The Effects of English Grammar Tests on German Students' Learning Development and

Use of Learning Strategies in a Communicative Setting

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Abstract

This mixed-method study examined the effects of short English grammar pre-tests containing contrastive linguistic input on learners' cross-linguistic awareness and German acquisition in a communicative, target language-only environment. The tests attempted to prompt participants to notice the linguistic similarities between German and English with regard to specific grammatical structures and, subsequently, to realize the learning strategy of positive language transfer. Two Elementary German 1020 classes ($n = 18$) at a liberal arts college in Wisconsin were separated into two equal groups, of which the experimental group received an English grammar test on the day the corresponding and structurally similar German grammar feature was introduced. The error rates on the German post-test given in the following class constituted the quantitative variable. Qualitative interviews conducted with the experimental group gave insights about students' attitudes towards communicative language instruction, their perceptions of the relationships between German and English, and their learning strategy use. The results showed that learners draw on NL knowledge to make sense of the FL and their FL learning ($p < .10$), even if the strategy of transfer can only remove part of the learning effort. Whether this strategy improved their learning seemed to depend on the particular grammar feature and individual student qualities. It was concluded that the English tests are a safe way for German teachers to raise awareness about English grammar rules while maintaining the standards of a target language-only, communicative classroom.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

Language requirements in institutions of higher education remain justified as the world

grows closer together, thus necessitating the need for effective intercultural communication. Just

as language requirements will continue to exist, however, related student problems will also

prevail. Across the country, many students struggle when learning foreign languages (Stein-

Smith, 2013). Then, after the necessary credits have been earned, how many of them pursue

foreign language learning beyond the elementary level? How many would say they can

communicate with ease in a range of contexts?

In general, learning a foreign language can be difficult. Successful foreign language

acquisition is often limited by lack of cultural instruction, immersion experiences, or sufficient

conversation in the target language. The people of the United States, specifically American

students, have been considered unwilling to learn another language due to the effort that is

commonly associated with it (Stein-Smith, 2013). The number of students enrolled in foreign

language classes has been diminishing through recent decades. Stein-Smith (2013) noted that, as

of 2007-2008, only about a fifth (18.9%) of K-12 students were enrolled in foreign language

classes. From 1960 to 2009, the percentage of university-level students studying another

language fell from 16% to 8%. Data from a 2001 survey showed that only about 10% of

monolingually-raised American adults are able to converse in another language (Stein-Smith, 2013). These numbers demonstrate that foreign language learning is not perceived as important nor as relevant in the United States as in other continents.[1] Nevertheless, the most popular foreign languages in American high schools are Spanish, French, and German, with the latter constituting 6% of all students enrolled in foreign language classes (James & Tschirner, 2001).

Americans generally perceive German as a language that is hard to learn (James & Tschirner, 2001). Apart from various individual concerns, the contrasts between the linguistic systems of German and English pose the strongest reason for this phenomenon. Although making use of the same Roman alphabet, the phonologies of both languages differ undeniably; English does not have vibrant sounds, such as the so-called French-r, nor does it have the umlauts <ä, ö, ü>. Aside from the sound system, critical sections also include the German article-gender-system and case system, as well as the different conjugations of German verbs according to each person. In addition, the unsystematic formation of the plural and the free word order seem to discourage students from pursuing German as a foreign language (Hall, 2010).

Despite all these differences, English and German share West Germanic as their predecessor language (Viereck et al., 2002) and, although they have evolved apart significantly, the two languages are still similar in certain areas (Hall, 2010). Examples of these areas are pronouns, strong verb inflections, the existence of definite and indefinite articles, and the formation of perfect aspect with the auxiliary *have* (Burgschmidt & Götz, 1974). Apart from grammatical similarities, the lexicon of American English has been influenced by the seven million German immigrants who have come to North America since 1776. Words like *delicatessen, check, kindergarten* or the words created with the suffix *–fest* have all been traced

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[1] In Europe, 56% of adults reported that they are able to have a conversation in a foreign language (Stein-Smith, 2013).

back to language contact with German (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). By and large, German and English may have strong contrasts, but they also have many similarities. This study will investigate three areas of grammatical similarity: preterite conjugation of the verbs *to be* and *to have*, indirect object pronouns, and the formal imperative.

There is a large body of scholarly research regarding transfer phenomena that supports the idea that the more alike languages are, the easier they can be acquired by their respective speakers (Hall, 2010; James, 2005). The previous argument is supported by the phenomenon of cross-linguistic influence or language transfer, which causes second language learning to be improved or impeded by the learner's native language (henceforth NL). In the case of positive language transfer, learning is facilitated because learners apply skills or systematics of their NL to establish their making sense of the foreign language (henceforth FL). The material in the FL is not considered something completely unknown or that needs to be learned from scratch. On the other hand, negative language transfer, interference, can lead to false assumptions about the FL and to errors that fossilize easily (Littlewood, 2004; Odlin, 2003). How the transfer of skills can work is exemplified in a study by Gilbert and Orlovic about the acquisition of the definite article in German (Gilbert, 1983). FL German learners from different linguistic backgrounds were studied in their learning of definite articles. Some of the participants' NLs were languages that include articles, some were not. The results showed that those students who had already been familiar with articles in their NLs used the German articles to much higher significant amounts than those in whose NLs they were absent.

In addition to the general transfer of language skills, several researchers have defended the belief that learners' proficiency in their NL may serve as a predictor for performance in FL

learning (Sparks et al., 2009; Williams, 2004). Especially Sparks et al. (1993; 1995; 1997) examined a great number of students from elementary school through higher education and concluded that the better students are at English, the more apt they are to learn a foreign language. Moreover, an analysis of various *language awareness* frameworks (Ellis, 2004; Gnutzmann, 2003; Littlewood, 2004) also suggests that a consciousness of the basic systematics of the mother tongue can improve learners' self-regulation, learning strategies, cognition, and, consequently, their learning of the FL.

Odlin (2003) states that "learners whose native language is English will find virtually all non-Indo-European languages to be much harder than Germanic and Romance languages" (Odlin, 2003, p. 441). On the whole, English and German share certain similarities and learners' NL can positively impact their learning of a FL especially when the two are genetically alike. Combined with the idea that a consciousness of NL grammar rules and structures usually enhances FL learning, German should not be as difficult to learn for American college students as it commonly is perceived.

However, it is questionable whether recent generations of American English native speakers have acquired secure knowledge about grammar rules and the purposes of language learning through NL and FL instruction prior to entering higher education. The debate about effective English grammar instruction in the United States has been ongoing since the Behaviorist 50s and 60s, when many students had to attend grammar schools (Kolln & Hancock, 2005). Empirical findings of the time conflicted with the traditional belief in the effectiveness of grammar instruction. During the 70s and 80s, the topic of grammar instruction was largely absent in programs and policies proposed by the *National Council of Teachers of English* (*NCTE*). In

1993, the annual *NCTE* conference did not have any presentations dealing with structural aspects of language, although there were over 1,000 presenters and a few hundred sessions (Kolln & Hancock, 2005). Future English teachers in America have not been obligated to study linguistics in university setting due to a preference for reading and interpreting literature in the high school classroom. Eventually, in the rare case of being required to instruct English grammar, teacher in-service programs often find only little didactical support because it has widely been removed from curricula.

Educational reforms of the past decade (such as 2001's *No Child Left Behind* or 2009's *Race to the Top*) ordained that public schools implemented state- and nationwide performance standards. In order to prepare students well for standardized English tests, schools and districts have allowed a partial reintegration of grammar in English curricula. Regardless of these recent improvements, Kolln and Hancock (2005) still argue that "the cost to English education of the NCTE anti-grammar policy is impossible to calculate" (Kolln & Hancock, 2005, p. 19). Generations of English teachers have been educated with a bias towards teaching grammar to K-12 students. It is unlikely that these teachers focus on their mother tongue's linguistic aspects in their classes unless they learn about them through professional learning development or out of personal motivation.

Teaching a subject of which one does not possess secure knowledge is a difficult and unrealistic task. McRae and Clark (2004) mentioned an increased application of teaching practices from the field of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) in response to a lack of grammatical focus in the classroom. This suggests that a number of students prefer that their language be taught to them with a foreign language approach. However, if the majority of today's working English teachers avoid teaching grammar, it is safe to conclude that only a

minority of our students have been taught the skills to analyze and understand language through its grammatical functions.

Since these generations of high school graduates enroll in universities, one can find a large variance with regard to English grammar knowledge and overall proficiency throughout all majors and minors. Writing skills range from more academic, well-structured composition to papers that require supervised editing with a writing tutor before they can be graded. As one particular result of this polarity in skills, professors in the English and Philosophy departments at the researcher's institution have made remarks expressing their occasional discontent with grammatical errors in the academic writing of their students.

Besides shortcomings in writing expertise, the ability to express abstract thoughts and to elaborate on ideas orally may be impaired in a similar manner. Students' NL vocabulary and argumentative speaking skills are meant to widen and improve during their undergraduate studies. However, some students may not achieve advanced skills. This may be due to varying reasons. In public dicussions on Internet forums, outspoken members mourned the grammatical deterioration of American English because the "vast majority of Americans" (Meirman, 2004) talk informally and "so sloppy […] that it's a wonder anyone can get a point across" (Kelli, 2010). However, this simple generalization cannot be upheld when one considers that a considerable amount of our present knowledge about the world has been made available to us in books and articles by researchers in this country. Surely, these Americans can get their point across. A more objective reason lies in the importance of having friendly, casual small talk in most public situations (Braun, 2010; Stein-Smith, 2013). Despite the fact that such "'water cooler' conversations" (Stein-Smith, 2013, p. 42) show high degrees of informality, they still

allow for comprehension even with low precision in the speakers' word choice, grammatical correctness, or semantic concreteness.

Having focused on stylistics in US English in particular, Braun (2010) found that the American population of her university-level student sample perceived grammatically incorrect language as very acceptable in spoken form. According to Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006), speakers of any language who pay less attention to their speech talk more colloquially and informally, whereas speakers attending to their speech express themselves more carefully in adherence to the grammatical standard. In other words, attention to linguistic performance directly correlates with its degree of grammatical correctness. Subsequently, frequent informal conversations that seldom require attention to proper structure and, thus, influence students' speaking habits over time by recalibrating their error acceptance, liberate them of the necessity of grammatical correctness when they communicate.

In order to understand other ways in which our preferred speaking habits can affect our perception of a grammatical system, research about pragmatics and language change must be consulted. In a monograph on American English variation and dialects, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) have illustrated that non-standard varieties[2] can influence the formal standard of a language. Specifically, individuals' perception of a grammatical standard may change if they are majorly exposed to and use informal, colloquial language in their linguistic environment. For example, a typical student in a college classroom may say "I read the book twice already. That's why I can locate every citation" will remain uncriticized despite a broken grammar rule. Since the speaker is referring to the number of times he has read the book during his lifespan, present perfect aspect "I have read" would be grammatical. Nevertheless, this not necessarily causes

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[2] Non-standard varieties have been developed from the official language and follow systematic patterns of their own, for example, certain youth and vernacular speech, regional dialects, etc.

their formal speech act be misunderstood; if a majority of speakers tacitly agree to talk in non-standard, yet systematic ways, effective communication is still possible. Given this absence of misunderstandings, the adherence to standard grammar is as unnecessary for the speaker as it becomes irrelevant for students in the formal setting of the English classroom. The broad acceptance of unprecise language and the lack of a focus on grammar instruction in schools suggest that most students are not encouraged to consciously regard English grammar rules for their language production, be it in speaking or writing.

The present study is thus based on the principle that devoting little attention to NL structural features in English classes inhibits learners' development of their NL awareness, their ability to detect grammatical peculiarities across languages, and, eventually, their FL skills. If learners know neither where to look for cross-linguistic similarities nor how to conceptualize the functions of grammatical elements, they have not developed language awareness. That being the case, opportunities for the application of positive language transfer in the FL classroom are also limited.

In general, the concept of 'spokenness' of language entails that an individual's speaking habits do not always accord with grammatical rules (McRae & Clark, 2004). Grammar errors are normal when we speak. Consequently, the previous argument must not be interpreted as stating that Americans are not proficient in their own language; in fact, they possess native-speaker mastery. According to Chomsky (Rajagopalan, 2004), native speakers know their NL intuitively and have a feeling for grammatical acceptability. That, however, does not imply that they have developed language awareness and are able to explain a certain structure's semantics or pragmatics expressed by a certain syntax. When learning their NL as children, native speakers do

not automatically gain the linguistic knowledge that would, for instance, enable them to teach their language (Rajagopalan, 2004).

With regard to the process of positive transfer described above, American English native speakers' informal speech habits and the relative unimportance of English grammar education might not enable them to be sensitive to syntactic functions and to perform transfer beyond the word level. If they cannot conceptualize in their mother tongue those grammatical structures shared by English and German, they may be precluded from many opportunities to make their foreign language learning easier.

Under these premises, the use of a communicative method may cause learning to be slowed down. Since the end of the 20th century, FL pedagogy in the United States has turned to communicative approaches in response to the ineffective Behaviorist-inspired practices of the past. Communicative language teaching is a set of curriculum design principles and teaching methods that are based on students' implicit learning through authentic and meaningful communicative situations in the classroom. The focus lies on discourse ability, so both the teacher and, optimally, the students use only the target language to communicate. Teachers refrain from direct grammar instruction in class and, instead, become the guides to demonstrate in what manner students have to be actively communicating during group work (Edmondson & House, 2006; Widdowson, 1990). The pedagogical objective is not to rear professionals in foreign grammar, but to instill in the students a sense for proper language and turn them into competent speakers who can use the target language effectively in a variety of contexts.

Despite the general acceptance of the approach in school districts, noteworthy concerns have been expressed. Swan (1985) criticizes situations in which FL instruction without a focus

on grammar can make the underlying systematics of a structure "so untidy that it cannot be learnt properly" (Swan, 1985, p. 78). Explicit grammar teaching is usually absent in classroom interaction, but assigned as self-study or homework. However, when students lack the routine to deal with structural aspects of language in general, it is unlikely that they understand them through reading. Doughty and Varela (1998) have shown that learners acquire grammar structures more quickly when the teacher explains them. The teacher can rephrase and exemplify rules in simple terms. MacIntyre et al. (2001) see another limitation in student motivation. Despite the belief that highly motivated students will learn from any pedagogy, communicative language learning depends largely on students' willingness to communicate. If they are reluctant to practice speaking in class or prefer studying a language with a larger focus on grammar, a communicative method may not provide them ample opportunity to learn the language effectively (Adamson, 2004). After all, learners may indeed be exposed to more diverse, authentic, and correct language, but a teacher's avoidance of direct instruction and the students' difficulties to understand grammar seem to slow down their learning process.

Statement of the Problem

The idea behind this research study arose during the instruction of elementary German classes. Contrary to the instructor's expectations, students displayed difficulties in categories of German grammar that structurally correspond to English grammar in a discernible manner. Given these similarities, the structures should have been easy to acquire (Hall, 2010); however,

the errors reoccurred and also appeared in similar categories throughout the entire class. Students seemed to have failed to recognize grammatical features shared by both languages and to associate them with each other. The individual student may analyze the structures independently and understand linguistic relationships. An effective processing of FL information in terms of the mother tongue, however, requires that students are aware of and sensitive to their NL grammar system.

In other words, students have to know what cognitive action they are performing when they use a pronoun, for example. It is not necessary that they can use and define grammar terms like 'pronoun' or 'noun,' but they have to sense when it is appropriate to replace a proper masculine noun with a masculine pronoun. Such routines can be trained through grammar exercises in any language.

Evidence from child first language acquisition demonstrates that such metalinguistic competence is not mandatory to use the native language correctly (Rajagopalan, 2004). Students who enroll in American higher education have English language skills. Given that many of the similarities between English and German allow for positive transfer as a facilitative learning strategy, the question remains why they produce errors and make wrong sense of German grammar when English is not significantly different?

It was assumed that the major reasons for these errors are a lack of language and cross-linguistic awareness. This is, for a large part, due to the widespread avoidance of English grammar instruction in schools, which deprived them of opportunities to refine their NL skills before entering higher education. A further reason lies in the influence of informal and often ungrammatical communication on their perceptions of standard language. Students first need to develop routines for the conscious application of grammatical knowledge to NL structures before

they can apply it to the foreign language. If students are barely aware of the grammatical

function or meaning of the individual words they use in their mother tongue, they will find it

similarly difficult to become aware of, first, the functions of those words in the FL and, second,

the possibility of facilitative positive language transfer. Additionally, the principles of

communicative language instruction encourage teachers to use activities that focus on authentic

communicative situations rather than to increase language awareness through teacher-led

grammar instruction of target language features. According to the researcher's knowledge, there

do not exist specifically communicative remedies to raise language awareness in a class of

students who have not developed grammatical sensitivity. As a result, there are fewer

opportunities for students to succeed in making connections between the FL and the NL and,

therefore, in the class.

Purpose of the Study

  The author of the proposed study, a German foreign language teacher, attempts to find a

method that can facilitate language learning in communicative classrooms. The study is rooted in

the rationale that learners' native language awareness and cross-linguistic awareness play an

essential role in the success of their FL learning. There is little research that specifically concerns

how students' native language and cross-linguistic awareness of structural similarities and

differences can be increased and used as an effective learning and teaching strategy in

communicative German-only classrooms.

This mixed-method design study in an elementary German 1020 class thus investigates whether the implementation of simple, ungraded English tests about grammatical categories shared by both languages is beneficial to the development of native language- and cross-linguistic awareness, facilitates language acquisition through positive language transfer, and results in better overall performance.

Hsiao and Oxford (2002) described that learners who are well aware of their learning strategies are better FL learners. In a similar manner, this study claims that students who exhibit higher NL awareness will transfer this awareness to the FL. With this ability, they become better learners and earn better grades.

The quantitative instruments necessary for the testing of NL awareness and its impact on acquisition are a set of tests on different grammar topics shared by English and German. The German and English versions of these tests are identical in content. Students of the experimental group receive an English pre-test on a grammatical topic before the class that introduces it in German. In combination, the English test and the class session expose them to a form of contrastive linguistic input; that is, the demonstration of similarities and differences between grammatical features in the native and the foreign language. When completing simple fill-in-the-gap tasks, students think about grammatical forms and sensitize their brains to the cognitive processes required to perform well in both languages. That way, they are primed for the structurally similar content to be learned in the FL. This heightens the chance that they discover connections between the features, and this awareness of cross-linguistic relationships encourages them to realize positive language transfer as a learning strategy.

After the class, an equally structured homework on the topic will be completed. During the following class, the German version of the test is taken by the students in order to determine

how much cross-linguistic awareness benefitted learning, i. e. how high they scored on the German tests. The control group will only receive the homework assignment and the German post-test as supplements to the regular communicative instruction. The variables under study are both groups' error rates on the German post-tests throughout the semester. On the afternoon of the day of the German post-test, interviews will be conducted with randomly selected students from the experimental group. The interviews will ask students to describe their linguistic background, their strategies for learning a foreign language, their techniques for learning German in particular, and their perception of the similarities between German and English. This qualitative portion of the experiment is meant to support the quantitative data by providing greater insights into the learning strategies used, the attitudes towards German instruction, the reasons for students' learning, as well as more profound understandings about cause-and-effect. A closer examination of the methodology applied in this study is presented in chapter 3.

In sum, the purpose of this study is to find a way to enhance the current practice of the communicative method by implementing consciousness-raising and NL transfer-inspiring tests designed to facilitate students' learning of German in the college-level communicative classroom. It therefore examines the effects of short English grammar pre-tests containing contrastive linguistic input on learners' development of cross-linguistic awareness and German acquisition. The experiment is meant to prompt participants to use the learning strategy of positive language transfer by demonstrating the linguistic similarities of specific grammatical structures between German and English.

Research Questions

Consequently, the research questions that arise are the following.

1. What effects do the English pre-tests have on learners' performance on the German post-tests?

2. In what ways do learners utilize cross-linguistic awareness or language awareness (components of positive transfer) in the German foreign language classroom?

3. How do participants assess their use of learning strategies (component of positive transfer)?

4. Which role do the participants ascribe to English (component of positive transfer) in the German foreign language classroom?

5. In what manner do participants consciously use positive language transfer?

The first research question is purely quantitative. It is hypothesized that the experimental group will perform better than the control group on specific transfer items and on the tests overall. The succeeding three questions draw on interview responses, and the last question is answered with information from both data sources, constituting the mixed-method design.

Definition of Terms

- **contrastive linguistic input (CLI)**: When teachers present the systematics of the foreign language and juxtapose them to the correlating systematics of the native language in the same

class session, they provide contrastive linguistic input (Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996).

Kupferberg and Olshtain (1996) asserted that CLI raises awareness about linguistic

relationships, brings about structural transparency, and triggers noticing of relevant target

language input.

- **cross-linguistic awareness**: Cross-linguistic awareness is language learners' ability to

  recognize the similarities and contrasts between different languages. According to Spada and

  Lightbown (1999, as cited in Odlin, 2003), cross-linguistic awareness can "help with certain

  difficulties in the target language" (Odlin, 2003, p. 478).

- **input**: Input is any form of foreign language material that learners are exposed to, be it in

  reading, writing, or hearing.

- **language awareness**: In short, language awareness is a consciousness of linguistic processes

  and features of grammar that can improve learners' self-regulation, learning strategies, and

  cognition in the native language and for foreign language learning (Gnutzmann, 2003).

- **native/foreign vs. first/second language**: In general, the distinction 'first/second language'

  is prevalent in empirical research. The difference between foreign and second language

  acquisition lies in the living environment of the learner. If the learner lives in a country with

  more than one official language of communication (e.g. parts of Switzerland, Canada, or

  Belgium), linguists tend toward the term 'second language' because no clear distinction is

  possible as to which variety constitutes the language of the natives, and, since many of the

  residents grow up and are educated bilingually, to enable bilinguals to quantify the degrees to

  which they are proficient in their languages. Usually, the language that is learned during

  childhood from the family is considered the first language (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). The

researcher chose to use the terms native and foreign language because learners are not

required to use German in any immediate day-to-day interactions.

- **positive language transfer**: Positive language transfer is a cognitive mechanism that

    language learners undergo when they facilitate their acquisition of foreign language skills by,

    either consciously or subconsciously, drawing on knowledge from previously learned

    languages. Language transfer can occur throughout all grammatical subsystems (phonology,

    lexicon, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) (Odlin, 2003).

Chapter Summary

The introductory chapter presented the topic and outlined the background of the study in relation to contemporary evidence. In order to explain the problem and to justify its pedagogical rationale, research on the status of foreign language learning in the United States (Stein-Smith, 2013), the linguistic similarities between German and English (Hall, 2010; Viereck et al., 2002), the nature of language transfer (Odlin, 2003), the role of English grammar instruction in American schools (Kolln & Hancock, 2005), and the communicative method (Swan, 1985) was consulted. The purpose of this study is to find a teaching and learning method that can enhance student achievement in communicative target language-only classrooms. Therefore, it examines the effects of simple English grammar tests containing contrastive linguistic input on learners' cross-linguistic awareness and German acquisition. Based on that, the research questions were presented and essential terms were defined. Chapter 2 will outline the study's scientific foundation by reviewing related theories and empirical studies.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Overview

The purpose of this study is to test whether the administration of English grammar tests stimulates beginning German students' cross-linguistic awareness and inspires positive language transfer, thereby enhancing and facilitating learning in the communicative classroom. Before introducing the method used in the experiment of the present study, a description of how the topic is embedded in disciplines of applied linguistics and second language acquisition requires elaboration. Drawing from a wide body of scholarly literature, this chapter illustrates the concept of native language transfer, the importance of NL skills in foreign language learning, the effectiveness of language learning strategies, and the nature of communicative language teaching.

The Concept of Language Transfer in Foreign Language Learning

An encompassing definition of language transfer/cross-linguistic influence has been the subject of debate since Lado (1957) introduced the term to the field of second language

acquisition (Odlin, 2003). An appropriate definition in the realm of the present study was delivered by Terence Odlin (2003), who described language transfer as "the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired" (Odlin, 2003, p. 436). In simplified terms, when a speaker applies knowledge from the native language or other known languages in order to produce or comprehend a FL, linguists commonly speak of the phenomenon of language transfer.

Transfer is subdivided into positive transfer or negative transfer/interference. It is 'positive' if the utterance resulting from the transfer process does not violate the grammatical norms of the target language and 'negative' if the information transferred interferes with acceptable forms (Brdar-Szabó, 2010). Though language transfer can most easily be noticed on the lexical level (e.g. use of cognates), it can occur in all linguistic subsystems. On the level of syntax, for instance, two languages sharing a strict subject-verb-object word order may allow positive transfer. In addition to such concrete forms, abstract syntactic categories such as gender agreement can also be taken from one language to another (Sabourin, Stowe, & de Haan, 2006).

Interference poses a threat to language learners in that it may hinder or prevent a proper acquisition process. Its potential to promote fossilized errors is based on the idea that such errors will seem right to the learner at an unconscious level due to automatized NL parameters (Benson, 2002). In light of the present study, however, primary focus is dedicated to the facilitative role of positive transfer in the communicative German classroom.

The Application of the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* in Teaching

Given the fact that possibilities for positive transfer emerge mainly when two languages share structurally similar, or even identical features in a linguistic subsystem (Jordens, 2008), the language classrooms of the 1950s and 60s saw a widespread pedagogical application of the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* (Lado, 1957). By contrasting languages and determining their respective differences or similarities, Behaviorist researchers often predicted which areas of a target language grammar would require more time to learn and which would not inspire learner errors (Benson, 2002). Criticizing the simplicity of this hypothesis, Wardhaugh (1970) introduced a weak version of the hypothesis which recognized the influence of the mother tongue in language learning but refrained from predictions about FL development, thereby not ignoring learners' individual differences which may impact their acquisition process. Whitman and Jackson (1972) conducted a study ($n = 2500$) in Japanese ESL classes which tested the predictive powers of the contrastive analysis procedures. With significant results, they stated that sheer contrastive analysis did not allow for prediction of "interference problems of a language learner" (Whitman & Jackson, 1972, p. 40).

A broad array of research from the 1970s led to a widespread repudiation of the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* because of its false predictive claims (Sheen, 1996). It was found that learners made errors which were predicted not to happen and performed well in areas where they were not expected to. Today, the use of contrastive strategies in the FL classroom rests on the conviction that positive transfer and attention to contrasts can be used effectively in

instructive environments. The theoretical background and research on this claim is discussed in the section on the didactical use of raising cross-linguistic awareness below.

Empirical Evidence for the Facilitative Role of Structural Similarities between Languages

The *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* cannot validate the general statement that, by similarity or difference, a language may be easy to learn for native speakers of given languages. Regardless, research suggests that the existence of similarities between two languages supplements foreign language acquisition. Benson (2002) mentions "acceleration" (Benson, 2002, p. 68) as one advantage. Verspoor and Behrens (2011) argue that it "is much easier for learners to learn languages that are similar than languages that are different" (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011, p. 30). The importance ascribed to the native language in such statements and its relevance to the present study will be discussed further below. This section will review studies supporting the conviction that foreign languages similar to the learner's native language are easier to learn.

Sjöholm (1976) tested the transfer behavior of a group of first language (L1) Finnish speakers, L1 Swedish-speaking students, and Swedish-Finnish bilinguals in an English as a Foreign Language class through tests about grammar and vocabulary. His results revealed that the L1 Finnish learners of L3 English transferred mostly from their L2 Swedish, whereas Finns with L1 Swedish barely showed signs of transfer from their L2 Finnish to their L3 English. Odlin (2003) credits that to the fact that Swedish, as a Germanic language, is structurally closer to

English than Finnish, which is a Finno-Ugric language. The success of the Swedish-speaking

population in Sjöholm's (1976) sample is, thus, due to linguistic similarities that gave way to

positive transfer. These findings were substantiated by Ringbom (1992) in a later study with

Swedish-Finnish bilingual English learners.

Further evidence about how similarity between languages promotes positive transfer is

delivered by Gilbert (1983). In an experiment conducted in the 1970s, Gilbert and Orlović

investigated the acquisition of the German definite article by immigrant workers ($n = 29$) with

native languages ranging from Turkish and Yugoslavic varieties to Greek, Italian, Spanish, and

Portuguese. Participants speaking the former did not have articles in their languages, whereas

speakers of the latter four did. A corpus analysis of the natural speech data showed that those

who had already been familiar with articles in their L1s used the German articles much more

frequently than those in whose L1s they were absent. This study investigated the transferability

of the particular grammatical feature of articles and demonstrated that similarity in the linguistic

systems creates advantages in language acquisition processes.

More recent indications about how the structures of the native language may benefit a

learner in a foreign language are brought forth by Sabourin, Stowe, and de Haan (2006) in a

study about the acquisition of Dutch grammatical gender by German, English, French, Italian,

and Spanish speakers ($n = 70$). The researchers conducted two experiments. In experiment 1, the

participants received a list of nouns and were asked to assign the proper gender article to the

noun. The results were interpreted in light of two questions. First, does the sheer existence of

category gender (e.g. masculine vs. feminine) in the participants' NL impact their performance in

the FL positively? Or, second, "does it require not only that the category exist in the L1 but that

its morphophonological realization is similar" (Sabourin, Stowe, & de Haan, 2006, p. 7) in both languages, i. e., that the form and sound of words resemble each other?

This distinctive questioning sought to explore whether positive transfer occurs at a concrete, surface level (that is, presence of category gender in Dutch, German, and Romance languages) or a more abstract, deep level (that is, alike qualities of gender allocation in Dutch and German). Data analysis revealed that the German-speaking population performed best, followed by the Romance language group. Although the English-speaking part of the sample scored above average as well, the data clearly showed that the participants speaking German or Romance languages profited from positive transfer out of their native language. The German group gave an average of >90% correct answers, which the researchers linked to the "high amount of congruency between the Dutch and German systems" (Sabourin, Stowe, & de Haan, 2006, p. 12).

Experiment 2 tested the determination of correct gender agreement between subjects and relative pronouns, a concept that exists in varying forms in German and Romance languages. Suggesting to the researchers that many guessed the answer, the native English speakers, lacking gender agreement in their NL, were significantly behind the German and Romance language speakers. The disparity in performance between the German and Romance language group was minimal, from which was concluded that positive transfer at a deep level fostered the correct gender agreement in relative clauses. Therefore, the existence of gender agreement between subjects and relative pronouns in learners' native language helps acquire such a concept in a foreign language.

Thus, Sabourin, Stowe, and de Haan (2006) found evidence that not just surface features, such as articles, but also more abstract phenomena, like gender agreement throughout clauses,

are positively transferred from the native language to the FL if the underlying systematics of the respective languages are similar.

The empirical evidence of the literature reviewed, thus far, is vital in understanding the processes under investigation in the present study. One of the fundamental principles in which this experiment is embedded is the notion that those areas of a foreign language which have resembling counterparts in a learner's mother tongue are easier to acquire on grounds of positive transfer.

The Impact of Native Language Skills on Foreign Language Learning

The previous section highlighted the relevance of cross-linguistic influence with regard to linguistic similarities between two languages. In light of this assumption, a further essential question that demands an answer is to what extent a learner's native language skills influence his learning of the foreign language. This notion has been studied since the late 1970s. Cummins (1979) first proposed that a language learner's given developmental state in the native language can be the basis of similar competences in the L2, and named this the *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis*. In his own words, Cummins asserts "that the development of competence in a second language (L2) is partially a function of the type of competence already developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins" (Cummins, 1979, p. 223), proposing that there is a functional relationship between native language and foreign language competence. According to his hypothesis, the formation of foreign language skills is directly

dependent on the native language dispositions on which the learner can build them. Cummins'

reasoning relies on studies of reading and writing skills, the results of which suggested that

learners' success in the foreign language is dependent on their previous level of acquisition in the

NL. The *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis* laid the basis for subsequent discussions

about differences in L2 proficiency and the impact of the first language (Alderson, 1984).

The *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis* was contrary to the contemporary

mainstream belief that foreign languages are learned with little to no influence from the mother

tongue. Mainly due to Krashen (1985) and his *Input Hypothesis*, the ability to explain a certain

grammar topic was not believed to influence the subconscious process of acquisition, but was

only relevant in the conscious processes of learning and monitoring (i. e. editing acquired

knowledge to accord with grammatical principles). Stemming from extensive research, the *Input*

Hypothesis claimed that "humans acquire language in only one way—by understanding

messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input'" (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). Grammar acquisition is

managed by the *Language Acquisition Device* (Krashen, 1985) at the subconscious level.

Overall, it was common to believe that learners did not rely on the first language for second

language learning and that their knowledge about language was drawn from the unconscious

realm of Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1965).

Nevertheless, Cummins' basic idea was supported by Bialystok and Hakuta (1994), who

ascribed the properties of the mother tongue a crucial role in language learning. They asserted

that the learner's NL provides the linguistic context and creates the principles according to which

a foreign language is acquired. Especially in the stages of initial exposure to the FL, the

automatized parameters of the NL determine the processing of new material. It is not until the

learning process advances that the cognitive mechanisms attached to the mother tongue gradually

shift to less dependent patterns in the foreign language. In other words, a learner employs cognitive strategies available to him from the native language to support his understanding of the foreign language.

White (2003) formulated a comparable argument. Opposing the monopoly of Universal Grammar in language learning, she adopted the claim that learners' inherent linguistic parameters are due to their competence in native language grammar and do not arise exclusively from one's inborn capacities to learn language, an assumption which "fails to provide evidence that interlanguage grammars are UG-constrained independently of the L1 grammar" (White, 2003, p. 41). In simple terms, the way a learner tries to understand a second language is not constrained to factors that are language-independent and seemingly subconscious, but to his knowledge of the mother tongue. Likewise, Butzkamm (2003) considers the mother tongue a learner's initial reference point, through which the life-long speaker gains access to the underlying mechanisms of language in general. With regard to the present study, this notion implies, firstly, that the mother tongue constitutes the basis on which a foreign language is learned and, secondly, that no native speaker of a given language is a 'blank slate' when beginning the learning process.

One practical approach to this research has been articulated by Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) in the *Full Transfer/Full Access Model*. With regard to transfer, they maintain that "the entirety of the L1 grammar (excluding the phonetic matrices of lexical/morphological items) is the L2 initial state" (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, p. 41), thereby claiming that a speaker's NL grammatical knowledge is fully transferred to serve as the beginning state for his foreign language learning. The reliability of such an assumption would prove that the linguistic disposition with which a learner starts foreign language acquisition is dependent on his

corresponding level of native language competence. In simplified terms, the more advanced a learner's grammar knowledge is in the native language, the better is the disposition to learn the foreign language (cf. Cummins', 1979, *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis*).

Attempting to substantiate the *Full Transfer/Full Access Model*, Grüter (2006) tested 17 beginning adult English-speaking learners of German on their ability to discover ambiguity in German wh-questions. One of her examples was "Was beisst die Katze?" (Grüter, 2006, p. 293), which can be understood as asking for a subject 'What is biting the cat?' or an object 'What is the cat biting?' Word-order rules avoid this ambiguity in English wh-questions. The most natural understanding for the learners would be the structurally similar interpretation 'What is biting the cat?' The results were analyzed and compared with a group of German participants ($n = 15$). To a very high significant degree (97.1%), the English-speaking population chose the meaning that most resembled the meaning of the underlying structure in their first language. The German group only interpreted half of the examples as ambiguous, the reason for which the author saw in "an overall bias towards an object-question interpretation in this experiment" (Grüter, 2006, p. 311). Regardless of the native speaker data and although further testing conducted within the same study did not yield ample results, the findings about the linguistic behavior of the English-speaking population support Schwartz and Sprouse's (1996) model insofar as her small sample resorted to the native language system to interpret a functional structure.

For the purpose of the present investigation, the most important notion to be taken from this section is that learners' native language skills influence their learning of the foreign language. This position has been validated in a number of different studies with varying approaches.

Lasagabaster (2001) found proof of a positive relationship between the metalinguistic knowledge of students about the native language and their performance on foreign language reading, writing, and grammar tasks. He examined 252 Spanish- or Basque-speaking English learners in Grades 5 and 8 in Spanish secondary schools and took into account a number of different variables, such as metalinguistic awareness, intelligence, motivation, and English classes outside of school, among others. Metalinguistic awareness, which is explained as "looking inwardly at each language and accumulating knowledge about the language itself" (Lasagabaster, 2001, p. 312), was tested with the standardized MAT-2 test. The dependent variables were correlated to the students' performance scores on separate English reading, writing, and grammar tests. For both grades, correlational analyses revealed that metalinguistic awareness had a significant effect on students English reading, writing, and grammar skills.

From a similar perspective, Meschyan and Hernandez (2002) investigated the degree to which college-level Spanish learners' NL word-decoding skills relate to their NL proficiency and predict the manner of their foreign language acquisition process. For that purpose, a quantitative study with 80 monolingual American college students was conducted in an introductory Spanish class over the course of one academic year. The researchers hoped to find correlations between test scores of native-language skills on the verbal SAT, reading mastery tests, and naming tests and put these variables in relation to the students' scores on a FL competency exam and a naming test, as well as their average and individual grades through 3 levels of Spanish. The overall findings confirmed the hypotheses in that they supported the idea that NL decoding skills, benefitting L1 proficiency, correlated to L2 decoding skills, which in turn benefitted L2 proficiency. Despite the incompatible context of college-level Spanish classes, Meschyan and Hernandez's (2002) findings bear essential information for the argument presented in this paper.

Students who have better general phonetic word-decoding skills in their mother tongue tend to do better at FL learning.

Investigating the transfer effects of native language reading skills on foreign language comprehension, van Gelderen et al. (2004) analyzed extensive data on 281 Dutch eighth graders from eight secondary schools around major cities. The students had taken an average of 1.5 years of English. The data was collected from scores of reading, vocabulary, grammar, word recognition, and metacognitive knowledge tests in both languages. A regression analysis of the contribution of first-language reading skills to reading comprehension in the FL revealed that the former skill is a significant determiner of expected success in the latter. Furthermore, the researchers used equal testing methods for both languages, which not only enhances the validity of the data but is also vital in the context of the present study, which also makes use of tests that are literal translations of each other.

In a longitudinal study, Sparks et al. (2009) examined what long-term effects American students' overall native language proficiency during elementary school had on their later learning of a foreign language in high school. From first until tenth grade, 54 high school students were tested on numerous different occasions on their competences in word decoding, spelling, reading, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and listening in their native and foreign languages. Although the data clearly showed that early native language skills are an indicator of later foreign language learning and the reason for differences in achievement, the sample size and the non-validated data collection methods bore too many limitations as to allow for valid statements about L2 learning. However, the tentative assumptions support the belief that native language proficiency at an early age can result in advantages at foreign language learning. With regard to the study at hand, this finding gives a deeper understanding of the positive influences that native

language expertise can have in second language acquisition.

As can be seen, the notion that a learner's native language skills can positively impact his learning process in a foreign language has been explored from different perspectives and with varying approaches and intentions. The following section will explore how this knowledge has been applied to didactics and the degree of effectiveness of corresponding learning strategies.

The Didactical Use of Explicitly Raising Cross-Linguistic Awareness through Learning Strategies

Spada and Lightbown (1999), as cited in Odlin (2003), confirmed the principle that stimulating and raising cross-linguistic awareness — language learners' awareness of the similarities and differences across languages — "will help with certain difficulties in the target language" (Odlin, 2003, p. 478). Considering this from a pedagogical viewpoint, and adhering to Edmondson and House's (2001) assertion that positive language transfer has transpired to be a facilitative learning strategy in foreign language classrooms, it becomes reasonable to include such learning strategies in teaching whenever the lingustic circumstances allow for their facilitative purpose. The previous statement comprises the rationale on which the method in this study is based. Preceding the methodology, this section provides the reasons for learning strategies in language teaching as well as a review of research about the purposes of direct contrasting of learners' NL and FL.

As with many concepts in applied linguistics research, a clear-cut and comprehensive definition of the term 'learning strategy' remains a desideratum. The following explanation stems from the field of second language acquisition and entails the essential characteristics suitable for this study. Oxford (2002) describes learning strategies as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language" (Oxford, 2002, p. 124). Applying this definition to the strategy under investigation, the previous observations in this chapter have shown that positive language transfer can improve the development of foreign language skills by facilitating the retrieval of and the access to foreign language material. It has also been discussed that positive transfer can come about unconsciously or be employed deliberately. In general, learning strategies can be categorized into direct or indirect learning strategies.

According to Oxford (1990), direct learning strategies involve a cognitive inspection of the foreign language, whereas indirect ones take effect on a level that is only indirectly linked to the target language. Direct learning strategies include memory, compensation, or cognitive strategies, the latter of which is drawn on to understand, analyze, and produce the foreign language. Since controlled positive transfer requires a processing of target language forms with the native language system and helps with both interpreting and using these forms, the learning strategy sorrounding the method in the present study can be categorized as a direct cognitive learning strategy. As for effectiveness, in general, research about learning strategies has affirmed that they enhance and facilitate language learning.

Furthermore, it was shown that there exists a correlation between effective language learners and the controlled utilization of learning strategies (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; O'Malley &

Chamot, 1990). Among other results, this correlation can positively impact learning habits, stimulate motivation, and activate a meta-awareness of one's own learning styles (Boyce, 2010). Language learning strategies, however, are not to be viewed as an absolute remedy for the problems in the language classroom. Given the broad array of learning styles usually found in classrooms, not every learner benefits from a given learning strategy (Boyce, 2010). A meta-analysis by Plonsky (2011) reviewed 61 studies and concluded that variables such as context, age, educational level, or duration of strategy instruction can impair the effectiveness of learning strategies. However, the knowledge about their general potential conveys to instructors that their didactic application can significantly improve student achievement.

Thus, taking the general benefits of foreign language learning strategies into account, there exists a reasonable impetus to teach students the strategy of positive language transfer. The immediate comparison of mother tongue structures to those of the target language for pedagogical purposes was first proposed by James (1980). His idea of *contrastive teaching* (James, 1980, p. 154) implied that teachers present the systematics of the foreign language and juxtapose them to the correlating systematics of the native language in the same class session. The explicit nature of such *contrastive linguistic input* (CLI) (Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996) bears benefits for the language learner because it raises awareness about linguistic relationships, warrants structural transparency, and triggers the noticing of relevant target language input. The *Noticing Hypothesis* was introduced and scientifically underpinned by Schmidt (1990, 1992, 1993, 1995). It holds that sheer exposure to target language input does not automatically result in an *intake*. This term has been defined as "that part of the input that the learner notices" (Schmidt, 1990, p. 139) and woven into different models of second language acquisiton (Gass & Selinker, 2001; VanPatten, 1996). In contrast to Krashen's (1985) earlier idea that all comprehensible

input functions as intake, VanPatten (1996) values the noticing of novel input elements as an essential factor in the process of acquisition (see also Johnson, 2004).

In reference to the present study, it is necessary to ask whether the noticing of similarities between the native language and the target language can nurture language acquisition in instructed environments. Brdar-Szabó (2010) reviewed relevant literature and, despite the fact that the complexity brought about by learner-specific variables such as age, motivation, or learning objectives may interfere, concluded that explicit raising of consciousness about interlingual similarities and contrasts can be a useful method in the foreign language classroom. Evidence for this hypothesis comes from Sheen (1996), Kupferberg and Olshtain (1996), and Godfroid and Uggen (2013).

In a study with Arabic-speaking adult students of English ($n = 50$), Sheen (1996) was able to provide evidence for the belief that controlled direction of attention to the syntactic contrasts between the native and foreign language benefitted language acquisition. The students were divided into two equal groups. One group received regular instruction in accordance with principles of communicative language teaching and foreign language use in the classroom. On selected grammar points, this experimental group underwent a contrasting of English structures with the corresponding or non-corresponding structures in Arabic, thereby gaining insights about how the native language works and how they can transfer or transform certain linguistic structures into the target language. The variable under study were students' error rates on a series of grammar tests. The experimental group performed significantly better than the control group, suggesting that the employment of contrastive techniques in instructed environments bears positive effects. Further implications of Sheen's (1996) study's outcome and its impact on the present study will be discussed in chapter 3.

Kupferberg and Olshtain (1996) conducted an investigation of Hebrew-speaking learners of English (*n* = 137) and concluded that "explicit contrastive input facilitates noticing and therefore is conducive to the acquisition of difficult L2 forms" (Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996, p. 149). Seventy participants in the experimental group received contrastive linguistic input (CLI) and were, along with the 67-strong control group, which received English-only instruction, pre-tested once and post-tested twice. The tests consisted of production and recognition tasks of structures that are different in the morphological and syntactical systems of both languages. Data analysis revealed that the experimental group scored better than the control group. Since the researchers were able to control possible confounding variables of their experiment, e. g. time of practice or task-based effects, their conclusion that CLI is an "L2 acquisition facilitator" (Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996, p. 162) seems valid. Further, by triggering the noticing of structural features in the mother tongue, CLI is assumed to have a large impact insofar as it also stimulates noticing in the foreign language. Based on Schmidt's (1990) arguments about the beneficial nature of noticing target language input, Kupferberg and Olshtain (1996) recommend the implementation of CLI methods in foreign language curricula.

Applying a slightly different method, a recent study by Godfroid and Uggen (2013) found solid proof for the fact that noticing positively impacts the learning of German stem-vowel changing verb forms. They carried out an eye-movement study to measure 40 beginning German learners' fixation times on the differences in spelling when a verb takes on an irregular form. It was postulated that longer fixation times relate to increased attention, which the researchers interpreted as "behavioral evidence for noticing" (Godfroid & Uggen, 2013, p. 310). Within the time frame of one hour, the participants were given a pre- and post-test, as well as four reading assignments on a computer screen in between, during which their eye-movement was recorded.

Apart from the test score analysis, the fixation times were correlated with the attainment score of stem-vowel changing verbs on the post-test. Linear regression analyses revealed that a longer attention time on the novel verb structures encouraged their learning. For the current study, these findings support Schmidt's (1990) argument that conscious attention to an FL form improves language learning.

The previous reviews establish the scientific foundation for the methodology used in this experiment. The rationale stems from the fact that the controlled direction of attention of students towards a target language structure is a facilitative method to be employed in foreign language classes. According to Schmidt (1990) and VanPatten (1996), this process of noticing constitutes an essential step in the acquisition of new linguistic material.

Apart from the empirical evidence presented, clarification of the role of language awareness in the foreign language classroom is needed because its impact on foreign language learning is considerable. Gnutzmann (2003) defined 'language awareness' as the "explicit knowledge about language, which begins to develop with the commencement of native language reading and writing instruction" (Gnutzmann, 2003, p. 335). This knowledge may comprise, e.g. conscious or subconscious knowledge about the systematics of a language, intuitive knowledge about grammaticality and error detection, realization of ambiguity, awareness about style and register, or the ability to reflect about the role of language for humanity. The concept can be approached from a variety of viewpoints. However, if applied to foreign language pedagogy, the term "language awareness" is often related to instruction that is based on the integrative relationship between the mother tongue and the target language. For instance, characteristics of a language awareness-inspired classroom may include a focus on exploration of cross-linguistic similarities and contrasts, a strengthening of the positive relationship between linguistic

competence and performance, and the fostering of metacognitive skills. Students learn how to reflect about their own cognition by thinking more deeply about language (Gnutzmann, 2003).[3]

This section has laid out why direct comparisons of the foreign language with the native language can be a useful pedagogical tool in the classroom. The general effectiveness of learning strategies combined with the concepts of noticing and contrastive linguistic input, which has received empirical support by Kupferberg and Olshtain (1996), Sheen (1996), and Godfroid and Uggen (2013), constitute an important rationale for this study.

The Nature and Limitations of Communicative Language Teaching

A primary objective of this research is to enhance the communicative method practiced in the German program at the researcher's institution. A description of the communicative method is needed to better understand the context of learning in this particular setting. Reasons for incorporating grammar and the mother tongue in the researcher's classes are explained with regard to learner qualities. Ultimately, the crucial aspects examined in this chapter are summarized and related to the logic of the study's thesis statement.

The didactic approach of communicative language teaching came about in the 1970s (Neuner, 2003). In response to the Behavioristically-inspired *Audiolingual Method*, which sought to induce foreign language habit-formation through grammar drills and repetition of authentic

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[3] Metacognition is an essential ability for learners to take control of their thinking and learning processes. Learners employing metacognitive skills are conscious of their use of different learning strategies and constantly look for new techniques to improve their achievement (Mendoza, 2014). They are more autonomous and, therefore, more trained to perceive positive language transfer as a learning strategy.

input, teachers and researchers were inspired to ascribe students a less receptive role and utilize their cognitive and creative potential in the classroom. The desire to create something different culminated in what is nowadays understood as communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching is a set of curriculum design principles and teaching methods based on the theoretical assumption that students learn implicitly through authentic and meaningful communicative situations in the classroom. The systematic structure underlying a language is said to be acquired through subconscious inferential analysis (Neuner, 2003). The traditional role of the *instructor* is shifted to one of a mediator who sets up "conditions for effective performance with the language" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 160). That implies, first, that explicit grammar instruction is not excluded, but majorly avoided. Second, the target language dominates the class, but in the event of didactical difficulty, the mother tongue may be used.

At the researcher's institution, a foreign language-only method is employed from the first class on for the vast majority of classroom interaction, even for the demonstration of grammatical functions. The veto of the mother tongue stems from the focus on learners' discourse ability rather than grammatical correctness. As long as mistakes do not impede comprehension, little attention is paid to them. The teacher is not the mediator of grammar, but the supplier of authentic linguistic input, and he/she demonstrates in what manner students will have to be active during independent group work. The rigid avoidance of the mother tongue in the communicative classes at this college is related to the learning progress that originates from the necessity to express everything in the foreign language. The absence of a focus on grammar is a result of two beliefs. First, it is employed in order to avoid Krashen's (1982) *affective filter*, which suggests that seemingly irrelevant and eclipsingly difficult input will raise a mental barrier that obstructs students' intake of the foreign language input. Second, Krashen's (1985)

subconscious *Language Acquisition Device* helps learners acquire grammar without conscious effort, thereby assigning it a superfluous role. Further, departmental curriculum design relies on the effectiveness of VanPatten's *Input Processing Model* (1996), which credits an important influence to the role of consciousness in foreign language learning.

Communicative language teaching can be very effective if certain learner qualities are provided. Since explicit grammar instruction and drawing attention to formal properties is avoided in class, it becomes students' active duty to infer linguistic features and idiosyncracies from the natural input of a given language. Oftentimes, students are not taught how to do this. In order to grasp how a foreign language works, learners are expected to make use of their *grammatical sensitivity*, a concept defined by Carroll (1962) as "the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words in sentences" (Nagata, Aline, & Ellis, 1999, p. 135). Second, students are required to possess learner autonomy and skills to reflect on language. Neuner (2003) asserts that student success in the communicative approach depends on their inferential skills to use general linguistic data, as well as to set up and hermeneutically test hypotheses with the mother tongue in mind.

These expectations in students have been the subject of criticism. According to Widdowson (1990), the subconscious adoption of grammatical rules often fails and learners end up with fragmental knowledge. His argument is rooted in the fact that the principles of authentic, day-to-day communication are governed by linguistic economy and a high tolerance of grammatical violations. Since native speakers have contextual knowledge and understand incorrect language, proper forms of expression are overruled by their dispensability in natural speech. This holds true for the mother tongue, as well as the foreign language. However, in order to be able to reach levels of proficiency on which standard forms can purposefully be modified to

non-standard, learners must have a systematic understanding of the language. In other words, since learners are not used to paying grammatical attention to their performance in the mother tongue, they are not prepared to do it in the foreign language. The absence of grammar being justified with the potential brought by inferential learning, thus, limits student learning (Widdowson, 1990). For that reason, Rall (2001) has contended that grammar is a useful guide to lead learners to a deeper understanding of linguistic functions. According to Rall (2001) and Widdowson (1990), grammar deserves to be more saliently integrated in communicative FL curricula in order for students to maximize the language learning process.

A further characteristic brought forward by Neuner (2003) was that communicative instruction must trigger references to the mother tongue. The usefulness of including the native language in a concrete and contrastive manner (Benson, 2002; Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Butzkamm, 2011) has been discussed. Butzkamm's claim that the native language is the "strongest ally" (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 30) is substantial. A wide body of related research (Cummins, 1979; Ringbom, 2007) has proven that learners constantly compare languages with each other and White (1991) has shown that transfer is provoked by overlapping linguistic similarities. The depth and breadth of similar scholarly literature provides compelling evidence for the precept of mother tongue references in the communicative classroom.

Finally, although learner autonomy and reflective linguistic capabilities may be present, the variables of learning style and motivation may interfere. MacIntyre et al. (2001) elaborate on the problem that students primarily must be motivated to communicate in order to benefit from communicative pedagogies. If willingness to communicate is generally absent, student achievement is limited. Further, Adamson (2004) recalled that strictly dwelling on a particular methodology does not correspond to students' preferences for learning style variation.

These arguments considered, successful use of the communicative method requires grammatically sensitive, linguistically aware, and motivated students who are constantly willing to talk. Even if the student deficits elaborated in chapter 1 were non-existent, a communicative approach would likely not reach every learner. The research highlighted in the foregoing discussion proves that an adherence to the communicative method as practiced at the researcher's institution can and does limit opportunities for foreign language learning. It suggests a need for the classroom to promote an inclusion of explicit grammar, references and comparisons to the learners' native language, and adjusted responses to the diverse learning styles in the classroom.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the scientific basis of the present experiment. This study claims that learning German as a foreign language in a target language-only oriented communicative classroom can be enhanced and facilitated when learners apply the strategy of positive language transfer of structurally similar grammatical properties. The investigation is reasonably embedded in research. Positive language transfer (Odlin, 2003) occurs throughout all linguistic subsystems and is especially instrumental when languages share similar features (Jordens, 2008). Although the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* does not allow for predictions of acquisition rate or difficulty, studies (Gilbert, 1983; Ringbom, 1992; Sabourin et al., 2006; Sjöholm, 1976) and other related research (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011) have shown that those areas in a foreign language which have analogous features in the mother tongue are easier to acquire through positive transfer.

In parallel to language-related facilitators, the *Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis* (Cummins, 1979) states that the development of a learner's foreign language skills is dependent on the availability and degree of skills in the native language. This hypothesis has received widespread affirmation from a large number of researchers (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Butzkamm, 2003; Grüter, 2006; Lasagabaster, 2001; Meschyan & Hernandez, 2002; Sparks et al., 2009; van Gelderen et al., 2004; White, 2003). In line with this hypothesis, pedagogical field research has confirmed that contrastive learning strategies drawing on knowledge from the mother tongue have solid supplemental potential, e. g. to enhance language acquisition (Horst, White, & Bell, 2010; James, 1980; Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996; Sheen, 1996) by eliciting

awareness of the linguistic similarities and differences between languages (Schmidt, 1990). A concluding discussion of the nature of the communicative approach (Neuner, 2003; Widdowson, 1990) and a description of prerequisite student qualities in communicative classes revealed that the form of communicative language teaching practiced at the researcher's institution has limited capacities to nurture successful foreign language acquisition. As a result, this approach may be in need of pedagogical and methodological enhancement as proposed in this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Overview

The present study examines the effects of simple English grammar tests on both learners'

cross-linguistic awareness and their inclination to utilize positive language transfer as a

facilitative tool to increase FL acquisition. This chapter will provide a chronological explanation

of the steps taken in the investigation. Information regarding the methodological design, a

description of the sample, the data sources, procedure of the experiment, and the data analysis

strategy will be embedded in this discussion.

Design

For the purpose of this study, a mixed-method design was deemed most suitable because

it answers the question as to what effects on learning can be discerned from the implementation

of the grammar tests. The qualitative part seeks to find more detailed answers about cause-and-

effect relationships, learner strategies, and student attitudes. The entire study was designed and

carried out by the researcher. The pre- and post-tests and the interview guiding questions were

peer-reviewed by the researcher's colleague, a bilingual Spanish-German linguist, his main supervisor, a German professor with near-native German proficiency, as well as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the college. Through these steps, the investigator was able to limit biases and maintain impartiality, as well as strengthen the reliability of his materials (Cresswell, 2008).

Population

A group of 18 German students enrolled in the researcher's two sections of Elementary German 1020 at a small midwestern college volunteered to participate (age range = 18-24; mean age = 19.2). The first section made up the experimental group. In each, two women and seven men participated, the majority of whom had previously taken German or other FLs for varying numbers of years. Students who are placed in German 1020 passed German 1010 in a previous semester or tested into it on grounds of prior knowledge. College-specific language placement tests confirmed that all students had comparable German proficiency. All participants speak standard American English as their native language and have been raised in the United States. None of them described themselves as bilingual. Their reported motivation to study German stemmed either from sheer curiosity, prior experience with the language, or reasons of heritage and family. For others, it was due to the obligation to study a foreign language because of the college's language requirement. The participation in the experiment was voluntary and random. Recruitment procedures were established in accordance with the regulations of the college's

Institutional Review Board. By the time the testing began, students had received three weeks of German instruction which included three class meetings (á 45 minutes) per week.

Instruments

The instruments included an English pre-test for the experimental group, homework formatted to resemble the pre-test, and a German post-test for the experimental and the control group, as well as an interview guide.

Pre- and Post-tests and the Homework Assignment

The pre- and post-tests contained typical cloze tasks for which students had to fill in the blanks with the proper verb form or pronoun. All vocabulary was either already learned, discernible from the context, or had been assigned and practiced in previous classes. The first and second set consisted of fifteen cloze sentences, the third test had twelve. Participants provided their name, year in college, and linguistic background for each test. Apart from the language, the English pre- and German post-tests were identical. For the purpose of practicing, the homework deviated in content, but was identical to the tests in the task requirement.

The first test (see Appendix A1) was on imperative forms. In order to give a stranger or an authority commands, the German formal imperative takes the infinitive form of a verb at the beginning of the sentence and adds the formal personal pronoun *Sie* (Gonglewski et al., 2013).

Kommen Sie zum Abendessen! —	Gehen Sie weg! —	Fahren Sie langsam!
Come to dinner!	Go away!	Drive slowly!

The morphological and syntactic structure of English is quite similar. The English verb is used in its 'infinitive' form and begins the sentence. The remaining complements follow. The difference brought about by the formal personal pronoun *Sie* was considered a lexical part of the general formal imperative structure and less of a functional feature. Students were taught that whenever a formal imperative was used, *Sie* has to follow the verb. It was assumed that on grounds of the major similarity, students only needed to remember the meaning of the vocabulary and were not required to memorize a new syntactical or morphological structure due to a positive transfer of these qualities.[4]

The second set of tests (see Appendix A2) was conducted in a class session on indirect object pronouns. Students were expected to read the sentence and determine the correct indirect object pronoun by the context. Cognitively speaking, that required a processing of contextual clues and a mental recreation of the situation with pronouns instead of proper nouns. An indirect object pronoun is a pronoun "that occurs in addition to a direct object after some verbs and indicates the person or thing that receives what is being given or done" (indirect object, n.d.). Unlike in English, the form of the German indirect object pronoun is different from direct object pronouns due to the German case system. According to Zorach and Melin (2001), case "means that different forms of a word are used depending on the word's function in the sentence"

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[4] The absence of formality in English could be taken as a limitation here because students may not have understood the concept of formal and informal address well and, thus, may not be able to resort to a mother tongue counterpart required for positive transfer. However, the participants had practiced the difference between formal and informal forms in a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts before they were introduced to the imperative forms. The lack of formality should not be viewed as a limitation.

(Zorach & Melin, 2001, p. 31). Table 1 contains an overview of the object pronoun system in both languages.

Table 1		
Overview of English and German Object Pronouns		
English object pronouns	German indirect object pronouns	direct object pronouns
me	mir	mich
you	dir	dich
him – her – it	ihm – ihr – ihm	ihn – sie – es
us	uns	uns
you	euch	euch
them	ihnen	sie

The indirect object pronouns' purpose of designating a recipient is the same in English and German. A further conceptual similarity is the existence of gender-distinctive pronouns for *him*, *her*, and *it*. As discussed in reference to Sabourin, Stowe, and de Haan (2006) in chapter 2, the existence of such distinct categories can facilitate learning because the core concept does not have to be acquired from scratch. Etymologic and graphemic similarity can also be discovered in the German equivalents to *me (mir)*, *him (ihm)*, *her (ihr)*, and *us (uns)* (Hall, 2010). Such comparable features allow for positive transfer or mnemonic techniques of memorization.

A limitation to the validity of the second test is that English does not differentiate between direct and indirect object pronouns by form, but by syntactical rules. In a previous semester (German 1010), some students were exposed to the German direct object pronouns first. The direct object case, the accusative, causes learning difficulties for English-speaking learners of German. The case system affects nouns, articles, adjectives, and the pronoun system. German pronouns pose a well-known source of learning problems for students of German (Hall,

2010). When an English-speaking learner of German thinks *him/her*, the cognitive process

leading to the correct German forms begins with questioning if *him/her* denominate a direct or an

indirect object. Lacking this distinction, the learner may become confused and eventually guess

the pronoun or use other strategies when translating these commands.

Regardless of this limitation, there is a chance that the contrastive input may stimulate

memorization or even forge the cognitive strategies with which students determine the indirect

object. Positive transfer of indirect object pronouns can happen on a conceptual level (existence

of gender distinction) or a graphemic level (shared letters).

For the third set of tests (see Appendix A3), the simple past tense forms of *to be* and *to*

have were addressed. Again, participants had to fill in the blanks with the proper English verb

form after scanning the contextual clues on the pre-test. The high morphological similarity of the

German and English forms of those verbs is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2

German and English Past-Tense Paradigms of to be *and* to have

		to be	sein	to have	haben
Singular	1st person	was	war	had	hatt-e
	2nd ps.	were	war-st	had	hatt-est
	3rd ps.	was	war	had	hatt-e
Plural	1st ps.	were	war-en	had	hatt-en
	2nd ps.	were	war-t	had	hatt-et
	3rd ps.	were	war-en	had	hatt-en

For *to be*, both languages use <wa-> or <we-> at the beginning of the word. In addition,

all of the German stems of past tense *sein* end with an <-r>, comparable to the majority of the

past tense forms of *to be*. The conjugational patterns are similar to those of the present tense,

which is one of the first grammar features German students learn. The only novel part is that the

German 1st and 3rd person singular forms do not take an ending. One could argue that this is easy

to remember because the *I-* and *he/she/it*-form of English are the only special ones deviating

from the norm as well.

In the case of *to have* and *haben*, not only the present tense forms are comparable.

English *had* ends in an alveolar stop – a /d/ or /t/ sound – like the German past tense stem *hatt–*.

Except for the 1st and 3rd person singular forms again, the conjugation complies with patterns of

present tense. The matter of positive transfer in the third set of tests are the past tense verb stems

of *to be* and *to have*.

Despite the concerns previously expressed, a few comments need to be made regarding

the validity and reliability of these tests. The extensive review of the related research did not

yield any studies that applied the same methodology. The scope of the present study did not

allow for pre-testing, amending, or determination of the reliability factor of the method. Thus,

this can be considered exploratory research. A general limitation inherent to such pilot studies is

the lack of standardized and valid instruments for data collection (Sparks et al., 2008).

However, a few studies had similar methodological features which can be interpreted as

supportive of the approach used in this study. Roehr (2007) mentioned that cloze-testing is an

appropriate tool to measure foreign language proficiency. Kupferberg and Olshtain's (1996)

experimental group received ten minutes of explanation and practice with contrastive linguistic

input in their mother tongue after a new English structure was introduced. This resembles the

application of the English pre-test in the present experiment. Kupferberg and Olshtain (1996)

further accepted the teacher's grades as a measure of proficiency and required that the post-tests

be in writing. Sheen (1996) also exposed his experimental group to grammatical contrasts and

similarities in the beginning of those lessons that entailed a particular grammar aspect. The data

analysis in both of the aforementioned studies relied on error rates as a main indicator of

acquisition. The researcher used the first ten minutes of class for testing because the pre-test is in

English and, due to departmental regulations, students' mother tongue in class must be avoided.

Given that FL learning strategies must be tied to the language tasks that learners are expected to

solve with them (Tönshoff, 2003), intervention at the beginning of class is appropriate. In

contrast to Godfroid and Uggen (2013), the scope of this study did not permit the collection of

data to test physical attention or consciousness. It can only be assumed that the explicit direction

of focus on the native language grammar task will activate a consciousness about the related

grammatical form, which in turn is meant to stimulate a positive transfer of such features into

German on the basis of structural similarity.

Most studies lose validity and reliability when the purpose of the study's design is

obvious to the participants (Cresswell, 2008). Since the German post-tests were identical in

content to the English pre-tests, it seems likely that some participants figured out the purpose of

the experiment. However, the researcher believes that this did not interfere with the outcome of

the study. In fact, participants' awareness about opportunities for language transfer was desired.

It may have summoned in them a deeper understanding of transfer as a learning strategy or

benefitted the manifestation of language awareness in general.

Interviews

The interview guiding questions are listed as Appendix A4 and in Table 3 below. Thirteen open-

ended questions asked for participants' prior foreign language learning experiences, learning

strategies and learner attitudes, study habits for test preparation and homework, as well as

attitudes to German. The researcher created most questions on basis of the research questions. Some were meant to instigate reflection about one's individual perception of their degree of proficiency, so that their statements can be supported with background information. In order to avoid revealing the cause of the study, inquiry about the use of positive language transfer as a learning strategy was transformed into questions about the relationships between German and English, the use of English in the FL class, and attitudes to target language-only German instruction. The interviews were held in a way that allowed for semi-structured inquiry. The researcher was thus able to respond to and follow up on participant cues. The questions were open-ended and allowed for sufficient interviewee reflection and input (Merriam, 2009). The time proposed for each interview were 15-20 minutes.

Table 3

Interview Guiding Questions

- Please tell me what languages you have taken.
- When and how long have you studied each of those languages?
- To what level would you assess your proficiency in the languages you speak?
- Describe the techniques you use to learn a foreign language?
- In what way do you learn languages best?
- Did you have a 'great language teacher' in high school? What did he/she do to make sure you learned?
- How do you usually prepare for tests?
- Explain the strategies you used to do your German homework in previous German classes and the ones you use now.
- Do you have a strategy to learn German?
- When you speak German, do you think about what you want to say in English and try to come out with a German sentence? Do you translate word to word?
- Do you think German is an easy language? Why?
- In what ways have you discovered similarities between English and German?
- What would you wish to be included or put more focus on in your German class?

Procedure

Data collection was carried out over the course of eight weeks, during which the population was tested three times. Participants did not receive any compensation but were notified that they could cancel their participation at any given time with no repercussions.

The first ten minutes of class were dedicated to testing. After the test, regular communicative German-only instruction began. Between the pre-test and the introduction of the corresponding German structure, review on material from the previous class never exceeded ten to fifteen minutes. During the explanation of the novel German structure, no references to the mother tongue or the tests were made.

Only the experimental group received the English pre-tests in the class sessions that introduced the structurally similar grammar features. Participants were instructed to write the required grammatical form into the blank. This was meant to activate students' schema about the English grammar before being required to use it for understanding German. The English pre-tests attempted to sensitize the participants to performing the cognitive actions necessary for proper sentence production in their mother tongue. Since the grammar structure is similar in both languages, the tests aimed to prime cross-linguistic awareness and, therefore, allow for positive language transfer during the introductory and practice phase of the corresponding German structure.

At the end of each pre-testing class, which were usually Mondays, students from both groups were assigned homework that tested the novel structure in German. The homework was

visually identical to the English pre-test, but differed in content. It was collected at the beginning of the following class to allow discerning of error patterns.

Two days after the administration of the English pre-test, the German post-test was given in the first 10 minutes of class to both the control and experimental group. It was a literal translation of the English pre-test. Students were assured that their test performance would not affect their grade. According to Horrowitz and Young (1991), this is an important factor in reducing language anxiety and its interference with students' accomplishment. When participants were struggling with an item during the test, they were allowed to write the English word into the blank. Permitting that, the researcher was able to rule out the disturbing influence of the participants' vocabulary gaps. A correct English answer proved that the participant understood the context but was unable to remember the German vocabulary word. Again, students turned in the test on completion. The participants did not receive feedback on any of the tests. The German post-tests were then scored, categorized according to participant name, and stored at the researcher's office. In computer data analysis tables, code names were assigned to participants in order to secure anonymity.

Within a few days after the German post-test, the participants of the experimental group were asked to volunteer for a twenty-minute interview. The interviews were conducted individually in an empty classroom on campus. Before each interview, participants were asked to consent to an audio recording of their voice. They were reminded of the scientific purpose of the interview and informed about the measures to keep data confidential, whom of the peer-reviewers will have access to the data, and when the recordings will be deleted. After building initial rapport, the researcher asked participants to elaborate on their linguistic background, their perception of and attitudes to foreign language instruction, learning strategies, and their

awareness of linguistic similarities between English and German. A total of seven interviews were held with two female and five male students. The interview data was stored on the researcher's work computer.

The difference in treatment between the two groups lay in the administration of the English pre-test, by which the researcher aimed to provide contrastive linguistic input and raise the participants awareness of cross-linguistic similarities.

Data Analysis Strategy

In order to measure the effects of the English pre-test on learning, German post-test error rates were determined and overall course grades were compared. Basic descriptive statistics were applied to compute the relevant values with the Data Analysis Pack in *Microsoft Excel 2007*. The suitable process to analyze the data was a t-test assuming equal variance. Error rate percentages on the German tests of the control and experimental group were compared. The English grammar test counted as the independent variable and was not considered for data analysis.

At this point, it must be clarified what types of mistakes were considered actual errors on each of the German post-tests. In the test about imperatives, a category of three error types was established. A type-I error happened when the word, the lexical content, was correct, but the conjugation was wrong. Students knew a vocabulary item, but forgot how to amend it to its grammatically correct imperative form. Type-II errors occurred when the word did not meet the exact meaning of the sentence, but was conjugated correctly. As for type-III, a participant either

left the gap blank or did not know a proper verb, nor how it needs to be inflected. The errors to be expected in the experimental group with contrastive linguistic input were of type-II because the grammatical form was what the pre-test entailed.

For the German post-test about indirect object pronouns, two levels of errors were investigated: general errors and transfer errors. A more detailed analysis was carried out of those errors which occurred with forms that have structural and visual similarity to English. As for general errors, type-II happened when a participant misinterpreted a given sentence as formal or informal and, thus, used the correct 2nd-person pronoun but with the wrong degree of politeness. Type-III errors were not counted as errors. They took place when a participant mistook the possessive pronoun 'ihren' for the indirect object pronoun 'ihnen.' The sentences in which this error usually occurred required 'ihnen,' and the individual participants' security about using the wrong form convinced the researcher that type-III errors are merely typographical. Type IV-errors resulted from either misunderstandings due to lexical gaps, ineffective pronoun allocation strategies, or logical errors caused by a misinterpretation of the context. Eleven out of the 16 grammar items displayed higher degrees of structural similarity. A distinct analysis of errors on these transfer forms allows for a less obstructed view of pertinent results.

The third test covered simple past tense forms of *to be* and *to have*. Error categories were identical to the trichotomy adhered to in the first test. Type-I errors stemmed from a wrong conjugation, type-II from a wrong word, and type-III combined both of the aforementioned errors or was assigned to an empty blank.

These distinctions were made in order to gain a clear overview about the possible error sources. Separating them into errors on a lexical, grammatical, or cognitive level is justified, given that the researcher argues for the positive transfer of structural features. For instance, the

data must be interpreted in a different way in case the errors found on the third German post-test were mostly due to participants lack of lexical knowledge about German past tense verb-stems.

The qualitative interviews were analyzed and the findings were summarized into different categories. Since the interview guide was created in accordance to the research questions, a few of the questions can be grouped together into categories. The corresponding and relevant responses were noted and grouped according to different schemes. Recurring and unanimous responses across participants were given more weight in the decision as to whether information constitutes valid empirical data. The schemes encompassed language learning strategies, attitudes and perceptions of language instruction, speaking strategies for German, and perceptions of the relationships between German and English. The findings from the quantitative analysis and discussion of the qualitative data in light of the research questions are presented in chapter 4.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodological approach followed in this study. A mixed-method design is most suitable for its purpose because it considers data about the pre-test's effects on learning as well as about the participants' reasons for their learning. The instruments were described and concerns about validity and reliability were discussed in reference to comparable studies. Data collection procedures were illustrated with considerations of participant anonymity. The data analysis plan was presented as it related to the research questions discussed in chapter 1.

Chapter 4

Results

Overview

      The aim of the present experiment was to investigate the effects of short English grammar pre-tests on beginning learners' ability to transfer NL knowledge to enhance their learning of German. The experimental and control groups' mean scores and error counts on three German post-tests were compared using one-tailed t-tests assuming equal variances. It was hypothesized that the experimental group would have either higher scores or fewer errors than the control group due to the English pre-test treatment. The numeric results are summarized in a table (see also Appendix B), explained, and discussed below in relation to the research questions. The analyses of participants' responses during the interviews generated insights into their language learning strategies, attitudes and perceptions of language instruction, speaking strategies for German, and their perception of the relationships between German and English. Information from the qualitative portion of the experiment provides relevant information beyond the statistics and is used corroborate the quantitative data in answering the research questions.

Quantitative Findings

The data tools included in *Microsoft Excel* were used to analyze the data. It was hypothesized that the experimental group would make fewer errors than the control group on all tests. The variables measured were error counts and percentages of correct responses.

As for the first post-test on formal imperative forms, there was no significant difference between the achievements of the experimental and control group. In fact, the numbers rather suggest that the control group outperformed the experimental group.

For post-test 2, total numbers of errors, transfer errors, and correct percentages with regard to indirect object pronouns were compared. The experimental group made fewer errors on transfer forms than the control group ($p = .09$). Although the experimental group attained better results on the other two variables, the probability that this occurred only by chance is too high ($p = .38$).

The variables compared on the third post-test were type I and II errors, as well as the total error count and average correct percentages of past tense forms of *to have* and *to be*. Statistically significant, the achievement of the experimental group was greater than the one of the control group in all respects. The comparison of type I errors fell under the ten percent level ($p = .08$) and type II errors ($p = .03$), as well as overall achievement ($p = .01$) were relevant at the .05 level. Altogether, a total of five results indicated a statistically significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control group.

Table 4

Error Count and Performance on Three Post-Tests

	Experimental Group M (SD), t, p			Control Group M (SD)		
	Type II	Total	Avg. correct	Type II	Total	Avg. correct
PT 1	3.1 (2.15) $t = -0.23$ $p = .41$	4.2 (2.91) $t = 0.49$ $p = .31$	72% (19%) $t = -0.49$ $p = .31$	3.3 (1.94)	3.7 (1.73)	76% (12%)
	Total	Transfer	Avg. correct	Total	Transfer	Avg. correct
PT 2	5.7 (2.55) $t = -0.30$ $p = .38$	2.9 (1.62) $t = -1.37*$ $p = .09$	65% (16%) $t = 0.30$ $p = .38$	6.1 (3.59)	4.6 (3.24)	62% (22%)
	Type I Type II	Total	Avg. correct	Type I Type II	Total	Avg. correct
PT 3	1.9 0.7 (1.17) (0.87) $t = -1.5*$ $t = -2**$ $p = .08$ $p = .03$	2.7 (1.22) $t = -2.50**$ $p = .01$	82% (8%) $t = 2.50**$ $p = .01$	3.1 1.3 (2.15) (0.5)	5.6 (3.24)	63% (22%)

Note. df = 16. * = p ≤ .10. ** = p ≤ .05.

Qualitative Findings

A total of seven interviews were conducted. The notes taken from the interviews revealed common themes and recurring motives among the participants regarding their language learning strategies, attitudes and perceptions of language instruction, German speaking strategies, and perception of the relationships between German and English.

Language Learning Strategies

The majority of participants see the essence of language learning in vocabulary memorization and grammar automatization. In order to facilitate their vocabulary acquisition, almost all participants use flash cards or two-column notes to repetitively drill their lexical knowledge in the foreign language. The act of writing a word is considered to be crucial in the learning process as well. Other accounts include looking up of unfamiliar words in the dictionary until they are memorized.

Participants use a wide array of strategies to automatize sentence structure and grammar features. Apart from traditional repetitive techniques such as learning conjugations by heart or writing and repeating phrases mentally, participants practice their grammar through trial-and-error in homework and workbook activities. Completing assignments carefully and detecting and correcting errors in previous homework are also considered requisite steps in the acquisition of proper grammar rules. Overall, the dominant techniques of successful grammar and vocabulary acquisition have a repetitive nature. This becomes even more understandable when considering that most participants name German grammar features and vocabulary the biggest sources of error.

In addition to such conventional methods, a few participants also employ more unique learning strategies. Some have an analytical approach to language learning. They take sentences apart and play with its components by determining the different syntactical agents and their purposes. They apply language awareness and use grammatical knowledge to support their understanding of the foreign language. Metaphorically, one participant referred to this approach as 'knowing how a machine works before being able to use it.'

Furthermore, two interviewees noted the effectiveness of trying to speak the language in conversations with advanced or native speakers. Meaningful and authentic dialog creates the necessity not only to attend to input, but also to produce output. Independent language use manifests patterns of thought expression. It shapes listening and speaking skills at the same time it broadens vocabulary and automatizes grammar structures. Even in the absence of such tandem partners, one participant mentioned that it was still helpful to contemplate how to express your thoughts in German.

Attitudes and Perceptions of Language Instruction

All interviewees had taken foreign languages at other institutions before participating in the experiment carried out in the researcher's communicative German-only classroom. The participants' opinions on effective language teaching seemed to depend on their preferred learning styles, but all interviewees mentioned similar pros and cons about the general nature of FL instruction. Among the features that learners find favorable in language teachers is the use of English to explain foreign language grammar. Participants mentioned that they get a better understanding of grammar when it is explained in the mother tongue. However, there is an aversion to exclusive mother tongue use. The participants want their instructors to use the foreign language properly often because it enforces more attention. Similarly, there needs to be time and opportunity for the learners to use the foreign language.

Negative attitudes about language instruction stem mainly from variation in teacher competence. The participants disliked their previous language classes because they were held mostly in English with little focus on foreign language speaking. In addition, the lack of discourse opportunities cooccurred with methodological monotony. Teachers who apply the

same types of exercises and drills repeatedly with little variation in their overall teaching style are perceived as negative. The participants desire the inclusion of many different instructional techniques to respond to their individual learning styles.

In addition to their assessment of pros and cons, participants were asked to share their suggestions for improving communicative, target language-only classes. Most interviewees wanted the grammar be explained explicitly by the teacher. They also thought that analyses of grammatical structures determined by their components or having compared them to the first language would be a method that improves comprehension. Concerning practice, participants highly value frequent review of activities in the form of vocabulary games or grammar worksheets. Regarding vocabulary, some interviewees mentioned that an extension of lexical contexts and more frequent reiterations of vocabulary are desirable for the sake of natural and creative performance.

Speaking Strategies for German

Despite the fact that most interviewees had different routines for speaking German, several common characteristics emerged in this study. Students translate word-for-word when the sentence structure allows for it, unless the structure is already so automatized that leaning on the mother tongue becomes unnecessary and speaking just happens naturally. For that, however, the structures must be practiced after.

In cases where the structures are not similar, there seems to be a strong dependence on the mother tongue for speaking. Participants reported that they often translate each word individually and, before they speak, readjust the sentence structure according to German syntactical rules, moving subjects, predicates, objects, and other components to their required

positions. Such a continuous reprocessing of linguistic information requires more time but, according to one participant, it makes language learning easier. In another interview, the participant noted that such word-to-word translations are possible for German learners with an English background because many words have a direct counterpart.

Perception of the Relationships between German and English

This section comprises responses about how participants perceived the relationships between German and English, as well as the value they assign to English when learning German. A distinction is made according to aspects that participants thought made learning German easy or difficult.

In general, German is perceived as an easy language to learn when there are similarities to the mother tongue. Because it is a Germanic language and closely related to English, German seems less difficult to learn. As a result of lexical similarity and semantic interfaces, associations between words can be made more easily. Consequently, learners cannot only access German vocabulary more swiftly that way, they also have a broad array of offline cognate vocabulary for which they can rely on the mother tongue. Even when words are not cognates, one can often guess the meaning from contextual clues or derivations. According to one participant, this can make German speaking more fluent because learners know how to construct sentences with fewer barriers.

In terms of grammar, it was noted that the logical structure underlying a language is more easily comprehensible when it is relatable to something the learner already knows. Similarity to the mother tongue, in that case, provides an intuitive monitor for correctness. When grammar features are comparable, there is 'not a lot to think about' in the foreign language because there

exists a feeling for proper structuring like in the native language. One participant mentioned that he discovered similarities in the way imperatives are formed in both languages, which helped him learn the German forms.

Even when there are more differences than similarities, German learning can be interesting and motivating. Fewer commonalities can even be beneficial for positive transfer. Some interviewees reported a strategy that applied German grammar rules to an English mental template and rectified its sentence structure afterwards. Additionally, direct comparison of structures was perceived as helpful. Writing an English sentence below a German sentence allowed most participants to discern structural differences more clearly. This directed focus enabled them to notice how forms change and to internalize these pattern changes.

Although many participants stated that they perceived German as an easy language, German is considered to be difficult in many respects. Grammar features that are non-existent or very different from English are hard to acquire. Not only are there more grammar rules, but many of the crucial ones (e. g. about the case system) are conceptually different from English. Although structures may look similar, a variety of articles may change the meaning of a simple sentence entirely. German focuses on different categories, such as conjugation, gender, or declination, to which learners of German usually do not pay attention to in their native language English. Some interviewees, however, have noted that this degree of difficulty can be motivating. One interviewee noted that German was especially interesting because of its straightforwardness and unambiguity brought about by grammatical sophistication.

The real challenge in second language acquisition is to automatize foreign structures to a degree where resort to the NL becomes unnecessary. During inquiry, all interviewees commented on the role of English in FL learning. English is the language that learners primarily

draw on in most new learning contexts. In fact, speakers may always apply English subject-verb-object syntax for German. One interviewee mentioned that he preferred to employ the more familiar word order of his 'base language' in German. Many English words, if not cognates, have Germanic roots. Since the languages are closer to each other, one participant found that German 'clicks faster' in comparison to other languages. In the student's opinion, contrary to any Asian language, German was much easier to learn with an English background (Odlin, 2003).

Research Questions

The results of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses have been presented. Next, these findings will be applied to answer the research questions. The first research question is of purely quantitative nature, while the following three pertain to information gained through qualitative inquiry. The last research question is answered by quantitative and qualitative findings and corresponds to the mixed-method design applied in this study.

Research Question #1: What effects do the English pre-tests have on learners' performance on the German post-test?

As described in chapter 3, the participants were divided into an experimental and control group, of which only the former received English grammar pre-tests before learning a corresponding German structure. It was assumed that the controlled activation of grammatical

knowledge in the mother tongue stimulates positive transfer and facilitates students' German-learning. The statistics listed in Table 4 show the differences in performance of students on the German post-test.

The results for post-test 1 were statistically insignificant. Post-test 1 covered formal imperative forms. The control group performed better than the experimental group, leaving the researcher to speculate that the English pre-test did not affect students' learning of German imperative forms. Possible reasons for this result and further implications will be discussed in the following chapter.

The second set of tests was given in classes about German indirect object pronouns. The average correctness of post-test 2 did not show a significant difference in overall performance between the groups. The experimental group, however, achieved better scores on forms that are easily transferable ($p = .09$). The similarity of form in both languages affected students' learning to an extent that the experimental group scored higher than the control group with statistical significance. The strategy to use mother tongue knowledge in FL learning has had positive effects on student performance.

The third pair of tests dealt with the simple past tense forms of *to be* and *to have*. Statistically significant, the results of post-test 3 show that the experimental group's overall correctness was 19% higher ($p = .01$). The experimental group, on average, made half as many errors as the control group ($p = .01$). In addition, the experimental group had fewer lexical type-I-errors ($p = .08$) and grammatical type-II-errors ($p = .03$). Fewer errors on these forms suggest that the learner realized the similarity between the two languages and used it to learn the structures. The experimental group's fewer type-I-errors indicate that they had secure knowledge of the lexical item itself, whereas the control group's higher amounts of type-II-errors imply that

there was confusion about word choice and conjugation. These findings suggest that the experimental group used knowledge from English in order to improve their learning of the German.

Overall, the statistical analyses reveal that the effects of the English pre-test on German post-test performance offer a deeper and more secure knowledge of German lexical items, their meaning, as well as syntactical purpose. The use of positive transfer is another effect. Transfer errors on post-tests 2 and 3 were less prevalent than in those of the experimental group, who received treatment through the English pre-test. However, since the results of the first set of tests were insignificant, the application of NL knowledge to foreign language environments seems to depend on additional factors, to be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Research Question #2: In what ways do learners utilize cross-linguistic awareness or language awareness (components of positive transfer) in the German foreign language classroom?

The information required to answer this research question stems from the interviews with the participants. Most interviewees made statements suggesting that they draw on the knowledge about their NL and language in general when learning a FL. A few participants have stated that they analyze the grammatical components of German when learning. Aware of the functions of language, they use grammatical knowledge in order to faciliate their learning of German. Knowing how language works is an essential part of their learning and speaking process. This is manifested not only in their error detection and correction procedures, but also in their determining of the different syntactical agents and their functions. The overall demand for

explicit grammar instruction through the teacher suggests that learners like to comprehend how certain foreign grammar structures work and need to be used.

The participants considered German to be a language that is similar to English. Through cross-linguistic influence, these similarities are exploited for the benefit of the learning process. For instance, word-to-word translations from English with subsequent grammatical aligning to German are easily possible every so often because many words have direct counterparts in the languages. Speaking can become more fluent because learners know how to construct sentences from NL knowledge. FL grammar is more comprehensible when learners can relate it to what they already know. If structures are similar across languages, learners can apply their sense of grammatical correctness of their native to the foreign language. In particular, one participant preferred to use SVO-syntax for most of his statements because it is the more familiar word order used in his 'base language.'

Ultimately, the majority of participants desire direct comparisons of NL and FL grammatical structures for the purpose of grasping subtle differences and noticing similarities. It is considered worthwhile to juxtapose an English with a German sentence and afterwards break them down into their respective constituents. This improves comprehension of the FL by demystifying the functions of the grammatical elements of both the NL and FL. Direct contrasting ushers learners to notice how forms change from one system to the other and thereby raising their awareness and understanding of both languages.

In short, the ways in which learners utilize cross-linguistic awareness or language awareness in the German FL classroom are by analyses of language and grammar, application of NL knowledge where the FL is similar, and direct comparisons of German with English structures.

Research Question #3: How do participants assess their use of learning strategies (component of positive transfer)?

Traditionally, the learning strategies associated with FL learning are repetitive vocabulary and grammar drills, trial-and-error, or input and output activities. The learning strategies mentioned by the interviewees entail techniques to facilitate memorization, comprehension, and communication. In general, most participants are fairly conscious about their strategy use and were able to articulate what they do for which purpose. They named repetitive practices such as flashcards, two-column notes, or trial-and-error learning for vocabulary memorization and acquisition of grammar features. Another technique was the analysis of foreign language material. Some examine the function and meaning of each syntactic constituent when encountering a new sentence. Such reflection provides them with a more profound understanding of the FL and, according to Sprenger (2005), instigates retention. For the purpose of improving their general competence in the FL, some participants indicated that they seek contact with native speakers. Communicating in natural conversations can be viewed as an encompassing learning strategy because it entails authentic language and obliges the speaker to understand and effectively respond.

An important learning strategy to be explained in the context of communicative German teaching is the way participants handle unfamiliar words and new structures. In line with their desire for explicit grammar instruction in their mother tongue, the participants resort to English when figuring out German grammar features. For example, they benefit from direct contrasting of sentences translated word-for-word. This does not only improve comprehension and untangle

the systematic of German syntax, it eventually helps with speaking. They keep relating new material to what was previously learned until they gradually develop a degree of competence that allows them to speak German automatically. Until then, the learner's NL will continue to be at the core of a central learning strategy.

In sum, the interviewees use learning strategies consciously in different manners for different purposes. In order to memorize vocabulary and grammar better, repetitive techniques are employed. For reasoning out complex German grammar features, some participants actively analyze the syntactic constituents. Lastly, almost all rely on English to have a linguistic point of reference, an intrinsic linguistic system on which a new language can be developed.

Research Question #4: Which role do the participants ascribe to English (component of positive transfer) in the German foreign language classroom?

As suggested above, English plays an important role in beginning German learners' learning process. The participants think that their mother tongue should be the language of grammar instruction because it can clarify new concepts faster and make them more easily understandable. In addition, the lexical and semantic similarities or the method of directly comparing both languages can make German-learning easier. English is seen as the 'basis' for every speech act in the FL unless the new form of thought expression has been automatized already. It can provide the learners with a sensitivity for grammatical correctness in cases of cognate structures because the monitor of the native language is already properly tuned.

Altogether, a majority of participants ascribe to English an essential role when learning German as a foreign language. English acts as a strong mediator when learners deal with difficult

situations in German. It is a tool that learners can use to understand German grammar because it

provides the linguistic basis for their language learning.

Research Question #5: In what manner do participants consciously use positive language

transfer?

In the interviews, participants spoke of word-for-word translations in case the sentence

structure in the NL allowed for a literal translation. Literal translations are one way in which

learners apply positive language transfer. Even if the structures are not similar, some participants

still translate all items individually and adjust their constellation afterwards. The availability of

cognates makes FL vocabulary more easily accessible for learners. One participant reported that

there was 'not a lot to think about' when speaking the FL. Speaking can be more fluent at an

early level due to lexical similarities that allow for positive language transfer. Beyond the word

level, transfer is used to understand and produce entire sentences if the syntax is comparable to

English. For example, the SVO-sentence structure is possible in both English and German. One

interviewee adheres to his 'base language' word order because it is acceptable in both languages.

In other words, he transfers syntactical knowledge from his NL in order to perform successfully

in the FL. The sheer awareness about the similarities and differences between languages is vital

to reap benefits from the technique of positive transfer.

Conversely, most participants mentioned that those grammar features that only exist in

one language are harder to understand and acquire. If the learners cannot relate FL input to

previous knowledge, the learning process becomes more difficult. Such statements show that

learners do draw on their NL to facilitate their learning whenever they have the option to do it.

The use of positive language transfer is also demonstrated in the statistical data. The results of post-test 2 on pronouns reveal that the experimental group performed better on forms that are easily transferable ($p = .09$). This suggests that the participants applied positive language transfer during the tests. The experimental group accomplished higher scores on the post-test on past tense forms as well. In addition to their higher overall score, the participants in the experimental group had fewer type-I errors ($p = .08$) and type-II errors ($p = .03$) than the control group. Type-I errors were made when there was confusion about conjugation but the lexical item was correct. Type-II errors were made when the conjugation was correct but the participant was unable to put a visibly similar word into the blank. This suggests that the experimental group learned the past tense faster than the control group. It further indicates that the experimental group was able to use positive language transfer because the lexical forms as well as the irregular conjugation are similar in both languages.

On the whole, participants consciously employ language transfer when focusing on linguistic subsystems such as lexicon, semantics, and syntax. When they were unable to relate the FL features to previous or NL knowledge, they perceived those features as much harder to learn. In statistical terms, this notion manifested itself in the better performance that the pre-test receiving experimental group displayed on average. Specific forms on the tests allowed for the use of positive language transfer and the experimental group outscored the control group on these to a significant degree.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of the data analysis. A summary of the quantitative data was provided in Table 4 and explained. The experimental group outscored the control group on transfer forms in post-test 2, as well as on all variables in post-test 3 at a significant rate. The qualitative findings emerged into four categories: participants' language learning strategies, their attitudes and perceptions of language instruction, their speaking strategies for German, as well as their perception of the relationships between German and English. Based on this information, the research questions were answered using a mixed-method approach. The concluding chapter discusses the meaning of these findings, their fit into the larger scope of the research, and the study's limitations and educational implications.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of short English grammar tests containing contrastive linguistic input on learners' cross-linguistic awareness and German acquisition. The experiment attempted to prompt participants to use the learning strategy of positive language transfer by demonstrating the linguistic similarities between German and English with regard to specific grammatical structures. This concluding chapter discusses the findings, the strengths and limitations of the experiment, the significance of the findings for the fields of German language education and second language acquisition, as well as suggestions for future research.

Discussion

The essential question in this study is whether a worthwhile way to enhance the current practice of the communicative method has been found in implementing consciousness-raising and transfer-inspiring tests. Overall, the method is able to facilitate students' German-learning

and improve their achievement. Whether or not it is worthwhile and applicable in all contexts is the subject of this discussion. An answer is sought in an evaluation of the findings, the interplay between language awareness and the communicative method, and possible reasons for unexpected results.

Evaluation of the Findings

The participants have proven that they have sufficient English skills and they have shown that they are able to apply these skills in the context of a new language. After all, every participant managed to establish basic relationships between the native and the foreign language. For instance, instead of using subject *er*, they chose to write the direct object *ihnen* where the indirect object *ihm* belonged. Instead of writing proper present tense forms of *sein* or *haben*, some wrote improper past tense forms on purpose, which suggests that an initial, yet incomplete interlinguistic connection has been established. Incorrect forms of this nature do not indicate failure of the method, but partial success of an association of the FL with the NL. They demonstrate that an initial awareness of the linguistic similarities has grown or is growing, and that it can be used to facilitate the learning of specific German grammar forms at least partially, if not entirely in some cases. In the interviews, participants mentioned that the languages appear similar to them. They ascribe a crucial role to English in their FL learning, be it for comprehension of FL input or grammar features, structuring of sentences according to shared syntactical rules, vocabulary acquisition, explanation, or memorization. Although it may not seem as evident as in the related literature that participants applied the strategy of positive language transfer for every test (Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996; Sabourin, Stowe, & de Haan, 2006; Sheen, 1996), the importance the mother tongue has in processing and producing German

implies that a re-evaluation of the purpose of English in our pedagogy would be helpful in responding to this need (Butzkamm, 2003).

One participant mentioned that, when speaking an Asian language, he has to think much more about what he wants to say in English. The participant is referring to the perceived language distance, that is, as to how similar a learner perceives a language to his own. This claim agrees with Odlin (2003), as cited in chapter 1, who asserted that "learners whose native language is English will find virtually all non-Indo-European languages to be much harder than Germanic or Romance languages" (Odlin, 2003, p. 441). On the flipside of this example stands the claim that languages similar to the mother tongue require less 'thinking.' This idea agrees with the findings of Sjöholm (1976), Gilbert (1983), and Sabourin, Stowe, and de Haan (2006), whose empirical evidence demonstrated that the more similar languages are, the more easily their respective speakers can process and acquire them. Ultimately, the participant's point alludes to the fact that learners' mother tongue plays an important role in FL learning.

In addition, the statistical data from tests 2 and 3 indicate that these tests can make a difference in German learning. Despite only performing better on four crucial variables out of a total of ten, the experimental group displayed greater achievement and performance on transfer forms overall; which may indicate an advantage in learning and retaining rooted in the realization of etymological relationships between two forms across languages. The advantage may have manifested itself in the way by which the experimental groups approached material and exercises in class, on the homework, and on the post-test. In order to fill in the blanks, students were required to actively search for contextual clues that allowed them to complete the sentence with the proper word. Given the structural similarity, the cognitive processes required for completing the English sentences are identical to those required for completing the German

sentences. Having been sensitized to employ a similar strategy, students may have been better engaged with instruction, homework, and classwork; additionally, having become aware of cross-linguistic relationships and realized positive transfer. It may be inferred then, that the group which received methodological treatment had an advantage over the group that did not. However, the diversity of variables that confound with learning success limits general statements about which group has eventually become better at German.

If the pre- and post-tests failed to teach the strategy of positive language transfer to a participant, there are still positive effects. In the interviews, some participants spoke of language-analytical learning strategies. The nature of their learning strategy allows for targeted guidance to understanding the FL forms on basis of the NL. For these students, the tests are likely to heighten cross-linguistic awareness and may tune their brains to searching for input understandable by relying on NL knowledge. Specifically, their 'noticing' (Schmidt, 1992) is directed to the proper forms. Schmidt (1992), as explained in chapter 2, asserted and has defended the idea that noticing of novel input is an essential factor in language acquisition. Thus, in the event of having failed to evoke a concrete learning strategy, the tests may still have had an impact on learners' noticing mechanisms.

The Issue of Language Awareness and Grammar Knowledge in a Communicative Method

Information from the qualitative data suggests that the communicative method is not an ideal pedagogy to teach beginning learners. Unless a learner is well aware of his own learning styles, memorizes vocabulary easily, knows how grammar works, and possesses an ability to hear language or feel when output is right or wrong, the communicative method seems to confine achievement rather than enabling it. This became evident in the participants' statements during

inquiry. Some students were able to explain their learning strategies and their supportive use of

the linguistic similarities and differences much more clearly than others. They also employed

abstract techniques of understanding language, such as the analysis of syntactic constituents.

These participants also happened to consistently perform above average on the written

assignments and at speaking German. Their input comprehension, flow and security in speaking,

and their ability to understand the meaning of grammatical structures clearly set them apart with

regard to actual in-class performance and, consequently, to grades; however, since this study did

not examine correlations, it would be wrong to suggest them at this point. In lack of pertinent

research, it can only be speculated that the above average performance of these few students was

due to the similar cognitive strategies or their knowledge of grammar. Nevertheless, the research

discussed in chapter 2 and the reseacher's teaching experience make room for the assumption

that future research could reveal a connection. The fact that learners' awareness of language and

their learning processes can benefit their achievement in FL classes aligns with the research

brought forward by Hsiao and Oxford (2002). In the same way, Lasagabaster (2001)

demonstrated that students' metalinguistic knowledge about their NL and their performance in

the FL correlate positively with each other. Carroll's (1962) 'grammatical sensitivity' seems to

be a requisite skill to subconsciously adopt grammar rules from what is being communicated, but

learners fail to do so (Widdowson, 1990) because they never had the chance to develop those

skills in grammar-free English classes in high school (Kolln & Hancock, 2005). If the qualities

mentioned in this section are prerequisite to be at ease, yet successful at learning a language

communicatively, the communicative approach could benefit from minor adjustments. A method

that responds to students who have grammar skills and advanced cognitive abilities may not be

ideal for beginners in a setting that requires all students to study a language.

The presence of suboptimal learner circumstances and the demand for teacher-led grammar instruction as stated by the participants suggest that a scientific reevaluation of explicit German grammar teaching in communicative classrooms could reveal valuable pedagogical practices.[5] This implication for German language education has also been asserted by Rall (2001), who praised the use of grammar instruction to inspire a deeper understanding of linguistic functions in learners. The effectiveness of a certain method is dependent on a variety of factors, all of which influence student achievement in different ways across pedagogies and languages. The field of German language education would benefit from an updated metaanalysis investigating the effectiveness of the most common pedagogical approaches with regard to, for instance, the degree of existing FL proficiency, NL awareness, the complexity of the grammar feature to be learned, or NL use. Only with a sound understanding of the processes with which learners acquire German will researchers be able to provide effective and encompassing teaching techniques. Hence, a current metaanalysis of the related literature is the subject of future research.

Gnutzmann (2003) described learners who exhibit high language awareness as, for instance, knowledgable in terms of the systematics of a language, having intuitive knowledge about grammaticality, or awareness about style and register. As summarized in the first paragraph above, the characteristics of a successful learner in a communicative classroom comply with features innate in individuals who display high language awareness. Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that pedagogical undertakings inspiring language awareness – such as raising awareness about cross-linguistic similarities, contrastive linguistic input (Kupferberg & Olshtain, 1996), or explicit grammar explanations in the mother tongue – can be a powerful tool

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[5] One of the early critics of the communicative method, Swan (1985) claimed that the lack of explicit grammar instruction would slow down the acquisition of proper language.

to improve student achievement and language learning in target language-only communicative classrooms.

This study examined the effects and perceptions about using English pre- and German post-tests to train language awareness as well as stimulate positive language transfer. Besides the limitations to this experiment in its present state, it can encapsulate an appropriate tool to learn German if the basic idea of these cross-linguistic awareness tests is enhanced. Recommendations as to how these tests can be improved are discussed in the following limitations section.

Regarding the practice of German language education, the present study bears methodological implications. Excluding English-speaking learners' NL from the German classroom and expecting that the pedagogical monocracy[6] of the target language are sufficient to educate proficient speakers of German does not only contradict the current research, it also deprives the learner of essential knowledge and helpful learning strategies. This is not to say that foreign language classes must be held in the mother tongue. The participants stated that FL learning deprived of actual FL communication is just as undesirable and ineffective. Disagreeing with the target language-only approach, German teachers are indeed effective if they include English to clarify grammatical complexities or if they contrast German with English and vice versa, according to the present findings. It is for these and other reasons that Butzkamm (2003), an experienced German ESL/EFL teacher, calls the mother tongue "a child's strongest ally" (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 30) in the acquisition process. It becomes a matter of school districts and departmental curriculum designers to adjust German curricula in a way that mediates between these two traditionally conflicting poles in foreign language pedagogy.

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[6] Prodromou (2002) referred to the mother tongue as a "skeleton in the cupboard" that is a "source of embarrassment" (Prodromou, 2002, p. 6) because of the seemingly global tendencies towards the target language-only direct method. Butzkamm (2003) sees one of the reasons for this development in the benefits that it brings to the market and the revenue of publishing houses who have specialized in the distribution of monolingual foreign language textbooks.

Possible Reasons for Unexpected Results

A closer analysis and interpretation of the data requires that the researcher contemplate the causes for the obtained results. In particular, the statistical significance of the data on post-test 1 is discussed in view of possible sources of error.

Post-test 1 covered the formal imperative structure. In both languages, the sentences are short and similar with regard to structure (verb in initial position) and verb form (in infinitive form) and, therefore, do not require a major cognitive effort. The experimental group was expected to perform better than the control group. However, the numbers do not agree. Opportunities for positive transfer did not seem to be such an easily recognizable option. It is possible that the participants may have been confused as to which of the three German imperative forms to choose. When trying to transfer knowledge from the NL English, which has only one imperative form, learners may have run into unexpected difficulties. Further, the absence of a formal address in English might also have been the source of learner problems. The concept of formality is very salient in German but entirely absent in English grammar. English-speaking learners of German might not comprehend its principle as quickly as they are able to produce it. So, when a direct taking-over of an English thought into a German thought leads learners to three different options, positive language transfer becomes less of an appropriate strategy than sheer memorization and mental categorization.

Another likely source of error may have emerged from previous improper learning strategies. When it comes to acquiring German pronouns, learners often associate them with each other. For example, in order to cope with the complexity of the German pronoun system, a lot of students become used to immediately thinking of *mein* (my) or *mich* (me) when they see *ich* (I).

When using *ich*, participants refer to an action that they carry out themselves. This focus on the ego is also a feature in the possessive *mein* or the direct object pronoun *mich*. Students seem to often think of the other two forms when seeing *ich* because it seems logical to them through semantics. If such a strategy has been only poorly learned and creates fossilized error patterns however, any assignment on pronouns is a possible error source. While reflecting on some of the participants' responses, the conclusion was drawn that a few students filled the blank by determining what they believed was the nominative personal pronoun in the context and wrote the corresponding pronoun into the blank. It was assumed that this led to errors on both the test on imperatives and pronouns. For instance, completing a sentence like "Du Lügner! Ich glaube dir nicht," or "You liar! I do not believe you," participants would occasionally write "Ich glaube mir nicht," which could have been caused by the thinking pattern that the one ego form *ich* automatically requires the other *mir*.

However, a possibility remains that the variation in the results stems from the fact that three different forms were tested overall. If there is no visual resemblance or direct representation of an English form to a German form, the possibility of applying positive transfer might not exist in the learners' perception. It is questionable, then, whether the teaching of contrastive linguistic input and the strategy of positive transfer can be applied effectively to all FL structures that bear genetic resemblance to the NL. The present results suggest that it does work for pronouns and past-tense forms, but not for formal imperative structures. Research about language transfer in general is yet incomplete. For instance, what structural or conceptual qualities have to be present in FL input so that transfer can be taught as a failsafe strategy? What qualities must learners have in order to assess independently where transfer is an appropriate

learning strategy or not? The various processes underlying positive language transfer necessitate clarification through future research.

In light of Godfroid and Uggen's (2013) assertion that highly-salient structures are usually acquired rapidly, the errors on post-test 1 nevertheless seem peculiar. Imperative forms are often used in the FL classroom, as well as in day-to-day NL communication. Pronouns, despite the complexity, are a recurring trademark of spoken and written conversations. Past-tense forms are used whenever we talk about past experiences. It becomes the subject of further linguistic research to decide whether or not the preferred communicative style and register of the present generations of American college students lack imperative forms and, thus, deem them less apt to learn them. Generally, the field of German second language acquisition calls for more research with a focus on applied linguistics and neuroscience. The only secure data source for the investigation of relationships and the interplay between the mental processors of the NL and FL seem to be brain imaging methods from neurological research. Methods such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) allow monitoring of brain activation while learners are displaying a certain linguistic behavior, such as when they use cognates or employ language transfer in other ways. In general, advancements in neuroscience could shine light on concepts whose examination went beyond the scope of this paper. Until then, a more extended, carefully constructed, and validated version of this experiment could enhance our knowledge about how certain German structures are acquired by monolingual English-speaking American college students.

Conclusively, positive language transfer does not happen as easily as expected. Though the learner is aware of a given FL structure's etymological relationship and visual similarity to a NL counterpart, the learner's decision to take advantage of his NL knowledge is still linked to

other factors. It is of vital importance to bear in mind that many of the processes in foreign

language acquisition remain mechanisms so diverse that clarity about their logic will continue to

depend on further research.

Strengths and Limitations

The essential debate in this section of the chapter revolves around questions of validity

and reliability of the findings with a focus on methodological issues.

A first limitation to this study originates from the language requirement at the

researcher's institution. The language requirement issue bears two limitations; one for German

learning in general and another for the results' validity. First, German is taught as a FL in a

setting that does not allow for authentic language use beyond the learners' educational or private

domains (Ellis, 1994). Unless it is spoken in the learners' families, they will barely have a

chance to practice outside of the classroom. Cook (2002) found that most learners see only a

"marginal relevance" (Cook, 2002, p. 3) of FL learning in their environment. Students doubt the

purpose of their FL learning when they have no possibility for real-life application. This is a

general limitation of all language teaching pedagogies and can negatively affect student

motivation. As described in chapter 2, student motivation plays a big role in the success of

language teaching and learning (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

At this institution, most of the students who enroll in the beginning language classes do

so because it is a general educational requirement. This is exemplified by the small number of

those who continue with the language after completing two mandatory semesters. As for their learning behavior, it can be assumed that a lot of them are not intrinsically motivated because they feel obliged to be in the class. Their desire to maintain their general grade point average and to focus more on requirements in their field of interest outweighs their motivation to devote time and energy into learning German – a trend that impacts their learning development, learner attitudes, and overall achievement (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). Given that from the beginning of the semester, many students have decided not to actively learn German, their receptivity of foreign language material and general willingness to engage with German in and out of the classroom are low. In simple terms, students may wonder why they should strive to habitualize a learning strategy now if they never intend to use the FL in a practical situation. This impairs the validity of this particular study by decreasing the likelihood that students make use of facilitative learning strategies such as positive transfer.

When working with human subjects in general, researchers are often only able to control a fraction of all variables. For the present study, it is improper to conclude that participants' learning happened solely because of the English tests. The evidence rather supports the idea that there may exist a correlation between the success at acquiring certain grammatical features and the awareness about the similarities between the native and the foreign language. It seems that only neurological methods, such as monitoring brain activitation during a linguistic behavior, can yield secure findings about the causal processes that underlie an individual's language learning. The participants of this study may have not even realized the transfer possibilities in the tests but could have still known the answer from memory. They may have copied from a classmate and not shown their true abilities. Some participants were absent on the day of the post-tests, thereby extending the duration between the pre- and post-test and confounding the results. Although the

vocabulary on the tests consisted of familiar or cognate words, students could have had

processing issues with some verb forms (Odlin, 2003). In such cases of primal misunderstanding

of foreign language input, it becomes questionable whether the participants actually realized the

linguistic similarities.

Further doubts about the reliability and validity of this study stem from limitations to the

study's method. The following paragraphs will discuss these limitations and give

recommendations as to how the present methodology may be improved.

The pre- and post-tests of this study were not tested for reliability due to the limited

means available. For future research, a reliability factor poses a necessary step before the

experiment. Further refinement requires that the tests be included more seamlessly in the flow of

the class. Vocabulary and sentence structures must be changed in a way that no room for

ambiguity is given and becomes a possible source of confusion. It must be considered

impractical that the experimental group reviewed previous grammar features after completing the

tests on the feature introduced in that class. This may have confused participants and reduced the

chance for creating cognitive associations between the structure of the mother tongue and

German. In addition, the methodology in this study lacks concrete support from research. Having

faced similar issues, Sparks et al. (2008) justified their use of nonvalidated instruments with the

unavailability of standardized tests or surveys. The absence of validated methods classifies

research as pilot studies, which are only hesitantly accepted as valid. Further research dealing

with the verification of methodology in this scientific niche remains desirable.

In reference to the procedure of this study, it is further recommendable that more frequent

assessments are given per semester. In order to successfully teach a strategy in a suggestive

manner, the techniques of that strategy must be seen as habitual rather than sporadic activities.

Also, despite the clear announcements that the pre- and post-test are part of an experiment and will not affect class credit, some students may have mistaken the instruments as ungraded tests that were meant to motivate studying. Although this is not an undesirable effect either, the methodology may have failed to inspire the adoption of positive language transfer strategies. As a possible remedy, qualitative inquiry of future studies could focus more specifically on the students' experience of how grammar practice in English might have affected their cognition in regards to working out the forms on the German post-test. Once the quantitative data is complete, straightforward interview questions can provide necessary insights, such as, "How did your taking of the English grammar test affect the way you thought about the work you were doing in class and on the homework?". In addition to giving personal feedback, participants could also be asked to explain what they consider the purpose of such tests in the German classroom. This would not only yield more pertinent data, it would also increase the chance that participants become aware of cross-linguistic relationships and of the purpose of the tests themselves.

Concerning the data collection process, a few improvements must be considered to rule out confounding variables. A more extended investigation of dependent variables such as time spent on German outside of class (be it music, film, lecture, or authentic conversations), age, gender, German grades from high school, and English grades from high school is appropriate. Both groups should be tested on their mean German proficiency with standardized tests before and after the study. Moreover, examining a larger sample over a longer period of time can ensure reliability of the findings and reduce the risk that the findings happened solely by chance. The variance in the data is due to the low number of 10 students in each group. Such small samples do not allow for ground-breaking implications for the field of German language education.

Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) assert that the automatized parameters of the native language determine the processing of new material especially in the initial stages of exposure to the foreign language. According to that, it is recommendable to carry out studies like this in the beginner level because the students' learning strategies are likely to be more influencable.

Elementary German 1020 students may already have fossilized errors from previous classes. The less they know about German, the more malleable is their perception of it. Finally, the qualitative data collection process could have yielded more pertinent findings if it had included a question like "What is your honest opinion about people who express themselves formally and correctly?" Videos showing members of the participants' peer group talk in a sophisticated manner may also elicit student attitudes towards proper forms of expression. These attitudes would bring another variable into play that could relate to their individual degrees of language awareness.

Despite these potential limitations, the outcome of the study has noted strengths. The qualitative data delivered useful insights about how students evaluate German teaching, their own learning strategies, as well as the role of the mother tongue in second language acquisition. These are opinions that one may not forget amidst the prevalent linguistic and educational theory. Although many unpopular methods are very effective, it is important to always consider the didactical needs of the students when we teach. Otherwise, reaching them is less likely.

The quantitative data from the post-test on past-tense forms showed clearly that the directing of learners' attention to etymological relationships between forms brings a learning advantage. It seems as if clarity about interlinguistic associations was a positive support system because the experimental group made significantly fewer errors in word choice, for which a

transfer strategy was helpful. This positive effect, according to the researcher's opinion, then also led to a better acquisition of verb conjugation, which became evident in the fewer errors that the experimental group made on verb endings. It must be concluded, then, that the strategy of positive transfer led to a minimization of the learning effort.

Current research in language teaching follows the trend to reinforce the role of the mother tongue in foreign language learning. Chapter 2 presented both quantitative and qualitative research from the fields of education and neuroscience, as well as applied linguistics and second language acquisition (e.g. Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994; Cummins, 1979; Godfroid & Uggen, 2013; Oxford, 1990; Sabourin, Stowe, & de Haan, 2006; van Gelderen et al., 2004). In other words, this study is embedded in an important area of research, which must be respected in foreign language pedagogy. Although the validity of the data remains low, this study showed that gaps exist in the discipline of second language acquisition that need to be filled. One of these gaps includes the relevance of the NL in FL learning for teachers, students, and the learning process itself. The information gained in this experiment will help inform future research.

As previously mentioned, the researcher did not find validated instruments nor pertinent past studies that directly relate to the purpose of the experiment. Therefore, this study can be viewed as exploratory research with strong preliminary findings warranting the need for future study. Common characteristics of pilot studies, such as this, entail that the data may be unreliable and not highly significant.

Suggestions for Further Research

This section has presented a few ideas regarding future research. Additional overarching suggestions for further research are noted as follows.

The likelihood of positive transfer is apparently linked to the speaker's perception of the distance between the languages. Might it be that learners sometimes do not perceive the languages as close to each other? In order to remedy problems that can arise from this, the development of a framework in order to test language awareness in American English native speakers would be desirable. This could be a useful tool in foreign language teaching. If teachers know their classes' degrees of language awareness from the beginning, they can plan the class more in response to the given learner qualities. Teaching would be more effective and learning would also be expected to improve. In addition, it would be interesting to discern whether such a framework would not only help learners acquiring languages that are similar, but also ones that are quite different from their own.

The argument from Stein-Smith (2013) about the language learning deficit in the United States can hardly be corroborated by this experiment. However, acquiring a FL to the extent of becoming biliterate appears to be an attainable goal primarily for individuals whose parents speak a FL. An extensive survey examining student attitudes towards FL learning throughout the entire spectrum of educational institutions constitutes a research incentive that remains unexplored. Clearer insights into students' expecations and motivations to learn foreign languages would help departments ameliorate language curricula more to student needs and abilities.

Eventually, effective methods to teach language awareness will be a necessity in the future. Developments in cognitive linguistics (Langacker, 2008) suggest that the way we speak correlates much more with the way we think than previously assumed. How we talk is a representation of how we perceive our living environment. If global cultural understanding and tolerance is an ultimate aspiration of a people, it becomes obligatory that we avoid misunderstandings at the most basic level. For instance, a German and a French speaker of English as a foreign language would naturally speak different versions of English because their perceptions of the world are tuned to the parameters with which their mother tongue expresses them. There would be variation in style, register, comprehension, argument structure, or politeness, to name a few. It is for this reason that native speakers of German are often considered impolite when speaking English. The popular German directness carries over from one mental linguistic system to the other (House, 2005). The researcher considers language awareness one of the major factors in remedying and preventing that such language-innate peculiarities interfere with effective communication.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of short English grammar tests containing contrastive linguistic input on learners' cross-linguistic awareness and German acquisition. The tests attempted to prompt participants to see the linguistic similarities between German and English with regard to specific grammatical structures and, subsequently, to realize the learning strategy of positive language transfer. The results have shown that learners indeed draw on NL knowledge to make sense of the FL and their FL learning. Whether or not this strategy can improve their learning and acquisition depends on the qualities of the particular grammar structure and the individual learner.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. Two out of three tests have shown that providing contrastive linguistic input in form of simple grammar exercises raises students' cross-linguistic awareness and brings a learning advantage. Although this trend suggests that learners successfully used language transfer as a cognitive strategy, it is not evident that they applied that strategy on all forms. A learner's decision to apply positive language transfer depends on a variety of factors. It is avoided when the foreign language structures that correspond to transferable native language structures have already been automatized. In case the features of the native language cannot be directly applied to the FL, a transfer of partial knowledge of the NL can minimize the learning effort. The claim that learners must exhibit advanced degrees of language awareness before being able to decide which structures allow for positive language transfer cannot be corroborated from the data and remains an assumption.

Grammatical knowledge is irrelevant to maintain effective communication. American English native speakers display varying degrees of casualness and ungrammaticality in almost any of their daily communicative tasks. The fact that the most commonly spoken variety of a language can impact its speakers' perceptions of the formal standard implies that grammatical knowledge is likely to remain relatively unimportant in the future, be it in daily life or the English classroom.

Communicative language teaching, as practiced at the researcher's institution, is conducted in the target language only and devoid of teacher-led grammar instruction. Under the aforementioned circumstances, this method is not ideal for students learning a distinctly grammatical language such as German. Given that American students have difficulties with English grammar, teacher's referring them to German grammar explanations in the textbook or only describing the English forms related to the German structures do not suffice. The desire of the participants for grammar explanations by the teacher is similar to generations of German learners preceding them (James & Tschirner, 2001).

In conclusion, this study provides useful teaching techniques that compromise between supporters and critics regarding explicit grammar instruction in communicative German-only classes. The English tests are easy enough that every college student can work on them without speaking English or requiring the teacher to speak it. They encourage students to actively think about the sentence production processes in their mother tongue, thereby making them contemplate the functionality of their own language's grammar before being required to understand the grammar of a foreign language. These tests may not be as effective when applied to more complicated grammar tasks, but in elementary-level classrooms they do incorporate helpful strategies to teach German.

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Footnotes

[1] In Europe, 56% of adults reported that they are able to have a conversation in a foreign language (Stein-Smith, 2013).

[2] Non-standard varieties have been developed from the official language and follow systematic patterns of their own, for example, certain youth and vernacular speech, regional dialects, etc.

[3] Metacognition is an essential ability for learners to take control of their thinking and learning processes. Learners employing metacognitive skills are conscious of their use of different learning strategies and constantly look for new techniques to improve their achievement (Mendoza, 2014). They are more autonomous and, therefore, more trained to perceive positive language transfer as a learning strategy.

[4] The absence of formality in English could be taken as a limitation here because students may not have understood the concept of formal and informal address well and, thus, may not be able to resort to a mother tongue counterpart required for positive transfer. However, the participants had practiced the difference between formal and informal forms in a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts before they were introduced to the imperative forms. The lack of formality should not be viewed as a limitation.

[5] One of the early critics of the communicative method, Swan (1985) claimed that the lack of explicit grammar instruction would slow down the acquisition of proper language.

[6] Prodromou (2002) referred to the mother tongue as a "skeleton in the cupboard" that is a "source of embarrassment" (Prodromou, 2002, p. 6) because of the seemingly global tendencies towards the target-language only direct method. Butzkamm (2003) sees one of the reasons for this development in the benefits that it brings to the market and the revenue of publishing houses who have specialized in the distribution of monolingual foreign language textbooks.

Appendices

Appendix A1

English Pre-Test and German Post-Test on Formal Imperative Forms

Name: _____   Year in College: _____

Have you studied a language before?   [_] Yes, I studied _____   [_] No

If so, for how long?   [_] 1 year   [_] 2 years   [_] 3 years or more

Are you able to have an animated conversation in that language?   [_] Yes   [_] No

Fill in the blanks with the proper verb form.

1. Mr. Woodward, please _____ to the formal dinner at 7:30 PM.

2. For the following activity, _____ to the audio recording and answer the questions.

3. Prof. Baer, you are very sick — _____ home and rest.

4. Teacher: "_____ the paragraph out loud."

5. Mr. Dirker: "_____ your German vocabulary!"

6. _____ to the people in the Business Office about financial aid.

7. The policeman said: "_____ slowly!"

8. Obama told the CIA in 2008: "_____ bin Laden, now!"

9. The manager in a restaurant tells the chef: "_____ better!"

10. To lose weight, _____ in the TARC pool for 30 minutes everyday.

11. _____ three liters of water everyday, the doctor said.

12. Mr. Dirker says: "_____ the German book at *Barnes & Noble*."

13. _____ your name on the top of the worksheet.

14. _____ five students in the class for their personal information.

15. "Please _____ up, I can't hear you in the back."

Name: _____ **Year in College:** _____

Fill in the blanks with the proper verb form.

1. Herr Woodward, bitte _____ Sie um 19:30 Uhr zum Abendessen.

2. Für die folgende Aktivität, _____ Sie die Audioaufnahme und schreiben Sie die

   Antworten zu den Fragen.

3. Prof. Baer, Sie sind sehr krank — _____ Sie nach Hause und ruhen sich aus.

4. Professor: "_____ Sie den Paragraphen laut."

5. Herr Dirker: "_____ Sie Ihre Deutschvokabeln!"

6. _____ Sie mit den Personen im Business Office über *financial aid*.

7. Der Polizist sagte: "_____ Sie langsam!"

8. Obama sagte der CIA im Jahr 2008: "_____ Sie *bin Laden*, jetzt!"

9. Der Manager eines Restaurants sagt dem Koch: "_____ Sie besser!"

10. Um Gewicht zu verlieren, _____ Sie täglich 30 Minuten im TARC-Pool.

11. _____ Sie drei Liter Wasser täglich, sagt der Doktor.

12. Herr Dirker sagt: "_____ Sie das Deutschbuch bei *Barnes & Noble*."

13. _____ Sie Ihren Namen oben auf das Blatt.

14. _____ Sie fünf Studenten im Klassenzimmer nach ihrer persönlichen Information.

15. "Bitte _____ Sie lauter, ich kann Sie nicht hören."

Appendix A2

English Pre-Test and German Post-Test on Indirect Object Pronouns

Name: _____   Year in College: _____

Have you studied a language before?   [_] Yes, I studied _____   [_] No

If so, for how long?   [_] 1 year   [_] 2 years   [_] 3 years or more

Are you able to have an animated conversation in that language?   [_] Yes   [_] No

Fill in the blanks with the proper pronoun.

1. "What are you giving Ryan for his birthday?" — "I am giving _____ a video game called *Age of Wonders III*."

2. "Ryan told _____ he finds that really cool, so I bought it on Amazon."

3. Alex texts Julia: "Why can't you just answer _____?"

4. This Carthage t-shirt does not fit _____. She needs a bigger size.

5. He looks better when he is wearing yellow; the color purple does not look good on _____.

6. You liar! I do not believe _____.

7. Steve has problems with Chinese. Alex, please help _____.

8. Miranda always bikes to Racine. Today, the weather is not good. Can you help _____?

9. "Can you give the German book to Elisabeth?" — "Yes, I am bringing _____ the book now."

10. "Do these books belong to _____, Mr. and Mrs. Faber?" — "Yes, they belong to _____."

11. Martin and Lisa, you are so friendly! I would like to thank _____!

12. Daniel bought his wife a car. He is giving _____ the car on her 50th birthday.

13. This man does not have an umbrella. Please give _____ a raincoat.

14. Does size 8.5 fit _____ or do you need another size?

15. The Board of Trustees is doing really great work. Dear trustees, we would like to thank _____.

Name: _____   **Year in College:** _____

Fill in the blanks with the proper pronoun.

1. "Was schenkst du Ryan zum Geburtstag?" — "Ich schenke _____ ein Videospiel namens *Age of Wonders III.*"

2. "Ryan sagte _____ er finde das sehr cool, also kaufte ich es bei Amazon."

3. Alex schreibt Julia: "Warum kannst du _____ nicht antworten?"

4. Dieses Carthage T-Shirt passt _____ nicht. Sie braucht eine größere Größe.

5. Er sieht besser aus, wenn er gelb trägt; die Farbe lila steht _____ nicht.

6. Du Lügner! Ich glaube _____ nicht.

7. Steve hat Probleme mit Chinesisch. Alex, bitte hilf _____.

8. Miranda fährt immer mit dem Fahrrad nach Racine. Heute ist das Wetter schlecht. Kannst du _____ helfen?

9. "Kannst du Elisabeth das Deutschbuch geben?" — "Ja, ich bringe _____ das Buch jetzt."

10. "Gehören diese Bücher _____, Herr und Frau Faber?" — "Ja, die gehören _____."

11. Martin und Lisa, ihr seid so freundlich! Ich möchte _____ danken!

12. Daniel kaufte seiner Frau ein Auto. Er schenkt _____ das Auto zum 50. Geburtstag.

13. Dieser Mann hat keinen Regenschirm. Bitte geben Sie _____ eine Regenjacke.

14. Passt _____ Größe 8.5 oder brauchen Sie eine andere Größe?

15. Das *Board of Trustees* macht sehr gute Arbeit. Liebe *Trustees*, wir möchten _____ danken.

Appendix A3

English Pre- and German Post-Test on Past-Tense Forms of *to be* and *to have*

DIRKER — GERMAN 1020 — FALL 2014

Name: _____   **Year in College:** _____

Have you studied a language before?   [_] Yes, I studied _____   [_] No

If so, for how long?   [_] 1 year   [_] 2 years   [_] 3 years or more

Are you able to have an animated conversation in that language?   [_] Yes   [_] No

Fill in the blanks with the proper past tense form.

1. Why _____ you not in German class yesterday, Martin?

2. I apologize for yesterday's absence: My grandmother _____ sick. She _____ a migraine.

3. Christopher and Barbara, where _____ you last night? We all _____ a really good time.

4. What a pity! We _____ problems with our car!

5. When _____ Mr. Dirker a freshman in college?

6. In 2011, I _____ still in Germany.

7. Last year, Tanja _____ no time for her husband.

8. On Friday, my brother and his wife _____ in the movie theater.

9. They watched *The Hangover 4* and _____ a lot of fun.

10. Josephine and I _____ at a Cuban restaurant the other day. In the restaurant, they _____

    a delicious buffet for a good price.

11. All the dishes _____ wonderful and authentic there!

12. Thomas and Franziska, _____ you at the library all day yesterday?

Name: _____   **Year in College:** _____

Fill in the blanks with the proper past tense form.

1. Warum _____ du gestern nicht im Deutschkurs, Martin?

2. Ich entschuldige mich für meine Abwesenheit gestern: Meine Großmutter _____ krank. Sie

   _____ Migräne.

3. Christopher und Barbara, wo _____ ihr letzte Nacht? Wir _____ alle sehr viel Spaß.

4. Was für ein Pech! Wir _____ Probleme mit unserem Auto!

5. Wann _____ Herr Dirker ein *freshman* in der Universität?

6. 2011 _____ ich noch in Deutschland.

7. Letztes Jahr _____ Tanja keine Zeit für ihren Mann.

8. Am Freitag _____ mein Bruder und seine Frau im Kino.

9. Sie sahen *The Hangover 4* und _____ viel Spaß.

10. Josephine und ich _____ vor ein paar Tagen in einem kubanischen Restaurant. In dem

    Restaurant _____ sie ein leckeres Buffet für einen guten Preis.

11. Alle Mahlzeiten (*dishes*) dort _____ wundervoll und authentisch!

12. Thomas und Franziska, _____ ihr gestern den ganzen Tag in der Bibliothek?

Appendix A4

Interview Guiding Questions

DIRKER — GERMAN 1020

Interview Guiding Questions

- Please tell me what languages you have taken.
- When and how long have you studied each of those languages?
- To what level would you assess your proficiency in the languages you speak?

- Describe the techniques you use to learn a foreign language?
- In what way do you learn languages best?
- Did you have a 'great language teacher' in high school? What did he/she do to make sure you learned?

- How do you usually prepare for tests?
- Explain the strategies you used to do your German homework in previous German classes and the ones you use now.
- Do you have a strategy to learn German?

- When you speak German, do you think about what you want to say in English and try to come out with a German sentence? Do you translate word to word?
- Do you think German is an easy language? Why?
- In what ways have you discovered similarities between English and German?

- What would you wish to be included or put more focus on in your German class?

Appendix B

Data Tables

Table 4

Error Count and Performance on Three Post-Tests

	Experimental Group M (SD), t, p			Control Group M (SD)		
	Type II	Total	Avg. correct	Type II	Total	Avg. correct
PT 1	3.1 (2.15) t = -0.23 p = .41	4.2 (2.91) t = 0.49 p = .31	72% (19%) t = -0.49 p = .31	3.3 (1.94)	3.7 (1.73)	76% (12%)
	Total	Transfer	Avg. correct	Total	Transfer	Avg. correct
PT 2	5.7 (2.55) t = -0.30 p = .38	2.9 (1.62) t = -1.37* p = .09	65% (16%) t = 0.30 p = .38	6.1 (3.59)	4.6 (3.24)	62% (22%)
	Type I / Type II	Total	Avg. correct	Type I / Type II	Total	Avg. correct
PT 3	1.9 (1.17) t = -1.5* p = .08 / 0.7 (0.87) t = -2** p = .03	2.7 (1.22) t = -2.50** p = .01	82% (8%) t = 2.50** p = .01	3.1 (2.15) / 1.3 (0.5)	5.6 (3.24)	63% (22%)

Note. *df* = 16. * = p ≤ .10. ** = p ≤ .05.