

Error Analysis in Learner Autonomy and Motivation*

Abstract

Various techniques exist, and are described in the literature, through which teachers of L2 languages can learn to identify and classify learners' L2 errors, using such broad categories as, for example, errors between L1 and L2 (interlinguistic) and errors from within L2 or indeed, L3 upwards (intralinguistic), and decide whether these are more likely to arise in oral/aural or written skills; further sub-categories exist for determining of errors at system level, at application level, and whether such errors demonstrate uptake of learning, or whether they are likely to appear in the transient memory dip or « u gap » between the learning of an item and its acquisition, or whether they are simply the product of inadequate learning, anxiety, over-dependence on teachers (through over-marking, for instance), unbalanced linguistic diet, inadequate or inappropriate input, false-bilingualism, and so forth. The present paper will seek to describe practical techniques whereby that knowledge in these areas can be communicated to Ls in the context of the development of both learner autonomy and learner motivation(s); and in addition to the theoretical and therapeutic presuppositions involved, will discuss what are the practical pitfalls of such an approach, based on developmental work which the author is currently testing in his teaching institution.

1. Introduction

This paper, based on a small-group pilot study, seeks to address a dilemma perceived by many « remedial » learners of French, and doubtless of other languages. One such learner verbalised the dilemma thus: « I know that to learn, you have to make mistakes. But the more mistakes I make, the less motivated I feel to carry on. And the more de-motivated I feel, the more mistakes I make. It's a vicious circle! » In this self-fulfilling prophecy the learner's « vicious circle » turns into a downward spiral, and the learner can give up. However, the question whether this dilemma reflects a true state of affairs is not altogether as relevant as the fact that these learners are perceived as remedial learners, and perceive themselves in the same way. With increasing numbers of mature students in higher and further education, the age of second language learners in this category can fall anywhere between late adolescence and late maturity. Yet even as early as in late teenage, such learners can already have quite bitter experience of non-success in second language learning, and sometimes have experienced outright academic failure.

1.1 Methodological Preliminaries

Error Analysis and Motivation are of interest to linguists in general, and to psycholinguists, teacher-researchers and teachers in particular. By way of introduction to this paper, a brief diachronic overview of what is understood by these terms will be presented, in order to contextualise the short, small-scale pilot study later described.

At the outset, as this paper is learner-focused rather than teacher- or researcher-focused, it may be useful to list some of the semantic « baggage » which learners can associate with the term « Error »: moral and/or social deviance, failure, stupidity, dissidence (theology, law, science ...), legal tort. The concept of « error » is, in itself, an excellent topic for discussion and indeed, negotiation between learners and teachers □ not least because there may, in second-language teaching, exist a cultural imperative whereby some teachers, whether or not they are native speakers of the L2 concerned, may be less dispassionate towards various « anomalies » of learner productions than they think, and thus be carrying some of the above « baggage » too. Likewise, teachers and teaching materials can themselves be possible sources of error, though this is not the primary focus of this paper.

1.2 Mistakes, slips and errors

The description of the « learner's dilemma », earlier, employs a further term, « mistake », and before turning to the factors which led to the development of Error Analysis as a theorised discipline in its own right, it is also necessary to distinguish between what is understood by the allied terms mistake and slip. Broadly, these are, respectively, anomalies of written production and of oral production whose psychological origins vary considerably: for whereas a written « anomaly » generally arises from the reflective, purposive and formal action of an individual who is in most cases under some pressure of formal accuracy, spoken « anomalies » are more likely to be made under some pressure of time, to be less « constructed » or rehearsed than in the written case, and to be made for an immediate purpose, and thus under some pressure for communicativeness.

This distinction between written mistakes and oral slips will be returned to later in the categorisations offered. However, written mistakes and oral slips may share a common psycholinguistic and epistemological characteristic, which is that of the gestation period □ variable both between individual learners and between

performance contexts □ required for « new » linguistic information to be adapted to previous learning; this may also be compounded by the fact that the previous learning may not itself have become fully internalised before being updated and extended.

1.3 Approaches to Error Analysis

The historical evolution of interest in learner errors is of great relevance, affecting both Error Analysis theory and the uses to which such analysis can be put beyond the purely taxonomic and explanatory.

In this perforce concise genealogy of Error Analysis, a behaviourist model of language learning is followed by an « a priori », predictive or « strong » Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, which in turn is succeeded by an « a posteriori », explanatory or « weak form » of the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis. The inherent flaws of the behaviourist model, whose pessimistic and essentially inhuman qualities brook no account or explanation of the exponential grammaticality of human language, rendered it even less useful in the study of second language acquisition than of first; indeed, these flaws served as the basis for Chomsky's 1959 refutation of the behaviourist project championed by Skinner.

The idealisations and presuppositions of the behaviourist model of language teaching/learning came to be replaced by the hypothesis that, in order to understand how adults learn a second language, it was therefore not simply necessary to study the learner's habits and to make certain predictions about their learnership, but to study the two language systems: the learner's native or source language [nl, sl or, in this paper, l1] on the one hand, and the target language [tl or here, l2] on the other, in order to make certain predictions about where difficulty would lie for certain learners of certain languages. This a priori approach, which understood language learning to consist primarily of acquiring those items which differed from the l1, presented the disadvantage that whereas it held possibilities for predicting affectively-induced avoidance techniques (Schachter 1974, Kleinmann 1977) whereby some learners of some languages simply dodged out of making errors by switching various elements in their second-language production, this « strong », predictive form of Contrastive Analysis failed on several accounts. For even before it could explain why different learners of the same l2 made the same errors in that l2, albeit perhaps not synchronously, it failed to predict certain errors which did appear systematically in individual learners' performances.

Likewise, it postulated certain areas of difficulty which proved not to be systematically problematic to individuals. The following sets of sentences, in which * denotes attested interlanguage errors and ** unattested ones, serve to demonstrate these two phenomena:

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 11 | 12 | |
| 1. He speaks French | « *Il parles français » | (predictable a priori but non-attested) |
| 2. Les grands garçons | « *the bigs boys » | (predictable a priori but non-attested) |
| 3. Il va aux toilettes | « He go to the toilets » | (attested but not predictable a priori) |
| cf: | | |
| 4. The big_ boys > | *Les grand_ garçons | (attested and predictable) |

Attempts to use an a posteriori, or more explanatory, contrastive approach presented the problem that, because of its 11« 12 (Language 1 to Language 2) focus _ and in addition to the avoidance problem we have already mentioned _ it failed to take account of the internal effects of the 12 itself: thus even though there are, incontestably, interferences from the learner's moth »r tongue, similar interferences are likely to arise from within the target language itself. Consider the following set of productions:

- | | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------|
| 5 | je parle | |
| | nous parlons | |
| 6 | je finis | |
| | *nous finons | (nous finissons) |
| 7 | je viens | |
| | *nous venissons | (nous venons) |

In example 5 a model is established; in 6 it is wrongly applied (as French -ir verbs are « irregular » in their present plural forms); in 7 overcorrection appears as the verb venir is, depending on learner perception and/or teacher presentation, either doubly irregular □ or not irregular at all, as compared to standard -er verbs. Notwithstanding possible explanations or teaching outcomes, the interference stems primarily from within the 12 itself.

1.4 Interlanguage, Competence and Performance

These factors led researchers back to studying second-language learning in a manner similar to that of first language acquisition, where it has become generally accepted that logic and system underlie cognitive processes of trial and error, of hypothesis testing; and that far from being holding tanks for expungeable flaws, learner's intermediate systems were a source of close interest to linguist-researcher and teacher-researcher alike. Nemser (1971), Corder (1971), Selinker (1969, 1972), and Schumann (1976) proposed a variety of terms, informed perhaps by their previous interests, for this intermediate stage between L1 and L2:

Nemser(1971)	Corder (1971)	Selinker(1969,1972)	Schumann (1976)
Approximative System	Idiosyncratic Dialect	Interlanguage	Learner« pidgin »

Despite certain varieties of emphasis and of agenda, such labels nonetheless share the idea that, in a very wide sense, learner interlanguage is both systematic within its own terms and also unstable: for interlanguage dynamically seeks to supplant itself, unless or until its intervention and inputs can re-orient it. Within this broad definition also, a wide variety of further definitions and sub-categorisations exist: for example, Corder's use of overt and covert errors to distinguish between those sentences which appear erroneous on the surface and those which appear « normal » until their context is revealed:

- 8 Trois heures et *demis
- 9 Trois heures et demie
- 10 ☐ Avez-vous des bananes?
- ☐ *Trois heures et demie

In example 8 above, there is an incorrect spelling of *demis (demie), a fairly overt error. Example 9 presents the morphologically and syntactically correct form of the phrase. However in 10, this « correct » form becomes covertly incorrect in the context of the utterance which triggers it.

Later (1973) Corder will distinguish between presystematic, systematic, and postsystematic errors which, as their name suggests, occur at various stages of attempted learning; pre-systematically, the learner can neither explain nor correct the error; systematically the learner ☐ very often because she has « dropped » one learning item temporarily to go on to another ☐ can nonetheless explain or

paraphrase the error if she is given correction by the teacher or learning group; and post-systematically (where the learner can both explain and correct). This post-systematic category will include both the mistakes and slips referred to in 1.1, even though their psychological preconditions \square and the method of their treatment \square differ.

Re-casting these sub-categories somewhat we can note that some defective sentences or utterances will reveal facts about the general competence-for-the-time-being of the learner: that is, the balance between the amplitude, stability and availability of her internalised grammar up to at that point; whereas others will be more indicative of spontaneous performance-at-that-point-in-time. In addition, anomalies can be categorised as being pre-performance ones which are due to affective factors such as tiredness, anxiety, or gazing out of the window, and thus not errors at all but anomalies which will present as written mistakes or oral/aural slips or lapses: here, the learner is failing to use a known system correctly, and can probably self-correct; whereas other anomalies \square true « errors » \square are far more revealing of competence rather than performance because the for-the-time-being language of the learner is noticeably deviant from that of adult native speakers.

Lastly, there is room for a further sub-classification also between errors which are neither slips or « not-yet » errors, and those which are « almost there » errors, where the phonetic, syntactic and semantic components of the learner's proto-l2 exist and match native speaker competence, except that for idiomatic or other reasons, the supposedly « native-speaker » l2 is too idealised because it is at times, pragmatically less perfect than the learner's internalised models of it.

Mindful of earlier overall distinctions between oral and written anomalies, one might refer to the 3 s's:

Slips/mistakes (anomalies of spontaneous oral or of written performance)

Skill errors (known rules misapplied \square possibly for intra-l2 reasons)

System errors (rules and principles flouted and/or not yet internalised).

This is of course to collapse a great deal of the literature, but the reasons for this will become apparent; at this stage, however, and in terms of outcomes for the learner, it is most useful to isolate system errors as these will almost invariably need markedly different t and l interventions, as compared to the other two categories mentioned above.

2. Defining Motivation

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Turning briefly to motivation, terminology varies a great deal, depending again, perhaps, on the research provenance and theoretical intentions of the commentators. An essential, but sadly not always obvious, distinction which the teacher-researcher must make is between non-existent motivation and lost or deteriorating motivation: sadly, not all learners are on courses of first choice, and teachers who fail to elicit this non-motivation will repent at length. Following Carroll (1962), motivation can be described as an internal, affective phenomenon which, together with attitude and general intelligence, can serve in predictions of second-language achievement; with Gardner and Lambert (1972), and with Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), we can subdivide motivation into Integrative, Instrumental or Group Social Identification: depending on whether the learner seeks, respectively, to integrate the target culture of her target language; or to achieve certain practical outcomes with her target language; or to denote her belonging to a certain social group. Elements of all three can, of course, co-exist: the child of, say, an expatriate Middle-Eastern or Irish family could, perhaps, be triply motivated in seeking to acquire a diploma in the language of the land of her ancestors so that she can gain employment, assimilate, and both identify with and be identified as a member of the culture, state, or nation concerned.

Analyses of motivation are of course far more detailed in descriptive and predictive domains of the literature; this concept will receive further consideration later, in the context of the particular learners involved in this pilot study. For the time being, however, it is important to note that in all probability, many of the definitions of motivation can a) overlap, and b) co-exist in a single individual or group of individuals.

3. The Pilot Study

3.1 The Learners

The group of learners involved in the study presented the characteristics described in Figure 1 below. All were intending to study French as a « minor » subject, the language component in a B.A. degree course in European Studies, involving 1 year of study (Year 3) of their Major subject in a francophone university.

Figure 1

Participants

Number of participants at course outset	26
Number of participants at course end	25

Passes at course end	25
Age/Qualifications	
Mature (25+ years) students	5
of which	
access (adult pre-university diploma) students	2
o Level	1
No formal qualifications including access	1
European Baccalaureate	1
Non-mature	20
gcse to a Level c or below	13
Internal transfers/Change of School of Studies	6
« Bilingual » but no formal qualifications in French	1

From this table, it will be noted that whereas the largest part of the group had some conventional qualifications in French (a gcse in French and/or an a Level of Grade c or below), a substantial minority were mature students absent for up to three decades from full-time education, and a further substantial minority of participants (taking mature and non-mature students together) had no formal qualifications in French language at all, having matriculated elsewhere in the University and been admitted to the Intensive French course on Diagnostic testing.

3.2 Diagnostic Testing at Course Entrance

Having matriculated into the University by the various paths described above, all non-standard matriculees were required to complete a short, five-part Diagnostic Test at entrance to the Intensive French course. The Diagnostic Test, which is more fully described in Appendix 1, seeks to elicit several categories of information about the learners for continuity-of-teaching purposes; its Section 2 (sentence-grammar based structural proficiency test) is repeated at course-end for value-added purposes, though the value-added component does not contribute to scores in the Preliminary Examination in French which, together with candidates' performance in their respective Major subjects, qualifies them to continue into Year 2 of their studies and re-incorporation into the Minor French stream on a par with other students. In particular, the Diagnostic Test elicits bilingualism (e/f or other), structural proficiency, written comprehension, guided and open-ended writing skills, and speaking skills. The Diagnostic Test is designed to provide a broad rather than a specific view of the learner's competence at the outset of the course; moreover, it has a diachronic function to the extent that it has been used year-on-year in its current format for some time, and its notional pass-mark of

45% is deemed equivalent to Grade b at gcse □ the bare minimum requirement for admission into Intensive French.

At the Diagnostic Test which, as stated, all intending Intensives sat irrespective of their status (Adult access, overseas, a-Level, gcse etc), the proportion of the participants in the present Study who were deemed not to meet the year-on-year admission criteria for this course, but nonetheless elected to remain, is shown in Figure 2. Given that the pass-mark for this diagnostic test (45%) is deemed to represent a Grade b at gcse, it will be seen that a majority of the students would not, in previous years, have been deemed acceptable candidates. Of those who failed, 8 held a gcse, 1 an a Level Grade c, 3 held overseas baccalaureates or equivalent, 2 were mature access students, and 1 was admitted to the University on the grounds of « bilingualism » at interview but held no formal qualifications in French. There was therefore no neat correlation between age, previous learning, British or overseas origin, or initial oral/aural proficiency, save a general lack of structural proficiency among entrants holding only a gcse.

4. Course Outline

The chart in Appendix 2 represents the broad organisational outlines of the course: as stated in 3.1, the course's main features are that the institutional expectation is that learners will move from a putative gcse Grade b into a second-year stream of a Level + 1 undergraduate year, and that at the end of that second year, they will be capable of linguistic, intellectual, cultural and not least, physical survival in a francophone university, where they study their Major subject alongside their native-speaker peers during Year 3.

4.1 Direct Teaching

Summarising Appendix 2, the general course outline followed a rib-and-spine model over 26 teaching weeks, divided into three terms (10 weeks + 10 weeks + 6 weeks); in a typical week of 8 hours' teaching, learners received 2 x 2 hours of « spine » teaching and a further 4 x 1-hour « rib » activities. « Spine » activities were single-tutor, integrative-grammar based classroom teaching dispensed in two broadly parallel (i.e. non-streamed) groups, centred around a commercially-available course-book and accompanying audio-visual materials (Beeching and Le Guilloux 1993), very greatly supplemented by in-house pre- and post-teaching and confirmation-of-learning materials resolved into a Course Handbook and cross-referenced for in-house « rib » tutors by categories of topic, skills,

functions/notions, lexis, and integrated grammar. « Rib » activities were modular units which concentrated on Listening, Reading/Text Analysis, Grammaire Authentique and Study Skills □ into which formal writing skills were subsumed; by a system of rotation, learners were thus exposed to a total of five tutors and an array of teaching styles, and both the course-book and allied materials could be cross-taught in « spine » and « rib » activities for mutual reinforcement and practice.

4.2 Affect, Introspection and Learner Reporting

Likewise, Appendix 2 shows that the learners were introduced progressively to a system of Learner Reporting: starting with the motivational introspection in the Diagnostic Test and progressing to periodic Learner Diaries written in the first few instances in English and enquiring of learners' opinions on their progress, affective problems and anxieties, and continuing with reflections on their learner style, the teacher styles they had encountered; and use, non-use and categories of oral correction deployed in class. The introduction of Introspections in the 12 coincided with the introduction of Learner Error Analysis as described in Section 5, which follows. These and similar introspections formed part of the prescribed « spine » course-work, and led to three end-of-course Assessed Assignments, the first of which was a 1200-word introspective document written in English on themes covering, inter alia, reactions to Learner Error Analysis. Successful completion of the Assessed Assignments qualified candidates to sit the Preliminary Examination in French, and to continue to Year 2 as described above.

4.3 Final Testing

In addition to the Assessed Coursework described above, and on condition of having completed it, Intensive Students sat a formal Preliminary Examination in French comprising equally-weighted papers in Grammar/Use of French (including Error Analysis and Commentary), Reading Comprehension, Essay (discursive writing), and an Oral Examination in French.

5. Introducing Learner Error Analysis

Combining the earlier discussion of Error Analysis and Motivation with the teaching realities already described, it can be seen that the following was true of the learners:

- Two thirds of the learners in the Pilot Study (15:10) were below the standard, year-on-year admission criteria for the course;
- The students included mature, school-leaver, British, overseas, qualified, and unqualified learners, though these categories overlap;
- As Appendix 2 shows, the Intensive Course is what it says: extremely demanding in time and in self-organisational capabilities;
- It combines direct teaching in the French language with a great deal of autonomous learning (typically, a further 3-4 hours consolidation and preparation per week), and learner introspection is a requirement;
- There was an ever-present risk of loss of motivation □ hence, of students from the course.

In these circumstances, designing a learner-centred approach and progressive learner autonomy into the syllabus becomes not so much a fashionable nostrum, but a necessity. How does Learner Error Analysis tally with these desiderata?

5.2 The Purpose of Learner use of Error Analysis

In the earlier discussion of the evolution of interest in Error Analysis and of the broad categories of anomaly involved, the intended users of this tool have, so far, been:

- linguist-researchers seeking to theorise the acquisition of second languages by observation, collection and analysis of various « anomaly » data, testing of hypotheses, and comparison with first language acquisition;
- teacher-researchers seeking insights into learner difficulties and strategies with which to aid learners.

The present study sought to add a practical outcome to Error Analysis, by enabling the learners themselves to undertake analysis of their own errors. As stated in 4.2 above, this activity took place in the general context of Learner Reporting. It was felt that if, using broad categories, learners could begin to distinguish their written mistakes, and coincidentally, their oral slips from errors, and errors which showed progress from those which heralded the need for revision or new learning, such learners might evolve positive self-help strategies from their discoveries, to complement classroom suggestion and teacher- or peer-assisted self-correction and repair strategies.

5.3 Learner Analysis Technique: which Errors and which Categories?

Part of the de-motivation reported anecdotally by earlier students had concerned the response to written work. Psychologically, written errors « stay », be they only mistakes: they are committed to paper and remain for all to see. By

contrast, classroom performance oral slips generated by psychological factors already described ☐ such as anxiety or peer-pressure ☐ received instant treatment through correction and/or feedback. Motivation, interest and participation remained high though, following Krashen (1977) and first-language acquisition researchers such as Braine (1971: 161) and Cazden (1972: 92), it is known that on the one hand, and even in the absence of the relatively greater preparation time accorded to written production, affectively « comfortable » stimulation of oral communicativeness and fluency in L2 teaching can militate against accuracy (and thus facilitate error-making); whereas, in the case of L1 acquisition, over-correction of infant and child speech can be at best pointless and, at worst, counterproductive, causing some foreclosure of acquisition processes in both cases.

5.3.1 Concepts discussed with learners

Thus in the pilot project, the learners were offered classroom explanation, examples and discussion of the categories mentioned earlier:

- ☐ Slips/mistakes (inattention + temporarily disappeared learning)
- ☐ Skill errors (« as yet » incorrect native-speaker application of rules and principles)
- ☐ System errors (opportunity to re/learn those principles and/or rules).

In the case of Skill errors, and as discussed in 1.4 above, teachers will bear in mind the proviso that native-speaker utterances are not always correct ones:

- 11 (*)Quand j'ai fini mes devoirs, j'ai regardé la télé.
- 12 Quand j'ai eu fini mes devoirs, j'ai regardé la télé.

Example 11 is widely regarded as accurate by native speakers and is extremely common in areas of France above the Massif Central; whereas 12 is the technically correct written form, and is also widely used orally in southern France, but would be regarded as precious in the North. Hence, definitions of what is « correct » can conflict with what is « appropriate », though such geographical interplay of use and usage is by no means restricted to France, nor to the French language.

Additionally the learners were offered two further source categories:

- ☐ Interlinguistic errors (transfers from n1 to t1)
- ☐ Intralinguistic errors (transfers from partly-acquired t1).

5.3.2 Concepts not discussed with learners

The concepts of Interlanguage itself, of overt or covert errors, or of idiosyncratic dialect were not discussed with the learners. This methodological

decision was underscored by the fact that « interlanguage », as a term, has mythological properties, as it is used in the literature variously as adjective and substantive, and to comprehend both linguistic instability and error systematicity. Further, it was deemed that offering Selinker's (1972) concepts of fossilisation for consideration to remedial learners might, at best, be discouraging and at worst, might invite prophecy to fulfil itself through learner de-motivation.

5.4 The Initial Process

The course participants had been made aware of the error and « anomaly » categories described above through a plenary session and subsequent tutor-led discussion, and classification work on fabricated and authentic (i.e. learner-produced) examples of these. The starting point into work on their own, individual mistakes and errors of written French occurred when the learners had received back their first fully teacher-corrected piece of « open-ended » writing. This piece was their third Learner Diary entry but the first to be written in French. Having ensured that the learners had understood the nature and need for tutor amendments of their « anomalies », the learners were invited to categorise these, and produce an analysis of their mistakes and errors expressed as percentages. As a first stage, the learners simply numbered the t interventions e.g. 1-21, 1-42, depending on the number of anomalies produced. They were asked to number each and every anomaly, notwithstanding either its apparent simplicity ☐ missing accents, for example, or the fact that the same error had been repeated. The second stage consisted of placing the various « anomaly » numbers in columns under the headings Slip, Skill, System ☐ according to the learner's classification of the anomaly produced. The third and final stage required the learner to add up the number of anomalies per column, and express these column totals as percentages of the total number of anomalies produced.

A typical statistical breakdown of errors produced by a learner in her first piece of « open-ended » French writing looked like this:

Figure 3

Total « anomalies »	21	as %
Slip: 17	81	
System:	2	9.5
Skill: 2	9.5	

Whether or not the teacher accepts learner's own categorisations of her slips/mistakes or errors is, at this stage, less important than the other outcomes that can result:

- Very obviously, the learner takes note of the (usually) high number of Slips.
- The teacher can form conclusions from other evidence as to whether the learner is under-reporting the systematicity of her errors, and possibly discuss this denial with the learner;
- The teacher can cross-check reported Skill errors with the number of intralingual error features in the learner's productions;
- The class or pairs/groups of learners can, by negotiation, work on each other's errors; indeed, it was found that as, the learners had become affectively comfortable with shared learning by this stage of the course, shared study of fellow class-members' written anomalies enhanced their alertness to error analysis in general, and to analysis of their own anomalies;
- Ultimately, the learner can report her affective and strategic reactions, in the end-of-course Assessed Assignment which relates to her learnership and to discoveries made during the course.

Anecdotally, the learner whose analysis appears above reported that, for the first time in her unhappy association with the French language, she now had the beginnings of control of her learning.

6.0 Learner Outcomes of the Pilot Study

6.1 Some constraints

Given the pilot nature of the study, and factors such as time constraints (26 teaching weeks), cohort-size, institutional inputs in terms of teacher-learner ratios and sheer teaching-time and, not least, the immutable distinction between methods of course-work assessment and credit-bearing final assessment which holds in the author's teaching institution, the preferred methods of evaluation of the study □ a value-added score derived from entry and exit performance in a standardised test, coupled to a tool which would allow empirical assessment of elimination of the specific mistakes and errors signalled in the initial stages by the learners themselves was deferred until future versions of the study (see below, 6.3 Development).

6.2 Learners' Appraisal of the Pilot Study

For the foregoing reasons, and mindful of the learner focus and of the learner outcomes sought in 5.2 above, the method employed for evaluating the success or failure of the process was to refer to the Learner Reports produced at the end of the course as the first of three Assessed Assignments. As has been stated, although these introspections formed part of the required coursework, they are not credit-bearing in the final grade of the Preliminary Examination and thus, perhaps, slightly less subjective than might have been a task to which learners were « trained » for exam-passing purposes.

Moreover, in reflecting on the affective, methodological and motivational aspects of their coursework, learners were aware that work on Learner Error Analysis would help in two particular directions: firstly, in final preparation of the two further Assessed Assignments, written in French on a Major-subject related topic and on a general, cultural topic, each of which was subsequently pre-marked by tutors using simple underlining of anomalies but without the correction and explanation more common at the outset of the course; and secondly, learners were aware that this process would help them to prepare for an « unseen » Error Analysis and Commentary question set as part of the Grammar/Use of French paper in the later Preliminary Examination.

From the degree of response provided by learners in the Learner Reports (Assignment 1), an informal score was produced as shown in Figure 4 (not reproduced).

Figure 4 scores the degree of positive, neutral or negative response to the Learner Error Analysis process (on a scale of +30 to -20 points, by increments of 10 points); the corpus used in this calculation was the 25 x 1200 words of learner reporting contained in the first Assessed Assignment produced at course-end, which also served to trigger and channel learner discoveries in related fields (see Appendix 3). In Figure 4, three learners failed to score: in all three cases, the 0 score represents non-reference to Error Analysis in that learner's report, rather than stated indifference. Though all students passed the course, there appeared to be no direct positive link between final grades and strength of response to the Learner Error Analysis process as reported by the learners themselves, with the exception of the two highest scorers in the (subsequent) Preliminary Examination who rated the process lowest amongst the positive respondents. The two

negative scores for Learner Error Analysis were received, in order of severity, from:

- a British mature student, whose entry, exit and coursework grades had, anecdotally, remained broadly static throughout the course;
- a European Union student whose overall improvement in performance was, paradoxically, among the steepest in the entire cohort but who stated philosophical reservations about making positive responses to negative evidence. He is an Economics Major.

The average score of Learner Response to Learner Error Analysis, on the scale of -20 to + 30, was +18.

6.3 Development

However fulsome the témoignages offered by the learners in response to the Learner Error Analysis process in their written productions at course-end (see extracts in Appendix 3), and despite the very favourable scores and average derived from Figure 4, the informality of this study together with the constraints referred to in 6.1 must caution prudence with any conclusions. Notwithstanding these reservations, and even if we are dealing with the interaction of various known placebo effects or the simple generation of a « feel good » factor, it is the author's intuition that this Learner Error Analysis and Reporting process is broadly positive, useful and informative; as stated, the acid test will be more detailed, empirical work on uptake of the specific difficulties the learners themselves and their teacher-researchers have noted. A crucial factor will be the findings of Deans of Schools in the author's teaching institution who, as elsewhere, are quite independently conducting their own cohort studies to compare methodologies, student performance and, critically, the relationship between costs and benefits. So far, based on in-house decanal comparative studies, student-led course-evaluation surveys, and the learner responses described in this study, the signs appear positive, with predictions of at least a broad matching of future exam performances between the Intensive and a-Level entrant cohorts.

Lastly, it appears to the author that further work may be needed on one very vital element of motivation. This element, which appears to be under-discussed in second-language learning literature, can be said to exist in animals' and in human children's learning processes. It is one which intuitive native-speaker-teachers regularly exploit in, for example, information-gaps and some learning materials and problem-solving exercises, and which the author has exploited cognitively and experientially in eliciting the introspections of the learners in this short study.

The element which, it is posited, renders some forms of learning \square and possibly acquisition \square virtually irresistible, and may help move some learners more directly into acquisition, is simple curiosity: a curiosity of the learners about themselves. Thus, in addition to expanding cohort sizes, the number of institutional test-sites, and empirical focus of the present pilot study in future versions, it is the author's intention to explore further the systematic use of learner curiosity as a motivational tool in developing the individuals' capacities for dispassionate introspection and analysis of their learning; and hence, their feelings of self-worth and, ultimately, their later autonomy as post-remedial students.

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Section 1 (not scored): candidates state whether they consider themselves to be bilingual, and in which languages. For statistical purposes extraneous to the present study, which has no predictive focus, candidates also state their year of birth, entry qualifications, and years/months since they received full-time teaching on a French course.

Section 2 (50 points) is a multiple-choice, receptive structural proficiency test in which testees examine 50 discrete and de-contextualised items of sentence grammar and can respond that either the entire sentence is correct or that one of three indicated sub-sections of that sentence contains an anomaly. They are aware that sentences which are incorrect contain an anomaly in only one of the three sub-sections given.

Example: [] Le Docteur Anne-Marie Dupont
[] est allée hier
[] à la Musée Grévin.

Section 3 (25 points), a « guided writing » exercise, requires comprehension and rehandling of a 200-word l2 news item into another written register of the l2 (letter to a friend) and reworking of tenses, moods and structures ☐ e.g. passives.

Section 4 (25 points) ☐ open-ended writing exercise in which testees state in 100-150 words why they wish to study French; scoring is not of motivation per se although very careful note is made of the type(s) of motivation expressed ☐ or absent.

Section 5 (20 points) ☐ oral: this is a brief, semi-structured communicative task usually conducted in pairs, in which one partner must elicit, for example, three class-negotiated and three optional items of information from the other.

Total: 120 points « 100 % . »

Appendix 2 Overall Course Outline

- Term 1 10 weeks integrated Core Course x 8 hours p.w.
i.e. 4 hours p.w. Integrated course and
1 hour p.w. Grammaire Authentique/Atelier
1 hour p.w. Listening Skills
1 hour p.w. Study Skills
1 hour p.w. Reading/Text Analysis Skills
Week 1 ☐ Diagnostic Entrance Test
☐ Learner Styles Tool
☐ Organisation of Course Filofax
☐ Learner Diary Entry 1 (Affect) (English)
Week 4 ☐ Learner Diary Entry 2 (Affect) (English)
Week 4 ☐ 1st Free Writing (French)
Week 5 ☐ Error Analysis/Computation on above
Week 10 ☐ Progress Testing
vacation diary
Term 2 10 weeks integrated Core Course x 8 hours p.w.
i.e. 4 hours p.w. Integrated course And
1 hour p.w. Grammaire Authentique/Atelier
1 hour p.w. Listening Skills
1 hour p.w. Study Skills
1 hour p.w. Reading/Text Analysis Skills
Week 8 ☐ Error Analysis Seminar
Weeks 8 & 9
☐ Introduction to Assessed Assignments
aa1: Learner Reflections inc. Error Analysis (English Language)
aa2: Major Subject in French context (French language)
aa3: Cultural Piece (French Language)
or Submission of Filofax (94-95 onwards)
Week 10 ☐ Progress Testing
vacation work on assessed assignments
Term 3 4 weeks integrated Core Course x 8 hours p.w.
i.e. 4 hours p.w. Integrated course and
1 hour p.w. Grammaire Authentique/Atelier
1 hour p.w. Listening Skills
1 hour p.w. Study Skills
1 hour p.w. Reading/Text Analysis Skills
Week 1 ☐ Pre submission of aa2 aa & aa3 (non-corrective marking)
Week 4 ☐ Final Submission of aa1, aa2, aa3
Week 5 ü
ýLearner-led Revision
Week 6 þformal teaching ends
Weeks 8 & 9
preliminary examination in french ☐ written
(includes « unseen » Error Analysis)
Week 10 preliminary examination in french ☐ communicative oral
Appendix 3 ☐ Observations and statements from the 1993-94 Intensive French
Learner Reports
A Observations
☐ self-reported avoidance strategies

- distilling various rules for oneself into principles
- unprompted realisations concerning translation strategy
- deliberate learning-strategy switch from « assimilation » [sic] to more deliberate overlearning
- evidence of (previous) teacher-induced error (defectively-sequenced modelling)
- learning by problem-solving
- the positive role of class-lead discussion
- the positive role of discussing learning strategies among learners
- noticing patterns [sic] in one's errors
- modifying study tips to [one's] own needs
- [a bilingual learning French as L3] throwing out all Spanish books, cds, magazines from [her] room
- making grammar « mind maps » to keep an overview of grammar
- explaining to [her]self what [she] has learned from someone else
- demanding feedback when it has not been offered

B Reports □ Positive

- « I find that words discovered through investigation remain more firmly fixed in my memory than those proposed by [the teacher] »
- « After a few weeks I found that during class discussions I couldn't stop myself ... I felt I had to speak ... Often it was wrong, but it definitely improved ».
- « I am no longer afraid to speak in class ... Phrases often pop into my head, too. Sometimes I think I've never heard them before but in fact they often turn out to be something I have heard a few times but not been conscious of. Subliminal learning? »
- « .. I think sometimes I must be making more mistakes than ever, but looking back on different assignments, I still think that this is because the range of vocabulary and grammar is increasing. Therefore the chance of making more complicated mistakes incr »ases ... I am not going to worry about this ... »
- « .. there was a great sense of support and unity between us. For example, there was always someone who grasped a particular concept quicker than the others, but they would always explain it in their own words to their classmates. None of us would be happ » to move on knowing that someone was still in the dark. I noticed that frequently one student can explain a certain grammar point better to a fellow student than the lecturer can ... This is due to the fact that the one student has just grasped the concept themselves and would therefore identify any difficulties the other student was having ... »
- « I felt the atmosphere during the classes inspired me to learn more French independently so I would have something to contribute in the next lesson ... »
- « I now think of myself as a language student, studying International Relations » [administratively, the reverse is true].
- « It was also useful swapping papers with a neighbour and correcting their mistakes because it helped click in your head mistakes you had just corrected ».

C

1 Less positive (?)

- « I felt so ashamed at having made this error after she [tutor] had painstakingly led us through the subject a mere minute beforehand that I will ever make the mistake again ».
- « Oh my god, all those people can speak my language but all I can do is massacre their's [sic] ... »

2 More negative

□ realisation of 13 French learner that he has been using English l2 and German l1 as translation languages;

□ « The fear of making mistakes, being misunderstood, and being unable to think of another way of saying it ... That terrible fear of being the centre of attention because you have made a mistake ... »

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See, for example, Larry Selinker's 1972 concept of « transfer of training » in Selinker (1972), esp. 37, 39.

See Noam Chomsky's (1959) review of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*.

With the reservation that in example 1 an attested strategy of reduction to the learner's most basic known form is more likely to produce *Il parler français; whilst in 2 and 4 respectively, the relative psychological ease □ in error-production terms □ of omission (4: plural marker, already phonologically absent) over insertion (2: English plural adjective marker) may explain why 4 is attested and 2 is not.

Example 6 is attested by the author; 7 invented.

The examples are the author's and not Corder's.

See also Section 5.3.1 and examples 11, 12 therein.

The author is indebted to Institute for Applied Language Studies, University of Edinburgh, materials for this classification.

Normal matriculation requirements for admission into French Minor is a Grade b at a Level, or an approved equivalent score in European or other national baccalaureates; or an in-house Diagnostic Test score (see 3.2 Diagnostic Testing) of 75%.

One participant (a mature woman student) left the course after several weeks for family/funding, and not academic, reasons.

By asking the testees to state whether they consider themselves to be so. Though students very seldom prove to have little more than enhanced listening/speaking skills, it is not unusual for such self-qualified « bilinguals » to be, conversely, poorer in written tasks.

Based on a self-testing Learner Style document adapted by the author from materials produced by the Australian Adult Migrant Education Service; see Willing 1988.

For reasons internal to the author's teaching institution, a distinction is made between Assessed Coursework and formal University Examinations (e.g. the Preliminary Examination in French), only the latter of which may be credit-bearing.

Based around a communicative task with an English-language support, with 10 minutes preparation, followed by a task-related then an open-ended interview in the l2, total duration 15 minutes.

Previous cohorts having suffered attrition of up to 15%; however, when attributing causes to loss of students, it is currently very difficult to isolate loss of motivation from other co-factors such as funding.

With the possible exception of Skill errors, teacher correction of individual learners' written work diminishes progressively throughout the course, in favour of group/pair correction, then self-correction.

Following Taylor (1975:73-107), these can be expected to predominate against interlinguistic ones as learning progresses.

Key:

AA, BA, CA, etc are coded learner names.
The taller columns, scale 0-80, are course exit (Preliminary Examination) scores per learner.
The smaller columns, scale +30 to -20, are Reported Responses to Learner Error Analysis, for the same learner.

Omitting the three 0 scorers, for the reason stated, from the average.