

# GRAMMAR IN DISGUISE: THE HIDDEN AGENDA OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING TEXTBOOKS.

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**ABSTRACT.** *This study analyzes the treatment of grammar in current foreign language textbooks in order to find out whether textbooks that claim to adhere to the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching really do so. We looked at eight introductory foreign language textbooks, four in Spanish and four in German, commonly used in the United States at the university level, and we analyzed the activities included in them. We looked at whether the activity focused on input or output, and whether it represented communicative language practice, or it was simply a drill. Drills were further subdivided into mechanical, meaningful and communicative. Results indicate that the primary focus of language instruction is still on output and that drills still have a strong presence in the beginner-level classroom.*

**KEYWORDS:** *foreign language instruction, input, output, drills, communicative language teaching, textbooks, grammar teaching.*

**RESUMEN.** *Este estudio analiza el trato que recibe la gramática en los textos actuales de lengua extranjera. El objetivo es determinar si los textos que dicen seguir el modelo comunicativo, realmente lo hacen. Examinamos ocho textos de nivel elemental, cuatro de español y cuatro de alemán, de uso común en los Estados Unidos en el nivel universitario, y analizamos las actividades que se incluyen en ellos. Clasificamos las actividades según tengan como objetivo la comprensión o la producción lingüística y también según representen un ejemplo de práctica comunicativa o sean simplemente ejercicios mecánicos. Los resultados indican que el énfasis principal de la enseñanza de lenguas sigue estando en la producción y que la práctica mecánica todavía tiene un peso importante en el aula de nivel elemental.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *enseñanza de lenguas, input, output, ejercicios mecánicos, enseñanza comunicativa, libros de texto, enseñanza de gramática.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Several researchers have pointed out in recent years the lack of correspondence between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and textbook design and classroom practices. The purpose of this paper is to determine to what extent this discrepancy between theory and practice is still true after almost 30 years of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Research conducted in SLA since the 1970s shows that students need to be exposed to meaningful and communicative practice, including grammar instruction, in order for them to reach higher levels of language proficiency (Savignon 1972; Hatch 1978; Spada 1987). An emphasis on communicative competence as the goal of language learning as well as a focus on meaning and context seem to be the common denominators of most syllabi in language courses. However, in their review of ESL textbooks, Richards and Rodgers (1986: 82) find them to have “much in common ... with Structural-Situational and Audiolingual principles”. Almost 20 years later, Aski (2003) comes to a similar conclusion in her analysis of Italian textbooks. Savignon (1998) uses a colorful metaphor to warn against this trend to mask mechanical practice under a “communicative” cover:

What ‘nutritious’ and ‘natural’ are today to breakfast foods, ‘communicative’ and ‘functional’ are to language texts. How much change has actually taken place is

debatable. Just as cereals containing ‘all natural’ honey are no less sweet, so ‘asking questions’ may be no more than a new label for an old unit on the formation of the interrogative. (Savignon 1998: 138)

Although in recent years almost everyone in the field has jumped on the communicative approach bandwagon—from teachers to textbook designers—more traditional approaches still seem to have a stronghold on the foreign language community, particularly in regard to the teaching of grammar. This paper analyzes the treatment of grammar in current foreign language textbooks to find out whether this disconnection between research and practice is still true.

## 2. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Richards & Rodgers (1986: 72) point out that although CLT does not subscribe to any specific theory of language learning, the practices associated with it imply several underlying theoretical principles that they describe as follows:

1. *The communication principle*: Activities that involve real communication promote learning.
2. *The task principle*: Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning.
3. *The meaningfulness principle*: Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

Lightbown and Spada (1999: 172) define CLT in the following terms:

CLT is based on the premise that successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of the language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings. *This approach to teaching emphasizes the communication of meaning over the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms* (emphasis added).

In the same vein, Savignon (2002) states that the four components of communicative competence identified by Canale and Swain (1980), grammatical, discourse, sociocultural and strategic competence, are expanded through extensive practice in a wide range of communicative contexts and events. Similarly, Omaggio (2001), another proponent of CLT, recommends an approach to language teaching that prioritizes communicative interaction and creative language practice.

As is evident from the quotations above, CLT emerged in part as a reaction to the emphasis on the formal aspects of language that was prevalent in earlier approaches to language teaching. In CLT meaning dominates structure and form; communicative competence is the goal, and not grammatical competence; contextualization is essential; and errors are considered part of the learning process, and not something to be avoided at all costs (see Finocchiaro and Brumfit 1983, for the characteristics of CLT and the Audiolingual Method). So what is the role of formal instruction in a communicative syllabus? The following sections try to answer this question.

## 3. FOCUS ON MEANING VS. FOCUS ON FORM(S)

There has been a long-standing debate in second language teaching over whether to follow a *synthetic* approach that concentrates on the explicit analysis of the language taught (focus on forms), or an *analytic* one that assumes that languages can be learned implicitly from exposure (focus on meaning).

Earlier approaches to language teaching, from the Grammar Translation Method to the Audiolingual Approach were largely based on synthetic syllabi. In these approaches, the language was seen as the object of study, and linguistic forms were taught explicitly and in isolation. As Long & Robinson (1998: 16) point out, these syllabi were organized around a series of linguistic items or forms that had “no independent reason for existence”.

A plethora of studies during the past 30 years demonstrates that such a narrow approach does not achieve the effects it was supposed to. Consequently, as a reaction to the lack of success of a focus on forms, some theorists, materials developers and teachers decided to turn to a focus on meaning that tacitly assumes that adult learners have the capacity to learn a second or foreign language in basically the same way young children learn their first language (Schwartz 1993; Zobl 1995). This approach considers unnecessary and even undesirable some integral aspects of the synthetic approach, such as the explicit teaching of grammar, error correction, and pattern practice (cf. Krashen and Terrell’s *Natural Approach*).

However, in their extensive research on French immersion programs, Harley and Swain (1984) and Swain (1985) found that ample exposure to meaningful, communicative language was not enough to guarantee high levels of communicative competence. Speakers who had been exposed to years of immersion were able to achieve high levels of proficiency but still remained far from native levels, especially regarding their grammatical competence. Nassaji (1999) argues that an approach in which learners focus only on the message fails to produce adequate language competence. Additionally, research shows that learners who receive formal instruction seem to learn the language at a faster rate than those who do not (see Ellis 1994 for a review).

Early research demonstrated the value of adding communicative activities to otherwise grammar-based instruction (Savignon 1972; Montgomery & Eisenstein 1985). In these studies, students who had communicative practice added to their regular grammar drills systematically outperformed those who did not. Later research has gone a step further in suggesting the value of what Long (1991) calls a ‘focus on form’, i.e. a focus on meaning combined with a focus on forms (Lightbown & Spada 1990; Doughty, 1991; Lightbown 1991; White 1991; White, Spada, Lightbown & Ranta 1991; Doughty & Williams 1998; Harley 1998). The objective of a focus on form lesson is to help learners notice forms in the input by focusing their attention on a linguistic form that occurs in the context of a lesson whose focus is on meaning.

Most proponents of the communicative approach recommend activities that require attention to form in order to maintain meaningful communication (Lee & VanPatten 2003; Nassaji 1999). Savignon (2002: 7) maintains that “while involvement in communicative events is seen as central to language development, this involvement necessarily requires attention to form”. Consequently, a majority of modern language textbooks that claim to follow the communicative approach include a balance of form-focused and meaning-focused activities.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF INPUT

SLA theories today place a special emphasis on the importance of input (Krashen 1985; Gass 1997; VanPatten 1996, 2000, 2003) and on giving the learner the ability to establish a connection between form and meaning. For Gass (1997: 1) input is “perhaps the single most important concept of second language acquisition”. VanPatten (2003: 25) goes even a little further to say that “the discovery of the role of input completely altered the way in which scholars conceptualized how languages are learned”.

We define good input as language that is comprehensible and that the learner has to attend to in order to get a meaningful message. Exposure to good input influences the acquisition of all aspects of a language, from morphology and syntax, to vocabulary, to the sociolinguistic norms of a language community. In a study on the acquisition of address terms by learners of Japanese, Takenoya (1995) examined the way in which these forms of address are presented in textbooks. He found that lack of sufficient input prevented learners from developing the appropriate form-meaning connections even though the textbooks analyzed provided extensive explanations.

Nevertheless, as we saw in the findings reported above by Harley and Swain (1984) and Swain (1985), just being exposed to input is not enough. Nassaji and Fotos (2004: 128) claim that “it is necessary for learners to notice target forms in the input; otherwise they process input for meaning only and do not attend to specific forms, and consequently fail to process and acquire them”, a claim that is also maintained by VanPatten (1996).

Researchers do not always agree on the characteristics of the ideal input (modified, unmodified, comprehensible, etc.) Although that discussion falls outside the scope of the present article, we believe that good input is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition. Learners, therefore, should be exposed to an abundance of good input and given ample opportunities to process it for form and meaning. Effective grammar instruction should be consonant with the role that input has been accorded in recent research on SLA.

#### 5. GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

Should grammar be taught in the communicative classroom? Starting in the 80s and mainly following Krashen’s (1981) distinction between acquisition and learning, many researchers argued that formal teaching of grammar had no effect on the developing system of L2 learners (see De Keyser 1998 and Ellis 2002a for a review of the literature). Explicit grammar instruction was supposed to produce only declarative knowledge that would not be accessible in unplanned production. However, a lot of recent literature in SLA dating back to Long’s (1983) review of the relevant research has supported the benefits of an approach in which there is a place for the explicit teaching of grammar as a way to attain higher levels of language proficiency (Doughty 1991; Norris & Ortega 2000; Ellis 2002b).

The question, then, would not be whether to teach grammar, but how to teach it. Most theorists have now rejected the assumption that the traditional way of teaching grammar through drills and practice has any effect on learners’ communicative competence (Skehan 1996; see Wong & VanPatten 2003 for an overview). However, the latest research has not translated into a redesign of the way in which grammar is

presented in many modern language textbooks. In fact, VanPatten (2002: 111) goes as far as to say that “the types of presentations and grammar practices in the vast majority of contemporary language textbooks, especially foreign language textbooks, are untenable as far as causing acquisition or even promoting it”.

A quick look at almost any foreign language textbook indicates that in most cases the question does not seem to be whether grammar should be explicitly taught. Textbooks almost invariably include sections devoted to grammar explanations and practice. Rather, the question concerns how grammar should be presented. Traditionally this was done in the form of drills. During the 1950s and 1960s, a period in which language instruction was dominated by the Audiolingual Method, mechanical drills were considered essential. During the 1970s meaningful practice was introduced, but mechanical practice still had an important role at least as a prerequisite for communicative practice. Later, with the advent of CLT, teachers and materials developers understood that students needed more opportunities to express their own meaning and open-ended communicative activities started to be considered, at least in principle, a crucial component of language teaching. However, as Lee and VanPatten (2003: 76) point out, the true goal behind many allegedly communicative activities is grammar practice; in those cases, “communication is at the service of grammar rather than the other way around”.

If meaning is paramount in CLT but attention to form is essential for developing accuracy and proficiency, the ideal teaching model would be one that requires attention to form while maintaining meaningful communication. Lee and VanPatten propose Processing Instruction as an approach that focuses on form and meaning and is consistent with what we know about language acquisition. The main difference between this approach and a traditional one is that learners are given the opportunity to process input extensively and develop form-meaning connections before they are asked to produce the target structure in the output. Discourse-based approaches, such as the one proposed by Celce-Murcia (2002) supply learners with abundant examples of contextualized discourse containing the target structure to facilitate the establishment of form-meaning relationships. Task-based approaches (Long 2000) promote learners’ awareness of grammatical forms through communicative activities. Consciousness-raising tasks (Fotos & Ellis 1991; Fotos 1994) in which learners are provided with a grammar problem that they have to solve through meaningful interaction, are also proposed as a way to integrate formal instruction within the framework of CLT.

What all these proposals have in common is their rejection of the traditional way of teaching grammar through mechanical drills that do not require attention to meaning. The following section reviews and explains the types of drills that have been traditionally used in language instruction.

## 6. DRILLS

Wong and VanPatten (2003) evaluate whether drills may be useful/necessary in (a) developing the speaker’s internal linguistic system, and (b) promoting accuracy and fluency. They conclude that drills are not necessary and can even impede acquisition in some cases.

Almost every textbook includes drills or exercises as a way to practice the target grammatical structures. Traditionally these drills have been classified according to the type of response (one/many possible answers; known/unknown to participants) and to

whether or not comprehension is needed in order to complete the drill. Paulston (1972) identified the following continuum of drill types going from the most controlled and convergent type to the most open ended: Mechanical drills → Meaningful drills → Communicative drills.

Mechanical drills are those for which there is only one possible correct response (see Figure 1). Furthermore, responding correctly to the drill does not even require comprehension by the student. In fact, one can substitute words from the drill with nonsense words and still be able to complete it correctly.

Meaningful drills (Figure 2) are those in which the student needs to pay attention to and comprehend the stimulus in order to provide a correct response. Still, meaningful drills are convergent; there is only one correct answer (which is known by all those participating in the exercise) so there is no need for any negotiation of meaning.

<p><b>Completar</b> Completa esta noticia con la forma correcta del pretérito o el imperfecto.</p> <p><b><u>Un accidente trágico</u></b></p> <p>Ayer temprano por la mañana _____ (haber) un trágico accidente en la calle Ayacucho en el centro de Buenos Aires cuando un autobús _____ (chocar) con un carro. La mujer que _____ (manejar) el carro _____ (morir) al instante y los paramédicos _____ (tener) que llevar a su pasajero al hospital porque _____ (sufrir) varias fracturas y una conmoción (<i>concussion</i>) cerebral. Su estado de salud es todavía muy grave. El conductor del autobús _____ (decir) que no _____ (ver) el carro hasta el último (<i>last</i>) momento porque _____ (haber) mucha niebla y _____ (estar) lloviendo. El _____ (intentar) (<i>to attempt</i>) dar un viraje brusco (<i>to swerve</i>), pero _____ (perder) el control del autobús y no _____ (poder) evitar (<i>to avoid</i>) el choque. Según nos informaron, _____ (lastimarse) ningún pasajero.</p> <p><b><i>Completion</i></b> Complete this news clip with the correct form of the preterit or the imperfect.</p> <p><b><u>A Tragic Accident</u></b></p> <p>Early yesterday morning _____ (to be) a tragic accident on Ayacucho Street in downtown Buenos Aires when a bus _____ (to crash) into a car. The woman who _____ (to drive) the car _____ (to die) instantly and the paramedics _____ (to have) to take her passenger to the hospital because she _____ (to suffer) several fractions and a concussion. She is still in critical condition. The bus driver _____ (to say) that he didn't _____ (to see) the car until the last moment because _____ (to be) a lot of fog and it _____ (to be) raining. He _____ (to try) to swerve, but he _____ (to lose) control of the bus and _____ (can, negative) avoid the crash. According to what we were told, none of the bus passengers _____ (to hurt oneself).</p>
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Figure 1. An example of a mechanical drill (¿Cómo se dice...?)

Finally, communicative drills are divergent because they allow more than one correct answer, and they require attention to the stimulus in order to provide a valid response. In addition, the response is not known by all the participants (see Figure 3). Communicative drills come the closest to replicating real-world tasks, but since students are not accountable for the information they exchange, there is no motivation to ensure comprehension through the negotiation of meaning.

<p>Say what you and your relatives normally do by adding the correct form of the missing verbs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mi tía siempre _____ (despertarse) tarde. <i>My aunt always _____ (to wake oneself up) late.</i></li> <li>Yo siempre _____ (levantarse) muy temprano. <i>I always _____ (to get oneself up) very early.</i></li> <li>Mi padre _____ (afeitarse) en el baño. <i>My father _____ (to shave oneself) in the bathroom.</i></li> </ol>
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Figure 2. An example of a meaningful drill. (Vistas)

Paulston (1976) favors a system in which lessons are organized following a progression from more controlled to more open-ended activities. Although her views were expressed almost 30 years ago, most modern foreign language textbooks still follow a similar approach to what she proposed, and mechanical practice is still included as a preliminary step to real communication activities.

Communicative drills are the only ones that approximate real-world communication and require attention to both meaning and form. Mechanical drills are at the opposite end of the spectrum. Our study looks at the rate of mechanical, to meaningful, to communicative drills used in different textbooks as an indication of where the emphasis is in modern textbooks.

## 7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our study tries to answer two fundamental questions: (a) if we consider input to be the building block of acquisition, do modern textbooks give it the treatment that it deserves? And (b) do language textbooks that claim to be communicative give enough weight to activities that promote real communication as opposed to mechanical drills?

## 8. METHODS

### 8.1. *Textbooks*

We chose to look at introductory textbooks in two languages: German and Spanish. We chose four textbooks in each language that have been recently published and that are widely used by university students. These textbooks were chosen because they claim to follow a communicative approach (see figure 4 for the textbooks from each language)

In each textbook we selected two chapters that were representative of the textbook as a whole in terms of their structure and that were far enough into the textbook that students would have learned enough language to engage in truly communicative activities. Combining the two chapters, all textbooks represented the same grammatical

features within the given language.

**In der neuen Wohnung.** Ergänzen Sie die Fragen mit **wo** oder **wohin** und die Antworten mit der passenden Präposition und mit Akkusativ oder Dativ!

_____ steht die Zimmerpflanze? S1: Wo steht die Zimmerpflanze?	_____ Bücherregal. (m) S2: Auf dem Bücherregal.
1. _____ springt die Katze?	_____ Couch. (f)
2. _____ hängt Antje das Poster?	_____ Küchentür. (f)
3. _____ steht der Herd?	_____ Küche. (f)
4. _____ geht die offene Tür?	_____ Küche. (f)
5. _____ steht der Karton mit den Büchern?	_____ Bücherregal. (m)
6. _____ legt Kurt den Teppich?	_____ Couch. (f)
7. _____ steht die Stehlampe?	_____ Sessel. (m)
8. _____ huscht die Maus?	_____ Couch. (f)
9. _____ hängt Uli das Landschaftsbild?	_____ Schreibtisch. (m)
10. _____ hängt der Picasso?	_____ Couch. (f)
11. _____ liegt der Ball?	_____ Schreibtisch. (m)
12. _____ krabbelt das Baby?	_____ Schreibtisch. (m)
13. _____ stellt Helga den Papierkorb?	_____ Schreibtisch. (m)
14. _____ stellt Thomas die Vase?	_____ Zimmerpflanze (f) und _____ Radio. (n)
15. _____ hängt der Kalender?	_____ Picasso und _____ Landschaftsbild. (n)

**In the new apartment.** Fill in the questions with **wo** (where) or **wohin** (where to) and the answers with the correct preposition and with accusative or dative.

_____ is the houseplant? S1: Where is the houseplant?	_____ bookshelf. S2: On the bookshelf.
1. _____ jumps the cat?	_____ couch.
2. _____ does Antje hang the poster?	_____ kitchen door.
3. _____ is the stove?	_____ kitchen.
4. _____ goes the open door?	_____ kitchen.
5. _____ is the box with the books?	_____ bookshelf.
6. _____ does Kurt lay the carpet?	_____ couch.
7. _____ is the standing lamp?	_____ armchair.
8. _____ does the mouse scurry?	_____ couch.
9. _____ does Uli hang the landscape picture?	_____ desk.
10. _____ does the Picasso hang?	_____ couch.
11. _____ is the ball?	_____ desk.
12. _____ does the baby crawl?	_____ desk.
13. _____ does Helga put the trash can?	_____ desk.
14. _____ does Thomas put the Vase?	_____ house plant. and _____ radio.
15. _____ does the calendar hang?	_____ Picasso and _____ landscape picture.

Figure 3. An example of a communicative drill. (Treffpunkt Deutsch)

German textbook chapters chosen covered the use of the verb pairs *stellen/stehe*n, *legen/liege*n, *hängen/hänge*n; the comparative and superlative forms; and prepositions



that require either the dative or the accusative. In Spanish all textbook chapters chosen covered the preterit and imperfect. The chapters were matched on grammatical features so that differences in activity types would not be the result of variance in grammatical features. All the German textbooks are used in first year German courses. Three of the Spanish textbooks are from first year courses while one textbook is used in second year instruction.

German Textbooks
Donahue, F. E. & Watzinger-Tharp, J. (1998). <i>Deutsch Zusammen: A communicative course in German</i> . USA: Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing.
Lovik, T., Guy, J. D. & Cahvez, M. (2002). <i>Vorsprung</i> . Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
Terrell, T. D. et al. (1992). <i>Kontakte: A communicative approach</i> . New York: McGraw-Hill.
Widmaier, E. R., & Widmaier, F. T. (1995). <i>Treffpunkt Deutsch: Grundstufe</i> . Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Spanish Textbooks
Blanco, J. A., Dellinger, M. A., Donley, P., & García, M. I. (2001). <i>VISTAS</i> . Boston: Vista Higher Learning.
Jarvis, A. C., Lebreo, R., & Mena-Ayllón, F. (2002). <i>¿Como se dice...?</i> . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
Martín Peris, E., Sans Baulenas, N., & Caballero Martín, J. (2003). <i>Gente</i> . Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
O'Donnell, C. C., & Kelly, K. (2003). <i>Portales: Comunidad y Cultura</i> . Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.

Figure 4. Textbooks analyzed.

## 8.2. Activities

To assess the implementation of communicative language practice, all the activities within the selected chapters were examined and assigned to categories within three levels. The first level looked at whether the activity in question was an input or an output activity. If the activity was deemed to be an output activity, then we submitted it to the second level of classification. In this level we determined whether the activity was an example of communicative language practice or a drill. If it was a drill then it went through the third and final level of classification. Here, the activity was assigned to the type of drill based on Paulston's (1972) categories: mechanical, meaningful, or communicative.

For an activity to be considered input, it cannot require the production of the target structure. An example of a typical input activity is shown in figure 5. An output activity, conversely, is defined as one that requires the production of the target structure. An example for the same target feature is shown in figure 6.

We classified all non-drill output activities as what Aski (2003) calls *communicative language practice*. According to Aski, communicative language practice "requires [...] attention to meaning in order to generate form. It is not possible to answer randomly and there is no pattern to follow. Typical examples are task-based, information gap, and role playing activities that give learners the opportunity to negotiate meaning" (Aski 2003: 61). Figure 7 shows an example of communicative language practice. Drills, on the other hand, require manipulation of form without negotiation of meaning. In drills students use a predictable formula to create grammatically correct sentences.

**Wohin gehen Karl und Stefan?** Finden Sie für jede Situation einen passenden Ort.

Wenn sie Durst haben, gehen sie in die Kneipe.

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Wenn sie Durst haben, gehen sie              | auf den Fußballplatz. |
| 2. Wenn sie billig essen wollen, gehen sie      | in den Hörsaal.       |
| 3. Wenn sie gut essen wollen, gehen sie         | in die Mensa.         |
| 4. Wenn sie einen Film sehen wollen, gehen sie  | in die Oper.          |
| 5. Wenn sie ein Buch suchen müssen, gehen sie   | in die Kneipe.        |
| 6. Wenn sie Fußball spielen wollen, gehen sie   | in das Kino.          |
| 7. Wenn Karl kochen will, geht er               | in das Restaurant.    |
| 8. Wenn Stefan Musik hören will, geht er        | in die Bibliothek.    |
| 9. Wenn sie eine Vorlesung haben, gehen sie     | in die Küche.         |
| 10. Wenn sie auf eine Hochzeit gehen, gehen sie | in die Kirche.        |

**Where do Karl and Stefan go?** Find the correct place for each situation.

If they are thirsty, they go to the bar.

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. If they are thirsty, they go           | to the soccer field.  |
| 2. If they want to eat for cheap, they go | to the lecture room.  |
| 3. If they want to eat well, they go      | to the cafeteria.     |
| 4. If they want to see a movie, they go   | to the opera.         |
| 5. If they need to find a book, they go   | in the bar.           |
| 6. If they want to play soccer, they go   | to the movie theater. |
| 7. If Karl wants to cook, he goes         | to the restaurant.    |
| 8. If Stefan wants to hear music, he goes | to the library.       |
| 9. If they have a lecture, they go        | in the kitchen.       |
| 10. If they go to a wedding, they go      | in the church.        |

Figure 5. An example of an input activity. (Vorsprung)

## 9. RESULTS

From the four German texts, three hundred and fifty-seven activities were analyzed. Of these activities, ninety-six, or twenty-seven percent, were input activities; while two hundred and sixty-one, or seventy-three percent, were output activities. See Figure 8. The four Spanish texts followed a similar pattern. Of the eight hundred and forty activities analyzed, two hundred and thirty-six of them, or twenty-eight percent, were input activities and six hundred and four of them, or seventy-two percent, were output activities. See Figure 9.

If an activity was assigned to the drill category, it was further defined as being either a mechanical, meaningful, or communicative drill. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the three types of drills.

The output activities were then classified as drill or non-drill activities. In the German texts, of the two hundred and sixty-one output activities, one hundred and forty-three, or fifty-five percent, were drill activities and one hundred and eighteen, or forty-five percent, were communicative language practice (see Figure 10). In the Spanish texts, of the six hundred and four output activities, two hundred and twenty-five, or thirty-seven percent, were drill activities; while three hundred and seventy-nine, or sixty-three percent, were communicative language practice (see Figure 11).

Minidialogue. Wohin? Ergänzen Sie den Artikel. Nützliche Wörter: der Baum, das Dach, der Fluß, die Stadt, der Stuhl.

1. ERNST: Wohin fährst du, Mutti?  
FRAU WAGNER: Ich fahre in \_\_\_\_\_ Stadt.

Figure 6. An example of an output activity. (Kontakte)

A further classification of the drill activities shows that for the German texts, out of the one hundred and forty-three drills, twenty-three, or sixteen percent, were mechanical; sixty-four, or forty-five percent, were meaningful; and fifty-six, or thirty-nine percent, were communicative (see Figure 12). For the Spanish texts, out of the two hundred and twenty-five drills analyzed, eighty-two, or thirty-six percent, were found to be mechanical; ninety, or forty-percent, were found to be meaningful; and fifty-three, or twenty-four percent, were found to be communicative (see Figure 13).

**Partnerarbeit.** Sie sind Zimmerkollegen/innen. Stellen Sie sich vor, dass einer von Ihnen gerade einen neuen Job bekommen hat. Sie werden jetzt etwas mehr Geld verdienen und wollen ein Zimmer in Ihrer Wohnung neu einrichten. Ihre Wohnung hat drei Zimmer und Küche und Bad.

1. Schreiben Sie auf ein Stück Papier, was diese drei Zimmer sind (z.B. Esszimmer, Wohnzimmer).
2. Entscheiden Sie dann, welches Zimmer Sie neu einrichten wollen.
3. Beschreiben Sie zuerst, was schon in diesem Zimmer ist. Wo *stehen* die Dinge?
4. Besprechen Sie dann, was Sie neu kaufen wollen. Wohin *stellen* Sie die neuen Dinge?
5. Lesen Sie der Klasse vor, wie das Zimmer aussehen soll.

**Partner Work.** You are roommates. Pretend that one of you has just received a new job. You will earn more money and so you want to redecorate a room in your apartment. Your apartment has three rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom.

1. Write down on a piece of paper what the three rooms are (e.g. dining room, living room).
2. Then decide which room you want to redecorate.
3. First describe what is already in the room. Where do the things *stand*? (Where are the things in the room?)
4. Then describe what new things you will buy. Where will you *put* the new things?
5. Read to the class how the room will look.

Figure 7. An example of communicative language practice. (Deutsch Zusammen)

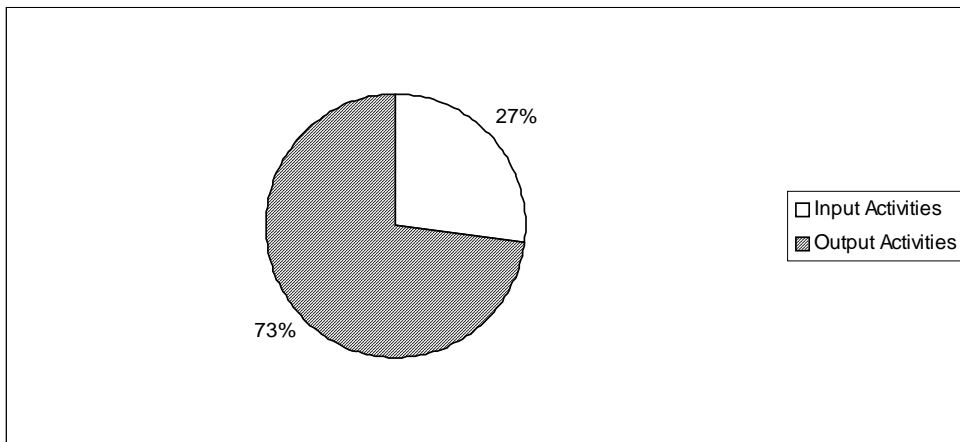


Figure 8. German Input vs. Output Activities

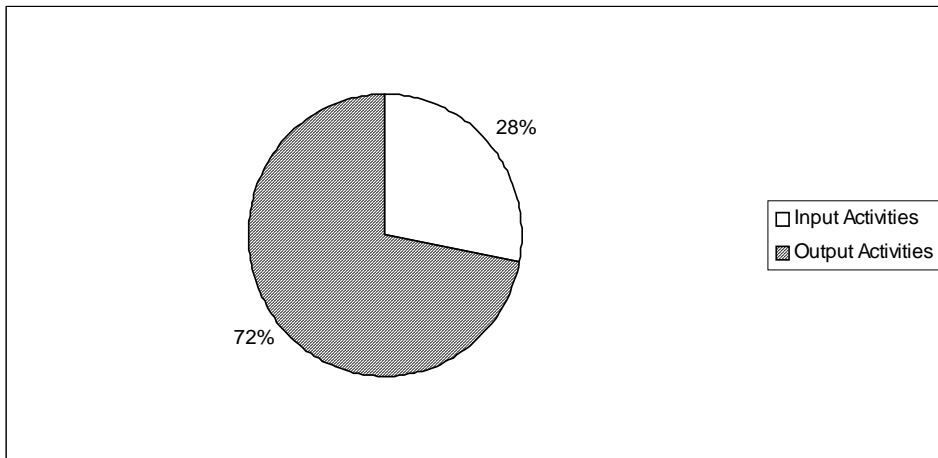


Figure 9. Spanish Input vs. Output Activities

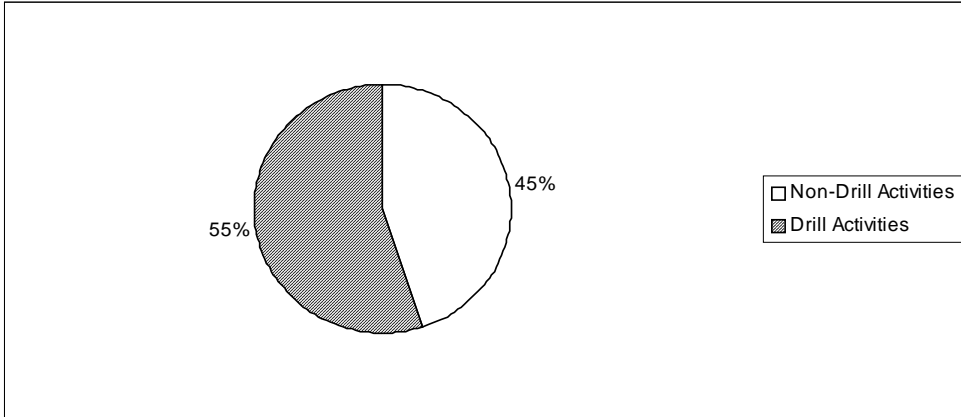


Figure 10. German Drill vs. Non-Drill Activities

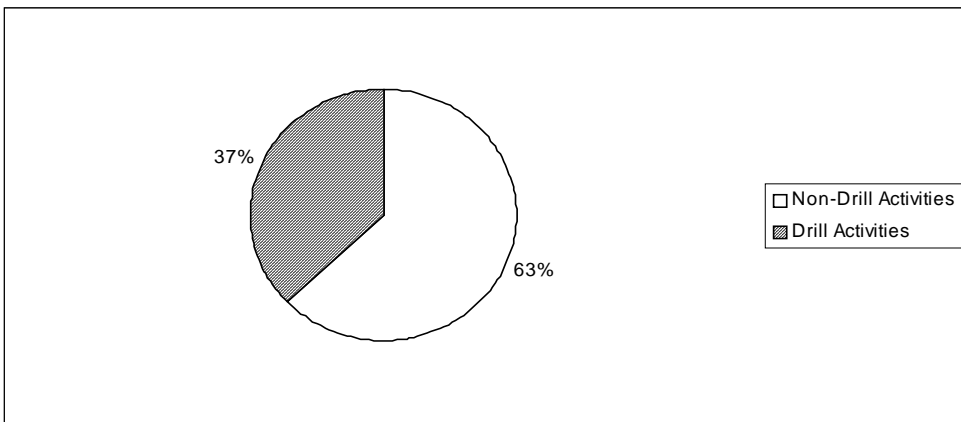


Figure 11. Spanish Drill vs. Non-Drill Activities

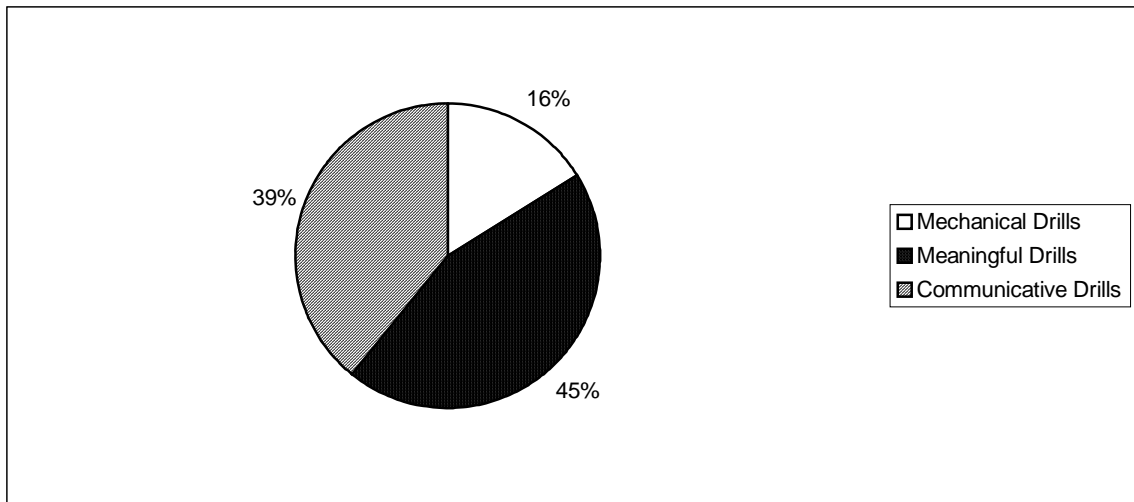


Figure 12. German Drills

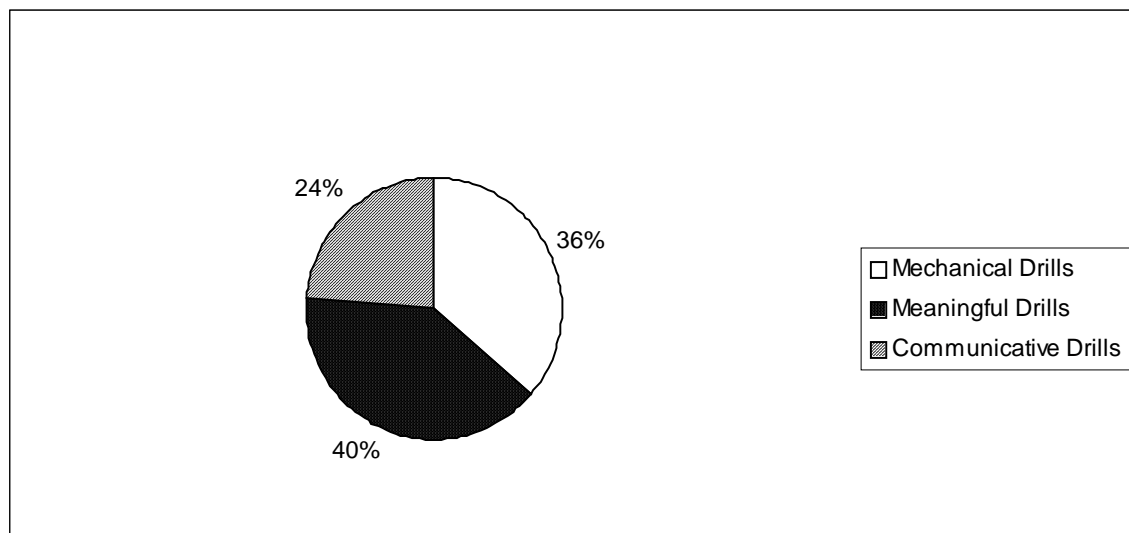


Figure 13. Spanish Drills

## 10. DISCUSSION

Our first research question addressed the role of input in current language textbooks. Based on the results reported above we can say that the implied notion of traditional grammar instruction that one learns to produce by producing is still very much alive. Only about a fourth of the activities examined can be classified as input activities. The grammatical features that we analyzed all represent cases of structures in which there is a complex form-meaning relationship that usually presents difficulties for acquisition. However, in most of the activities analyzed students are asked to produce the structure immediately after it is presented.

VanPatten (1996) proposes a model of language acquisition in which production is only the final step in a process. This process starts with the input, which, together with some other internal factors, is responsible for the creation of the learner's developing system. This internal system, in turn, is the "raw material" to which the learner has access for producing output.

In VanPatten's model output has only a facilitative role. It allows learners to notice gaps in their developing systems and perhaps helps them become more fluent. If we agree that this model is valid, it is quite obvious that the way most textbooks are designed today, with much of the emphasis on output at the expense of input, does not actually contribute to language acquisition.

The answer to our second research question about the role of 'real' communication in current language textbooks is more promising. Although the results of our study indicate that drills in general still have a prominent place in most textbooks, the reality is that in the ones we examined non-drill activities receive more attention than was common in the past. It also seems evident from the results that purely mechanical drills are slowly being replaced by meaningful or communicative drills. Still, as we said in our discussion of the different types of drills, we agree with Aski (2003) that the only type of activity that is truly conducive to real communication in the classroom is what she calls communicative language practice. As a practical aid for language teachers we have included in our appendix a set of guidelines that can be used to turn many of the typical communicative drills that are found in foreign language textbooks into real communicative language practice.

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## APPENDIX

### GUIDELINES FOR EXPANDING ACTIVITIES

Experience shows that when students are held accountable for the information they exchange they are motivated to negotiate meaning and exchange information. Many communicative drills can be modified in the classroom to require meaningful communication. The application of the following guidelines, illustrated with an example, represents a way in which communicative drills can be expanded to become communicative language practice activities.

1. Students should be responsible and accountable for information exchanged. This motivates students to negotiate meaning.
2. Students should engage in preparation activities before participating in the output activity: input activities, brainstorming, etc.
3. Activities should be presented in an organized but not rigid manner; students should have flexibility with the language they can use to accomplish the task.
4. The activities should be presented within a meaningful context and students should be able to connect them with their own personal experience.

An example of a typical communicative drill is found in Figure 14. This drill requires students to ask questions about the weekend activities of their classmates. While the answers to these questions are open-ended, this is still a drill because the students are not accountable for the information they receive from their partners about the weekend activities; they merely move on to the next question. Using the guidelines for expanding activities, we will look at how to create a communicative language practice activity from this drill.

The first consideration in expanding an activity is how to make the students responsible for the information they exchange. This can be done in this activity in several ways. The students could treat the questions like a survey. After all students have been polled regarding their weekend activities, the results can be compiled and listed on the board. Then the students can identify which activity was most popular among their classmates.

The third guideline calls for an organized, but flexible, environment in which the communicative language practice is carried out. For this expansion, the students would pair up with a partner and ask that partner about one thing he or she did over the weekend. The table would require such information as where did their partner go, at what time, with whom, what they did, saw, etc. at that particular activity. In this way, the students have some flexibility in how they obtain the information because the focus is on obtaining the information, not on producing a particular grammatical structure. After they have finished discussing their weekend activities, each partner writes a paragraph about the other student's weekend activity and shares it with the class.

While output activities are important, the second guideline is a reminder that preparation activities that do not require production are necessary to prepare students for output activities. Students could brainstorm activities they have done or would like to do on the weekend. The students could each make a list, working individually, and then form small groups to share and discuss their lists and finally share their combined list of activities with the entire class. Another possibility would be to introduce the topic by having the students read a paragraph about several students' weekend activities. After reading the paragraph they could complete a worksheet or a listening activity where they

identified which student participated in which activity. This could be designed as a structured input activity where the student must focus on the form of the verb in the question to understand which student's activity is being addressed.

There are endless possibilities of how an activity can be expanded using these guidelines. Hopefully, they will be a useful tool to help language teachers bridge the gap between textbook design and SLA research in developing communicative activities for the classroom.

*Interview a classmate to find out what s/he did over the weekend. When you finish with the following questions, switch roles. Answers should be given in complete sentences.*

Durante el fin de semana...

Over the weekend...

1. ¿Estudiaste para un examen?  
*Did you study for a test?*
2. ¿Hiciste la tarea para tus clases?  
*Did you do your homework for your classes?*
3. ¿Saliste con tus amigos?  
*Did you go out with your friends?*
4. ¿Fuiste a una fiesta?  
*Did you go to a party?*
5. ¿Fuiste a un baile?  
*Did you go to a dance?*
6. ¿Viste una película?  
*Did you see a movie?*
7. ¿Comiste en un restaurante?  
*Did you eat at a restaurant?*
8. ¿Hablaste con tus padres por teléfono?  
*Did you talk with your parents on the phone?*
9. ¿Dormiste tarde?  
*Did you sleep in?*
10. ¿Fuiste de compras?  
*Did you go shopping?*

Figure 14. A communicative drill