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HANDBOOK FOR LANGUAGE DETECTIVES

LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

University College
SJÆLLAND



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16. Interlanguage analysis

Firstly, we will introduce a model that sums up what you have learnt in the previous chapters and discuss some of the elements from the model in detail, by considering the interpretation of interlanguage analysis. We will then consider the interlanguage more closely to see that a particular learner's interlanguage is systematic, dynamic and variable. We take an optimistic view of the interlanguage to see what a particular learner is capable of doing or will be capable of doing in the future (additive approach) rather than only the negative view of what the learner is not capable of (subtractive approach). We will discuss how "errors" (incorrect hypotheses) are evidence of interlanguage development. The narrow focus on errors in error analysis back in the 1960s has today been replaced by an analysis of errors *and* successes. We will then discuss how teachers can use the analysis and interpretation to help learners improve. Afterwards there is a short discussion on how to give feedback to learners in practice and how learners will benefit from working on their problems after having been given feedback by their teachers. Finally, you are asked to analyze and compare learners' texts by using the whole model.

16.1. Before reading this chapter

Exercise 1.

1. What do you already know about interlanguage and interlanguage analysis?
2. Why are errors not always negative – how can they be signs of development?
3. How can English teachers use interlanguage analysis and interpretation to help learners develop?
4. Should teachers correct all errors? Why/why not?
5. What do you think is most important in writing? Put the topics below in the right order depending on how important they are. Start with the most important one. Which criteria did you use¹?
 - a. Correct grammar
 - b. Length
 - c. Originality of ideas
 - d. Spelling
 - e. Punctuation
 - f. Neat handwriting
 - g. A good range of vocabulary
 - h. Complex and well-structured sentences
 - i. Good organisation with introduction, body, and conclusion
 - j. Keeping to the title
6. What would you correct in a learner's essay – and what does this depend on?

7. What do you remember from school about getting feedback on your papers?
8. How did you best learn from the feedback?
9. How do you plan to correct papers and give feedback?

Eye opener

Here is a task². Do what the instructions say.

TASK 19

Grade the mistakes in the following sentences from 5 - 0 where 5 is a very serious mistake, and 0 is no mistake at all. You must define for yourself what 'serious' means.

1. She asked me where did I come from.
2. The book was into the bag.
3. The problem was that the door wasn't keyed.
4. He's fond of cooking himself and for me.
5. A few people and I was looking for the mysterious monster.
6. Did you went there alone?
7. The people panicked and some of them runed away.
8. She was about herself very sensible.
9. We visit Torquay last weekend.
10. I like the city very much, because it is lively and expected about the future.

16.2. How to analyze a learner's text

16.2.1. Errors

The interlanguage is constantly changing – it is dynamic and temporary³: a learner changes his mental grammar continuously based on his experience with language and the feedback he gets. Therefore errors are a sign of development. In the long run, it is better to be a risk taker who tries out many different language features than to play it safe and use very simple English to avoid making mistakes. A risk taker that forms and

tests many hypotheses, resulting in developmental errors, is more likely to later successfully speak and write more complex English. Inconsistency or variability does not always reflect sloppiness but often tells us that the learner is currently learning a specific language issue but does not master it completely yet.

16.2.2. Hypotheses

Each learner has a systematic, individual interlanguage. It is systematic, because the learner has a system within his mental grammar concerning his right and wrong hypotheses. Obviously we do not normally have access to the learners' thoughts and hypotheses when they were writing the text, so we do not always know whether an error is simply due to sloppiness (e.g. typos) or whether we are right about our interpretation of the analysis. However, we can still attempt to guess why the mistakes were made based on signs and evidence in the learners' hypotheses.

It is useful to distinguish between at least the following types of wrong hypotheses, which are related to the communication strategies a learner uses to express meaning:

1. **Transfer** (interference) from the learner's first language is common, especially in the early stages of language learning. These are also known as *interlingual* problems, problems *between languages*. When learners have Danish as their mother tongue, the transfers are also known as **Danicisms**. A transfer/Danicism is not a type of error but an explanation behind a wrong hypothesis.

Typical transfers could be false friends, wrong word order of S+V+C, inflecting uncountable nouns as countable and the use of lower case letters in nationality words. Transfer errors can also come from other languages than L1, e.g. many learners who start learning German suddenly write *sie* instead of *she*, *while* (German *weil*) instead of *because*, and *become* instead of *get* (German *bekommen*). When teaching bilingual learners of English whose mother tongue is different from Danish, the teacher does not necessarily know this L1 but may still detect some patterns and ask the learners about how they would say it in their mother tongue to make them compare languages and be conscious of differences and similarities.

It is important to stress that explaining language problems as transfers does not mean a return to Behaviourism and the discussion of bad habits in Contrastive Analysis. Interlanguage analysis considers transfers to be signs of the learner's experimentation with English. They are only some of the strategies we use to communicate. Often the transfers work well since Danish and English are both Germanic languages. A guess based on the learner's L1 is often a better guess than a random guess, so L1 is a great resource.

However, in a classroom with learners whose L1 is the same, it can be difficult to discover incorrect transfers since the learners will be able to understand each other's ways of making English expression based on their L1. As learners fine-tune their language, they therefore sometimes need comparative grammars and consciousness raising activities to discover that the transfers do not always work.

2. **Wrong hypotheses within English** make up the other main type. They are also called *intralingual* problems, *intra* meaning *inside*. So these are developmental problems within the foreign language due to faulty or partial learning. Learners of different linguistic backgrounds all seem to make the same types of errors. Sometimes such mistakes can be traced to the learning context - to what has been taught in lessons, e.g. the overuse of the continuous perspective can be explained as an exaggerated focus on this in the early English teaching.

Sometimes we distinguish between two types of intralingual problems but they are often difficult to separate:

- a. **Generalization:** using a language feature too much in a context where it should not be used.
Examples could be using the regular past tense ending *-ed* on irregular verbs or the regular plural *-s* in irregular nouns or using the continuous perspective when it is not needed. The famous *-s* on 3rd person singular verbs in the present tense is often also a generalization error.
- b. **Simplification:** simplifying language, maybe to avoid taking risks. E.g. in the early stages of learning English, learners tend to use only the present tense. Using very general words such as *good* and *bad* also exemplifies simplifications.

Sometimes a learner forms hypotheses that cannot be easily categorized. E.g. the famous 3rd person *-s* problem can be understood in various ways. When a learner uses it too often it is a question of generalization. On the other hand, when he leaves it out, it is a question of simplification. In other words, one grammatical problem can be a sign of a variety of hypotheses.

16.2.3. What to focus on

Exercise 2.

1. Discuss which errors in particular you would help a learner with and why?
Here are some criteria:

- All errors ↔ only some types of errors.
- Many occurrences of the same problem.
- What you recently taught.
- Problems that disturb meaning.
- Basic problems.
- Errors that reflect interlanguage development: variability - sometimes the learner gets it right and sometimes he does not.
- Problems you and the learner previously decided he should focus on.
- Other criteria?

2. What does your choice depend on?

- Your language view and language acquisition view?
- The individual learner, his personality and his level? E.g. consider a weak

learner in Year 7 compared to a strong learner in Year 9 right before the written exam or a learner in Year 5 compared to a grown-up in evening class.

- Other reasons?

When analyzing a learner's language, it is useful to be encouraging and positive instead of handing back an essay full of red ink that will not result in very motivated learners. If instead the teacher is selective and only corrects a few types of errors (i.e. 2-4), the learners will hopefully feel that the work-load is more manageable. What you decide to correct probably depends on your language view and language acquisition view. If you have a social constructivist or cognitive language acquisition view, you are likely to focus on problems that showed interlanguage development in your analysis. This can be seen when the learner sometimes gets it right and sometimes wrong. If the learner makes the same mistake all the way through and never gets it right, he is probably not ready to learn it yet since he is not forming any hypotheses about this issue. A high frequency of the same mistake is therefore not necessarily a justifiable focal point. The teacher can support the grammaring process by preparing specific activities aimed at a particular learner by turning his attention to the specific area, e.g. by using some of the activities in the relevant chapter in this grammar.

Being interested in helping learners communicate something meaningfully, teachers with a functional and communicative language view will also be interested in helping the learner with errors that disturb meaning. In contrast, teachers with a structuralist language view tend to mainly focus on "basic problems" regarding formal grammar, such as Subject-Verbal agreement or the use of the *to*-infinitive after a preposition instead of the *-ing* form. Often, however, such formal problems do not disturb the meaning and are therefore not to be focused on first. The teacher would need to limit his advice to 2-4 areas so that it will not seem too overwhelming.

Unfortunately, making detailed analyses and interpretations of learner's texts, such as the example we are going to present to you, is not always possible for busy teachers to do with every text they receive. In the real school environment, a teacher may teach perhaps three classes of 25 pupils and do not have the time. Instead, it may be possible to make a thorough analysis once a year to keep track of the progression of individual learners.

Being able to analyze interlanguage is, however, an important part of the learning process of developing from being a student of English into a teacher of English. Therefore, the more thoroughly you analyze learners' texts now, the more you will automatize and the more easily you will discover positive points in a text and also the areas of interlanguage development, so that when reading learners' texts as a qualified teacher you can better help and assess the learners' progress.

16.3. A model of interlanguage analysis

There are several ways of analyzing a learner's text; the model below is our proposal of how it can be done.

The Danish Ministry of Education publishes 'Vejledning til prøverne i faget engelsk'. These guidelines can also be used for analyzing learners' texts.

The model has this structure:

A. CONTEXT

B. CONTENT

C. ANALYSIS

1. Text level: Grammar across sentences
2. Grammar at sentence level
 - a. Sentence structure
 - b. Group structure
 - c. Punctuation
3. Grammar below sentence level
 - a. Vocabulary and idioms
 - b. Spelling

D. INTERPRETATION OF THE ANALYSIS

E. ADVICE, HELP AND FEEDBACK

You will find a more elaborate version of the model further below.

The model is based on the structure in the previous chapters of this book and the purpose of it is to support the learner's development. The model reflects that there are many elements we need to consider. When we analyze a learner's text we should not limit the analysis to the FORM dimension nor to sentence level only, as was traditionally done; we must look at both text level, sentence level and below-sentence level to find out how successfully the learner is able to communicate and we must consider all three dimensions: MEANING, FORM and USE.

When analyzing a learner's texts, we must remember that the learner has put a lot of effort into writing it, so we should try to be positive. Before making a detailed analysis, it is important to read the whole text and examine how the context of the writing influences the outcome and to assess the content. Only then do we start the actual analysis, starting from a global text perspective, working through paragraph level and sentence level down to the smaller entities of language below sentence level. After the descriptive analysis we interpret the analysis to find out how successful the learner has been in writing. We attempt to interpret which hypotheses the learner has formed. Based on this, we finally discuss what to focus on with this particular learner and why and how to give advice and feedback. In fact, you have met this procedure many times in the previous chapters in the exercises in relation to learner language and wrong hypotheses:

- a. Identify and categorize: find the problem (identify) and say what kind of problem it is (categorize).

- b. Correct: say what we would say instead.
- c. Explain: say why we would say this instead.
- d. Interpretation: interpret the problem – why did the learner make the error?

Please note that due to the limits of this grammar we do not always give the full grammatical explanation in the analysis below. Several grammatical topics could appear in several places in the model, e.g. pronouns, articles, punctuation and the axes of orientation.

A. CONTEXT

- In which context did the learner write the text (e.g. exam situation) and does this influence the text?
- Did the learner know about the topic in advance and did he use this knowledge?
- Does he use any learning strategies while writing the text, e.g. finding information on the internet, asking people, reading texts and using various aids?
- Does the learner use the material provided (if required)?

B. CONTENT

- Does the learner answer the task given?
- Is he able to communicate what he intends to say: does he express knowledge, attitudes, feelings, experience and imagination?
- How cognitively difficult/simple is the text: does he give examples, put ideas into perspective, evaluate and conclude?
- Does the learner use knowledge of culture in English-speaking countries (if required)?

C. ANALYSIS

1. Text level: Grammar across sentences

- a. Is there an interesting and appropriate title or headline?
- b. What is the communicative situation and is the learner conscious about it?
 - Who is the writer, what is his message and who is the receiver of the text?
 - What is the genre and does the learner follow the particular characteristics of the genre regarding e.g. structure and layout?
 - Recount
 - Narrative
 - Report
 - Procedure
 - Discussion
 - A mixture of some of these
- c. Is the level of style appropriate regarding the communicative situation?

E.g. you could examine the vocabulary, sentence structure, punctuation etc.
- d. Coherence and cohesion

i. Text level:

- Does the learner stick to the same general idea/topic/storyline all the way through his text ("Den røde tråd") or does he associate?
- Is there an intro, a body and a conclusion (depending on the genre)?
- Is the learner explicit or implicit: does he leave out so many holes that the reader cannot fill them and needs to guess too much?

ii. Paragraph level:

- Has the text been clearly graphically divided into paragraphs?
- Does each paragraph make up a clear part of the whole and is the number of paragraphs adequate?
- How are the paragraphs linked? E.g. does he use Linking Circumstantials such as *however*, *firstly*, *lastly* and *nevertheless*?

iii. Sentence level:

- Which cohesion devices does the learner use and is he able to vary them (see the list below); how correct is he compared to the complexity of cohesive devices?

HERE IS A LIST OF EXAMPLES OF COHESION DEVICES; MOST OF THEM CAN BE CONSIDERED AT ALL THREE LEVELS (TEXT, PARAGRAPH AND SENTENCE):

- The information principle: Topic + new information
- Conjunctions:
 - Co-ordinating conjunctions only: *and*, *or*, and *but*
 - Any problems with parallel constructions ("apples and oranges")?
 - Sub-ordinating: *because*, *when*, *if*, *how*, *as*, *that*, *since* etc.
- Linking Circumstantials: *nevertheless*, *on the other hand*, and *in addition...*
- Articles: *a* – *the*.
- Pronouns: missing, too many or wrong so that the reader gets confused?
- Tense: does the learner use one general axis of orientation or switch between the present and the past axes – and is this appropriate or confusing?
- Circumstantials of time and place: *yesterday*, *last Monday*, and *in the UK*? E.g. do they support the use of tense?
- Vocabulary: Does the learner use synonyms or other means?
- Punctuation and layout: does the punctuation support the meaning of the text or is it disturbing?

2. Grammar at sentence level

a. Sentence structure

- How simple/complex is the sentence structure and is he able to vary it?
- How does the sentence structure fit the communicative situation?
- Do the sentences start the same way, e.g. always the Subject first, or is there variation?

- Does he mainly write simple independent clauses or does he include all three types of sub-clauses (circumstantial, post-modifying (e.g. relative) and nominal)?
- Does he mainly use finite sub-clauses or is he already able to use non-finite sub-clauses?
 - In the non-finite sub-clauses: is the reader able to find the implied Subjects of the *-ing* forms or does he use dangling participles?
- Is he able to use the proper word order:
 - Subject-Verbal regarding straightforward word order or inversion?
 - The position of Circumstantials?
- Is he able to use Subject – Verbal agreement?
- Does he use a finite Verbal in all independent clauses – or does he e.g. use a non-finite form only?
- Is he able to use verbs correctly in relation to verb patterns, e.g. *-ing* ↔ infinitive or including IO when necessary?
- How correct is the learner compared to the complexity of sentences?

b. Group structure:

- How simple/complex is his use of groups?
- Does the learner use Pre-modifiers to make descriptions and actions more precise and vivid: adjectives in the NGs, adverbs in the AdjGs and AdvGs, and auxiliary verbs in the VGs?
- Does he use Post-modifiers to be more precise – e.g. relative clauses in the NGs?
- How appropriate is the use of Pre- and Post-modifiers to the genre?
- Are the FORM, MEANING and USE of groups and word classes correct and appropriate? (see detailed help below)

**HELP FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE FORM, MEANING AND USE
DIMENSIONS OF GROUPS:**

VG and verbs

- Modal verbs**
 - Are the MEANING and USE of modal verbs correct – did he choose the right modal verb?
 - Is the verb form following the modal verb the infinitive?
- The present perfect, the past perfect and the past tenses**
 - Has he used the present perfect and the past perfect correctly in relation to the axes – or does he e.g. overuse the present perfect?
 - Has he used a form of *to be* instead of *to have* as auxiliary (Danicism)?
- The active and the passive**
 - Has he used the passive to create cohesion and to e.g. appear authoritarian and impersonal?
 - Has he used a form of the auxiliary verb *be* followed by the past participle?

NG, nouns, articles and pronouns

- d. The simple versus the continuous perspective
 - Has he only used the continuous perspective when necessary regarding MEANING, e.g. to express action within a limited period of time – or does he overuse it?
 - Has he used a form of the auxiliary verb *be* followed by the *-ing* form?
 - e. Phrasal verbs
 - Has he connected the right verb with the right preposition or adverb to express a particular meaning?
 - Is it appropriate to use phrasal verbs in this communicative situation?
 - f. Dummy-*do*
 - Has he used dummy-*do* when necessary in questions, negations, emphasis or substitutions – or has he overused it?
 - Is the following verb form the infinitive?
 - g. Contractions
 - Is his use of contractions appropriate compared to the communicative situation – or is it e.g. too informal to use contractions here?
 - Is he able to form contractions correctly, e.g. concerning apostrophes?
 - h. The future
 - Is he able to choose the appropriate way of expressing the future depending on the exact meaning?
 - Does he only use the present tense when necessary or does he overuse it?
- a. Can he inflect nouns in the singular and the plural correctly? (FORM)
 - Can he inflect regular and irregular nouns?
 - Is he aware of the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns and the difference in meaning?
 - b. The genitive
 - Does he use the genitive e.g. to express possession?
 - Does he use the *of*-genitive and the *s*-genitive appropriately and correctly?
 - c. Articles and reference
 - Does he use the right articles in front of nouns when necessary in relation to MEANING (reference)?
 - or does he use the definite article in front of uncountable nouns and nouns in the plural in generic reference (MEANING)
 - or does he leave out articles in front of countable nouns in the singular?
 - Does he use the form of the indefinite article (*a/an*) correctly depending on the following word?
 - d. Pronouns

Does he use pronouns correctly in relation to FORM, MEANING and USE?

 - Personal
 - Possessive
 - Reflexive
 - Relative (or does he e.g. use *there* as a relative pronoun or *which* instead of *whose*?)
 - Interrogative
 - Demonstrative
 - Indefinite

AdjG and adjectives

- a. Can he compare adjectives correctly and use the forms appropriately?
- b. Can he distinguish between adjectives and adverbs in relation to their function in sentences and groups?
- c. Can he use adjectives correctly as heads in NGs and does he remember to use a supporting noun or pronoun when necessary? (FORM)

AdvG and adverbs

- a. Can he compare adverbs correctly and use the forms appropriately?
- b. Can he form regular adverbs by adding *-ly* to adjectives and does he know irregular adverbs?
- c. Can he distinguish between adjectives and adverbs in relation to their function in sentences and groups?

PrepG and prepositions

- a. Does he choose the right prepositions depending on meaning?
 - Idiomatic use: in combination with previous adjectives, nouns and verbs
 - Preposition of time and place attached to the following noun
- b. Does he use prepositions when necessary – or should he use more/fewer?
- c. Can he form PrepGs correctly or does he e.g. use the infinitive or *that*-clauses after prepositions (as PC)?

c. Punctuation

- Does the learner use punctuation to help the reader?
- Is he able to use:
 - Full stops correctly? If not, does he need to use more or fewer?
 - Commas correctly? If not, does he need to use more or fewer?
 - Quotation marks in connection with direct speech?
 - Apostrophes in contractions and the genitive of nouns – if not, should he use more or fewer?
 - Other types of punctuation, e.g. dashes, question marks and semicolons?

3. Grammar below sentence level

a. Vocabulary and idioms

- How rich and precise is the learner's vocabulary?
 - Did he use a dictionary (successfully?) to find precise words?
 - How appropriate is his vocabulary in relation to the communicative situation?
- Are there repetitions or does he use synonyms?
- Idioms: does he use fixed expressions and collocations (successfully)?
- Are there any problems with false friends?
- Can he use prefixes correctly?
- Can he use suffixes correctly (e.g. in relation to word classes)?
- How correct is the learner in relation to the complexity of his vocabulary?

b. Spelling

- How correct is the learner regarding high-frequent words and low-frequent words?
- Can he distinguish between spelling and pronunciation or are there any audio-visual problems? You could e.g. look for:
 - homophones
 - words that look or sound almost identical
 - silent letters
 - spelling that reflects wrong pronunciation
- Can he use capital letters correctly?
- Can he spell words in one word or two words?
- Can he spell in relation to morphology (e.g. *y* → *ie*)?

- Is he conscious of spelling regarding American versus British English?
- Does he make typos?
- Sum up: how far has the learner come in his spelling in English?

4. INTERPRETATION OF THE ANALYSIS

1. What is good about the text?
2. Can you detect any variability in the *interlanguage*: sometimes he gets it right and sometimes he is wrong? What does the learner almost master?
3. Which hypotheses can you detect?
 - a. Interlingual: Transfer from other languages (e.g. Danicisms)
 - b. Intralingual:
 - Generalizations
 - Simplifications
4. Does he predominantly have interlingual or intralingual problems?
5. Do any particular language problems disturb the meaning of the text?

5. ADVICE, HELP AND FEEDBACK

1. What is the learner good at?
2. Prioritize what you want to help the learner with and why (e.g. find 2-4 areas)?
 - a. What does the learner almost master?
 - b. Which types of problems are disturbing meaning-wise?
3. How will you help him? Should he consult grammars, dictionaries or make certain activities?

16.4. Analysis

We will now analyze the text *First Impressions* below by using the model of interlanguage analysis presented above.

Here is the script that the learner wrote in the examination after year 10:

1 First Impressions

- 2 I had left Denmark, and come to the USA as an exchange student, I were very confuse. It was so different
- 3 from Denmark. On my second week in my new school, my teacher asks me to write about, how I find the
- 4 school life in the US different from at home in Denmark. I started to write.
- 5 My first day in school, was much confusing. My new parent had toll me about rules and the dress code on
- 6 the school, but I don't think I really understand it until I stood in it. My first thought was oh no, not a hole
- 7 year, I want home. But later that day I change my mind and start to like it.
- 8 First that I head about the dress code I think it was strange, why can I dress me ass I wanted it?! Why can I
- 9 not have my favourite mini skirt on? I talked with the other girls about it. They told my that it is only our self
- 10 to blame, when you arrived with mini skirt an are almost topless, people looked after you and the teacher
- 11 looked, some times girls fell the nearly take on one, an then it is the teacher fault, an they get problems.
- 12 Maybe I shut just learn to live with it. Quickly I had many friends from many different places in the world, on

- 13 away it was us exchange student, we stick together, we were all in the same situation. I think a lot off them
- 14 were a little bit strange, but we came all from different cultures, an were all different in mind. Also the first
- 15 day we have tacking a picture were we all stand, at same age but we looked very different somebody is
- 16 black, whit, have wry eyes, a big nose, clumsy an clever.
- 17 The school life in US is great, nobody walked alone. People were nice and sweat they take care of another.

- 18 At the school there are many activities there are drama club, band, school magazine, football, track and
- 19 field, cheerleading an a community club. In Denmark we go to something after school, and a lot of time we
- 20 don't have company from people at our school. Just looked at a activities like the School Magazine, the read
- 21 about the school, stories, an articles there is great for us to read, the now what there can catch us, they now
- 22 it because they are like us. I think it is totally good idea. I will like to have it like that at home.

- 23 They have rules about absence I real like because if you play truant it is your one responsibility to get the
- 24 homework assignment when he or she is absent.
- 25 If work missed due to suspension or class cutting must be made up, and any student who leaves the school
- 26 without proper authorization may be given a minimum of 1 week of afterschool detention. I like that I think
- 27 it may be a good idea to take the rules home to Denmark. But some times I think it is a little to hard, it is a
- 28 school were you have many of your friends, you shut allowed loitering in the stairways, restrooms and
- 29 around the school. They say, move from class to class, there are now time to stand an talk.
- 30 After the first week, my homesickness was high when the other students ask my I beating aron the bush. I
- 31 had so many thought about taking home, I don't like the hard way the tried us student. In Denmark there
- 32 are room for run amok an go ballistic, but here you shut be so polite all the time. We may not called to the
- 33 teacher with first name, it Mrs. And Miss. And then there surname. I think it is so impersonal.

- 34 Today in my second week, I think it is all right, I have decision about I will make the best out of it, I think it is
- 35 north while. In the started I think I was so well, then I were a little down, an now I think I am on the right
- 36 road. I have learn all the rules: Dress code, classroom rules, absence, loitering. I had many friends, we eat
- 37 "Today's Lunch" every day together. The price is 1.75 dollars and then it can be cheeseburgers with fries or
- 38 chicken nuggets with vegetables or something else. When I com home in a year I think I will bear in mind all
- 39 the rules and looked at them in a different way. I will recommend all my friends to take to the US next
- 40 summer, I think I will get a great year.

A. CONTEXT

The text was written during the written exam after Year 10. This means time pressure may have been important and the learner is likely to be stressed. Also, being in an exam situation means that she is not able to make use of helpful learning strategies such as proper use of the internet and reading additional texts, but she has had access to a dictionary, e.g. she has probably used it to find *wry* (l. 16) and the idiom *play truant* (l. 23), but she could have looked up more precise words as we shall see when we examine her vocabulary.

The learner has clearly been inspired by the material provided, as she has written about spare time activities, the lunch menu, the dress code and rules at school. She often

manages to integrate the information successfully, but on a number of occasions she lifts sentences from the material e.g. in ll. 23-26. She has clearly attempted to integrate *It is the responsibility of the student to get homework assignments when he/she is absent*" (see "Absence" section in the writing task in the web section) into her own writing when she writes: *it is your one responsibility to get the homework assignments* but she has not managed to change the pronouns into *you* in the rest of the sentence and writes *when he or she is absent* (ll. 23-24). In ll. 18-19 she remembers to put an article in front of *Community club* but not so in front of the other activities she has copied from the list *Extra-Curricular Activities – Fall Semester* in the material. In l. 29 she has also attempted to integrate the info about loitering. It would have been better for her to formulate her own sentences; within an exam situation this has a negative influence on the mark.

B. CONTENT

The learner answers the task given quite successfully, since she explains how school life in the US and in Denmark differs. She comments on it, expressing her own opinions and feelings (e.g. concerning the rules). However, she does not compare dress code and lunches - she mainly discusses them and expresses her own opinion. She also uses her imagination, e.g. she imagines how she would have been taught the rules by her new parents and how she would feel homesick. She is able to go into details with examples, e.g. when she writes about the school magazine from the list of activities. She also evaluates the rules and expresses what could be used in Denmark. However, the learner could have expanded l. 7 about how she started to like her stay later that day.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Grammar across sentences

a.-c. Communicative situation and level of style

The learner is told to imagine she is an exchange student in the US and is told to write an exam paper about the differences between school life in the US and Denmark. The communicative situation is unclear in the exam question: the intended readers must be the teacher in the US - and perhaps her classmates, but at the same time there are also other readers, the examiners in Denmark. The learner seems to be conscious of this and has attempted to create background info in the introduction ll. 2-4, in which it is explained to us as to why she is writing. This works as a meta-text. She follows the characteristics of the genre, which is a personal recount, by using an appropriate headline (the one provided), including an introduction, a main section and a conclusion. The level of style is quite adequate, but sometimes it is too informal, e.g. when she uses a question mark and an exclamation mark together (l. 8), when she uses the informal adverb in *totally good idea* (l. 22), when she uses an informal expression *I want home* (l. 7) and when she starts a new sentence with *and* and *but* (e.g. ll. 7 and 33). Her vocabulary is not very precise either and some words belong to the spoken register: *down* (l. 35) or have the wrong connotations: *topless* (l. 10).

d. Coherence and cohesion

i. Text level

The general coherence is quite good since she sticks to the same general idea of comparing school life throughout her text. The intro (ll. 1-4) sets the stage in that she writes *I had left Denmark* (l. 2) to explain the background and later *I started to write* (l. 4) to introduce the text itself. In the main section she first explains about her confusing first day (ll. 5-7), then she discusses dress code (ll. 8-12), friends (ll. 12-17), after school activities (ll. 18-22), and lastly rules about absence and loitering and appropriate language to use when addressing teachers, which she finds too strict and impersonal (ll. 23-33). The latter issue is not mentioned in the material but is her own invention. She is mainly interested in discussing the dress code and the other rules. In the conclusion (ll. 34-40) she imagines to be back in the present in the US, feeling positive about the year ahead of her, accepting the rules and wanting to recommend a year in the US to her friends at home. She also includes how she has made many friends, but then she suddenly introduces information about lunches, perhaps because she feels she has to use as much information as possible from the given material. In general, the introduction fits with the main section and the conclusion. She frames the whole text by the temporal expressions *my first day in school* (l. 5) and *today in my second week* (l. 34). However, there are some holes in the text where the reader is left at a loss e.g. *and a lot of time we don't have the company from people at our school* (ll. 19-20)

ii. Paragraph level

The text is divided into 9 paragraphs and generally the division is helpful and graphically clear, but those starting in ll. 17 and 25 do not skip a line and the one starting in l. 30 is suddenly indented, so she could be more consistent. When it comes to the content of the paragraphs, nos. 2 and 3, which both deal with the dress code, could have been joined. She could have started a new paragraph about friends (ll. 12-17) including the very short paragraph (l. 17). Paragraphs 6 and 7 (ll. 23-29) both deal with rules about absence so these two could be joined into a more general paragraph on other rules than dress code since no. 7 also mentions loitering. As we have already seen, she could have worked more carefully with these paragraphs and, for example, tried to formulate sentences herself instead of copying them and could also have added some more examples and opinions herself.

Paragraphs 8 and 9 are linked well with Circumstantials of time: e.g. no. 8 takes a starting point with *After the first week* and no. 9 starts with *Today in my second week*.

iii. Sentence level

She attempts to use a variety of cohesive devices. She is able to use the information principle, e.g. in *I talked with the other girls about it. They told my...* (l. 9) in which the new information *the other girls* becomes the topic *they* in the following sentence.

She uses co-ordinating conjunctions (*and* and *but*) and also includes a fair number of subordinating conjunctions (*because*, *that*, *until*, *when*, *if*, *how*, *as* and *where*). In gen-

eral she manages to use co-ordinating conjunctions well, but she fails to coordinate the verb forms in ll. 38-39: *I will bear in mind all the rules and looked at them* and there are also parallel problems in l. 16 in which she starts to coordinate adjectives but also includes a Verbal and DO and a NG. She could have written: *some are black or white. Others have slanted eyes or a big nose and others again are clumsy or clever*. She could have used more sub-ordinating conjunctions to make the cohesion clearer, though, e.g. in l. 2 which has two short independent clauses without sub-clauses. She could have connected them by using *because*: *I was very confused because it was so different from Denmark*, which would also solve a punctuation problem. In ll. 13 and 17 she could also have joined the short independent clauses.

She clearly knows that she should use punctuation to help the reader understand her text: full stops and commas, e.g. she knows to use commas in a list (l. 16 and 18) but sometimes her punctuation with regard to direct speech disturbs the meaning: *My first thought was oh no, not a hole year, I want home* (l. 6) (*My first thought was, "Oh, no, not a whole year. I want home."*). She has many run-on sentences in which she leaves out the full stop between two independent clauses as between *different* and *somebody* (l. 15), *sweat* and *they* (l. 17), *that* and *I* (l. 26) and *high* and *when* (l. 30). She also very often uses a comma instead of a full stop, e.g. between *student* and *I* (l. 2), *blame* and *when* (l. 10) and *Magazine* and *the* (l. 20). Sometimes there are disturbing superfluous commas, as in *I had left Denmark, an come* (l. 2) where two coordinated Verbals are separated and in *My first day in school, was* (l. 5) where the Subject has been separated from the Verbal.

She only makes use of the highly frequent Linking Circumstantial *also* (l. 14) so she could work on using more e.g. in the paragraphs about rules of absence, e.g. she could have written: *when you are absent. Furthermore, if students fail to hand in papers.... In addition to that if you leave the school...* (ll. 24-25)

She uses a fair amount of pronouns but sometimes we are not sure what they refer to, e.g. *the(y)* (l. 11), which might refer to *people* or maybe to several teachers, and *they* (l. 11), which probably refers to *teachers*, and *it* in *it is a little to hard* (l. 27), which probably refers to *rules* even though there is a difference in number.

She is a risk taker regarding tenses because her text is quite complex with direct speech, indirect speech, the special intro and the fact that she looks back at her two first weeks and also looks ahead. She clearly is aware of the idea of tenses but she still has a lot to practise. She imagines to be writing from the present perspective, which is clear in the beginning of her conclusion when she uses the present tense: (*today in my second week, I think it is all right, I have decision about I will make the best out of it, I think it is north while*) and in her comment *I don't think* (l. 6) and the passage on after school activities: *are* (l. 22), *go* (l. 19) and *don't have* (l. 20). When she explains what happened during her first two weeks, she should use the past tense. She does so sometimes: *was* (l. 5), *stood* (l. 6), *was* (l. 6), *hea(r)d* (l. 8) and *talked* (l. 9) but several times she uses the present tense instead: *asks* (l. 3), *find* (l. 3) *understand* (l. 6), *change* (l. 7), *think* (l. 8), *can* (l. 8), *is* (l. 9) and *ask* (l. 30). To some extent this is also a problem the other way round because a few times when she should use the present tense (or the imperative), she uses the past instead, e.g. *were* (l. 17) and *looked* (l. 20). It is unclear whether the statement *I don't like...* (l. 31) should be in the

present or in the past. It depends on whether it belongs with the previous sentence or not (punctuation and/or conjunction problem). Her problems with the present and the past tenses are partly due to confusion about direct versus reported speech. She uses the present tense correctly in direct speech: *want* (l. 7) but also uses the present tense in indirect speech: *is* (l. 9). It is not clear whether ll. 10-11 are part of indirect speech or whether they are her own comments. She can also use the past perfect *had left* (l. 2) and *had toll (told)* (l. 5) and usually the present perfect: *have decision* (l. 34) and *have learn* (l. 36) in relation to the MEANING and use of the axes of orientation, but she is not yet fully able to apply the right forms.

She includes several Circumstantials of time and place, such as *to the USA* (l. 2), *On my second week in my new school* (l. 3), *until I stood in it* (l. 6), *First that I heard about the dress code* (l. 8) and *today* (l. 34). Even though there are formal problems with some of these Circumstantials, they help us find out when and where something happens and somehow compensate for her problems with verb tenses.

She also uses vocabulary to make her text cohesive e.g. the following words are related semantically: *rules* and *dress code* (l. 5) and *understand, thought* and *mind* (ll. 6-7). In general she is quite a risk taker when it comes to cohesion, but the meaning is disturbed by tenses, confusing pronouns and punctuation.

2. Grammar at sentence level

a. Sentence structure

She is able to use sub-clauses, but as we have seen already there are also several lines consisting of short independent clauses without sub-clauses. She can use both circumstantial (e.g. ll. 6, 8 and 10) and nominal (e.g. ll. 3, 6, 8 and 9) sub-clauses. She attempts to use relative clauses, which she uses correctly with zero-relatives (l. 23 and 31) and *w(h)ere* (l. 15), but she has problems with *there* (l. 21) and a nominal relative pronoun: *what there* (l. 21), so she does not fully master this type yet.

She varies her sentence structure: sometimes sentences begin with Subjects (ll. 2, 2, 2, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6, 9, 9 and 11) and sometimes with Circumstantials (ll. 3, 7, 8, 10, 11, 11, 12 and 12). She manages word order very well and successfully sticks to straight-forward S-V also when the sentences start with a Circumstantial. The position of Circumstantials is also correct. She almost always includes a finite verb in the independent clauses, except l. 30 (*I beating...*) and then she misses a Verbal in *it (is) Mrs. And Miss* (l. 33). She almost always gets the Subject-Verbal agreement right, but there are a few exceptions: *I were* (l. 2 and 35, but she uses *I was* correctly in l. 35), *there are no(w) time* (l. 29) and *there are room* (l. 32). There are a few other problems with syntax: she uses *recommend* (l. 39) wrongly (should be *recommend going to the US to all my friends*). The IO after *recommend* needs to be a PrepG introduced by *to*. There are two other syntax problems: *Dress me* (l. 8): *dress* does not take a DO (should be *dress alone*) and *it is only our self to blame* (ll. 9-10) (should be *we could only blame ourselves*). As we have already seen, when she copies lines from the material they are sometimes poor in sentence structure (ll. 25-26).

b. Group structure

VGs

We have already discussed the learner's use of the axes of orientation. She can use complex VGs. We have also seen she can use the past and the present perfect almost correctly in relation to the axes, but sometimes she cannot FORM-wise: *have decision* (l. 34) and *have tacking* (l. 15). She should use the past participle *decided* and *taken*. She also has a few other problems with complex VGs regarding the passive: *shut (be) allowed loitering* (l. 28) and the form of the verb after modal verbs, which should be the infinitive: *may not called* (l. 32), *shut (should) allowed* (l. 28) and *will...looked* (l. 39), but she uses the infinitive correctly in *shut...learn* (l. 12), *shut be* (l. 32) *can catch* (l. 21), *may be* (l. 27) and *will make/recommend/get* (ll. 34, 39 and 40). Several times she chooses the right modal verbs MEANING-wise: but she should replace *shut (should)* with *must* or *have to* in l. 32 and *will* (l. 22) (should be *would*).

She is almost able to inflect all irregular verbs correctly in the past tense and the past participle: *left* (l. 2), but there are a few problems with high-frequent verbs: *toll* (l. 5) (*told*, correct in l. 9 though) and *fell* (l. 11) (should be *felt*).

NGs

She is able to use articles, but sometimes forgets them in front of countable nouns: *with mini skirt* (l. 10), *there are _ drama club, _ band...* (l. 18) and *_totally good idea* (l. 22) and wrongly uses the indefinite article with a noun in the plural: *a activities* (l. 20) – but perhaps this is a typo. There is also a problem with generic reference in uncountable nouns: *the-school life* (l. 4 and 20) and a missing definite article: *in (the) US* (l. 17). She can use pre- and post-modifiers in NGs: *my second week in my new school* (l. 3) *favourite mini skirt* (l. 9) and *different places in the world* (l. 12). She only attempts to use one genitive: *teacher fault* (l. 11) and as we have seen, she does not fully master relative clauses. She generally masters the plural of nouns: *girls* (l. 9), *problems* (l. 11) *friends* (l. 12), *places* (l. 12) *cultures* (l. 14) and *activities* (l. 18) but she also has some problems with particular nouns: *parent(s)* (l. 5), *thought(s)* (l. 31), *student(s)* (l. 13 and 31), but she also uses *students* correctly (l. 30).

We have already discussed pronouns in relation to cohesion. She mainly gets the form of personal and possessive pronouns right, but has problems twice with distinguishing between the personal pronoun *me* and the possessive pronoun *my* (ll. 9 and 30), but she is mainly correct (e.g. ll. 3, 5 and 6) so it may just be due to spelling. There are a few other problems with pronouns: the reflexive pronoun *our self* (l. 9) (*ourselves*), the indefinite pronoun *somebody (some)* (l. 15) and relative pronouns: *there* (l. 21) and *what there* (what) (l. 21). Furthermore, she has problems with expressing the general pronoun 'man/en' in English: *one* (l. 11) and *he or she* (l. 24).

AdjGs and AdvGs

She is able to use some Pre-modifiers: *almost topless* (l. 10), *so impersonal* (l. 33) and *a little to hard* (l. 27) but there are also a few formal problems as in *much confusing* (l. 5). She

mixes up adjectives and verbs in *confuse(d)* (l. 2) and adjectives and adverbs in *I real like* (l. 23) (*really like*). Furthermore, there are also many simple groups so she could use more adjectives and especially more adverbs.

PrepGs

She uses many prepositions correctly: *to the USA* (l. 2), *in school* (l. 5) and *at the school* (l. 18) but there are also some problems: *on my second week* (l. 3) (*in/during*), *on the school (at/in/of)* (l. 10), *with mini skirt* (l. 10) (*in a*), *look after* (l. 10) (should be *look/stare at*) and *called to the teacher with first name* (ll. 32-33) (*call the teachers by their first names*). There is a superfluous preposition in *at same age* (l. 15) (*simply the same age*).

She wrongly uses *that*-clauses and infinitives after prepositions: *for run(ning) amok an go(ing) ballistic* (l. 32) and *I have decision about I will make the best out of it* (l. 34) (*I have decided to make the best of it*).

To conclude we can say that she is certainly able to use pre- and post-modifiers, but she also often uses simple groups and there are many different problems within the groups.

c. Punctuation

Above, we saw that her punctuation disturbs the coherence of the text.

3. Grammar below sentence level

a. Vocabulary and idioms

She includes several fine idioms (almost) correctly: *beating aro(u)nd the bush* (l. 30), *run amok and go ballistic* (l. 32), *bear in mind* (l. 38) and *make the best out of it* (l. 34). However, there are also several problems with idioms and collocations: *take on* (l. 11) (could be *touch/grope*), *I stood in it* (l. 6) (should be *I was there*), *what there can catch us* (l. 21) (*what can catch our interest*), *my homesickness was high* (l. 30) (*I was very homesick*), *taking home* (l. 31) (*going home*) and *on the right road* (ll. 35-36) (*track*). She has a tendency to use simple words and to repeat some words quite a lot, e.g. *different*, which is used three times (ll. 14-16) and *I think*, which is used 13 times in the text. Some words are wrong: *read* (instead of *write*, l. 21), *wry* (instead of *slanted*, l. 16) and *a lot of time* (instead of *often*, l. 19). So she could have found more precise words and synonyms e.g. by using dictionaries and the word processor's thesaurus.

b. Spelling

She is able to spell several high-frequent words, but she misspells some of the most frequent words which is confusing because it results in wrong words: *an/and* (but she is also correct e.g. in ll. 7, 18 and 19) and *the/they* repeatedly, and there are also problems with *hole/whole* (l. 6), *as/ass* (l. 8), *shut/should* (ll. 12, 28, 32), *off/off* (l. 13), *where/were* (l. 15), *tacking/taking* (l. 15, but she is correct in l. 31), *whit/white* (l. 16), *sweat/sweet* (l. 17), *now/know/no* (ll. 21 and 29), *one/own* (l. 23), *to/too* (l. 27), *now/no* (l. 29), *aron/around* (l. 30), *tried/treated* (l. 31) *their/there* (l. 33) and *com/come* (l. 38).

D. INTERPRETATION OF THE ANALYSIS

1. What is good about the text?

The learner has definitely written a good recount of how she imagines the differences between American and Danish school life. She imagines what it would be like to be an exchange student and how she would react to being there. She manages to make the reader interested in her story.

2. Variability

Her language shows variability in several ways:

She sometimes seems to be conscious about the axes of orientation. She clearly knows she is writing from the present perspective in the conclusion and attempts to use the present perfect, but in the rest of the text she does not seem to be aware about when to use the present and the past tenses. Since she has done it partly right, the mistakes are positive developmental problems/wrong hypotheses. The fact that she gets so many verbs right tells us that she is probably currently forming and testing hypotheses about the axes of orientation and this also concerns the formal aspects of the VGs, which she can also sometimes form correctly. There is, therefore, a good chance that this is the 'moment of teachability' and that the learner will understand an explanation from the teacher about these issues.

The learner clearly knows about paragraphs, but could benefit from making an outline as part of the writing process and include headlines for her paragraphs in the draft. It would be too difficult for her at this level to understand about topic sentences.

The fact that she (without success) copies lines from the material tells us that she is either short of time or the language in the material is too difficult for her skills, so she cannot rephrase it. But there are definitely positive signs of development since she is almost successful in ll. 23-24. The fact that she uses the indefinite article in parts of the list of words copied (l. 18) shows us that she has noticed articles but has not automatized the use yet.

She clearly shows she is aware of pronouns and punctuation as cohesion devices since her use of them is partly right.

She also seems almost sure about Subject-Verbal agreement, which is normally late acquired, but maybe she has formed the wrong hypotheses that the plural should be used in connection with the dummy Subject *there* even though the real Subject is singular.

The learner is also a little inconsistent about nouns in the plural. She has clearly understood that we add -s in the plural but she consistently fails to use -s on nouns ending in -t (see examples above). This may be due to pronunciation.

She spells many high-frequent words wrongly. Most of her spelling problems cannot be detected by a spell checker since they are audio-visual and are due to homophones (e.g. *their/there* and *hole/whole*), spelling or pronunciation that is almost similar (*now/know*) and spelling the way she pronounces (*com/come*) – sometimes wrongly: *shut/should*. *North* (l. 35) must be a typo and *on away it* (ll. 12-13), which is very difficult to understand, may mean *on average* and is probably due to the spell checker or it could be a Danicism and

simply mean "på en måde". The capital letters in *And* in *Mrs. And Miss. And* (l. 33) are also due to the computer.

3. Hypotheses

In the text we find some interlingual problem. The following examples are transfer problems/Danicisms: e.g. the preposition *on* from the Danish preposition *på* in *on the school* (ll. 5-6), the syntax problems with prepositions (ll. 32 and 34), *what there* (l. 21), the definite article in generic reference (l. 4), the modal verb *will* (l. 22) and idioms such as *take on* (l. 11). Likewise the sentence, *It was so different from Denmark* (ll. 1-2) is presumably a transfer from the similar Danish expression.

The learner generalizes *there are* in connection with a noun in the singular and sometimes uses *were* in *I were*, and she simplifies her language by using *think* a lot.

In other cases it is difficult to categorize her hypotheses, e.g. she uses *my* instead of *me* when the word is an IO. Is this a hypothesis that the form *my* is used after verbs like *tell* and *ask* or is it wrong spelling? That she uses the present tense so often can also be interpreted in different ways: is it a generalization or a simplification, or is it because she avoids using difficult forms?

Exercise 3.

Do you agree with the analysis and interpretation above? Why/why not?

E. ADVICE, HELP AND FEEDBACK

Below we discuss how to help this particular learner and how to make sure there is progression in the learning process.

At text level, the teacher could help her by supporting her understanding of the axes of orientation. He could ask her questions as to which point of time she is speaking from and then he could ask her to find all the verbs in the text and determine when something happens compared to something else. He could supplement with helpful communicative exercises. Only when she has understood the axes, is the learner ready for learning how to form complex VGs correctly at sentence level concerning the present perfect and modal verbs by doing relevant communicative exercises.

As to punctuation the learner could be told to read aloud her text to somebody else. When she makes a long break, she has to use a full stop and when she makes a short break, she has to use a comma. However, at this level she is also cognitively mature enough to learn about the structure of clauses and how to recognize independent clause, sub-clauses and direct and indirect speech by doing exercises. The problems with the lack of full stops and quotation marks and to some extent the use of superfluous commas are more disturbing than forgetting a comma. Therefore she should learn when to use full stops and quotation marks first. Afterwards she can learn about commas, conjunctions and linking Circumstantials to further improve the cohesion of the text.

To improve the cohesion regarding pronouns, she must be asked questions as to what the pronouns refer to and work on activities that ask her to use pronouns, e.g. by replacing a noun with a pronoun. Afterwards she can train some of the formal problems

regarding relative pronouns and the difference between the possessive pronoun *my* and the personal pronoun *me*.

The learner has many audio-visual problems in spelling. She must learn about the advantages and the limitations of spell checkers and she could work on activities on the difference between spelling and pronunciation (homophones etc). She should train the spelling of the highly frequent specific words that she mixes up and put them in a check-list that she must use every time she writes. She might also benefit from reading more or using some of the mnemonic techniques mentioned in the chapter on spelling. In order to use more idiomatic language and more precise vocabulary, she needs to work on finding synonyms in a thesaurus, e.g. for *I think* and *different*. She needs to fully understand that words are often parts of chunks and she could work on comparative activities, such as translations or analyzing texts with idioms and false friends and learn how to find idioms in her dictionary.

Exercise 4.

Test your skills as an English teacher by using the model for interlanguage analysis on learners' texts in web activity 1.

16.5. Marking learners' errors

Exercise 5.

1. Read the poem "Marked" by Eric Finney and discuss your own experience with giving and receiving feedback.
2. How can you avoid the red pen syndrome?

Eric Finney, "Marked"⁴

My English book's full –
It's dead, deceased –
Curled at the corners,
The cover creased.
Name and Subject
Just a blur;
Inside, slaved over
By me and sir,

He says, 'Look it through
From front to back.
Ask yourself:
Is it good – or slack?'
So I flip it through
From front to back
And read the red
Below the black:

Quite a good start.
Take more care.
Disappointing.
Only fair.
Not your best.
This is careless stuff.
You simply don't
Try hard enough

And that's not true –
I really tried.
There's plenty more
In red beside:
Remarks that cut
Worse than a knife.
This marking's left me
Marked for Life.

Exercise 6.

1. Below is a list of ideas for how to mark an error and examples of these correction strategies. Discuss advantages and disadvantages in relation to interlanguage development and the fact that you want your learners to learn from their mistakes.

weigh!!
I am weighing 60 kg and this
is more then^a my friends weighs
weigh!!

x I am weighing 60 kg and this
xx is more then my friends weighs

verb I am weighing 60 kg and this
sp+S-V is more then my friends weighs

§ 317
I am weighing 60 kg and this
is more then my friends weighs
§ 201

2. Would you use the same feedback strategies with all learners? Can you think of other influential factors than these:

- Beginners versus advanced learners.
- Age.
- Weak versus strong learners.
- Confident versus sensitive learners.
- Ensuring learners are active.
- Anything else?

3. Would you use the same way of marking in all types of mistakes – or does it depend on any of the following circumstances:
 - You can see from your interlanguage analysis that the language rule is too difficult for the learner: so you simply write the right form – or you don't mark it at all.
 - The learner ought to know this because you taught it in class – so you simply underline or write a category of language.
 - You can see from your interlanguage analysis that the learner is ready to learn a particular language rule: so you refer him to a specific page in a grammar.
 - The learner ought to know this because this is basic grammar.
 - Anything else?
4. How will you mark that something is wrong? Discuss the following marking systems:
 - a. Tell the learner that something is wrong without telling him what it is by highlighting a word, underlining a word or indicating in the margin (e.g. by x or \div) that something is wrong in this line.
 - b. Underline the problem and categorize it by using e.g. a system of abbreviations or visual signals (such as *S-V* for Subject-Verbal agreement error, *sp* for spelling, writing a large empty γ to show that a word is missing etc.). It could also be a system of colours: e.g. yellow for spelling, green for punctuation etc.
 - c. Tell the learner that there is an error (same as above) but in addition write a list of categories of problems at the end to help the learner find out what is wrong and to enable him to consult a grammar, dictionaries etc. You might also refer to a specific paragraph in a grammar. This is known as a 'rettenøgle' in Danish.
 - d. Underline the problem; categorize it as in *b* and write explanations.
 - e. Cross out the error or underline it and then write the correct word.
 - f. Can you think of other ways?

ELECTRONIC MARKING SYSTEMS

Most students probably already know that it is possible to track changes in texts written in word processing programmes and include comments in the margin. However, specific programmes for electronic marking systems have been developed to enable teachers to categorize problems and/or write comments and/or explanations. The programmes include certain categories of problems and explanations and the teacher can supplement with his own categories. This makes it quite easy for teachers just to press a button that e.g. is called S-V agreement. Some of the programmes refer to particular grammars that the learner can consult for correcting his mistakes and handing in a second version. For example a programme developed for Danish learners, *Stifikseren*⁵, interacts with the grammar *Stifinderen*⁶. The systems can supply learners and teachers with statistics of types of errors (see example with *Stifikseren* below). Obviously such an analysis can provide the teacher with an overview but it needs to be supplemented by interlanguage analysis, since it is merely quantitative (see exercise 2) and not qualitative.

Statistik

Klik på tallet for at åbne alle fejl af denne type. Klik på tabel overskriften for at sortere tabellen.

Antal	Beskrivelse
1	Tegnsætning
1	Kongruens
1	Udvidet tid
1	Ordforråd – forkert ord
2	Tegnsætning – indledende bisætning
2	Sætningsopbygning

Keeping in mind the socio-constructivist and the cognitive learning theories, we need to encourage the learners to continuously learn from their mistakes. Therefore the learners need to continue forming and testing hypotheses after being given feedback. If the teacher always gives away all the right answers in his marking, the learners will not use so much mental processing on the problem. They are more likely to learn (and less likely to give up) if:

- They are first given positive feedback concerning what is fine about their texts.
- They are told something is wrong concerning a few specific categories.
- They are told to correct the mistake themselves and hand in a second version to the teacher.

It makes sense to adapt your marking system to the individual learner. You must be systematic and explain your marking system to parents and learners, e.g. it is important that they know why you do not always correct all mistakes.

Exercise 7.

Discuss the suggestions⁸ below for how to give general feedback on writing, which might be used, no matter which marking system you choose. Can you think of others?

- Always mention what the learner has improved and say which aspects are good in relation to both content and grammar at text level, sentence level and below sentence level.
- Note which particular problems the learner could work on and suggest how to improve.
- Summarize strengths and weaknesses and point out a sense of development to the learner.

Exercise 8.

Practise marking texts by analyzing a learner's text and marking it in web activity 3.

Exercise 9.

In web activity 4 you can discuss how you make sure the learner learns from his mistakes.

Exercise 10.

In web activity 5 you can discuss how to explain to parents and learners why you often do not correct all mistakes.

16.6. After reading this chapter

Exercise 11.

Return to the eye opener of this chapter. Do you agree with the way you solved the exercise before?

Exercise 12.

It is time for your final reflections in web activity 6.

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Quotes

- 1 Based on Hedge, Tricia, *Writing*, OUP, 2005, p. 128
- 2 Bartram, Mark & Richard Walton, *Correction – A Positive Approach to Language Mistakes*, Language Teaching Publications, 1991, p. 24
- 3 Ellis, Rod in Helle Pia Laursen, *Intersprogsanalyse og andetsprogpædagogik*, CVU København & Nordsjælland, 2007, p. 12
- 4 Foster, John, *Excuses, Excuses*, OUP, 2004, p. 79
- 5 *Stifikseren*, Andrico, 2009
- 6 Wachter, Hanne and Kim Kjærgaard, *Stifinderen*, Andrico, 2012
- 7 Hedge, Tricia, *Writing*, OUP, p. 124