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Teach it or ignore it? How do some trainee English teachers in the French secondary education system deal with grammar in the classroom?

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1. Introduction

- 1 This article will examine how a group of trainee English teachers in the French state education system deal with grammar in their classrooms, and more generally what their representations and perceptions of grammar and grammatical competence are with respect to teaching English. For the needs of the present study, grammar can be defined as in the Council of Europe's C.E.F.R. : "the set of principles governing the assembly of elements into meaningful labelled and bracketed strings" and grammatical competence as "the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognising well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with these principles".
- 2 The study is based on a corpus of questionnaires and interviews carried out during a seminar entitled "English grammar and secondary school English teaching", which was part of a second year master's programme in secondary school teacher training ("Master MEEF"), leading to certification in the French public school system.
- 3 One of the seminar's objectives was to highlight the links between the theoretical linguistics component of the national competitive teaching exam (the "CAPES"), normally taken at the end of the first year of the master's programme, and the teaching

practice that the students were presently completing, as well as to explore more generally the role of grammar within the broadly task-based approach to language teaching (TBLT) that is recommended by the French Ministry for Education. (More information on the theoretical underpinning of the linguistic component of the CAPES will be given in section 3.2.)

- 4 The French Ministry for Education's official guidelines concerning the teaching of English in the secondary school system accords very little space to the study of grammar and the acquisition of grammatical competence. Generally speaking, grammar is seen as one of the many tools necessary for the ultimate goal of communicative competence, but no explicit guidance is given as to how grammatical competence is to be obtained in the classroom. The guidelines for the teaching of English in the first year of secondary education, for example, give a description, skill by skill, of what the pupils should be able to do at CEFR common reference levels A1 and A2; a very brief mention of grammar is made here in the form of a list of grammatical elements (verb morphology, tenses, determination, etc.) that the pupil should be able to "have limited control over" and which belong to a "memorised repertoire". In an accompanying document designed to give an overview of linguistic progression in the same year, a more detailed list of grammatical elements is given, but again, no reference is made to the teachers' need to incorporate in their teaching an explicit reflection on the way language functions. (Chini (2009) points out that this apparent lack of a theoretical framework in teaching methodology may be because the Ministry's guidelines draw on the C.E.F.R., which itself encourages an eclectic approach to the teaching of English.)
- 5 Thus a great deal of freedom is given, in theory, to qualified French teachers of English in the way that grammar is integrated (or not) within their teaching. Teacher training courses run by university I.N.S.P.E. structures, however, encourage trainee teachers to integrate grammar, using a predominantly inductive approach, within a task-based teaching unit only when, or if, the pupils have a communicational need for a particular grammatical structure.
- 6 The seminar under study took place during the first semester of the 2018-2019 academic year, from September 2018 to December 2018. Twelve semi-qualified trainee teachers (those having obtained the CAPES) and three unqualified teachers (those needing to re-sit the CAPES exam) were enrolled in the seminar. All fifteen participants were native French speakers. Nine of the participants had entered the master's programme having previously completed a bachelor's degree in English (*licence L.L.C.E.R.*), while the others had obtained a degree in Applied Foreign Languages (*licence L.E.A*) or other less English-specific degrees such as Business Studies or Cross-Cultural studies.
- 7 They had all observed secondary school English classes as part of the first year of their master's programme. The semi-qualified teachers (known in French as *fonctionnaires-stagiaires*) were teaching part-time – approximately 9 hours a week – in secondary schools, under the supervision of a mentor, as well as following classes in English and in teaching methodology at university. The three unqualified teachers, while preparing to retake the national CAPES exam, were observing more secondary school English classes.
- 8 Although it is inevitably difficult to draw general conclusions from such a small corpus, this pilot study allows for initial insight into the subject. Its findings will be developed

below. At the time of writing this article, the author is collecting new data on a larger scale (more than 30 responses), the preliminary analyses of which would appear to confirm the initial findings described here.

2. The study and its methodology

- 9 The participants (anonymously) completed four on-line questionnaires in French, each of which explored a different aspect of their representations of grammar. These aspects were:
 - 1) their representations of their own knowledge and skills in grammar;
 - 2) their opinion on the links between the theoretical linguistics component of the CAPES exam and the teaching of grammar in the classroom;
 - 3) their remarks and impressions on how grammar was incorporated within the secondary school classes they had observed;
 - 4) the importance they gave to grammar in their own teaching.
- 10 Each questionnaire contained seven questions incorporating Likert scale responses, followed by the possibility to freely develop each of the responses. Although the questionnaires were not a compulsory component of the seminar, all 15 participants completed them, even if they did not necessarily respond to every question (some questions were aimed more specifically at the semi-qualified teachers rather than those who were re-sitting the CAPES exam). After their completion (at the end of November), a semi-structured individual interview with each participant was also conducted, lasting approximately 15 minutes, during the first two weeks of December. During these one-to-one interviews, they were given the opportunity (in English and/or in French) to enlarge on some of the aspects dealt with in the questionnaires, by responding to a series of guiding questions.
- 11 As a complement to the first questionnaire dealing with their representations of their own knowledge and skills in grammar, a short written grammar evaluation was administered to each participant. It consisted of a series of sentences in English, each of which contained one or more basic grammar errors (such as a present perfect instead of a preterit verb form alongside a marker of past time). The participants were asked to underline, and correct, the errors; additionally, they were asked to write a simple explanation in French as to why they corrected each error - i.e. an explanation that they might give to a secondary school pupil who made the error in question. To reduce participant anxiety that the results of this evaluation might influence the grade they obtained for their semester (their final seminar grade was given by the researcher), participants were told to complete this grammar evaluation anonymously.
- 12 The structure of this article will be as follows. The results of each questionnaire will be examined in turn (sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4), supplemented with some of the corresponding responses obtained in the individual interviews. Then the results of the grammar evaluation will be developed (section 4). Finally, in section 5, some general remarks and conclusions will be put forward, with suggestions as to how the French master's teacher-training programme might be improved with respect to the integration of grammar.

3. The questionnaires

3.1. Questionnaire 1: the participants' representations of their own knowledge and skills in grammar.

- 13 This questionnaire dealt with two different areas. Firstly, the participants' representations of their own skills in English grammar: did they feel that they made mistakes when they spoke or wrote English? Did they consider that their own level of grammar was enough for them to be able to teach effectively in the secondary system? Did they feel that their knowledge of grammatical terminology was adequate? Secondly, their general impressions of how at ease they were when introducing grammar into their lessons. Did they feel that their own (sometimes fragile) grasp of certain grammar points hindered effective teaching of them? And more generally, did they consider that they were still in need of help when introducing grammar in the classroom?
- 14 The majority of participants felt that their own knowledge of grammatical terminology was adequate or better (11 out of 13, henceforth 11/13) and that their grasp of grammar was good (10/13). All participants felt that the grammatical quality of their production allowed them to teach English effectively in the secondary school system (13/13).
- 15 Analysis of the interviews allowed three distinct profiles to appear in this respect. One group stated that their grasp of grammar was good and that they generally felt able to explain why they used the structures they used:
- “I think I learnt my grammar both inside and outside the classroom. Inside, with rules and exercises, outside with songs and stuff. It was the combination of both that worked.”
- “I’ve never had a problem learning grammar. I enjoyed the traditional method of rules and exercises. Being bilingual (Arab/French), I’ve never been troubled by differences between languages. OK, so the adjective goes in front of the noun in English. That’s fine, now I’ll get on with my life.”
- 16 A second group maintained that their grammar, although good, had been learnt implicitly and that they were often incapable of explaining certain points:
- “I don’t respond to following rules, that doesn’t fit the kind of person I am.”
- « je ne me sens pas à l’aise avec les explications de grammaire, je parle de manière intuitive. » [I don’t feel at ease with grammar explanations; I speak intuitively.]
- 17 A third profile, consisting of two participants, admitted that the grammatical quality of their oral production was sometimes poor and needed constant monitoring in the classroom.
- « Je n’ai pas l’habitude d’expliquer la grammaire sachant que je viens à peine de découvrir certaines règles. » [I’m not used to explaining grammar, as I’ve only just discovered some of the rules myself.]
- « En parlant je fais souvent des erreurs. » [I often make errors when I speak.]
- 18 Interestingly, the generally positive opinion on the quality of their grammar given by the first two profiles contrasts quite strongly with the results obtained in the grammar evaluation, as will be seen in section 4.
- 19 When it came to the successful integration of grammar points within their lessons, however, they were generally far less confident. Only 7/ 13 declared that they felt at

ease in the way they introduced specific grammar points, and 10/13 stated that they needed more help in this area (see figure 1). This concern will be developed further in section 3.4, dealing with the results obtained in questionnaire 4.

J'ai l'impression d'avoir besoin d'aide pour introduire efficacement la grammaire dans mes cours

12 réponses

Figure 1: "I feel that I need more help to introduce grammar effectively in my teaching" (from top to bottom: I completely agree / I agree / I don't really agree / I really don't agree)

3.2. Questionnaire 2: the participants' opinions on the links between the theoretical linguistics component of the CAPES exam and the teaching of grammar in the classroom.

- 20 The second questionnaire focused on the grammar component of the CAPES examination. This written exercise requires the analysis of several occurrences of a grammatical phenomenon in a written text, adopting a strict methodological approach imposed by the examining jury. Examples of such an exercise would be to compare and contrast three occurrences in a text of the present perfect, or of the present continuous, or of the determiner "every" or of the relative pronoun / conjunction "that". Candidates are firstly expected to use traditional grammatical terminology to describe the occurrences under study, then to apply a theoretical linguistic approach in order to identify core values shared by the occurrences, before studying the precise meaning of each occurrence in its context. Interestingly, no reference to the teaching of these elements is expected. The justification behind the exercise is to test the candidates' theoretical knowledge of English grammar, implying that before a teacher is expected to teach a grammar point – at however simple a level – its full complexity needs to be totally mastered by the teacher.
- 21 The answers obtained from this second questionnaire showed a certain ambivalence concerning this linguistics component. Half of the interviewees declared that they found no connection between the linguistics classes they had attended during their undergraduate and master's degree courses – classes which prepared them for the CAPES – and the teaching of English to secondary school pupils. Their comments highlighted the "absurd" difference in complexity and abstraction between what is expected for the CAPES and the ultra-simplified explanations given in the classroom. They declared that they "never" used any of the content of these classes in their

classroom, preferring to rely on simplified explanations that they themselves had received as pupils. Others, however, pointed out that these classes had helped them to understand the subtleties of English grammar, and that a thorough understanding of grammar is essential for any teacher of English, at whatever the level: in order to be able to simplify an explanation of a certain grammar point, it is first necessary to understand it fully.

- 22 Most participants (11/15) declared that the linguistics exam could be improved by rendering it “more practical”, “less theoretical”, more connected to what they had to do in the classroom. Many suggested a modified exam format that would allow the candidates to show how a certain grammar point could be integrated within a teaching unit; others, however, pointed out that when taking the CAPES, they have very little practical experience of teaching (their teaching practice only occurs the following year) and thus they preferred an exam that tested purely their theoretical knowledge. One participant remarked:

« Valider l'épreuve de linguistique du CAPES donne une certaine confiance en la matière. » [Passing the CAPES linguistics exam gives you a certain feeling of confidence in this area.]

3.3. Questionnaire 3: the participants' remarks and impressions on how grammar was incorporated within the classes they observed.

- 23 During the first year of their master's programme, all participants had observed English classes taught by experienced, qualified teachers. These observation periods had taken place one day a week (always the same day) for approximately 12 weeks. Some participants had observed middle school (*collège*) classes, others high school (*lycée*) classes.
- 24 The answers obtained from this questionnaire were varied: around half of the observed teachers never treated grammar points directly in their class, while the other half did. Of those that did, some chose to dedicate a particular time to grammar while others preferred to improvise grammar explanations based on their pupils' immediate needs or questions. Some teachers incorporated grammar within a task-based approach, while others followed a more traditional method of introducing a grammar point apparently unrelated to any other activity, followed by gap-fill exercises. Both deductive approaches (“present the rule then practice it”) and inductive approaches (“study the examples and discover the rule”) were observed. In short, no general trends could be detected, which is not particularly surprising given the two types of schools (*collège* and *lycée*) in which the observations took place (and thus the large age-range and English levels of pupils), as well as the relative freedom given to teachers in the French education system as to the teaching approach they wish to adopt.
- 25 However, two general points did emerge clearly. Firstly, all of the teachers always, or nearly always, used French (15/15) to explain and/or explore grammar points with their pupils, even if the rest of the class was conducted entirely in English. Secondly, the participants had the impression that often, the teachers tended to avoid dealing with grammar on the day that they were being observed, perhaps believing that other activities would be more useful or interesting for the participants to experience. Thus, the participants felt frustrated that because they were unable to observe a complete

teaching unit (known in French as *une séquence*) lasting several lessons, the grammatical component was often dealt with in their absence.

3.4. Questionnaire 4: the importance that participants give to grammar in their own teaching, and how they integrate it in their teaching units.

- 26 Only 7/15 of the participants felt that they received enough information concerning how to integrate grammar in their classes; this information came from their secondary school mentor, from training courses at the I.N.S.P.E., or from elsewhere. Those that responded positively pointed out that the I.N.S.P.E. training courses described the general philosophy concerning grammar integration – i.e. that it should always be seen as a tool needed to allow communication within a task-based language teaching approach – but without necessarily giving detailed examples of how particular points should be integrated within teaching units. Most participants (11/15) felt that globally they tried to respect this philosophy, but only 4/15 felt at ease with their treatment of grammar.
- 27 As for answering spontaneous questions from pupils, 11/15 replied that they felt able to reply more than adequately to the (few) grammar questions asked, pointing out that generally these questions were relatively simple.
- 28 All participants declared that they used French to explain grammar all, or most, of the time, even if the rest of the class was exclusively conducted in English. They generally justified their choice by saying that the pupils' level of English was not sufficient to understand grammar explanations in English, and that the rare times that some had tried to do so, they had rapidly lost their pupils' attention.
- 29 The question of when and how grammar was integrated within their teaching units was explored more thoroughly during the individual interviews. The answers they gave to the guided questions on task-based language teaching (TBLT) allowed three distinct profiles of participant to emerge, which for clarity can be referred to as “pro TBLT”, “pro TBLT, but modified” and “anti TBLT”. Interestingly, no clear correlation could be made between these three categories and the academic backgrounds of the participants; students who had completed a bachelor's degree in English appeared in all three categories, as did those who had completed other less English-specific degrees.
- 30 The “pro TBLT” profile consisted of five participants. However, their remarks showed that in fact only three of them actually integrated grammar within their teaching units. The other two participants explained that although they adhered to the philosophy of task-based learning, they didn't feel that studying grammar was a necessary component, or they simply avoided it because they lacked the skills to deal with it:
« Je ne pense pas que la grammaire soit nécessaire ; ce n'est pas comme ça que j'ai appris l'anglais. » [I don't think that grammar is necessary; that's not how I learnt English.]
“I don't really know how to integrate grammar, so I don't.”
“For grammar, I don't know how to proceed so I avoid it.”
- 31 They both acknowledged, however, that they were not adequately dealing with pupils' and parents' expectations concerning grammar.
- 32 The other “pro TBLT” group clearly expressed their opinion that grammar is best introduced when the pupil feels a communicational need for it – i.e. in the middle of a

task when the need becomes apparent (a concept that Niemeier (2017:10) refers to as introducing grammar “through the back door”) . They commented that their lack of teaching experience often meant that they didn’t anticipate the precise grammar elements needed for a task; or, frustratingly, the pupils never spontaneously asked for help in grammar and they felt obliged to push the pupils into asking relevant questions; one participant, intent on using the grammar element that she had prepared even though it turned out to be unnecessary, commented:

“it often feels fake and forced”.

- 33 All five “pro TBLT” felt that often they had to juggle with conflicting advice from their secondary school mentors and INSPE tutors, and were concerned that trying unsuccessfully to please all parties would jeopardise their end-of-year inspection and teaching qualification; one participant commented:

“Next year, when I can do what I like, I’ll probably do the grammar right at the end of the activity, with an exercise to follow it up.”

- 34 The second profile of participants, labelled “pro TBLT but modified”, agreed that treating grammar only when there was an immediate need for it in order to complete a task was a logical and coherent strategy. However, they felt ill at ease with the idea of setting a task which, in their eyes, was unachievable without first having introduced the necessary grammar:

« Je ne comprends pas comment on peut donner une activité à faire sachant qu’elle va être complètement ratée. » [I don’t see how you can launch an activity knowing full well that it’s going to fail]

« I don’t feel comfortable teaching grammar as the INSPE tells me to »

« Ça rompt complètement le rythme » [(interrupting the activity to introduce grammar) completely breaks the rhythm]

- 35 Furthermore, they didn’t agree that pupils were intellectually mature enough to ask their teacher for grammatical help:

« Ils n’ont pas la métalangue et le niveau d’abstraction nécessaire pour poser la bonne question. » [They don’t have the metalanguage and the level of abstraction needed to ask the right question.]

« Ou les élèves bloquent totalement, en disant ‘on ne sait pas le faire’, ou alors ils demandent une traduction de chaque phrase dont ils ont besoin. » [either they are totally stuck, and simply say ‘we can’t do it’, or they ask for a literal translation of each sentence they need.]

- 36 Thus, this profile of participants decided to systematically introduce the grammar needed to complete the task at hand before launching the task. They varied in their approaches: some used inductive, others deductive, techniques. Like the first profile, they were concerned that they were not always following the advice given to them:

«... quand je donne la grammaire au début, ma tutrice m’accuse de faire un cours magistral. Je trouve ça absurde de les lancer dans un truc qu’ils ne peuvent pas faire. » [...when I give the grammar at the start, my mentor accuses me of giving a lecture. I just find it absurd to give them something to do that they can’t actually do.]

- 37 They all expressed a wish to give related (or unrelated) structural grammar exercises to consolidate the grammar point under study, but felt ill at ease doing so, as they believed that it was not recommended by their INSPE tutors and regional inspectors.

- 38 Finally, they all felt as if the information given to them concerning the treatment of grammar was contradictory; one participant summed this up:

« Il faut de la grammaire, c'est important, mais pas trop, pas de la grammaire pour la grammaire. Ils ne donnent pas d'exemples précis de l'introduction de la grammaire, juste des vagues règles : les besoins doivent être exprimés par les élèves ; il ne faut pas leur poser des questions concernant la grammaire ; les documents doivent être authentiques mais doivent de préférence déclencher un besoin en grammaire... »

[You need to do grammar, it's important, but not too much, and never grammar for the sake of grammar. They never give you precise examples of how to introduce grammar, just vague rules: the pupils need to spontaneously express their grammatical needs; you should never ask them questions about grammar; the documents we use must be authentic but at the same time they should trigger a precise grammatical need.]

- 39 The third profile, comprising three participants, were categorically opposed to the TBLT approach:

« En début d'année j'ai essayé l'approche actionnelle mais ce n'était pas pour moi. »
[At the beginning of the year I tried TBLT but it wasn't for me.]

« Si je fais comme l'INSPE me demande de faire le jour de l'inspection, ça va être catastrophique. » [If I do what the INSPE tells me to do on the day of my inspection, it'll be a disaster.]

- 40 All three participants were extremely concerned with what they perceived as being a worryingly low level of grammatical competence in their pupils, giving examples such as eighteen year old pupils who cannot produce a sentence in the simple present, or fifteen year olds who don't know the difference between *is* and *are*, or between *am* and *was*. They had all decided to dedicate specific times in their classes to grammar revision, entitled "let's do some grammar". They experimented between inductive and deductive methods, insisted on there being a written trace of the grammar rules in their pupils' copy books, but made no effort to connect the grammar with other activities in the classroom. All three commented on how difficult it was to "do grammar" when their pupils lacked very basic grammatical notions such as "subject" and "object".

4. The participants' ability to detect, correct and explain grammar errors

- 41 As mentioned in the introduction, as a complement to the first questionnaire on the participants' impressions of their own knowledge and skills in grammar, a short written grammar evaluation was administered (anonymously) to each participant. They were asked to underline and correct the grammar errors in seven sentences, and then write an explanation as to why they had corrected the errors. They were told that the type of explanation expected was not a theoretical linguistic explanation such as they might find in their linguistics classes, but rather a simple explanation that could be given to advanced pupils in the secondary system, or that they might give to other colleagues. They were given approximately twenty minutes to complete the task.
- 42 The test is reproduced here; the instructions in French explain that sometimes there is one error per sentence, sometimes more. The first sentence is corrected as an example. For the purposes of this study, the errors in sentences 2-7 have been underlined and are followed by a correction and example of an explanation (of the type expected) given in brackets.

- 43 Corrigez ces phrases. Parfois il y a une seule erreur grammaticale par phrase, parfois il y en a plusieurs. Pour chaque correction, expliquez pourquoi vous corrigez. La première phrase est donnée comme exemple.

1. I've lived here since two years. Correction: for two years. Avec le present perfect, pour indiquer la durée de l'action, on utilise « for ». « Since » est suivi d'un point de départ.

2. The directors have arrived half an hour ago, and they're still arguing about what to do with the company.

Correction 2: The directors arrived

Explanation 2: The present perfect is normally incompatible with a past time locator. A preterit is needed.

3. The unemployment rate in France goes up at the moment.

Correction 3: is going up....

Explanation 3: the ING aspect needs to be used to indicate a situation that is in the process of changing.

4. I'm born in 1951 and I now live in one small village in Mexico, although I lived in the capital during nearly five years.

Correction 4a: I was born.

Explanation 4a: It's a past event, so the preterit of the verb to be is needed.

Correction 4b: a small village

Explanation 4b: the determiner one is used only to emphasise the singularity of the noun, often for comparative reasons.

Correction 4c: for nearly five years

Explanation 4c: for answers the question for how long? while during answers the question when?

5. I work in a company that produces computers. It's a good work and I'm enjoying it enormously, what was a real surprise to me as I never really liked technical subjects.

Correction 5a: a good job

Explanation 5a: work is an uncountable noun. Job is countable and can be preceded by the determiner a.

Correction 5b: which was a surprise.....

Explanation 5b: which picks up on what has just been said; what announces what is to come / which is a sentential relative pronoun, whose antecedent is to its left. What is a nominal relative pronoun, containing its own antecedent.

6. According to his diary, next week he'll go to Paris for a meeting.

Correction 6: he's going to go/ he's going, etc.

Explanation 6: will is not used for programmed future events.

7. He told me that he would buy me a new car as soon as he would have earned enough extra cash.

Correction 7: as soon as he had earned.

Explanation 7: will and would do not appear in adverbial time clauses.

- 44 The results were analysed as follows. The number of correct modifications for each error was recorded, out of a total number of participants (15). Their explanations were categorised as being either acceptable (OK) or unacceptable (not OK), and the number of acceptable explanations was also recorded. While this method of analysis remains

rudimentary and is inevitably somewhat subjective, there were very few cases where any doubt arose as to the acceptability (or non-acceptability) of certain explanations. Examples of acceptable explanations for error 2 (*The directors have arrived half an hour ago*) are as follows:

« 'an hour ago' est un point précis dans le temps et doit être associé au prétérit. »
 ['an hour ago' is a precise moment in time and must be associated with a preterit.]
 « action passée, datée, terminée. » [action in the past, dated and completed.]

45 Examples of unacceptable explanations for the same error are:

« le prétérit est plus logique que le past perfect (=have arrived). » [the preterit is more logical than the past perfect (have arrived).]
 « Ils sont arrivés à un moment T, le présent perfect n'est pas nécessaire pour montrer un étalement du temps d'arrivée. » [they arrived at time T, the present perfect isn't necessary to show a spreading of their arrival time.]
 « moment-repère, pas besoin de have. » [locator point, no need for 'have'.]
 « 'have' n'est pas nécessaire, le prétérit suffit (-ing qui suit). » ['have' isn't necessary, the preterit is enough (-ing follows).]
 « J'enlèverais le 'have' car pour moi c'est une action ponctuelle dans le passé et je trouve que ça sonne mieux. » [I'd get rid of 'have' because for me it's a one-off event in the past and it sounds better like that.]

46 Figure 2 summarises the results obtained.

Figure 2: detection, correction and acceptable explanations for each error (15 participants)

47 As can be seen from Figure 2, when errors 2 to 6 were detected, they were systematically modified correctly. Error 7 (*as soon as he would have earned...*) stood out from the others in so far as it was never modified correctly, frequently being modified incorrectly for *as soon as he earns* or *as soon as he has earned*. Among those that were detected and corrected most often were error 2 (*have arrived*), error 4a (*I am born*), error 5b (*what was a surprise*) and error 6 (*he'll go*). Detection of the two errors relating to noun determination and noun type (countable v uncountable), errors 4b (*one small village*) and 5a (*a good work*), was significantly lower (only 8/15 and 2/15 respectively).

48 As for the acceptability of the explanations given for each error, not surprisingly those that scored highest for detection and correction also generally scored higher for

acceptable explanations. However, apart from error 4a (*I am born*), whose explanation rate was almost identical to its detection rate (15/15 and 14/15), all other errors scored considerably lower explanation rates, often less than half of their detection rates. As an example, while 8 participants detected and corrected error 4b (*one small village*), only 2 gave an acceptable explanation. Similarly, only 7 out of the 14 who corrected error 2 (*have arrived*) were able to explain why a preterit was needed to replace the present perfect.

- 49 Generally, the number of explanations which were either incoherent or simply based on intuition (*it sounds better like that*) was much higher than anticipated when the study began, especially when taking into account the results obtained for questionnaire 1 (see section 3.1); moreover, these results seem to be corroborated by a new set of data (based on participants in the following year group) which is currently being analysed by the author.

5. Concluding remarks

- 50 A common thread running through both the results of the four questionnaires and of the grammar evaluation is the heterogeneity of the participants.
- 51 Firstly, there is heterogeneity in their own personal grammar knowledge (and ability to detect and explain errors); this is certainly due in part to the diverse backgrounds of the participants. Six of them had completed degrees in Applied Foreign Languages or other less English-specific degrees, where there is certainly far less emphasis on the analysis of English grammar. Ideally, the students arriving from these alternative backgrounds need to have access to basic grammar analysis classes such as those taught in the bachelor's programme.
- 52 However, their diverse background is not the only reason for the relatively poor results obtained in the grammar evaluation. Another important factor is certainly that the preparation for the linguistics component of the CAPES does not encourage the students to develop pedagogical grammar skills: at no time are they required to detect and correct common errors in pupils' productions, and neither are they encouraged to develop essential skills in simplifying the complex linguistic explanations needed for the CAPES. In the second questionnaire, as well as in the individual interviews, many participants suggested that a more suitable format for the linguistics element of the CAPES would be an exercise whereby candidates are required to adapt this theoretical knowledge to the classroom situation.
- 53 Secondly, there was also heterogeneity in the responses obtained in the third questionnaire dealing with the English classes observed last year by the participants. They witnessed all types of approaches to integrating grammar, from present-and-practice methods to more task-based approaches, while other participants saw no explicit grammar treatment at all. While this diversity is inevitable in a system where qualified teachers are given a relatively free rein in the classroom and where older teachers are still using techniques that were in vogue two or three decades ago, the interviews revealed that many participants were confused as to why their observations did not correspond to what they had learnt during their theoretical training, i.e. a task-based approach. In this respect, it would have been useful to include in their theoretical training a brief historical background in the teaching methodologies typically employed over the last thirty years (the audio-visual approach, the

communicative approach, inductive and deductive grammar integration, etc.) in order for them to be able to fully contextualise their observations within a theoretical framework.

- 54 Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, more attention needs to be paid to the fact that most participants genuinely feel ill-equipped when integrating grammar within a task-based approach; while this is to be somewhat expected in the first year of teaching, it does appear that grammar is the “weak link” for many participants, and tends to be ignored at least for the first few months of the school year while other more pressing preoccupations such as introducing a cultural theme into the teaching unit, or quite simply the issue of classroom management, take priority. A more complete training in grammar integration – in the already very full programme of teacher-training courses – is certainly necessary. Indeed, at present, there is very little literature available on exactly how precise grammatical phenomena can be implemented in a task-based way within a communicative situation. Niemeier (2017) is one of the few to tackle this issue, giving concrete examples from a cognitive grammar perspective of how elements such as conditional forms, the passive voice, phrasal verbs and prepositions may be integrated within TBLT.)
- 55 This feeling of being ill at ease with the integration of grammar is often exacerbated by the heterogeneity of advice given to the participants: advice from university teacher-trainers, from their school mentors and other school colleagues, from inspectors, along with often very differing expectations from parents and pupils themselves. The interviews conducted in this study sometimes revealed genuine feelings of distress linked to this diversity of advice and expectations; as the interviewees pointed out, validation of their probationary year of teaching (and hence attribution of qualified teacher status) depended on positive reports from many of these ‘advice-givers’. In conclusion, teacher-training courses need to acknowledge more explicitly that differences of opinion and advice are inevitable and even enriching, allowing trainee teachers to more easily find and develop their own theoretical and pedagogical space within which they can operate with steadily increasing confidence.

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ABSTRACTS

This article will examine how a group of trainee English teachers in the French education system deal with grammar in their classrooms, and more generally what their representations and perceptions of grammar are with respect to teaching English within the broadly task-based approach to language teaching that is recommended by the French national authorities. The study is based on a corpus of questionnaires, interviews and grammar evaluations carried out with twelve semi-qualified trainee teachers (those having obtained the CAPES exam) and three unqualified teachers (those needing to re-sit the CAPES). The study took place during the first semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. Although it is inevitably difficult to draw general conclusions from such a small corpus, this pilot study gives some initial insight into the subject, allowing for reflection on the evolution of language teacher-training in France.

Cette étude donne un aperçu à la fois sur la place accordée à la grammaire dans les cours assurés par un groupe de fonctionnaires-stagiaires tout récemment reçus au CAPES d'anglais, ainsi que sur leurs représentations et ressentis vis-à-vis de la grammaire. Basées sur une cohorte de 15 sujets (12 fonctionnaires-stagiaires et 3 étudiants détenteurs du M1 MEEF mais pas du CAPES), les données analysées sont réunies dans un corpus constitué d'entretiens, de réponses à des questionnaires, et d'évaluations des compétences en grammaire. L'étude a eu lieu au cours du 1^{er} semestre de l'année universitaire 2018-2019. Bien qu'il soit difficile de généraliser les conclusions qui émergent d'une si petite cohorte, cette étude préliminaire permet d'apporter un premier éclairage sur le sujet, et de réfléchir à une évolution de la formation des enseignants de langue.

INDEX

Keywords: Key-words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), representations on grammar, Task-based language teaching (TBLT), teacher-training, trainee English teachers.

Mots-clés: Anglais Langue Étrangère (ALE), approche actionnelle, formation des enseignants, fonctionnaires-stagiaires, représentations sur la grammaire.

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