

# How do general psychological processes inform FLL pedagogy? Presenting a new instructional framework<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Learning invariably proceeds by relating new facts to the already familiar and present in the conceptual structure. In the context of FL study the familiar is, of course, the student's mother tongue. Drawing on the learner's L<sub>1</sub> (or another mastered tongue) and showing comparisons and contrasts between the languages mirrors, facilitates and accelerates the processes which occur independently in his/her mind. At the same time, when in a new situation, we look for familiar orientation points and similarities owing to our instinctive need for safety. This is also why the target language should literally be taught *in the framework* of the learner's L<sub>1</sub>. Instruction in the Language Interface Model (LIM; Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2003a,b, 2004a,b, 2005) proceeds from an *explication* of how relevant rules operate in the students' L<sub>1</sub> through an *explanation* of corresponding L<sub>2</sub> rules and subsequent *interface formation*, modifying the L<sub>1</sub> rule to accommodate L<sub>2</sub> data, with practice first expecting the learner to apply the FL rules to L<sub>1</sub> examples before moving to more traditional exercises, to finally end with *competence expansion* – integrating the two competences, leading to the development of multicompetence and allowing for the obliteration of the rules governing the structure of the utterance from the learner's conscious mind.

## 1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that mastering the functional-grammatical system of a foreign language poses many problems for the learner; a fact that needs to be addressed by the teacher. Many have argued that Universal

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Grammar, or the innate faculty<sup>2</sup> enabling us to acquire our mother tongue effortlessly and without the presence of overt instruction, ceases to become operative or at least loses some of its grip<sup>3</sup> as puberty advances. Despite a few anecdotal cases to the contrary, post-pubertal L<sub>2</sub> acquirers hardly ever reach native-like proficiency. To the ubiquitous arguments I would like to add yet two more, strengthening the No/Partial-Access stance. First, it has been argued (e.g. Newmeyer 1998) that if UG were to stay operative after puberty, our L<sub>1</sub> competence would remain unstable. Frankly, I dispute this view since it can be assumed that just as a multilingual child can pretty soon distinguish between two languages and use each in the appropriate context accordingly, so our broadly conceived mental grammar may be able to store information concerning different language systems separately (even if interconnected) and ‘decide’ when the acquisition process can be finalized<sup>4</sup>. A more forcible argument is based on evidence from the acquisition (or rather the lack thereof) of universal parameters which customarily—if not universally—tend to pattern in tandem. A crucial property of the parameters is that a single setting of one can have effects in several places in the grammar of a given language. If together with mastering the appropriate setting of a given parameter in a FL a cluster of related effects were acquired, this could be treated as evidence of UG still being operative. A study carried out by Gozdawa-Gołębiowski (2004a) examining the Null Subject Parameter reveals that instruction in this area of grammar is not conducive to adult learners developing native-like intuitions about processes usually attributed to the operation of that para-

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<sup>2</sup> A fact corroborated by the discovery of the *FOXP2* gene, which apparently steers the development of the parts of the brain responsible for our speech abilities and the mutation of which causes problems with the articulation and formulation of sentences (Lai *et al.* 2001:519).

<sup>3</sup> Here I understand Universal Grammar in line with its current treatment as a finite set of *constraints* which circumscribe the possible characteristics of natural languages and prevent the language learner from forming ‘wild’ grammars, rather than the somewhat more vague and liberal designation ‘principles’ intended to capture commonality among human languages.

<sup>4</sup> Barring cases where intense contact with another language over a period of time leads to one leaking into the other with the consequence of L<sub>1</sub> attrition, i.e. unconscious restructuring of the native language system in order to embrace grammatical structures of the L<sub>2</sub> as its own, where utterances are being produced which monolingual speakers do not produce or find odd. Yet, such an evolution of the mother tongue is only parallel to the intralingual development observed e.g. in writers and journalists, difficult to be accounted for by reference to the un/availability of UG, especially as the language in the *tertium comparationis* of the monolingual culture of reference is ever-changing as well.

meter (such as *that*-trace effects, left dislocation, or expletives). This vindicates the *unavailability* of UG in the process of FLL (*cf.* also White (1991a) for similar observations related to the issue of clustering round the verb-raising parameter in English and French<sup>5</sup> – assuming, of course, that this parameter indeed functions in the way proposed; Marit Westergaard, p.c., 26 Sep. 2007).<sup>6</sup>

Thus, acknowledging the Critical Period Hypothesis (or Seliger's (1978) milder 'differential fossilization hypothesis'), the implication is that without full access to UG and prolonged access to indirect positive evidence the grammatical system of a FL will never be internalized without the compensatory remedy of formal instruction, a 'catalyser' in the words of Professor Maria Dakowska (p.c., March 12 2007). Positive evidence alone does not allow the learner to arrive at certain properties of the L<sub>2</sub>. Explicit form-focused instruction and negative evidence help learners notice target language (TL) features and patterns in the input and verify their hypotheses (*cf.* e.g. Tomasello & Herron 1988, 1989; White 1987, 1991b; Trahey & White 1993; Zhou 1992; Carroll & Swain 1993; Jordens 1996). This in turn summons the eternal question, how to achieve this aim effectively and efficiently – one of the issues teachers mention most frequently as of top relevance to language pedagogy.

The overwhelming majority of language course books and grammar reference materials on the market (with a few notable exceptions where contrastive grammar boxes are present) provide one-size-fits-all English-language explanations and totally ignore the relations holding between the students' L<sub>1</sub> and the TL. As Cook (2001) puts it, the writers have adopted the 19<sup>th</sup>-c. injunction to avoid the first language as much as possible in the classroom rather than seeing it as a resource for teaching. In the words of Howatt (1984:289), "the monolingual principle, the unique contribution of the twentieth century to classroom language teaching, remains the bedrock notion from which the others ultimately derive." Such mainly Euro- or Amerocentric books molded in the generic approach are, using James' (1980:24) term, "universally valid [but] for purely commercial reasons". Many students—and, regrettably, teachers as well—are not sufficiently

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<sup>5</sup> Hawkins *et al.* (1993) suggest that English speakers may never really *set* the V-to-T parameter to *on*, but instead rely on other mechanisms by which they can 'fake' French.

<sup>6</sup> Alternatively, this might perhaps be accounted for using a multi-parametric explanation (White 1986), or Hawkins and Chan's (1997:216) Failed Functional Features Hypothesis, under which it is only functional categories that are subject to a critical period unless instantiated in the L<sub>1</sub>, while UG *principles* remain fully operational.

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aware of the common properties of the TL and their  $L_1$ , which could be beneficially put to use in the teaching and learning process.

I contend that for a pedagogical grammar to be fully pedagogic, it must be contrastive (especially with linguistically homogeneous FL groups). This entails that competence in the FL should be developed by exploiting the common ground, relating TL facts to NL competence (what is known as the *extension hypothesis*), which involves two consequences.

Firstly, a successful teacher should be proficiently conversant in both the  $L_2$  and  $L_1$  of the learners, thus refuting the myth of nativespeakerism<sup>7</sup> in grammar teaching (for a panoply of arguments behind this rationale cf. Paradowski 2007:221–38). This may go counter to the enshrined attitude exorcising the use of the  $L_1$  in the classroom; an assumption prevalent throughout the past century at least (“It is assumed throughout that the teacher’s success is judged by the rarity of his lapses into the foreign tongue;” Thorley 1910). Yet, acknowledging that language transfer, both positive (facilitative) and negative (debilitative, interference) is unavoidable—even where there is no need for it to compensate for the unavailability of UG<sup>8</sup>—we should capitalize on it and turn it to our advantage.

This brings us to the second basic assumption behind the method presented here. It is an empirically supported psychological fact that learning always progresses by taking in new information and relating it to the already familiar, relying on prior knowledge to facilitate new learning (that is why we typically learn in terms of prototypes; cf. Rosch 1975; also Fillmore 1977; Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987, 1991; Taylor 1989; Gärdenfors 2000) – the inherent comparative expectation evident already in the question “What does it look like?”<sup>9</sup> This general observation is also true in the case of FL learners, where the familiar is their  $L_1$ , which is why they will inevitably try to explain a new  $L_2$  item to themselves and make sense

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis (1993) talks of what he calls ‘the tyranny of NSs’. Nowadays the ultimate authority and reference-point in FLL tends to be a NS. But it should not be so. Learners do not replicate the  $L_2$  but operate their own interlanguage; if only it is communicative—especially in the context of English as an International Language—they may achieve their goal and not necessarily seek to aim at perfect Eton idiom. The engrained idea of the intrinsic superiority of NS teachers is frequently taken on trust and considered a major selling point for language teaching institutions; as demonstrated in (Paradowski 2007), without deeper rationale.

<sup>8</sup> As is the case with early SLA.

<sup>9</sup> Consider also Vygotsky’s (1934b; 1934/78) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development and Feuerstein’s (*et al.* 1980) mediation theory, which both entail taking into account the learner’s current knowledge and past experiences (which also implies the mother tongue!).

of it in NL terms and comparing it with their  $L_1$ <sup>10</sup>. FL learners invariably attempt to incorporate the new language in the framework of the known one(s); they seek a safe passage from the TL to their mother tongue (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2003a:196). The most likely strategy for the learner is to make a conscious—albeit perhaps unarticulated—link to the  $L_1$ . These attempts are instinctive and made irrespective of the classroom methodology employed; learners compare languages with or without being instructed to do so, as proven by experiments from various disciplines (*cf.* e.g. Williams & Hammarberg 1998; Franceschini *et al.* 2003; de Bot 2004). Even with the Audio-lingual Method, where no occasions were provided for making semantic-associative links between  $L_2$  and  $L_1$  words, such links were undoubtedly forged anyway. As Stern (1992:282) puts it, “whether we like it or not, the new language is learnt on the basis of a previous language.” Learners do not compartmentalize the languages as hermetically separate entities and can generally only comprehend items which they can assimilate with the knowledge already available. Oxford (1990), for instance, estimates the proportion of learners reliant on interlingual strategies at 60% (which is not to mean that the remainder do not fall back on the  $L_1$ ; rather, it refers to the stratagems employed consciously).

Suppressing  $L_1$  use in the classroom does not eliminate it, but only relegates the activity of comparing inside the student’s mind, where the  $L_1$  is always present; the first language cannot be totally switched off when another is being used, whether in terms of vocabulary (Beauvillain & Grainger 1987), syntax (Cook 1994), phonology (Obler 1982) or pragmatics (Locastro 1987). As Cook (2007) pointedly observes, the absence of a systematic role for the mother tongue in language courses means jettisoning one of the most valuable assets that the  $L_2$  learner has.

Rather than driving the  $L_1$  permanently and unavoidably active in the students’ minds underground, this potential should be utilized. Acquiring  $L_2$  use that would be unrelated to the  $L_1$  is virtually impossible to achieve. The corollary is that FL rules must be formulated in a way that deliberately relates to  $L_1$  (or another known language) experience. *Ergo*, there are certain areas we need not spend much time on because they are identical in both languages – with a little explication and a handful of apt examples the learners will assimilate these with great facility<sup>11</sup>; others, where the FL

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<sup>10</sup> FL learners with different mother tongues behave differently with respect to certain linguistic properties.

<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, they may try to construct some completely novel forms which they will believe to be more ‘foreign’; not infrequently, learners express their surprise or disbelief at similarities between their  $L_1$  and the TL (which is why some overegg the pudding attempting to sound ‘native-like’). Also, Di Pietro’s (1971) assumption that Contrastive

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structures share only some common ground with the students'  $L_1$  – we compare the two languages. Noticing the most problematic contrasts between the  $L_1$  and the  $L_2$  and helping learners overcome the arising difficulties facilitates and accelerates the learning process.

To this end, I propose the employment of the Language Interface Method, which proves appreciably more successful than other approaches, with the results and enhanced retention preserved long after the instruction period has ended. The current paper explores to what extent—if any—experimental groups taught in line with this approach outperform control subjects who were instructed in the same areas of grammar ('reported speech' and relativizers), albeit with the use of other, more customary methods. After a brief portrayal of the model illustrated by a few examples, the methodology and participants of the study are introduced, and the results of the experiment are presented and discussed.

### 2. The model

*We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language...  
Language is not simply a reporting device for experience  
but a defining framework for it.*

—Benjamin Lee Whorf (1936); cf. also (1940/56:212)

The method presented here is to a considerable extent based on the model of pedagogical grammar charted in (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2003a), with a couple of minor modifications and expansions on my part. What is so innovative here? The model builds upon the long-known Contrastive Analysis, but in a novel and eclectic fashion, by forging an interface between the learner's  $L_1$  and the TL. This is supplemented—especially in areas not fully amenable to interfacial instruction, but also in others as an either inherent or auxiliary measure—by an explication of the underlying grammatical system, thus leading to a better understanding of the 'how's' and 'why's' of the material to be mastered. But let us first delineate the *modus procedendi* step by step.

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Analysis needs only show where the languages *differ*, with practice of these items only and sanctioning the learner's temptation to transfer others from the  $L_1$  (which cannot be prevented anyway) is erroneous, as such an approach will not forestall the learner's attempts at transferring other constructions (illicit in the TL) on the one hand, nor will the learner know where s/he *can* fall back on the  $L_1$  unless the items have been indicated (Sanders 1976). Sanders thus gives three reasons why similarities *as well as* differences ought to be pointed out and practiced:

- so that the learners do not have to *guess* which forms are similar;
- so that they can get an 'emic' (i.e., an 'insider's'; cf. Pike 1967) view of the TL;
- in order to base a hierarchy of difficulties on more than just differences.

The method usually commences with *initial exposure*<sup>12</sup> and *imprinting* (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2003a:196ff; James 1994) of new language material in a natural context, accompanied by its direct translational equivalent, but without aiming at structural decomposition. However, due to the relatively advanced competence of the participants in the current study the vast majority of the structures being subject to instruction were already well familiar, which—these being no longer novel language material—in most cases made the two initial stages superfluous.

The instruction thus now begins with an *explication* of how the rules of a given grammar area operate in the learners' L<sub>1</sub>. That is, the learner is introduced to facts s/he intuitively knows and subconsciously applies in performance, but which s/he may have never consciously pondered upon. In other words, we lead to the learners' enhanced language *awareness*.<sup>13</sup> More attention here is characteristically being paid to higher-order rules of use (concerning more complex syntax, semantic, pragmatic and discourse competence; Rivers 1968:ch. 3; Walsh & Diller 1981; thus rules pertaining to matters of personal meaning and choice, hence more suitable for conscious cognitive learning (Westney 1994:74–5)) than low-level rules of formation (concerning mechanical regularities in language, including inflectional morphology, basic principles of sentence structure, and phonology; hence more appropriate for rote learning) as, at least in the case of the research carried out and discussed further on, the latter did not pose problems for the already fairly competent language users.

Thus, the first major step is getting the learners to observe and notice patterns in their NL. Things that have once been explicated have the added preponderance of not becoming easily obliterated and can be recalled as the need arises. Moreover, source language proficiency determines L<sub>2</sub> development (*cf.* e.g. Vygotsky 1934b/1962:121; Collier 1992; Gabryś-Barker 2005), which is especially evident in school and academic circumstances. This has one more advantage: we can explicate only those L<sub>1</sub> items that are relevant to the L<sub>2</sub>, disregarding ones that may cause confusion.

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<sup>12</sup> While during the imprinting stage novel, interesting and original sentences can be used that may be argued to enhance memorability, the initial stage should rather introduce constructions that do not distract the learner by their meaning, thus more prone to be taken in (see Cook 2002a:266).

<sup>13</sup> Language awareness means sensitization of the learner to the functioning of a mastered language, “an ability to contemplate metacognitively a language over which one has therefore developed a coherent and relatively stable set of intuitions” (James 1994:209); in short, “*implicit* knowledge that has become *explicit*” (Levelt *et al.* 1978:5; emphasis added).

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A passage is subsequently made to the *explanation* of relevant  $L_2$  regularities – something more novel this time, being the target proper of the instruction. What happens now is raising the learners' *consciousness* of FL features<sup>14</sup>, revealing the underlying TL pattern behind the data imprinted in the learners' memory and offering a first-approximation rule (frequently through a discovery technique), but without losing sight of the  $L_1$  principle, showing parallels between both languages. Language-awareness and consciousness-raising tasks sensitize the learner to language phenomena which are present in both his/her  $L_1$  and the TL, but whose overt realization in the two languages may differ. Learners discover whether the  $L_1$  rules are operative in the  $L_2$  and vice versa. The teacher's task is to demonstrate to them through comparative analysis that they already know something which they have so far regarded as mysterious. This eases the burden and is greatly facilitative in lowering the affective filter<sup>15</sup> (Dulay & Burt 1977; Krashen 1982:32) – another factor not to be disregarded.

It is essential to note at this point that at the two stages—especially at early levels of proficiency or where the subject-matter is muddled or would require the introduction of complex taxonomy otherwise—in order to maximise efficiency, the clarifications had preferably better be formulated in the mother tongue of the learners “as a more accessible and cost-effective alternative to the sometimes lengthy and difficult target-language explanation” (Ur 1996:17; *cf.* also e.g. Hammerly 1982; Atkinson 1987; Harbord 1992; Lucas & Katz 1994:539; Schweers 1999; Cook 2001; Wilen *et al.* 2004; Temple *et al.* 2005).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the judicious use of the  $L_1$  in the

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<sup>14</sup> Insight into what the learners do not yet know in the FL, without necessarily directly instilling the rules (Rutherford 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Emotional responses to the language learning experience which, when debilitating, act as a barrier separating the learner from effective learning. The filter controls how much input the learner receives, how much of this input actually becomes let in and converted into intake and how much rejected, whether the learner is ‘open’ or ‘closed’ to the  $L_2$ .

<sup>16</sup> This, of course, goes counter to the ‘official doctrine’. The place and use of the  $L_1$  in the  $L_2$  classroom (both as the medium of instruction and as the *tertium comparationis*) was frowned upon and advised against during a good portion of the past century. There has been a long tradition in the métier of ELT of not only ignoring the mother tongue in the learner's mind, but also of suppressing its surfacing in class, and many teachers still feel guilty if the learners'  $L_1$  was let in. Even today in numerous classes across the globe the  $L_1$  is banned completely and all activity essentially resembles the ‘Direct Method’, where all communication is supposed to take place in English, or through gesture and mime when the former fails (Grant 1993:v). Still, practice departs from the preached policy: in his study Franklin (1990) found that as many as 88% of teachers use the  $L_1$  for explaining grammar.



classroom should not be limited just to conveying the meaning of new lexical items or constructions (thus giving impetus to the explanation as taking the  $L_1$  shortcut is considerably more effective and efficient than often frustrating, time-consuming and imprecise roundabout descriptions in the FL), but also in using it as metalanguage helping students understand grammar. Cook (2007) makes the relevant point that “[i]f one believes that a crucial element in learning is the students’ conscious understanding of grammatical rules, one needs to ask which language acts best as a vehicle for conveying the actual rules. There is no virtue in making the grammatical explanation deliberately difficult by using the students’ weakest language.” He also brings in here the incidental advantage of building on metalinguistic nomenclature which the learners already know from their study of their  $L_1$  in school, rather than requiring them to master yet another cumbersome taxonomy (or having to simplify the explanation for the sake of their low  $L_2$  knowledge; Cook 1999; 2002b). Developing links between languages ought to be encouraged.

Of course, given the limited exposure that students get in EFL settings the language of instruction can serve as additional input. Yet, as Cook (1999) observes, “once one goes beyond greetings and pleasantries, the language of the classroom is ... specialised language used for teaching where the vocabulary and the language functions are unlikely to be duplicated in the world outside,” thus not as useful as some would have it. Moreover, it can be argued that much of classroom communication and instruction is highly repetitive, hence failing to contribute to enhanced linguistic proficiency after a while.

Once the relevant material has been explained, an *interface*—a contact area between the two language systems—is forged, usually consisting in modifying the  $L_1$  rule to accommodate relevant  $L_2$  data (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2003a:206) and an explicit presentation of this ultimate rule. Subsequent carefully monitored practice first expects the learner to apply the FL rules to  $L_1$  (!) examples. Precisely that: foreign rules are to be applied to mother-tongue texts. Only then does the teaching move to more traditionally sanctioned TL exercises, but even then in a progressive fashion: the first assignments being translational equivalents of the  $L_1$  examples (in order to preserve the familiarity appeal), subsequently moving on to entirely novel ones, where the learner tackles the tasks without the aid of a *déjà vu*, as in real-life contexts. We thus reach the final *competence expansion* stage – making the learners collapse their already conscious knowledge of the FL system with their already explicit reflection of their subconscious  $L_1$  competence and integrate the rules. This is effected through the wisely constructed meaning-focused tasks, ultimately

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expecting submersion and subconscious absorption of the rules. Although simple formula *memorization* poses a lighter learning burden, rule *internalization* is undeniably more successful. James (1994) maintains that in order to forge the interface a ‘common denominator’ has to be discovered. Metacognition can fulfill the function of this denominator as one can have metacognition of both the native and foreign language(s). The resulting L<sub>1</sub>:L<sub>2</sub> merger is expected to become automatized and—with sufficient frequency of use—proceduralized, thus conducive to accuracy-*cum*-fluency and compensating for the lack of native intuitions (Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2003a:*passim*).

By such a gradual, multi-stage method the learners gain command of the TL system before actually starting to use the operational principles in the TL itself. A cognitive inferential (inductive) approach gets them—at least mentally—more engaged in the learning process (benefit of the hands-on approach: ‘you learn best what you’ve done yourself’), while the juxtaposition and use of L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> rules alongside help the latter merge with the former and thus, hopefully, submerge to the subconscious, indicating that the material has been successfully automatized and internalized. By practicing the TL rules in the safe grounds of the L<sub>1</sub> first, the learner feels more comfortable and at ease (this reducing the affective filter).

With the use of the LIM the learners are taught grammar from their own perspective; they obtain a bridge linking the FL with their NL. Every new structure should best be introduced through the prism of the learners’ L<sub>1</sub>, the only language in which they are (and will ever be) *fully* competent (unless raised in a bi-/multilingual environment from an early age). Explicit exposure to contrastive linguistic input expedites the acquisition of given L<sub>2</sub> forms; while consciousness-raising (C-R) coupled with negative evidence elucidates the gap between the learner’s production and the model one. As Lewis (1993:154) notes, the “process of acquisition is best aided by making students aware of features of the target language, and, in due course, of how their production of the target language differs from its norms.” Engaging terminology-free contrastive cross-linguistic comparisons may be viewed as an acquisition facilitator, much more straightforward than employing grammatical explanations (which not infrequently take a convoluted form), leading to a better understanding and retention of the target rules. A fluent speaker of a FL does not think of rules when s/he uses the L<sub>2</sub>, although they are “stored, ready to be recalled at some higher level of the conscious knowledge about the language” (Marton 1981:157). Comparing two languages, and conscious knowledge about the structures which are different in the L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> and therefore prone to be transferred, does not constitute an impediment to fluent language usage. C-R does not

even require the learner to be able to verbalize the rules s/he has learnt. The ideal solution for a Polish learner of English would be a textbook written by a Polish author aware of the areas of potential difficulty as well as those in which positive transfer can be invoked. Only in this way can we compensate for the alleged (by some, e.g. Clahsen & Muysken 1986, Meisel 1997, Beck 1998; but also cognitive and functional linguists) unavailability of UG mechanisms. We can also quote here the argument for the study of grammar of the FL raised by the Grammar-Translation Method that focusing on grammar in such a contrastive way will familiarize students with the grammar of their own language, which may—in turn—help them speak and write it more skillfully: language awareness in the L<sub>2</sub> does result in increased L<sub>1</sub> accuracy (Ewert, *forthc.*).

Let us now pass on to a handful of examples amenable to the interfacial instruction. While the data used in the experiment were Polish, in this paper, given the character of the current journal, for expository purposes I also employ patterns from Norwegian.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Examples

#### 3.1. Existential sentences

With Polish being a pro-drop language, English constructions with obligatory (in non-imperative clauses) non-referential elements functioning as subjects or raised objects require some time for the understanding of and getting used to this characteristic. Students find it difficult to entertain the idea of using a subject with no semantic content, whose function is purely syntactic—that of filling the obligatory specifier position—and when they manage, they frequently erratically oscillate between *it* and *there*. Before introducing English existential sentences, the teacher should make learners aware how word order changes the meaning of the sentence in their L<sub>1</sub>. This means sensitizing students to the universal principles of information structure, such as the given-new order characteristic of nearly all natural languages<sup>18</sup>: when the topic of the sentence is known, it opens the sentence, when not, we demote it to the end of the clause to signal its playing the discourse role of focus. This is visible in both Norwegian and English, which insert an expletive up front:

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<sup>17</sup> I would like to thank Professor Romuald Gozdawa-Gołębiowski for ideas presented in points 3.1.-3.3., and Professor Tor Anders Åfarli for the generous provision and discussion of the Norwegian data.

<sup>18</sup> In some Native North American languages (*e.g.* Cayuga, Ojibwa, Papago, or Ute), however, old thematic information comes relatively late in the sentence.

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- (1) a. The gangsters are in town.  
          OLD                          NEW
- b. Gangsterne er i byen.  
          OLD                          NEW
- (2) a. There are gangsters in town.  
  NEW
- b. Der er gangstere i byen.  
  NEW

(cf. also Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2000:7)

Such a contrastive comparison simultaneously offers the advantage of being able to illustrate the use of English articles, even where the learners' L<sub>1</sub> may not include this category.

### 3.2. 'Reported speech'

Polish learners typically take a considerable deal of time to realize that the English tenses, just like the deictic expressions (pointing to time, place and persons at the moment of speaking), are interpreted in relation to the time, venue, and participants of the act of *reporting* rather than the *original* utterance (cf. Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1023). In this respect the most notorious minefields are constructions requiring the preterite perfect (practically without an equivalent in modern-day Polish), situations where the salient, intended interpretation of the initial utterance, belief etc. still obtains, is trusted, applicable and relevant (*op. cit.*:156f.), and where consequently a deictic non-backshifted tense is more appropriate (also favored when the reporter endorses or accepts the original), and, above all, reporting coupled with an embedded interrogative, thus requiring the coordination of a couple of principles. The phenomenon of *oratio obliqua* may be taught by elucidating the difference between the nature of tenses in the NL and the TL: in Polish, they are *arbitrary*: anterior to, concurrent with, or posterior to the *matrix clause action/state*. English and Norwegian tenses, in contrast, are *absolute*, *i.e.* they relate the message to the *moment of speaking* (see the very interesting discussion in Perlin (1996) or McTaggart's (1908) distinction between an A series, an external timeframe, where events are relative to the narrator's viewpoint as taking place in the past, present or future, and a B series, an internal timeframe, a sense of a serial order of events). Polish learners may be asked to consider the following examples and to discover the difference in temporal reference themselves (cf. also Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 2000:96f.; 2003a:220–23):

- (3) a. Powiedział, że jest chory. – When he was saying that, he was ill.  
*said-MASC COMP is-MASC ill*  
 He said that he was/is ill.
- b. Powiedział, że był chory. – Prior to saying that, he had been ill.  
*said-MASC COMP was-MASC ill*  
 He said that he had been ill.
- (4) a. He said he is ill. – He is still ill now.
- b. He said he was ill. – He was ill.
- c. He said he had been ill. – He had been ill and then he said so.

This will allow them to realize that the backshift—rather than to be considered as yet another special apparatus to be mastered—is a straightforward reflection of the general principles of past tense use in English. For Norwegian, a brief illustration of the parallelism should suffice:

- (5) a. Han sa han er syk.
- b. Han sa han var syk.
- c. Han sa han hadde vært syk.

### 3.3. *Embedded questions*

Numerous longitudinal interrogation studies found that when embedded questions first appear in the learners' interlanguage, they are characterized by subject-verb (or subject-auxiliary) inversion, as in simple specific questions, *e.g.*:

- (6) a. \*I don't know where does he work.
- b. \*I don't know how did he get killed.

Only later does the learner successfully 'unlearn' the inversion rule and differentiate the word order of ordinary and embedded questions, *e.g.*

- (7) I don't know how he got killed.

An ingenious shortcut is to teach indirect questions split into two parts as in the following sentences:

- (8) I don't know where | he works.
- (9) I'll tell you how | he got killed.

(*cf. Gozdawa-Gołębiowski 1999:140f.*)

The teacher can then illustrate that they can be constructed by as if translating two simple and familiar Polish sentences, as in (10) and (11) respectively:

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- (10) Nie wiem, gdzie | Pracuje.  
(11) Powiem Ci, jak | Został zabity.

### 3.4. Conditionality

Conditional sentences are notorious for being one of the areas of grammar that Polish students curse most, owing to the distinct nature of English tenses coupled with the virtual lack of the pluperfect in contemporary Polish. Consequently, much classroom time needs to be spent particularly on remote conditionals which suggest a lesser likelihood, counterfactuality, or desire, and where the preterite expresses modal remoteness not past time. High-risk constructions include:

- the ‘third conditional’, where attitude to an imagined past situation is described,
- structures of logical equivalence, which are not really conditionals, with the meaning of the alleged/factual ‘*if*’ closer to ‘*since/as*’,
- factals where epistemic modality represents a consequence implicature of inference type (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:740),
- structures where the subordinating conjunction denotes frequency and can be paraphrased as ‘*invariably*’, ‘*every time*’, ‘*when(ever)*’,
- ‘mixed’ conditionals – the most frequent type, yet surprisingly marginalised in ELT materials, and
- the construction *but for you*.

Again, the learning burden may be reduced if we try to filter the system through the prism of the L<sub>1</sub>. First, we need to introduce the distinction between the two principal uses of tenses: for *fact* and for *non-fact*. In the former, tenses have ‘real’ values, which means that in English they relate to the moment of speaking. In this case it often suffices to present a translation, as certain things follow directly. Consider e.g. this sentence from Francis Ford Coppola’s famous *Godfather I*:

- (12) a. I apologize if I offended you.  
b. Jeg beklager om jeg fornærmet deg.

There is no need to mention conditionality here, as (12a) is no conditional sentence, and a straightforward word-for-word translation works perfectly.

For non-fact, English is a hypocritical language: the tenses lie, as each temporal framework employs a tense going one step backwards. Here we can also, in many cases, rely on direct cross-linguistic comparison and account for the difference in the structure of sentences representing likely and unlikely conditions, present in other languages as well:

- (13) a. If I get a rise, I will buy a new car.  
 b. Om jeg får lønnsøkning, vil jeg kjøpe en ny bil.
- (14) a. If I got a rise, I would buy a new car.  
 b. Om jeg fikk lønnsøkning, ville jeg kjøpe en ny bil.

Once we have introduced the distinction, it will directly apply to other aspects of English, such as ‘reported speech’, *wish*-sentences, or the ‘*as if*’ and ‘*if only*’ non-factuality, again manifest across languages and language families (cf. Gozdawa-Gołębiowski (2003a:224) for a similar pitch), where no metalinguistic jargon and little instruction, for that matter, is required:

- (15) a. If only these exercises were easier!  
 b. Om bare disse oppgavene var lettere!

One more type of conditional structure is sentences such as (16):

- (16) When you see him, tell him to get in touch with me.

This contains what is known as conditional *when* – it expresses conditionality, but not allowing for a doubt. We can explain to our learners why no future form is used after this ‘when’ by pointing to the parallelism between the English constructions ‘When you see him, ...’ and ‘If you see him, ...’ and the Polish structures ‘Kiedy go zobaczysz, ...’ and ‘Jak/Jeśli go zobaczysz, ...’ respectively, and indicating that since the structures are quite (although not entirely) synonymous, we use no future form after conditional ‘*when*’ just as after conditional ‘*if*’.

#### 4. Utilizing syntactic insights

The cognition-based part of the model may also fall back on the underlying syntactic structures, particularly where no direct L<sub>1</sub>:L<sub>2</sub> correspondence can be established. Thus e.g. Polish learners, owing to transfer from their L<sub>1</sub>, will typically say (17) rather than the more idiomatic (18):

- (17) #How does it look?  
 (18) What does it look like?

A way out here is to demonstrate that (18) is derived from a structure as in the emphatic question, where the interrogative NP is subsequently preposed to sentence-initial position:

- (19) It looks like *what*?

Even more successful can be Deep Structure revelation when elucidating the contrast between constructions such as subject question (20) and object question (21):

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(20) Who loves John?

(21) Who does John love?

A non-advanced learner, typically focusing on the content of the message rather than form, will not perceive the difference between the two constructions or use the wrong one, especially where it is not marked syntactically in their L<sub>1</sub>, as is the case with Norwegian:

(22) Hvem elsker Jon?

The mistake can be eradicated and the contrast elucidated if we present the underlying schemata along the lines below, respectively, and elucidate the subsequent fronting of the (*wh*-)object of (24) that yields (21):

(23) X loves John?

(24) Does John love X?

It can thus be argued that some insights from generative grammar may be of considerable benefit in explaining FL material. Moreover, as X-bar syntax (even when we dispose of the intermediate phrasal categories in order to ease the cognitive load) is a framework common to all natural languages, this ties nicely with the Language Interface Method, and universal principles and constraints can function as yet another common denominator teachers can utilize. Regrettably, language course books or grammar handbooks where such insights are capitalized upon are practically nonexistent. Even reference grammars fail to turn the possibility to their advantage, with the notable exception of Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and (albeit to a lesser extent) Carter and McCarthy (2006).

Focusing on the meaning *and* form at the same time overcomes the problem that form-oriented input is *unsuccessful* if not interpreted as such. C-R contrasts with traditional grammar instruction in that it devotes much greater attention to form-function relationships. On top of that, it attains to situate grammatical forms and structures within a broader discursive context. It enables the learner to see how grammar operates in discourse and how meanings are realized by grammatical features. Rutherford (1987:26) believes that C-R may result in better production and a wider scope of contexts in which the learner will be able to employ the rules.

## 5. Methodology and participants

*“Winwood Reade is good upon the subject,” said Holmes. “He remarks that, while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician.”*



—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle *The Sign of the Four* (1890:Ch. 10.  
The End of the Islander)

The current project constitutes a *single blind research design*, with the subjects (in contrast to the researcher) blind to the research aims and conditions (McCall 1994:293). It can be classified as a *semi-naturalistic enquiry*, as it investigates variable manipulation in the context of naturally occurring events (Możejko 2002:137) but, as opposed to *naturalistic enquiry* (Allwright & Bailey 1991:40), in a non-laboratory setting. The research paradigm falls into the category of *quasi-experimental* (Cohen *et al.* 2000:211ff), since the groups taking part in the research could only have been based on the composition of the already existing language-group division in the school. The selection of the subjects could thus be categorized as ‘convenience sampling’ (Hatch & Lazaraton 1991:42; Miles & Huberman 1994:28) since, rather than designing the groups specifically for the purpose of the experiment, the researcher had to rely on an already pre-existing division.

The study involved continuous collection of data over a period of one school year (9.5 months) and focused on two distinct areas of grammar: the phenomenon commonly referred to as ‘reported speech’ (a systemic area, already overviewed in Section 3.2), and relative constructions (more lexical in character), which also are a minefield for the Polish learner – here negative transfer emerges, as the pronouns and adverbs that are expected in the English constructions frequently differ from those in the superficially similar Polish sentences, to add to the dissimilar punctuation conventions and intonation which in English distinguish between defining/restrictive and non-defining/non-restrictive relative clauses (or, using Huddleston and Pullum’s (2002:1034f.) terminology, integrated vs. supplementary relatives). The study was carried out on 144 second-form (post-reform, i.e. 17-18 years old) students at one of Warsaw’s elite secondary schools with an approximately upper-intermediate level of proficiency. All had Polish as their mother tongue, although their prior exposure to and fluency in other languages varied considerably. In addition to the experimental group, there were 6 control ones (altogether comprising 118 pupils), with ‘group’ understood not in the sense of form division in the school, but as the students taught by each individual teacher. Thus, for instance, the experimental cluster (instructed in LIM) comprised 28 students from two language groups, and the total number of these in the school (at this level of proficiency) was 10. In terms of size, therefore, there were in a few cases considerable differences in the number of subjects taking the test with each respective instructor. Each student had five hours of English a week, half of which with a Polish instructor, the rest with a native speaker.

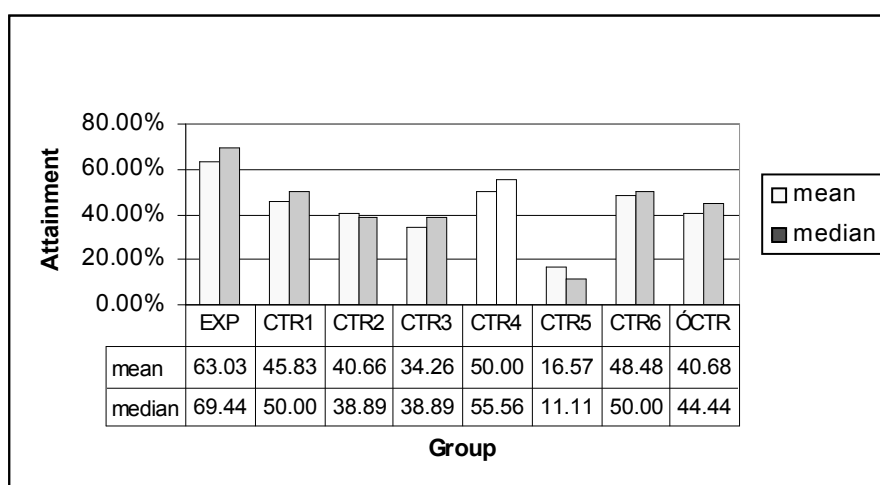
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The control groups were instructed in the same language areas as the experimental cluster, but via the employment of other (i.e., non-interfacial) methods and approaches, favored by the individual teachers.

### 6. Results

Let us first take a look at the results of the final test, administered as unannounced and non-graded:

Figure 1: Reported speech deferred test results.



The diagram indicates significantly higher performance of the experimental group (EXP) over all but one control group (CTR<sub>1</sub>-CTR<sub>6</sub>), the significance of the results computed using the heteroscedastic *t*-test formula and the reference point being critical values considered for one-tailed decisions.<sup>19</sup>

The most recurrent mistakes in the control groups concerned:

- use of the simple past in constructions requiring the preterite perfect;
- unwarranted backshift in situations where the salient, intended interpretation of the initial utterance, belief etc. still obtains, is trusted, applicable and relevant (*cf.* Huddleston & Pullum 2002:156*f.*), or when the reporter endorses or accepts the original;
- unprovoked backshift in the subordinate clause when that of the reporting frame (matrix) is present perfect (which focuses on the present rather than past; *cf.* Huddleston & Pullum 2002:158);

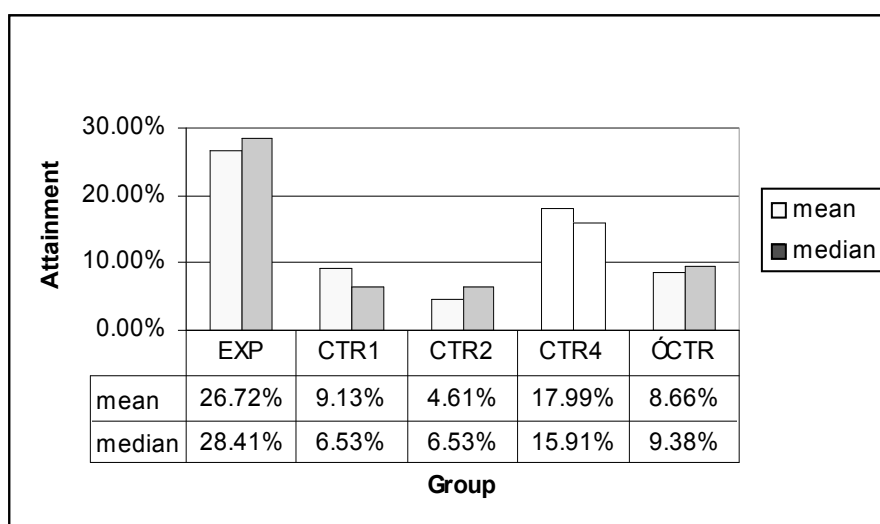
<sup>19</sup> The bars for groups where performance failed to be superior to that of the EXP cluster to a statistically significant extent are marked here and hereafter in white. Both mean and median values are provided, since the latter are more revealing in the case of mixed-ability groups with a large standard deviation in performance, which was the case in the research quoted.

- unnecessary complications in reporting utterances with modal verbs (*must* used to draw conclusions, *could* expressing im/possibility, other past-tense modals and *ought to*);
- gratuitous conversions of sentences with non-deictic backshifted preterite and of the second conditional into the third;
- and inversion in embedded interrogatives.

It should be noted, however, that the results of the final test need not necessarily tell us what they seem to tell us. This is due to the fact that, although all the students had taken the same language-competence school entrance test and had followed the same course of language instruction over their first year of secondary education, ‘stronger’ and ‘weaker’ groups can invariably be distinguished even with mixed-ability classes. A more insightful measure of success would therefore be the computation of the *progress of each student* in the respective grammar areas. To this end, a diagnostic test of the relevant grammar areas had been administered to the participants of the study at the commencement of the school year, against which the deferred post-test results could be weighted. Let us then consider what these data reveal.

Owing to logistic considerations and the tight foreign-language curriculum framework, results for both the diagnostic and the deferred post-test in the areas of ‘reported speech’ and relativizers were only available from three control teachers, nevertheless presenting a representative sample. This time the differences are considerably greater:

Figure 2: Reported speech progress (repeated items).

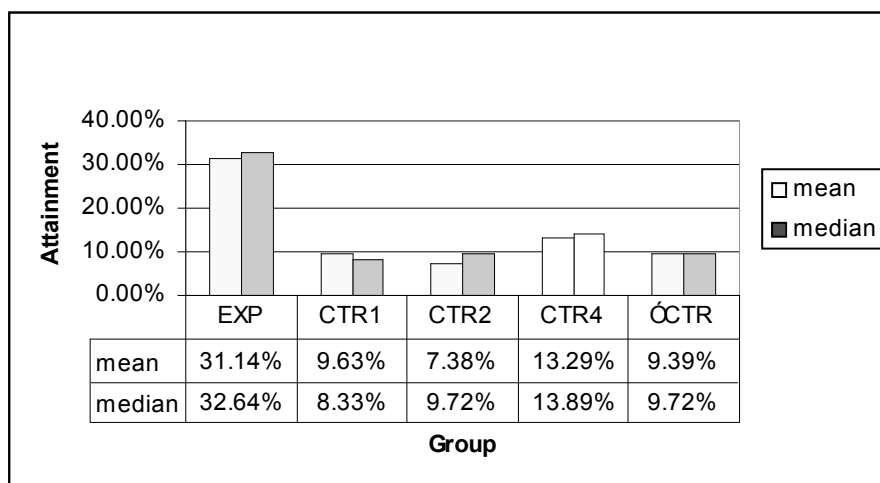


The diagram represents progress in that part of the test items which had appeared in the earlier diagnostic test. It should however be borne in mind that mere repetition of the diagnostic test to measure progress, although producing perfect inter-test reliability, is not devoid of shortcomings. Too

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great a number of language data already encountered may influence the response in both a facilitative and a debilitating fashion. On the one hand, having encountered the sentences before, the students may have discussed them, pondered upon them, or have had an enlightenment. On the other, they may write what they think they had written in the diagnostic test (or exactly the opposite, for that matter), or may fill in the items (or leave these blank) off-hand, finding the repetition tedious. Thus, in order to circumvent this problem, some of the items have been removed (including sentences performance on which tallied over 90 per cent in the diagnostic test, but with distracters remaining) and others added, especially representing the constructions where most deficiencies had been observed in the initial diagnosis. We thus compromise somewhat on the statistical inter-test reliability in order to overcome the disadvantages of item-familiarization and task-weariness (Mozejko 2002:151), and to present data unblurred by items which had posed no problems for the subjects at the outset of the instruction. This step taken, the results are uncompromising:

Figure 3: Reported speech progress (all items).

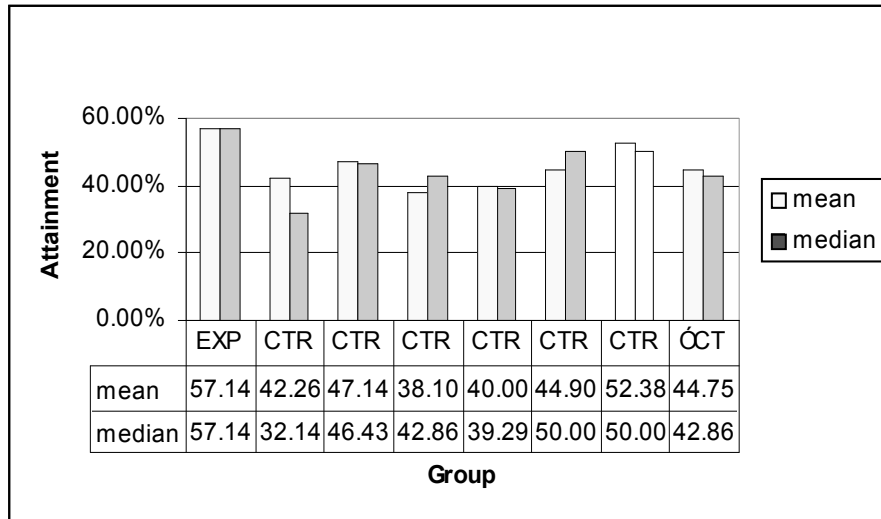


It must be added at this point that insofar as the diagnostic and the post-test results are not *directly* comparable, the findings can only be interpreted as *relative* to one another, but *not* as *absolute* values (thus, using language-testing terminology, an *internal norm-referenced* rather than a *criterion-referenced* perspective has been adopted, although without positing any expected benchmark)! Thus, for instance with respect to the above diagram, while it should not be claimed that the mean progress in the experimental group equalled 31.14%, it can that the difference between that and the mean progress in the control groups was at a—relative—level of 21.75%. The reason why the term ‘progress’ has nevertheless been preserved is, this notion can refer not only to enhanced performance within

a predetermined métier, but also to the extension of acquired knowledge to new contexts.

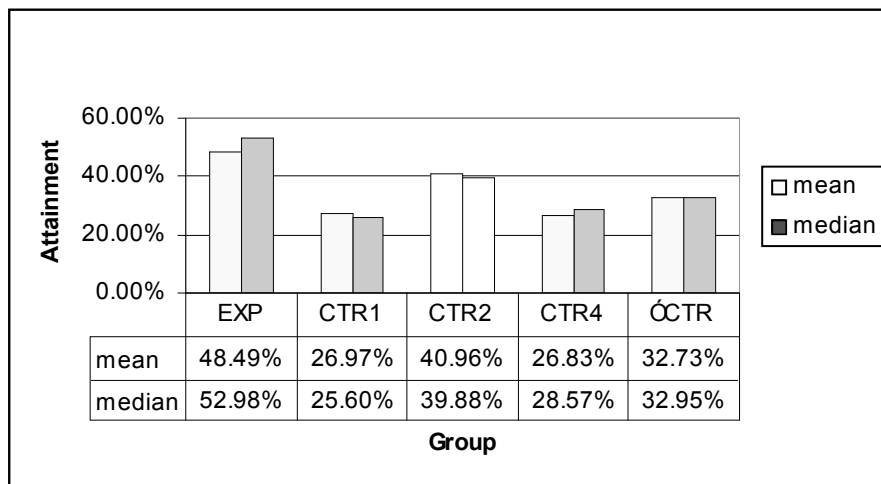
Where relative pronouns and adverbs were concerned, the differences between the individual scores were less pronounced:

Figure 4: Relativizers deferred test results.



Nor were they particularly more distinctive when change from the performance in the diagnostic test to that in the final was measured where only the repeated test items were taken into consideration, although the attainment of one group gained significance when other items added to the ‘relativizers’ section in the meantime were considered as well:

Figure 5: Relativizers progress (all items).



Here the mistakes made by the controls oscillated chiefly around:

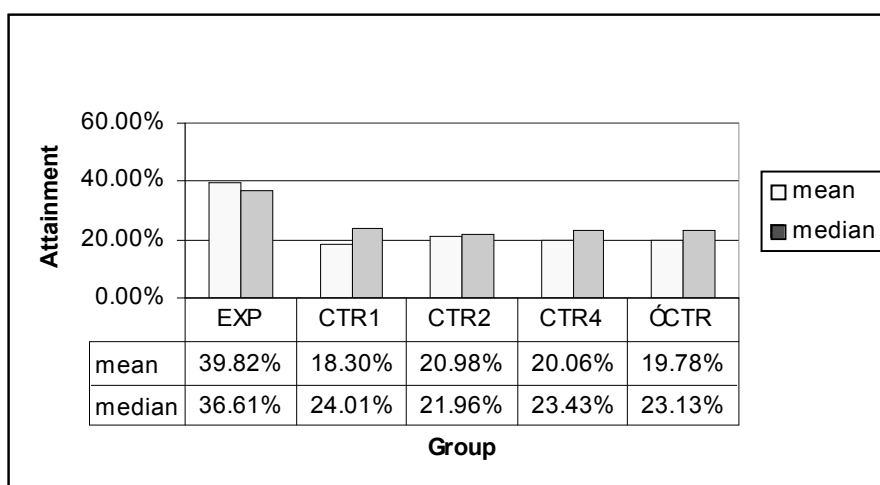
- *it*-cleft constructions, with foregrounded elements being either a PP or an AdvP (where ‘*where*’ and ‘*when*’ were frequently used in place of the expected ‘*that*’);
- constructions with a fronted partitive *of*-phrase (‘*of which*’);

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- placing ‘*who*’ rather than ‘*whom*’ as an adjacent complement of a P (in formal writing);
- ‘*which*’ instead of ‘*who(m)*’ referring to human antecedents;
- difficulties with supplying ‘*whose*’ as a possessive determiner with non-personal antecedents;
- ‘*what*’ in place of ‘*which*’ in supplementary sentential relative clauses, commenting on a previous AP, VP, whole clause or longer stretch of discourse (Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1052);
- ignorance of the non-*wh* (‘*that*’) preference after superlative adjectives, compound determinatives (*any/every/no/some+thing*) and non-personal fused determiner-heads (*all, much, most, few, little, some, any*; Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1053f.);
- and vice-versa with demonstrative pronouns (*this, that, these, those*).

To sum this up, let us last look at the average progress in the two language areas:

Figure 6: Average progress.



Summing up the results of the experiment, it seems that instruction via the Language Interface Method does perform its job satisfactorily; even if the effectiveness is not necessarily supreme in all areas of grammar, it is, at least, never significantly inferior to other methods, a fact not to be ignored by language teachers and methodologists alike.<sup>20</sup> The essential benefit is

<sup>20</sup> Obviously, by its very nature the model is more suited for analytic rather than holistic or *gestalt* learners. For this reason, it will not really benefit young learners, who are characterized by involuntary and limited attention, holistic skills, inability to observe regularities and causal relations, undeveloped problem-solving skills, weak memory, limited experience, *hic-et-nunc* reasoning, undeveloped aptitude, mechanical memory, lower-order processing, undeveloped interactional skills, volatile motivation, lack of literacy (and numeracy), and ongoing categorization (Paradowski 2007:251–6). But, for this matter, neither will any other attempt at teaching kids FL grammar.

that the results of the instruction are maintained beyond the immediate teaching time – a long-term pedagogical goal certainly more desirable and creditable than just short-term retention displayed in a follow-up test. Thus, LIM appears to be more effective in helping FL learners master the relevant properties of English than other approaches. Importantly, the method turns out to be particularly successful for less-advanced learners as, despite a strong correspondence between the participants' initial and final proficiency ( $r = .5356$ ), progress correlated negatively with the initial proficiency ( $r = -0.3907$ ).

When the learners remember, internalize, proceduralize and automatize the rules on the go, we can profess that we teach grammar as process, not merely as content, even if eventually arriving at a product<sup>21</sup>. Utilizing awareness- and consciousness-raising, as it is done in the Language Interface Model, “fulfils a process rather than product role: it is a facilitator, a means to an end rather than an end in itself” (Nunan 1991:150). Adhering to this procedure the teacher may trust the learners know more than just the surface structure of the utterances taught.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

*Now this is not the end. This is not, even, the beginning of the end.*  
 — Winston Spencer-Churchill's (1942, Nov 10) speech  
 given at Lord Mayor's Luncheon, Mansion House, London,  
 in response to the Allied victory over the German Afrika Korps  
 at the Second Battle of El Alamein

We may fall back not only on the knowledge of the learners'  $L_1$ , but equally well apply analogy learning with other languages that our learners are familiar with – this inclusion of more than just the first language in the FLT classroom, with the connection of languages acquired earlier and later, are being proposed by several researchers (e.g. Meißner 1999; Neuner 2001; Gabryś-Barker 2005; Marx 2006). Explicit metacognitive awareness of  $L_2$  contributes to proficiency in  $L_3$ .

However, when presenting learners with comparisons of two structures in their non-native languages one must set about it cautiously in order to prevent negative transfer from occurring in other constructions. If the learners begin to rely too much on another language, transfer will be very difficult to confine, since learners will be influenced much more by the  $L_n$

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<sup>21</sup> A product-oriented syllabus focuses on the outcome of a language program and on specifying content, the skills we aim to develop, and the aim is defined as the end-product intended to be reached – ‘banking’ of knowledge. A process-oriented syllabus, in contrast, focuses on the learning process, *i.e.* the means by which communicative skills will be brought about.

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than the L<sub>1</sub> (*cf.* e.g. House 2004; Ringbom 2007), as things acquired consciously will be more entrenched – the awareness of one’s learning processes, strategies, and competence in the language(s) perceived as ‘foreign’ is developed better than of those of the L<sub>1</sub>—which are typically unconscious and automatic. A good case in point will be Polish students who first began learning German and then English. Both Polish and German are languages in which the rule of final devoicing<sup>22</sup> is operative, which is absent from English. Thus, initially Polish learners correctly transfer the rule to the German language context. However, once they come to know that the rule is not operative in English, many automatically cease applying it to German as well, presenting yet another example of retroactive interference.

The LIM is a promising tool for building *multi-competence* in L<sub>2</sub> users, regardless of whether we adopt this general term coined by Cook (1991) to denote the coexistence of more than one language (encompassing both L<sub>1</sub> competence and the L<sub>2</sub> interlanguage) in the same mind as a single integrated system, or whether we prefer to think of FL learners more precisely as *compound bilinguals*, where the two—or more—languages are kept apart, compartmentalized, but with systematic access points, or whether we will adopt a *partial integration* model, capturing the idea of partial overlap of the language systems in the mind (Cook 2003). Even though hemispheric lateralization suggests that both languages are stored in roughly the same areas of the brain, this does not preclude either of the options mentioned, but this need not worry us as the essential thing is the rough concept of multicompetence, not the question how it is exactly realized.

Moreover, language awareness in the L<sub>2</sub> may also result in enhanced L<sub>1</sub> awareness and increased accuracy: learners of English are more likely to accept (well-formed) passive construction in Polish (Ewert, *forthc.*); Hungarian children who have learnt English use stylistically more complex writing in their L<sub>1</sub> (Kecskes & Papp 2000), just to mention two attested examples. Thus, learning another language is not just adding a separate annex to an already existing construct, but it affects different aspects of the user’s mind in subtle ways. Transfer is thus seen as a two-way process in which the L<sub>1</sub> in the L<sub>2</sub> user’s mind is affected by the L<sub>2</sub> as well as the reverse (Jarvis 2003) – a belated recognition of the bidirectionality of interference already noted in 1953 by Ulrich Weinreich: “deviation from the norms of *either* language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a

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<sup>22</sup> Whereby voiced obstruents get devoiced before a word boundary.



result of their familiarity with more than one language” (Weinreich 1953:1; emphasis added).

Of course, there remain many more interesting issues arising with this approach which merit further investigation, and many more grammar areas for which the method presented here is applicable. For obvious limitations of space I have only been able to present a fraction of the methodology and the data here.

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