Enhancing Automaticity in Middle School Textbooks

Ahmed Moumene, Mentouri University - Constantine

Abstract

Recent approaches in second or foreign language teaching such as the Competency-based Approach seek to enhance automaticity amongst learners. An examination of Algerian Middle School English textbooks *Spotlight on English* reveals that their ultimate aim is to promote automaticity through the Competency- based Approach. Automaticity in these textbooks is said to be achieved through oral interaction, negotiation, and interpretation of oral and written texts as well as their production. More importantly, the syllabus puts more emphasis on helping pupils to *use* language *creatively* and not merely *reproductively*. In this paper, we will highlight the notion of 'automaticity' in recent SLA literature, its implementation in the Algerian school and its eventual application amongst pupils following the English textbooks in the Middle School.

ملخص

تسعى المقاربات الحديثة لتعليم اللغات الأجنبية أو الثانية كمقاربة الكفاءات إلى تطوير أوتوماتيكية الكلام بين المتعلمين. والمتتبع للكتب المدرسية الإنجليزية في المتوسط يلاحظ أنها ترمي أساسا إلى تعزيز هذه المهارة من خلال مقاربة الكفاءات. وحسب هذه الكتب يمكن ترسيخ الأوتوماتيكية عبر التواصل والتفاعل وتفسير النصوص الشفوية والمكتوبة وتلفظها. ويركز البرنامج على استعمال اللغة بطريقة خلاّقة وليس بالإعادة فحسب. سوف نسلط الضوء في هذا المقال على مفهوم الأوتوماتيكية في البحث الحديث واستعمالها في المدرسة وأثرها على التلاميذ الذين يتّبعون الكتب الإنجليزية في المتوسطات.

Introduction

This paper purports to highlight the place accorded to automaticity in the Algerian Middle School English textbooks *Spotlight on English*. It also tries to expose SLA findings on this burning issue and to diagnose the effects of the syllabus implementation of automatization on pupils' levels.

In Algeria, where English is taught as a Foreign Language, many moans and groans have been voiced in despair about the language deficiency that characterizes pupils' levels. Pupils generally do not make much progress over the four years of learning English in the Middle School. In particular, teachers, learners and parents notice that pupils do not acquire linguistic competence that allows them to promote their communicative competence. On the face of it, this problem is attributed to the Competency-based Approach, which has been accompanied by a devaluation of language command, and has not brought about the necessary improvement that teachers ultimately try to achieve. In this paper, we try to evaluate the status of automatization in these textbooks, to find out the real causes of pupils' failure to automatize and to present some hints to develop automaticity.

1. Automatization

Automatization or automization is the process that leads to automaticity; i.e., 'making automatic'. It is "a fundamental component of skill development" (Shiffrin and Dumais, 1981; in Johnson, 2008: 102).

Automaticity is a subconscious process in which learners "perform a complex series of tasks very quickly and efficiently, without having to think about the various components and subcomponents of action involved" (DeKeyser, 2001: 125).

Research on cognition usually discerns three stages for skill acquisition. Fitts and Posner (1967) distinguish between cognitive, associative and autonomous stages. Anderson (1992) speaks about

declarative knowledge, proceduralization of knowledge and automatizing or fine-tuning priocedural knowledge. Anderson's Adaptive Control Theory (ACT) model (1992) of cognitive skill acquisition on how automaticity is brought about has become the most widely accepted theory. It specifies that knowledge starts out as explicit knowledge, 'knowledge that' which is then turned into specialized procedural rules, and 'knowledge how'.

According to Johnson (2008: 106), the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge could be equated with learning and acquisition, as he argues, learning can be called DECPRO, i.e., "movement from declarative to procedural knowledge through a process of proceduralization or automization. Although procedural without declarative knowledge is possible, it remains inadequate because the learner who does not have the latter will not understand how the language works, and he is likely to fossilize and pidginize; so he must develop declarative knowledge or PRODEC. This process is called declarativization; converting procedural to declarative knowledge. As Johnson emphasises, "procedural knowledge needs to be supplemented by declarative knowledge if fossilization is to be avoided" (p. 110)

Logan, Taylor and Etherton (1996) investigate the role of attention in the acquisition and expression of automaticity, and show an intrinsic correlation between automatization and memory. They allege that "attention determines what goes into a memory trace in encoding as well as what is taken out of it at retrieval time" (*ibid*. 636). It becomes clear then that good automatic performance requires a good memory which is responsible for both reception and production. In an experimental study drawn about the interaction of rule-based and memory-based learning, Robinson (1997) examines the extent of generalizability and automaticity of learning grammatical sentences by 60 adult Japanese ESL learners under conditions with no focus on form (implicit and incidental conditions) and with focus on form (enhanced and instructed conditions). He comes to the conclusion that:

> 1. Implicit knowledge is memory-based and limited in its generalizability. Access to it is fast.
>
> 2. The knowledge acquired during incidental and enhanced learning is also partially memory-based, but the enhanced learners in particular show evidence of the development of a generalizable rule-based representation. Access to this is slow and effortful.
>
> 3. Unstructured learning of rules results in generalizable knowledge and fast decision making about new sentences, because the rules are accurate, determinate, and practiced. (Robinson, 1997: 242)

What must be stressed here is that memory plays a crucial role in language acquisition. While some part of linguistic knowledge, especially chunks or formulaic language is memory-based; the other part which conforms to acceptable grammatical formedness represents the greatest portion, and is generally rule-based. Language learning depends on the depth of attention, consciousness, noticing on the one hand and on the acuteness of memory on the other. Some learners have better memories than others. They can learn by heart. They have a great power of encoding facts in their mind and can call them back when needed. Others have less power of retaining and reproducing facts. This category of individuals seems to favour rule-based learning and reject any form of rote-memorization. Since people have different styles of learning, recent learner-centred approaches tend to cater for such differences from the very beginning.

2. Restructuring

McLaughlin (1987: 138) recognizes the importance of automatization, but stresses the need of learners' restructuring stating that there is "more to learning a complex cognitive skill than developing automaticity through practice". According to McLaughlin (1990: 117), the concept of restructuring can be traced back to Piaget. It "is characterised by discontinuous, or *qualitative* change as the child moves from stage to stage in development. Each new stage constitutes a new internal organisation and not merely the addition of new structural elements". Restructuring is a process of mental operations which involves changing, readjusting or reorganising the previously internalised rules which are already encoded in the brain. Cognitive representations of language forms are continuously changing as a result of developing new complex linguistic tasks. As learners acquire new forms, the whole representational cognitive system of language will be altered and restructured. This bears evidence in support of SLA researchers who hypothesise that language learning is not a linear, cumulative process.

Lightbown (1985) shows that SLA is characterized by the constant 'loss of forms' that have been learned before as well as 'backsliding'; that is, relapsing, reverting, regressing or going back to old linguistic habits. He explains:

> [Restructuring] occurs because language is a complex hierarchical system whose components interact in non-linear ways. Seen in these terms, an increase in error rate in one area may reflect an increase in complexity or accuracy in another, followed by overgeneralization of a newly acquired structure, or simply by a sort of overload of complexity which forces a restructuring, or at least a simplification, in another part of the system.
>
> (Lightbown, 1985; in McLaughlin, 1990: 121)

3. Aims of Middle School English Textbooks

Middle School English Textbooks *Spotlight on English* strive at developing *automaticity*. This competency is, in fact, a high cognitive skill that requires great work on the part of learners. The First year Middle School English Textbook *Spotlight on English* sets out the following objective: "At the end of 1st AM the pupil must be able to *use* the functional language acquired in class as well as verbal and non verbal means to come into contact with his schoolmates and his teacher."

In the introduction to *Teacher's Book, Middle School - Year three,* the inspectors Arab *et .al*., (2004) state that *Spotlight on English: Book Three* substantiates the new English syllabus; i.e., the Competency-Based Approach, as set down by the Ministry of Education, and aims at making teaching and learning "less daunting, more fruitful and certainly *more interactive*". They also stress that the project work in this syllabus provides learners "with the opportunity to use language *creatively* and not simply *reproductively*" (*ibid.* 11).

The aim of the textbook is to help learners develop the interaction skill. As mentioned in File One, Sequence One starts with a "getting started" phase wherein learners are encouraged to *interact orally* with each other and with the teacher (*ibid.* 12). Under the *Listen and Speak* rubric which moves on to the *Say it clear* sub-rubric, the "activities aim at training the learner to infer what people mean from tone of voice ... and to use intonation and stress patterns for expressing their own ideas (*ibid.* 13)

The speaking skill, in this textbook, includes the use of functional language and communication. It engages learners "in activities involving guessing, group discussion, role play, questionnaire completing, information gap activities, matching, grid-filling, re-ordering..." (*ibid.* 16).

The ultimate goal of this textbook is to develop the speaking competency in third-year Middle School learners. The authors (2004: 16) go as long as to claim that:

> Each of these activities aims at developing communication strategies related to "spoken interaction" and "spoken production" such as turn-taking, asking for clarification, coping with vocabulary problems, confirming, understanding, reformulating, paraphrasing, and asking for help. Finally, the learners speak in order to take part in discussions about various topics, to tell stories and jokes, to make announcements, to hold telephone conversations, to read poems aloud, to hold monologues, to play language games, to describe objects and persons, in short to take part in varied situations of social interaction and transactions.

Automaticity is best achieved through repetitive creative use of the language rules taught in a context of authentic communication through Competency-Based Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching. The approach which is said to promote automaticity in Algeria is the Competency-Based Approach. Indeed, it is an approach which strives at promoting creative language use; i.e., communicative competence. The question that may be raised here is: what is communicative competence?

4. Communicative competence consists of five main components; each one has an effect on teaching and learning the spoken language.

4.1 Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is defined by Hedge (2000: 46) as "knowledge of the language itself, its form and meaning." Moreover, linguistic competence, from a speaking point of view, consists of pronunciation, sentence structure, and lexicon. etc. It helps the FL learner to achieve accuracy in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation (Hedge, 2000: 56).

4.2 Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is concerned with knowing about how language is used for communicative purposes. It is based on the intended meaning rather than the meaning of isolated words. It develops on learners how to learn the relationship between forms and functions, to use stress and intonation, to express attitudes and emotions, to learn the scale of formality, to use the pragmatic rules of language and to select language forms appropriate to topic and listener...etc (Hedge, 2000: 56).

4.3 Discourse Competence

Discourse competence will help FL learners in how to take long-turns, use discourse markers and open and close conversations.

4.4 Strategic Competence

Strategic competence consists of some strategies that are used when the speaker could not express himself in the FL, may be, because he misses some words. One of these strategies, for example, is borrowing a word from his MT and using it instead of the missed word. Strategic competence plays an important role in improving speaking and communication. It increases learner's taking risks in using the TL.

4.5 Fluency

Fluency is the main feature in FL learning. Improving this ability means improving how to deal with information gap of real discourse, to process

language and respond appropriately with a degree of ease and to be able to respond with reasonable speed in 'real time' (Hedge, 2000: 56).

5. Automatization constraints

Like all such utopian proposals, there will be problems of implementing the Task-Based Approach or the Competency-Based Approach in the real classroom. An approach that may function well in a particular situation may not yield the fruitful results in another situation. The main constraint for putting the Competency-Based Approach into practice is the requirement of very high competence on the part of teachers and enthusiastic involvement on the part of learners. Nevertheless, there are many factors that impede automatization amongst learners, namely the approach, the syllabus, learning, teaching, the classroom environment and the socio-cultural environment. Each of these elements will be developed separately below.

5.1 The Approach

The approach used in the Algerian Middle School for teaching English and other subjects is the Competency-Based Approach. In contrast to the traditional approaches which could be described as 'learning to use' the language, this approach, in connection with the strong Communicative Language Teaching form and Task-Based Language Teaching could be depicted as 'using the language to learn it'. The CBA puts more emphasis on doing than knowing. Emphatically speaking, what it claims is not just a mere doing, but it is a highly qualified act; called 'competency'. Let's see together the definition of 'competency':

According to Sullivan & Burnett (2006), a competency is often defined as:

> "an underlying, deep, and enduring personal characteristic of an individual that predicts behavior in a wide variety of situations and results in effective or superior performance."

Competencies by definition are both measurable and more importantly, demonstrable. According to the Report of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Working Group on Competency-Based Initiatives in Post Secondary Education (NPEC Report, Jones, & Voorhees, 2002),

> Competencies are the result of integrative learning experiences in which skills, abilities, and knowledge interact to form bundles that have currency in relation to tasks for which they are assembled" and "demonstrations are the result of applying competencies. It is at this level that performance can be assessed". (p.7)

The Competency-Based Approach claims strong far-reaching objectives. It is too demanding on both teachers and learners. It can work with small groups of learners who are well-motivated and who are responsible for their own learning.

5.2 Content selection

Content reflects what learners should learn in terms of language knowledge, culture and performance. Since there is a great deal of knowledge to be learned, and since learners are endowed with limited capacities for learning, the content to be taught should be carefully selected on some criteria such as:

1. *Learnability*: Some lexical and grammatical forms are easier for learners to learn than others; so easier items should be taught first and complex things a bit later.

2. *Validity*: It is the content relevance or possibility to help learners achieve the already defined learning objectives.

3. *Interest*: The content has to meet the learners' interests and needs.

Indeed, the textbooks deserve recognition as being of academic worth and social value. Nevertheless, some teachers who were interviewed assert that the textbooks fail on some grounds. In terms of learnability, the level of the textbooks seems to be difficult to achieve. In terms of validity, the textbooks do not allow the pupils to attain the expected objectives: competencies. In terms of interest, the textbooks do not respond to the pupils needs.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 58) point to the need to distinguish between linguistic complexity and learning complexity. Linguistic complexity is defined as "the amount of linguistic knowledge in a structure" (*ibid*.). For example, perfect tenses are regarded more complex than simple tenses because they involve more morphemes. Blends and diphthongs are also considered more complex than consonants and vowels. In Transformational Generative Grammar, the structures which require more transformations to be generated are said to be more difficult than others. Learning complexity, however, is defined as "the degree of difficulty a learner experiences in acquiring a structure" (*ibid*.). In terms of this definition, the possessive *–s* marker is regarded more complex than the progressive *–ing* since it is learned later.

SLA studies maintain the idea that certain English morphemes as well as certain syntactic constructions are acquired according to a well-established universal order. Teachers and syllabus designers are called to respect these findings and to avoid overloading learners' heads with great amounts of grammatical rules that are not easily amenable to processing, storing and retrieving. After citing some advanced proposals for sequencing such as the natural order, the frequency of occurrence, the utility, and the most common grammatical simplicity, Krashen postulates

that SLA theory has not yet provided an appropriate sequencing, but predicted that the rules should be (1) *learnable* (that can be easily learned), (2) *portable* ("what can be carried around in the students' heads"), and (3) *not yet acquired* (Krashen, 1987: 115).

5.3 Language learning processes

The new declarative vs. procedural knowledge dichotomy which is found in Cognitive Psychology reflects the ancient distinction in philosophy between 'knowing about' and 'knowing how to' such as knowing about driving and knowing about how to drive. A driving test which concentrated on declarative knowledge and not on procedural knowledge would be a recipe for disaster (Johnson, 2008: 102).

Having declarative knowledge about language is quite different from being able to speak it. In general, language learners go through some stages in their way towards automaticity:

5.3.1 Declarative stage: At this stage of full consciousness, learners are supposed to receive knowledge to be stored in memory. They focus on the correct production of language forms like correct grammar and pronunciation.

5.3.2 Proceduralization stage: When learners want to perform actions, the stored knowledge has to be retrieved from memory. Here learners suspend performance of other actions and consciously bring back to mind what to do next.

5.3.3 Automatic stage: It is the stage of unconscious, effortless language production. Knowledge becomes proceduralized or automatized.

What the pupils really need at this level is the storing of sufficient declarative knowledge. If this knowledge is not provided adequately, we should not expect learners to develop procedural knowledge.

5.4. Learnability constraints

SLA studies have identified a range of constraints upon learnability; that is, the propitious time where learners are developmentally ready to acquire whatsoever of the language structures.

The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis attempts to explain how learners acquire L2. Krashen regards this hypothesis as the most important one in his theory. He claims that "humans acquire language in only one way –by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input'…. We move from *i* , our current level, to *i + 1*, the next level along the natural order, by understanding input containing *i + 1*." (Krashen, 1985; in McLaughlin, *op. cit.* 36). If there is a gap in pupils' knowledge while moving from one lesson to another, assimilation is not likely to take place. The accumulation of gaps reduces the pupils' chance to improve and increases the degrees of failure. Teachers of English could not cover all the lessons in the book, and this spawns serious repercussions on the pupils.

The primary problem resides in the fact that the input presented to learners, however rich and diversified, does not convert into intake. There is a problem of comprehension. Batstone (1994: 38) strongly maintains that "exposure to language means exposure to what is called *input*. But input is not enough. Some of this language needs to get through to the learner; rather than remain as input it needs to become *intake*."

5.5 The Natural Order Hypothesis

The Natural Order Hypothesis stipulates that learners acquire grammatical morphemes and syntactic structures in a predictable natural order. This order has already been discovered by many SLA researchers in both cross-sectional and longitudinal morpheme studies and other syntactic constructions such as negatives and interrogatives. Krashen succinctly summarises this hypothesis:

> We acquire the rules of language in a predictable order, some rules tending to come early and others late. The order does not appear to be determined solely by formal simplicity and there is evidence that it is independent of the order in which rules are taught in language classes.
>
> (Krashen, 1985; in McLaughlin, *op. cit.* 30)

Through this citation, Krashen explains that there is a natural order which is affected neither by grading nor by linguistic complexity. As for McLaughlin, he criticises this invariant order, but does not rule it out. What are then the pedagogical implications of this hypothesis? Even if Krashen firmly believes that there is a natural order in the acquisition of grammatical structures, he does not recommend to grade grammatical points in accordance with this order. Rather, he goes as far as to reject any grammatical syllabus where the focus is on language acquisition (Krashen, 1987: 14).

5.5.1 The Morpheme order studies

Before the 1970s, the generally-held belief among educators was that grammatical morphemes and linguistic structures were learned by pupils in the order in which they were taught. Errors were regarded as a sign of non-learning, carelessness, laziness or lack of interest. In a word, all errors were considered as mere causes of the lack of interest. With this interest in mind, SLA researchers sought to inquire into three main issues: (1) whether there is a natural order for the acquisition of grammatical morphemes, (2) whether L1 acquisition order is similar to that of L2 acquisition, and (3) whether the developmental order is the same for learners with different linguistic backgrounds (Ellis, 1985: 73; Richards, 1985: 64 *inter alia*).

The grammatical morphemes belong to what is called inflectional morphology. They include progressive "–ing", copula, auxiliaries, articles, plural, past forms, third person "–s", prepositions, and possessive "'s". The focus on inflections is largely attributed to their high frequency of occurrence even in the early stages of acquisition. Historically speaking, the morpheme studies were initiated by Brown (1973) who found that children acquiring English as an L1 internalise fourteen grammatical morphemes in a similar order. Surprisingly, Dulay and Burt (1973) even questioned the relevance of teaching children syntax. They reported that Spanish-speaking children learned a series of English morphemes according to a predetermined order of acquisition. These results were achieved through the use of the "Bilingual Syntax Measure" through which learners were asked to describe vividly an array of pictures first in spoken words and then in written forms. Most surprisingly, Dulay and Burt (1974) found that Chinese-speaking children also displayed the same acquisition order which had been reported for the Spanish-speaking children in their first experiment. In sum, L2 acquisition order was proved to be different from that of L1 acquisition already provided by Brown; but it was indicated that all L2 learners, regardless of their L1, followed the same developmental order.

In another empirical study, Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974) find that the 'difficulty order' followed by child L2 learners are also respected by adult L2 learners representing various linguistic backgrounds. They also demonstrate that both child and adult L2 subjects do not go through the same morpheme order reported for child L1 subjects. In an attempt to explain the factors which directly or indirectly trigger the morpheme acquisition order, Larsen-Freeman (1976) analyses learners' oral production in terms of some well-defined determinants such as morpheme complexity, input frequency, learner variables, and instructional procedures. She comes to the conclusion that the accuracy order highly correlates with the input frequency of the grammatical morphemes in the acquisition of English as an L2. For the sake of more security and reliability in the presentation of empirical findings, Larsen-Freeman did not content herself with the results she obtained in 1976 with English-speaking parents. She subsequently conducted another research that appeared in her 1978 article in which she examined twelve morpheme order studies: six from the speech of English as a Second language (ESL) teachers during classroom instruction, four from Larsen-Freeman's (1975) study, one from Brown's (1973) and another one from Dulay and Burt's (1973). She concludes that "The evidence cited here was felt to be supportive of the hypothesis that the frequency of occurrence of the nine morphemes in English native-speaker speech is the principal determinant of the oral production ESL morpheme acquisition order"(Larsen-Freeman, 1978: 329).

On their part, Hatch and Wagner-Gough (1976) maintain that there is a natural sequence of language acquisition and a general pattern to the learners' errors. They also note that the variation in data could be explained

in terms of transfer, interference or language universals. Other recent publications in the field provide evidence that there is a 'natural route' followed by L1 and L2 learners in the acquisition of the English morphemes and other grammatical constructions. Dulay, Burt and Krashen for instance, after investigating a range of 'acquisition order' studies, assert that:

> An L2 acquisition order has been discovered which is characteristic of both children and adults, and which, for as yet unknown reasons, holds for both oral and written modes, provided natural communication tasks are used to elicit the language data. (Dulay *et al*. 1982: 229)

In a similar vein, Goldschneider and Dekeyser (2001) maintain that English L2 learners irrespective of their age, exposure, and L1 acquire a series of morphemes in the same order (*ibid.* 37). In sum, the morpheme order studies can be said to be real indicators of how learners irrespective of their native language and culture actually progress in the acquisition of language.

5.5.2 The Transitional construction studies

Although early morpheme studies were criticized by some researchers, subsequent cross-sectional and longitudinal research works concerned with the acquisition of syntactic structures such as negation, interrogation, yes-no questions, Wh. Questions, and relative clauses have demonstrated that learners pass through a series of 'universal' transitional stages before achieving the correct final stage. Below are concrete examples of interrogative transitional constructions presented by Ellis (1985: 60-61):

I am colouring?
Sir plays football today?
I writing on the book?
What's this?
What you are doing?
What 'tub' mean?
What the time?
Where you work?

Examples of the acquisition of negative transitional constructions are put forth by Nunan (1991: 147):

Stage 1: 'no + verb'	No work / No understand.
Stage 2: 'don't + verb'	I don't like / He don't can swim.
Stage 3: 'auxiliary + negative'	She can't go / He don't stay.
Stage 4: 'analysed don't'	He didn't stay.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (*op. cit.* 136) conclude their analysis of "Transitional Constructions" holding that "The numerous studies that focus on transitional constructions all indicate that L2 learners, like L1 learners, acquire grammatical structures in an ordered series of key steps." Larsen-

Freeman and Long (*op. cit.* 92-93) point to the existence of common predictable developmental sequences in the acquisition of syntactic structures. Concerning the internalisation of interrogatives, they find that ESL learners follow four developmental stages:

1. Rising intonation: He work today?
2. Universal WH (+/- aux): What he (is) saying?
3. Overinversion: Do you know where is it?
4. Differentiation: Does she like where she lives?

In the main, Ellis (1993a) concedes that structural grammar does not promote implicit knowledge because there is a real psychological 'learnability problem'.

6. Teachability constraints

SLA studies have diagnosed a series of restrictions upon teachability. Teachers are supposed to be pedagogically well-informed that certain grammatical structures and language forms should be taught before some others. According to this theoretical motivation, learners do not progress from one state of knowledge to the next haphazardly; they rather follow a certain acquisition order irrespective of their L1 background and of the amount of instruction offered to them.

More typical, however, is the finding by Pinemann (1984) who contends that there are some psychological constraints in learners that prevent them from bypassing certain predetermined acquisitional stages; and as a consequence, sets forth his renowned 'teachability hypothesis'.

Pinemann (1989: 53) also points to the existence of "general stages of acquisition through which all learners must pass", and suggests that their relevance to pedagogical recommendations for any kinds of syllabus construction (*ibid*. 76). In a recent article, Tschirner (1998: 115) looks further before discounting the morpheme order studies. Like many SLA researchers, he finds that "second language learners go through some stages of development towards the TL. At each stage, some grammatical structures or parts thereof are acquired while others remain unacquired. In addition, some structures build on other structures, and cannot be acquired before these other structures are acquired.

Numerous studies have shown that practising grammatical structures does not lead to their acquisition and automatization. Pinemann's 'teachability hypothesis' (1984) stipulates that learners cannot learn some specific structures unless they are developmentally ready to do so. That is, even if teachers devote a great amount of time to make their learners practise certain forms and patterns repeatedly in order to perform the task correctly under controlled conditions, learners may not be able to integrate them into their IL and to use them freely in communication

7. Form-focused instruction

On balance, most empirical studies cast real doubts on the claim that CI is sufficient alone, and appeal for drawing learners' attention to some grammatical forms of language. Krashen (1981, 1987) strongly holds that learning grammar helps only as a monitor, and does not warrant the shift from controlled to automatic use of language. More importantly, Ellis (1992) reviews a collection of recent studies to investigate if practice really works. He finds out that there are some empirical and theoretical grounds that lead some researchers to doubt about its efficacy in language learning, but this does not mean that it is of no value at all. It is rather an effective means for learning pronunciation, vocabulary, and formulaic chunks (*ibid*. 237). In the same perspective, Willis (1996) sees that practice has no utility for language use, especially for communication as learners continue on making the same errors. This point is strongly emphasized in the following:

You don't have to sit long in any staffroom before you hear the cry: 'But I have taught them that so many times and they are still getting it wrong!' Sometimes students seem to master a grammar point successfully in a lesson, and get it right when doing an exercise on it; they even reproduce it in a test or exam. But they often fail to use it correctly when expressing themselves freely. In other words, this temporary mastery seems to happen when they are paying conscious attention to form (i.e. the surface pattern), but not when they are trying to communicate and paying attention to meaning. There is, then, a lot of evidence that practice activities, such as drilling a particular language pattern, do not necessarily 'make perfect', especially when it comes to communication. (Willis, 1996: 5)

7.1 The Morpheme/sequence order studies and language teaching

The morpheme studies as well as the transitional construction studies cited above are just a few examples; there are numerous other important studies that have not been mentioned for purely methodological reasons. In general, these studies bear a considerable significance on the teaching of grammar; and as such, they should be taken into consideration before any attempt to teach the targeted features and structures. The results of the morpheme studies seem to be very important because they explain a large portion of learners' errors in the use of morphemes, and bear substantial proof of the existence of developmental stages in the learning process. The flow of intractable errors that persist in learners' IL despite the tedious efforts to minimize them must have an explanation in the light of the empirical findings of these studies. Nevertheless, such studies have not passed unquestioned particularly in their first days. In a word, the acquisition order is said to be an artefact of the Bilingual Syntax Measure which is used for the elicitation of data. This criticism, however, has been refuted by many researchers. Krashen (1981: 56) firmly declares that "while this evidence is at first glance suggestive, recent studies and reanalyses show conclusively, I

believe, that the natural order is not an artefact of the BSM [Bilingual Syntax Measure]." In addition to that, Larsen-Freeman and Long strongly hold that:

> In sum, despite admitted limitations in some areas, the morpheme studies provide strong evidence that Ils [interlanguages] exhibit common accuracy / acquisition orders. Contrary to what some critics have alleged, there are in our view too many studies conducted with sufficient methodological rigour and showing sufficiently consistent general findings for the commonalities to be ignored. As the hunter put it, 'There is something moving in the bushes'.
>
> (Larsen-Freeman and Long, *op. cit.* 92)

The first consequence of these studies is that grammar instruction is found to have no effect on the acquisition process since learners, irrespective of their age and their L1, seem to progress along some universal developmental stages in the acquisition of morpho-syntactic structures. Two deductions must be drawn here; first, syllabuses should not be graded grammatically but communicatively where the focus is laid on functions rather than forms. Second, if there is a compulsion to teach grammar at all, it should be taught and graded according to the general acquisition order postulated by the host of SLA researchers. In response to the above question, Larsen-Freeman (1978: 329-30) argues that the implications of the morpheme studies depend on one's view of the learning process. For a Behaviourist, the correlation between input frequency and order of acquisition lends support to the stimulus-response theory. For a Cognitivist, however, these findings demonstrate that there is "a pre-programmed principle in learners' minds" which enables learners to build hypotheses and to deduce the rules for themselves.

What is worth recommending here is that grammar teaching should not fail to take into account the learning strategies followed by learners at various stages of their interim grammars. Put otherwise, it must be in conformity with the natural processes and the gradual development of L2 learning. This state of affairs has led to the emergence of learner-centred approaches whereby naturalistic language learning ought not to be abruptly violated by the provision of grammatical rules that are beyond learners' capacities. Thus, as long as learners are not cognitively ready for input that is higher than their level, there will be no utility for overloading their heads and overdosing them. Moreover, IL theory has also exerted a great influence on syllabus design. Some researchers believe that teaching materials should not be discrepant but in harmony with the learner's internal syllabus.

8. Classroom interaction and automatization

The Interaction Hypothesis considers interaction as the most important component in language teaching; it is found to promote language acquisition further than anything else. So, interaction should not be overlooked in the process of language learning. It is necessary for proceduralization to take place. Classroom group work allows learners to interact; nevertheless, providing learners with ample opportunities to communicate and interact in group-works does not warrant that the produced language will be very good. Indeed, if the input is grammatically poor, the proceduralized knowledge will be automatically poor. Thus, learners ought to be geared towards form and meaning while performing grammar tasks. This will enable them to negotiate meaning, to notice the targeted structures, to fill the gaps in their knowledge, and to restructure their IL development.

Moreover, oral communication involves the ability to use the language appropriately in specific contexts for social interaction purposes which, by its turn, involves more than just verbal communication. It entails also elements of speech such as pitch and stress and non-linguistic elements like gestures and facial expressions. To enable the pupils to be more orally productive, teachers would encourage them to indulge in comprehensible meaning-focused communication and to react in a socially appropriate way to what their classmates say.

After all, it is worth mentioning here that there seems to be an avowing incompatibility between the Competency-Based Approach and the large number of students in the classroom. Because classes are very crowded, teachers seem to work with a limited number of pupils who are really motivated and do their homework assignments and the rest are left for their own. What is worse is that even the best pupils become drowned in a weak milieu that does not enable them to blossom their intellect and to boost up their emergence.

9. Socio-cultural environment

Social aspirations have a great influence on language learning. In the process of wishing to be associated with a certain prestigious language like French or English, pupils who are moving in that direction socially, culturally and economically will achieve better gains in language use and automaticity. It is commonly noticed by teachers that pupils who come from large metropolitan cities or well-off urban areas are likely to automatize the foreign language better than those who come from the rural areas or the dilapidated poorly-off areas.

Attitudes in the process of learning may be positive or negative. Attitudes are threefold in essence – (a) attitudes towards the second language itself, (b) attitudes towards its native speakers, and (c) attitudes towards language learning in general. Positive attitudes generally lead to learners' success. The impact of positive or negative attitudes from the

surrounding society can be critical. Community attitudes towards a foreign language can have a profound impact on SLA. When the community has negative views of the foreign language and its speakers, learning becomes much more difficult.

Socio-cultural factors play a great role in SLA. If learners have positive views of the L2 society and culture, learning will be facilitated. However, forming *stereotypes* about peoples' cultures may hinder learning L2. So, SLA needs acculturation; i.e., adapting the target language culture and resenting social distance and cultural shock.

Conclusion

Developing automaticity is not an easy task as it may appear at first glance. Many factors enter into play. Knowing alone is not enough and doing alone is not enough. What should be grasped first is that promoting the automaticity competency does not, in any case, imply turning one's back on knowing.

In the Algerian Middle Schools, there seems to be a mismatch between knowing and doing. What the learners need at this level is what is known as *savoir-faire* or knowledge of how to behave appropriately in a particular situation. The problem factually resides at the pre-automatization stage where learners do not receive enough declarative knowledge that enables them to proceduralize subsequently. However, rules and isolated terms that are learned are not what learners need outside the classroom. What learners need is that how to use the language in specific contexts.

Indeed, competencies entail the mastery of vocabulary, grammar, stress, rhythm, intonation patterns, fluency as well as skills in transaction, interaction, speaking turns, negotiation, discourse and paralinguistic elements. Learning just the language system is not the appropriate way for learning how to communicate as knowledge of the language code alone does not explain the demands of communication and interaction with others in the target language. In short, automaticity could be achieved when knowing and doing are intelligently targeted in tandem.

References

Anderson, J.R. (1992). Automaticity and the ACT theory. *American Journal of Psychology*. 105: 165-180.

Arab *et .al*., (2004). *Teacher's Book, Middle School - Year three.*

Bailey, N., Madden, C., and Krashen, S.D. 1974. Is there a 'natural sequence' in adult second language learning? *Language Learning*, 24/2: 235-43. Reprinted in B. W. Robinett & J.

Schachter 1983 (eds.), *Second Language Learning, Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis and Related Aspects*, (pp.316-325). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1983.

Batstone, Rob.1994a. *Grammar*. Oxford: OUP.

Brown, R. 1973. *A first Language*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press.

DeKeyser, R.M. (2001). Automaticity and automatization. In P. Robinson (eds.): *Cognition and Second Language Instruction* (pp-125-151). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dulay, H. and Burt, M. 1973. Should we teach children syntax? *Language Learning*, 23: 245-58.

Dulay, H. and Burt, M. 1974. Natural sequences in child second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 24: 37-53.

Dulay, H.; Burt, M. and Krashen, S. 1982. *Language Two*. Oxford: OUP

Ellis, Rod.1985. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.

Ellis, Rod. 1992. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Pedagogy*.

Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Goldschneider, Jennifer M. and DeKeyser, Robert M. 2001. Explaining the "natural order of L2 morpheme acquisition" in English: A meta-analysis of multiple determinants. *Language Learning*, 51/1: 1-50.

Hedge, T. 2000. *Teaching and Learning the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hatch, Evelyn and Wagner-Gough, Judy. 1976. Explaining sequence and variation in second Language acquisition. *Language Learning*, special issue, 4: 39-57. Reprinted in B.W. Robinett and J. Schachter (1983) eds., pp. 334-353.

Krashen, Stephen D.1981. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. London: Printice Hall International.

Krashen, Stephen D. 1987. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Printice Hall International.

Kuk, Linda and James, Banning. June, 2009. Student affairs preparation programs: a competency based approach to assessment and outcomes. *College Student Journal*. http:/findarticles.coms/p/search.qa=lindaKuk..

Johnson, Keith. 2001. *An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. (2nd ed. 2008).

Jones, & Voorhees. (2002). Report of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Working Group on Competency- Based Initiatives in Post Secondary Education (NPEC Report).

Larsen-Freeman, Diane. 1976. An explanation for the morpheme acquisition order of second language learners. *Language Learning*, 26: 125-134

Larsen-Freeman Diane. 1978. Implications of the morpheme studies for second language acquisition. *ILT (Review of Applied Linguistics)*, 39/40: 93-102. Reprinted in B. W. Robinett and J. Schachter 1983 (eds.) , pp. 326-333. Logan, Gordan D.; Taylor, Stanley E. and

Etherton, Joseph L.1996. Attention in the acquisition and expression of automaticity. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 22/3: 620-638.

McLaughlin, Barry. 1987. *Theories of Second language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold.McLaughlin, Barry. 1990. Restructuring. *Applied Linguistics*, 11/2: 113-128.

Nunan, David. 1991. *Language Teaching Methodology*: *A textbook for Teachers*. London: Printice Hall International.

Pienemann, Manfred. 1984. Psychological constraints on the teachability of languages. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 6: 186-214.

Pienemann, Manfred. 1989. Is language teachable? Psycholinguistic experiments and hypotheses. *Applied Linguistics*, 10/1: 52-79.

Richards, Jack C. 1985. *The content of language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.

Robinson, Peter.1997. Generalisability and automaticity of second language learning under implicit, incidental, enhanced, and instructed conditions. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19: 223-247.

Sullivan, John and Burnett, Master. Apr 17, 2006. Recruiting Using a Competency-Based Approach.http:/www.reproline.jhu.edu.english/8sw.htm.

Tschirner, Erwin. 1998. From lexicon to grammar. In J. Harper; M.G. Lively and M.K. Williams (eds.), *The Coming of Age of the Profession Issues and Emerging Ideas for the Teaching of Foreign Languages*, (pp. 113-128). New York: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Willis, Jane.1996. *A Framework for Task-based Learning*. Addison Wesley: Longman.