speaking and writing.

Omaggio (1986, 1993) as well as most advocates of proficiency-based instruction believe that there should be great concern for the development of linguistic accuracy from the onset of second language instruction. Early attention to grammatical accuracy may prevent some faulty items' fossilization into a learner's interlanguage.

Ellis (1985) indicates that there exists great variability in types of interlanguage. Even within one learner's interlanguage, there may exist several types of interlanguages corresponding to various contexts. Therefore, in his view, a learner's linguistic competence is certainly not homogeneous, but heterogeneous. Ellis (1985) states that learners have several distinct "styles" they use for performing different specific tasks. Among the sources of variability cited by Ellis (1985), are the type of task the learner has to perform and the complexity of the language the learner is trying to use. Ellis's model implies that learners attempting to perform simple tasks and paying attention to form perform most accurately. In other
words, the simpler the task and the most attention devoted to grammatical accuracy, the most accurate the performance.

The interlanguage theory is central to this work, because it deals with error correction in the productive processes: speaking and writing. Since this dissertation proposes to examine compositions written by students in a foreign language class, it is crucial that the reader understand that the compositions in this study represent examples of learners' interlanguage at work. The treatment of errors in the productive skills has changed over the decades, and the next section in this chapter proposes to examine recent research endeavors in the area of native and non-native reactions to student errors in oral and written production.

NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE REACTIONS TO STUDENT ERRORS

For the sake of clarity, this section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection deals with studies in student oral production, and the second one discusses studies conducted in the area of student written production.

Studies in student oral production

A growing number of studies are analyzing native speaker and non-native speaker reactions to student errors in speaking. Most of these studies can be said to examine these reactions in terms of comprehensibility,
irritation and acceptability of student production in the target language. Many of these studies focus on comprehensibility, and some of them consist of artificially created sentences (Guntermann, 1978; Piazza-Gaylord, 1980; Chastain, 1980). The sentences represent what second language learners might say rather than what they actually said. One advantage to the use of created sentences is that there is greater control over the linguistic factors that are hypothesized to affect comprehensibility. The disadvantage is that created sentences are not samples of authentic communicative language and they lack context.

In Chastain’s study (1980), instructors of Spanish were asked to list student errors that they thought were the most serious ones. From all the lists collected, one master list was compiled. Based on this list of errors, thirty-five Spanish sentences were generated, each containing at least one of the mentioned errors and none containing more than three errors. The sentences were evaluated for comprehensibility by native speakers of Spanish.

Results show that comprehension is most severely limited by word usage, use of a wrong word or addition or omission of words. Many errors are unacceptable for reasons other than frustration from trying to understand. Native speakers were greatly concerned neither with correct use of definite articles, nor with correct agreement of nouns and adjectives. In
most circumstances, the absence of distinction between preterit and imperfect did not seem to bother the native Spanish speakers.

Piazza-Gaylord's study (1980) investigated French native speakers' tolerance for sentences containing grammatical errors typical of American students learning French. She examined the following four items: 1. the degree to which the grammatical errors interfered with comprehension; 2. the degree of irritation caused by the errors; 3. whether the errors were more easily tolerated in written or oral mode of presentation; and 4. a rank order of the errors in terms of comprehensibility, irritation and mode of presentation. Two hundred sixty four Parisian students were randomly divided into four groups to rate their tolerance of twenty types of grammatical errors in spoken and written language samples. The raters were not told that the students were American. The language samples were evaluated in the following six grammatical categories:

1. noun-marking
2. word order
3. agreement
4. verb form
5. tense usage
6. pronouns
In general, the more comprehensible an error type, the less irritating it was. The less comprehensible an error type, the more irritating it was. Greater tolerance was shown for tense usage and agreement errors. Incorrect word order was relatively non-irritating but could be a problem for comprehension. The least tolerance was shown for errors of verb forms and pronouns. Errors were generally better tolerated in writing than in the spoken language samples.

A similar study conducted by Politzer (1978) had German students evaluate a series of sentence pairs containing errors. Results showed that vocabulary errors were considered most serious in 77% of the sentence pairs, that grammatical errors were indicated as serious 50% of the time, and that in 36% of the pairings, phonological errors were indicated.

Thus far, and in light of the studies surveyed (Chastain, 1980; Piazza-Gaylord, 1980; Guntermann, 1978; Politzer, 1978), it appears that vocabulary errors especially in combination with grammatical errors, are the most serious obstacle to effective oral communication.

Corroborating the results of the above-mentioned studies, another study conducted by Magnan (1982) investigated sensitivities to fifteen types of grammatical errors typically made in speech by American learners of French. A survey conducted by Magnan in 1981 tried to determine which grammatical errors made by Americans speaking French were more irritating
to native speakers of French and to what extent these same errors were irritat
ting to teachers of French in the U.S. In order to answer the preceding que
tions, fifteen types of grammatical errors considered to be typical of lower-level American learners of French were investigated. They represent five parts of speech and were classified in the following five categories:

1. Definite article
2. Adjective agreement
3. Preposition between verb and infinitive
4. Verb morphology
5. Clitic pronoun

These fifteen types of grammatical errors were embedded in 110 pairs of sentences. The sentence pairs were identical, except for the error contained by each.

Judges listened to a recording of the 110 sentence pairs. The judges included native French speakers from Paris and Nancy, tested in France and who represented three age groups: students in C.E.S. (or middle school equivalent), students in Lycée (or high school equivalent) and adults. The other judges were teachers of French tested in the U.S. belonging to four groups: native French speakers teaching at all levels, and native English speakers who were junior high/high school teachers, university instructors, and university faculty. The judges listened to the recording of the sentence
pairs and completed a sociolinguistic background questionnaire dealing with age, sex, socioeconomic status, experience with English for the French native speakers in France; for teachers in the U.S., the questionnaire asked for information on age, sex, years of teaching experience, skills emphasized in the classroom and proficiency in French.

Results for adults and Lycee students show the following hierarchy of errors, from most to least irritating:

1. verbs
2. pronouns
3. definite articles
4. prepositions
5. adjectives

Research findings in the sensitivities of teachers of foreign languages in the U.S. were very similar to those of native speakers of these languages. The teachers of French teaching at all levels reacted to the fifteen types of grammatical errors in much the same way as the nonteaching native French speakers tested in France.

Magnan (1982) ends her article with a pedagogical hierarchy for error correction in French, based on French native speaker reactions. The hierarchy is as follows:
1. More serious errors:
- Verb morphology
- Pronouns
- Omission of definite articles

2. Intermediate errors:
- Inconsistency in gender agreement
- Non-agreement with nouns showing natural gender
- Prepositions between verbs and infinitives

3. Less serious errors:
- Non-agreement with nouns having only grammatical gender
- Verb errors attributable to pronunciation

Following the same idea, Ensz (1982) examined French attitudes toward speech errors of American students. Three passages were recorded by three native speakers (one female, two males). Each set of recordings had five "guises", or versions that varied only in terms of the errors committed. Guises of the same passage were never presented consecutively so that the native speaker informants would not realize that they were hearing only three speakers instead of fifteen separate individuals. The five guises were arranged as follows:
Ensz (1982) asked native speakers of French of all walks of life and all ages to react to the guises in terms of error tolerance and attitude toward the speakers heard. They found that grammatical errors were the most intolerable. The two hundred fifty respondents preferred guise # 5 over all others, then # 2, # 4, # 3, and # 1. In conclusion to this study, Ensz (1982) stated that:

While an American accent and some Anglicisms may be moderately tolerated, American speakers of French should be most concerned that they speak with the greatest possible grammatical accuracy. (p. 137-138)

The fact that raters expressed a significant intolerance for errors shows that French-speaking groups might be especially sensitive to accuracy - and perhaps more so than other language groups. The study
clearly reveals that the French speakers who participated in Ensz's study, judged irritation factors more severely than they did the comprehensibility of the language they heard.

To corroborate Ensz's findings and speculations about native speaker reaction to student errors, one may want to discuss a study conducted by Davies (1983). The purpose of this study was to find out and consider some ways in which a judge's viewpoint may affect the way he or she evaluates errors. A set of eighty-two sentences was generated. Not all sentences contained errors. However, when the sentences did contain errors, they were typical of the work of Moroccan secondary school learners of English. The sentences were presented to the judges (43 Moroccan teachers of English, 43 native speakers of English, all resident of Britain, none of them teachers).

The results show that natives were more lenient than non-natives. The comments revealed that natives had enjoyed grading the test and had a very positive attitude toward the learners' efforts. The non-natives who were also teachers took it as yet another tedious duty, and saw errors as another reminder of failure. The ranking of errors was not the same across the groups. The teachers ranked errors in tense and morphology as most serious, whereas the natives found clause errors as most unacceptable. The natives' viewpoint was not as syllabus-oriented as the teachers'.
Studies in student written production

Green and Hecht (1985) conducted a study comparing native and non-native evaluation of learners' errors in written discourse. The purpose of their work was to establish categories, causes and gravity of errors and to examine differences in native and non-native assessment of them. Sixty German students (aged 15) wrote replies in English to English letters of elicitation. Each letter was graded by three German teachers of English and five native speakers of English, all of them teachers. The five native speakers of English included three who taught English, one Foreign Languages, and another Physics. Forty-six native speakers of English (all students) also wrote replies to the same letters of elicitation. And each letter was graded by two native speakers of English (other than the five native speakers mentioned previously) who also taught English. The letters written by the students who were native speakers of English served as the authenticity check of the task. The results show that all the letters written by the German pupils achieved a minimal communication. Only one letter was found to be largely unintelligible.

An error survey chart was established for each German student's letter. Everything any grader considered an error was recorded on this chart. Then the errors were classified by error category, according to whether or not the errors had been identified by a majority or a minority of German or
English graders. Then, only those errors identified by a majority of English graders were treated as real errors. Errors identified by a majority of German graders without support of the majority of English graders were regarded as pseudo-errors. Errors identified by only a minority of both German and English graders were considered idiosyncratic errors. Overall, there was a large measure of disagreement over errors and a very low inter-rater reliability. The real errors were then analyzed in three areas: 1. error category, 2. error cause, 3. error gravity.

Results in error category show that more than half the errors recorded were grammatical in nature. Few errors caused a breakdown in meaning. Out of about 1045 errors, 108 (10 %) affected comprehension. 24 % of those that did were grammatical errors and 76 % errors in vocabulary and style.

Results in error cause show a variety of possibilities or a combination of more than one possibility. Among the causes listed were: interference from first language; interference from second language (overgeneralization); faulty teaching; inadequate learning; lack of contrast; confused thinking.

In the area of error gravity, results demonstrated little agreement between graders. However, it can be said that overall, German graders were the most severe in the category of grammatical errors. Natives were more influenced by meaning in their judgment of error gravity. German graders
focused more on form and consequently, communication of meaning was somewhat secondary and often simulated.

Also in the area of writing, Kobayashi (1992) conducted a study investigating how English native speakers and Japanese native speakers at professorial, graduate and undergraduate levels evaluated ESL compositions written by Japanese college students. Two compositions (composition A and composition B) written by two 22-year-old male native speakers of Japanese were evaluated by a total of two hundred sixty nine subjects, all of whom were in language-related disciplines (some were undergraduate students, some graduate students, others were professors) such as: linguistics, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, ESL, English literature, speech communications, Japanese, French, and Spanish. There were 145 native speakers of English. In this group, one third of the professors taught in ESL, Linguistics, English, European Languages, and East Asian Languages. Another third taught in various language-related departments. The last third of the professors taught English to college students in Japan. The rest of the native English-speaking group consisted of undergraduate students who were all majoring in English or another language.

In the Japanese native-speaking group, the professors held degrees in English literature, English linguistics, and applied linguistics. All of them taught English. The graduate students in this group were enrolled in MA
programs in ESL, and the undergraduate students were all majoring in English education, linguistics, English literature, and speech communication.

The subjects were assigned either composition A or composition B and asked to evaluate them according to the following four criteria: grammaticality, clarity of meaning, naturalness, and organization, using a 10 point scale.

Results in this study are divided into four areas. The first is that of grammaticality. Overall, it can be said that Japanese subjects of all academic levels evaluated both compositions more positively on the grammaticality scale than did the English native-speaking subjects. For both compositions, the higher the academic status of the groups, the smaller the differences were between English and Japanese subjects. Among the English native-speaking group, the higher the status of the group, the more positive the rating for both compositions. Among the native Japanese-speaking group, the ratings varied widely for the two compositions: in composition A, the Japanese graduate students gave the most positive evaluations, whereas the professors gave the most negative. In composition B, the findings were reversed.

In the area of clarity of meaning, when comparing native speakers of English and Japanese with the same academic status, English native-speaking professors and graduate students gave more positive evaluations.
than did the equivalent Japanese-speaking group. However, the Japanese undergraduates evaluated the compositions significantly more positively than the English native-speaking undergraduate students. Among the English native-speaking groups, the higher the status, the more positive the evaluation. This was not true for Japanese native-speaking groups. Perhaps, one may have expected those who share a common first language to be better able to understand learner writing in the second language. In this study however, results yielded the opposite scenario. Kobayashi (1992) suspects that English professors and graduate students were simply more generous in their evaluation of what they considered as being reasonably good writing by nonnative speakers.

In the area of naturalness, if one discards the graduate students' evaluation of composition B, English native speakers were more strict in their judgments than their Japanese counterparts. A safe explanation to this finding may be that native speakers have stricter criteria for naturalness in their own language than do nonnatives. And in turn, this may be explained by the fact that nonnatives have difficulty judging the naturalness in a second language, whereas native speakers can rely on their intuition.

In the last area of organization, when comparing English and Japanese native speakers at each level, English native-speaking professors and graduate students gave more positive evaluations for both compositions
than did their Japanese counterparts. However, the Japanese undergraduate students evaluated both compositions far more positively than the English undergraduate students.

Takashima (1987) raised another important question with a study examining to what extent non-native speakers are qualified to correct free composition. In order to investigate this issue, a Japanese university graduate who majored in English was asked to write a composition. A Japanese teacher of English and two native speakers of English who were also college level teachers were asked to correct the composition. The corrected versions were compared and the results are as follows:
- the non-native corrected as many mistakes as the natives
- the non-native modified the composition in a different way from the native speakers, and sometimes to the detriment of the original meaning
- the non-native was relatively good at correcting mistakes in punctuation and spelling
- the non-native's lack of knowledge of some grammatical rules or proper usage had some effect on his ability to correct the composition.

In light of the above presented studies, it is apparent that native speakers are generally more competent than non-native speakers in their corrections; it also appears that native speakers correct errors that affect comprehension and meaning, whereas their non-native counterparts tend to
be more syllabus-driven in their corrections. One can also conclude that
generally speaking native speakers are more qualified than non-native
speakers to correct free compositions at the advanced level. Possible
implications from this research are that when correcting written samples
produced by students, instructors who teach with a communicative approach
should correct mistakes when and if they hinder comprehension and the
negotiation of meaning. Perhaps they should not correct mistakes at all?
However, foreign language teachers still view students' writing only as a
product for evaluation. Current research in this area does not support this
view. On the contrary, recent studies in the area of writing as a process
show that the act of writing in a second or a foreign language involves a lot
more than the mere "regurgitation" of memorized structures and vocabulary.
The next section of this chapter proposes to examine recent positions and
current research findings in the area of writing as a process.

RECENT RESEARCH IN THE WRITING PROCESS

As was stated in the first chapter of this work, research in both
second and foreign language acquisition has recently shown that there is a
lot more to the act of writing than just a means of verifying the acquisition
of a language's structures (Heilenman, 1991; Nystrand, 1982; Kern &
Schultz, 1992). Therefore, writing should no longer serve as a mere support
product-oriented skill, but should be regarded as a process-oriented, interactive and communicative act. Research in the role of communication in the foreign language classroom has placed the discussions, as Savignon (1991) puts it:

Not so much on whether learners should be given the opportunity to communicate, but rather on whether explicit attention to rules of usage is of help in the acquisition of functional, that is, communicative skills. (p.35)

Today's discussions do not question the validity and the efficiency of a communicative approach. Omaggio (1993) views the shift from writing as a support skill to writing as a communicative act as parallel to Rivers' (1975) distinction between skill-getting and skill-using activities. She states:

In Rivers' schema, skill-getting emphasizes the understanding of the way the language operates while skill-using emphasizes the use of the code for expressive writing and purposeful communication. (p.291)

Omaggio (1993) points out that Rivers (1975) had admittedly foreseen how difficult it is for teachers to effectively bridge the gap existing between the skill-getting and the skill-using phases of foreign language instruction. When dealing with writing, Omaggio (1993) believes that avoiding activities that are impersonal and manipulative in nature, and favoring activities that
are contextualized, meaningful and personalized can alleviate the problem. Omaggio (1993) also points out that most of today's research in writing comes from first language acquisition research and should therefore be interpreted with great caution.

However, there exists a consensus among scholars who agree to say that good writing in any language involves the same four components: (1) knowledge of the conventions of written discourse in that culture; (2) ability to choose from near synonyms the precise word that conveys one's meaning; (3) ability to select from a variety of syntactic structures those that transmit one's message most precisely; (4) ability to adopt a style that will have the most positive rhetorical effect (Omaggio, 1993; p.319). It is now quite obvious that the development of such expertise in foreign language writing does not come from practice exercises in grammar and vocabulary at the sentence level. Rather, teachers have to design writing instruction that will help students understand writing as discourse, along with the strategies and qualities characterizing writers' purposes and cultural backgrounds. Teachers must carefully plan second language writing instruction that can teach students more about the composing process itself, and according to Omaggio (1993):

A recursive, problem-solving activity that has the potential to affect students' writing and thinking skills in their native language, thus
extending the benefits of language study well beyond the second language classroom. (p.294)

Krashen (1984) extensively researched the composing process and found out that good writers differ from poor writers in at least three ways:

1. **planning**: good writers plan more, organize and take more time before they start writing;

2. **rescanning**: good writers stop often to review what they wrote;

3. **revising**: good writers revise more often and differently; poor writers tend to revise surface level forms, whereas good ones are more likely to make changes in content.

According to Savignon (1991) the teaching of composition has benefited from the new focus on the process rather than the product of writing. In agreement with Krashen (1984), Savignon (1991) states that the written expression of meaning is no longer seen as translation, transformation exercises, or the recombination of memorized phrases. Today, texts, not sentences, are the mode of self-expression, and the criterion for text identification is no longer length, but coherence. The professional literature is unanimous on the value of meaningful practice in second language writing: the more the better.

However, even if there exists a consensus on what makes one a good or poor writer, Carrell and Monroe (1993) remind the profession not to
lose sight of different leaners’ styles. Their research examines how different learning styles influence the effectiveness of different instructional methods for writing. In other words, it is suggested that different students engage in different writing processes, and not one, unique writing process. In this study, all the participants, who were also volunteers, agreed to take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a self-report inventory based on Jung’s theory of psychological type. The MBTI is a measuring instrument which attempts to identify an individual’s basic preferences in terms of his or her habitual use of perception and judgment. There are basically four scales representing polar opposites: 1. Extraversion-Introversion; 2. Sensing Perception-Intuitive Perception; 3. Thinking Judgment-Feeling Judgment; 4. Judging-Perceiving. The results of this study showed that students’ psychological types influenced their choice of individual writing process and their response to a particular instructional method. Raimes (1991) wrote a very comprehensive essay on the emerging traditions in the teaching of ESL writing in which she explores the following five issues: 1. the topics for writing; 2. the issue of ‘real writing’; 3. the nature of the academic discourse community; 4. contrastive rhetoric; and 5. responding to writing. Raimes (1991) reports on the shifts in focus in the area of writing. Historically, the focus of writing instruction was first placed on form in the 1960s. Writing took the form of sentence drills, fill-ins, substitutions, transformations, and
completions. Later, in the 1970s the focus was placed on the writer and the
writing process, and writing instruction took the form of sentence combining
and controlled composition. A focus on content came with the 1980s and the
advent of content-based instruction. Writing instruction took the shape of
reading and writing tasks built around academic contents. Simultaneously
in the 1980s came a focus on the reader, and on the expectations of
academic readers.

As far as topics for writing are concerned, Raimes (1991) states that
to each briefly described approach corresponds a wide array of topics. They
tend to be teacher-assigned in a form-dominated approach, chosen by
students in a writer-centered approach, inspired by the subject matter in a
content-based approach, and in response to a particular demand or exercise
in a reader-dominated approach.

Raimes (1991) then indicates that there has been much debate about
choosing topics for writing assignments as well as about the dichotomy of
writing as a product versus writing as a process. Criticisms of writing as a
product were presented to the reader in chapter one of this work. However,
critiques of the process approach say that it simply does not teach students
"university writing" (Raimes, 1991; p. 414). What "university writing" means
is left unclear in Raimes's article, but she states very clearly that, in her
opinion, the debate over these issues of product and process has remained
sterile because it has always been presented in an "either/or" fashion. In her view, two kinds of writing instruction are possible and are to be encouraged if we want our students to benefit from our classes: "writing for learning" (a process-dominated approach with pre-writing, drafts, revisions, etc.) and "writing for display" (a product oriented approach such as writing for exams) (p. 415). Surely, what Raimes (1991) mentions for ESL could also be applicable in foreign languages.

Raimes (1991) ends her landmark article with a synopsis of emerging traditions in the teaching of writing. First comes the recognition that composing is a very complex process. Next is the recognition that students come in a variety of cognitive styles. Also emerging is the recognition of learners' processes, of the politics of pedagogy and of the value of practice. Raimes (1991) finishes on a cautiously optimistic note when she says:

The fact that we are beginning to emerge from the woods with new recognitions but not a single new approach is perhaps the happiest 1991 ending that we can expect, given the diversity and complexity of our students and of learning and teaching writing. But by the end of the century, we could well be reading (and writing) a different story. (p. 423)
CONCLUSIONS

In light of the preceding discussions, it is now clearer what fuels the debate over accuracy. Form has been pitted against meaning. Current research tends to show that the more accurate the grammar, the more comprehensible the message. Therefore, grammatical accuracy should be tended to in foreign language instruction. However, it should be taught in context.

Error correction in the area of accuracy should be carefully planned for. As we know, students' production of language is interlanguage at work and will therefore contain many errors. In section three of this chapter, a review of studies conducted on the reactions of native speakers compared to reactions of nonnatives in the area of error correction was presented. Some of these studies yielded pedagogical instruments (Magnan, 1982) for use in the foreign language classroom.

Finally, the complexities of the writing process were presented to the reader as well as the issues associated with composing in writing, especially in a foreign language. As Raimes (1991) said, we have not made it out the woods yet, but current positions and realizations about writing do represent a beginning.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter is comprised of five parts: the first part contains a description of the population and the participants in this study: the native/non-native speakers/teachers groups. The second part depicts the data sources. The third part describes the method and the design. Part four deals with the analysis of the data. And part five discusses the design’s weaknesses and the limitations of the present study.

POPULATION AND PARTICIPANTS

Population

The total population is all university students enrolled in eight sections of third and fourth semester French at a large Southeastern state university. Studying a foreign language is a requirement for all undergraduate students enrolled at that institution in the college of Arts and Sciences. Completion of 12 hours of coursework in a foreign language is mandatory in order to graduate. The beginning language program at this university consists of two semesters of 4 credit hours each (1001, 1002) and the intermediate language program is comprised of two semesters of 3 credit hours each (2101, 2102). The total number of hours completed by a student after beginning and intermediate language instruction is 14 hours. Therefore,
most students participating in the present study are students in their "terminal" semesters, unless they are declared foreign language majors.

They are assigned to each section of third and fourth semester French courses by "Reggie," the registration computer. The names of the instructors normally do not appear in the pre-registration schedule of classes for they themselves usually do not find out what they will be teaching until the last minute. Moreover, students tend to choose a particular section over another based on time convenience with their own schedule.

Native and non-native speakers/teachers

The group of instructors through which the data was collected are teaching assistants in the Department of French at the same large southeastern state university. The native speakers' group includes four citizens from France. The non-native speakers' group includes four American citizens, all native speakers of English. It is common practice to assign more experienced teaching assistants to the intermediate courses. This means that the TAs in this study have all taught beginning level courses successfully and have been judged capable of handling intermediate level instruction. All of them have been teaching in the department of French for a minimum of two years. In this particular case, all eight TAs have already taught this level before and have had the experience of correcting and grading compositions.
DATA SOURCES

The researcher asked the eight teaching assistants who teach second-year French to provide her with photocopies of all the compositions (rough and final drafts) written by their students, already corrected, graded and returned to the students. The semester compositions were all syllabus assigned and the researcher chose the second written assignment on the syllabus. The researcher collected the compositions (both the rough and final drafts) only after they had been returned to the students so as to prevent the study from biasing the grades the students received, and in order to guarantee that the instructors not change their grading method for the purpose of the study. The topic of the composition was common to all sections (eight total) of second year French courses. The researcher did not tell the teaching assistants that she wanted to collect the compositions. She just made sure that they would be a mandatory assignment for all sections. Length of the composition was limited to no more and no less than one page, typed and double-spaced. This should allow the researcher to control for handwriting discrepancies: some students write more than others on one line of text. The deadline for turning in the compositions was the same for all sections so that students had approximately the same knowledge of the language at the time they did the assignment. Even though some were in their third semester and others in their fourth, after looking at the data itself,
the researcher can assert without a doubt that the differences in the knowledge and mastery of the language are negligible - if they exist at all - between the written production of a third semester and a fourth semester student. Indeed, the written performance of third and fourth semester students showed the same characteristics as far as the number and the nature of form errors are concerned. Moreover, students displayed the same range of sophistication in vocabulary and syntax. In addition to this, there was no difference between third and fourth semester students' compositions in the area of organization.

SAMPLE

Once collected, the compositions' final drafts were put in ascending order from lowest to highest score within each section, based on the grade assigned each composition by the teaching assistant. There were approximately fifteen compositions per section and there were eight sections total, therefore a total of one hundred twenty compositions. They were placed in one of the following two groups: low (Cs and Ds) or high (As and Bs), according to score. In each section, the researcher randomly selected four compositions per group (low and high). The number of randomly selected compositions in each group and in each section constitutes the
METHOD AND DESIGN

The method used in this study is both quantitative and qualitative. The design answers research questions one and two. The third research question will be dealt with qualitatively through the analysis of participants' answers to a questionnaire and an interview, as well as through the researcher's interpretation of participants' comments found in the compositions.

The randomly selected compositions were placed into two groups:
- those corrected by native speaker teachers
- those corrected by non-native speaker teachers

The types of error correction present in the data from each group was examined by the researcher - who is a native speaker of French - and another native speaker of French, according to a previously established correction grid. This correction instrument was partially borrowed from Magnan's study on Grammar and the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (1988, p. 270). Magnan (1988) isolated seven grammatical categories which, she explains, are "based on knowledge of French, experience with the areas of student difficulty and experience with OPI testing" (p.270). The seven

Following this idea, the researcher grouped several of Magnan's items together into the following four error categories:

1. **verb-clause error**: is an error dealing with the conjugated form of a verb with respect to the subject and tense used; for compound tenses, it includes choice of auxiliary as well as its form; it also deals with the choice of tense and mood, including use of infinitive and present participle.

2. **noun-clause error**: concerns all errors with determiners, including the partitive; it also deals with the form and position of all noun and pronoun modifier, and with adjective agreement.

3. **spelling error**: deals with all morphemic spelling mistakes other than an inflection. An example of this is: un shat, instead of un chat, as opposed to: les chat, instead of les chats.

4. **other errors**: this category deals with all errors in accuracy not included in the previously defined categories. An example of this is errors dealing with object pronouns or relative pronouns.

This grid is used to answer the first two research questions in this study.
For the purpose of the present study's design and for reasons of feasibility, the definition of grammatical accuracy is reduced to the usage of particular morphological or syntactic features.

The error types represent the first variable in this design: it is independent, fixed, and within subjects. The second variable in the design is Native versus Non-Native: it is independent, fixed, and between subjects. The third independent variable is Teachers: it is nested within the native or nonnative variable. Including teachers in the design allows for control over teacher differences by accounting for the variability of individual differences.

To assess inter-rater reliability between the researcher and the other native speaker, the researcher calculated the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The dependent variable in the design is: number of errors corrected per error category per composition. The design is a 2 (native/non-native) X 2 (low/high) X 4 (number of teachers nested within native/non-native) design.
Design map

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In each cell of the design, a ratio was calculated: the number of errors corrected by the teacher divided by the total number of errors in a category. In order to calculate this ratio, the researcher counted the number of errors corrected and the total number of errors present in each composition and in each error category. For example, the number of noun- clause errors corrected by the teacher was counted; the number of noun-clause errors not corrected by the teacher was also tabulated; the total number of noun-clause errors was obtained by adding the number of errors corrected and the number of errors left not corrected. This procedure was repeated for each subject in each error category.
ANALYSIS

Whenever applicable, the data analysis procedures in this section are structured around the three research questions proposed in chapter 1.

Research question one: Are there any differences in the number of corrections performed by native and non-native speakers/instructors of university intermediate French classes when they evaluate compositions?

In order to determine whether or not such differences exist a multivariate analysis of variance was performed on the data: namely on the percentage of corrected error means. An analysis of the results yielded by the MANOVA can be found in chapter 4 of this study.

Research question two: Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers in the categories (verb-clause, noun-clause, spelling, other) where error correction was performed?

In order to answer this question, the researcher ran four ANOVAs, one for each error category. The results of each ANOVA provide F values for each error category under analysis, and therefore indicate in which category or categories the native and nonnative speakers corrected differently.

Research question three: Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers when and if they paid attention to content?
The researcher invited each participating teaching assistant to respond to a questionnaire about pedagogical background and whether or not composition evaluation guidelines had been provided that semester. The participants were also asked to provide their own evaluation tools if they had any (for a copy of the questionnaire and participants’ answers, see Appendix A). The result of this questionnaire can be found in the fourth chapter of this work.

The researcher also interviewed each participant to explore two questions:
1. when grading a composition, are all errors marked considered in the grade?
2. when grading a composition, are all errors marked and considered in the grade of equal importance and weight in the grade?

(For a copy of the questions asked during the interview and transcripts of the participants’ answers, see Appendix B). The results of this interview can be found in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Also used in order to determine the answer to research question three, the researcher read the instructors' comments (if any) on both rough and final drafts of the compositions and analyzed the focus of the comments (grammatical accuracy, content, interest, originality, etc.).
DESIGN WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In order to assess the efficiency of the proposed study, we will now evaluate it in terms of internal, external, statistical conclusion and construct validity.

Internal validity

One possible threat to internal validity of the design is students' prior knowledge of French. Intermediate French (third and fourth semesters) is for students who have completed one year or the equivalent of one year of instruction in French: first and second semesters in college or intensive French + high school French. Students in fourth semester French are expected to write better than their counterparts in third semester French. However, realistically and according to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, the amount of knowledge of the language that a student enrolled in third semester has at his disposal does not differ dramatically from the knowledge of a student enrolled in fourth semester French. The ACTFL proficiency guidelines for writing (1989), state that similar types of mistakes can be expected since that knowledge of the language is typically and overall rather limited at the intermediate level, whether it be intermediate-low or intermediate-high. Typically, the written proficiency of a student at the intermediate-low level allows him to:
Write short messages, postcards, and take down simple notes, such as telephone messages. It can be understood by natives used to the writing of nonnatives. (ACTFL proficiency guidelines, quoted in Glisan and Shrum, 1994; p. 289)

At the intermediate-mid level, a student can "write short simple letters", and the writing "can be understood by natives used to the writing of nonnatives" (Glisan and Shrum, 1994; p. 290). And at the intermediate-high level of proficiency, students can

Write simple letters, brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data, work and school experience. (Glisan and Shrum, 1994; p. 290)

Once again, the writing of a student at the intermediate-high level of proficiency is "generally comprehensible to natives used to the writing of nonnatives" (Glisan and Shrum, 1994; p. 290). As the reader can see, the differences existing in the nature and quality of writing at these proficiency levels are minimal and should not present any threat to this study.

Another concern was that teaching assistants are required to take one Education course during their first semester of graduate work. They might have heard of error correction issues and strategies. The follow-up questionnaire and the interview mentioned in the previous section of this
chapter allowed the researcher to determine if the training received by the participants influenced the way they corrected and graded the data.

**External validity**

There does not seem to be any major problems with external validity in this design, and one can expect that it will indeed be possible to generalize its results to and across populations. However, the relatively small number of participants (eight total) available for this study may constitute a problem. Since the analysis in this research is dealing with correction categories, this relatively small number should not present a major threat to external validity.

**Statistical conclusion validity**

Teaching assistants may demonstrate varied ways to correct mistakes, but since the researcher used a measuring instrument - the correction grid presented earlier in this chapter - this problem should be alleviated.

The unreliability of measures could be a threat to statistical conclusion validity. Error correction in compositions is a complex process in which one may find that instructors can be biased when assessing a student's performance (i.e. if the student in question is normally a "good" or a "bad" student; or if the student in question is "good" or "bad" at oral language production, etc.). However, after looking at the data, the
researcher concluded that this issue should not be of great concern: indeed, since students were given the opportunity to revise their writing, they all had a rather fair chance at earning a decent grade. And in fact, most compositions received fairly good grades (between A and C). Moreover, by including teachers as a factor in the design, this problem should not be of great importance. In fact, including teachers will allow for control over individual differences by taking them into account in the analysis of variance.

**Construct validity**

The definition of grammatical error is an arbitrary one. So is the error correction grid. Other types of mistakes could have been included. The categories could have been smaller and more specific, or they could have been divided into subcategories. However, the main concern here is to examine typical intermediate level students' mistakes in intermediate French courses. The mistakes presented and identified in the error grid are typical mistakes for students taking a third or fourth semester course in French (see page 86 for a more thorough explanation). Having more specific categories for errors (for example, if the verb-clause category had been divided into subcategories dealing with verb tense, then verb form, then verb mood, etc.) would have complicated the design needlessly. The same concern applies to the other error categories.
Subjects in the study (the teaching assistants and the students) were not able to guess its purpose since it appeared to the instructors that the students were under examination. Indeed, the researcher explained to the participants that she wanted to analyze second-year students' compositions. Therefore, the participants thought their students' writing was the object of the study. In turn, the students were guaranteed anonymity: their names were removed from the compositions, making it impossible for the researcher to find out their identity. Thus, there was no apprehension about evaluation for either group.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents both the quantitative and the qualitative results of this research. It is divided into two parts. The first part gives an account of the statistical results. It presents the outcomes of the multivariate analysis of variance and an interpretation of these results.

The second part deals with the qualitative results of the study. It is divided into three subsections. First, the information gathered from the questionnaires and an interpretation of these results are presented. Next, an account of the participants' answers during an interview with the researcher is provided. Third, the researcher interprets the comments (or the absence thereof) written by the participants on the compositions. The results are presented in relation to each of the three research questions this dissertation has set forth to answer.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

In order to assess inter-rater reliability between native speaker one and native speaker two who both corrected the compositions, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated. A correlation of .92 was obtained, which indicates a reliable set of ratings.
The means of error correction for native and non-native speakers in each error category and for the high and low groups of compositions are presented in table 1.

**Table 1 Native and Non-Native Error Correction Means**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NATIVE</th>
<th></th>
<th>NON</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERB</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOUN</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPELL</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTH.</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to interpret the statistical results efficiently, it may be appropriate at this point to recall research question 1: *Are there any differences in the number of corrections performed by native and non-native speakers/instructors of university intermediate French classes when they evaluate compositions?*

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will answer this question. The MANOVA is a test of the means presented above. The
MANOVA results for the design introduced on page 73 yielded significant F(1, 124)=16.960, p < .05 for the main effects of the variable High/Low. This result can be interpreted as a sign that there are differences in the number of errors corrected according to which group (high or low) the compositions belong. In other words, there were differences in the number of corrections according to what grade a composition received.

No significant F values were yielded for the main effects of the variable Native/Non-native, nor for the interaction of the two variables High/Low and Native/Non-native. For the main effects of Native/Non-Native, F(1, 124)= 1.129, p > .05, and for the interaction between High/Low and Native/Non-Native, F(1, 124)= 1.815, p > .05. This lack of significant values for the main effects of Native/Non-native can be interpreted as a lack of differences between native and non-native speakers of French when they correct the compositions overall, regardless of the group they belong to (high or low). The lack of significant results for the interaction between variables Native/Non-native and High/Low means that when they correct the compositions, the native and the non-native speaking groups do not differ overall.

The answer to research question one is therefore no, there are no significant differences between native and non-native speakers/instructors in the number of errors corrected. However, there are significant differences
in the number of errors corrected according to which group (high or low) a composition belongs to. More errors were corrected in the low compositions than in the high compositions.

Since the main effects of High/Low was significant, univariate F-tests were also conducted in order to find out if the effect was significant for all variables. Results are presented in table 2.

**Table 2 Main Effects of High/Low - Univariate F-tests with (1, 124) D.F.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>variable</th>
<th>hypoth. SS</th>
<th>error SS</th>
<th>hypoth. MS</th>
<th>error MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>sig. of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verb</td>
<td>2.50320</td>
<td>18.3013</td>
<td>2.5032</td>
<td>.14759</td>
<td>16.960*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun</td>
<td>4.34019</td>
<td>11.8761</td>
<td>4.3401</td>
<td>.09578</td>
<td>45.316*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spell</td>
<td>3.20678</td>
<td>17.9111</td>
<td>3.2067</td>
<td>.14444</td>
<td>22.200*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>.85969</td>
<td>14.2941</td>
<td>.85969</td>
<td>.11528</td>
<td>7.4576*</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to interpret the results of univariate F tests, it seems relevant to reiterate research question 2: Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers in the categories (verb, noun, spelling, other) where error correction was performed?
Looking at the results presented in table 2, it can be said that the main effects of High/Low are significant in all error categories. An asterisk (*) placed next to an F value indicates that it is statistically significant.

Therefore, it can be said that whether a composition received a high grade or not has a great deal of impact on the corrections performed by native and non-native speakers of French. There are significant differences in the way native speakers and non-native speakers correct the high and the low compositions in all of the error categories. However, since the main effects of Native/Non-Native was not found to be significant, the answer to research question 2 is no, there are no differences between native and non-native speakers/instructors in the error categories where correction was performed. In light of these results, it can only be said that native and non-native speakers alike corrected more errors in all the error categories in the low group of compositions than they did in the high group.

In order to determine the answer to research question 3, it will now be necessary to examine the questionnaire and interview answers provided by the participants, as well as the comments present on the compositions themselves. This is what the next section proposes to examine.
QUALITATIVE RESULTS

This section will present an account of the results obtained when the researcher examined the participants' answers on a background questionnaire. This part will also deal with answers provided by the participants during an interview with the researcher. Lastly, the comments written by the participants on their students' compositions will be analyzed for quantity and quality. For the sake of clarity, this researcher gave titles to each subsequent part of the qualitative results. In order to analyze the participants answers and comments efficiently, it is appropriate to recall research question 3: Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers when and if they paid attention to content?

Questionnaire results

This section deals with the questionnaire results. For a transcript of the questions and answers, see Appendix A. Of the total number of participants (eight), four were native speakers of French, four were native speakers of English. Of the four native speakers of French, one had one course in pedagogy, two had more than one course in pedagogy and one had no background at all in pedagogy. Of the four native speakers of English, three had one course in pedagogy, and one had more than one course.
None of the participants in the study had been given formal guidelines pertaining to composition correction. Three native speakers of French and three native speakers of English had personal guidelines pertaining to composition correction. The others had none. The personal guidelines are presented below, first for native speakers of French, next for non-native speakers of French.

**Native speakers of French**

For the first native speaker of French, the compositions were graded and corrected according to grammar and spelling mistakes, and interest.

The second native speaker of French penalized more heavily errors already talked about in class, as well as mistakes that could have been avoided using rules of the language (plural with S, -ent in conjugations, etc.).

For the third native speaker of French, the compositions were graded and corrected according to vocabulary pertaining to the chapter studied at the time, grammar (proper use of forms, verbs, structures, etc.), relevance of the essay, that is, is it answering what the student is asked to do, and organization of ideas.

The fourth native speaker had no personal guidelines.

**Native speakers of English**

For the first native speaker of English, the compositions were graded and corrected with a point deduction system: 2 points were deducted for
preposition, verb, and article errors; 5 points were lost for contraction errors; 1 point was deducted for gender and spelling errors. He did not take points off for content and graded the grammar only.

The second native speaker of English graded and corrected the compositions according to grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and organization.

The third native speaker of English graded and corrected the compositions according to the following criteria: grammar, vocabulary, content/interest ("especially to be a little kinder to the bad spellers" sic).

The fourth native speaker of English had no personal guidelines.

**Interview answers**

This section deals with the answers provided by the participants during an interview with the researcher. For a complete transcript of the interview questions and answers, see Appendix B.

Three native speakers of French and three native speakers of English reported they do not count all the errors marked on the student's paper in the grade. One native speaker of French and one native speaker of English reported they count all errors marked on the student's paper in the grade.

All participants reported they do not consider all errors marked to be of equal importance.
Comments

This section presents a discussion of the comments written by the participants on their students’ compositions. The researcher examined both the rough and final drafts for instructors’ comments. For the sake of clarity, this section is divided into two subsections examining non-native speaker comments first, then native speaker comments.

Non-native speaker comments

One non-native speaker of French wrote no comments on the rough drafts. On one final draft he wrote: "Bon Travail!" (Good work!). He indicated the presence of errors by underlining or circling them.

The second non-native speaker of French did not write any comments at all. She used the following coding system to indicate the presence of errors on rough drafts.

WC = word choice
VC = verb conjugation
VT = verb tense
AGR = agreement (subject/verb, adjective/noun)
ACC = accent
SP = spelling
WO = word order
PREP = preposition
This non-native speaker computed composition grades according to the following system: Content = 20 points; Grammar = 15 points; and Vocabulary = 15 points.

The third non-native speaker wrote some comments, such as "bien écrit, mais il faut que les marges soient normales. Deuxième ébauche devrait être un peu plus longue" (Well written, but the margins should be normal. Second draft should be longer.) On another composition, she wrote "One day late". This non-native speaker indicated the presence of errors by writing out what the nature of the errors was: i.e. verb tense, noun, gender, etc.

The fourth non-native speaker sometimes wrote comments on final drafts. She wrote "Much better" on two compositions, "Bien" (good) on two other compositions, "What happened to the imparfait?" on another, "Bien - Great use of the subjunctive" at the bottom of one composition. This non-native speaker indicated the presence of errors by circling or underlining them.

Generally speaking, non-native speakers of French commented very little, and if they did, the comments focused primarily on grammatical
accuracy. None of the comments emphasized content in specific ways, interest, originality or creativity.

**Native speaker comments**

The first native speaker only made two comments: one on a first draft "C'est très bien" (This is very good) and one on a final draft "Bien" (Good). This native speaker indicated the presence of errors by circling them.

The second native speaker wrote the following on a final draft: "Attention aux répétitions: Dominique est mentionnée 10 fois dans le texte" (Beware of repetitions: Dominique is mentioned 10 times in the text). On the same student's first draft, she wrote "Très bien" (very good). On another student's paper, she questioned the meaning of an idea: "Vous trouvez?" (Do you think so?). On another, she asked for the meaning of an expression the student used: "Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire?" (What do you mean?). On another student's rough draft, she wrote: "Un peu court Rick. Une ou deux phrases en plus serait mieux." (A little short, Rick. One or two more sentences would be better). This native speaker indicated the location of errors by underlining them or by suggesting another word or grammatical structure.

The third native speaker wrote on three students' rough drafts: "Make the final draft longer (one page typed)". She also wrote on one rough draft: "Content totally inappropriate. Pretend that you do believe everything that
you read. And re-write the composition". This native speaker's grading system appeared very clearly and simply to be a half a point deduction for each incorrect grammatical usage. Correction hints were coded:  

Voc meant there was a vocabulary error  
A indicated an error with an accent  
T indicated an error in verb tenses  
O was for spelling errors  
G symbolized an error in grammar.

The fourth native speaker wrote "Bien" (Good) on three final drafts. She wrote in a lot of correction hints for grammatical accuracy, such as: "Why are you using the *imparfait*?", "See chapter 9", "Review this structure", "Be careful with adjective agreement", "Wrong verb", etc. She also wrote at the top of some of the compositions. As some of her general comments, the researcher found: "*Pourquoi ne tiens-tu pas compte de mes corrections?*" (Why don't you take my corrections into consideration?); also "*Revoir p. 292 Quand + futur..."* (Review p. 292 Clause 'quand' + future tense). "*Attention aux accords des noms et des adjectifs*" (Be careful with adjective-noun agreements).

In general, native speakers commented more than non-natives. However, their comments remained as focused on grammatical accuracy as the non-native speaker comments. With the exception of the second native
speaker who asked questions about actual meaning, none of the native speakers commented on content, interest, originality or creativity.

The answer to research question 3 is therefore, no. There are no differences between native and non-native speakers of French in the area of content.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is divided in five parts. First, a summary of the goals and findings of this dissertation is presented. Part two provides a discussion of the results offered in Chapter Four. A number of conclusions are drawn in the third part of this chapter. Certain implications are discussed in part four. And recommendations are presented in the fifth and final part of this chapter.

SUMMARY

This research studied error correction provided to university students enrolled in intermediate level French classes. It compared French native and non-native speakers' corrections in the area of grammatical accuracy, as well as their approach to the correction of compositions in general.

The purpose of this study was to examine (1) the differences between native and non-native speakers of French as concerns the number of errors corrected, (2) the differences between native and non-native speakers in the categories (verb-clause, noun-clause, spelling, and other) where error
correction was performed, and (3) the differences between native and non-native speakers when and if they paid attention to content.

The data consisted of the corrected and graded compositions, an background/information questionnaire, an interview of the participants by the researcher, and the comments the participants had written on their students' compositions. The results of this study and observations based on these results can only be applied to composition writing and error correction in French language classes.

Method

In order to investigate the issues presented above, the compositions written by the students were carefully examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Analyses of variance were conducted to determine the differences between native and non-native speakers of French in four error categories: verb-clause, noun-clause, spelling and other. Examination of instructors' comments on the returned compositions provided answers concerning the issue of content and meaning. The researcher also collected and interpreted answers provided by the participants on a background questionnaire and during an interview.

Results

Clearly, the most surprising result yielded by this study was the fact that contrary to other language groups (and contrary to the researcher's
hypothesis), native speakers of French in this research seemed to be as intolerant of student errors than their non-native speaking counterparts.

Almost equally astonishing was the virtual absence of instructor comments on the graded compositions. When there were comments at all, they consistently pertained to grammatical accuracy.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study can be best understood and interpreted by looking again at the three research questions. Each of the questions will be discussed in the order in which they were presented in chapter one. Question one: Are there any differences in the number of corrections performed by native and non-native speakers/instructors of university intermediate French classes when they evaluate compositions? In order to answer this question, the researcher looked at the results yielded by the MANOVA.

The main effects of the variable High/Low proved to be significant. This can be interpreted as meaning that the fact that a composition received a high or a low grade had a great deal of impact on the number of errors corrected by the participants. This finding could have been expected for the simple reason that, traditionally, a composition that received a low grade tends to contain more mistakes than a composition that received a high
grade. Therefore, the more mistakes are present, the more correction is to be expected. Hence, the differences shown by the MANOVA between the number of errors corrected by native speakers of French and non-native speakers of French in relation to what group a composition belongs to were to be expected and make perfect sense.

The interaction of variables High/Low and Native/Non-native was not found to be significant. This result indicates that the variable High/Low had no significant effect on variable Native/Non-native and vice-versa. In other words, native speakers do not differ from non-native speakers in the number of corrections they performed when the compositions are considered as belonging to one large group, regardless of the grade they received. This finding is consistent with the result mentioned previously and could have been expected to be so, because the main effects of the variable High/Low are significant.

The main effects of the variable Native/Non-native were not found to be significant. This result means that there are no differences between the number of corrections performed by native and non-native speakers of French.

The answer to research question one is therefore no. There are no differences between native and non/native speakers of French in the number of errors corrected in the high and low groups of compositions. As was
stated before, this result is logical and could have been predicted, because it is a well-known fact that a composition that received a low grade contains many more mistakes than a composition that received a high grade.

The fact that native speakers of French corrected as many mistakes as did non-native speakers in the low compositions is still a surprise. The researcher's hypothesis, based on prior studies (Chastain, 1980; Politzer, 1978; Davies, 1983; Magnan, 1982; Green & Hecht, 1985; Kobayashi, 1992; and Takashima, 1987) was that non-native speakers of French would correct more mistakes than native speakers. In the studies mentioned above, native speakers tended to show more leniency toward errors than did non-native speakers. Only one study (Ensz, 1982) showed opposite results, where native speakers tended to correct more errors than non-native speakers. Perhaps then, this behavior is particular to native speakers of French. It has been said that the French are very protective and possessive of their language. Perhaps correcting errors made by learners is an example of this behavior.

Question two: Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers in the categories (verb, noun, spelling, other) where error correction was performed? In order to answer question two, the researcher examined the results yielded by the univariate F-tests, after the MANOVA was run.
The univariate F-tests for variable High/Low yielded significant results in all of the error categories: verb, noun, spelling and other. Therefore, it can be said that native and non-native speakers corrected more errors in the low compositions than they did in the high compositions in all of the error categories. However, it cannot be said that there exist differences between native and non-native speakers in these categories because the main effects of variables Native/Non-Native were not statistically significant. It has already been shown that part of the differences found between the high and the low groups of compositions can be explained by the fact that there were more likely going to be a greater number of errors in the low group of compositions. Moreover, this finding shows that non-native speakers of French are as competent as native speakers when identifying grammatical mistakes.

As was mentioned in the discussion of question one, these findings are not very consistent with much of the related literature. However, this study’s results do match others as far as determining which errors are more serious than others. Indeed, in two of the studies surveyed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, results indicated that verb forms and pronouns are the most irritating and least tolerable errors in French (Magnan, 1982; Piazza-Gaylord, 1980).
Question three: Are there any differences between native and non-native speakers when and if they paid attention to content? In order to answer this question, the researcher examined and interpreted the answers that the participants gave during an interview and provided on a questionnaire. She also analyzed the focus of the participants’ comments (or the absence thereof) on students’ compositions. First, the interview answers will be discussed, then the questionnaire answers will be interpreted and last, the comments will be analyzed.

Interview answers

All participants (regardless of whether or not they were native or non-native speakers of French) answered in much the same way. Only one native and one non-native reported they count all errors marked on the paper in the grade. All the others (three native and three non-native speakers) reported they do not. All eight participants indicated they do not consider all errors marked and considered in the grade to be of equal importance.

These answers are not always totally consistent with what the researcher found when examining the compositions. More than one native and one non-native speaker seemed to count all errors marked on the paper in the grade. Equally puzzling was the finding that more than three of the participants seemed to consider all errors marked on the paper of equal
importance (hence the point deduction formula: half a point deduction for each grammatical mistake, regardless of its kind or importance). The inconsistencies found between what the participants disclosed of their grading systems and what happens in reality seems to show that the participants may think that they are following a specific correction pattern, but they truly are not. This conclusion connects to the next section which deals with the questionnaire answers. For a complete transcript of the questions and answers of the interview, see Appendix B.

**Questionnaire answers**

One of the very interesting results provided by the questionnaire answers is the fact that none of the participants had been given any formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions. It seems that this area of foreign language instruction is somewhat neglected and left up to each individual.

Equally interesting was the finding that out the eight TAs, two (one native and one non-native) had no personal guidelines pertaining to composition correction. All other participants had devised their own system. Those systems were largely based on grammatical accuracy, whether the TA was a native or a non-native speaker of French.

Two of the native speakers who had personal guidelines indicated that they do take content, ideas, organization and interest into account.
However, they had first indicated that the compositions were graded according to grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. The third native speaker did not mention content at all.

Looking at the compositions themselves, the researcher immediately realized that the grading systems used by the participants seem to be mere variations on the old formula described by Gaudiani (1981): 5 errors = A; 6-10 errors = B; 11-14 errors = C; etc.

It is therefore very discouraging to realize that after decades of research, scores of studies, and the publication of numerous articles on the topic, today's instructors still grade compositions in the same old way. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, in this particular study, participants were not given any formal guidelines pertaining to composition evaluation. They were not prepared to transcend conventions. Since none of the eight participants were pedagogy majors nor minors, how could they have known about other ways to evaluate compositions? They were simply applying what they knew, which is probably the way their compositions were evaluated when they were in beginning foreign language classes. For a transcript of the questionnaire questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Comments

The most important realization the researcher reached upon examining the compositions searching for instructors' comments is there are
hardly any. Most of the compositions were returned to the students bare of any comments, encouragements or even remarks. The great majority of rough drafts bore no comments at all. Those which did had been corrected by native speakers of French and then again, the main focus of the comments dealt with length, grammatical accuracy, and once only with content.

Final drafts also showed very few comments. However, it appears that there was a difference between native and non-native speakers of French in the quantity of the comments they wrote. Overall, native speakers wrote significantly more on students' compositions than non-native speakers did. Non-native speakers' comments focused primarily on grammatical accuracy. So did the comments written by three of the native speakers. However, one native speaker commented on meaning and content as well as stylistics.

The lack of comments on the compositions can be at least partially explained by the fact that the participants had not been given any guidelines pertaining to composition evaluation. Another feasible explanation is the typical lack of time that instructors have at their disposal for writing in comments. It takes time to read a composition, and it takes more time to write one's reaction to it. The TAs who participated in this study are graduate students who have term papers to write, courses to attend, and
research to conduct. They are typically very busy and probably do not feel that they have the time to write reaction comments on content for each one of their students.

Generally speaking, reading the comments on the compositions (or realizing that they were none) was the most disappointing part of this work for this researcher. In spite of what current research in the area of writing and error correction clearly states (Semke, 1983; Omaggio, 1993; Cohen, 1987) -that is, instructors must evaluate compositions not only for their grammatical components, but also and most importantly for their content - the data gathered by the researcher shows that native and non-native speakers alike still view writing very much as a product and as a form-driven act.

CONCLUSIONS

Student compositions in the target language are examples of interlanguage, or learner-language at work. They contain many mistakes in grammatical accuracy. As recent studies demonstrate, the systematic correction of all mistakes does not necessarily aid students to acquire grammatical structures. However, as was mentioned before, a certain degree of attention must be paid to errors in accuracy. Just how much attention must be devoted to these errors remains to be determined. This
research was conducted in hopes that it could help define more precise indicators as to what kinds of errors should be corrected. With the help of native speakers' behavior toward error correction, several conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study.

**Frequency of error correction**

If one is to form an opinion as to error correction frequency on the results obtained with the observation of the native and non-native speakers in this study, then it can be said that error correction as performed by native and non-native speakers of French is rather consistent and frequent. Obviously, grammatical accuracy is important to native and non-native speakers of French.

**Most important error correction categories**

Again judging by the results yielded by this study, all error categories (verb, noun, spelling and other) are given a great deal of attention. It appears native speakers of French behave as "intolerantly", or at least identify and correct as many mistakes in these categories than do non-natives.

**Composition content**

There were no differences between native and non-native speakers of French in the way they reacted to content. Apart from one native speaker, none of the participants had any comments concerning ideas developed in
the compositions. Even though a great majority of the participants indicated in the questionnaire answers that they graded compositions on grammatical accuracy and content, none of them actually commented to the students about how interesting or uninteresting, or how original or boring, or how well- or poorly- organized their compositions were.

**Correction guidelines or systems**

With the close examination of the corrected and graded compositions, and the answers provided by the participants on the questionnaire and during the interview, it became quite clear that:

None of the TAs who participated in this study were given any formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions.

Six out of the eight TAs who participated in the study devised their own correction system.

Two out of the eight TAs (one native and one non-native speaker of French) had no personal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions.

The six TAs who did have personal correction guidelines quite clearly used grammatical accuracy as their main criterion for what makes a "good" composition.

Therefore, it is disappointing to conclude that, in spite of what current research recommends as far as composition correction is concerned,
instructors continue to pay attention solely to the grammatical component of their students' compositions. Clearly, the profession's recommendations on how to instruct writing in the foreign language classroom has not made it yet into the practical field.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The implications that can be drawn from the results of this study touch on three areas: TA preparation, error correction and classroom instruction.

**Implications for TA preparation**

It is clear from the results of this study that there is a need for more preparation of the instructors (and especially first-timers such as TAs) who are going to teach writing. Writing instructors need to receive guidelines pertaining to composition correction if we want some consistency to be achieved in error correction.

Such guidelines should include some form of evaluation grid for composition correction and grading. Foreign language departments across the nation should prepare TAs to evaluate students' writing not only in the area of mechanics but also for their personal and individual contents. In these guidelines, there should be some mention of interlanguage, as instructors will be evaluating students' writing in its early stages. Perhaps
instructor training could show how to exploit language-learner language, instead of systematically correcting it.

TAs (and other instructors) should also be encouraged to comment on their students' compositions, and to share their opinion not only concerning HOW students expressed their ideas, but also to discuss WHAT their students had to say.

**Implications for error correction**

In light of the present study's results, it appears that writing instructors who teach French should pay some attention to grammatical accuracy. All the TAs who participated in this study corrected grammatical mistakes with great consistency, and the study shows that native speakers corrected as many errors as did non-natives. At least, then, it can be said that non-native speakers of French are capable as native speakers of French to identify grammatical mistakes.

This study can also help devise a correction system for compositions written by students learning to write in French. Instructors should correct mistakes in the four grammatical areas mentioned previously (verb-clause, noun-clause, spelling, and "other") rather systematically, and especially at the early stages of instruction, if they want their students one day to be able to effectively communicate a message in writing to native speakers of French.
Implications for the classroom

The results of this study show implications in two areas dealing with classroom instruction: the teaching of grammar and the place of writing.

The teaching of grammar

As the results of this study showed, grammatical accuracy is still the criterion used by French instructors to determine composition grades. One of the main reasons why grammatical accuracy occupies such a central role in composition grading and correcting is that today's foreign language instructors still teach languages using grammar as the central element of instruction. Foreign language textbooks are still organized around grammatical structures; chapter sequencing revolves around grammatical "items". As a result of this, the bulk of foreign language instruction remains centered on the morphological and syntactical features of a given language.

In light of the results yielded by this study, it appears that French instructors should not neglect grammatical accuracy, but they should not lose sight of the main goal of foreign language instruction which is first and foremost, to be able to communicate in the target language.

The place of writing in the classroom

Instructors need to realize that writing is a communicative act. The tendency to view writing as a product for evaluation or verification of structure acquisition needs to be changed. We need to show our students
that WHAT they write is at least as important as HOW they wrote it. When an instructor focuses on the message of a composition, rather than on its mechanical components only, students come to the realization that their individual and personal ideas are important. This realization encourages students to write and motivates them to try new things. It also challenges them to try as best they can to convey their message in a language they barely know. Perhaps, if teachers would assign students composition topics which had a real life purpose, students would feel more motivated to express their ideas. Writing for real-life purposes has been shown to promote better writing skills.

Current research in the area of writing also supports the idea that one learns to write by writing. As students write to learn how to write, they undoubtedly make a lot of form errors, especially at the beginning stages of foreign language instruction. In this study, students were asked to write a rough draft that was handed back to them with correction hints and suggestions. When the researcher looked at both the rough and final drafts of the compositions, it was clear that the second versions of students' writing had dramatically improved in grammatical accuracy. Correction hints and suggestions do allow students to self-correct and write better. Writing a rough and a final draft looked at and commented by the instructor could therefore present a rather effective way to deal with grammatical accuracy.
without losing sight of the importance of content and ideas. In this study, however, the rough drafts were not returned to students with comments and suggestions about content as well as about grammatical accuracy. They should have been.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Composition writing represents the bulk of student writing practice today. As we know, form and content are equally important in a good composition. Therefore, instructors must learn to view writing in a new light, and need to evaluate students’ writing with new tools. In an era of communicative approaches to foreign language teaching, and knowing the importance of any message’s context, the profession must practice what it preaches. More studies are needed in order to examine the importance of grammatical accuracy across languages. If some standardization is to be achieved in the correction and evaluation of good writing in foreign languages, the development of new tools is necessary. These new tools will enable instructors to evaluate and correct students’ writing more effectively and more objectively.

As an instructor who has taught writing in French for many years, this researcher hopes that the present study can help instructors come to the realization that composition correction should not be just about grammatical
components, but also about ideas and creativity. Since this research shows that nothing has changed in composition correction and evaluation, perhaps it can help give a headstart to other studies examining the inner workings of foreign language students' writing. Agreeing with Garrett (1991), this researcher believes that our profession needs to study the many kinds of foreign language learner interlanguage mappings. Such studies need to concentrate on interlanguage as presented in contextualized and communicative writing samples.

Writing for real-life purposes has been shown to promote better writing skills in foreign language students. Recent research in the use of dialogue journals in the foreign language classroom (Baudrand, 1991) showed that students who write in their journals learn to write as well as, if not better than, students who receive traditional writing instruction. This result is attributed in part to the fact that dialogue journal writing is a strictly personalized, communicative and message-oriented activity. In their journals, students typically write about personal events and ideas, for the purpose of exchanging this information with the teacher. The instructor then reads the students' writing but does not correct grammatical accuracy. Eventually, students who have written a journal achieve the same proficiency level as students who were taught writing formally. Therefore, there is a great need
for more research in the use of dialogue journals in the foreign language classroom.

Lastly, as educators and researchers, teachers must reflect on their positions and their roles in our students' acquisition of foreign languages. They need to admit to themselves that classroom instruction alone cannot under any circumstances lead language learners to be fluent communicators in the target language. With this admission, the task of educators becomes clearer: they must motivate students to learn.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please indicate if you are a native or a non-native speaker of French
   ______ native  _______ non-native

2. Please indicate if you are a native or a non-native speaker of English
   ______ native  _______ non-native

3. If you are both a non-native speaker of French and a non-native speaker of English, please indicate your native language(s)
   __________________________

4. What is your formal training in pedagogy (if any)?
   ______ none
   ______ one course
   ______ more than one course
   ______ it is your minor area of specialization
   ______ it is your major area of specialization

5. Were you given any formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions this semester?
   ______ yes  _______ no

6. If you answered yes to question #5, please indicate the guidelines you received
7. If you answered no to question # 5, please indicate whether you had personal guidelines

________ yes  _________ no

8. If you answered yes to question # 7, please indicate what your guidelines were. What criteria did you use in correcting your students' compositions?
(i.e. grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, etc.)
TRANSCRIPTS - QUESTIONNAIRES

NON-NATIVE GROUP

Teacher 1

Question 1: non-native speaker of French
Question 2: native speaker of English
Question 3: N/A
Question 4: more than one course in pedagogy
Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions
Question 6: N/A
Question 7: had personal guidelines
Question 8: 2 points for preposition, verb, article errors

  5 points for contraction errors

  1 point for gender, spelling errors

Did not take off points for content, graded the grammar only.

Teacher 2

Question 1: non-native speaker of French
Question 2: native speaker of English
Question 3: N/A
Question 4: one course in pedagogy
Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions
Question 6: N/A

Question 7: had personal guidelines

Question 8: grammar, spelling, vocabulary, organization

Teacher 3

Question 1: non-native speaker of French

Question 2: native speaker of English

Question 3: N/A

Question 4: one course in pedagogy

Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions

Question 6: N/A

Question 7: had personal guidelines

question 8: grammar, vocabulary, content/interest (especially to try to be a little kinder to the bad spellers)

Teacher 4

Question 1: non-native speaker of French

Question 2: native speaker of English

Question 3: N/A

Question 4: one course in pedagogy

Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions
Question 6: N/A

Question 7: no personal guidelines

Question 8: N/A

NATIVE GROUP

Teacher 1

Question 1: native speaker of French

Question 2: non-native speaker of English

Question 3: N/A

Question 4: one course in pedagogy

Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions

Question 6: N/A

Question 7: no personal guidelines

Question 8: N/A

Teacher 2

Question 1: native speaker of French

Question 2: non-native speaker of English

Question 3: N/A

Question 4: more than one course in pedagogy

Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions
Question 6: N/A

Question 7: had personal guidelines

Question 8: grammar and spelling mistakes, interest

**Teacher 3**

Question 1: native speaker of French

Question 2: non-native speaker of English

Question 3: N/A

Question 4: no training in pedagogy

Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions

Question 6: N/A

Question 7: had personal guidelines

Question 8: penalize more heavily errors already talked about in class as well as mistakes that could have been avoided using rules of the language (plural with S, -ent in conjugations, etc.)

**Teacher 4**

Question 1: native speaker of French

Question 2: non-native speaker of English

Question 3: N/A

Question 4: more than one course in pedagogy
Question 5: no formal guidelines pertaining to the correction of compositions

Question 6: N/A

Question 7: had personal guidelines

Question 8: vocabulary pertaining to the chapter studied at the time, grammar (proper use of forms, verbs, structures, etc), relevance of the essay, that is: is it answering what the student is asked to do?, organization of ideas
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When you grade/correct compositions, are all errors marked considered in the grade the student receives? In other words, do all errors marked on the student’s paper count in the grade?
   _____ yes  _____ no, explain:

2. When you grade/correct compositions, are all errors marked and considered in the grade of equal importance and weight in the grade? In other words, do all errors marked and considered in the grade weigh the same amount in the grade?
   _____ yes  _____ no, explain:

3. Please indicate whether you are:
   a native speaker of French  _____
   a non-native speaker of French  _____
NON-NATIVE GROUP

Teacher 1

question 1: no, I usually comment on the syntax but I don’t take off for such mistakes.

question 2: no, with grammar errors, the most horrendous ones (such as contraction errors) are counted for more points off.

question 3: non-native speaker of French.

Teacher 2

question 1: yes.

question 2: no, where grammatical errors are concerned errors such as agreement of adjective and noun are considered as serious as incorrect conjugation or verb tense errors. Failure to make past participle agree with its subject in verbs conjugated with être is considered a minor error, as is lack of agreement with a preceding direct object when the verb is conjugated with avoir. However if the student never or almost never makes agreement where it is needed, the mistake is more serious although it still may be counted as one error.
question 3: non-native speaker of French.

Teacher 3
question 1: no, some of the errors marked may be grammatical points not yet covered in class, or idiomatic expressions that they aren't familiar with.
question 2: no, most of the errors that I marked are of a grammatical, structural, or idiomatic nature, but the students are graded on 1) content (1/3), 2) creativity (1/3) and 3) grammar (1/3).
question 3: non-native speaker of French.

Teacher 4
question 1: no, where they wade into deep waters and, say choose a wrong verb for what they wish to express, I do not subtract from their grade (unless they misuse the correct verb in a final version of their composition).
question 2: no, errors where they should know better count more heavily against the students.
question 3: non-native speaker of French.
NATIVE GROUP

Teacher 1

question 1: yes.

question 2: no, accents don’t count much. Spelling and grammar mistakes are major mistakes.

question 3: native speaker of French.

Teacher 2

question 1: no, otherwise grades would be too low! I usually count off for errors that hinder comprehension or errors that are linked to a grammar point we went over and over in class. In other words, the compositions are not subject to a mathematical system of notation.

question 2: no, I weigh the importance of a mistake with the overall composition comprehensibility and with what I think should have been acquired by the students long ago. i.e. a fourth semester student writes "Je vas a l'école"; the error does not affect comprehension much, but is hardly acceptable for a student at that level.

question 3: native speaker of French.
Teacher 3

question 1: no, I grade my students according to what they are asked to do. For example, if the topic of the composition focuses on their knowledge of vocabulary, I am not going to focus mainly on their grammatical knowledge.

question 2: no, I focus mainly on the organization of ideas and the content of the compositions: I have certain priorities. As for grammar, I do not take points off for absence of agreement for example, but on syntax if the order of the words makes it impossible to understand the sentence.

question 3: native speaker of French.

Teacher 4

question 1: no, I usually count off for mistakes that really prevent me from understanding what they mean.

question 2: no, syntax is the most important, then grammar, but also certain mistakes that are irritating for example in a passé composé sentence when they say something like j'ai venu or even j'ai veni.

question 3: native speaker of French.
VITA

Catherine A. Jolivet was born in Cambrai, France where she grew up. She obtained a Licence d'Anglais in 1982. In 1984, she came to study in the United States and obtained an M.A. in French Literature at Louisiana State University in 1988. In 1994, she received a Ph.D in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction with a major in Foreign Language Education at that same institution.

She is currently an instructor at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. She is teaching French in the Department of Foreign Languages and Teaching Methods in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Her professional and academic interests lie essentially in the teaching of foreign languages and in language acquisition processes.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Catherine A. Jolivet

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Title of Dissertation: Error Correction in Second Year Students' Compositions: A Comparative Study of Native and Nonnative Speakers/Instructors of French

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination: September 19, 1994