Changing Norms in English Language Teaching

The Present and Future of Foreign Language Education at German ‘Gymnasien’

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1. Introduction

1.1. The basic conflict of ELT

Foreign language teachers spend too much time and effort on the correction of errors and mistakes. “People who are flying for the first time often try to get a window seat” (WYHMIW\(^1\) 1998/1: 26) is a sentence which would be marked wrong by a large number of English language teachers at German schools because it apparently violates the grammar rule that sees a necessity for the use of the simple form instead of the progressive here. Well, one may argue, if it is wrong, why not correct it? I believe, however, that it is not wrong to begin with, it is just a different usage. But, above all, it is unnecessary to correct sentences like the one above.

Saying this immediately triggers a host of questions. Disputing that the above structure is erroneous necessitates a basic discussion of what is right and what is wrong, of where the dividing line between right and wrong lies. In fact, it raises the question of what an error actually is. It also seems to entail the question as to whether assessing language production along the right/wrong dichotomy is a useful approach at all. Saying it is ‘unnecessary’ to correct structures like the one above, of course, requires a discussion of the notion of necessity in the context of error correction. If necessity turns out to be a useful guideline, one must answer the question as to when it is necessary to correct errors.

Above all, though, bringing the issue of necessity into play for error correction – an area that claims to argue using straightforward criteria – shakes one of the apparently solid pillars of foreign language teaching. Targeting one of the cornerstones of the system requires a basic debate about the overall concept of foreign language teaching in general and English language teaching (ELT) in particular. The question: ‘What are we aiming at in ELT?’ needs to be answered. Taking it from there immediately opens up the next question: ‘How do we get

\(^1\) WYHMIW is the abbreviation I have chosen to refer to the column “Would you have marked it wrong?” which appears in the periodical Praxis des neusprachlichen Unterrichts. People anonymously send queries to an editor, who answers them in the following volume. As the authors’ names are unavailable, I list these works – in accordance with MLA standards – by title (cf. Gibaldi 2003: 190 + 239).
there?’ In this Ph.D. thesis I will address and answer these questions and others that lie beyond this briefly sketched horizon.

Before I go into detail, however, I would like to go back to the beginning, namely the assumption that teachers correct all too frequently. This was my point of departure and, in fact, the recognition which stirred my interest as well as my irritation in the first place and thus got the whole project going.

I first started reading about ELT purely for the sake of gathering practical information and advice for myself as a future English language teacher at a German Gymnasium. The first works I consulted were Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth’s *Introduction to English Language Teaching*, Medgyes’ *The non-native teacher* and Gnutzmann’s article “English as a global language: Perspectives for English language teaching and for teacher education in Germany” in his work *Teaching and Learning English as a Global Language: Native and Non-Native Perspectives*. The reason I chose these particular books as introductory reading is very simple. I just browsed the relevant shelf in the library, and those were the books that first caught my attention because their titles seemed to provide for an interesting read. I soon realised that even though all these authors came from different academic backgrounds and were trying to contribute to their discipline, they all had something to say about ELT.

I should probably stress that, although I came across these works on language teaching randomly in the first place, they all do show an interestingly similar tendency. Despite the fact that they all describe ELT phenomena from different perspectives or different academic backgrounds, they all left me with the impression – or rather the disappointment – that something was fundamentally wrong with present-day teaching practice. All the works mentioned entertain the notion that teaching practice today is not in accordance with the research results that the self-same literature presents. This impression was further strengthened by a comparison between what I was reading and a) my personal experience as a pupil – which admittedly dates back a while – and b) what I had seen during my recent teaching experience at a school, now further backed up by everyday experiences as I have entered the preparatory teacher training service at a school in Baden-Württemberg. There seems to be a wide discrepancy between theory and practice.
1.2. The layers of the conflict

The discrepancy between theory and practice is best described as follows: English language teaching in present-day Germany is still largely restricted to the teaching of formal linguistic correctness. Grammar occupies the most prominent position of all the areas of ELT and is, therefore, granted the lion’s share of classroom time in most school children’s English language education. Creativity and communication are still considered secondary virtues and thus rather kept in the background, despite the fact that they are described as the paramount principles and virtues of ELT today in the works cited above.

This is what the criticism in the ELT literature – no matter where it comes from – boils down to. There is a great deal of overlap in the identification of the flaws of ELT, even though different disciplines deal with it.

Péter Medgyes states, for instance, that “some non-NESTs\(^2\) are preoccupied with accuracy to the point of obsession” (Medgyes 1999: 35). He explains that grammar is concrete and limited, so that non-native speakers can obtain a firm grasp of it, which makes them feel secure. According to him, this accuracy-based view of language teaching is also reflected in the way non-NESTs mark their pupils’ written work: they tend to focus on grammar.

This relative feeling of security, however, may encourage us to attach more importance to grammar than it deserves. Studies on error correction show that non-NESTs tend to penalize grammatical errors with the utmost severity, including even the use of structures that have long come into everyday use, such as, *if I was* in hypothetical sentences. (Medgyes 1999: 35)

The reasons for this odd behaviour have ‘psychologically’ been attributed to a conflict which every non-NEST permanently carries in them: every non-NEST has been striving for native-like competence since the day they chose to become teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). At the same time, however, they are quite unlikely to ever achieve it. Gnutzmann argues straight along these lines:

Becoming like a native speaker in one’s command of the language and perhaps even in one’s general behaviour – this was for a long time the main objective of many non-native language teachers, the doctrine of foreign language teacher education. (Gnutzmann 1999: 160)

\(^2\) ‘Non-NESTs’ is the pseudo-acronym Medgyes uses to refer to non-native English speaker teachers, whom he can thus conveniently separate from ‘NESTs’. Most English teachers at German schools are, of course, ‘non-NESTs’.
This doctrine is attributed to their professional self-estimation, their love of the target language (TL) and culture and not least to their need for authority in class. Operating in a system in which the expertise a teacher possesses constitutes to a large extent the authority required, a lack thereof leads to a weak position in class. In EFL teaching this expertise appears to consist in native-like proficiency in the foreign language. Many EFL teachers, who have been cramming for this native-like proficiency but have not achieved it and cannot achieve it, have come to replace their initially desired goal with a high level of competence in grammar. Since they indisputably require authority for teaching successfully, and in order to overcome their sense of personal failure for not meeting their wish to use the language like a native speaker, they have unconsciously chosen to project native-like proficiency onto a minor but easily accessible subsystem of the whole language: i.e. grammar.

The pseudo-psychological analysis can be driven even further. Beside the necessity for authority in class, which requires high levels of language proficiency exercised through grammar, non-NESTs are constantly exposed to involuntary competition. It is a fictitious competition with the native speaker him- or herself. Even if a native speaker is not present in the everyday teaching situation and thus only exists in imaginary terms, the non-NEST at all times is certain that there are real people out there who are in possession of the longed-for competence. As a result Medgyes diagnoses an “inferiority complex” (Medgyes 1999: 38) on the part of the non-NEST. Non-native speakers will remain learners all their lives even if they are EFL teachers by profession. Hence, they themselves will never achieve native speaker proficiency in English. In order to compensate for this defect they give more weight, both in teaching and in text correction, to an area of which they seem to be in absolute command, namely formal correctness.

A second, equally important explanation for the view that EFL teachers in Germany – and elsewhere, maybe even to a higher degree – concentrate largely on grammar can be found in the relevant literature, too. In a nutshell, it was the tradition of English language teaching whose impact could still be sensed in today’s conception of ELT.

The grammar-translation method of the late 19th century presented the instructed language through rules in the learners’ L1 and then practised these rules by translating
sentences. (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 20)

Of course, we have come a long way since the end of the 19th century, and many things have changed in ELT, but it is obvious that this approach focused solely on form. In the middle of the 20th century this approach was replaced by the audiolingual method, which saw teachers still concentrating largely on formal correctness without explaining grammar, though. This approach is based on the psychological theory of behaviourism. Language learning was considered a mode of habit formation, just like any other skill a human being can pick up. This approach has had an enormous impact on ELT and scholars still see it raising its head today. Although a lot of research has been carried out since then, and researchers have suggested that a foreign language be taught with a strong emphasis on communication and meaning instead of form, based on the results of cognitive psychology, many scholars argue that EFL teachers have proved surprisingly resistant to change. Most teachers still adhere to “traditional grammar teaching [...] on the basis of the presentation, practice, and production approach (PPP)” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 104). This is an extremely formalised approach based on the idea that learners should strictly be guided towards the ability “to quickly produce the discrete language items” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 42).

On the whole, pupils today are still expected to produce newly learnt structures correctly instantly. In line with the still prevailing PPP approach it is still considered to be of utmost importance to avoid errors. Errors are looked upon as though they were a disease. Marking is carried out accordingly. Mitchell and Myles sketch the alleged teacher attitude behind this practice:

> Traditionally, language teachers have often viewed these errors as the result of carelessness or lack of concentration on the part of the learners. If only learners would try harder, surely their productions could accurately reflect the TL rules which they had been taught! (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 10)

In the context of behaviourist thinking “errors were often viewed as the result of ‘bad habits’, which could be eradicated if only learners did enough rote learning and pattern drilling using target language models” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 10).

The “inferiority complex” and the accuracy-based tradition of foreign language teaching are two explanations for some of the prevalent practices in ELT nowadays. These deeply rooted attitudes are the most powerful obstacles in the way of a necessary modernisation of ELT towards more communication and
interaction. A further problem is that they prop each other up because they are interlocked. The traditional call for accuracy perpetuates the “inferiority complex”. And the “inferiority complex” supports the diligence and eagerness to be even better at accuracy: a vicious circle.

This diagnosis is, of course, highly academic. Teachers who work in the system would certainly argue somewhat differently. The following reaction was observed at the last English teachers’ conference that I attended at my school. The teacher who chaired the meeting had just stressed the need to a) teach English in more open forms which allow for more creativity and self-expression of the pupils and b) make the students use portfolios. This immediately triggered a reaction in which one teacher, who seemed to speak for the majority of those present, incredulously shook his head and asked when he was supposed to do all this. Even now, he said, he did not have the time to teach correct English adequately, let alone concentrate on grammatical structures. He ended his contribution on a frustrated note by asking whether it was desirable that our students merely learn some random “Pidgin English”. The other teachers nodded approvingly.

Here is another layer of this already highly complex situation. It appears to me that alongside the insinuated “inferiority complex” and the long teaching tradition in which teachers find themselves, there is a fundamental lack of comprehension of how second language acquisition works and how deviations from ‘correct English’ have come to be viewed today.

One result of these interplaying factors is the creation of a very specific image of what constitutes ‘a good language teacher’. Since the need for the eradication of mistakes and the sometimes obsessive attempt to do so on the part of the teachers occupy this tremendously prominent position in ELT, the belief has been established that those teachers who best live up to these expectations are also the best teachers. This, of course, further complicates and confuses the whole matter.

### 1.3. Ways out of the dilemma

Considering that this current situation appears to be in deadlock and that it has further come about as a result of a long schooling tradition, which certainly has at
times been reformed and adapted, the pressing question is whether this situation is completely unalterable or whether it is possible to change it. In this thesis I will argue not only that it is possible to change it but also that it is necessary to do so. My argument will boil down to a much more wholesome appreciation of the teacher. The conviction held by many teachers as well as authorities, parents, and students, too, namely that the ability to correct mistakes is the constitutive pillar of the foreign language teacher, is one-dimensional to put it mildly. It will be my overall aim to show that this dimension, though not entirely irrelevant, plays a much less significant role than many people would claim. Other dimensions exist and bear much more heavily in ELT than error correction.

Teaching is a highly complex challenge. Its mastery requires a host of factors to be taken into account. And indeed, there has been a lot of research geared towards determining the parameters that constitute an ideal teaching situation. The complexity of the teaching situation becomes clear when one looks at Wolfgang Butzkamm’s brief but comprehensive account. He summarises the entire enterprise as the ‘creation of a positive working environment’ [Butzkamm 2007: 273; my translation, HE]. He stresses, however, that this notion is more than just the creation of favourable surroundings or a favourable setting. In fact, the physical or geographical element, though important, is at the periphery. The working environment primarily entails technical, mental, presentational, interpersonal, political and social components. Butzkamm reveals the full complexity of his notion of an ideal teaching situation:

Arbeitsklima meint mehr: die Verbindung einer freundlichen Atmosphäre, die Sicherheit und Entspannung gewährt, mit einer effizienten Klassenführung, d.h. mit zügiger, ernsthafter Arbeit, die den Aktivitätsfluss aufrechterhält und Leerlauf und Langeweile vermeidet. Der Unterricht ist klar strukturiert, unterschiedliche Techniken wechseln sich ab und sind sinnvoll aufeinander bezogen, die Schüler halten die Regeln ein und sind mit vielen Arbeitsformen vertraut. Der Lehrer ist fair und setzt Lob und Tadel geschickt ein, um die Schüler zu engagiertem Arbeiten zu motivieren. Es gibt eine schöne innere Konsequenz und Verbundenheit aller Unterrichtsgestaltung, die im Ganzen wirkt. (Butzkamm 2007: 273)

This description considers all the necessary factors that must coexist so that teaching becomes most effective and, therefore, most successful. Although this description seems to be comprehensive because it captures the notion in its entirety, it appears to be extremely general and above all highly abstract. Jeremy Harmer, who claims to combine language teaching theory and traditional
teaching approaches into practical advice, provides more details as to what constitutes a good teaching situation. He ascribes different roles to the teacher, depending on the activity that is underway in the classroom. The teacher can be a controller, an organiser, an assessor, a prompter, a participant, a resource, a tutor and an observer (cf. Harmer 2001: 58ff). The most important thing, though, is the fact that, in order to create the teaching situation described above, the teacher must be able to assume different roles within a very limited timeframe. And he or she must be able to switch between roles smoothly and unnoticed.

The role that we take on is dependent […] on what it is we wish the students to achieve. Where some activities are difficult to organise without the teacher acting as controller, others have no chance of success unless we take a less domineering role. There are times when we will need to act as a prompter where, on other occasions, it would be more appropriate to act as a resource.

What we can say, with certainty, is that we need to be able to switch between the various roles we have described here, judging when it is appropriate to use one or other of them. And then, when we have made that decision, however consciously or subconsciously it is done, we need to be aware of how we carry out that role. (Harmer 2001: 63)

Harmer then moves on to describe the finer details that the roles entail, i.e. how one needs to play them.

A little anecdote from my own career as a student in Germany who is training to be a teacher will illustrate that there are quite a few scholars who see the major deficits of teacher education in the lack of training in the acting of roles. Students on a teaching degree in Baden-Württemberg nowadays have to go through a practical semester at some point in their university course. They have to spend three months at a school, a period during which they also attend classes in pedagogy and didactics. When I was doing that semester one of my professors of pedagogy said at one point that he strongly advocated the idea that students who want to be a teacher should go to drama school for at least one semester. Despite not understanding the implications of this seemingly weird remark at the time, I have since then grown into a fervent supporter of this idea, maybe not literally demanding a thespian education as an obligatory part of teacher training but understanding the necessity of acting skills in class. It is the teacher who is in the driving seat. It is his or her responsibility to make sure that the ideal teaching/learning situation materialises. In order to do that the teacher must be able to switch between roles silently and smoothly, or even play several at a time.
1.4. What does this thesis aim at and how do we get there?

The aim of this thesis is highly practical. Its primary task will be to encourage a change in the practice of foreign language teaching at secondary schools in Germany in general and English language teaching (ELT) in particular. Guided by the restrictions of educational policy and based on the scholarly research into error correction and second language acquisition (SLA) I will offer principles and basic notions that are relevant to the teaching of English at all times. Though I do not address specific questions that refer to particular classroom situations, this thesis can be used as a guideline that eventually provides answers even to specific questions, i.e. when one checks one’s specific method against the background of the principles mentioned here.

I should stress, though, that I do not offer a coherent theory of ELT. However, I will make some very general remarks that must be considered universal principles of ELT nowadays, but they do not emerge as a single theory of ELT that resists any thinkable exceptions or academically motivated challenges. This university ideal cannot be met in a thesis that is concerned with practice and everyday problems of EFL teachers. It would even be undesirable as it would suggest that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to ELT.

Neither do I place my work within one single academic discipline only. I draw on several disciplines, all of which contribute to my underlying goal: to improve teaching practice! The disciplines on which I base my discussion are not chosen randomly, though. They all champion approaches to ELT that share a large number of features. The interesting part is that they all deal with different single problems of ELT or approach ELT from different academic angles. Nevertheless, their suggestions all point in one common direction, a direction which I believe strongly backs up my initial thesis: the correction of errors should actually only play a minor role in ELT, but this role is currently greatly overrated.

Basically, I have already demarcated the academic territory on which I will be moving in the course of this thesis by quoting from the works that triggered my interest in the first place. As I mentioned before, these works also proved to tackle the same problems even though they were written with different motivations and in different research strands. The works by Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth and by Medgyes are located in the field of
didactics. They are mainly concerned with providing information on teaching and learning, in general, and the teaching and learning of English, in particular. These writings are meant to give the reader a comprehensive overview of how the teaching and the learning of English work and what components must be taken into account in order to make it successful. While Medgyes writes for a global audience and any teacher whose mother tongue is not English, Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth concentrate on ELT in Germany and the particularities of teaching English at a German school.

I consider methodologies for ELT to be part of the discipline of didactics – simply because they are also concerned with the theory and practice of learning and teaching – so that Medgyes’ *The non-native teacher* and Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth’s *Introduction to English Language Teaching* as well as the already quoted Jeremy Harmer and Wolfgang Butzkamm and an article by Joybrato Mukherjee (2005), for example, have all contributed to my thesis from that angle. In fact, their works have provided very fruitful and rich sources to back up my ideas and to create a solid framework for the other disciplines.

However, I do not envisage devising my own methodology for ELT. I reject the notion of calling this thesis a methodology on the grounds that it lacks the specific advice geared towards particular situations or the proposition of concrete methods. Yet I do intend to term it a comprehensive and general approach to ELT. The ideas I am putting forward rest on several pillars; didactics, which I have mentioned, is just one of them. The others belong to the wide-ranging discipline of linguistics, more precisely sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. These three pillars, which I will refer to as a three-pillar structure, are my basic tool of analysis for the entire project.

Sociolinguistics has already briefly come up in the shape of varieties and in the name of Claus Gnützmann, who writes about ELT from a linguistic perspective. He deals with the varieties of English and the implications of language change for the teaching of English as a foreign language. Research on varieties and language use is highly relevant to my thesis because its findings automatically create new boundaries for the crucial question of what is right and what is wrong, i.e. the question I started out from. In fact, this area of linguistics might call this binary system into question altogether. In any case it will be indispensable to dedicate a larger section (2.3.) to it in order to address these
issues and find suitable criteria for the notion of Standard English that can be applied at German Gymnasien.

Finally, bringing Mitchell/Myles' work into play means expanding the discussion by another academic discipline in addition to didactics and variety research: the field of second language acquisition research. This is the third research area I will draw on when dealing with ELT. It provides important psycholinguistic insights that contribute a third perspective to the present reflections on how to improve the present situation of ELT. The didactic and sociolinguistic analyses describe a problem from a learner-external perspective while the psycholinguistic view looks at the learner from the inside. Interestingly, as I will show, these disciplines coincide or rather suggest similar strategies, each arguing from its distinct research angle.

Although it is without any doubt the most important research area for teachers, and other scholars (cf. Harmer 2001: 126ff.) do incorporate it into their remarks, I will not elaborate on pedagogy in general because this would lead me too far away from the actual core and the particularities of EFL teaching.

I have claimed that my remarks will constitute a fairly comprehensive approach to ELT because the disciplines of sociolinguistics, second language acquisition and didactics are the areas that deal with the cornerstones of foreign language teaching: the language (i.e. the content of language classes), the learner (i.e. the relevant person in the language class), and the interaction of the two (i.e. the processes that lead to the desired outcome). It is important to note, however, that the thesis will neither be characterised by any groundbreaking new insights in any of the areas mentioned nor push their research any further. It would even be undesirable from my highly practically-oriented perspective merely to dig into an academic field for its own sake.

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3 Note on terminology: I am fully aware that the repeated appearance of terms in a language different than the chosen language of the thesis can be an obstacle to smooth reading. As this thesis, however, is solely concerned with the German school system and particularly designed for a German readership, I would like to maintain German terms that are specific to this system and have been invented to denote particular phenomena in it. Gymnasium will therefore always appear as such. Bildungsplan and its co-phenomenon Bildungsstandards, for example, will occur in German, too, not least because the terms are also the titles of the same-labelled documents, which are frequently referred to throughout the paper. Abstract descriptions of these terms (e.g. 'new curriculum') are used in places where ambiguity is desired. Furthermore, the smoothness one would gain through a full replacement or circumscription of these terms by English terminology would instantly be lost by difficult and longish explanations resulting in inaccuracies. All German terms will, however, be explained when introduced.
Instead, I will tie up some loose ends by bringing together knowledge of the individual disciplines which is available already. I intend to illustrate that the different research strands do not have a stand-alone character but nicely fit together, whereby surprising coincidences come to light. I will try to make the existing knowledge usable for teaching practice by explaining contexts and putting into perspective issues that teachers are not aware of, as I repeatedly realised when delivering talks about the subtopics of this thesis to teacher audiences. Hence, I will not suggest a method here and a technique there, tools that can be implemented when needed in certain cases with certain classes to attain specific goals. I will look at the bigger picture, yet I still see the immediate goal of this thesis as being to narrow the gap between theory and practice, as described above. In other words, my aim is to derive direct teaching advice that can be useful for teachers and teacher trainers with the help of the three-pillar structure. The reason for this manner of proceeding is, I should stress again, the wish to achieve an immediate impact on teaching practice.

On top of that, the *So what’s new then?* contribution which this thesis may provide is a description of certain aspects of the present-day practice of ELT at German Gymnasien. For that purpose I have carried out a field study in which the informants had to fill in questionnaires and do some marking. The questionnaires were directed at the different language varieties which teachers base their teaching and marking on, as well as their general approach to correction. The correction component was intended to provide information on the actual correction practice and the consistency of two competing scoring practices. The field study will allow immediate insight into ELT practice as well as further inferences, in particular with regard to the area of correction, and thus the core and most problematic field of ELT. The arising picture of ELT will be urgently needed for the verification of my conclusion that there is a wide gap between research findings and reality and for the recommendations I will be making concerning necessary changes to be implemented.

### 1.5. The structure of the thesis

The main part of the thesis is divided into four chapters (2.-5.). In chapter 2 I will discuss the new approach to ELT which will be presented as the compelling
future model for this subject at school. The sections of this chapter are motivated by the parameters that determine ELT in general. I will argue for three pillars which coincide, meaning that the present situation poses a unique opportunity for fundamental change since the different pillars do not block one another. These pillars are the policy framework, the possibilities that modern linguistics offers to describe and examine language and, finally, the knowledge about learning, and especially learning foreign languages, which both linguistics and psychology provide. After an introductory section (2.1.), I will begin with an outline of the policy framework within which ELT teachers have already started operating (2.2.). In 2.3. I will deal with the second pillar, which addresses language perception based on modern linguistic research and description. It will include a discussion on language variation and the importance of it in the ELT classroom. This section will also touch upon the debate as to whether modern ELT needs to take into account pragmatic approaches to language. Further, I will describe how ELT can and should be practised if one considers the available knowledge about learning, in particular second language acquisition (SLA) and the knowledge about teaching. Of course, knowledge about learning and teaching always depends on what the goal of the teaching/learning situation is. Teachers will have to use a different approach if they want to teach mental and physical discipline than if they want to teach creativity, for instance. Hence, in 2.4. I will need to take into account the goals and tools that are available and that have been laid down in the two previous sections. This will provide a comprehensive picture of what ELT today should be like. In 2.5. I will then apply the stipulations that I will make for ELT in general to the specific field of error correction as the focal area of this thesis.

In chapter 3 the results of the field study will be presented. The presentation of the field study material will be split up into three sections, preceded by an introductory passage on the methods and instruments of the analysis. In 3.2. I will then look at the varieties of language that are taught at schools. In 3.3. I will present a part of the study which inquired into teachers’ correcting and scoring preferences with regard to varieties. The preferences expressed will be checked against the results of the questionnaire in which the participants had to decide if structures were right or wrong, and a piece of correction that the informants were asked to do. In 3.4. I will discuss results of the survey that were concerned with the frequency of and priorities in correction.
These results will be interesting in relation to the question of varieties and will also allow inferences to be made as to whether teachers’ attitude towards and handling of correction is appropriate. The informants were asked to mark a script based on two distinct modes of marking. So, finally, I will pit these two modes against one another. The idea behind this is to provide answers to the perennial issues of fairness, consistency and validity in connection with marking.

Chapter 4 will then serve as a kind of conclusion in which the results of the study will be summarised and compared to the stipulations of what ought to be. The structure of this chapter is largely parallel to chapter 3 so that a direct comparison will emerge. So sections 4.1. and 4.2. will look at teaching and correcting reality and ideals, respectively. Section 4.3. will put into perspective the concept of the mistake and how it is handled at school. Basically, chapter 4 is an opportunity to suggest concrete advice on how ELT ought to be practised against the background of the gap that has evolved as a result of chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 5 will offer an outlook. After some introductory remarks, sections 5.1. and 5.2. will each be dedicated to an approach to ELT that can be of assistance when implementing the newly gained insights into what – according to a broad consensus - constitutes better ELT.
2. English Language Teaching – Present-day requirements

2.1. Preliminaries

ELT at school, of course, is not just some random routine whose handling can take any form the teacher finds appropriate or feels like practising at any given time. ELT practice must be guided by a framework which serves two distinct purposes.

First of all, it explicates the goals of ELT and the reasons for teaching English at school, which in turn have been determined by social needs and arise from democratic agreement. Thus the framework in which ELT takes place is one which tells all the people involved, i.e. teachers and pupils in the first instance, parents and authorities in the second, what ought to be done and for what reasons. This framework, therefore, is a point of reference for everyone to turn to in order to put forward concrete expectations that ELT must fulfil. It can also serve as a checklist as to whether the ELT that students have received has fulfilled all its claims.

Secondly, this framework must also serve teachers as a means of justifying their work. As teaching, and marking in particular, can become a judicious matter, teachers must also be able to refer back to the framework in order to provide answers to the question of why they have done certain things. This framework is therefore also a matter of security, something for teachers to turn to for the justification of their teaching. If they find whatever they do to be located within the framework, they must be on the right line.

This almost reads as though I was referring to a legal document. In fact, it is a legal document and it is represented by the educational policies that are in place for ELT in the German state of Baden-Württemberg. For a thesis like this one, it is quite useful to have this solid base because it gives the linguistic and methodological discussion a firm frame and fixed boundaries. Jeremy Harmer distinguishes “syllabus design” from “curriculum design” (Harmer 2003: 295).

Syllabus design concerns the selection of items to be learnt and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence, [... while; HE] in the latter, the designer is concerned not just with lists of what will be taught and in what order, but also with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management
and administration of education programmes. (Harmer 2001: 295)

I will not be concerned with either area in a narrow sense. It is certainly not my intention to design a syllabus by suggesting individual teaching items and their order, even though the notion of sequence will play a role in the context of the acquisition of a foreign language. I will not design a curriculum either, or make suggestions for its modification. The curriculum in place, which has only recently been introduced, will be one formal basis of my thesis. It is a policy which I do not want to question here – although I am not saying that it should not be questioned – because it would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

At the same time, though, the policy alone remains incredibly hollow and abstract. It needs to be filled with strategies and content that are desirable and feasible with regard to the overarching goals. Above all, however, it must be filled with concrete advice that enables the people involved in ELT to achieve these goals. Keeping this in mind, I will henceforth use the image of the three-pillar structure to approach a description of ideal ELT. The educational policy I have just named denotes the first pillar of the ELT architecture. As I am concerned with the teaching of ELT at secondary schools in Germany in general and in the state of Baden-Württemberg in particular, the policy in question is the state’s new curriculum, the Bildungsplan, which was devised between 2001 and 2004.

The Bildungsplan is, of course, just a cover term for the entire overhaul of educational policy in Baden-Württemberg. The individual subjects all receive a specification of their own, the Bildungsstandards. However, they still remain very general and require an interpretation as to how the goals that are stated can be achieved. This interpretation, whose aim it must be to formulate concrete teaching advice, the “How to”-guide for teachers, has to be provided by scholarly work and scientific knowledge. Hartmut von Hentig explains the position of scholarship and academics with regard to teaching at school:

*Die Wissenschaft* bringt nicht nur ständig neue Erkenntnisse über Sachverhalte hervor, sondern auch über ihre eigenen Voraussetzungen, Wirkungen, Vermittlungsformen und Folgen. Die Hirnforschung etwa legt eine andere Einstellung zum Frühlernen nahe; die Lernforschung hat den Blick für die außerordentliche Wirksamkeit der Lernumstände geöffnet. Die beschleunigte Ausdehnung des verfügbaren Wissens verlangt nach Strategien der Zusammenfassung und nötigt zu veränderten Formen des Lernens. (Hentig 2004: 7)
It remains the task of this thesis to make scholarly work available in order to fill the *Bildungsstandards* for the subject English at school. The two issues that need to be determined for teaching a foreign language within the policy framework are obviously the language itself, which is the content of ELT classes, and the ways to achieve the goals that have been mapped out in the policies, i.e. a methodology. If these parameters were set, teachers could draw on this interpretation as the tool and knowledge to carry out ideal foreign language teaching.

2.1.1. How the two building blocks of ELT relate to the three-pillar structure

In the course of this thesis I will try to do exactly this with the help of the three-pillar structure already introduced. Having said that there are *two* issues that must be determined, i.e. the language and the methodology, it may seem strange to work in a *three*-pillar structure. The reason is that the two issues are not congruent with any single pillars of that model. The two issues are simply the two essential building blocks of ELT that interplay in a manifold way, in fact, and that must be combined so that sensible teaching can be the outcome. The three-pillar structure is only the necessary groundwork which is needed as expertise in order to find ways to combine the building blocks of language (content) and methodology (tools) into an actual approach.

In order to approximate the language issue, I will mainly be moving within the second and third pillars. The first pillar, i.e. the policy, determines quite explicitly the target varieties. However, it is unable to provide a detailed analysis of language and a subsequent comprehensive assessment that can serve as a ‘right-or-wrong guide’ for teachers with regard to discrete language items. The only discipline that has the potential to be a reliable resource in this respect is linguistics. The vast field of linguistics, in which different schools of thought clash (or cooperate, as the case may be) must be exploited in a way that satisfies the desire of teachers to assess language reliably. In the second pillar I will therefore turn to variety research and will present ways of looking at language that would equip the teacher with the necessary background knowledge so that language assessment on a scale wider than just a sentence-by-sentence analysis becomes possible. This is particularly important for non-native teachers, who
tend to focus too much on what is wrong on a “local” level while completely neglecting a “global” (Bartram & Walton 1991: 89) look at pieces of writing. The latter would enable an appreciation of the effectiveness of communication, whereas the former encourages the search for mistakes. “Students must get to know what is good as well as what is ‘wrong’.” (Bartram & Walton 1991: 80)

The third pillar also has the potential to make statements about the language issue. Not only is it concerned with psycholinguistic concepts – a linguistic subdiscipline itself – but it also shapes the view one has about language. The question of how a language can be learnt casts light on the fundamental conception of language – and vice versa. This issue is particularly interesting in the context of language learning at school, where traditionally formal approaches to teaching prevail. Rod Ellis, for example, believes that

all classroom discourse, irrespective of whether it derives from form or meaning-focused instruction can be considered as interaction of one kind or another. (Ellis 1990: 125)

Admittedly, the third pillar merely reaches out into the language issue, since it is mainly concerned with processes that would be part of the other building block, namely the issues of how to achieve the goals of ELT.

Most questions revolving around the methodology, such as How to…? or Why this but not that? will be addressed mainly through the third pillar or as a result of the third pillar. One must bear in mind though, that with regard to the methodology, too, certain boundaries are in place thanks to the educational policies, in other words: pillar I.

Although methodology is not the major focus of this thesis, this very field will require much attention. The reasons for this are obvious: the methodology is the nitty-gritty, the real craftsmanship of teachers and thus everything concrete that arises out of the principles for ELT that I am negotiating in this study. The question of methods and approaches to teaching depend on the aims that the teacher is pursuing. Even though I do not aim at creating a methodology, one of the major claims of this thesis is its highly practical value. Most of the things that I am describing here are bits and pieces that teachers are supposed to immediately translate into practice. The question, then, is, of course, how and by what means, in other words the trouble of the choice of adequate methods.

It is extremely difficult to come to conclusions about which approaches and methods are best and/or most appropriate for our own teaching situations. [...] Both theorists and practitioners argue constantly about how languages are
learnt and the best ways to encourage this. (Harmer 2001: 96)

An example quoted in Harmer (2001: 93) impressively illustrates how damaging unawareness on the part of the teacher can be. What it boils down to is the choice of the wrong approach to teaching.

In the following transcript from a class at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, USA, two students, a Japanese male (S3) and a Malaysian female (S4) are taking part in a role-play about buying a wedding dress. Hovering over them to help and/or correct is the teacher (T2).

S4: The price …
S3: A little costly …
T2 (helping out): Too expensive.
S3: No … not … a little costly?
T2: OK, so won’t choose that because it is too expensive …
S3: I think it is costly.
T2: Yeah, in English we say too expensive.
S3: I can’t say costly?
T2: Well … (long pause). Costly is OK, yeah, but more often … probably we say expensive.
S3: OK, you are my teacher … (laughs)
T2: No, you don’t have to agree with me …
S3: I don’t have to …?
(Kumaravadivelu 1991: 107)

The difficulty here is multilayered. Not only is there a lack of agreement in the communicative intentions of the student and the teacher, but there is also a discrepancy in the comprehension of the individuals’ roles in this interaction. Thus there are a number of factors to be aware of when choosing teaching methods. Harmer then goes on to point out some universal principles that ought to be considered when choosing the method. As German English teachers at Gymnasien usually do not face situations in their English classes at school where two or more profoundly different cultures meet, they are not confronted with the difficulties the teacher in the above example faces. On the contrary, we operate in a steady and mainly uniform environment when it comes to culture. The conditions in which we have to teach are set. Yet we have to make choices about the methods all the same. Therefore it is essential to be aware of the goals and the wider frame of ELT at school. This is what the thesis will provide. Teachers are expected to find it easier and more obvious to exercise a “pragmatic eclectism where decisions about what and how to teach” (Harmer 2001: 97) are required.

Methodology is not a discipline in its own right in any case, but draws on the findings of other fields. In this thesis it will profit from the three-pillar structure.
As I said above, it is, of course, subject to the restrictions of the policies which I deal with in pillar I. These policies, however, are not merely restrictive. On the contrary, they do already greatly influence methodology when demanding, for example, that ELT be taught so that students achieve communicative competence. This is a fundamental choice of teaching direction. Following this directional decision made in pillar I, the fields of linguistics and psychology, which I think of as pillars II and III, will produce more fine-tuned and also highly relevant material for methodological advice.

What I have just referred to as ‘linguistics’ is, of course, the very specific field of varieties or sociolinguistics. Dealing with varieties of English in pillar II will automatically contribute methodologically usable information, such as the advice not to correct students when using particular structures on grounds that these structures do occur in certain varieties of English around the world and must thus not be considered wrong. These may be different from native English in Britain and/or the US, but they are certainly not deficient considering that they perfectly fulfil the purpose of communicating and expressing ideas and intentions. On the contrary, these structures may even correspond better to the expectations of the speech community in question than the ‘correct’ pattern that the native English speaker would use. Baumgardner justifies the acceptance of difference in English usage:

World Englishes in the Expanding and Outer Circles, as well as in varieties other than mainstream Standard English in the Inner Circle, reflect the cultural imprints of those communities that use them. While the classroom is the ideal forum in which to address such innovations, it often turns out to be the site for cultural suppression. (Baumgardner 2006: 666)

Kingsley Bolton even argues for the complete egalisation of Englishes around the world, no matter where they originate. He advocates “the importance of inclusivity and pluricentricity in approaches to the linguistics of English worldwide.” (Bolton 2004: 367f.) Whether this linguistic view is fully adaptable to and desirable for the ELT classroom in German Gymnasien remains to be seen. However, it is definitely a point worth keeping in mind.

Of equal or probably even greater importance is the area of psychology, which figures here in its interface with linguistics, i.e. the psycholinguistic area of second language acquisition. Being aware, for example, that the most effective way of having students acquire language competence is by making them
negotiate meaning rather than formally teaching them structures will probably have a massive methodological impact, since this insight suggests that interactional methods, though less loved, are more efficient than instructional ones. Although the famous distinction between conscious learning and subconscious acquisition that Stephen Krashen once put forward has long been called into question, there is no evidence that going back to formal instruction will do the trick.

Current SLA research orientations can be captured by a single word: complexity. Researchers have begun to realise that there are social and interpersonal as well as psychological dimensions to acquisition, that input and output are both important, that form and meaning are ultimately inseparable, and that acquisition is an organic rather than a linear process. (Nunan 2001: 91)

In order to find some generalisable principles, a merging of the three-pillar structure with the building blocks of ELT will be exemplified in section 2.5. in chapter 2 of the thesis. The crucial area of error correction serves perfectly to illustrate the core ideas of my entire concept of ELT. I will show the linguistic side as it is shaped by the three pillars as well as the methodological side that derives its nourishment from the three pillars. At the same time, it will once again become quite clear that I will not devise a methodology of my own but that I mean to stop at the level of principles that must eventually guide the choice of methods.

### 2.2. Changing norms in educational policy

#### 2.2.1. Making it new - from Lehrpläne to Bildungsplan

In this section I will provide a glimpse at the spirit of the new curriculum (i.e. *Bildungsplan*) and mention the overarching goals of ELT as laid out in the individual standards (i.e. *Bildungsstandards*) for the subject of English at Gymnasien in Baden-Württemberg. These I will examine in comparison to their legal predecessor, the previous curricula (i.e. *Lehrpläne*), and explain briefly why a change was thought necessary. I will also place the *Bildungsstandards* in their wider context by relating them to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.

The basic shift that has occurred since the new curriculum replaced the old one has seen a move from content to competences. The implications are that
the character of the educational policy, and with it its focus, has fundamentally changed from input to output. Again, the well-respected academic Hartmut von Hentig delineates this shift in greater detail in the introduction to the actual document:


Lehrpläne geben an, was ‘gelehrt’ werden soll. Ein Bildungsplan gibt an, was junge Menschen im weitesten Sinne des Wortes ‘lernen’ sollen. (Hentig 2004: 7)

Wolfgang Hallet points out the changes in policy that led to this decision and places the shift into its wider context:

Seit längerer Zeit hat in vielen Ländern, zuletzt auch in Deutschland, ein Paradigmenwechsel stattgefunden, der auf die (durch mehrere internationale Bildungsstudien beförderte) Einsicht zurückzuführen ist, dass Lernzielvorgaben nur wenig oder gar nichts über die tatsächlich am Ende eines Bildungsgangs ausgebildeten Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten aussagen (‘outcome’). Deshalb ist man nunmehr dazu übergegangen, die am Ende eines Lernprozesses erwarteten Fähigkeiten zu definieren. In einem solchen outcome-orientierten Ansatz bestimmen sich die Inhalte eines Lehr- und Bildungsgangs also von seinem Ende her. (Hallet 2006: 21)

Teachers must ensure that pupils possess a number of competences at the end of their career at school rather than pure knowledge of selected areas of interest. The authors of the Bildungsplan, influenced by political decisions, thus reacted to social, socio-political and socio-economic changes as well as technological progress that have shaped today’s societies over the past two decades, so that present-day life differs significantly from life twenty years ago. In the same vein Hentig further explicates the idea that a new curriculum, in the shape of the Bildungsplan, would respond to what constitutes societal life today:
Thus what children need today to get by in our society is competences that make them independent actors, rather than knowledge of facts. Independent actors can crucially imply learners, who can gather the knowledge which they want at any time. Again, Wolfgang Hallet cogently explicates the underlying idea of competences, both on the level of the individual subject and, more significantly, on a general or universal level:

Kompetenzen werden in diesem Kompetenzmodell sowohl als fach- und bereichsspezifische Fähigkeiten als auch als fachübergreifende allgemeine Fähigkeiten und Fertigkeiten („Schlüsselqualifikationen“) verstanden. (Hallet 2006: 20f.)

Therefore schooling is meant first and foremost to enable pupils to cope with the majority of social situations they might have to face in life. What Hallet among others labels ‘key qualifications’ (= Schlüsselqualifikationen), appears as ‘basic skills’ (= Basisfähigkeiten) in a document authored by Eckhard Klieme et al. In it he describes in more detail what this notion entails, i.e. what students are supposed to learn in order to be ‘ready for life’:


This passage once again illustrates that the current reform is not concerned with an improvement here and an addition there. The new policies target the basics of education. Every subject is meant to contribute to a holistic education that prepares the individual student for life. I will now investigate how the subject English at school is meant to play its part.
2.2.2. A new curriculum for English at Gymnasien

The Bildungsstandards apply the aforementioned overarching goals to the individual subjects. The specifications for the subject English at school could hardly be clearer. In the introduction to the Bildungsstandards for EFL at school, the authors describe English as the most important language in the world.

Deshalb müssen Schülerinnen und Schüler auf die Anforderungen vorbereitet werden, die sich im Hinblick auf Berufsqualifikationen, neue Formen der internationalen Kooperation (Englisch als Ausbildungs- Verhandlungs- und Konferenzsprache) sowie vermehrte interkulturelle Begegnungen ergeben. (Bildungsstandards für Englisch 2004: 108)

This basically means that the subject of English as a foreign language in secondary education in Germany, in this case in Baden-Württemberg, is supposed to prepare pupils for any situation in life in which they might encounter English. It is an adaptation to the needs of reality, the educational reaction to globalisation one might say. In accordance with the demand that competences be taught, ELT at school is primarily meant to provide pupils with communicative competence:

Das wichtigste Ziel des gymnasialen Englischunterrichts ist folglich die Entwicklung einer kommunikativen Kompetenz, die die Schülerinnen und Schüler sprachlich handlungsfähig macht. (Bildungsstandards für Englisch 2004: 108)

This simple and uncompromising statement cannot be interpreted in more than one way: communicative competence is the paramount objective of ELT at school.

One example which illustrates the turning away from traditional accuracy-based teaching in favour of modern communicative competence is the area of translation, which has a long history at the German Gymnasien. Translation is increasingly becoming an exception in teaching because the skill as such is not valued highly any more, as it seems to be quite useless in everyday business.

Das Primat des Kommunikationszweckes schließt in alltagsweltlichen Kontexten zunächst die text- oder gar wortgenaue schriftliche oder mündliche Übersetzung eines Ausgangstextes in die Zielsprache aus. Denn simultanes oder konsekutives Dolmetschen oder das Übersetzen stellen in den allermeisten Kommunikationssituationen eine Überforderung aller Beteiligten dar und erfordern normalerweise eine professionelle Ausbildung. Vor allem aber entsprechen sie in der Regel nicht den kommunikativen Anforderungen im Alltag, die auf Sicherung der Kommunikation, auf die Herstellung oder Aufrechterhaltung
Hence, there is now a new focus on an area which is called mediation. Mediation means transferring thoughts and ideas from one language into another. Translation, on the other hand, is the direct and exact transfer of texts – generally carried out on the sentence level, or even a word-by-word basis – into another language. Mediation is much freer and focuses mainly on the appropriateness of the transferred thoughts. So mediation can include explanations of key ideas, summaries, and other expansive or reductive forms of the original text. It thus requires communicative, intercultural, interactional and strategic competences. (cf. Hallet 2008: 4ff.) Grammatical accuracy, which is the major necessity for translation, becomes less important, though not useless.

Still, is it really true that no interpretation of communicative competence is needed? It certainly is a fact that communicative competence is the paramount objective of ELT. However, there is no description or explanation of what communicative competence is, what it entails, or what form it is supposed to take. Subsequently, a great deal of interpretation is needed to provide more clarity with respect to these issues and to fill the vague and abstract notion of communicative competence with more graspable concepts, even concrete skills. In this context the most urgent issue that needs clarification is the question as to whether communicative competence allows for the use of rudimentary English that just manages to get across the intended message (or something close to it), or whether communicative competence still entails some notion of standard.

Again, I would like to come back to Wolfgang Hallet in order to place the notion of communicative competence in its wider context. In the above remarks the concept seems to figure as a tool, a means to exchange messages:


In fact, however, it is a much more basic concept, which makes the question of language variation appear negligible. It does not even touch upon this issue. Communicative competence is considered a skill that is fundamental to all areas of human life because the world is made material through language. Thus it is the basis of every subject at school.
Eigentlich gebührt den kommunikativen Kompetenzen aber über diese kommunikationspsychologische und rhetorische Dimension hinaus mehr Aufmerksamkeit und eine zentrale Stellung in jedem Kompetenzmodell angesichts der Tatsache, dass alle Lehr-/Lernprozesse sprachlich vermittelt sind und dass die Einbettung des Lehrens und Lernens in die [... ] dargestellten vielfachen institutionalen Rahmenbedingungen nur durch beständige Kommunikation und Aushandlung mit allen Beteiligten erfolgen kann. Daher bilden die kommunikativen Kompetenzen im didaktischen Kompetenzmodell die Basis, die in allen anderen didaktischen Tätigkeitsbereichen wirksam ist und diesen unterliegt. (Hallet 2006: 127)

Understanding communicative competence as the basis of all human intersubjectivity and thus everything that creates reality is necessary in order to be able to live up to the expectations of the altered norms in educational policy. As the subject of English, however, is primarily concerned with language, i.e. a particular language, it is impossible to elude the debate on the norms of that language. It is necessary to determine the exact shape of the desired TL. In other words, beside the general notion of communicative competence there needs to be a specification of communicative competence for the subject English, for the target language English.

The Bildungsstandards for English are largely in agreement with the spirit of another document which I will now use to cast more light on the notion of communicative competence. It is the closely ‘related’ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (CEF) which was devised by the Council of Europe in 2001.

The two documents are closely related because they share the idea of providing learners with competences rather than knowledge. The Council of Europe is convinced that it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination. (CEF 2001: 2)

It goes without saying that the CEF is a much more comprehensive document than the Bildungsstandards for English. But I chose this quote to illustrate the general idea behind the whole enterprise. The CEF is concerned with political and cultural cooperation between peoples of different nationalities, native languages and cultures. Languages are seen as the medium overcoming barriers. Thus the obvious requirement, made by the CEF is that young pupils
must be provided with the necessary competence to do so, i.e. communicative competence. However, the ambitious document does not stop at the mere abstract demand for communicative competence, it “describes in a comprehensive way what learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication.” (CEF 2001: 1) It explains the concept of communicative competence.

2.2.3. Communicative competence and plurilingualism in the new curriculum

In order to answer the question about the exact shape of communicative competence I now make reference to the CEF. On top of communicative competence it introduces the concept of “plurilingualism” (CEF 2001: 4) to explain its notion of this highly complex phenomenon. Plurilingualism is described as somebody’s ability to communicate effectively with people who come from various linguistic backgrounds or to read a text composed in a foreign language by drawing on the resources of many languages oneself. Plurilingualism does not mean a person is highly proficient in two or more different languages, even though it does not exclude this situation either.

The term ‘resources’, as I have used it, is the cornerstone of communicative competence as it is employed here. This can be a certain degree of proficiency in one language or more, but essentially it means a person creates connections, establishes relationships and discovers similarities and common ground between languages and cultures. All this constitutes communicative competence. Plurilingualism thus differs from “multilingualism” (CEF 2001: 4), which is simply the existence of a few languages alongside each other, either in a person or in a setting, without mutual interference. What I call ‘mutual interference’, however, is just what plurilingualism supports. The learner does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. (CEF 2001: 4)

Given that, according to the Bildungsstandards, the overarching goal of ELT is communicative competence, one must decide whether it is this very type of
communicative competence that is wanted at school. If so, ELT at German schools and elsewhere, as the _CEF_ admits, would seriously be affected:

From this perspective, the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop plurilingual competence. (CEF 2001: 5)

Here we have a clear statement of what communicative competence means. At the same time, however, the implications of this concept are far-reaching when it comes to the issue of Standard English.

Traditionally, the goal of EFL teaching was to teach Standard English. This was somewhat uncritically considered ‘correct English’ and therefore a suitable target norm for ELT.

Standard English is of course that variety, or set of closely related varieties, which enjoys the highest social prestige. It serves as a reference system and target norm in formal situations, in the language used by people taking on public persona [...] and as a model in the teaching of English worldwide. (Kortmann/Schneider 2004: 1)

Thus, teachers were of course aiming at the highest possible degree of perfection and thus of correctness. The norms of Standard English were considered to be constituted by a set of rules, first and foremost grammar rules. Correct English, therefore, was considered to consist in following grammar rules. The more straightforward and regular a structure, the more correct it is. Hence grammar books broke down and reduced the complexity of English by pressing the language into convenient streamlined rules as can be found in pedagogical grammars like Davis’ _A Crash Course in English Grammar_ (2000) or Hoffmann & Hoffmann's _Kurzgrammatik Englisch: Zum Nachschlagen und Üben_ (2006).

Of course, the authors of these grammars never claimed to represent the entirety of Standard English. Yet, these works have become the main resources and reference works for ELT at German schools. In fact, grammar accounts like these might serve learners’ needs quite well. The trouble is, however, that teachers use them also for purposes of correction. In other words, if students produce structures that violate the rules laid out in these works, they are told that their speech or writing is incorrect because – and here is the greatest flaw – they violated the rules of Standard English.
In the meantime, however, this narrow conception of Standard English has increasingly come under attack. In modern descriptive linguistics it is treated “as a variety on a par with all other (regional, social, ethnic, or contact) varieties of English” (Kortmann & Schneider 2004: 2). The reason is simply that “in terms of its structural properties it is not inherently superior to any of the non-standard varieties” (Kortmann & Schneider 2004: 2). Seeing this linguistic development in relation to the change of norms in teaching policies which I described above, there is definitely a need for a reassessment of the role of Standard English in ELT.

Additionally, in a traditional view of ELT, the native speaker was considered the ideal model of the target language, though I should probably say an idealised model. “Becoming like a native speaker in one’s command of the language [...] was for a long time the main objective of many non-native language teachers” (Gnutzmann 1999: 160), and thus automatically of learners. It seems as though this goal had something of the status of the Holy Grail. The quote suggests an attitude that is blind to anything else but the achievement of this goal.

Looking at this from a certain distance, the notions of the phenomena ‘native speaker’, as used by English teachers, and ‘Standard English’, as taught by English teachers, may differ considerably from what they are in reality. Hence these concepts have increasingly come under attack. Also, the relationship between the two phenomena was not well-explored or used for school at all. The fact that the two notions in their own right were somehow blurred in this traditional view encouraged people to see an inexplicable congruence of the two phenomena. In fact, it allowed for the assumption that only the teaching of this version of ‘correct English’ as described above would eventually lead to the desired outcome, i.e. native-like proficiency. Interestingly, though, the fact that no native speaker speaks anything that vaguely resembles the idea that many teachers have of Standard English did not appear to be in conflict with the goal that the teaching of this version of English should eventually lead to native-like competence.

The CEF, on the other hand, suggests teaching communicative competence rather than any standard language. Yet the relationship between communicative competence and language standard needs further clarification. And indeed, there are concepts available that shed light on this matter. Hence I
will deal with these concepts and all the linguistic implications in more detail in the section on language (2.3). For now it will suffice to realise that plurilingualism as a way to achieve communicative competence does away with the traditional ideal of Standard English as understood by English teachers, but also with any notion of standard as used by the native speaker. Instead the CEF puts forward an approach to English that can be interpreted as opening the gates to an acceptance of all language production that manages to serve the communicative purpose.

The implications for teaching could not be greater. If communicating and receiving others’ communicative intentions were all that mattered it might indeed suffice to teach some rudimentary rules of grammar and to have pupils do projects in which they can try out and practise their communicative competence. From the point of view of teachers, especially those who have practised ELT all their professional lives with the above mentioned standard in the backs of their minds, this may seem like a radical ‘anything-goes’ mentality and, therefore, utterly alienating. It remains to be seen whether the plurilingual approach is also the desired model of communicative competence in the Bildungsstandards, i.e. the one that is legally binding for teachers at German Gymnasien.

Indeed we find that, though communicative competence is the prime objective of ELT, it is by no means the only one. Other competences are attributed considerable importance, too, and these in return modify the manner in which communicative competence is seen. In fact, these other competences have a deradicalising effect on communicative competence. The sentences that immediately follow the passage in the Bildungsstandards quoted above read:

I call this ‘deradicalising’ because it clearly sets limits to a radical interpretation of communicative competence in which any linguistic production would be considered acceptable as long as communication did not break down. In the radical interpretation correctness would not be an issue. The *Bildungsstandards*, on the other hand, lay great emphasis on correctness despite the fact that they allocate top priority to communicative competence. Mind you, there is also mention of the appropriate use of language, but eventually one must acknowledge that it is the term ‘correctness’ that distinguishes the *CEF* from the *Bildungsstandards*. The *Bildungsstandards* do not advocate plurilingualism at all. They do not even mention it. They still cling to some notion of standard, which entails correctness as a central element and thus obviously incorrectness, too.

### 2.2.4. The role of the native speaker in the new curriculum

In this context one other distinction between the *Bildungsstandards* and the *CEF* can be identified: it is the role of the ‘ideal native speaker’ which I briefly touched upon above. Under the auspices of plurilingualism, the *CEF* no longer accepts foreign language teaching “with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model” (*CEF* 2001: 5). Where do the *Bildungsstandards* locate this established authority? There is no explicit mention of it in the text, but this following paragraph allows an interpretation.

> Der Erwerb von soziokulturellen Kenntnissen über das ziel sprachliche Land weitert den individuellen Horizont und wirkt persönlickeitsbildend, indem er andere Perspektiven eröffnet, die es zu reflektieren und gegebenenfalls zu integrieren gilt. (*Bildungsstandards für Englisch*: 108)

Thus, even though there is a focus on communicative competence in the *Bildungsstandards*, it does not mean that they do away with the native speaker model. Admittedly, the concept ‘ideal native speaker’ needs a great deal of readjustment if it is to endure the change in norms. Compared to the traditional model, which I described above, it must be shifted on to more realistic ground so that teachers gain a more realistic perception of it.

Joybrato Mukherjee (2005) offers a detailed account of a useful notion of the concept of the native speaker. He identifies several dimensions of the concept ‘native speaker’ only to reject all of them that are not usage-based. He explains the uselessness of traditional ideology-laden ideas, namely that there is
a birthright to a language. In the same vein he repudiates the view that native speakers’ English is accounted for in “prescriptive traditional grammar […] along the lines of Standard English, Received Pronunciation (and, in terms of general usage, the written norm)” (Mukherjee 2005: 11). The imaginary model of “the ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows his language perfectly” as put forward by Chomsky (1965: 3) seems fully detached from reality. Instead Mukherjee acknowledges that native speakers are “stylistically multilingual” (Mukherjee 2005: 10), which completely annihilates the possibility of the existence of the one perfect model, living or abstract. This also questions the validity of the adherence to Standard English. In fact, Standard English may differ considerably from the speech or writing of a native speaker. It is thus difficult to choose either of the two concepts (Standard English or nativeness) as a reference point for the target language or as an orientation point for learners:

The Standard may, of course, be one of the many dialects that a stylistically multilingual native speaker has at his or her disposal. But nativeness is not a result of knowing and using the Standard alone, but at least to the same extent the result of the ability to adapt oneself stylistically to different communication situations and to follow linguistic routines. (Mukherjee 2005: 12)

In other words, the ideal form of the target language can only be measured by actual speaker performance. As soon as they fulfil the aforementioned criteria they must be considered a native speaker. Mukherjee *expressis verbis* lists the necessary criteria as follows: “(1) lexicogrammaticality; (2) acceptability; (3) idiomaticity” (Mukherjee 2005: 13). I understand his explanations of these phenomena to mean (1) *What is accurate?* (2) *What is appropriate?* and (3) *What is likely?* Obviously, these variables may differ enormously between different native speakers; hence it is important to distinguish between the native speaker as a concrete individual and the abstract category of the ideal native speaker. In order to find about the English of the ideal abstract native speaker, one needs to gather representative language data from individual real native speakers – whose expertise is welcome anyway. Mukherjee’s usage-based definition, therefore, rests on corpus-linguistic accounts of English:

The abstracted corpus norm is an abstraction based on the performance of many individuals in various communication situations. It thus provides a corpus-based operationalisation of what we may wish to call the native speaker norm. Of particular importance is the fact that such an abstracted corpus norm makes it possible for the first time to put an
idealised and supra-individual concept of an abstract native speaker on empirical footing. In allowing for the identification of abstracted corpus norms, corpus-linguistic resources thus provide a very useful approximation to the native speaker norm. (Mukherjee 2005: 14f.)

So in contrast to the belief, put forward in the CEF, that the native speaker is not a valid entity any more, Mukherjee reasserts the need for such a concept in several respects. Apart from the live native speaker who is “relevant to the reality of language use” (Mukherjee 2005: 15), he reinforces “the concept of an abstract native speaker as an ideal native speaker norm” (Mukherjee 2005: 15), which is the example for learners to turn to because we expect individual native speakers to be represented. The means for deriving this concept is delivered by the resources provided by corpus-linguistic analysis. Finally, Mukherjee clearly rejects the idea of establishing target norms that are based on non-natives’ performance data, in other words norms of English that is used as a lingua franca.

In his remarks Mukherjee argues the case for the Bildungsstandards, which definitely retain the ‘ideal native speaker’ as an implicit concept. They explicitly encourage the acquisition of sociocultural competence for the TL country. Obviously, in order to obtain this particular competence the learner must rely on the native speaker as a model. Only then can they study the TL, which is embedded in the target culture, more thoroughly in its entire authenticity. Mukherjee stresses that language-educational professionals have voiced stark criticism towards the attempt to dissociate [...] the English language as a communicative device from its sociocultural context and to reduce its complexity at the level of pronunciation, lexis, grammar and pragmatics (Mukherjee 2005: 19).

Eventually, he adds the fact that teachers and learners both dislike the idea of aiming at target language norms that were derived from English as a lingua franca. In this way the native speaker remains or becomes an important subject of study, not only as far as language is concerned but also considering the cultural background. I will therefore follow Mukherjee’s definition, which provides an up-to-date and sensible concept in this difficult issue.

Having clarified these important particulars of educational policy I will in the next section elaborate on the issue of standard from a linguistic perspective. The question of standard is shaped by the premises of what type of communicative competence we aim at and the role correctness is meant to play.
Through the policy and its concept of communicative competence I have established an outline which I will now try to fill with a linguistic description of Standard English that is fitting. However, I will not have to squeeze the debate on standard into any unnatural pattern, since it has become possible to describe Standard English in a way that – as communicative competence suggests – allows for quite some leeway with regard to the issue of correctness. By no means does the standard debate require a rigid model version of English like the one teachers have been using for decades. In fact, this version of English is far from what is today considered standard. This historical situation is also what I meant at the beginning when I said that in the current situation the pillars coincide nicely and fit into an overall structure. The question of standard, of course, has a tremendous influence on teaching, and in particular on marking. In section 2.3. I will suggest a concept of standard while in section 2.5. of this chapter I will elaborate on the impact of standard on marking in detail.

Before moving on to discuss ELT from the linguistic perspective I will briefly shed some light on the position that communicative competence, linguistic accuracy and correctness and the mutual dependence of these two areas used to have in the Lehrpläne, i.e. the predecessor of the Bildungsstandards, in order to find out whether there has actually been a change in norms.

2.2.5. Did the old curriculum have different norms?

Although the term ‘communicative competence’ as such is not used in the Lehrpläne at all, they do seem to advocate a usage-based approach, one which aims at enabling pupils to communicate in English: “Der Englischunterricht soll die Schüler befähigen, die Welt sprache Englisch im privaten und beruflichen Leben zu verwenden” (Bildungsplan 1994: 24) Communication is given top priority over all other issues: “Im Vorder grund steht der Erwerb der englischen Sprache als mündliches und schriftliches Kommunikationsmittel” (Bildungsplan 1994: 24). The role of grammar here does not seem to differ from the role it has in the Bildungsstandards, it serves communication:

> Die Grammatik erfüllt eine dienende Funktion im fremdsprachlichen Lernprozeß. Sie ermöglicht den Schülerinnen und Schülern, auch auf kognitivem Weg Sprachmittel zu erwerben, die sie für die Kommunikation in der Fremdsprache benötigen. (Bildungsplan 1994: 24)
There is even emphasis, which there is not in the *Bildungsstandards*, that the teaching of grammar must never occur in isolation and for its own sake: “Daher ist auch die Kenntnis grammatischer Termini kein Selbstzweck” (Bildungsplan 1994: 24).

I have set out to explore the change of norms that is occurring in ELT at German *Gymnasien* these days. I have also claimed that all three pillars on which ELT rests are changing, starting with educational policy as pillar one. Having examined the two policies with particular focus on the constitutive components in the framework (communicative competence and accuracy) and their position to one another, I have to recognise that the similarities outweigh the differences. The positions that communicative competence and accuracy have in the two approaches do not diverge; on the contrary; they seem to be very similar. Hence, one may rightfully challenge the assumption that there is a change in norms in the first place. Is the only fundamental difference between the *Bildungsstandards* and the *Lehrpläne* the focus on competences as opposed to content? I suppose the answer to this question must be affirmative. Apart from a few minor differences, they seem to head in the same general direction, considering that the constitutive parameters are similar. They are both in favour of communication over accuracy.

Admittedly, the *Lehrpläne* are less stringent and conclusive in their general outlook, but did they really used to give accuracy more weight than it has under the *Bildungsstandards*? One must really delve into them in depth and read between the lines if one wants to identify elements in the *Lehrpläne* that lay more emphasis on correctness. They envisage, for instance, the use of translation as an exercise type for language acquisition.

> Als weitere Möglichkeiten der Informationsübermittlung von einer Sprache in die andere lernen die Schülerinnen und Schüler das Übersetzen vom Englischen ins Deutsche und das Dolmetschen in Alltagssituationen. (Bildungsplan 1994: 24)

Translation is traditionally highly accuracy-based and thus a foothold of correctness-oriented teaching. Even though the direction of translation here is from the TL into the mother tongue, teachers make pupils read the original very carefully and translate it with absolute precision. In the *Bildungsstandards*, on the other hand, there is no explicit mention of translation at all.
Secondly, the *Bildungsstandards* give priority to speech. And yet again, this is more an interpretation than an explicit statement:

Insbesondere werden die Sprech-, Hör- und Leseverstehenskompetenz sowie die Fähigkeit zur Sprachmittlung in den verschiedenen Ausprägungen nachhaltig gefördert. (Bildungsstandards für Englisch: 108)

These are all predominantly oral competences rather than written ones. In the *Lehrpläne* the two are always mentioned side by side with no recognisable preference: “Im Vordergrund steht der Erwerb der englischen Sprache als mündliches und schriftliches Kommunikationsmittel” (Bildungsplan 1994: 24).

On the whole, there seems to be a slight shift towards more communicative competence and away from correctness-based teaching. But we must acknowledge that the difference is nuanced rather than affecting any basic nature. The role of communicative competence is paramount in both approaches. Once again the question arises whether we can genuinely call it a paradigm shift or a change in norms that has occurred in educational policy.

We can, for three reasons. First of all, the *Bildungsstandards*’ approach to communicative competence has more substance to it. The use of the term ‘communicative competence’ – which does not occur in the *Lehrpläne* – proves that there is a whole concept behind it, one which I will elaborate on in the course of this thesis. The ideas as to what communication is and what role it assumes in present-day life figure much more clearly in the *Bildungsstandards* than in the *Lehrpläne*. Communication is about international and global understanding, not least with the *CEF* backing up the *Bildungsstandards*. There also seems to be more credibility towards the need of the concept of communicative competence in the age of globalisation than there was ten years earlier. It has moved from a vague idea to a substantial matter. It is, just as the *CEF* suggests, a widening of the aims in a much closer Europe: this approach demands (implying there is no way around it) intercultural skills and the abandonment of the narrow-mindedness of a time in which communication stood back behind the teaching of ‘correct’ grammar, whose mastery allegedly led to the achievement of native-like proficiency.

This model of communicative competence also appears to make more sense with regard to the overall *Bildungsplan 2004*, where there definitely has been a genuine paradigm shift from content to competences. There is considerable emphasis on ‘the autonomous learner’ these days: learners who get
around on their own once they have acquired the necessary competences. In order to create autonomous learners, teaching is meant to be learner-centred these days. Communicative competence fits so much better into this general concept of learning/teaching than it fitted into a concept that focused on the teaching of content in a teacher-centred lecture-style manner. Also, seen from this angle, communicative competence has more substance to it under the *Bildungsstandards* than under the *Lehrpläne*.

Secondly, the *Bildungsstandards* will definitely constitute a shift once they have been turned into reality. My basic thesis of this entire study is that real teaching practice is lagging far behind, not only behind the theory but also behind the policies. Of course, this remains hypothetical until proven by the field study material which I will present in chapter 3. But assuming it was true, the realisation of the *Bildungsstandards* with all their implications would be a change in norms of teaching practice, since it would mean the realisation of a theoretical document, something that has never fully happened to the *Lehrpläne*.

Thirdly, the development of linguistics supports this concept in a very natural manner, so that now an approach to teaching communicative competence can indeed draw on solid linguistic research. In linguistics European functional approaches and descriptive corpus-linguistic approaches have been gaining ground over the last few decades and have become highly influential for the description and perception of language; there is now the option to teach the communicative concept with the back-up of tools that teaching lacked ten years ago. It is this third reason that I will now turn to and explain in greater detail.

### 2.3. Changing norms in English

In this section I will look at what linguistics can contribute to the practice of EFL teaching. Two strands must be considered in this part of the debate on changing norms:

- the change of norms in the TL speech community
- the change of norms in the ways of dealing with the language, i.e. the changes in linguistic research, which may simply have led to a change in the perception of the TL
The two aspects are closely intertwined and may have impacted on one another. At the same time, the simultaneous occurrence of these phenomena and combined effect of these two developments, which are mutually dependent and work dialectically, have also impacted on the devising of the *Bildungsstandards*. In fact, one must recognise that the co-occurrence of these two phenomena is by no means purely coincidental. They are both part of a larger social development which has brought about the change of norms in the policy framework in the first place.

The perceived change in the speech community powerfully reflects the changes in society. Linguists who are concerned with reality have reacted to this development. Thus one must acknowledge that it is not the policies that occurred first and then dragged English usage and linguistics after them, but on the contrary, it was a change of norms in society and language use that has brought about the change in educational policy. Those people who set out to make new policies took into account the development which had occurred on a social level before. In this way, the reasons why communicative competence is now granted top priority in the *Bildungsstandards* are rooted in social change.

As I am concerned with the teaching of English at German schools in general and with the linguistic side of it specifically in this section, I will not be able to discuss the change in norms from a sociological point of view. I will restrict myself to a linguistic discussion, considering the two angles mentioned above, even though social aspects are at the centre of attention in linguistic disciplines such as sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

As there is a whole host of linguistic schools of thought, all of them having different research interests or different ideas of how to approach the subject matter of the discipline, I will first need to decide what school to follow. Actually the decision is not about following a linguistic school. It is more about certain elements of linguistic research that can be used to back or justify theories and practices in ELT. These elements may well originate in various linguistic schools, and even so they may still all nicely fit into the pattern of ELT I am supporting here. So far I have only described the framework in which ELT needs to be carried out nowadays according to educational legislation. These laws, the *Bildungsstandards*, are also the point of departure for the linguistic discussion to follow. Taking this for granted within this context is, of course, in line with one linguistic school of thought whose findings share more common ground with the
“All functionalists share an interest in the role of language in communication and human society” (Mair 2008: 215). The stress is on the relationship, the link between language and its users. In the other linguistic approaches to language, only language is at the centre of attention. Functional linguistics sees grammatical structures as a result of communicative needs. “Form […] reflects function and is to a considerable extent determined by function” (Mair 2008: 214). Grammar is meant to serve the purpose of communicating a particular message. Considering the passages that have been quoted above from the Bildungsstandards, it seems as though its authors have based their remarks on the linguistic convictions put forward by Christian Mair.

In a formalist approach to language, on the other hand, grammar is seen as a system which represents a universal human conceptual structure. This is known as the notion of the Universal Grammar. Only the language and its grammar rules would be at the centre of teaching. The notion of language as a system is even more prominent in the school of structuralism. What strictly separates these two latter schools of linguistics from functionalism is their strong conviction that there is a strict separation between the system language and the spoken word, in their specific terms: the Chomskyan competence vs. performance or the Saussurean langue vs. parole. Functionalism, on the other hand, sees the user and language use in the foreground and as the initiators of grammar rules.

There are linguists, though a rare species, who try to find ways to reconcile these apparently fundamentally opposing views. Frederick Newmeyer, who describes himself as a generativist, believes that “formal and functional accounts are taken as complementary, rather than contradictory” (Newmeyer 2003: 687). He even subsumes the field of linguistics under this general statement by acknowledging “that much of grammatical structure is motivated by external functional pressure” (Newmeyer 2003: 687). The decisive question for him then is only “where and how much, and the centrality of focusing on this motivation [is] in one’s research program” (Newmeyer 2003: 687). For generativists like Newmeyer it is conceivable that the “needs of communication HAVE [emphasis in the original; HE] helped to determine the properties of
grammars.” (Newmeyer 2003: 699). For Chomsky, the father of generativism, this is not an issue.

I do adopt a mainly functional approach to language for reasons mentioned above which are to further be clarified in the passages to come. Against this background the most important issue I want to address is the question of standard. The discussion of ‘standard’ must be conducted within the limits that have been set by the policy framework, i.e. the Bildungsstandards. Within these limits I will attempt to describe what ‘standard’ means for ELT at German schools, as it has become clear that teaching EFL cannot be carried out adequately without having an orientation mark. Clearly, the standard notion which I will deliver may differ considerably from the one that has been used by teachers for the past decades.

2.3.1. From grammar to usage

In order to illustrate the change in norms from a linguistic point of view I am obliged to delve into the recent history of linguistic thought. Traditionally, among all the teaching methods that saw correctness as the most important criterion for ELT (i.e. the grammar-translation method, the audiolingual method, etc.) nothing was to be gained by looking at empirical linguistics because they pursued a strongly prescriptive approach. Now that communicative competence has become most important, we must draw on the results of research that puts language use in the centre. The linguistic research strands that do so are, of course, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and corpus-linguistics. These approaches study the use of language and with it the language user, rather than ‘well-formed language’.

One factor which has contributed to progress in linguistics […] has been a purely external one – technological progress in the ways in which we record, store and transmit linguistic data. […] Corpus linguistics [emphasis in the original; HE], that is the empirical description of languages on the basis of digitally stored spoken and written language, […] has been a powerful driving force in the renewed interest in concrete language use and the development of usage-, parole- or performance-based theoretical models. (Mair 2008: 216)

The most far-reaching implication for linguistics, simply because it represents a massive shift for the existing consensus on the subject matter of linguistics, i.e. written language, is the fact that with the advent of these disciplines and
supporting technologies, for the first time **spoken language** became the object of study. At the same time, linguists started conducting research without the desperate need to derive from their findings explanations with regard to the human mind. These linguists contented themselves with the mere description of language as it is used in different contexts by different people. Hence, their approach became known as descriptive linguistics.

These two fundamental shifts in the conception of linguistics are reflected in the *Bildungsstandards*. As I explained above, oral competence is valued more highly in a policy that puts communicative competence at its heart. Secondly, a descriptive approach to language allows for a wider acceptance of language production in different realisations. This issue will figure more prominently below when I discuss the methodology of error correction. For now it is sufficient to see that a descriptive approach and with it a more comprehensive understanding of language can also be more tolerant towards learners' language production, which implies that descriptive linguistics does not entertain a strict notion of accuracy. And this is a change in norms that the *Bildungsstandards* definitely advocate.

### 2.3.2. Prescriptive grammar

The system of supposedly correct grammar, which was and largely still is taught, is often a type of grammar which dictates to teachers and learners what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'.

The study of grammar is often seen as a prescriptive enterprise, itemizing the grammatical rules required for 'correct' speech. Rules such as 'Don’t end a sentence with a preposition' and ‘Be consistent in the use of tense throughout a sentence’ are prescriptive rules that many students associate with English grammar. (Biber/Conrad/Reppen 1998: 55)

The consequence is that students find these rules boring and hard to live up to, and the teachers spend the majority of contact hours presenting those rules and correcting students’ language production in accordance with them. The tiniest problem of this approach is that it is indeed boring and monotonous. On top of that, teachers are considered patronising if they dare to correct students along those lines. These drawbacks are overcome by the great
advantage that this approach to teaching is simple and clear-cut. It is the attempt to teach a language in a scientific, almost mathematical manner.

The more substantial problem underlying the use of prescriptive rules is that they do not reflect the reality of the language at all. Beside the fact that it is communicative competence that is today preferred over the learning of rules in ELT, it is the native speaker who is considered the target model for EFL learners. These two goals, which I have pointed out repeatedly in the above discussion as being laid down in the legal document that guides EFL teachers, i.e. the Bildungsstandards, cannot be achieved by the teaching of prescriptive rules!

When I discussed the concept of the ‘ideal native speaker’ and inferred that it was still inherent in the Bildungsstandards as a target model I also stated that this concept needed some readjustment. Up to now, EFL teachers have tended, despite the fact that grammar has been taught prescriptively, to name the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the guiding norm for their teaching: an absurd contradiction, because no native speaker uses English the way prescriptive grammar books suggest. So the readjustment I was hinting at would imply the recognition that real native language use is very different from prescriptive grammar books, i.e. the ‘ideal native speaker’ is a completely different concept from the one that we find in grammar books. I am sure that most EFL teachers are aware of this fact, and even so many of them disregard this wide gap between the requirement to teach the TL by aiming at native norms and the use of prescriptive grammar books for the achievement of this goal in actual teaching. I suppose this is an unconscious practice which is kept alive by tradition, although there is sufficient awareness of this discrepancy on the part of teachers if the issue is addressed.

Also, one may have to adjust the concept of the ‘ideal native speaker’ in another way, apart from realising that it is certainly not represented in a prescriptive grammar book. This ‘ideal native speaker’ is, as I have repeatedly mentioned, a concept. So when it comes to shifting this concept onto more realistic ground, one may want to look at real native speakers and their language production. This, of course, immediately raises a couple of questions. What constitutes a native speaker? Is it somebody from the UK or from the US? Or can it possibly be someone from Singapore or South Africa? Must it be the ‘Queen’s English’? Or would a Glaswegian pub owner be a good language model, too?
2.3.3. Descriptive grammar – and corpora

Saying that it will not do to use prescriptive grammar for ELT under the Bildungsstandards entails the necessity of proposing an alternative. The guiding norm for a conception of grammar which is embedded in an approach to teaching that focuses on communicative competence is real language use. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive account of real language use as used by the native speaker. This knowledge could replace the overly narrow prescriptive approach. The answer to the question of how this knowledge can be obtained is as easy as can be: One looks at authentic language. One gathers speech or writing samples from native speakers and analyses them. Thus, one can obtain the necessary description of the TL.

It sounds easier than it actually is because the collection of material needs to be extensive in order to make reliable and valid predictions of how English is used. Representativeness is a key feature in corpus design, especially when one has a concept like the ‘ideal native speaker’ in mind. Thus this method is basically a type of quantitative research. Large amounts of data have been collected and are available now. They are compiled in “machine-readable language corpora” (Mindt 1995: 7). And it is only today that there exists the possibility of processing material to an extent that is necessary to provide valid and reliable results. Even though the first corpora, i.e. the Brown and the LOB corpora, were compiled in the early 1960s and in the 1970s, they can only be fully exploited since fast computerised processing entered the stage. Hence real corpus work is inseparably tied to modern computing. The Collins Birmingham University International Language Database, aka CobiBuild, is the largest corpus to date, consisting of 500 million words.

These huge corpora then enable researchers to produce grammars that solely describe the way in which English is used in reality. They are purely descriptive, meaning that they are not based on previous grammars but only on the English language as it is used. The arrival of corpora on the linguistic scene has led to new descriptions of language. These descriptions of language, however, may differ considerably from what has been regarded as ‘good English’, so that teachers get the impression that the content of their teaching is changing in radical ways.
This seemingly simple revolution in linguistic description has brought about a change in norms for ELT. Sticking to prescriptivism and disregarding these accounts of the English language would not only prove to be a massive professional failure and an ignorance of reality on the part of the teacher, but it would also be irresponsible with regard to the learners’ goals: the pursuit of communicative competence – as I have mentioned above – sees language use in the foreground. Now that these huge collections of actual data representing language use are available, disregarding them would be a violation of the framework set by the *Bildungsstandards*. “It thus appears to be of paramount importance that many more teachers get actively involved in working with – and thus disseminating knowledge about – corpora” (Mukherjee 2006: 7). Mukherjee’s comment is definitely worth considering and highly relevant for the future of ELT. Corpora can be used in a multitude of teaching situations. At a later stage in this thesis I will include some of the suggestions that have been made. For now, though, I will restrict myself to the demand that teachers be made familiar with corpora so that they are aware of the scientifically reliable possibility of describing real language and of producing corpus-based grammar books for ELT.

**2.3.4. The implications of descriptivism for teaching**

On a less abstract level, the relevance of this discussion lies in the need to find an answer to the question of what Standard English is, and consequently of what ELT teachers at German *Gymnasien* want to use as Standard English. The relevance of this is the need to have an orientation frame for judging what is right and what is wrong in students’ language production.

Prescriptive grammars do not provide the required information on how native speakers speak and write English. On the contrary, they diametrically oppose the stated goal according to which the native speaker’s fashion of speaking is the guiding norm. A prescriptive approach is far too narrow to account adequately for the way in which native speakers speak. Too many forms that are used in everyday language, be it spoken or written, are not accounted for in prescriptive grammars. “In prescriptive approaches, deviations from the norm are generally considered to be errors.” (Biber/Conrad/Reppen 1998: 56) In
reality, however, the ‘norm’ is not as one-dimensional as a prescriptive grammar may want to make people believe, and above all, it is highly debatable to describe a deviation from the alleged norm which occurs in a native speaker’s speech or writing as an ‘error’. After all, what constitutes a language is the community of people who use it. And if they do not abide by the rules that are laid out in a prescriptive grammar book, it may be unfortunate for the book’s author, but it is hardly justifiable to accuse the native speaking community of producing ‘errors’. That’s why descriptions of genuine language use are needed.

There were descriptive grammars around long before corpus-based analyses became possible. Those were grammars which would give out a rule and then back it with an example. Or they would quote an example and then classify it. In any case, they were not prescriptive in laying out rules which would only cover a limited percentage of real language use. Thus the early descriptive grammars were indeed already more useful than the prescriptive ones. The most famous and widely-used grammar is probably still *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985).

What these grammars still lack in comparison to the corpus-based ones is the empirical facet. Dieter Mindt in his *An Empirical Grammar of the English Verb*, for instance, pursues an inductive approach. He proceeds “from language to grammatical generalization, rather than [...] from pre-stated rule to example.” (Mindt 1995: 6)

Biber/Conrad/Leech explain in the introduction to their *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* that

> in the past, grammars have usually presented a single view of the language, as if the grammar of English were one fixed and unchanging system. This clearly is not true. Although there is an underlying system of grammar, speakers and writers exploit that system very differently to meet their communication needs in different circumstances. (Biber/Conrad/Leech 2002: 3)

The empirical and descriptive approach obviously covers a far wider range of possible structures than a prescriptive grammar. The empirical approach, furthermore, can make predictions as to which form a native speaker prefers in a given context. It thus takes the whole business of grammar-writing one step further. Not only can it back up the rules it states with the help of real language, but it also takes into consideration the likelihood of a certain feature to appear in a certain context by providing actual figures relating to the frequency...
with which the feature in question appears in real language. It can “explain not just what is possible in English grammar, but what is more or less probable in different situations” (Biber/Conrad/Leech 2002: 2). Earlier descriptive grammars paid “little attention to functional reasons for choosing between the alternatives” (Biber/Conrad/Reppen 1998: 56). What emerges is an ultimate and, above all, comprehensive account of the English language as it is used in the real world.

The advent of corpora has given empirical linguists incessant momentum and functional linguists extremely powerful back-up for their approach. Generativists may ignore this development or helplessly shrug it off as irrelevant, but an area like ELT, for example, simply cannot turn a blind eye. Empirical linguistics in combination with the functionalist paradigm has de facto brought about a major shift in the perception of language, turning away from the formalist approach. This shift must now be turned into reality, i.e. find its way into the ELT classroom. What this means for actual teaching I will discuss now. There are two far-reaching implications for the teaching of English:

1. An immediate step must be to introduce much more tolerant correction practices in class. The underlying idea of this step in practice is to push grammar and accuracy away from the centre of attention in ELT classes to the periphery.

2. This new position grammar will be holding is not just a random or personally preferred choice, but a linguistically motivated decision that is due to the function grammar fulfils in language. This recognition will lead to a completely altered treatment of grammar in ELT.

A more tolerant approach to correction means that a wide array of structures that learners produce and that were formerly considered wrong English suddenly become acceptable. Of course, structures themselves do not change, but teachers’ attitudes towards these structures must. Teachers should stop worrying about linguistic items which they think wrong or about which they are unsure as to whether they are fully in agreement with some rule that they have in mind. Mark Bartram and Richard Walton, who advocate a very progressive stance on the issue of correction, co-authored a highly practical book with the telling title *Correction*. In it they convincingly and cogently summarise and justify this tolerant attitude with regard to correction procedures:

There are two important things for you to bear in mind here. Firstly, a great many things are possible in language which you may not have heard. We suggest that rather than
correcting or worrying about everything that seems new to you, you should adopt a basically tolerant attitude to the language your students produce. Instead of asking ‘Is it right?’, you can frequently ask ‘Can I understand it?’. If you can understand it, we suggest that you look on it positively and favourably, and encourage the students. If you can’t understand it, then clearly you have to ask the student about it, or if it is written work, make some written query or correction.

Secondly, it is important to remember that many of the grammar ‘rules’ which you learned at school, or even at university, are partial rules. A comprehensive grammar of English is much larger than most pedagogic grammars. However useful it might be to teach the ‘some in positives, any in negatives and questions’ rule, it is certainly nowhere near the truth of how English actually works. It is very important for you to realise that if you start applying rules, you will start to correct and worry about many things which are correct and natural already! (Bartram/Walton 1991: 102)

The structures that must be looked upon favourably rather than penalised as Bartram and Walton demand are those that empirical research proves as being used by native speakers of the TL, too. A very impressive example is the use of the past tense in combination with not yet, as in I didn’t see that movie yet (Example from Bartram/Walton 1991: 7). Every English teacher would insist here on the use of the present perfect and mark this sentence wrong. Maybe they would do it for good reasons and argue that this statement refers to something that has started in the past and continues up to the present moment, a situation which is expressed through the present perfect. Fair enough! Looking at the issue from that angle, i.e. analysing the use of the present perfect and deriving an abstract rule that seems systematic is fine.

It only becomes problematic when teachers turn the process around, i.e. give out the rule and demand that pupils apply it consistently. Still, up to this point this way of handling the matter still seems to make sense. If, however, the rule comes to be regarded as a dogma whose violation must be penalised, then problems arise. The reason that it becomes problematic then is that in reality there is no such rule. On the contrary, a huge number of native speakers in North America use the very structure I mentioned above on a daily basis, a fact which is known to us through empirical and corpora linguistics. Against this background it becomes hard to justify marking this as a mistake.

Admittedly, the example I chose is rather better suited to illustrate this matter than others, for two reasons: the narrowness of the rule (i.e. its prescriptive character) is absolutely obvious and the structure is, of course, fairly
prominent as it occurs really frequently in usage and is thus highly conspicuous. In other words it is a structure for whose existence one quickly finds evidence, e.g. in corpora and empirical grammars. I am quite sure that this seems convincing, and yet many teachers may want to raise objections saying that this is a singular example. It is not! The “some in positives, any in negatives and questions’ rule” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 102) and the insistence on (only) three types of conditional clauses, to name just two, are other examples of prescriptive rules that have achieved a certain degree of fame in this debate. And indeed there are many others, most of them less prominent but all of them subject to the correction area in which teachers must start accepting deviations from the prestated rules.

The reference I made to North America as well as using corpus linguistics as a source for my argument indicates the direction in which I am heading. The area I am getting at is research on language variation. “A variety of a language is defined as a regionally, socially, situationally or otherwise specific sub-type of the language.” (Mair 2008: 141) Peter Trudgill (1992: 77) states that the term variety is

used to refer to any kind of language – a dialect, accent, sociolect, style or register – that a linguist happens to want to discuss as a separate entity for some particular purpose.

In a thesis on the future of ELT the issue of variation plays a major role for both the teaching of the language and the reference system that teachers use for correction. Obviously, one can tolerate a lot more in students’ speech as correct if one has a wider basis to choose from (i.e. more than one single variety) than merely, say, British English. As Mair and Trudgill indicate, varieties are not only regional dialects. They can also be sociolects or even idiolects. There can even be variation of speech within one person depending on the situation that this person is exposed to, as William Labov first showed in 1966 (Labov. The Social Stratification of English in New York City (2006, 1st edition 1966)).

Labov was able to show that [...] variation was neither random nor free, but that there were statistically significant correlations between independent social or situational variables (in this case: the speaker’s social class and the formality of the situation in which the recording took place) and the dependent linguistic variable (in this case the presence or absence of postvocalic /r/). (Mair 2008: 173)

Labov’s study, which I quote here in order to demonstrate that – opposed to EFL teachers’ desires and beliefs – language variation is natural and ubiquitous, was
initially geared towards falsifying the “widespread apprehension that accents in densely populated places with mobile populations would be capricious, vacillating, and disparate” (Chambers 2003: 17). They are not; there are patterns which the speakers follow. The most important issue for ELT purposes, however, remains the acknowledgement that variation is a normal thing. ELT could thus also draw on sociolinguistic research.

For my purposes regional and social variation, as researched in dialectology, play a role insofar as students do frequently display language usage that may not be British or American English but maybe some kind of International English resulting from their native German background. On the level of register, variation becomes even more important as students with a limited level of competence do produce language that may get across a message, but fails to live up to the required criteria of appropriateness. Considering that today’s students are exposed to a vast and broad amount of media availability of all kinds, they do not encounter English in the classroom alone. Thus it is also important for them to create an awareness of variation as they are likely to hear and read much of it elsewhere.

For teachers in the ELT classroom, variation is important in two respects: a) for the assessment of students’ language production, i.e. on the level of performance, which as explained above often fails to meet the traditional standards of Standard English (Should it always be considered wrong language use then?) and b) as their personal choice in teaching, which depends on their personal “EFL socialisation”.

On top of this I would like to add one aspect of a “specific sub-type of the language” (Mair 2008: 141), namely the issue of interlanguage. There is reason enough to consider interlanguage, a specific feature of second language acquisition, a form of language variation in its own right.

For now, however, I will content myself with stating that varieties, as have been analysed with the help of corpora, must be taken into account for ELT. This research immediately ties in with what has been said about the ideal native speaker above. The usage-based description of native speakers’ speech and writing provides a much broader basis than traditional Standard English, in other words it documents language variation.

Tolerance is definitely a desirable end in any case. Yet the issue of varieties also brings up the need to discuss where this tolerance needs to end,
i.e. the question of standard. As already indicated, I will look at the TL speech community and the change of norms that can be identified there, which can thus determine the boundaries of tolerance.

2.3.5. Lexicogrammar

Having elaborated on descriptive grammar and language variation, I would like to bring up the notion of lexicogrammar before finally turning to the question of standard. To me lexicogrammar seems to be the perfect interplay between a descriptive approach to grammar and a usage- or user-based view of language. Hence I will briefly elucidate this notion and describe how it conveniently plays into the hands of the new overall ELT architecture that has been erected with the Bildungsstandards.

Grammar teaching must live up to the claim that every use of grammar is communicatively motivated. Grammar can thus not be taught in isolation. It must be embedded in functional purposes. Yet of course, grammar will have to continue to be taught and explained explicitly since a) formal schooling is still considered important and b) it also enhances communication. For ELT practice the consequence of this discussion must be to turn away from the huge amount of time that is spent on grammar teaching for its own sake. Grammar must be given a smaller share of the overall amount of time and energy than in the past, in favour of other issues.

In reality this may materialise as the teaching of the aforementioned lexicogrammar. Lexicogrammar is another result of empirical linguistics. It is the recognition that grammatical structures always occur as preferred lexical realisations, an insight which could only emerge as a result of corpus linguistics. Huge amounts of data have proved, for instance, that the use of the get-passive (Mukherjee 2002: 141; all examples of the get-passive stem from this source, where they are discussed in detail) is restricted to certain collocations.

In a traditional ELT class the get-passive structure would be taught in abstract as a grammatical item. It would not be subjected to semantic restrictions as long as grammaticality is ensured. Something like *He got born* would be in accordance with the rule. Obviously, this is certainly no structure that a native speaker could be expected to use. And, indeed, empirical research does not
account for this structure. It does, however, account for the following usages: *They got married* or *He gets involved*. Clearly, the realisation of the *get-passive* is subject to usage restrictions. Subsequently, EL teachers must teach the *get-passive* structures as semantically embedded structures, ideally tied to real communicative needs of the students. *They get married* must thus be taught as a so-called chunk. Students are supposed to learn grammatical patterns with their most frequent lexical realisations, rather than being taught a highly abstract rule that they must fill with lexical items, which may not be a common way of expressing the desired meaning. If teachers manage to significantly increase the teaching of chunks, correct use and the observation of the underlying grammar rule (if there is such a thing) will be assured. Students’ competence is likely to become more natural.

Having dealt with the change in norms in the perception and the handling of language, what is still needed to complete this section on changing norms in English is the issue of changing norms in the actual language and its community. This is required to finally determine the question of standard, which teachers also need as a reference basis for correction, i.e. deciding on whether language structures are ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. It is this issue that I now turn to.

### 2.3.6. The TL community – who is a speaker of Standard English?

On one of the first days of my teacher training at school I overheard a conversation between an elderly male colleague and a woman who is slightly younger than he. He approached her asking whether it was correct to use the noun “city” with a plural verb, because that was what he had come across in a student’s paper and had marked that very structure as wrong. She replied that actually she believed it was correct but in order to make sure he should ask the two native speakers who were in the building that day in connection with an exchange programme. He nodded but then said: “But what if they are American?” She explained that they were not because, in fact, it was an English school that they had come from, etc. Even though this situation seems as though it has been fabricated for this thesis, it does occur in reality. It highlights a major concern of many EFL teachers in Germany.
Traditionally, teachers of English at German Gymnasien claimed to be teaching British English; only British English, that is. Over the past few decades, however, this dogma has gradually been watered down and American English has achieved the status of a painfully accepted but deficient variation of English. Rather than being genuinely accepted it was considered more an unstoppable, spreading virus. It is still occasionally frowned upon. It is interesting, though, that those who consider themselves conveyors (and guardians) of British English rarely speak, let alone teach British English, for reasons discussed above.

Obviously, the description given is somewhat biased and ironic. But it does capture an influential notion that underlies the whole business of ELT in Germany. It is, of course, unsatisfactory to uphold these biased views that are not at all academically motivated or justified. The reasons that led to this situation in the first place are based on feelings and tradition: British English was ascribed a sense of purity, superiority and high social rank. American English was considered more base and lazy, characteristics that did not go well with the German educational culture of discipline and apparent aspirations to omniscience. Given that American English, which was at least the language of those who had the strongest economy, the most powerful army and the oldest democracy in the world, was considered deficient, I need not mention that other varieties such as Irish or Australian English were considered to be entirely beyond the realm of the classroom. Indian or Singapore English did not even exist in the scope of English teachers. In this section I will attempt to put this issue into perspective by giving it an academic framework. Not only is this issue relevant for teaching; it also has, of course, tremendous impact on correction procedures.

The traditional position towards the target language suggests that German teachers of English either entertain a colonial or imperial notion with regard to the English language or simply expend little thought on the development that the English speaking community and the English language have undergone. These teachers still consider British English the mother of all other forms of English and thus the only true, correct form, in short: Standard. British people are thus considered the only bearers of correct and good English: the native speaker models that teachers say they strive to emulate. Funnily enough, only a barely noticeable minority of all British people meet the 'requirements' that are ascribed to ‘the British native speaker’ by some German teachers of English. There is only
a slim minority of English people from the South of the country who speak the prestigious accent RP, and a slightly larger one who use standard grammar.

Not only is this view an extremely distorted picture of the English speech community that may find its closest equivalent in real life during the heyday of the British Empire, but on top of that, it reveals complete ignorance of the fact that this speech community has changed massively in reality. Now there are many “Englishes” around the world, so that it has become fashionable to use the plural to refer to the spectrum of varieties (e.g. Jenkins 2003). And indeed, in the meantime they have additionally gone through a democratisation process. This process may not be complete at this stage, but basically all varieties must be considered legitimate, correct and good varieties.

Just to point out the change in norms in linguistics that correlates to this development: the former perspective teachers held, i.e. British English spoken by RP speakers was the only standard, perfectly fits the formalist assumption that there is only well-formed English. Formalists, however, would never deal with any real language production, not even if the structure stemmed from a British RP speaker. Language samples formalists use are entirely made up and thus fictional. The reason I am equating these two notions is that the image of Standard English (BrE with an RP accent) that I am suggesting is also almost fictional. Furthermore, formalism would not allow for considering varieties at all, which again suits the view that this standard notion is the only legitimate English. In order to accept the equality of all varieties and to justify their appearance in class, one must clearly adopt a functionalist perspective. Functionalism, as I stated before, matches the new approach to ELT much better anyway. It is dialectology and sociolinguistics within the functionalist paradigm that allow for this view of language.

The change in norms in the TL speech community is the result of a global socio-political development. An account of how this situation came about in the first place exceeds the scope of this study and can be found in much better quality elsewhere (e.g. Kortmann et al. (Eds.). A Handbook of Varieties of English: A Multimedia Reference Tool (2004)). The only consequence of this development that is of crucial importance for my thesis is the linguistic component of this development. The socio-political evolution of the past two centuries has entailed a massive expansion of English all over the world in a wide array of different circumstances. English today is and has been for a while
in the position of the most dominant language on the globe. At the same time, however, the Empire as the carrier and conserver of British English has long ceased to exist, but the English language has stayed. Simultaneously, a new superpower has entered the scene and has been exporting its own variety of English. Countries that received English in the past have turned into new centres of gravitation and have shaped English in their own ways. And it is a development that has not come to a standstill all of a sudden.

This internationalisation and the global spread of English have led to the existence of a good many varieties of English, so that the notion of standard is more precarious for English than for any other language. In order to provide a certain degree of systematicity Braj Kachru in 1985 developed a highly influential model of the English language that classifies all the Englishes of the world into categories without analysing them in greater detail: the three circles. Not only are there societies in which English is spoken as a native language (ENL), but also those in which it is used as a second language (ESL) and those in which it is used as a foreign language (EFL). The terms that Kachru introduced and that have widely been adopted to denote this tripartite division of the language are “inner circle, the outer circle (or extended circle), and the expanding circle” (Kachru 1985: 12). Having this model in mind one cannot but acknowledge – as Péter Medgyes among many others did before the turn of the millennium – that “by the end of the 20th century people who speak English as a second or foreign language will outnumber those for whom it is the mother tongue.” (Medgyes 1999: 1) But the story does not end here:

English has become the primary language of international communication, the lingua franca of the world. [...] Today, English is no longer the carrier of essentially one culture, but that of the cultural heritage of all those individuals and communities who use English in their everyday lives, each of them giving it a distinct identity of their own (Medgyes 1999: 1f.)

The implications are enormous. All these varieties are very different. Formerly, this did not pose a problem. British and, later, American English were the chosen varieties that were considered standard. All the others were looked down upon as deficient rather than different. Native speakers of British and American English were the models teachers would try to imitate and would encourage their pupils to study.
And even then there were two varieties rather than one, which may already cause problems for the standard notion. In fact, this continues to lead to the famous (or infamous) quarrels between teachers over formal issues like spelling and grammar. Supporters of British English would at the first encounter with forms like *traveled* or *He didn’t see that movie yet* – especially when pupils come up to them to show them that they have seen the structure elsewhere – disgustedly shrug them off with the words: “Oh, that must be American English.” Occasionally, they would add their personal bias towards the other variety: “They don’t pay much attention to grammar, Americans don’t.” In return, teachers who are familiar with American English would attribute stiffness and formality to British English and excuse their marking of a correct structure with the words: “I’ve never heard this, but I’m fairly sure the Brits say it.” At the end of the day, though, EFL teachers supporting either variety were happy with this situation of two standard varieties despite their rivalry. And, obviously, having two varieties that are both standard and differ only slightly is still much better than having eight or ten different Englishes that all rightfully claim to be correct, even Standard English.

The British Empire exported English into the world. When the Empire collapsed, the British had to leave while their export product stayed. These countries, such as India, South Africa and Singapore are considered outer circle countries. Since the end of the Empire these varieties have been developing on their own. Long after the end of the British Empire another geopolitical development opened the gates for the expanding circle, whose size today exceeds even that of the other two. After the end of the Cold War, during which the Soviet sphere of influence posed a bulwark against the global spread of American-style democracy, we are now facing a situation in which the nation state with a capitalist economy seems to be the preferred societal form of organisation. This development, which is, of course, modelled on the Anglo-Saxon system, has also led to the global adoption and use of English. In general, this process is described as globalisation. Despite the facts that the US and the West still dominate the world, and nation states all over the world have more or less successfully tried to adopt the Anglo-Saxon political and economic system and with it the English language in some way or other, this is no unchallenged dominance of Western culture as used to exist during the British Empire. All these nations that have adopted Western political, economic and language
systems have adapted them to their own needs. This need not surprise us, as the prime concept the West has exported into the world is democracy and with it the principle of free choice. This freedom has also stretched into the linguistic sphere, meaning it is not British or American English that is used but varieties that are evolving in their own right in the expanding circle. Democratically speaking, all varieties of English, then, are valid forms of the language, all different but none deficient. Keeping this in mind, it becomes much harder, if not even impossible, to derive a notion of standard, let alone the questions of who counts as a native speaker or who can serve as a model for EFL teachers and learners.

Thus the implications of the *lingua franca* notion, which Medgyes mentions, cannot be overestimated:

Lingua franca has come to mean a language variety used between people who speak different first languages and for none of whom it is the mother tongue. (Jenkins 2004: 63)

English is not just a means of communication in “a myriad of diverse settings” (Baumgardner 2006: 664), with countless distinct shapes. It has developed an additional distinct character as a *lingua franca* on top of all its national varieties: another variety in its own right. The speakers of English of the expanding circle will eventually develop their own norms. The argument runs that the new variety which is used by a huge speech community is, of course, also subject to normal language change processes, such as regularisation and simplification. Its change is motivated by speech economy on the part of the speaker and clarity on the part of the hearer, just as with any other language. The evolving variety has been called English as an International Language (EIL) or English as a *lingua franca* (ELF).

As Germany is among the expanding circle countries, Germans are potential candidates for ELF use. They are likely to end up in a context where they meet speakers of other expanding circle countries. For communication, though, they may have to use English. This situation, in which only non-native speakers of English relate to one another through English, would represent a typical ELF setting. A classical EFL setting, on the other hand, would be constituted by interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers of English, in which the participants use English as a means of communication. ‘What difference does one native speaker make?’ one might wonder, especially
since the rest of the setting remains unaltered. The significance lies in the language variety used: ELF or EFL. And in the ‘ownership’ of that variety.

In the EFL situation interaction is carried out in accordance with the norms of the native speaker. He or she is in full command of the code, whereas the non-native interlocutor is not. What can happen if one interlocutor’s communicative behaviour is not in accordance with the dominant culture is presented in Baumgardner (2006), who refers back to Canagarajah (1999):

Canagarajah writes about a dialog used for a role play in Jaffna classroom in Sri Lanka. In the dialog, a loquacious woman misses her train because she is involved in a conversation with the station agent. ‘The message indirectly and unintentionally conveyed to students by this passage is that they should value a strictly focused, goal-oriented, utilitarian conversational style, whereas Tamil discourse values the digression and indirection typical of predominantly oral, rural communities.’ (Baumgardner 2006: 665)

Obviously, a situation like this is unlikely to have any impact on the ELT classroom in Germany since the sociocultural discrepancies between the English-speaking world and the students’ German home culture are much narrower. But it ought to be borne in mind that culture is encoded in language or carried by it. In the EFL communication situation the non-native speaker must also use the cultural concepts of the native speaker to communicate meaning. So either there is talk about and through the native speaker’s cultural code and the non-native speaker’s culture does not figure at all, or the non-native speaker can explain issues about his/her own culture through the cultural code of the native speaker, but never through the communicative means that encode the non-native speakers cultural concepts. In sum, EFL considers the native speaker’s manner of speaking and writing the TL, and thus the basis of communication. So the non-native speaker has to play by the native speaker’s rules, both linguistically and culturally, whereas the native speaker moves on home turf all the time. (cf Jenkins 2004: 63)

In contrast to this, in the lingua franca setting there is no ‘home team’. The language used, i.e. ELF, is not the native tongue of any of the interlocutors involved. By the same token, there is no cultural concept that underlies the discourse. On the contrary, it is one of the defining features of ELF that it is neutral with regard to cultures. There is no cultural concept whose carrier is ELF, and through which one communicates one’s desired meanings. ELF is a culturally neutral means of communication which develops its own norms as it
progresses in its international use, in which case, by the way, it may eventually become home turf for all non-native speakers. Crucially, all users of ELF are equally entitled to the language and equally entitled to change it, which fundamentally implies that there is no hierarchical relationship in any ELF interaction. From a democratic perspective ELF is a major step away from linguistic imperialism towards linguistic equality.

However, the most significant aspects of ELF are less of an ideological nature than realistic and pragmatic. The ELF setting, i.e. a meeting of non-native speakers of English who, nevertheless, use it to communicate, is a situation that may occur with an ever increasing frequency even in a globalised world. One might then argue that in order to meet the requirements of communicative competence and the challenges of globalisation, German pupils ought to be taught the ELF norms at school in the first place, rather than EFL with a British or American model in mind.

On the other hand, there is an equally valid non-policy reason to retain EFL rather than ELF. It is the still profound and even increasing contact between young people from Germany and the two target culture countries: the UK and the US. Students who are socialised in German society, which is massively exposed to US-UK cultural influence, develop a strong urge to establish closeness to these cultures and often go and visit the countries, maybe even spend some time of their school career there. The position of English as a global language raises in many students – and even more parents – the wish to be well-prepared for their future careers. So if they actually go and spend time abroad with the goal in mind of acquiring English, they would go to the US or the UK, or maybe another inner circle country. It probably is the rare exception that students during their school careers spend time in India or Pakistan or even Russia or Italy in order to learn English. So despite all scholarly attempts to look at the different Englishes of the world as though they were all equal, it makes more sense for students from this part of the world to learn British or American English, especially since it does by no means mean that the rest of the English speaking world will be closed off for them.

For the decision on Standard English and the ideal model speaker, clearly the existence of ELF, alongside all these varieties, does not make things easier. But having a concept of standard and knowing one’s language models is of vital importance for ELT at school, especially since teaching and correcting are
involved. In this way, the background I have sketched in this section has actually opened up more questions than it has resolved:

- With all these varieties that are all very different and all rightfully and democratically claim to be correct English, how does one decide which one is Standard English? In fact, with all these varieties can there be a harmonious, consistent and coherent notion of standard at all? Who can serve as a language model? Does it need to be a native speaker or is a speaker with high competence from one of the other two circles sufficient?

- Immediate follow-up questions to the general ones above, and some that are immediately relevant for teaching, are: What is the variety one teaches, i.e. what are the ‘rules’ we give out if we teach prescriptively? Can we stick to British and American English considering that there are many more valid varieties out there?

- By the same token: How does one correct? Do we mark everything wrong that is not in accordance with the prescriptive rules we have taught? And if not, do we mark everything wrong that is not covered by the descriptive account of one variety? Or do we even accept everything as long as it is a structure that can be found in any one variety? Or do we even bring ELF into the equation, which would provide an even wider basis for correction? Finally we could even disregard varieties altogether and accept everything that meets the criterion of effective communication.

I will now try to provide answers.

2.3.7. Standard English at school

There are indeed scholars who would support the idea that the days in which native speakers were the only genuine and desirable model for ELT are long gone. Baumgardner, for example, believes that the three circles “must be considered in an informed discussion of SLA” (Baumgardner 2006: 662). He then lists all the components from which ELT could benefit if speakers from the outer or expanding circles were accepted as models. These benefits were described by Kachru in 1995 (initially published in an article in 1988). He explicated that the teaching of international English should definitely comprise the components “(1) bilinguals’ creativity, (2) contact and convergence, (3) cross-cultural discourse,
(4) textual competence and interpretation, (5) language acquisition, (6) language attitudes, (7) language in society, and (8) lexicography” (Kachru 1995: 246)

Both authors explicitly demand that each of these components be studied from the perspective of “other” (Baumgardner 2006: 662) speakers of English, but crucially not from that of the native speaker. This position may seem highly academic and rather than applying it to ELT at German Gymnasien, it may make more sense in a university setting or in international language classes. However, it is not entirely irrelevant for the scope of German schooling.

As I mentioned above, the CEF claims that

the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence. (CEF 2001: 5)

This represents a clear declaration of the conviction that native speakers have lost their status as the linguistic model for language learners. The CEF seems to argue along the lines of Baumgardner and Kachru, who take into account that non-native speakers of English will outnumber the number of native speakers one day, and that they develop their own norms. The willingness to do away with the native speaker as the standard of orientation might be utterly alienating to a large proportion of those people who are professionally involved in ELT. The problem is twofold: 1) EFL teachers would have to give up their long established routines and their beloved belief that they teach British and American English. This is the less significant side to it, though. On a more substantial level, though, this fundamental shift in the conception of the language model would also deprive the whole ELT business of the last benchmark of orientation when it comes to the assessment of what is right and what is wrong. In fact, this position, in which there is room for “all linguistic abilities” (CEF 2001: 5), cannot be combined with the right/wrong pattern at all. It would, so its opponents argue, basically open the gates to an ‘anything goes’ mentality with regard to learners’ language production. All that counts would be effective communication. “Dann brauchen wir ja gar nichts zu korrigieren. He play ist doch auch für jedermann verständlich.” Similar comments usually come up when I get to this point in presentations of my thesis in front of teacher audiences.
If this position really constituted the future approach to ELT and the issue of the language model, I could here stop worrying about finding answers to the questions that came up at the end of the last section. In this case, one would not need to worry about right and wrong any more. The only guideline for language assessment would be intelligibility. So any rudimentary form of the TL would be all right, correct even, as long as communication did not break down. Even more support for this position could be gathered from the previously discussed change in norms in educational policy: the basic insight one gains from studying the *Bildungsstandards* is a new focus on communicative competence through action-oriented teaching. This nicely plays into the hands of those who see intelligibility as the only relevant aspect of ELT these days. From this perspective, correctness-based teaching has become entirely obsolete, the native speaker has ceased to be a valuable model, and any linguistic production that meets the requirement of effective communication is a good enough mastery of the TL. Crucially, though, the notion of Standard English in the sense of one variety or a fictional but streamlined TL concept has become useless for ELT.

However, this does not capture the issue exhaustively. The position I have just elaborated on could surely be described as a realisation of plurilingualism, which I outlined earlier. Plurilingualism is exactly that use of language by which speakers draw on any linguistic resources available, no matter whether these are of a native-based standard. Plurilingualism, however, is not covered by the *Bildungsstandards*, which is why I have already rejected this concept for ELT at German schools.

In the same vein, teaching ELF norms, which are developing as a result of the internationalisation of English, is not covered by the *Bildungsstandards* either. One may object here that the introduction to the *Bildungsstandards* for the subject English at school does indeed put forward the *lingua franca*:

This does give rise to the assumption that the teaching of ELF norms is desirable after all. Reading on, however, one has to acknowledge that the specifications in the subsection on cultural competence in the *Bildungsstandards* for the pre-graduate forms (i.e. *Kursstufe*) do not support this impression. There is a strong focus on national issues of the United States and Great Britain. In more detail, it is US- or UK-related sociocultural, historical, political and literary issues that teachers must deal with in class.

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler kennen

- zentrale Elemente des nationalen Selbstverständnisses Großbritanniens und der USA;
- wichtige Erscheinungen des zeitgenössischen öffentlichen Lebens und der politischen Kultur Großbritanniens und der USA;
- die jeweilige Bedeutung der Beziehung zwischen Deutschland und den USA beziehungsweise Großbritannien;
- die derzeitigen Lebens- und politischen Verhältnisse in den USA und in Großbritannien auch in ihrer historischen Bedingtheit; […]
- mindestens zwei umfangreichere Werke der englischsprachigen Literatur und Beispiele verschiedener literarischer Gattungen sowie sonstiger künstlerischer Produktionen der englischsprachigen Welt. (Bildungsstandards 2004: 124)

So there are explicit regulations in place that require a TL which is embedded in the Anglo-Saxon cultures of the US and the UK: there is clearly no room for ELF here.

The only explicated aspects in this detailed subsection which would allow for the teaching of ELF are:

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler kennen […]

- Chancen und Probleme sozialen Wandels vor dem Hintergrund der Globalisierung;
- ausgewählte Aspekte eines weiteren, über die USA und Großbritannien hinausgehenden Teils der englischsprachigen Welt; […]
- die Bedeutung des Englischen als *lingua franca* und die Probleme des sogenannten Sprachimperialismus. (Bildungsstandards 2004: 124)

Obviously, in comparison it makes more sense to teach EFL with an Anglo-American background than to teach ELF, if one has to deal with all these culture-specific issues anyway. Not only do the arguments in favour of EFL outweigh those for ELF in this subsection, but there is also explicit mention of a preference for British and American English over ELF in the subsection on language itself.

The section is split up in phonological, lexical and grammatical competence:

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler können
The authors of the *Bildungsstandards* probably believe in the old but not entirely accurate wisdom that “accent divides, grammar unites” (cf. Mair 2008: 156). Apart from this conclusion, though, one must acknowledge that this again is a hint at a preference for EFL. Students are merely supposed to become acquainted with some particularly conspicuous varieties, and this only on a phonological level. So the actual TL remains the English that is used by speakers from Britain and the US.

This all represents a huge gamut of information that lacks a clear direction. Yet it does allow for interpretation. First of all, one must recall the change in norms that I worked out in section 2.2. The *Bildungsstandards* have created a clear preference for communicative competence over grammatical accuracy. On the level of varieties this means that a wide array of structures that used to be considered wrong are, in fact, correct. Accepting variation in language simply as different realisations of the same meaning creates a much wider basis for the acceptance of language production than teaching within the narrow notion of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. At the same time, though, the policy clearly reinforces a preference for the teaching of British or American as the two most important regional varieties. So here again, the policy expects teachers to operate within the narrow frame of two varieties. Deviations from it are not desirable and,
therefore, must not be taught. ELF is entirely out of the question. This may be considered the restrictive factor for the communicative competence concept.

Communicative competence, as I pointed out earlier, may entail an ‘anything goes’ approach with regard to language production, but the sole criterion it must meet is effective communication. A student who knows the structure Alex go supermarket may be said to communicate effectively. If that student, who obviously has no clue about subject-verb agreement, aspectuality and prepositions, then additionally knows the adverb yesterday and combines it with the previous sentence into Alex go supermarket yesterday one must acknowledge that this is still effective communication. No listener will get the illocution wrong, although they might have to negotiate meaning if the time reference is unclear in the first sentence. But the two interlocutors will definitely arrive at an understanding.

Clearly, this is not the type of English that German Gymnasien aim for. Thus despite the fact that communicative competence reigns supreme, there must be a certain corrective to this ‘anything goes’ idea. The question is: What are the criteria for judging whether a structure is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in an EFL context which subscribes itself to the importance of accuracy but sees communicative competence as even more important? I have stated before that the native speaker’s way of speaking is the guiding norm. I have reinforced this notion by rejecting the teaching of ELF norms. So if one wants to apply rules, it must be those of the native speaker and certainly not some evolving ones for ELF. Neither those found in any kind of prescriptive language accounts.

But then again: Are there any rules at all with which a native speaker complies, or can he or she, exerting their unchallenged linguistic authority, make up random forms whenever they like? The latter would mean that ‘anything goes’ after all, provided you have the necessary mother tongue. Of course, native speakers cannot make up random forms. Their speech and writing is, in fact, governed by rules, the most important one of which is probably the need to communicate meaning. So using a form that prevents the communication of meaning is ultimately wrong. Native speakers also live in a community which depends on linguistic cooperation, so there is an underlying agreement that the structures which are used are understood by everyone. This is where the insistence on standard, and here in the form of British and American English, comes into play. These two varieties may serve as an orientation for decisions on
whether something is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Of course, this much ought to be clear by now, and the judgement must be made in reference to a corpus-based description of the two varieties in question. In the section on the role of the native speaker in the previous section I outlined Mukherjee’s position on this issue and made it quite explicit that I will follow his suggestions as to how one can derive native speaker norms.

Hoping to have dispelled the suspicion that communicative competence equals ‘anything goes’, I wish to point out that this notion of standard is, at the same time, the implicit guideline against which teachers should measure accuracy. Accuracy does matter, but it must be tied to a realistic basis. Hence, teachers must take into account the existence of varieties, their democratisation as well as the specific TL goals of ELT when correcting their pupils’ speech or writing. At the end of the day, the general rule teachers must derive from all this is: communication is more important than accuracy!

The fact that it is possible to think of the notion of communicative competence as a liberal and random ‘anything goes’ approach to English can be attributed to a deeply rooted fear among EFL teachers. In ELT reality the ‘right’/‘wrong’ thinking is anchored dogmatically and immovably, not least because it provides a firm basis to cling to for EFL teachers who seem to suffer from an “inferiority complex” anyway. As it is also their only stronghold in a world that bears much insecurity, they hold on to it even more tightly. Because of this firm grasp and because the binary ‘right’/‘wrong’ thinking has been so dogmatic and seemingly immovable, a dramatic change in norms is necessary to bring about at least a slight shift.

But the actually shocking aspect for EFL teachers in the context of communicative competence is yet to come. Not only does it lie in the mere fact that this deprives them of the firm grasp of their ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ world, but they lose a major foothold of natural superiority to any pupil. In other words: their authority when it comes to language issues is challenged. The worst thing about this is – and it constitutes my interpretation as to why there is such an unwillingness to practise communicative ELT – that this language authority is for many the only source of authority.

In order to diminish the shock, though, and also in order to put communicative competence into perspective, there is also mention of accuracy and standard in the Bildungsstandards. In the preceding remarks, I have
interpreted and specified the concept of language standard, which is indispensable for ELT. Language standard in combination with the necessity of correct usage of language, i.e. the thinking of language as something that can be categorised into ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, gives back to teachers what has just been taken from them. However, and this is the most important aspect of the new approach to ELT, accuracy is in second position after communication, and is explicitly ascribed a serving function. Accuracy is not a value in its own right.

All fair enough, but this is just the legal side of it. An academic study, though, should also dare to look beyond these aspects, and at least check whether this balance or relationship of communicative competence and accuracy makes sense.

2.3.8. Communicative competence vs. grammatical accuracy. Rivals or partners?

Since I have repeatedly pointed out that communicative competence is awarded the central role in present-day language teaching and that grammatical accuracy is almost as important but has to acknowledge the supremacy of communication, there is a need to explore the relationship between the two in greater detail. From the descriptions of traditional ELT one could assume that they used to be considered as existing next to each other as separate entities, and that it was up to every user to decide how much they would choose from each of the two categories in order to produce language.

The opposite is true. Communicative competence and grammatical accuracy are highly interdependent and inextricably linked. Traditionally, teachers used to teach grammatical structures prescriptively without relating them to a purpose or usefulness of any kind. Pupils, thus, were forced to practise structures which did not serve anything near communicative competence. Meaning, context, or actual language use were not considered at all. This formal approach stopped in the 1950s when it was replaced by the so-called audiolingual method. Professor of Education and of Linguistics Diane Larsen-Freeman identifies it as being an ELT realisation of functional linguistics, a viewpoint which I find only partially convincing. Although its underlying theory of language may have been functional, its methods suggest strictly generative elements. Pattern drilling reigns supreme and mistakes are meant to be avoided.
Additionally, little attention was paid to cognitivism. Students were trained in a behaviourist manner. Its aim, however, was to enable students to communicate in the TL. Spoken language was more important than written. These elements built upon the functionalist approach to linguistics.

It is also this approach that I believe has more explanatory power to clarify the relationship between communicative competence and grammatical accuracy than the formalist one, for it seeks “to explain why one linguistic form is more appropriate than another in satisfying a particular communicative purpose in a particular context.” (Larsen-Freeman 2001: 34). Functional linguists study the information structure and the interpersonal interaction that occurs in written or spoken exchange in order to find out patterns of conveying meaning, while formalists only study grammar structures.

What is of interest to the functional grammarian is not that the rules generate grammatical sentences, but rather that the production of rule-governed sentences is the means to coherent communication. (Larsen-Freeman 2001: 36)

Hence, grammar is not regarded as an end in itself but as a means to an end, namely the creation and the exchange of meaning. In order to get across a message conveniently, it is indispensable to follow certain linguistic rules.

The implications of this whole functionalist approach for the field of ELT were far-reaching. The pressing question was how to translate the findings of the functionalist study of grammar into teaching which was dominated by the teaching of grammatical forms. It is important to remember that ELT was not something which was suddenly newly installed when functional linguistics entered the scene. It had a long tradition, a tradition which consisted of the teaching of grammatical structures which had to be practised in textual translations: an entirely formal approach.

All of a sudden, teachers were expected to teach manifold patterns of language to serve communicative purposes since

for someone learning about the English language for the purposes of communication, it is the real use of the language that is important. It is not enough to study just the grammatical forms, structures and classes. These tell us what choices are available in the grammar, but we also need to understand how these choices are used to create discourse in different situations. (Biber/Conrad/Leech 2002: 2)

Since the 1950s the functionalist approach has dominated ELT theory. In practice, however, there have been times when it was granted more space in the
ELT classroom, and others when traditional formal approaches retained a firm grip of ELT practice. In any case, functionalism since its emergence has evolved into different refined sub-approaches. Today one can distinguish between two schools of thought within the functionalist tradition in ELT: a structural and a communicative one. Both believe that grammar is necessary to communicate meaning and thus believe in the inseparability of the two. However, they differ in the way they tackle the task of teaching. They go about differently when it comes to teaching. Coming from a tradition in which teaching the structure through the grammar-translation method, which was entirely detached from meaning, was everything that constituted ELT, EFL teachers in Germany first adopted a structural approach.

Its adherents assume that communicative ends are best served through a bottom-up process: through practising grammatical structures and lexical patterns until they are internalized. (Larsen-Freeman 2001: 36)

As I outlined above, this was very popular in the 1950s and 60s in line with behaviourist psychology and was called audio-lingual language teaching. It has persisted through the decades and is still an approach that is practised at schools these days. Pattern practice and structural drills are meant to serve their internalisation. When the internalisation of the structures eventually sets in – so its adherents believe – the learner has been equipped with the necessary means and tools to communicate any meaning they desire. This is why I have argued above that I can only partly agree to labelling this approach functionalist. The underlying idea may be functionalist inasmuch as its supporters believed that grammar is inseparably tied to communication, that the first serves the second. Practising structures, however, before genuinely communicating meaning, i.e. learning structures detached from real communication, is far from the functionalist idea of language. Besides, no ELT career can seriously claim to cover all possible structures needed for communication. Hence, the practice of hollow structures must necessarily entail the generativist idea that one practises structure A as an example of all structures that follow the rule of structure A. So students who had practised this structure and had been given the rule were expected to be able to produce all structures that followed this rule. This practice suggests the idea that language is rule-governed and that being in command of a set of rules, one can produce an infinite number of sentences. This is why I have
argued that the method applied was far from functionalism. On the contrary, this approach was quite generative in this respect.

The second approach, which also chronologically followed the structural one, entirely focuses on language use instead of formal aspects. In the 1970s it was introduced through “notional-functional syllabuses” (Larsen-Freeman 2001: 36) and developed into teaching language use through role plays and communicative tasks. The underlying idea was to learn communication in a foreign language by verbal interaction. The actual performance of interaction would then generate syntactic structures so that formal accuracy would come as a by-product. This seems much closer to, if not entirely in accordance with, the functionalist paradigm. At the time, this approach was often smiled at as it did not seem to be substantial teaching, for it entailed all these elements of playfulness and thus a profound lack of seriousness. Students did not have to learn and revise as they did for maths or chemistry, and, above all, in the traditional approach to foreign language teaching. They just did not ‘suffer’ enough from this ELT practice for it to be taken seriously among its fellow subjects. But on a more substantial note, apart from these polemic reasons which its opponents could name, this approach simply did not achieve the desired results. The reasons for the lack of success of this approach are manifold and extend from the then contemporary reluctance to exert authority to the belief in unrestricted creativity.

Coming back to the above discussion on ELF vs. EFL, the ELT approach of the 1970s may have been considered an ‘anything-goes’ age. The results were horrendous and thus teachers and authorities soon returned to established practices. They have retained the odd element from this period, reformed the approach fundamentally, or mixed some traditional grammar-focused approach with this very liberal practice. Yet, at the end of the day, the accuracy-based, prescriptive teaching kept the upper hand, unfortunately. I am expressing pity about this development, as the basic idea of building one’s foreign language education on functionalism is a very good one. Only 30 years ago, too many mistakes were made when turning it into practice, for reasons that primarily lie in the lack of the necessary tools and knowledge. On a secondary level, this approach did not work back then for sociological reasons. Analysing these is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nowadays, I would confidently assert, the necessary knowledge and tools are available, especially on the linguistic and didactic front. It is thus the task of this thesis to integrate and collect these
aspects in order to provide for a compact and comprehensive course in ELT theory and practice. The approach to ELT which failed back then is worth pursuing again; this time for real and with substantial back-up from scholars and with different but very clear goals in mind.

For the moment, all one must bear in mind is that the functionalist approach has managed to clarify that grammar can never be taught adequately if it is detached from meaning. “Grammar is a resource for making and exchanging meaning.” (Larsen-Freeman 2001: 36) Structure or communicative competence can, therefore, not be regarded as separate and single entities but maybe as the opposing ends of a continuum. When it comes to teaching, teachers must decide where on this continuum they would like to locate their teaching approach. Ideally, it must be somewhere in the middle with a self-confident tendency towards the communicative end. Incidentally, this view is precisely reflected in the Bildungsstandards where it is stated that the structural features are partial competences whose function is to serve the overall aim of communication: “Lexikalische, grammatische und orthografische Fertigkeiten sind Teilkompetenzen und haben dienende Funktion.”

2.3.9. EFL vs. ELF

Should this discussion bring up the question in what way the relationship between communication and grammar is linked to the EFL vs. ELF debate, then I would like to point out that the two varieties are associated with the two ends of the continuum just mentioned. ELF seems to embody communication disregarding any formal rules or linguistic norms of one single variety, the ‘anything goes’ approach, which is just the thing that school does not want to adopt. EFL, on the other hand, is what we have always had in schools: a way of ELT that strongly focuses on grammar and correctness, with one particular target variety in mind.

From this simplified angle, ELF does play a major role because seeing ELF as the embodiment of communication means – following my earlier remarks – that teachers even have to tend towards the ELF end. Seeing ELF as communication and EFL as grammar would mean we cannot but put ELF into practice after all. The equation I have opened up would thus mean: we want to
have EFL with an ELF core. ELF is the underlying idea, but EFL is the corrective. We do not want ELF norms but an ELF mindset. We want EFL norms but no EFL mindset. We want ELF teaching methods and EFL teaching goals. One could go on and on in this manner, but it would probably just become more confusing. Clearly, we have to acknowledge that the concept of English as a *lingua franca* will inevitably continue to influence the future of ELT at schools. In fact, it might eventually replace EFL entirely. Some aspects of it have already entered the conception of ELT. Right now however, the desired classroom context remains an EFL context. Above all, one ought to remember that the equation is not very precise anyway, so the most advisable thing to do is look at ELF and EFL separately from the communicative and grammar ends of the continuum I suggested.

What remains true, however, is that teachers do need to move away from grammatical accuracy. The gap that this leaves behind opens up space for doing other, more useful, things during class time. English classes that take place against the background described must incorporate the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence, again with a focus on British and American cultures. In this culture-specific context it would make sense to include collocations and idiomaticity into teaching, especially since these structures inherently carry culture in them. So they perfectly go with the lexicogrammatical idea of teaching ‘chunks’.

Yet again the learning of intercultural competence must always train an open mind towards any other culture whose members may end up using English in an interaction with the learners of this class.

This brief discussion of different beliefs in terms of teaching EFL and ELF, grammar and communicative competence and combinations of all the components perfectly sets the scene for the wider field of how to conduct ELT under these premises in general. I will now discuss some findings of second language acquisition research and error analysis as well as other didactic aspects that are in accordance with the new model of ELT.
2.4. Changing norms in teaching theory

In the introduction to this study I stressed that I would like to use the image of a three-pillar structure to describe ELT today. I have elaborated on the first two pillars in the two previous sections. Those are the Bildungsstandards, i.e. the policy framework that is in place now, and the research findings and tools that present-day linguistics provides, in particular with regard to varieties. The third pillar is mainly constituted by the findings of second language acquisition (SLA) research. This field of research generates quite a lot of knowledge which is useful for the creation of the underlying teaching theory. As such it is indispensable for completing the new approach to ELT. SLA in turn uses insights from various other subdisciplines. It mainly rests on psycholinguistics and is greatly shaped by the ideas that exist of learning in general, i.e. developmental psychology.

In this section I will present findings of SLA research that are useful for my approach to ELT. The term SLA was initially used to merely describe the process that takes place in human minds when people acquire a second language in a natural environment. Back then it referred to learners that were exposed to the foreign language but did not receive any instruction in it. At some point, researchers started including in their research the type of SLA that occurred in formal teaching. They analysed how different methods in teaching led to different results in the SLA process and outcome. Although it is far from having been exhaustively researched, nowadays a vast amount of work devoted to this discipline is available. One can thus draw on research results that cater for all kinds of needs.

SLA is a linguistic area that directly borders ELT in terms of its research interest. Scholars concerned with the theory of ELT, however, have always dealt with didactics, pedagogy, and teaching methodology first. They may have glimpsed at SLA research but never built an entire teaching approach on it. Instead they were primarily concerned with improving methods; their sole point of reference being the previously practised method. SLA never had too much weight in the shaping of a teaching approach. During the grammar-translation method this even seemed to be a sensible thing to do, less so during the audiolingual method, though. One should note, however, that the audiolingual method did have a correlating theory in psychology. This theory was merely not
labelled a SLA theory. Scholars at the time believed that learning a language occurred according to the principles of behaviourism.

Even when the cognitive turn in psychology and the Chomskyan turn in linguistics occurred, the correlating results of SLA research did not enter the classroom. Apart from the fact that behaviourism and the audiolingual theory were extremely influential, the explanation for disregarding cognitive psychology and SLA in its wake to that extent is that it was never expected to bear much potential anyway for ELT approaches that occurred in highly artificial settings. SLA research was geared towards explaining the workings of natural SLA. For this same reason, however, today’s new approach to ELT can benefit greatly from this field of research as the new goals stipulate that learners should be provided with the utmost degree of natural competence in the TL.

SLA research seeks to explain the processes that are at work when a learner acquires a second language. SLA research is then also able to explain why different teaching methods lead to different results. ‘Different results’ obviously means varying degrees of success on the part of the learner. Success, of course, must be measured with regard to the goals that the type of instruction in question was trying to achieve when the language course began. Nowadays the top goal we have for ELT is something that very much resembles naturally achieved competence in the foreign language, i.e. the original research field of SLA research. This makes the discipline more relevant for ELT than it has ever been. As a teacher, one ought to make use of the SLA research findings by arranging one’s teaching in such a way that it most enhances acquisition. At the same time, SLA research has also brought about the insight that natural SLA may have certain drawbacks. So it is not the teacher’s sole duty to create a natural SLA sphere. If this were the case, we would not need any teaching but could send our students simply to a TL environment. It is a teacher’s duty to use the findings of SLA in a way that ideally serves the achievement of goals previously stated, which means both encouraging natural acquisition and at the same time creating a setting that eliminates the drawbacks of natural acquisition. I will elaborate on this in more detail in the course of this section.
2.4.1. Second language acquisition

Second language acquisition has become a major field of research in the past three decades, so that today there is an enormous amount of material and scholarly writing on it available. A pattern that has been used to illustrate and clarify some basic notions of SLA research is dichotomy.

SLA really took off in the 1970s. Stephen Krashen, one of its most eminent representatives through the 1980s, introduced a dichotomy (Krashen. Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning (1981)) that distinguished between acquisition and learning. Acquisition was defined as the result of the unconscious process of natural interaction in which meaningful communication occurred. This was considered the only way to achieve competence in the TL. Learning, on the other hand, was defined as the outcome of the conscious process of classroom experience where the focus was on form. This solely served the knowledge about a language.

Krashen’s dichotomy has strongly been criticised for being vague on the one hand, yet claiming, on the other, to be able to determine clear cut-off points as to which type of input, whether meaningful communication or formal teaching, takes which route. “How can we tell when a learner’s production is the result of a conscious process and when it is not?” Mitchell and Myles (1998) quite rightly ask. Yet the distinction has been very influential and, thus, persistent. Despite its insufficiencies it bears great explanatory potential, not to mention the great illustrative power it has.

Rod Ellis has modified it in a way which makes it more watertight, paradoxically by breaking the dogmatic view that ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ are sealed off from one another by an impermeable boundary. He does not see each phenomenon as a closed-off process. Ellis extends this ‘either/or’ notion to a more complex two-dimensional framework by additionally introducing the distinction between formal and informal learning. He stresses that classroom experience does not necessarily equal formal learning. It can involve informal learning, too. He explains that the “advocates of the communicative method [...] emphasise the importance of teaching activities designed to encourage informal learning” (Ellis 1990: 2). Vice versa, a naturalistic setting can equally involve formal learning, e.g. when the less proficient interlocutor explicitly asks for an explanation of a specific form.
These very simple but insightful remarks may tempt some to claim that this much SLA knowledge is sufficient to understand the fundamental division in teaching approaches. Obviously, one can relate Ellis’ pair of informal vs. formal learning in SLA, combined with Krashen’s ‘acquisition’/‘learning’ hypothesis, to the oppositional pairs of communicative competence vs. grammatical accuracy, descriptive vs. prescriptive grammars and NEST vs. non-NEST. They all seem somehow interconnected and all play into the hands of those who see one dividing line that separates all the concepts into two streams of belief: on one side are those teachers who are proponents of prescriptive formal learning and grammatical accuracy, which would only allow for ‘learning’ in Krashen’s terms. This group would typically consist of non-NESTs. On the other side are those teachers who teach descriptively, informally and communicatively, by which they stimulate ‘acquisition’. Those would be NESTs.

Gass/Selinker state that “NNSs⁴ in a classroom setting often spend more time on metalinguistic activities (e.g. studying rules of grammar or memorizing vocabulary words) than on activities of pure use” (2008: 359). This observation runs straight along the lines of the accusations that are raised in many articles and texts on EFL teaching. I have emphasised the inclination in scholarly work to accuse teachers of focusing too much on grammar and structural issues (i.e. “metalinguistic activities”) at the expense of the practice of language use. The implicit advice for teachers is to turn to communication instead. The results of SLA research at first sight also seem to strongly support the argument in favour of communicative teaching. Hence the tendency in current educational reform schemes towards more communicative practice while doing away with the obsession with grammar and form. Assuming, however, that SLA research supports the pure practice of communicative teaching would be a premature conclusion which falls short of the much more complex findings SLA research provides. It is a tendency towards and not a replacement of the one approach with the other. One ought to think of the two teaching approaches as the two ends of a continuum and not as two mutually exclusive entities.

Since SLA research has evolved into such a huge enterprise it also provides a large number of models and theories. The EFL teaching situation is, of course, only a small part of the entire field of SLA. The overarching questions which need to be addressed in this section are: a) What role does instruction play

⁴ NNSs = Non-native speakers.
in the process of SLA? b) How can we optimise the business of instruction so that it contributes most efficiently and effectively to SLA? Some researchers would argue that the role teaching plays is minimal. If I believed so, too, I could generously skip this whole section. I believe, however, that teaching, if carried out appropriately, can have a huge impact on the ultimate success of the pupil.

I will now present the research findings of the most important hypotheses in SLA research. I ought to stress that I will not proceed chronologically because this has been done elsewhere more comprehensively, e.g. Gass/Selinker. Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course (³2009) or Mitchell/Myles. Second Language Learning Theories (²2004). Space is too limited to treat all the approaches equally and separately. Instead I have picked out those approaches that I find most convincing and significant for reasons I will discuss in the relevant section. I will present them in clusters that have occurred as natural groupings. So quite naturally, the universal grammar (UG) approach will appear as a cluster in its own right because there is nothing similar. The only chronological account will be provided in the next section, in which I will introduce the basic terms of SLA.

2.4.2. Contrastive analysis

Structuralist linguistics of the mid 20th century was concerned with the synchronic analysis and description of individual languages. One option that this type of research opened up was a comparison of different languages in minute and precise terms. Research was geared towards finding out structural similarities and differences. This became known as contrastive analysis. The significance of this research strand for my thesis in general and the section on SLA in particular is the fact that initially it was strongly believed that contrastive analysis had major didactic implications for the ELT classroom. Second language teaching at the time was strongly tied to behaviourist thinking. It was believed that a foreign language was basically learnt by ways of adopting certain patterns of behaviour (cf. Nunan 2001: 87f.). A foreign language was considered just another skill one could learn by practising certain habits, just like the way one learns to change gears in a car at driving school. It was believed that the point of departure for learning a second or foreign language (L2) was one’s first language (L1). It was,
therefore, regarded as necessary to study the differences between languages because the influence of L1 on the learning of L2 was apparently tremendous. If structures in the two languages were similar the acquisition process was believed to be easy, just like a driving novice can take advantage of having once learnt to play the piano, since the ability to use the piano’s pedals has provided him or her with the necessary feel for the clutch, the brake and the accelerator in the car. According to that theory it was particularly difficult for the learner to acquire new forms if there was a conflict between the rules of L1 and L2. Hence, the study of difference, i.e. contrastive analysis, was considered indispensable for predicting and potentially resolving difficulties. Applied linguist Robert Lado (1957) put these ideas forward as the contrastive hypothesis:

We assume that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult. The teacher who has made a comparison of the foreign language with the native language of the students will know better what the real learning problems are and can better provide for teaching them. He gains an insight into the linguistic problems involved that cannot easily be achieved otherwise. (Lado 1957: 2)

Didactic scholars were convinced that they could greatly improve teaching practice by making use of the research results that structuralist linguistics had initiated.

The simplistic separation and the clear-cut patterning that contrastive analysis provided were called into question before long. It was too obvious that sometimes even similar structural patterns can lead to acquisition difficulties. (cf. Kortmann 1999: 122). Secondly, the whole theory borrowed a large proportion of its ideas from behaviourist psychology, and could, therefore, retain its popularity only just as long as behaviourism itself managed to:

It is no coincidence that research questioning the contrastivist position emerged at about the same time as cognitive psychologists began to challenge behaviourism. (Nunan 2001: 88)

2.4.3. Error analysis and interlanguage

Not only were the tenets of the contrastive hypothesis called into question in the 1970s, but other developments in the area of SLA research entered the stage at
the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. In particular, the study of learners' errors came to be considered a valid instrument in gaining insight into SLA processes. Researchers began regarding

the investigation of learners' errors as a way of obtaining insights into the processes and strategies underlying SLA. Errors were seen not as evidence of pathology on the part of learners (as suggested by behaviourism), but as a normal and healthy part of the learning process. (Nunan 2001: 88)

Königs explains that not only errors were then recognised as indicators for cognitive processes but any kinds of utterances, so that an analysis of linguistic performance would allow inferences about the learner's preconditions as regards language (cf. Königs 2003b: 435).

Error analysis proved that some of the regular errors were indeed due to the interference of L1. The majority, however, occurred for other reasons. The most important insight gained from error analysis was that learner “errors and mistakes are patterned” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 10), “rather than random” (Nunan 2001: 88). Learner utterances may be deviant from the TL norms, but they are highly systematic in themselves. As the types of errors gradually change, there is reason to believe that learners go through various developmental stages, “from very primitive and deviant versions of L2, to progressively more elaborate and target-like versions” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 10). These successive stages are governed by a set of underlying rules: “These interim rules have their own integrity and are not just inadequately applied versions of the TL rules.” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 10) The generally accepted term which was coined to describe each individual stage of learner competence which comes prior to the TL is “interlanguage” (e.g. Nunan 2001: 88 or Corder 1981: 2).

Corder illustrates the notion of **interlanguage** (IL) by employing an imaginary model of a continuum. One end of the continuum represents the mother tongue of the learner, which is always the point of departure for anyone attempting to learn a second language. The other end represents the TL, i.e. the – rarely achieved – goal of a foreign language education. As the learner moves along this continuum towards the TL, he or she gradually develops more target-like forms. At any stage between the two poles the learner has an interlanguage, i.e. “a sort of hybrid between his L1 and the target language” (Corder 1981: 2), in any case a complete system which is characterised by unique rules.
There is a need to stress that this model of IL would only apply to SLA at the time when the impact of the learners’ L1 was still tremendously overestimated. At this point I must admit that I have deliberately deprived Corder’s remarks of their context and further comments. In order to do his writing justice I should clarify that he immediately refutes this view of IL and goes on to assert that “clearly interlanguage was not a hybrid language and had a developmental history of its own” (Corder 1981: 2). The results of error analysis proved that IL only to a small extent suffered from interference of the rules of L1.

Still, I would like to uphold the image of the continuum since it does indeed serve to illustrate IL as something that is situated between two ends. I would like to modify the concept by simply attributing zero competence in the TL to the first end of the cline. Thus I avoid ascribing to the mother tongue a constitutive status in SLA. Certainly the learner’s mother tongue does play a role in SLA, but it is not the single point of departure on the IL path.

Thus learners begin their SLA process displaying zero competence in the TL (=starting point on the continuum) and gradually acquire more and more competence in the TL as they move along the cline towards the other end of the continuum (full competence). This model of IL does not comment on the role of the mother tongue. With the knowledge available today one can confidently assert that its role is limited, though not negligible. But crucially, it would be inaccurate to describe the mother tongue as the sole departure point for SLA.

The most important insight error analysis has brought about, beside the recognition that the second language is not built upon the mother tongue, is the fact that the learner’s competence in the TL is never flawed. The advent of the concept of IL has clarified that any stage on the continuum is a complete system. IL is highly systematic. It is deviant from the TL norms, but it is not random and faulty. Taking these findings seriously must necessitate a complete review of the ELT’s notion of error. I will discuss this issue in the next section. For now all we need to bear in mind is that one property of IL is systematicity.

Once a learner has achieved a particular stage of IL, it is by no means certain that he or she is able to reproduce the competence potential of that stage at all times. Learners move up and down the cline all the time, meaning that they theoretically have certain stages at their disposal, yet not entirely under their control. The reason I am emphasising this difference is that according to Mitchell
and Myles (1998: 11) another important characteristic which interlanguage displays next to systematicity is variability:

Learner language systems are presumably – indeed, hopefully – unstable and in course of change. [...] Most obviously, learners’ utterances seem to vary from moment to moment, in the types of ‘errors’ which are made, and learners seem liable to switch between a range of correct and incorrect forms over lengthy periods of time.

Beside systematicity and variability, learners display a third feature when developing their IL, namely “creativity” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 11). Creativity means that once learners get an idea of some features of the TL, they make generalisations and apply rules they believe they have discovered.

Having arrived at the term ‘interlanguage’, the essential developments in SLA research have been outlined so that there is a firm basis on which I can now operate when introducing some strands of thinking within the field of SLA. I will explore a few of the hypotheses, which exist in the SLA literature in more detail, in an attempt to find out what is useful for the context of ELT.

2.4.4. **Input-oriented hypotheses and the concept of negotiation of meaning**

The image of dichotomy I mentioned at the beginning of this section will now bear its fruit since the hypotheses can be split up into two opposing groups. Again there is informal vs. formal learning as the overarching conflict, but then there is also input-oriented vs. output-oriented learning, both of which can occur in either setting. The most influential input-oriented theory is probably Krashen’s *comprehensible input hypothesis*, which has been resumed by many authors. Nunan (2001: 89) explains that “the basic mechanism underlying language acquisition was comprehenshion”. This theory states that pupils can acquire structures that exceed their current level of competence by one step. Thus this hypothesis bases successful acquisition on the input a pupil receives. However, as it also involves the pupil’s own competence, it is actually a model of interaction.

That was indeed the direction this line of thought took after it was established. Further research concentrated on interaction and process. Teaching and learning went on to be seen as interaction which involves a high degree of exchange, ruling out passivity on the part of the pupil.
L2 acquisition occurs most efficiently when learners have plentiful opportunities to negotiate meaning whenever there is some kind of communication difficulty. (Ellis 1990: 12)

This concept of negotiation of meaning has become the cornerstone of all followers of the interactional hypothesis. Negotiation, so they argue, brings learners into contact with L2 data and ensures that they have to attend to it. Thus they will incorporate it into “their mental grammars” (Ellis 1990: 12). The input-oriented hypotheses also comprise the frequency model. Frequency is considered another factor that determines acquisition. The more frequently learners are exposed to a certain feature, the more likely they are to acquire it. Finally, I would like to include the discourse hypothesis on the side of the input-oriented models. It states that the nature of the discourse in which the learner is involved ultimately determines the nature of the linguistic competence they acquire.

The core of the input-oriented hypotheses, however, is that input and interaction were brought together under the umbrella of negotiation of meaning. Ellis (1990: 116) sums up:

Both the input and the interaction hypotheses emphasize the importance of meaning-focused communication as a source of comprehensible input, which is seen as the necessary condition for acquisition to take place.

Yet Krashen’s original comprehensible input hypothesis, though very powerful in terms of its impact, was seriously challenged. It has been argued that pupils who are exposed to natural language a lot, which would be the ideal situation for acquisition according to this hypothesis, ought to perform much better in the TL than they actually do.

2.4.5. Output-oriented hypotheses

Alternatively, and in immediate opposition to the input-interactional model, there is a model that concentrates on output, “suggesting that opportunities to produce language were important for acquisition” (Nunan 2001: 90). The output-oriented hypotheses share the idea that the pupils’ production, rather than the input they receive, is the central element for acquisition. Although there is this common ground, there are also finer shades of difference between the various models of output-oriented hypotheses.
The *topicalisation hypothesis*, for instance, emphasises the necessity for learners to control the topic of the conversation in which they participate. This is the most likely way to obtain intake, and in any case ensures that the learner can produce enough output.

Another model I want to mention is the *collaborative hypothesis*, which claims that learners need scaffolding. It also emphasises the need to produce output, but since learners are not in full command of the TL they require the help of their more proficient interlocutors to produce syntactical structures that are beyond their competence. Then they will be able to pick them up.

The last model I want to group among the output-oriented hypotheses is the *monitor hypothesis*. It states that learners consciously check and modify the L2 output they produce against the grammar rules they have learnt. Of course, the degree to which learners monitor themselves varies substantially between learners, so that there are monitor over-users and monitor under-users depending on how much the individual cares about accuracy and fluency. Whichever concept one tends to favour, the creation of output-oriented hypotheses must be understood as an attempt to draw some attention to the importance of production on the part of the learner, as Mitchell and Myles (1998: 15) point out, in order to enhance acquisition:

> The act of speaking forces us to try out our ideas about how the target grammar actually works, and of course gives us the chance of getting some feedback from interlocutors who may fail to understand our efforts.

Although there seems to be an opposition between input- and output-oriented hypotheses, they clearly interconnect since output in turn requires feedback, which again provides new input. The overall concept of communication is by nature marked by both input and output.

Apart from the models I have introduced so far within the framework of the opposition between input and output, there is one more hypothesis which does not fit this dichotomy, though. I will briefly explain it as it carries a high degree of relevance for ELT. It is the so-called *acculturation model*, which claims that the degree of acculturation determines the success in SLA. Acculturation is the feeling on the part of the learner towards the speech community of the TL.

> The closer they feel [...] the more successful their learning will be. The more alienated from that community they perceive themselves to be, the more pidgin-like their L2 will remain. (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 39)
This also explains why the other term that is applied to this model is *pidginisation hypothesis*.

### 2.4.6. The UG approach

The Chomskyan revolution in linguistics made its impact on SLA research, too. A universal grammar concept was conceived, henceforth the *UG approach*. The introduction of the *UG model* is attributed to the recognition that “human language is too complex to be learned, in its entirety, from the performance data actually available to the child” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 7). Chomsky transferred the Cartesian argument from poverty of the stimulus to language acquisition:

> Experience conforms to our mode of cognition, as his [Descartes'; HE] immediate successors, and later Kant, were to say. This mode of cognition must, Descartes argued, involve such innate ideas as geometrical figures, as well as all the ‘common notions,’ since the stimulus does not resemble what the mind produces on the occasion of stimulation. [...] Descartes’ argument [...] relies on the observation that the stimulus does not contain the elements that constitute our knowledge, though it may serve as the occasion for the mind to produce an interpretation of experience in terms of conceptual structures drawn from its own inner resources. [...] Language is a case in point. (Chomsky 1980: 35ff.)

The conclusion was that there must be an “innate predisposition to expect natural language to be organized in particular ways and not others” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 7). The obvious question which emerged for the study of SLA was whether the UG was also responsible for the acquisition of a second or foreign language. Supporters of this idea claim that the learner’s UG – which has been given its shape through the process of first language acquisition – is further shaped by the learning of the second language. This would imply that the L2 (i.e. the TL in an ELT context) also sets its parameters in the human language faculty. On the other hand, it might be possible that UG does not play any role at all when learners acquire a second language. This became the most hotly debated issue among researchers who tried to make sense of the UG tradition in an SLA context.

Three positions can be identified in this debate. First there are those who believe that every individual undergoes a certain period during childhood in which language acquisition happens. After that, however, there is no further access to
UG, so that learners of second languages have to make use of other learning or acquisition mechanisms.

The reasons for adopting such a position are several […]. but one is the commonsense observation that immigrant children generally become native-like speakers of their second language, whereas their parents rarely do. (Mitchell/Myles 2004: 84)

A diametrically opposed view would be that there continues to be full access to UG when second languages are learnt, as long as parameters in the L2 are learnt that are different from the L1. A prime example of this assumption would be that “adult Japanese learners of English as a second language can successfully reset the head-direction parameter (i.e. from head-last to head-first)” (Mitchell/Myles 2004: 85). The authors believe that “the best interpretation is the continuing operation of Universal Grammar” (2004: 85).

Finally, there are scholars who position themselves between the two extremes of ‘no access’ vs. ‘full access’. These hold the view that there is partial access to UG when second language learning takes place.

Proponents of this position claim that learners only have access to Universal Grammar via their first language. They have already accessed the range of principles applying to their first language, and set parameters to the first language values, and this is the basis for their second language development. Other principles and parameter settings are not available to them, and if the second language possesses parameter settings that are different from those of their first language, they will have to resort to other mechanisms in order to make the second language data fit their internal representations. (Mitchell/Myles 2004: 87)

In any case, the debate which initially revolved around the question whether or not UG can be accessed in second language acquisition has become a more refined one:

What is becoming increasingly clear within the Universal Grammar framework is that the question which has generated so much research over the last 15 years or so [from the point of view of 2004 that is; HE] – namely, whether Universal Grammar is available to second language learners or not – is now being replaced by more focused questions about which sub-components of Universal Grammar might be available or not to the second language learner, how Universal Grammar interacts with other modules involved in language learning, and the role played by the first language settings. Principles are generally thought to be available, as second language learners do not seem to produce interlanguages that violate them. (Mitchell/Myles 2004: 83)
The cue of ‘interlanguage’ in the preceding quote briefly brings me back to my remarks from section 2.4.3. on error analysis and interlanguage. The disenchantment with the predictive power of contrastive analysis stirred interest in the role the L1 played for errors that occurred in learners’ L2 production.

When error analysis was first carried out, researchers expected to find a large number of transfer errors. As I mentioned earlier, the collected data, however, proved that these transfer errors were rather limited compared to other types of errors. This view, though generally confirmed, has been slightly modified by now. Researchers today once again attribute more importance to the impact that the learner’s L1 has on his or her SLA process than they used to. They believe, however, that the impact of L1 is of a different nature than behaviourists wanted to believe. Mitchell and Myles (1998: 13) assert that theoretical today [...] would generally accept once more that cross-linguistic influences play an important role in L2 learning. However, we will still find widely differing views on the extent and nature of these influences.

Without wanting to dwell on it any further now, one may want to keep in mind that the learner’s mother tongue is not entirely irrelevant. This point will surface again in the next section, when I discuss monolingualism and the creative potential of learners.

One other fundamental insight into learners’ errors that error analysis in connection with interlanguage has contributed to SLA research is the fact that “these errors seemed to be found in most learners at the same stage of development and largely independent of the nature of their mother tongue” (Corder 1981: 2). Errors were found to resemble one another cross-linguistically, which gave rise to the assumption that there was a natural order of acquisition.

The notion of a ‘natural sequence’ for second language learning is now widely accepted with considerable support from experimental evidence. (Corder 1981: 2)

This thesis is further supported by descriptive accounts SLA research has produced for IL. Mitchell/Myles point out that learners follow “relatively invariant routes of learning” (1998: 195), which means that the sequence is not only natural but is, furthermore, unchangeable. Thus no stage can be jumped or acquired earlier than the order would naturally allow. Any learner of a foreign language will have to pass through these passages in the fixed order. The aspect of variability assures that “such routes are not linear, including phases of restructuring and apparent regression” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 195). The natural
order of acquisition that is independent of the learner’s L1, along with the three components of systematicity, variability and creativity, appear to be universal features of SLA and must thus be considered in an informed discussion of ELT.

These results seem to confirm the theoretical assumptions that the UG approach makes. The one and major drawback of this theory is that it does not manage to explain why there are some people who easily learn a new language and others who have tremendous difficulty in getting the simplest of forms right, even though both groups have received the same linguistic education or socialisation. The UG approach does not account for differences between learners because it simply does not view the learner as an “individual with varied characteristics, nor as a social being, but as some kind of idealised receptacle for the UG blueprint” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 69).

2.4.7. The relevance of SLA research for ELT

Saying that the UG approach is universal in explaining the SLA process, regardless of any other variables, leaves one with certain questions. It does not account for differences in the setting, or for social and psychological nuances. It is solely concerned with “the developmental linguistic route followed by learners when learning an L2” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 70). The UG approach is only interested in the language as the object of study, not in the learner as a social being. Its claim to universally explain SLA processes makes the UG approach hover above all the other SLA approaches, somewhat detached from any pragmatic context. The question is thus how to deal with such an abstract concept in a thesis that focuses quite specifically on a classroom context and above all claims to provide applicable knowledge.

Suggesting that the explanations which UG provides can be ignored entirely, simply because the context is very specific and the UG approach is universal, would be absurd. The impact UG has on a theory of ELT could not be more powerful. “This approach has informed our understanding of the stages L2 learners go through, and of the systematicity shown by L2 learners.” (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 71) The recognition that there is a natural sequence of acquisition must necessarily result in the so-called teachability hypothesis. “An item will only be acquired, and therefore should only be taught, when the learner
is developmentally ready to acquire it.” (Nunan 2001: 91) Furthermore, “grammar teaching is powerless to alter the natural route of L2 acquisition” (Ellis 1990: 15). Learners cannot jump a stage if the developmental framework does not permit it. Nor can they learn an item that would naturally only occur after a couple of others have been learnt.

So the practical value the UG theory has for ELT is the advice to leave learners to follow their own innate syllabus, just as in L1 acquisition. I should stress that first and second language acquisition are not identical, though similar in scheme. They have different sequences and different rates of acquisition. In any case, the implications of the UG approach for ELT are considerable, especially when it comes to the design of the curriculum:

Dabei sollen also die Strukturen, die im außerunterrichtlichen Zweitsprachenerwerb zuerst erworben werden, auch im Unterricht zuerst angeboten werden; umgekehrt sollen die später erworbenen Strukturen auch erst später in den Unterricht eingebaut werden. (Königs 2003b: 436)

As I stated, the UG approach is not restricted to any particular SLA context. Ellis offers a good classification of the different SLA contexts. He distinguishes between four interrelated categories: informal learning, formal learning, classroom learning and naturalistic learning. One might believe that formal learning actually equals classroom learning and that informal learning can only occur in a naturalistic setting. That is not the case. Instead, classroom learning and naturalistic learning constitute an oppositional pair, just as formal and informal learning do. However, classroom learning can include both formal and informal learning, and so can naturalistic learning (cf. Ellis 1990: 2). The recognition that learners will only be able to pick up grammatical structures when they are developmentally ready applies to classroom and naturalistic settings, to formal and informal learning. As I am strictly concentrating on a classroom context in this study, I will have to explore how to best translate the findings into this context.

The deduced teachability hypothesis proves to be of great value for the classroom context. It has revealed that the learners’ grammars follow the inbuilt route, that the route is unalterable despite teaching efforts, and that the learners must be ready to pick up a structure, or else they will be resistant. The latter, by the way, accounts for the fact that some students manage to get the third person singular present tense marker in the 6th grade right, while others struggle through
to the end of their school career before achieving correctness in this structure. Beside the necessity to wonder whether penalising students for not getting it 'right' is sensible, as they obviously have not arrived at the necessary IL stage, the question this recognition entails is whether it actually makes sense to teach grammar at all, since its influence appears so limited.

Grammar teaching in a classroom context is usually practised by means of formal instruction. The teachability hypothesis given, there is reason to wonder whether the efforts that are put into this formal instruction could better be used for other activities.

This question gains additional weight since learners who acquire their second language in a naturalistic setting, where they do not receive formal instruction, eventually pick up grammar, too. Moreover, the pupils' innate syllabi cannot be altered anyway. The question of the use of formal grammar teaching gains even more relevance because correction often seems ineffective – and not only because L2 learners are lazy. It seems that learners often cannot benefit from correction but continue to make the same mistakes however much feedback is offered (Mitchell/Myles 1998: 16).

Correction is also a constitutive characteristic of formal instruction. Is formal learning thus completely useless?

In a comparison between classroom learners and naturalistic ones, Ellis (1990: 13) found out, on the other hand, that "learners who receive formal instruction generally outperform those who do not". A comparison of the acquisition sequences of classroom learners with those of naturalistic learners has shown them to be very similar. Classroom learners, however, proved to learn more rapidly in the long-run and "to achieve higher levels of ultimate success" (Ellis 1990: 13). So there seems to be an effect of form-focused instruction after all: it speeds up L2 learning viewed from a long-term perspective. Ellis, therefore, suggests a shift in the perception of form-focused instruction on the part of the teacher. Form-focused instruction is more of a kind of "consciousness-raising [which; HE] aims to facilitate acquisition, not to bring it about directly" (Ellis 1990: 15f). Gass/Selinker (2008: 392) argue straight along these lines advising teachers to adjust their expectations to reality: "Even explicit instruction may serve as an introduction to information about a form rather than being the moment of learning." At the same time one ought to remember that, contrary to what I said above, formal learning does indeed occur in naturalistic settings, too.
It may not take the shape of formal instruction as in the classroom, but when interacting with other, more proficient speakers learners are occasionally corrected and may even discuss linguistic issues. This view is backed by current accounts on SLA, too:

Interaktionen ermöglichen es dem Lerner, mit der Zielsprache zu experimentieren, den Input im Hinblick auf eigene Verwendungszwecke zu analysieren und die eigenen Äußerungen gleich Hypothesen im Lichte negativen Feedbacks zu bewerten, gegebenenfalls auch zu korrigieren. Vor allem Kommunikationsengpässe bieten Anlässe, mithilfe des *negotiation for meaning* den Input auf das Niveau des Lerners abzustimmen und dabei die Aufmerksamkeit auch auf sprachliche Formen zu lenken. (Schoormann/Schlak 2007: 101)

Resuming my remarks from the beginning of this section, the relevance of the UG approach for ELT in a classroom context becomes crystal clear. The contribution of the seemingly detached UG approach for a classroom setting is to put into perspective the whole business of formal instruction. Some SLA scholars attribute uselessness to formal instruction altogether. This view, so the UG approach informs us, is by no means justified. On the contrary, one has to acknowledge that formal instruction plays a major role in SLA. It can be summarised as follows: If formal instruction takes place the learner must be ready to acquire the new forms.

Formal instruction is not superfluous. It must, however, be given the rank it deserves, bearing in mind what it can actually accomplish. An obsession with formal instruction, therefore, is just as unjustified as skipping it altogether. The knowledge that the UG approach provides may not serve the individual teacher when actually teaching in class on a day-to-day basis because it is highly theoretical and does not give any practical advice. Yet it is quite useful to have a realistic notion of the limited impact of formal instruction, especially since an academically-grounded argument that diminishes the role of formal instruction provides the necessary justification for teachers to spend more class time and effort on the development of communicative competence. And this is what present-day EFL teaching is supposed to focus on anyway.

In addition, since the classroom setting can involve both formal and informal learning, I dare say that there is a lot to be gained from the SLA research findings since they also provide results that apply to both domains. Considering that I am operating in this narrow scope and considering my comments on the nature of the UG approach I will first discuss where the results
of this approach come in. Are they relevant at all or can I ignore them? After having dealt with the UG issue separately I will deduce possible advice for an ELT context from the results of SLA research.

2.4.8. The inseparability of meaning and form

Having established the insights of the UG approach as a foundation of ELT, and having recognised that the classroom context is a setting in which an interplay of formal and informal learning processes occurs, which ultimately aims at providing the learners with communicative competence, I will now turn to a discussion of how the results of SLA research other than the UG approach can serve this overall purpose on a more practical level.

It has become apparent in the account of SLA models I introduced earlier that there is a great diversity between the various approaches. None of them claims to be the one and only theory – except, possibly, for the UG approach which, as I have just explained, has to be looked at from an entirely different angle – that can comprehensively account for all the factors that come into play in SLA. There is simply too much factual and empirical material that needs to be explained for one theory to do it all. In fact, all the different approaches to SLA concentrate on individual aspects of the process of SLA. Thus, one cannot simply ignore the odd theory, which is a view shared by all the participants in SLA research: “Konsens besteht vielmehr darin, dass der Zweitspracherwerb als ein dynamischer und mehrdimensionaler Prozess aufzufassen ist.” (Henrici/Riemer 2003: 38) Ellis’ work Instructed Second Language Acquisition (1990) seeks to integrate the results of various approaches. Yet he does not claim to provide definite answers. On the contrary, he admits that his integrated theory “is only likely to provide insights or clues [emphasis in the original; HE] about what happens when teachers try to intervene in the process of language learning” (Ellis 1990: 204). But when he actually gets down to formulate the ‘insights’ one learns that

the integrated theory is able to resolve the central paradox of instructed language learning. Instruction fails to result in the direct acquisition of new linguistic structures, yet instruction results in faster learning and higher levels of achievement (Ellis 1990: 196).
This is highly interesting for teachers, although it does not contain any practical advice. Mitchell and Myles (1998: 191) state that “on the whole, grand synthesizing theories, which try to encompass all aspects of L2 learning in a single model, have not received general support.”

It is crucial to extract from a theory those aspects that serve the goal ELT is supposed to achieve. Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2004: 94), ardent supporters of the supremacy of communicative competence, promote “the conviction that grammar and vocabulary are very much interrelated in language learning”. Instead of learning separate entities, e.g. individual words, they suggest learning words in context “which will be stored as units or chunks in their mental lexicon, and may, therefore, be recalled for production more easily” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 94). This is a functionalist view which claims the inseparability of meaning and form. Thus pupils who want to communicate a certain meaning can then call upon those chunks which they have at their disposal in order to communicate that specific meaning. The mental lexicon, Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2004: 95) argue, stores words semantically by association, “i.e. the stimulus of a certain word brings up other words”. An utterance thus actually starts with the wish to communicate a message. This message is nothing but a particular meaning, which is then inextricably tied to certain linguistic forms. Meaning and its communication thus seems to be at the core of ELT. The wish to express a certain notion will bring about the necessity to use the grammatical form that fulfils this function. “Lexical knowledge and grammatical knowledge are interrelated in a kind of ‘lexicogrammar’.” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 97) This concept of language learning seems to be very close to the ideas put forward in both the Bildungsstandards and the CEF. Furthermore, it is congruent with functionalist linguistic research that sees lexicogrammar as the constitutive unit of language because it is possible to determine the likelihood of co-occurrence of items. The question to be addressed is thus: How can we apply the SLA research results to this model?

Given that the wish to communicate meaning is at the core of ELT, there is obviously a lot to be gained from those input-oriented approaches to SLA that stress the major importance of the negotiation of meaning. In a classroom the teaching-learning situation is considered to be interaction. Negotiation of meaning occurs whenever a difficulty in communication comes up.
At the same time, this is not at all in conflict with the requirement of the output-oriented hypotheses. Interaction in which pupils need to negotiate the meaning of certain items automatically forces them to produce output. In a nutshell, teachers should design their classes in a way that allows as many opportunities to interact, to force the pupils to call upon their resources and to rephrase and restructure utterances. The implication is that instruction should be, above all, meaning-focused. Learners are to be encouraged to develop fluency through constant communication. By resolving communication problems learners are supposed to both automatise their existing L2 knowledge and acquire new L2 knowledge through exposure to input in the process of interaction. In didactic terms, teachers who wish to practise meaning-focused instruction could, for instance, apply the concept of task-based language teaching. I will come back to this concept at a later stage.

Now I will turn to the area of correction. Evidently, correction procedures are the single most important methodological factor of ELT. Whatever one does in ELT classes, the handling of errors is part of it. One’s attitude towards errors casts a bright light on one’s view of language: “How you react to a mistake is part of your whole vision of what a language is, what learning is, and what a teacher is.” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 5) Throughout the previous sections correction has repeatedly come to the surface every now and then. After additionally dealing with SLA, though, one has gathered sufficient background information to give reliable advice as to how correction as the basis of teaching must be handled in order to live up to the standards of present-day ELT. Since correction is where the change in norms with regard to SLA knowledge in combination with policy demands and variety research becomes most prominent, I will devote some more space to this topic on its own.

2.5. Changing norms in modes of correction

Teachers’ lack of a firm theoretical basis, their lack of competence in the TL as well as their fear of accepting students’ language items that they have never heard before combined with the obsession with accuracy have led to weird and alarming ways of handling correction: in class, students are corrected instantly. Accuracy questions that cannot be resolved on the spot are taken home,
pondered, looked up in dictionaries and grammar books, discussed with colleagues and ultimately referred to native speaker friends via telephone or email. Sometimes a few days go past until a satisfactory solution has been found to the question whether it should be *different from* or *different than* – merely a preposition. Under these circumstances: who is still surprised by teachers’ likelihood to be hit by burnout? Or an “inferiority complex”?

The task of this thesis is, then, to provide for the theoretical consistency needed. This would hopefully create the necessary courage to overcome the pathological conditions. Not only are readers meant to gain immediate advice for their teaching practices, but they are also meant to acquire the necessary background knowledge that enables them to understand and justify what they do in class. So far it has probably become clear that I am not in favour of extensive correction in ELT. Correction counts as a profoundly formal feature of teaching. Though it is important, formal teaching needs to be restricted in time and weight in the ELT classroom. Other issues must receive higher priority than formal teaching.

Traditionally, teachers believe that every linguistic structure can be assessed as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ English. Furthermore, teachers believe that it is their duty to decide upon every single student utterance – written or spoken – as to whether it is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. There are didactic as well as linguistic reasons to stop using this binary system.

My point of departure here to counter these views and routines is the language itself. As I pointed out at some length in section 2.3., there is hardly any linguistic reason to coerce language into the ‘right’/’wrong’ pattern. On the contrary, linguistic research provides excellent accounts of varieties, which implies that often there are many ways to express meaning. The native speaking community does not function according to the ‘right’/’wrong’ paradigm. A great many forms are possible; language performance is governed by functional reasons. So why should learners be subject to the ‘right’/’wrong’ yoke if even native speakers do not observe it.

The acceptance of and the subsequent research on varieties must be considered for ELT. Manfred Görlach believes that the study of varieties may have opened up a path to “error analysis, contrastive studies and psycholinguistics” (Görlach 1999: 7), which can be of great interest for teaching. Since varieties also reflect reality more genuinely than any alleged standard, it
seems hard to justify the non-acceptance of deviation in class. “Broken English is more widespread, and is becoming institutionalised, than educational authorities may care to admit” (Görlach 1999: 7). Thus discussing these questions discloses that a manner of English language teaching in which it is assumed that there is a standard, which represents correct English, and that anything which deviates from that standard is wrong can, apparently, not do justice to the language.

Even though their work is primarily concerned with pedagogy, Bartram and Walton (1991: 6f.) also question the ‘right’/‘wrong’ pattern as such on linguistic grounds:

We tend to think of the target language as a single, unified body of rules and usages. But this is not true: all languages, and especially English, have a wide variety of forms, regional, national, dialectal, formal/informal, colloquial/careful, old-fashioned/modern. Language is also constantly changing, admitting new words and new usages from other languages, and leaving behind old ones which no longer serve a purpose. Any native speaker will be in doubt about certain areas of English. […] Even the dictionaries disagree about some things. We are in doubt, and being in doubt is not a problem. In certain circumstances, it is more helpful to say I don’t know than to insist on providing a ‘correct’ answer which, in fact, is wrong or incomplete.

It is important to remember, therefore, and especially for non-native-speaker teachers, that anybody’s knowledge of a language, including their own is partial. A teacher must be very careful about saying that a particular form is ‘wrong’. It may be wrong in London, but perfectly acceptable in Jamaica. It may be wrong in a speech but perfectly acceptable in a playground. It may be a form that the teacher has never seen, but which in fact exists.

[…] Teachers may find it more useful to think of a ‘spectrum of likelihood’ – with forms being more or less likely to occur – especially in particular situations or media of expression.

Even native-speakers do not understand the grammar of their own language in its entirety, and certainly do not know all the variations of it. There is no point in ‘correcting’ a student only to find they learnt their English in Alabama, Nairobi or Sydney! The job of language teachers is to present the language they speak, rather than criticise students for speaking a form of it which is different from theirs.

What they say is fully in accordance with the functionalist view of language, but crucially also with descriptivism, which is best achieved through corpora. For correction, they suggest using the spectrum of likelihood rather than the either/or- ‘right’/‘wrong’ dichotomy. Practically, this has to materialise in a twofold manner. To begin with, the question as to whether something is linguistically right or wrong must move from the centre of attention in class to the periphery. Instead
the focus must be on content and topical issues. The second implication, which follows from the first, is that teachers should simply correct less. They should enhance communication without being alert to mistakes all the time. They ought to genuinely concentrate on the communication that happens.

There is essential back-up from the SLA section for this manner of handling students' language production. SLA research has proved that “an item will only be acquired, and therefore should only be taught, when the learner is developmentally ready to acquire it” (Nunan 2001: 91). This natural sequence of SLA “cannot be bypassed” (Ellis 1990: 166), which also implies that it is useless to correct a learner according to the TL rules because the learner’s IL has not developed far enough to get it right.

Strictly speaking, ILs ought to be considered varieties in their own right because they are systematic linguistic systems. They may be deviant from the TL, yet complete. Looking at ILs as varieties or not, in any case, teachers must be aware that in most cases students do not make mistakes because they are stupid or careless but because their IL tells them this is right. For the same reasons, students will make the same mistake over and over again. They are resistant to correction until they have reached the necessary IL stage. Also, as a result of the IL’s variability they may slide backwards on the IL slope, meaning they get something wrong which they got right the day before. SLA takes time.

Still, these findings do not in any way encourage one to stop correcting altogether. Correction and form-focused instruction remain absolutely necessary, not least because instructed learners “outperform” (Ellis 1990: 165) naturalistic ones eventually. Taking all these remarks into account, for teaching practice this can only materialise – just as the linguistic side demands – through less correction.

This position finds even more support from another source: the Bildungsstandards. In section 2.2. I explained that educational policy is displaying a shift in focus towards communicative competence. Yet the document also includes a phrase like “Gebrauch von korrektem Englisch sowohl im Schriftlichen wie auch im Mündlichen”. The coexistence of the two requirements of communication and accuracy, with the former being superior to the latter, again underlines the need for a well-balanced approach to correction. Communication reigns supreme, but not correcting at all is out of the question, too. So clearly, this can only mean that teachers must correct less, which
automatically happens when the mistake and with it the concept of accuracy are moved to the periphery of ELT.

In summary, all three pillars that constitute ELT in the model I am proposing suggest the same handling of correction. In fact, they all suggest the same weighting of the two major components of ELT: communication overrides accuracy. However, accuracy or formal teaching has not become insignificant altogether.

And yet there may still be reason to teach English as though it were a limited set of rules. This is the moment in which I must insist on the very subtle distinction between formal teaching and correction, which I have so far dealt with as one whole. Formal teaching is the explicit instruction in grammar, while correction is the teacher's response to students' language production. Both are profoundly formal features and should together not consume but a small amount of class time. Yet they must take place; hence, I will make suggestions as to how they ought to do so.

On correction I have commented extensively, in particular remarking that in the future teachers must correct less altogether. I have established principles of correction that allow for much more tolerance towards students' language production on various grounds. I have put forward the need to correct on a descriptive basis because it is more realistic and allows more leeway. In general, I have only called for more linguistic freedom for pupils' desire to express meaning, which makes a lot of sense as it is in accordance with the three pillars of ELT. It also implies getting rid of the ties and obsessions with accuracy, a profoundly restrictive feature. Now I wish to make a few remarks about the other formal means, i.e. explicit instruction.

"Formal instruction" or "form-focused instruction", as Rod Ellis (1990: 165ff.) calls it, is an indispensable part of EFL learning in order to achieve the highest possible levels of competence in the long run. The need to separate instruction from correction derives from the problem that would arise if I demanded to carry out instruction descriptively, too! This is simply impossible and would justify challenging the validity and practicality of the thesis as a whole. Formal instruction is a deeply restrictive factor of ELT and will remain so in the future. The implication is that formal grammar instruction will always be prescriptive! Obviously, teachers must give out clear rules when they formally teach grammar. If they do not manage to do this their teaching will not be taken
seriously. Grammar teaching is an awareness-raising process and is meant to serve the clarification of linguistic issues that may have been used in interaction but that have not been understood, for example.

One must bear in mind that this profoundly restrictive element will be granted less room and time in class in the future. When it happens though, it will have to be prescriptive. My suggestion is therefore: teach prescriptively, correct descriptively!

Let us now turn back to correction and see how the change in norms applies to the two fields of speaking and writing.

2.5.1. Speaking

One hundred years ago, speaking the language was not a goal of foreign language teaching at all. The foreign language that was most commonly taught at the time, mainly because it enabled one to read the classics, was Latin. Language teaching did not aim at providing learners with a command of the TL. The only skill that was taught then was translation.

The grammar-translation method of the late 19th century presented the instructed language through rules in the learners’ L1 and then practised these rules by translating sentences. It did not to (sic!) teach learners how to use the language, but how to translate the classics. (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 20)

When English first became a subject at school, this approach to teaching as well as the underlying ideas prevailed for some time to come.

We have come a long way since then, and translation has lost weight in the overall idea curriculum designers have of ELT. Nowadays, the top goal, if not the only one, is to provide learners with communicative competence in the TL. This communicative competence entails both oral and written competence, i.e. speaking and writing. I dare say, though, that in the new approach to ELT speaking holds supremacy over writing. Speaking is, in fact, the core of the EFL education of pupils who attend a German Gymnasium as it conveys most directly the notion of communicative competence. Writing still carries the stigma of the grammar-translation method, and with it the obsession with formal instruction in which accuracy is the only value. I will show later on that there are ideas of writing that differ from this notion fundamentally. Writing, in fact, if practised
appropriately, is an indispensable way of achieving communicative competence and also an invaluable element of a holistic communicative competence in EFL. I am saying holistic because if we take communicative competence seriously speaking cannot be divorced from writing. Doing one enhances the competence of the other and vice versa. Writing in particular can be used as an occasion to speak. In the sections concerned with writing I will show how this may materialise in greater detail. Right now, I will turn to speaking and correction procedures in oral interaction.

2.5.2. Language of instruction

Before making any recommendations on how to correct learner errors, I must address and decide on an issue that precedes any oral correction procedure: the language of instruction. As I said above, at the times of the grammar-translation method, the language of instruction was the learners’ mother tongue. The TL was only ever spoken when sentences that had to be translated were to be read out. This changed radically when the direct method entered the scene. It aimed at providing learners with oral competence, and it was believed that the best way to achieve this was immersion into the foreign language even if one had zero knowledge of it. Teaching for the learner then meant simply massive exposure to the TL. This method never made it into the mainstream of teaching. The audiolingual method did, though. It also used the TL in class to practise patterns. If it ever came to grammar-explanation, however, they probably were provided in the learners’ L1, i.e. German. In the aftermath of the audiolingual method, communicative language teaching entered the stage. When it actually materialised at school, its representatives saw it in a close relationship with the direct method. The TL was used in class only, and grammar explanations were hardly provided. Since then there has been a constant struggle between those who advocate more structural approaches to teaching with a lot of pattern practice and guidance and those who support more communicative approaches with freer exercise types. Beside this clash of beliefs, scholars clashed over one other issue: the classroom language. On one side there have been those who believe that grammar and other difficult issues, especially in lower year classes, must be dealt with through the mother tongue. Their opponents have been in
favour of strict monolingualism from the very beginning of the learners’ EFL career. Monolingualism in this context always means using the TL in class only. In fact, over the past 30 years strict monolingualism has been the prevailing academic view of ideal ELT:

Richtlinien und Fachdidaktiken zeigen eine unverkennbare Tendenz zur strengen Einsprachigkeit. Besonders bei der Vermittlung und Einprägung des Wortschatzes wird der Rückgriff auf die Muttersprache nur als ultima ratio zugestanden. (Butzkamm 1978: 68f.)

When some teachers did not stick to this 100 per cent, the ‘perpetrators’ were accused of violating the most important principle of successful ELT as well as spoiling the children’s foreign language potential: “Der Kollege, der die Einsprachigkeit nicht durchhält, strengt sich eben nicht genug an.” (Butzkamm 1978: 69)

The actual practice of ELT has been very different from the theory anyway. It has been a mixture of the above approaches, displaying little theoretic coherence. Some teachers pride themselves in conducting their teaching entirely monolingually and accuse colleagues who do not of a weak command of the TL and of not taking their profession seriously. At the same time, they are the ones who switch to L1 when it comes to dialogues that are not immediately related to their teaching. Most teachers probably just apply the traditional pattern of using English most of the time, but allow the L1 for really difficult problems. There is a wide array of practice patterns, none of which meets the requirement of strict monolingualism. In other words, there is a large gap between theory and practice.

Of course, the discrepancy between theory and practice, though a widespread phenomenon in all fields, is something one must tackle. Usually, one would argue that it is the theory that is far ahead of the practice, which needs to try to catch up. In this case both theory and practice are not ideal. Both must be adjusted and be brought in line at the same time. It is my wish to contribute to the narrowing of this gap by once again providing the knowledge that has been available for a while. It then remains the duty of the individual teacher to turn it into reality.
2.5.3. **Monolingualism**

I have extensively dealt with the parameters that constitute modern ELT. Internalising them should give teachers enough background knowledge to decide how to proceed in detail for most specific teaching situations. In other words, with this thesis I am providing a framework which is meant to help teachers decide which exercise type is suitable and which is not, which mistakes should be corrected and which should not, how to introduce grammar and how not to etc. There are also sufficient hints already to make a decision upon the language of instruction in class. In this section I will touch upon this question only briefly and hopefully provide more insight into it.

Years and years ago Wolfgang Butzkamm wrote extensively about this issue and presented a well-researched opinion on it that has become the state-of-the-art view with regard to language use in the ELT classroom. And yet this view has not been consistently put into practice; in fact, it has not even entered teacher training. Teaching novices are still taught the old doctrine of monolingualism.

Initially, Butzkamm set out to challenge the monolingual doctrine, arguing that it lacked a theoretical basis and was only the result of an ideological decision. Since the day it was made this decision has never been questioned. The only issue that has been discussed since then is whether it is actually possible to conduct ELT classes strictly monolingually. But then again this has not even been discussed seriously. It has just been answered in the affirmative and it has been claimed that it was just a matter of effort and willingness on the part of the teacher. If teachers were willing to make this effort, success would be guaranteed. (cf. Butzkamm 1978: 70)

In his work *Aufgeklärte Einsprachigkeit* Butzkamm argues that banning the mother tongue from the classroom would result in a highly artificial setting. Superficially, the mother tongue would be eliminated from ELT classes, but in reality it would still be around anyway, because second language learners tend to link newly acquired linguistic competence with similar or related elements that they know already. As the things they know already as well as their thinking and feeling in general have been shaped by their mother tongue, they will need to link the new material to the equivalents and their immediate environments in the mother tongue.
SLA research as well as the concept of plurilingualism back the assumption that there are not strictly separate compartments for different languages. On the contrary, learners must combine and integrate linguistic systems into one huge semiotic repertoire. For example, there are certain gestures that automatically go with certain phrases. It is thus necessary to incorporate new material that is related to some existing material into the entire system at a place that joins the two or more items together. On a very basic level, this may be translation. A student who acquires the word *pillow* must be able to create the link to *Kissen*. So why not provide the link from the very beginning? Butzkamm explains the concept in more elaborate terms:

Im diametralen Gegensatz zur Forderung nach Systemtrennung wird hier gefolgert, daß der Lerner den neuen Lernstoff an die gesamte (muttersprachlich vermittelte) frühere Erfahrung anknüpfen muß, um erfolgreich zu lernen. Neues verstehen und sich aneignen heißt, es mit der angesammelten Erfahrung möglichst vielfältig verketten. Dabei können bilinguale Techniken den Lerner wirksam unterstützen. Der Direkt-Methodiker glaubt, sein Schüler lerne deshalb gut, weil u.a. die Muttersprache aus dem Unterricht verbannt wurde. Der Lernneffekt beruhe auf einer bewußten Lehrenteilscheidung. Wir sagen: der Lernneffekt konnte nur deshalb eintreten, weil der Schüler die Anbindung an die muttersprachlich vermittelte Erfahrung vollzogen hat – der Methode zum Trotz. Der *Fortfall der Muttersprache und die Ausbildung eines autonomen fremdsprachlichen Spurensystems ist eine Funktion der Häufigkeit sinnvollen In-Gebrauch-Nehmens der fremden Formen, gleichgültig, ob bei der Erstbegegnung die Muttersprache den Sinn vermittelt oder nicht.* (Butzkamm 1978: 177)

The author makes absolutely clear that monolingual classes are the point of departure for a discussion of the issue. He does admit that using the L1 randomly is, of course, a potential source of interference errors. However, there are no figures available that prove that strict monolingualism reduces the number of interference errors significantly. But still he acknowledges the possibility and therefore asks for caution in connection with L1 use. This caution, however, is part of enlightened monolingualism: “*Aufgeklärte Einsprachigkeit* bedeutet methodische Ausnutzung der Muttersprache als Lernhilfe, ohne die Muttersprache als möglichen *Störfaktor* zu unterschlagen.” (Butzkamm 1978: 189) In enlightened monolingualism the L1 is only used for one specific purpose: semanticising. For the judicious use of the mother tongue he thus recommends the so-called sandwich technique. The sandwich technique is a very refined way of providing language material when needed. The moment the teacher realises
that either a student is in need of a particular structure or a structure is used for
the first time (both occasions of semanticising), he or she can utter the new
structure twice in the TL with the equivalent in the mother tongue in between the
two mentions. An example from a German ELT class could be the following: the
teacher realises that the student has missed one line while reading out a text.
The TL phrase to alert the student to this fact has not been acquired yet. So the
teacher takes this as an opportunity to say: “You’ve skipped a line. Du hast eine
Zeile übersprungen. You’ve skipped a line.” (Example taken from Butzkamm
2007: 15) The teacher passes the necessary structure to the student.

David Atkinson, who contributed to this discussion in an article in 1987,
merely warns against “excessive dependency on the mother tongue” (Atkinson
1987: 246) as this would only impede TL acquisition. Although he may be
absolutely right in what he writes, he fails to provide firmly grounded advice as to
how to go about it with regard to the language issue. Instead he simply shares
his feeling about the issue with the reader: “I feel that to ignore the mother
tongue in a monolingual classroom is almost certainly to teach with less than
maximum efficiency.” (Atkinson 1987: 247) John Harbord, on the other hand,
who refers to Atkinson’s article, takes the issue much further by acknowledging
that it is not so much the simple use of the TL in class but meaningful interaction
that contributes to acquisition. Of course, his small-scale article is not as well-
researched as Butzkamm’s long-term studies. In any case he puts forward the
main point to be made in this discussion:

If proponents of task-based teaching […] are right, it is not
so much what the teacher chooses to isolate and explain in
the way of grammar that the students will pick up but the
language the teacher uses in negotiating meaning with the
students: giving instructions, checking meaning, and so on.
(Harbord 1992: 351)

In recent years Wolfgang Butzkamm has adapted his concept, though the basic
idea remains the same. Nowadays he argues for a functional use of the TL as
the guiding principle in EFL teaching. Functional use of the TL, of course, means
precisely meaningful communication. At the same time, however, pattern practice
must not be eliminated entirely. He, therefore, suggests a double focus:

Die funktionale Fremdsprachigkeit des Unterrichts ist
machbar! Ich [Wolfgang Butzkamm; HE] empfehle den
doppelten Fokus, also eine Art Mischstrategie. Dass es
einzig und allein auf Mitteilungsbezogenheit ankomme, ist
der ‘naturmethodische Denkfehler’, der ‘kommunikative
Trugschluss’. Das Üben darf nicht aus dem Unterricht
verschwinden, müsste aber wohl im Allgemeinen zugunsten
2.5.4. Negotiation of meaning vs. correction

As a result of the discussion of the three pillars I have repeatedly emphasised the need to correct less. ‘Less than what?’ may be the rightful question. Indeed ‘less’ requires a point of reference. By less I mean less than currently practised. This is, of course, just a reference to a seemingly widespread opinion in the relevant literature, where it is believed that today’s teachers correct too much. From that perspective, teachers ought to correct less. True as it may be, this statement, however, is extremely ill-founded and vague. Hence, I will try to put forward more reliable guidelines that do not have relative reference points. I will examine the discrepancy between current correction practice and the ideal at the end of this study after arriving at empirical results that describe current practice.

Having established the three-pillar structure which should be foremost in ELT, the guiding principles for correction can immediately be derived. The core of an ELT approach with a communicative focus must be negotiation of meaning. Negotiation of meaning is an informal style of language learning in which learners are meant to interact naturally in the TL in order to resolve problems. For the concept ‘correction’ this fundamental change of norms has far-reaching implications:


The sense of correction and with it its right to exist is called into question. Banning correction entirely from classroom teaching, however, is not an option. This would be just as disastrous as obsessive correction, maybe even worse. And indeed Konrad Macht offers a more fine-grained differentiation. Though it constitutes the major teaching type, negotiation of meaning does not cover all the requirements that are placed on present-day language learning. As I have outlined myself, and as Macht takes for granted, there will remain the need for formal teaching, too. Once again I have arrived at the distinction between meaningful communication and form-focused instruction. This distinction
conveniently also denotes the boundary for correction. Correction is a profoundly formal feature.

On this basis, the only reasonable way to proceed is a functional one: in form-focused phases of teaching, which will comprise only a small part of the overall classroom time, teachers must correct every single mistake students make with regard to the particular structure that is being practised. In meaningful interaction phases, which must be the major part, teachers must exercise a tremendously high degree of tolerance towards students' speech production. Let's first look at the latter more closely.

Meaningful communication requires a high degree of error tolerance. This way of handling the entire issue, however, is not that unusual. It is simply guided by one very basic principle that rules interpersonal relations globally. It is about taking people seriously. Bartram and Walton (1991: 41) provide an example which they apparently witnessed in class. It perfectly illustrates the flaws of traditional correction. The following dialogue occurs in a phase of meaningful interaction:

T  What about house prices in the city centre?
S  I don't know exactly how much cost a house in city centre, but I think it's very expensive.
T  Yeah. Don't forget you have to invert verb and subject in an indirect question.
S  Sorry?
T  ...so you say ‘...how much a house costs...’
S  Oh, yes.

This would obviously be the worst way imaginable of correcting mistakes, not least because it is absolutely ineffective, but mainly because it is a glaring way of disrespecting the student as a communicative partner. In everyday communicative situations, nobody feels inclined to improve their interlocutors' linguistic competence. People normally listen to the message their partner tries to get across. If they manage to understand it, they react to it. If they do not understand though, they negotiate meaning until they do. But they would hardly switch the focus of the interaction from the negotiated content to the linguistic form. This is, in fact, a perversion of the simplest of societal rules that govern communication.
Why would it be different in a classroom? Or why should these rules be out of force in the classroom? Because it is a classroom, some will argue, and thus not a normal communicative setting. In the classroom, there is the need to focus on language, especially in an ELT classroom because that is what it is all about.

Yes and no! Surely, a classroom setting differs from a natural setting, not least because it involves a hierarchical relationship between students and teacher. And, of course, the goal of a class is to teach a subject, English in this case. However, as I have stressed over and over again, present-day ELT has committed itself to the teaching of communicative competence. Since this is the point of departure, everything must be subordinated to this goal. The question towering above methodology must thus be: How do we achieve communicative competence? The answer is quite simple: By creating a communicative setting. That would be a setting which resembles a naturalistic setting in the target culture. Crucially though, this communicative setting requires teachers to take the students seriously, to discuss issues of content rather than form, in other words to negotiate meaning in the TL. This, in turn, implies a complete absence of correction.

Complete? Not quite. In naturalistic interaction one also finds evidence of correction. There, however, it takes a very different shape than direct intervention with the students’ language production. Direct intervention always entails the breakdown of communication altogether. The trouble is that direct intervention at the same time does not aid the improvement of linguistic competence. The example above vividly illustrates this phenomenon: The student expects to be asked about house prices and reacts appropriately to it. The teacher, however, is not at all interested in house prices, therefore leaps in as the student does not manage to produce an error-free response. This does not lead anywhere. The student will not manage to improve his or her competence. Nor is he or she able to contribute seriously to a discussion upon house prices.

In natural communication the only justification for correction, if one can call it that at all, is the failure to understand one’s communicative partner. If an utterance is unintelligible for whatever reason, the addressee will, of course, ask for clarification. This would be the most natural thing to do. Since ELT today must be striving for natural communicative settings, it should not be too difficult to incorporate this most natural of routines into its basic repertoire. The concept of
negotiation of meaning has a built-in way of handling correction. Negotiation of meaning means talking about something until everybody gets it right, until everybody has understood, until everybody has achieved the same basis of perception of the world. Correction as direct intervention becomes obsolete. Strictly speaking, there is no ‘wrong’ any longer. This would be a model situation which can only be approximated.

In the introduction to this section I quoted Bartram and Walton, who question the ‘right’/’wrong’ pattern as such. They propose thinking of language more in terms of a “spectrum of likelihood” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 7). The general idea behind their proposal heads absolutely in the right direction. But even an ELT approach that attempts to create communicative competence and, therefore, spends the largest part of class time on communication will remain a classroom approach with a teacher-student relationship. It will include the need for guidance and instruction. And because the available time for negotiation of meaning in class is not endless and teaching includes assessment or grading, even the spectrum-of-likelihood approach entails a boundary beyond which something is simply wrong. This boundary, however, must be stretched much further than in traditional ELT and can ultimately only be constituted by intelligibility. Something that is unintelligible cannot be accepted. That’s real life!

What I have put forward in this section so far solely applies to meaning-focused phases of teaching. Intelligibility can be the only criterion on which a decision between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ can be based. Apart from intelligibility as the orientation mark for correction, there is one other innovation I would like to establish here as a must for future ELT. Obviously, even in classes that focus on meaningful interaction, there will be the need to talk about students’ performance, be it the structural or the content side of it. Teachers must function as advisers for students and also as assessors of students’ performance. They must praise students’ work as well as criticise it. In fact, it is more important to let a student know about the things he or she got right than to correct them. Therefore, instead of speaking of ‘correction’ I would like to give this phenomenon a wider and less restrictive basis which is reflected in the more general and cooperative term ‘feedback’. Feedback can by all means be correction. In meaningful interaction phases this kicks in when something is unintelligible. But feedback can assume many different shapes, and should ideally only be correction in a minority of cases. Shortly I will suggest other types
of feedback. Before, however, I must turn to feedback in form-focused phases of teaching.

In form-focused teaching phases, there are no options and is no leeway. Teachers must provide feedback on every single mistake. Feedback here, obviously, can only be correction, i.e. direct intervention. The motivation is the same as in meaning-focused phases: taking students seriously. If teachers announce that the following exercise is supposed to train grammatical accuracy with regard to a particular structure, and they do not correct every mistake students do not feel taken seriously either. It goes without saying that the focus must be on the structure that is practised. For the rest of the language used, intelligibility is the watchword. These phases, however, must but consume little of the overall class time. It is again Wolfgang Butzkamm, in yet another work he wrote with two colleagues, who provides for the necessary clarity with regard to the status pattern practice can assume:

Üben tut Not, aber nur so viel üben wie nötig! Disziplinierte Spracharbeit motiviert immer dann, wenn sie unmittelbar in kommunikative Erfolge umgesetzt werden kann. Der Hauptfehler des Unterrichts ist zu vieles, zu langes und falsches Üben. Das Resultat: Die im Üben erreichte Kommunikation ist kümmerlich, befriedigt niemanden so recht, ist nur sporadisch, oder findet mitunter gar nicht statt. (Butzkamm & Klippel & Siebold 2004: 19)

When it comes to pattern practice, though, teachers must – just to remain credible for their students, which should be reason enough – correct every mistake.

Having acknowledged that correction is but one type of feedback which must be used cautiously and sensibly in order to meet certain requirements, I will now move on to other types of feedback which should replace correction in all cases except for the form-centred phases of teaching.

2.5.5. Types of feedback

Bartram and Walton as well as Macht suggest feedback approaches that all necessarily uphold communication while attempting to provide the learner with the information that there is a structural flaw in an utterance. I would like to pick out two which I find very convincing and at the same time easily practicable.
Reformulation seems the most reasonable way to react to a faulty utterance. The teacher, who is involved in a communication process with a student, takes up the student’s utterance and puts it slightly differently so that an accurate structure is used. It should not be a student’s echo since this already destroys the impression that the student is taken seriously. Therefore, the teacher may add a comment, or use the reformulation as an opportunity to include someone else in this dialogue, etc.

A couple of advantages that make this correction procedure very useful can be mentioned. First of all, it requires no time at all, certainly less than direct intervention, even though this may appear to be the shortest way to achieve correctness. Direct intervention, however, bears the massive drawback that it interrupts communication, destroys the flow, and is frustrating and useless. Reformulation gives the mistake the amount of attention it deserves. The teacher does not need to expect everyone to listen up, interrupt anything else they do and wait for the correction to settle in all the students’ minds. Instead reformulation upholds communication which, if conducted well by the teacher, should engage everybody’s mind anyway. Thus everybody is at least exposed to a right structure to express that meaning. In SLA terms reformulation is comprehensible input for every learner present. If they struggle to get this structure right, the correct form, which is provided by the teacher, is “just above the student’s current level of English” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 53). Whether it sinks in on that very occasion or not the teacher does not know. And indeed, it does not matter and does not worry anyone because ideally the teacher has informed his or her students that SLA takes time and IL varies.

The greatest advantage of reformulation, however, is its natural appearance, which is just what is needed in an approach that strives for natural communicative settings. It is, in fact, an instant of negotiation of meaning. Again Bartram and Walton provide for a good description of this advantage of reformulation:

Reformulation attempts to imitate the way in which real-life correction happens. People in the street or in shops do not usually go around tapping their fingers or waving their arms in front of them to indicate a mistake has been made. Often, they reformulate what the speaker said in a correct form. Sometimes they do this without realising there was a mistake.

To do this in the classroom is a real skill, and an important one for teachers to develop. (Bartram/Walton 1991: 52)
One drawback of reformulation in this manner might be that it is highly teacher-centred. But then again which type of feedback is not? There are indeed forms of feedback around that may keep the teacher in the background. I will get back to these and assess them when I deal with feedback to written work.

The second approach I will only briefly touch upon is feedback conferences. I will elaborate on it in more detail in the section on writing. A feedback conference is a brief gathering of the teacher and one student (or more, but the fewer the better). This can happen in class, when the rest is engaged otherwise, or after class. In this conference the teacher and the student reflect on the students’ performance. Several advantages should be mentioned. It is genuine communication additional to the regular communication in class; crucially, though, the student gets all the teacher’s attention, which contributes to meaningful interaction and a high degree of concentration. Everything that comes up in this talk is taken in immediately. The teacher can take it as an opportunity to point out some structural mistakes. The likelihood that the student gets something out of it, meaning that he or she improves their English, is much higher than in any other correction procedure:

Aufwändig, aber nachweislich effektiv ist das individuelle Kurzgespräch mit Schülerinnen (sic!), mit dem Ziel, sie auf die Strategien aufmerksam zu machen, von denen viele ihrer Fehler herrühren. (Macht 1998: 365)

Significantly though, the teacher should, of course, mainly use this opportunity to point out everything that is good about the student’s performance. Macht has also mentioned the major drawback of this approach. Though it may be short, a conference is still extremely time-consuming. Apart from that it is probably much more relevant as a way to provide feedback on written work, to which I turn now.

2.5.6. Writing

Traditionally, writing was viewed as “a support skill in language learning” (Reid 2001: 28). It was not considered an independent skill, so its purpose was mainly designed “to practise handwriting, write answers to grammar and reading exercises, and write dictation” (Reid 2001: 28). The development of writing as an important part of language learning in an L2 context only came about gradually after the composition theory for classes of native speakers of English was established.

The way writing had been practised, before this development set in, had strongly been shaped by the overall manner in which EFL had been taught at school. An account by Reid (2001: 28), in which she describes the earlier writing method, definitely reminds one of ELT classes with a major focus on grammar strictly taught by means of the PPP approach. Writing was used as a means to support the study of grammar:

Students copied sentences or short pieces of discourse, making discrete changes in person or tense. [...] Students were taught incrementally, error was prevented and accuracy was expected to arise out of practice with structures.

All that mattered was the written product, which was checked for accuracy. The development process of a piece of writing was of no interest, especially since this process used to be short and one-dimensional anyway. Students were set a task which they had to fulfil within a limited time. The product had to be submitted and there was no opportunity to edit, let alone rewrite it. The first attempt at resolving the task, i.e. the first draft, was also the final product, which was then graded.

Writing was practised in this fashion well into the 1970s. The emergence of the composition theory in native English speaker classrooms eventually brought about a shift in the concept of writing in EFL classrooms in the 1980s. Teachers moved away from strictly controlled writing to guided writing and eventually slowly to composition techniques and strategies (cf. Reid 2001: 28). This development, which had set in a good many years earlier, could only be sustained because it hit the general tendency in EFL teaching which shifted its focus from formal accuracy towards more communication. This development included the newly gained view on errors, which ceased to be considered a display of laziness on the part of the pupil, but became viewed as an indicator for the progress on the part of the pupils on their interlanguage path.

With the gradual acceptance of error as productive and developmental rather than substandard and deviant,
grammatical accuracy became secondary to communication. (Reid 2001: 28)

Hence, the production of texts came to be seen as another way of communication. Writing, however, developed further as composition theory underwent another shift. Writing became seen as a means to achieve self-discovery. During the process of writing writers would put their feelings and thoughts into words. The emphasis of this approach, which entered the EFL classrooms in the 1990s, was thus on the process.

The product as such, which had been checked for accuracy before it was considered the carrier of the communicative message, lost most of its importance altogether. The only part of the whole enterprise of writing that was then of interest was the process, which is why this approach became known as the ‘process movement’. In those EFL classrooms that actually adopted this approach, teaching thus concentrated on “personal writing [...] student creativity and fluency” (Reid 2001: 29). Teachers and scholars came to believe that the process-oriented and the product-oriented approaches were irreconcilable and mutually exclusive.

Those who favoured the process-oriented approach would direct the pupils’ attention to their “internal resources and individuality” (Reid 2001: 29). They would teach a kind of writing that was exclusively meant to be read by the writer him- or herself. External audiences were not addressed.

They neglected accuracy in favour of fluency; the processes (generating ideas, expressing feelings) were more important to individual development than the outcome (the product). (Reid 2001: 29)

Those, on the other hand, who adhered to the product-oriented approach, would teach their pupils to bear in mind at all times that they were actually writing for an external audience. There would be no consideration of the writer’s individuality. On the contrary, the writer was forced to press their ideas into given conventional patterns

that stifled creativity. [...] It was suggested that product teachers focused solely on accuracy, appropriate rhetorical discourse and linguistic patterns to the exclusion of writing processes (Reid 2001: 29).

At first glimpse, the product-oriented approach seems to contain all the features I have been arguing against throughout this thesis. Accuracy reigns supreme, while language development is not considered, let alone IL levels. If students do not manage to live up to the expectations of writing an error-free text,
they are penalised through marks. The whole concept is highly formal. Interaction between the author, i.e. the student, and the reader/marker, i.e. the teacher, does not occur.

The process-oriented approach, on the other hand, seems to be of great help for the overall process of language development. All that matters is the ability to turn feelings and thoughts into words that convey the very meaning they are supposed to get across. That truly is communicative competence, in other words exactly what present-day ELT wants students to possess. Also, the concept seems very informal and allows for a great deal of interaction between the student and the teacher who is supposed to counsel during the process. Unfortunately, the product, if there is one, lacks agreement with generally acknowledged writing conventions and, therefore, is useless for any other purpose but the EFL class and the acquisition of communicative competence.

What is needed, therefore, would be selected elements, the strengths of both approaches to arrive at a comprehensive theory of writing. And, in fact, the two approaches are the extreme ends of yet another continuum. So let me explore the option to devise a way that combines the strengths of both approaches, without being a watered down version of one or the other approach that has come about as a result of some random compromise.

2.5.7. Writing as one part of communicative competence

As usual, the matter is not black or white as some authors may want to suggest. The seemingly insoluble conflict that was identified between product- and process-oriented writing may also be considered just a wider scope and thus a more comprehensive perspective on writing altogether. In order to obtain an ideal model of writing, it is necessary to combine process- and product-oriented writing approaches. Thus, I will now make an attempt at a more balanced view, resulting in a notion of writing that is in agreement with the changing norms in ELT. It is certainly not possible to mix the two approaches randomly in order to devise a standard method as to how writing ought to be taught so that it would fit all pupils in all settings. There need to be incorporations of certain features of the respective approaches into one integrative one that is able to fulfil the expectations which are raised by the new approach to ELT.
A theory of writing must comply with the three components I have laid down for ELT in general. As an integral part of EFL learning, writing must be considered one constitutive part of communicative competence. The question of Standard English is of particular importance when it comes to corrections of written papers. And the final area of SLA plays an important role for the approach that is chosen as to how writing ought to be taught to serve SLA. I would, therefore, like to establish the notion of writing as a fully-fledged “skill to be developed in its own right, that is, as part of students’ communicative competence and literacy” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 66), in which case it has a variety of jobs to accomplish. Writing needs to help learners in their general process of learning a foreign language. It also needs to be considered a complex process which requires revision and repetition until the final product is achieved. However, it is of great importance to stress that, even so, the final product must be able to live up to the expectations of certain formal standards. If writing is meant to fit in the new system it must be a lot more complex than just product- or just process-oriented.

It may sound as though this was asking too much of one single component of learning a foreign language, and I admit it would be challenging to put such a model of writing into practice. Still, there are many facets to this approach and it is definitely not too much to ask teachers to bear in mind that writing is highly complex and not something that is acquired naturally. “Writing is a technology, a set of skills which must be practised and learned through experience.” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 6)

2.5.8. The importance of genre

Writing is communication even if one writes for oneself only. Adopting this view implies that writing comprises a set of competences which need to be learned so that the writer is able to communicate. Grabe and Kaplan (cf. Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 224) identify four components, i.e. grammatical, sociolinguistic, discursive and strategic competence. They acknowledge the importance of writing as a process, but assume that teaching today largely focuses on this approach anyway. That is why they feel the need to emphasise that

the written product, and formal aspects of writing, cannot be disregarded in instruction. […] For L2 writers, greater
language proficiency (however defined) will lead, at some point to better writing quality. (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 238)

Hence, there ought to be models of writing that are taught to L2 learners. One might get the impression that they support a product-oriented approach with its major focus on form and accuracy. However, I would like to interpret their remarks as an attempt at moving carefully on the new ground which sees writing, above all, as communicative competence. They put forward the argument that L2 learners must be aware of the conventions that exist since “words, structures, and genre forms all contribute to purposeful communication” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 238). The notion of genre as a particular type of form gains an important position in their work.

It is now recognized that genre form has evolved out of a consistent and conventionalized means of addressing specific purposes and tasks in writing. Thus, genres are conventionalized ways to achieve meaning – to solve rhetorical problems – and students vary their writing according to genre structures which match their purposes for writing. (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 242)

They suggest practising these genres. And again, I ought to stress that they do not pursue a product-oriented model of writing in the traditional sense. They simply believe that writing is practised as a process anyway in current ELT, so that form is neglected to an extent that is inappropriate\(^5\). They do actually add that, although genres ought to be practised, they should not be “arbitrary models” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 242) but means to achieve meaning.

The idea of genres which L2 learners ought to practise in order to communicate the intended meaning is closely related to the idea of lexicogrammar. According to the concept of lexicogrammar, learners ought to learn chunks of words in prefabricated patterns for two reasons: 1. These chunks or units of words in a particular grammatical structure are inextricably linked to a certain meaning, which can be expressed by reproducing the structure in question; 2. Every utterance starts with the speaker’s wish to express a certain meaning, which he or she can do by choosing a particular pattern. The same reasons apply to writing. In order to communicate a certain idea, writers must choose a certain form: a genre.

Being in command of many writing genres, just like being in command of a large number of lexicogrammar units, is an indicator of somebody’s overall

\(^5\) Whether this is true remains to be seen. Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth, for instance, believe that the opposite is true.
proficiency in a language in that sense. It is in this context that Grabe and Kaplan attribute this high degree of importance to form, though not in the traditional sense of formal arbitrary correctness. They display a firm belief that “both language proficiency and composing abilities must be considered in evaluating L2 writing performance” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 240). The notion of composition alone is, of course, highly process-oriented. Having dealt with the concept of genre, I will now elucidate how a composition process ought to be designed so that it also fits the requirements of the new ELT approach.

2.5.9. Writing as negotiation of meaning

The writing process involves a variety of aspects such as the topic, the audience, the purpose of writing and the writer him- or herself. Obviously, I will not support the process-oriented approach, but I want to point out the importance of the different aspects. Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth do not hesitate to call their favoured approach process-oriented, which makes it slightly more difficult to distinguish from the traditional process-oriented writing which did not consider the product at all. The components they name as being involved in the composition process are “planning, drafting, and revising” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2006: 67). They take into account that the complex writing process is recursive and not linear, which implies that it entails re-writing. They also emphasise that writing is meant to serve learning which can only be achieved if the composing skills are being trained (cf. Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2006: 67). And finally, they offer a distinction between product-oriented approaches which “focus on the final product (a coherent, error-free text)” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2006: 67) and process-oriented approaches which “focus on the steps involved in drafting and redrafting a piece of work” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2006: 67). Nonetheless, they do stress that “there is no dichotomy between process and product” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2006: 67). It may be hard to imagine what they are trying to convey by speaking up for a focus on the process but denying, at the same time, that they suggest turning a blind eye to the product. The reasoning for this manner of arguing, however, may be found in their perception of present writing instruction. In contrast to Grabe and Kaplan,
they believe that teachers still adhere too much to the product-oriented approach so that a change in the opposite direction would be desirable, because they argue that the process of writing serves the overall aim of SLA best.

In order to determine, however, which theory of writing ought to be embedded into a classroom context under the conditions of the new model of ELT, I will, once again, consider how SLA can best be developed in class. One of the most important recognitions for EFL instruction that is meant to serve SLA is the necessity to create genuine opportunities to negotiate meaning. Pupils should be enticed at all times to try out forms and structures which they assume to be appropriate. The feedback they receive will prove their attempt either right or wrong. Above all, however, their attempts at using the foreign language must be meaningful. What I am recalling are those results of SLA which see input and output together, i.e. meaningful interaction, as the most important contributor to SLA.

If writing is regarded as the medium, this entire procedure needs to be transferred to the writing process. Pupils should want to communicate a certain meaning. So they try it out in writing, then they receive feedback. This procedure can occur more than once before a final product is achieved. They negotiate meaning through writing. In order to put this theory of writing into practice, a method like the task-based approach, which I will describe in more detail later, could be useful. The task-based approach would in any case entail the meaningful use of written language. If the task, for instance, involved written exchange with somebody who does not speak the learner’s mother tongue, it would even include purposeful interaction. Whether this kind of exchange was included or not, writing would be “a problem-solving activity” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 244). Writing would also contribute to knowledge-building. Not only would it allow the discovery of additional knowledge of the thematic area, but it would certainly help to gain new linguistic competence, which in turn would allow for a better quality of writing. Writing instruction which takes this approach seriously can gain a lot from creative writing tasks. This might be as simple as re-writing texts from different viewpoints, or slightly more demanding in the form of shifting registers to explore changing communicative effects and writing completions to given texts in order to obtain a better understanding of the text, or it might be as difficult as crossing the boundaries of genres, i.e. turning a poem into a prose text. (cf. Reid 2001: 29f).
If writing is considered communication, however, the most important aspect of a writing process is certainly the social context. The social context inside an EFL classroom consists of the other pupils, any kind of interaction, the teacher, and the world outside the classroom, regardless of whether the actual writing is continued there or not. This dynamic element takes into account the author-reader interaction, the classroom community and student responsibility. As I suggested by the term ‘dynamic’, this theory of writing is mainly about interaction and the question of who is involved in the overall writing process.

Ideally, EFL teachers create a setting in which pupils are aware of “what is involved in the creation of a text” (Reid 2001: 30). This includes recognising that writing is a recursive process, which means it is natural for writers to “continually plan, revise, and refine” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 262). Pupils would set about using multiple drafting, a process in which they generate ideas, organise them, and choose the appropriate linguistic forms to externalise them. This would also ensure that pupils start drafting without immediately expecting a final text at first attempt. This, by the way, saves a lot of frustration since the first draft simply cannot be the best. But above all, pupils would be offered many opportunities for feedback. In an ideal EFL class, pupils should be taught to incorporate techniques of self-monitoring, but should, in any case, be offered feedback at all stages of the writing process. It could hardly be more obvious that this is the heart of a writing theory which sees writing as a “communicative social act” (Reid 2001: 29). Feedback in its various forms is the prototypical type of interaction in connection with writing. Feedback can indeed take many different shapes and can serve many different purposes. Feedback may be corrective, it may serve to generate new or modify existing ideas, which I would like to call broadening, or it may be evaluative. I will discuss feedback on writing in more detail at a later stage. Before that I will turn to the impetus that the product-oriented approach can contribute to a concept of writing in EFL classes today.

2.5.10. The role of accuracy in writing

I have outlined that writing, on the one hand, can be practised as another way to negotiate meaning, which would account for the informal part of SLA, in particular the achievement of fluency and the acquisition of new linguistic items. This would
be a theory of writing that would very much concentrate on the process. Again, I will have to deal with the question of formality since I am not suggesting a model of writing which only concentrates on the process. The product-oriented approach used to be accused of focusing too much on form and accuracy, which was why the process movement was launched in the first place. Of course, the product-oriented approach has not become obsolete, nor have form and accuracy.

When speaking, you can modify what you say by repeating, rephrasing, hesitating, starting again, gesturing. You can ‘improve’ your message by looking angry or encouraging, raising your eyebrows, digging your elbow into the other person’s ribs, and so on. As a listener you can check the message by asking for repetition or clarification, by looking doubtful or puzzled, or, in certain countries, by handmovements. When writing, you do not have these possibilities: your message must be understandable and clear first time. (Bartram/Walton 1991: 64f)

This is a clear argument in favour of a product-oriented approach to writing. The authors suggest that there is no room to negotiate meaning in writing, which is why a piece of written work, if it is intended to get a certain message across, i.e. serve a communicative purpose, must be accurate. So here again, the argument is that communication depends on formal and grammatical accuracy. Not only does writing need to be accurate for communication’s sake, though, but also because accuracy is generally appreciated even more in writing than it is in speaking.

Written work which has a lot of mistakes, even if these are relatively minor, tends to be frowned upon. [...] ‘Real life’ values accuracy in written work highly – depending on the situation, perhaps as highly as intelligibility. (Bartram/Walton 1991: 65)

So clearly, the product does matter. It needs to be capable of communicating a meaning, and in order to do that it needs to comply with certain formal criteria, e.g. in the area of grammar.

The implications for the context of EFL in secondary education in Germany are such that pupils must achieve the ability to produce texts which meet these formal criteria. The recognition that grammatical accuracy actually matters and that formal instruction is useful in ELT is not entirely new, since I have already elaborated on it in the section on SLA. The challenging part, however, is to translate this recognition into writing instruction: How will a teacher manage to make his or her pupils produce correct texts? What is the status of the
term ‘correct’ in writing instruction, especially since the focus on the accurate product has to be combined with a focus on the process? In any case, the two aspects are by no means incompatible. On the contrary, there needs to be a path that merges the two aspects and maybe, under the new norms of ELT, they are complementary to one another.

2.5.11. Feedback as the interface of meaningful and accurate writing

The crucial field to explore is the area of feedback. Regardless of whether it is provided continually during the writing process as a way of exercising interaction or whether it is evaluative, coming as a grade on the marked paper when the teacher returns it to the pupil, feedback is the interface of all the approaches to writing. In a recent study, Icy Lee (2009) has identified several mismatches between teachers’ beliefs with regard to the role of written feedback and their practice of it. The mismatch listed first is, in accordance with my earlier remarks: “Teachers pay most attention to language form but they believe there’s more to good writing than accuracy.” (Lee 2009: 15) I will refrain from rendering the results in greater detail here. What is important to bear in mind, though, is the fact that feedback must be subject to an overhaul, not least because it is such an important, sensitive and influential aspect of learning. In order to use it effectively, it must be reviewed. I will look at this area here from a slightly different angle.

There is also a tremendously important pedagogical dimension to feedback in the context of teaching EFL, in particular with regard to the field of writing. It “can greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 377). Unclear responses can be confusing and frustrating, and thus impede the writing process and linguistic development. Supportive and positive responses, on the other hand, can positively motivate pupils to explore the area of knowledge in question and their personal creativity.

The decisive question, however, which needs to be resolved in the context of feedback on written work, remains to determine what counts as an error and how to deal with it. Using the three pillars of ELT as a point of departure I have suggested creating a dividing line between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ at the point of
intelligibility for oral performance. Having identified errors, I have also suggested various ways of reacting to them. This is exactly what is needed for written work, too. There is the need to set up a boundary beyond which language production is simply ‘wrong’. Additionally, there is the need to devise handling routines for feedback.

2.5.12. What is the role of errors in writing?

When teachers set writing tasks “the tendency is still ‘Give out a title – correct every mistake in the composition – give it back and tell the students the answers’” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 67). This approach, where feedback is mainly given in the form of a final grade on a paper, was universally adhered to before the writing-as-a-process movement entered the classrooms, and some authors see it still as being pervasively practised nowadays. Obviously, this practice is strongly tied to the product-oriented approach, in which only the final product is taken into account for assessment. This approach to feedback simply assumes that pupils carefully study the mistakes that have been marked so that they both see the reasoning behind the grade and avoid these mistakes in the future. Marking is seen as a way to raise students’ awareness of erroneous forms so that they get them right in the future. Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 378) comment that it is now apparent to most teachers and researchers that such an approach left many bewildered and confused students unable to work constructively on their writing skills.

Not only does it leave pupils “bewildered and confused”, but it is diametrically opposed to one of the fundamental discoveries that SLA research has brought to light: Errors cannot and must not be avoided.

Errors – being deviant forms from the TL – are a constitutive characteristic of SLA. Every learner goes through various stages of IL, each of which displays different types of errors. Rarely do learners achieve a degree of proficiency in which their IL equals the TL. And then there is still the question of whether there is anyone whose language is free of errors, considering that the TL is not a unified set of rules. Bartram and Walton (1991: 1) argue that the area of error correction has generally been accepted, i.e. by teachers and learners, as “an essential part of language teaching and learning”. However, the position which
errors have held is, after all, one that is marked by an unjustified significance. When teachers used to believe that language learning worked in a behaviouristic fashion, when errors were thought of as being simply a display of laziness on the part of the pupils, when EFL teaching was carried out as the PPP approach, teachers could obviously not draw on any other indicators for the pupils’ development and grade except errors. In that context, the only remedial treatment was thought to be correction. “They [i.e. teachers and learners; HE] have persuaded themselves that mistakes and correction are important.” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 1) I have been extremely careful in simply adopting descriptions that have been put forward as representative of general attitudes, beliefs and practices of teachers and learners. In this case, however, I do not hesitate to agree entirely with the view that Bartram and Walton hold. Despite the results of SLA – this much can be anticipated – teachers still attribute too much weight to the institution of error and, thus, spend too much time and effort on it. Of course, a third component, beside the teachers and the learners, that has contributed to perpetuate the institution of error is the legal situation. School and education authorities have set up a legal framework in which the importance of error is upheld and self-renewed, through fixed correction procedures, for instance.

I am not trying to argue that mistakes are entirely unimportant. They are important, but not “as much as we have been led to think” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 1). This obsession with mistakes is particularly pronounced in the setting of EFL teaching which I am dealing with, i.e. a non-native setting. It is widespread in language teaching in general, but even more so when teachers are learners of the language themselves. Those teachers who lack confidence in their own English, which is more likely to happen with non-native speakers, are even stricter than those whose competence is better. Bartram and Walton (cf. 1991: 2) even go as far as formulating this as a general rule: The higher the proficiency the more lenient a marker is. Non-NESTs seem to be more heavy-handed when it comes to the correction of mistakes, because they seem to believe “that ‘good English’ means ‘free of mistakes’” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 24). Ironically enough, a non-NEST would never dare to criticise an American for saying “I didn’t see that movie yet” (example taken from Bartram/Walton 1991: 7), but they certainly would if it was one of their native German pupils who came up with this structure.
Generally speaking, a long-term objective of ELT must be to adopt the view, which has been established in SLA research for three decades, that an error should not be stigmatising; rather, it is often systematic and reasonable, occurring in a period of ‘interlanguage’ in which they are literally and positively developmental (Reid 2001: 31).

This is almost a positive attitude towards mistakes, which might be entirely shocking to someone who has been trying to eradicate errors in pupils’ ILs for the largest part of his or her professional life. It is, however, a view that is widespread among scholars who deal with errors, correction or instructed SLA in general. Some scholars even suggest encouraging many mistakes (cf. Bartram/Walton 1991: 12). I will not go as far as that simply because I also argue that formal accuracy does matter. But I will promote a neutral and accepting attitude towards mistakes in general, as supported by Frank Königs (2003a: 377):

Dabei sind Fehler im Fremdsprachenunterricht unvermeidlich; diese Position ist heutzutage nicht mehr umstritten. Fand sich vor drei Jahrzehnten noch die Auffassung, dass Fehler in jedem Fall auszumerzen und als vermeidbares Übel anzusehen seien, so hat sich doch in der Zwischenzeit die Auffassung durchgesetzt, dass sie notwendiger Bestandteil der Aneignung einer fremden Sprache sind.

I take it that Königs’ remark about the fact that for three decades now, mistakes have been considered necessary in SLA refers to the academic world, not the ELT classroom at school. In any case, it is precisely the status that Königs describes which the institution of error should be given in a classroom context. Therefore, I suggest adopting this view for EFL teaching at school.

Taking this step is a necessary prerequisite for bringing about changes in the norms for writing but, at the same time, the only ‘big challenge’ that needs to be tackled. The reason is that anything that ought to follow will come more or less automatically. Once this step has been made, it will be natural to alter the criteria for marking. As I mentioned above, the current practice – which fully applies to German schools – is to mark every single mistake in a pupil’s paper. So the feedback pupils currently receive is no more than their own product in which incorrect forms have been marked with red ink, to which the teacher might have added a paragraph of written comment. The product has also been classified into a category which figures as a number, i.e. the grade, which is meant to tell the pupils how good they are at writing.
Before suggesting various types of feedback, I briefly want to come to a conclusion regarding this everlasting issue of how to handle mistakes in a correction procedure. Adopting the view that errors are both acceptable and inevitable is the mindset required for a new way of dealing with mistakes. The question that needs to be addressed is how to materialise it. I have negated the procedure in which every single mistake is marked, but I have not suggested an alternative yet. By marking every single mistake, “students’ creativity is stifled, because accuracy is valued much more highly than fluency or imagination” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 26). Additionally, SLA research tells one that pupils cannot benefit from this type of correction in the way teachers hope, because the moment of instruction is not the moment of learning. And if it is the case that the corrected form refers to an item that is beyond the pupils’ stage of IL it is utterly useless to mark it because pupils are not ready for that particular item.

The opposite strategy would be not to mark anything at all. Both the heavy corrector and the non-corrector create problems and cannot do justice to the challenges of the concept of ELT and writing that I am devising in this thesis. Those teachers who do not correct anything have to face pupils who complain “about being corrected too little” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 27). Not only will pupils complain but parents and school authorities are also likely to frown upon this manner of handling mistakes. On an SLA level, teachers will not enhance the learning process if they do not correct anything. Correction is a means of form-focused teaching which is, despite a focus on communicative competence, necessary for the process of SLA, especially if teachers attempt to accelerate this process. Another argument against the abandonment of correction is that under the conditions of present-day ELT “exams are often accuracy-based” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 27), which is a systemic flaw but must not be neglected.

The obvious conclusion is that it would be just as useless to mark every mistake as it would be to mark none. As it is often the case, the right path in this issue is in between these two extremes. A reasonable perspective would be to mark major errors, especially when they impair comprehensibility. In general, it might be a useful guideline to decide along the line of intelligibility vs. non-intelligibility, just as in speaking. Another guideline might be the notion of Standard English that is based on a descriptive, corpus-based account of grammar which tells one what is possible rather than prescriptively ruling out certain forms in advance. It would allow a more tolerant approach to correction.
However, the focus on form should not be given up, which means that even if a form is intelligible but wrong in register or usage the pupil would have the obligation to continue targeting the form in question until his or her level of IL allows for acquisition. It depends a lot on how teachers manage mistakes if they expect a positive result. Mistakes must be “dealt with in a non-judgmental, supportive and effective way” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 31). These criteria seem useful but also difficult to pin down.

2.5.13. Types of feedback

The crucial problem with the kind of feedback pupils receive under the current system is that it only concerns the product. Not only does marking exclusively focus on the product, but it also assumes that the product must be perfect. It is characteristic of marking in ELT that teachers only deduct points. The point of departure for every marker when he or she starts marking a pupil’s paper is the assumption that the text is perfect, which means it displays no mistakes. From these initial 100 per cent teachers then deduct points and, thus, arrive at the final grade. Again, this attitude is highly unnatural. One might argue that it is a *deformation professionelle* that comes like an ‘incurable virus’ with the teaching profession. Bartram and Walton (1991: 24) illustrate it with the help of an example:

If you show the same set of imperfect compositions to separate groups of teachers and non-teachers, the non-teachers will praise the amount the students have managed to get right, while the teachers concentrate on what is wrong!

In their work on marking which carries the simple title *Correction*, Bartram and Walton (1991: 19) suggest that “rather than criticise the product, it may be the teacher’s job to aid the process [emphasis in the original; HE]”. This does not entail a return to the days of process-oriented writing. There will definitely have to be a correction and a grading of the final product, but, at the same time, there must be continual support and permanent feedback, i.e. non-evaluative, during the composition process.

Students value student-teacher conferences where the teacher is able to ask for clarification, check comprehension of oral comments made, help the writer sort through problems, assist the student in decision-making. This has not only had a beneficial effect on writing, but also helped to
The most effective forms these conferences can take are either small groups of pupils conferencing with the teacher or even one-to-one dialogues, just as I suggested for in the section on speaking. If done like this, teachers can and should be able to provide feedback at all stages, i.e. during the pre-writing activities, during the idea-generating activities, after the first draft, during the revision, after the second draft etc. until the pupil can eventually hand in the final product. These approaches are highly efficient because they enable the participants to work together intensively and in an informal atmosphere. The major drawback is that they are extremely time-consuming.

Another form a feedback conference could take is that of peer feedback. Pupils come together in small groups or on a one-to-one basis, and exchange their drafts. They mark, discuss or comment on their partners’ draft, which provides new input and entails interaction, and then hand it back so that all participants can set about devising their second draft. Peer feedback is a concept that may leave some participants, especially among the pupils, unsatisfied. Pupils might not be convinced that it helps them if they are given feedback by their classmates. In fact, there are many pupils who “expect teachers to correct them, because that is the traditional view of what a language teacher does” (Bartram/Walton 1991: 29). And, indeed, pupils are not trained to provide clear goals and guidelines, which calls the effectiveness of this approach into question. Thus the peer feedback approach depends entirely on how effectively it is prepared and organised by the teacher.

The last approach to feedback can only have little relevance for ELT in a classroom setting because it does not involve interaction and does not, thus, contribute greatly to SLA, or to the achievement of communicative competence. It is a kind of feedback which every pupil can offer to themselves.


Even though self-assessment and self-monitoring are indispensable when writing, if not even self-evident, I am reluctant to attribute great importance to them, especially since they exclude communication and interaction.
2.5.14. The pillars of a new theory of writing

Essentially, the theory of writing I suggest boils down to three imperatives:

1. Pupils must be granted many stages to develop a piece of writing which is ready to be submitted. Never should the first draft be the final product.
2. The various stages must entail continual feedback. Feedback, however, does not place error at the centre of attention.
3. Ideally, feedback is organised in a way that allows pupils to negotiate meaning, e.g. conferences.

Again, the concept of negotiation of meaning proves invaluable:

Evidence suggests that conferences in which students participate actively and negotiate meaning (confirmation checks, clarification requests, revision confirmations, revision queries, etc.) are more effective than those in which students are passive recipients of teacher comments. (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 391)

This is where writing, writing feedback in particular, ties in with SLA as argued by those who support the approach to writing which I am outlining. Negotiation of meaning as the cover term for and interface between input- and output-oriented hypotheses of SLA is crucial for the learning process. Hence, organising writing feedback in a way that it includes the concept of negotiation of meaning must necessarily enhance the process of SLA. Furthermore, a concept of writing which places negotiation of meaning at its heart is in accordance with the stipulations of the Bildungsstandards and the CEF. Negotiation of meaning is a key concept required to provide pupils with communicative competence.

This takes me back to the definition of writing as a fully-fledged “skill to be developed in its own right, that is, as part of students’ communicative competence and literacy” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 66). Writing which is organised in the way I have so far suggested is an integral part of the pupils’ competence in EFL, which means primarily communicative competence. The quote by Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth, however, also mentions “literacy” as the second pillar that is to be developed in writing. Literacy must be read as accuracy.

Both the goals which the Bildungsstandards state and the inferences for ELT teaching which I have drawn from SLA research primarily focus on and support communicative competence. However, both dimensions have also led to
the recognition that a second quality is of major importance despite all the attention that communicative competence deserves. This second quality I am referring to is formal accuracy. Recalling the decisive paragraph from the Bildungsstandards clarifies the status that is attributed to correctness.

Die angemessene Verwendung sprachlicher Mittel und der Gebrauch von korrektem Englisch sowohl im Schriftlichen wie auch im Mündlichen stellen neben der Verständigungs- und Gesprächsfähigkeit ebenfalls wichtige Lernziele dar.

The recommendations which I have developed as to how ELT can be served best by SLA research state that despite the importance of informal teaching with a focus on negotiation of meaning, formal teaching, in which grammatical accuracy is trained must be carried out as well. Of course, the teaching of form can also be organised as interaction.

The quintessential recognition is that form does matter. I also argue that the theory of writing which I suggest is absolutely congruent with this stipulation. The term “literacy” which I have highlighted above is the carrier of the concept of formal accuracy in writing. The training of form is an integral part of teaching. Hence, during all the stages of feedback the meaning that is negotiated must also entail form-focused grammatical instruction. Despite all the drafts, re-writings and feedback conferences, there will eventually be the need to submit a final product which is then graded.

2.5.15. Grading and scoring

Generally speaking, researchers use the term ‘scoring’ to refer to the processes which are described divergently by the terms ‘marking’, ‘correction’, ‘rating’, ‘grading’, ‘response’, so essentially to refer to any kind of feedback on the final product of writing in the form of a figure. Sara Cushing Weigle (2002: 108) determines that “the score is ultimately what will be used in making decisions and inferences about writers”. Her further definition of scoring is very convenient for my thesis because it completes the picture of writing as one essential skill in the comprehensive concept of communicative competence which I have put forward.

A score in a writing assessment is the outcome of an interaction that involves not merely the test taker and the test, but the test taker, the prompt or task, the written text itself, the rater(s) and the rating scale. (Cushing Weigle 2002: 108)
This is the understanding of scoring that is needed if scoring is meant to fit into a system of ELT – and writing instruction in particular – that is guided by the superordinate idea that foreign languages are primarily taught and learnt in order to be able to communicate. The reader, who is also the marker in ELT, should always keep this concept of writing in mind when marking.

The two crucial criteria in any scoring context are reliability and validity. Reliability is the term that is used to describe the degree of objectivity. Of course, no human scoring can be entirely objective. But the author of the rated script should at least be sure that his or her score has not come about as a result of an entirely subjective decision. Each written work should, therefore, be marked independently by at least two different markers. This is a widespread practice and the only reasonable way to do it. I will come back to this issue at a later stage when suggesting a way which can further enhance the degree of objectivity and when I will discuss the issue of subjectivity in different types of scoring.

An element which is even more important in this thesis on the goals of ELT is the question of validity. “Do the scoring procedures [...] accurately reflect the construct being measured?” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 137) is a question every marker should be able to answer positively at any given point in time. Applied to the concept of ELT and writing I have devised so far, the marker must find out whether the piece of writing is able to fulfil the function of communication in a certain situation, i.e. whether it communicates the message the sender, i.e. the author, has intended to send. I need not further emphasise that a type of marking that primarily focuses on grammatical accuracy is not at all valid. There is a third major criterion that is mentioned in scoring theory, namely practicality. I will turn to this issue as soon as I have shown why one scoring practice is preferable to another.

I will highlight two major schemes of scoring, one of which I believe to be both a lot more valid than and at least just as reliable as the other. Additionally, it is much more practical. The two opposing approaches I want to discuss are holistic and analytic scoring.

Holistic scoring is “the assigning of a single score to a script based on the overall impression of the script” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 112). The most common accusation supporters of holistic scoring find themselves confronted with is that it equalled “deciding on a general, and subjective, score” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 404). Yet this assumption is utterly wrong since holistic scoring fundamentally
differs from “its less reliable predecessor, general impression marking [emphasis in the original; HE]” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 112), which truly is highly subjective. Holistic scoring, however, implies that each piece of written work is read and then “judged against a rating scale, or scoring rubric, that outlines the scoring criteria” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 112). This is a significant difference because the existence and the use of a fixed scale entirely relieve the final scores of their arbitrariness, which was bound to rear its head in general impression marking. The scale used in assessing performance is the

underlying basis upon which the test is founded; that is, it embodies the test (or scale) developer’s notion of what skills or abilities are being measured by the test. For this reason the development of a scale (or a set of scales) and the descriptors for each scale level are of critical importance for the validity of the assessment. (Cushing Weigle 2002: 109)

Understanding writing as communicative competence within the wider field of learning EFL, it is necessary to use a scale for scoring that reflects the level of competence. One might, therefore, use the descriptors that have been laid down in the CEF as an orientation scheme for the development of individual descriptors. Other descriptor models are available too.

If scored analytically, “scripts are rated on several aspects of writing or criteria rather than given a single score” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 114), which means that they are most probably read a couple of times. Analytic scoring is meant to provide detailed information on different aspects of written performance. Written performance is separated into a set of categories, all of which are rated separately and, potentially, weighted differently. Possible categories may include grammatical accuracy, style and content which is the common practice in secondary education in Germany. Since all the categories are rated separately in analytic scoring, it apparently provides “more useful diagnostic information about students’ writing abilities” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 120), which would come in particularly handy in an EFL setting where pupils may want concrete information on the areas they specifically need to work on. The fact that all the aspects are rated separately is the reason that analytic scoring is considered to be more reliable because it seems more transparent and, therefore, more just.

Yet despite all these apparent advantages that analytic scoring offers, it is indeed holistic scoring that I favour for several reasons. All the advantages that analytic scoring has are merely illusory. If holistic scoring is strictly practised in the way I have suggested, namely on the solid basis of descriptors against which
a performance is rated, such as the ones put forward by the CEF, it will both provide more detailed diagnostic information on a pupil’s competence and writing abilities than analytic scoring, and it will be just as transparent as analytic scoring because the pupil will easily be able to reconstruct how the grade has come into being. The former argument, i.e. the diagnostic information, has little relevance anyway simply because SLA research has proved that grammar teaching cannot alter the sequence of learning anyway. So even if pupils wanted to work on particular areas, the mere concentration on single issues would not make them acquire this item. The organic metaphor underscores that it will not do to simply work on one area because language competence grows irregularly.

Most significantly though, the argument that analytic scoring was more transparent does not hold true. It quantifies the pupil’s abilities and provides a figure from which the pupils can try to infer what it states about their writing abilities, whereas with holistic scoring against abstract descriptors, pupils can actually look up in words what the score means with regard to their abilities. The most illusory assumption, however, is that analytic scoring, since it is more transparent, is more reliable and, therefore, fairer. The same paper rated by different raters can get differing marks ranging from very high to very low depending on the individual rater’s focus and strictness. I will illustrate this in the empirical chapter with the help of an example. This phenomenon, which is actually nothing but subjectivity, is less likely to occur with a firm basis against which a paper has to be measured, because that is just what analytic scoring lacks, even though it quantifies everything. So I am arguing that holistic scoring is not only more reliable, contrary to the popular view, but also fairer.

The argument of justice also applies vice versa. A pupil who knows about his or her abilities can easily fool the entire system by concentrating on one aspect and deliberately neglecting the others. If he or she knows, for instance, that a low number of errors will get him or her a high grade in the rubric ‘accuracy’, he or she will, of course, only construct main clauses and avoid taking a risk. Thus, the pupil can always ensure that he or she will get a decent grade even if the other aspects have been largely neglected. But this is extremely unnatural and by no means reflects the pupil’s writing abilities, let alone his or her communicative competence. In a concept of teaching EFL that sees the various aspects of a language inseparably tied together, this approach is unlikely to do justice to either the language or the goals that are pursued.
Having rejected the popular assumption that analytic scoring bears certain advantages over holistic scoring, I will now even set out the additional assets that holistic scoring provides. Again, these are features of special importance in the context of this thesis, which means that I will, furthermore, support holistic scoring because it naturally fits my concept of ELT.

The general practice is to deduct points for what is wrong instead of rewarding what is good. “Holistic scoring is intended to focus the reader's attention on the strengths of the writing, not on its deficiencies, so that writers are rewarded for what they do well.” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 113) I have already mentioned the validity that holistic scoring can provide in its own right because it measures somebody's competence in the language, provided that writing is seen as communication. Compared to analytic scoring, “holistic scoring is more valid [...] because it reflects most closely the authentic, personal reaction of a reader to a text” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 114) whereas analytic scoring distorts the picture of a pupil's writing ability because it focuses too much on individual aspects. In the case of analytic scoring, writing ability is assessed “by testing a subset of skills assumed to constitute components of writing ability” (Grabe/Kaplan 1996: 397). The way analytic scoring is currently practised in Germany, divided into the categories of accuracy, style and content, two thirds of the overall score relate to language and one third to content. Weighting different components differently means making “an explicit statement of a theory of writing ability (i.e. that certain aspects are more or less important/relevant/involved (sic!) than others” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 124).

There is nothing wrong with making an explicit statement of a writing theory as such. However, the statement that the current practice displays is not in agreement with the theory of writing I have put forward. The theory of writing I support is based on the functionalist notions of communicative competence and negotiation of meaning, which see meaning and form, content and language as inextricably linked to one another. Thus this theory of writing ability cannot accept an imposed model of scoring that does not match the underlying principles. Scoring must recognise that content and language, meaning and form are one. The only approach that can live up to this aim is holistic scoring. Finally, experienced raters may rate holistically anyway, they “may target their ratings towards what they expect the total score to come out to be, and revise their analytic scores accordingly” (Cushing Weigle 2002: 120).
I do not need to dwell upon the issue of practicality. Obviously, holistic scoring is tremendously superior to analytic scoring in terms of practicality. It is less time-consuming but also more efficient to aid the learning process, because it is more likely to provide positive feedback than analytic scoring, which only focuses on what is bad.

In order to back up my remarks about ideal writing I have included a component in my survey that is intended to test the hypotheses about scoring which I have put forward. Only after having looked at the results of that part of the study will I be able to finally evaluate the scoring issue.

In all the individual sections and sub-sections I have repeatedly provided short summaries. Hence I will refrain from drawing a conclusion here, which would summarise the entire theory I have laid down so far. There will be a resumption of all the key issues in the debate at the end of the thesis in which I intend to suggest alterations and adjustments that need to be implemented. In order to do this, however, I need an empirical basis that elucidates how ELT is practised at the moment. It is the empirical part that I turn to now.
3. Present-day practice

3.1. Preliminaries

Schooling seems to be an area in which everyone is interested and on which everyone feels authorised to comment because they feel sure that they have the ‘right’ view. The reason is probably that everyone in this part of the world has been to school themselves, so that most people feel like top-notch experts knowing how the educational system should be run. The trouble is that, when commenting on education, most self-appointed experts refer to an imaginary school system, individual cases about which they have heard, or their own teachers who instructed them decades earlier.

Therefore, there is the need for a survey which allows opportunity for making solid statements about an area that is too often discussed, yet too little researched. To my knowledge there is no comparable study available, meaning that this study will not only back up rightly claimed assertions and falsify polemic biases towards teaching, but it will also fill a scholarly information gap. It will provide material on which other researchers can draw for their theoretical remarks in the fields of didactics or foreign language teaching.

For a project that is geared towards impacting on teaching practice because its author assumes that something has gone wrong with that very practice, there was the need to have reliable information on whether this assumption holds true in the first place. If it did not prove to be true, this project would hardly need to be pursued any further. It would just appear to be an affirmative though irrelevant piece of work.

On the other hand, jumping to this frustrating conclusion may be somewhat premature. The project might still deserve to be pursued to the end, even if the common teaching practice turned out to be fully in accordance with all the claims made above. If this was the case, the project’s justification would simply lie in the fact that the assumption which I have made and which is shared by many others, namely that teaching practice is going fundamentally wrong, would have been falsified. Everybody who is interested in foreign language teaching and maybe concerned about its being on the wrong track would then be assured that, in fact, it is not that bad at all. I can anticipate this much: the case
that everything is perfect is as unlikely as that in which the result is that everything is terrible.

It will hardly be possible to say that either everything is fine or everything is wrong. The whole issue of foreign language teaching as well as the whole survey is multi-layered. So the picture that will emerge from the survey is quite differentiated, allowing for detailed insight and inferences on present-day teaching practice. Subsequently, the survey may provide manifold advice, especially bearing in mind the theory of EFL teaching that I have put forward.

I also mentioned at the beginning that this study will not develop any new theories or expand on existing ones. On the theoretical front it is more about tying up some loose ends of knowledge that exist already. So the actual scholarly contribution of the thesis lies in this empirical survey.

This part of the study will be particularly interesting to those who have participated in the field study. As tiring as the filling out of the questionnaires and the marking may have been, these participants will probably have benefited from the participation already. The reading of the questions and possible answers alone may have constituted an awareness-raising process or an expansion of existing views. Yet the most interesting bit for the participants will probably be the results which I will present in this part. Participants will be eager to find out whether they have gone with the majority in certain issues or not. They can see whether they have allocated an average mark to the script or a particularly good or bad one. Or maybe they are just interested in seeing whether they have opted for the 'right' choices. Because, after all, this is what this study is all about: giving advice on how to act in class, how best to enhance communicative competence, how to mark etc. By the same token, this part of the survey may also be interesting to those participants who felt patronised by the questionnaires in the first place. When some questionnaires were returned, they came with comments which suggested that their authors knew everything about foreign language teaching already. These participants may either confirm their views with the help of the results, or they may need to abandon them since they cannot be upheld against the empirical evidence.
3.1.1. Methods, instruments and informants

The survey consisted of three sections, all of which every participant was asked to process. The instruments in sections one and two were standardised questionnaires\(^6\). The first questionnaire comprising 30 single questions was, at the same time, the core of the entire enterprise. It asked for external details about the informant and then went on to draw a comprehensive picture of the person’s attitudes towards and ideas about EFL teaching. One area that was a subject of this questionnaire and thus intended to provide this information was the person’s preferred varieties of English in all contexts, i.e. in teaching, in correcting and grading, in spoken and in written language production. Secondly, the informant was asked in that section to reflect on and give their idea of ‘the mistake’, again in all classroom contexts. Following up on ‘the mistake’ as a concept, participants had to provide information on how they dealt with mistakes in specific situations and what their priorities were with regard to feedback in general. Additionally, the questionnaire asked about issues such as classroom language, preferred marking mode, and reference works used by the teachers, i.e. issues that are closely related but not covered by the other two categories. These questions, as well as a question on how teachers go about the task when they actually have to mark a script, allow for specific inferences with regard to individuals’ teaching practice. One central element the survey was intended to throw light upon but which could not be addressed through a direct question was the relationship between the teachers’ actual manner of dealing with students’ mistakes and their own perception thereof.

Hence, the second section of the survey. In part one the participants were asked about how they viewed themselves and their practices with regard to the handling of mistakes. Then they were asked to do genuine marking. The informants were asked to look at a total of 30 sentences, which were either taken from students’ scripts or made up, and to imagine that they appeared in a paper they had to mark. They were then asked to decide as to whether the structure in question was right or wrong. There was also the possibility of expressing uncertainty about the correctness of the sentence. If a mistake was identified the participant was asked to categorise it.

\(^6\) See Appendices 1 and 2.
The third section applied a different testing instrument than a standardised questionnaire as in the two previous ones. In this part – quite naturally the most laborious one for teachers – the participants had to mark a class test. The script used was a paper that was initially written as a real class test by a 12th-year pupil at a German school. All the informants were given the very same script, but they did not all use the same rating mode. One group, chosen randomly, marked the scripts holistically, while the others used an analytic system. The idea behind this was to test the two modes with regard to consistency and fairness as well as other criteria.

The material was entirely designed by myself and endorsed by my supervisors. Naturally, I gratefully accepted additional input and suggestions during the process of creating the first questionnaire, which was edited and proofread by colleagues and friends. Despite all this, it apparently aroused the irritation and incomprehension of a few participants. Some uttered useful criticism, it should be said, but others just ignored parts of the survey material or commented on it as though the questionnaire was a personal offence. I will include some of these comments in the discussion because they allow for interesting insights themselves. Many informants also enjoyed filling out the material or took it as an opportunity to reflect critically on some of the issues touched upon. Quite a number of participants expressed the wish to be informed about the results.

The informants were all teachers at German Gymnasien. Having a strictly tripartite school system in Germany it was important to me that all the informants were teachers at a Gymnasium. It did not matter what type of Gymnasium\(^7\), i.e. whether a traditional Gymnasium, a Gesamtschule with a so-called gymnasialer Zweig, a Wirtschaftsgymnasium, a Technisches Gymnasium, or an Oberstufengymnasium; only a different school type, such as Berufsschule, Real- or Hauptschule, or Grundschule would not do. I should stress that there is no thought of discrimination behind this selection. The reason is simply that the whole thesis is about EFL teaching at German Gymnasien, and as Germany entertains the strict separation of school types, the approaches to foreign language teaching in the various school types do differ significantly. Therefore, I

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\(^7\) The German terms used here all denote different school types. The only relevant schools for my survey were schools of the type Gymnasium. The point I am making is that within this superordinate group of Gymnasien there are serveral subtypes with particular foci. Informants of all subtypes were welcome.
would be unable to make reliable remarks on EFL teaching practice at German Gymnasien if I had informants who taught at a different kind of school than Gymnasium. Nor would I be able to present reasonable advice for teachers across the board anyway, i.e. for all branches of school. Having a tripartite school system, there are bound to be different approaches in the individual branches, which in turn means that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to ELT.

In spite of the school branch restriction, I did not insist on a regional restriction. The participants teach at schools all over Germany. Although education is a state matter, there is more harmony between the approaches to ELT at Gymnasien in two different states than between ELT at a Gymnasium and a Realschule in the same state. Another reason for not excluding participants from other states than Baden-Württemberg, which is clearly my prime area of reference, is the leading role that the Baden-Württemberg Bildungsstandards play in the national debate on the issue. They do provide a model for discussions and policy documents on ELT in the whole country. All the federal states will follow suit, if they have not done so already. The top goal of communicative competence can be considered – not least due to the CEF – to have been adopted everywhere. Consequently, the remarks I have made and will be making can be taken seriously on a wider scale than only within Baden-Württemberg, with the restriction I mentioned: for Gymnasien only. For these reasons I encouraged teachers from all over the country to take part.

For processing and analysing the data I have used SPSS 15.0. After these fairly general explanations I will now look at the results of my survey in greater detail.

### 3.1.2. General facts and figures

The survey was carried out over a period of 12 months between September 2006 and September 2007. The general procedure was to directly approach teachers at schools and ask them the favour of filling out the questionnaires and marking the paper. I received a total of 115 completed survey packets. The minimum I intended to achieve was 100, which I had agreed with my supervisor was the critical mass needed to make reliable statements about teaching habits. Hence, I contacted all the people I know in the teaching profession who teach EFL at German Gymnasien. Not only did these people process one survey pack
themselves but they approached other colleagues at their schools or among their acquaintances and asked them to do the same. In this way alone, I managed to obtain quite a large a number of completed survey packs.

Yet I could not have gathered the total number of completed survey packs mentioned solely using this method. In order to achieve a basis as broad as 100, I further relied on the students of my classes in the winter semester 06/07 and the summer semester 07 for additional help. In these two semesters I was teaching a class on ELT at Freiburg University which revolved around the topics of this thesis. One of the course requirements of this class was to contribute to the field study. Students received blank material and took it to schools asking teachers to fill it out. Eventually I arrived at the above number, which significantly exceeds the total expected.

The three external variables that were enquired about at the beginning of the first section of the survey were the participants’ mother tongue, their sex and their age. Out of 115 informants there were 109 (= 94.8%) native speakers of German, 4 (= 3.5%) native speakers of English and 2 (= 1.7%) others. Two of the four native speakers of English stated they were bilingual, i.e. English and German. I counted them as English as their bilingualism provides them with the competence the monolinguals of German lack but the monolinguals of English have. In any case, the four native speakers of English are such a slim minority that they can hardly provide well-grounded insights in comparison to the native speakers of German.
The gender distribution (Figure 1) reveals a majority of 64 women (55.7%) over 51 men (44.3%).

Agewise the participants display a fairly even distribution (Figure 2), too. I offered four choices for age classification. The first age group, those below 35, was ticked by 34 informants, which accounts for 29.6% and is at the same time the largest share. Between 35 and 44 there were 29 teachers (= 25.2%), while 25 (= 21.7%) ticked the 45-55 box. The remaining 27 participants (= 23.5%) belonged to the fourth age group over 55.

This particular distribution may be the result of two causes. First it probably mirrors, even if not accurately, the current age structure at German schools. Due to many recently retired teachers who began service in the early to mid-1970s, there is now quite a significant number of people who have only just started teaching. They also constitute the largest group of my informants. Yet another fairly large group is represented by those teachers who started teaching 30 or more years ago. In other words, the two groups at the extremities are the representatives of the two major waves of employment, one back in the 1970s and the ongoing one now. Between these two massive waves few teachers were hired, which explains the bump in the third age group.

Secondly, this distribution might also be caused by the specific contacts of my students and myself. Naturally, we would first approach those teachers that we know personally. And obviously, we being in our late 20s, the teachers we
know personally are those we were taught by at school. With our school careers having ended between 5 and 10 years ago, those teachers most probably belong to the age group over 55 by now. The other teachers we know personally are – given that we are all

### 3.2. Teaching and varieties

#### 3.2.1. The varieties of ELT

Traditionally, EFL teachers at German *Gymnasien* would treat British English as the only accepted and desired variety of the TL. In fact, many teachers regard all other varieties not as varieties but as deficient forms of English. In order to find out what the general attitude towards this issue is nowadays, I asked several questions about this matter in the first section of the survey. The introductory question was a fairly general approach to the issue. It was a twofold question that distinguished between grammar and accent and asked participants to state which variety of English the informants were teaching. The distribution of answers can be seen in figures 3 and 4:

![What is the national variety of English according to which you teach EFL grammar?](image)

Figure 3
Clearly, British English is still far, far ahead of all the other varieties, even of possible combinations. In grammar teaching British English holds an unchallenged top position, with 62.3% of all teachers claiming to teach this variety. The only contestant that managed to achieve a double-digit result in the percentages is the combination of British and American English, with 28.1%. According to the teachers’ self-perception, the grammar of American English does not seem to play a significant role at all. A total of 3.5% stated they were teaching American English grammar, which is the same share that the grammar of International English holds.

Interestingly, the figures change quite significantly when it comes to accent. Again British English is the number one accent taught at schools, with a staggering 57.4%. In second place comes yet again the combination of British and American English, whose share amounts to 22.6%. However, accent presents a third variety that may claim to be important in ELT at school, and that is, unsurprisingly, American English at 10.4% this time round.

The different distributions allow for some interesting inferences. One must acknowledge that all the other varieties except for BrE, AmE and the combination of the two, display merely minor differences in distribution between the field of grammar and the field of accent, not to mention the fact that they have only received tiny percentages anyway. Having acknowledged that they all remain more or less unchanged, the shift must necessarily have occurred between the other three. The three varieties mentioned indeed undergo a massive
redistribution from grammar to accent, with American English gaining almost 7% at the expense of BrE and the combination of BrE and AmE.

The reasons as to why British English, American English or the two together are more relevant than all the others are obvious: these are the varieties the teachers have learnt and acquired themselves. Most of them have spent time in the UK or the US. Additionally, university degrees in Germany concentrate mainly on British and American cultures, literatures and linguistics, although there may be individual opportunities to dive into the niches of other varieties. Moreover, the schools’ teaching materials mainly focus on British and American English.

And, indeed, this is a good thing, I dare say. The relations between Germany and the Anglo-American nations are among the closest within the Western world, definitely closer than between Germany and South Africa, India or New Zealand. It is mainly English speakers from the UK or the US that Germans come into contact with. Stop, one might exclaim, why did no one mention Scottish English, then? After all, Scotland is part of the UK. The fact that Scottish or Irish English do not figure prominently, although they are spoken within the British Isles, probably has to do with the idea that one aims at being understood by everyone in the British Isles and at understanding everyone. The standard variety of the British Isles serves this goal better than Scottish English. In fact, this reason may be generalised: Standard British or American are understood all over the globe where English is spoken.

Foreigners learning German would not want to learn Swabian German, nor would teachers teach Saxonian German. One would attempt to approximate the standard variety of the language in any language simply for the sake of intelligibility. For a more detailed discussion of this issue see chapter 2 (in particular 2.3.). In any case, the reasons for having these varieties are exclusively pragmatic.

At this stage, it is important to realise that there is no discrimination against any other variety involved. So far the remarks are only about the teaching of EFL: that is, presenting English through one variety without looking down upon others. Teaching EFL necessarily entails championing the preference of some particular variety and thus neglecting all the others. But then again, teachers are only in command of this one variety and probably of no other. This does not necessarily mean that they hail it as the one and only and at the same
time badmouth all the others. If so, however, this becomes particularly interesting – and also dangerous – when it comes to correction matters. Therefore, I will soon scrutinise the answers that were given in the questionnaire section on varieties in the context of correction. Before that, however, I will turn back to the percentage shift mentioned above.

These remarks so far do explain and reinforce why there is such a strong focus on British and American English, but do not explain why American English grammar is so much less popular than American English accent. I will presently interpret the percentage discrepancy between American English in the area of accent and American English in the area of grammar, and with it the mitigation of percentages for British English and the combination of British and American English.

I have identified a number of explanations for this phenomenon. They may be interrelated, but may also occur in isolation. First there is the old assumption that “accent divides, grammar unites” (cf. Mair 2008: 156). Although this quote initially originates from a description of language at a time when dialects were only identified and analysed on a phonological level, it does capture the underlying idea of the point I will be making. Even though university courses in English linguistics today offer classes that are concerned with non-standard grammar research and dialectology, students hardly acquire knowledge in these fields. The reason is simply that only a few students who want to be teachers enrol for these classes. Students do not consider that these courses may be relevant for them at all as teachers, so their interest is not triggered. Non-standard grammar research is still a very young field in linguistics and has not yet gained the popular reputation which it would need in order to be of mass interest. It still carries the connotation of something exotic and elitist that is not designed for the broad masses of students, but only for some linguistics cracks who want to specialise in dialectology. Students on teaching degrees also tend to believe that classes in linguistics are much more difficult than a course in literature. And as most German university degrees used to allow students a great deal of choice in compiling their classes, students used to prefer dealing with Victorian novels than with the grammar of Irish and American English.

One should note that these last remarks are not based on hard evidence. They are but an expanded interpretation of my figures. However, they are not really far-fetched either and are probably well-known at universities, too. The
reasons for this situation are manifold, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to dig into them in greater detail. For the development of my argument all one must remember is that the informants, many of whom got their degrees many years ago, hardly studied grammar varieties. But even today’s students aiming towards a teaching degree probably have little knowledge about differences in grammar. The result is that teachers concentrate on accent rather than grammar differences in teaching.

It is, after all, the most natural thing to do. Accent is the more conspicuous feature of the two and the one that is much easier to identify. When laymen, i.e. non-linguists, of the same mother tongue talk about linguistic differences between their mother tongue varieties they tend to talk about accent. Grammar differences require profound study and a deeper understanding of the language structure. Accent is the thing you hear and notice the first time somebody opens their mouth. In order to find out about grammatical differences, one has to be sensitive to such issues, which is only the case if one has dealt with language differences academically, i.e. studied dialectology.

So, in a nutshell, these results just show that teachers have got a lot of sense when they leave aside grammatical distinctions, of which there is only a limited number, when teaching beginners of EFL learning. These difficult and highly specific features are quite rightfully a matter for linguists to look at, not for students at school who are meant to acquire a basic degree of communicative competence.

Secondly, however, teachers deliberately seem to attribute more importance to accent than to grammar varieties. This backs up the idea put forward by Claus Gnutzmann and others, who identified that EFL teachers strive for perfect formal imitation of the native speaker of the TL in order not to be recognised as a foreigner. This is most easily, but also most superficially, achieved through the imitation of accent. I am saying most superficially because accent is but a formal veil that may compensate for structural deficits to a certain degree. Accent can serve as a good decorative feature that may mislead the listener into believing that somebody’s competence in the TL is excellent although it is restricted to the imitation of accent. As I stated above, accent is much more conspicuous than grammar, which is why teachers themselves struggle so hard to get their personal accent ‘right’. Subsequently, it seems an obvious solution for teachers to work a lot more on their pupils’ accent than on
their grammar. The grammar they teach then is just the grammar that is presented in the school book, without reflecting on it any further. Accent, though, is worked upon constantly and with great care. Those teachers who prefer an American accent then obviously try to get it across, too.

Not only are differences in accent more conspicuous than in grammar. Accent also carries a great amount of hidden emotive power. A large number of English teachers are emotionally tied to a particular accent. They may, for instance, adore RP for its clarity and prestige, while they virtually hate GenAm because they associate it with carelessness and exaggerated coolness. Vice versa, there may be teachers who love the serenity of GenAm while they detest the stilted arrogance of RP. What I am saying is that teachers have strong and emotional opinions about accent. Grammar, on the other hand, is austerely assessed according to rational criteria. This is where the ‘right’/’wrong’ paradigm which is deeply engraved into the collective mind of teachers kicks in. Grammar, so teachers believe, can be ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but it can never have a sound like music or some divine grace. In the same vein, accents are not assessed along the ‘right’/’wrong’ dichotomy.

Furthermore, in writing one can identify grammar deviations, whereas pronunciation differences remain concealed. As many teachers approximate the writing ideal with their students and strongly believe in the superiority of elaborate language use, which clearly is represented in written production rather than spoken, they favour one strict grammar model but allow for leeway in speaking.

The third reason for the shift towards American English in the field of accent is immediately linked to the previous remarks and may also explain why it is British English that serves as a standard grammar model but American English that may go with it accentwise. The teaching materials which German Gymnasien use these days still predominantly present British English grammar as the standard model. Orthography footnotes explaining that ‘traveled’, ‘color’ and ‘favor’ are American spellings is the furthest these books get into the exotic waters of American English. As all teachers have to use the same books, they will understandably hardly make the effort to teach the few differences in grammar between British and American English. It would barely make sense for the kids either, who may already be struggling with the learning of a foreign language.
At the end of the day, this discussion boils down to one principle that I have been stressing over and over again throughout this thesis: every component of ELT ought to be given the space, time and weight in teaching that it deserves according to an analysis of the requirements of present-day ELT. This is exactly what I have done in chapter 2 of this thesis, where I outlined the constitutive pillars of ELT and derived the model of ELT that lives up to these requirements. I suggested, for instance, that teachers ought to put errors into perspective, which must lead to an overhaul of correction practice considering what it is supposed to achieve, but at the same time bearing in mind how little it can actually achieve. I also suggested focusing more on interaction and less on form. I proposed not to teach grammar in isolation and to consider varieties different but not deficient forms of English etc. Applied to this particular case here, my approach would obviously entail a reassessment of the importance of the individual components in teaching. Both grammar and accent are formal features of teaching. My thesis so far has been that formal teaching gets too much attention anyway. Additionally, a misbalance in this area (the area of formal teaching, that is) has come to light. The conclusion must be to give accent the small share of time it deserves within the formal component of teaching, which must be reduced itself in an overall balance of class time, so that more time emerges for interaction and communication. Ideally, of course, grammar and accent should be embedded in communicative exercises which would do justice to the language as such.

I shall refrain from providing the individual results for the teaching of varieties with regard to the sexes and the different age groups here. There is not much to be gained from this. They can be looked up in Appendix 3. Instead I will move on to discuss how teachers handle variation in pupils' language production.

3.3. Correction and varieties

3.3.1. Correction of oral language production with regard to varieties

At school pupils learn both to speak in the TL and to write texts in it. Therefore, there is the need to split up this discussion into teachers’ feedback on students’
oral performance, on the one hand, and their feedback on student-authored texts on the other. Here I will begin with their reaction to spoken English. Figure 5 shows the distribution of varieties when it comes to correcting speech in the area of grammar.

![Bar chart showing variety preferences](chart.png)

This chart draws a very different picture of teachers' attitudes to varieties than the tables about their teaching preferences as regards varieties of English. Assessing this chart as a whole, one has to acknowledge that teachers are more tolerant with regard to their students’ English than their personal teaching variety would suggest. Those who correct their students on the basis of Standard British English still constitute a share of 31.6%. They act as though English was one single variety according to which they tell their students what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’.

Interestingly enough, American Standard English alone barely plays a role at all at 0.9%, and neither does International English at 1.8%. Then, however, comes the decisive part. A staggering 57.9% of teachers accept both British and American Standard English as correct varieties. Other combinations such as British, American and International English or British and International English achieve 3.5% and 2.6%, respectively. The other combinations are negligible. The
gist, however, is that a total of more than 64% accept more than one single variety in spoken performance as correct English grammar. This result gives rise to the hope that, contrary to the prevalent assumption, teachers do not think one-dimensionally when it comes to language assessment, which is a necessary prerequisite for teaching communicative competence instead of accuracy-based EFL.

Accentwise one witnesses a slight step backwards from the rather progressive picture that the survey has brought to light for grammar correction. The stricter focus on particular accents backs up the previously made interpretation that accent entails a highly emotional component that hinders teachers from ignoring or happily accepting deviations from their preferred one. Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of varieties as regards accent correction. 45% of teachers correct their students’ speech according to RP, the accent that is considered Standard British. 5.5% insist on American pronunciation. These two figures account for those teachers who correct speech according to one accent only. Another 45% of informants stated they used both RP and GenAm as a basis for correction. 3.8% even said that all varieties would do. The total picture here then is one that sees just above half of all participants (= 50.5%) correcting along the lines of one single accent, while 48.8% use a wider basis, at least two but maybe more accents, as orientation frames for correction.

Considering that this thesis is primarily meant to optimise EFL teaching, these results must lead to an assessment of correction practices against the theoretical background laid down in chapter 2. As I have indicated before, the grammar correction procedures seem to be quite tolerant towards students’ language production. On the accent front, on the other hand, teachers ought to spend less of an effort to get their students to speak the ‘right’ accent. After all,
the overriding principle that should rule ELT these days is communicative competence. Strictly speaking, if this was the only principle, teachers would have to accept any structure and pronunciation that is understandable regardless of grammar or accent varieties. Of course, this is not the only guiding principle for ELT, so I will not go that far. In chapter 2 of this thesis I therefore suggested a ‘healthy’ balance of the various principles, with top priority given to communicative competence, keeping accuracy and the models of British and American English in mind, though. On top of that one must bear in mind how little correction can actually achieve, considering the findings of SLA research. So, at the end of the day, teachers are well-advised to use a broader basis than one grammar or accent variety as a model for correction.

Furthermore, these last findings report a focus on accent over grammar in correction, which ties in with my comments on the teaching of varieties in the section before. The fact alone that teachers seem to have clearer ideas of their desired accent, which is reflected in the fewer choices of varieties in accent than in grammar, is an indicator of this phenomenon.

3.3.2. A closer look at the issue

The troubling question in this context is whether the 50.5% of teachers who only use one accent (i.e. BrE or AmE) actually do correct their students if their speech is not in accordance with it. The same issue can be raised for grammar too, where 32.5% claim they correct according to one variety only. These teachers seem to correct their students if their speech deviates from their preferred variety.

Strictly speaking, however, the distribution of answers to this question does not allow these inferences. The two questions in the questionnaire about correction practices went: “What is the (national) variety (i.e. grammar) according to which you correct oral performance in class?” and “What is the accent/pronunciation according to which you correct oral performance?” The distribution of answers was presented above. So the aim could only have been to find out about the informant’s general approach to oral correction and their mindset as regards correction of deviating language in the area of varieties. The question merely inquired about the basis of their correction habits as regards
varieties. It did not cover, however, the actual handling of deviation. Certainly, there is a correlation between the variety teachers use as a basis for correction and their actual reaction when a student produces a deviant form, but still the above interpretation is not compelling. In order to be able to make reliable statements on this issue I asked two follow-up questions directly after the ones on grammar correction and accent correction.

The one inquiring about the handling of deviation from the stated grammar variety was therefore: “What do you do if a structure or expression is not in accordance with that variety but clearly understandable?” Here 41.2% stated they would correct these structures, whereas 58.8% let the students get away with it (Figure 7). Bearing in mind my approach to ELT the way the majority handles the matter is obviously preferable for three reasons:

1. A different variety is not bad or wrong.
2. Interfering destroys communication and the student’s interest in the matter that is discussed.
3. Interfering does not ‘improve’ the student’s competence.

The follow-up question inquiring about the actual handling of accent correction was: “If a student chooses to speak a different accent and variety” and the two options given: “I correct him/her” or “I do not correct him/her”. Figure 8 shows that the overwhelming majority (87.3%) do not correct students whose English belongs to a different accent variety than the one they use as a basis for correction. 12.7% do.
There is no reason for me to comment on these results other than to say that this way of handling accent – despite the emotional component – appears to be satisfactory for action-oriented teaching whose focus is on communicative competence rather than on imposing one particular accent on the pupils, especially in spoken English.

Interestingly, a few teachers quite vigorously asserted that they did not care what variety their students used as long as they remained consistent in its use. This is particularly interesting since there was no specific question in the questionnaire that asked for this detail. On the questionnaire, however, I left space beneath most questions so that the teachers had the chance to give written comments on the issues, so for example on the use of varieties and correction. 17 informants out of 115 wrote down remarks like “I accept another variety, but I think it should be spoken consistently. A ‘mixture’ of varieties is not desirable.” or “Basically I accept all varieties if used consistently.” or “I lived in Britain. I certainly accept Standard English (American), but I’m not familiar with the others. The main point is that the student’s variety is consistent.” or “These are the two varieties taught at school [BrE and AmE; HE]. Students should stick to one variety, though.”

Although it was only this rather small minority of informants who expressed this view, I sensed that it was an aspect that carried a lot of importance for them, which is why I would like to comment on it briefly. This way of looking at varieties suggests an underlying attitude that is hostile to deviation and ignorant of linguistic reality.
Language is always subject to change, and language purity, though desired by many, is an impossibility. Today the phenomenon of language change with a particular focus on its causes is being researched thoroughly. One reason that languages change is certainly language contact, which is precipitated by modern information technology and media. Therefore, it is quite natural that speakers of one language use expressions or structures that originate in another language. One famous example is the German *etwas macht Sinn*, which is considered Standard German today but was initially adopted from the English *something makes sense*. The point I am trying to make is that the attempt at keeping a language free from features that originate in another one mainly interrupts communication and is ultimately useless. Yet again, I should stress that I do not advocate a wild ‘anything goes’ approach but the exertion of tolerance towards features such as the initially American way of introducing the rendering of direct speech through the structure *He was like*, even if the student claims to adhere to British English. Apart from the fact that it is a structure used pervasively in the UK today as well, it perfectly and even idiomatically communicates an idea. And this should be at the core of teaching.

Additionally, looking at the results relating to the teaching of varieties, which I presented at the beginning of this section, one will find that teachers themselves do not live up to the expectation of consistency themselves. This must not be considered an assault on or criticism of the teachers’ competence. On the contrary, this is the confirmation that this is the most natural thing to do. If one wants to elicit advice from these remarks it can only be the call for teachers to take on a more laid-back attitude towards the TL and their students’ production of it.
Figure 9 illustrates again the phenomenon of the divergent varieties in teaching grammar and accent in a cross tabulation with clustered bar charts.

The chart shows that 8 (= 11.3%) out of 71 teachers who teach British English grammar combine it with American accent, while not one single teacher does it vice versa. In any case, the distribution shows that teachers do not adhere to the consistency demand themselves all that much. As I said, I do not in any way criticise this fact, because there is nothing wrong with drawing on various resources for producing communication. Nevertheless, the same flexibility should, of course, be allowed for students, too. Yet one must not forget that quite a significant number of teachers (28.1% in grammar and 22.6% in accent) claim to teach both varieties equally, and an even greater number (57.9% in grammar and 45% in accent) correct in accordance to both varieties, which allows the inference of a more laid-back attitude and greater tolerance towards language production as being in place to some extent already.
### 3.3.3. Gender and age as distinguishing variables?

Two interesting factors of analysis are gender and age. Therefore I will provide results in greater detail for these two sociolinguistic variables and their influence on the choice of varieties and the dealing with deviations.

With regard to sex I have no specific hypothesis in mind, which is why I begin by briefly presenting the results for this variable first.

The distribution of varieties with regard to the two sexes seems fully in accordance with the general picture that I drew earlier. The correction of grammar (Figure 10) is carried out in relying on both British and American, English mainly. In second place for both sexes is British English grammar. Interestingly, though, the ratio between British English only and British and American English is different between the sexes. While men achieve a ratio of 14 to 33, women go up to a ratio of 22 to 33. This suggests a slightly higher specific variety consciousness in grammar among women than among men. Whether this means in turn that men are more tolerant towards students’ oral language production can only be determined when looking at the answer to the follow-up question which went: “What do you do if a structure or expression is not in accordance with that variety but clearly understandable?” The results of this question show that there are hardly any differences between the sexes. 39.5% of men do correct deviating structures while 60.5% do not. For the women this ratio...
is 42.6% to 57.4%. So I will leave it at the assumption that men exercise a marginally greater tolerance. The stress, however, is on assumption since the chi-square test of dependency remains negative.

As for pronunciation correction (Figure 11), the rough picture seems again in agreement with the general results presented above. A greater awareness of accent on the part of the participants as well as a higher degree of salience which accent has over grammar lead to higher figures for individual accents and lower ones for combinations. An equal share of men (each 45.8%) correct accent according to either RP or RP/GenAm. GenAm on its own achieves 4.2%. The women are also split between RP and RP/GenAm with each receiving 44.3%. GenAm alone achieves 6.6% among the women. But then again, this higher concentration on specific varieties in accent is compensated by a very high degree of tolerance when it comes to actual correction. “If a student chooses to speak a different variety” was the scenario I sketched out for the participants who then had to decide whether they corrected them or not. The men here seemed the stricter sex: 83.3% stated they did not correct deviant forms while 16.7% did. With the women a staggering 90.3% claimed not to correct a different accent and only 9.7% stated that they did. These last figures, however, do not pose an occasion for criticism. This high degree of tolerance is a must, and, therefore, the results are reason enough to be content with the handling. In sum, gender does not seem to be a decisive category at all.

With regard to age I assumed that there would be clearer dependencies with correction practices. The obvious theses would be: the older the participants the more focused on British English, the younger the wider the acceptance of different varieties and, therefore, ultimately: the older the stricter. It is just as obvious, however, that these theses are far too simple. The fact alone that the users of only British English did not claim to be the stricter correctors must give rise to doubt as regards the above chain of theses. Indeed the statistical results draw a much more differentiated picture.
Figure 12 provides the distribution of grammar varieties used for correction across the age groups. In fact, this may be one of the most interesting statistics of the entire survey. The first age group, which consists of participants under 35 years of age, represents a whole myriad of varieties that they use as a basis for correction. Less than one quarter, only 23.5%, of this group restrict themselves to one single variety. This variety is once again British English. The other 76.5% have all ticked a combination of varieties, among which of course the British/American English one figures most prominently at 55.9%. The other combinations that were given are British/American/International English (5.9%), British and International English (5.9%), all varieties except International English (2.9%) and simply ‘all varieties’ (2.9%). The only other answer given was International English, which received 2.9%. However, I consider International English to be among the more ‘tolerant’ varieties of English as it entails a whole host of non-standard features that would be ‘wrong’ in Standard British or American. For more details see the EFL vs. ELF debate in 2.3. The crucial thing to note, though, is the ratio of 23.5% to 76.5% in favour of more than one single variety of English for correction among the youngest age group.

The 35-44-year-olds came out with a similar ratio, yet a different distribution. In this group 24.1% gave British English as their only correction basis for oral language production. All the others, i.e. 75.9%, ticked a
combination. This time round, however, the popular combination of British and American English received a total of 69%. The only other combination ticked was British/American/International English at 3.4%. And International English as a member of the varieties that grant more leeway got 3.4%, too.

The inferences I can draw at this stage are limited. The two age groups appear to have a fairly open-minded idea of correction, meaning that the majority are willing to accept more than one single variant of English as ‘correct’. The difference is that some members of the younger of the two groups have even stretched their horizon of EFL to other varieties than British and American English. The members of the older group restrict themselves to British and American English unless they focus on British English only. Now comes the interesting bit.

In the third age group (45-55) the ratio shifts all of sudden in favour of the two major standard varieties of either British English or American English. There still remains a preference for the combinations all right, but it is not as clear as it is with the two previous age groups. British English alone or American English alone are used as a basis of correction by 33.4% of the participants, in other words just above one third compared to less than a quarter in the two preceding groups. 66.6% use a combination, the lion’s share (= 62.5%) of which is constituted of course again by the combination of British and American English. Admittedly, this is still not so exciting a result that one can build a verifying interpretation of the above theses on it. One needs to look at the fourth age group to find that the anticipated development indeed continues.

Among the participants who are older than 55 there is for the first time a majority for correction according to one single variety only. This group have expressed a preference for British English over the combinations. It may be a slim majority at 51.9%, but in any case it represents more than half of this group’s members, which is yet again a significant rise compared to a third in the group before. These 51.9% stated they used British English only, while 48.1% opted for combinations. Again British/American English constitutes the largest part of it at 44.4%.

Does this, in fact, mean that the theses I formulated earlier hold true? It is apparently hard to shrug off “the older the more focused on British English, the younger the wider the acceptance of different varieties” as mere speculations. This correlation receives backing from the data I have just presented. Admittedly,
the results have not passed the chi-square significance test, and are therefore only tendencies. I dare say, though, that the reason that the results have failed the significance test is due to the size of the sample. In other words, the tendencies suffice to establish the theses anyway. The remaining question is whether the third assumption I have made can be inferred from these results too: are the older teachers the stricter ones? And in turn: are the younger ones more lenient?

In order to give reliable answers to this question, one must again turn to the question that is directly concerned with deviation and look at the answers for the different age groups individually. The follow-up question to the one about the preferred variety for correction was: “What do you do if a structure or expression is not in accordance with that variety but clearly understandable?”

Figure 7 above provided the general results, i.e. of all participants, for this question: 41.2% stated they corrected these structures, whereas 58.8% did not. Figure 13 splits up the results for this question into the four age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>I correct it</th>
<th>I do not correct it</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 plus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contrary to the benefit I was giving the oldest age group in assuming that they compensated for their limited focus on one single variety through more lenient correction or less correction altogether, there are no genuine differences between the age groups when it comes to correction. The marginal shifts between the groups are negligible. They all revolve around the average figures of 41.2% (“I correct it”), respectively 58.8% (“I do not correct it”). The preliminary
conclusion must, therefore, be to accept that the thesis “the older the more focused on British English, the younger the wider the acceptance of different varieties” has a certain amount of truth to it. These results also suggest that the older teachers are the stricter correctors in oral language production. Yet one large ‘But’ is still looming over the definitiveness of these hypotheses. The results so far are entirely based on self-assessment on the part of the participants, which means they need to be read carefully. In order to obtain a more objective picture I will have to look at genuine corrections. Therefore, I had my participants carry out a correction of a written script. Only with the help of these results can I back up or topple the preliminary findings presented here.

If, however, the results remained unchanged, the interpretation would allow for two paths. Either the tolerance of deviation is a generational thing which will stop being an issue as soon as those teachers who currently represent the oldest age group retire. With them the stricter handling of deviation and the narrow focus would leave ELT for good. Or the stricter handling is a thing that catches up with every teacher after a certain number of years in service and grows as teachers progress in their careers. I will, of course, be unable to determine which of these two interpretations is correct. Whichever it is, I still need to verify the results in the first place, which I can only do by looking at real correction, experimental results of which I will present in the section on written correction. Before turning to the section on written language correction though, I should like to present the age-specific findings of oral correction with regard to accent.

![Age and accent](image)

**Figure 14**
Figure 14 provides an overview of the distribution of answers for this issue. Accent, that much has been established, has a highly emotional component to it, which makes it a more sensitive issue than grammar. The implication is that teachers tend to be less tolerant with accent deviations and tend to use a narrower basis for correction. In other words: for accent you are more likely to find that teachers use one single variety for correction than you are for grammar. Even among the youngest age group 40.6% insist on either British or American English. That is over 40% compared to 23.5% in grammar! 59.4% correct pronunciation according to more than one single accent, the lion’s share, of course, being British and American English at exactly 50%.

For the second age group the figures are quite similar. Here the ratio is 38.5% to 61.5%. Admittedly, there is – contrary to the prediction – a slight shift towards the combinations at the expense of RP and GenAm. However, it is so small that I will consider it negligible. Moreover, the further picture will show that the overall development actually continues, and this remains a coincidental break with the otherwise steady trajectory. The third age group, for instance, already displays a clear majority for the two varieties of British and American English, each as a single basis for correction. 62.5% of the 45-55-year-olds prefer to have one of these two as the sole reference system. Only 37.5% use the combination of British and American English.

Moving on to the fourth age group means witnessing yet another increase for the two ‘big’ accents, each used on its own. 63% of this group only refer to either British or American English, while 37% use more than one accent. The person that ticked ‘Other’ in this question specified that he/she meant ‘International English’, which is why I counted it with the combinations for reasons explained above. Chi-square testing the dependency between age group and variety brings about a negative result.

I need not repeat that these results alone do not account for the strictness or tolerance of the teachers in the area of correction. Therefore, I directly addressed the issue of how teachers reacted when a student spoke a different accent, the results of which I have presented above. Here they are again (Figure 15), this time split up into the four age groups.
If a student chooses to speak a different accent and variety?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Below 35</th>
<th>35 to 44</th>
<th>45 to 55</th>
<th>55 plus</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I correct him/her</td>
<td>I do not correct him/her</td>
<td>I correct him/her</td>
<td>I do not correct him/her</td>
<td>I correct him/her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8,8%</td>
<td>91,2%</td>
<td>10,7%</td>
<td>89,3%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would just like to reiterate that the same question asked in the context of oral grammar correction brought about harmonious results across all age groups. Therefore, I had to interpret the figures as proving a more restrictive approach on the part of the older teachers because they had allowed for fewer varieties in the preceding question. However, I have admitted that these results were somewhat weak and could at most serve as a preliminary indicator for this thesis. Again, the chi-square test sees no dependency between age and correction varieties, which is most likely, however, owed to the small size of the sample.

The answer to the handling of oral accent correction, however, seems to add some momentum to the weakly established thesis “the older the more focused on British English, the younger the wider the acceptance of different varieties”. One finds a steady increase of percentages for the answer “I correct him/her” as one moves up the age ladder. Within the youngest age group only 8.8% find it necessary to correct different accents, while the oldest group presents almost double the figure at 16.7%. Of course, it is notable that these figures are fairly low altogether, meaning that the correction of the conscious use of a different accent as such is not that prevalent a phenomenon. But then again, it should not be an issue at all, since all accents are acceptable as long as intelligibility is not impaired, but that is a different story. The point I am trying to make here is that these figures serve as another indicator for the above thesis, according to which older teachers are less tolerant to deviant speech production, both on the level of grammar and, in an even more marked fashion, on the level of pronunciation.
Yet again, despite all the indicators I have been collating here to verify my preliminary thesis, I am still far from having watertight evidence, let alone proof for it. I will have to look at the questionnaire’s results for written correction in general and, in particular, at the actual corrections, including grade-giving, which the participants carried out during the survey. It is this issue that I turn to now.

3.3.4. Correction of written language production with regard to varieties

The area of written correction is one of the most interesting parts of this whole empirical examination, especially since it also encompasses the results of sections two and three of the survey. In section two, the participants were given written sentences and had to decide whether the structures presented were right or wrong, while in section three the participants had to mark and grade class tests. The benefit of these two parts of the survey lies in the fact that the assumptions I will make based on the teachers’ self-assessment from section one can be tested against the corrected scripts and the participants’ reactions to the given structures. Before that, however, I will present the answers to the questions on writing from section one (i.e. the main questionnaire) of the survey.

The first question asked in this section was – analogous to the questions on oral correction: “What is the national variety of English (grammar) according to which you correct written performance?” The aim of this question was to establish correction patterns on the part of the teachers and to determine the degree of strictness, which in turn allows an assessment of the practice and potential for improvement against the theory background I laid down in chapter 2. The table below (Figure 16) provides an overview of the distribution of varieties that teachers use as a basis for the correction of student-authored texts written in the foreign language, such as class tests.
29 informants (25.7%) asserted they corrected writing referring to British Standard English as a model. One participant stated “Other” and explained it depended on the student’s choice. He or she would correct according to the variety the student had chosen. These 30 participants (26.6%) constitute the entire group of teachers who use only one variety as a basis for their written correction procedures. There is no one who corrects written English on the sole basis of American English. Subsequently, 73.4% of teachers use more than one variety as a reference frame for correction. 69.9%, which equals 79 informants, stated they used both British and American English for their corrections of writing. Two teachers (= 1.8%) even allow British, American and International English grammar, while the combinations “British and International English” and “All varieties except Indian and International” were checked by 1 teacher (= .9%) each.

The question is yet again whether a deviation from the individual teacher’s correction variety or varieties automatically leads to a non-acceptance of the structure in question. The obvious thing to do was, therefore, to ask the follow-up question of “What do you do if a structure or expression is not in accordance with that standard but clearly understandable?” The following chart (Figure 17) displays the results:
Contrary to the answers to the same question in the context of oral correction, where a majority of 58.8% did not find it necessary to correct a deviant but understandable structure, an overwhelmingly clear majority of more than two thirds (68.2%) declared they would mark these structures as ‘wrong’. Subsequently, only 31.8% would accept these structures as correct and not mark them ‘wrong’.

These figures are not surprising at all. All they tell us is that accuracy is valued much more highly in writing than it is in speaking. So, in fact, these results are fully in agreement with my claims as to how one should handle deviation in scripts, where the approximation of a norm is very important. There is definitely a justification for being stricter in scripts than in oral interaction.

These benevolent remarks are just one side of the coin, however. Despite all this I would also like to use these figures as an opportunity to utter some criticism. Looking at them in comparison to the correction procedures of oral production they seem perfectly sensible. Yet taken on their own, they display an unhealthy eagerness on the part of the teachers to streamline the pupils’ TL so that it becomes free of what teachers consider errors. There are two reasons behind this.

First there is the analytic marking system, which fundamentally depends on the teacher’s capability of identifying errors and counting them. The actual grade given for a script largely rests on this main step in the correction process. And indeed, the grade is highly volatile depending on the teacher’s willingness to find ‘mistakes’ and mark them. In fact, many external sources, such as the media or parents, assess a foreign language teacher’s competence – both their
command of the TL and their teaching competence – by looking at the person’s ‘ability’ to produce ‘correct’ language. The fact that these sources often have no idea – other than their long gone personal careers as pupils – about the foreign language themselves, let alone foreign language learning and teaching, does not count. What counts is that they are in the position to determine public opinion. They believe that failing to identify a mistake means not doing one’s job properly and vice versa. They do not understand that refraining from leaping in when a mistake has been made, does not mean it has not been identified. They do not understand that maybe there has not been a mistake at all, or that maybe it is much more important to encourage a student rather than give him/her a sermon on what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. If it was just the bad press teachers have, it would be reason enough to worry all right, but then the whole problem would not lash back at students’ EFL education. The trouble is that it was teachers and schools who first established this view of foreign language teaching. In the meantime the dynamics have changed. Teachers have lost their power – and willingness – to shape public opinion, so that this view is now hard to get rid of. This, in turn, means that teachers and students have persuaded themselves that teaching has to revolve around mistakes. This is the view against which I strongly argue for reasons that were extensively discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. I am bringing this up at this stage because the grading system is an issue that is partly under the control of the teachers. Obviously, they cannot change the system without the consent of educational authorities, but this is at least a very concrete point to grapple with in order to gradually start moving in a different direction. If there was a grading system in which ‘the mistake’ as such did not play a decisive mathematical role, the markers would cease to attribute such an importance to it and would probably adopt a more laid-back attitude to language deviation in general. For now, all teachers can do is simply mark fewer deviant forms as ‘wrong’, especially when they are understandable.

Secondly, the above chart allows the inference that communication has not yet been accepted as the paramount principle of ELT, certainly not for written language production. The first interpretation I offered for figure 17, i.e. that it shows the importance teachers see in accuracy when it comes to written English, is certainly true. Recalling my remarks about writing from chapter 2 (esp. 2.5.), it also seems the right thing to do, because writing requires an unevenly higher standard of accuracy than speaking. If, however, more than two thirds of all
teachers mark structures as wrong that are “not in accordance with” their preferred variety yet “understandable”, one can safely assume that it is not communication that rules this handling.

Writing is one pillar of communicative competence and, therefore, ought to be treated as one. Maybe it sounds ludicrous to simply demand a reduction in the amount of correction when actually the whole model of writing should be reviewed. But then again, correction is one issue over which teachers exercise direct control. And it is at their discretion to decide what they mark as ‘wrong’ and what they accept. So the approach to correction can at least serve as a starting point for change.

If teachers looked at written language production first of all as a piece of communication rather than as a text whose linguistic correctness must be checked, much would be achieved. Treating a student’s text as a piece of communication would entail reading it while paying genuine attention to the ideas the student intends to get across. In which case marking mistakes would only be an issue when it becomes impossible for the marker to understand the illocution on the paper in front of them.

These remarks may sound radical once again, because they can be interpreted as a call for non-correction of linguistic deviations as long as one can vaguely understand what is meant. Again, I would like to stress that this is not my intention. I do acknowledge the necessity and usefulness of formal correction even when intelligibility is not inhibited, for writing even more than for speaking. In an overall evaluation, however, correctness comes in second position after communication. And since figure 17 suggests this is currently not the case, I call for less correction. The underlying idea, which I will address later in more detail, is to read and appreciate a student’s text in a global manner just as one would a newspaper article, rather than tearing it apart and assessing the bits and pieces separately. In the context of scoring types this issue will come up again.

Before finally moving on to real correction, I briefly want to analyse the results of the previous question split up into the two major groups of varieties, as I did with oral correction, too. When asked how they handled a structure that was not in accordance with their correction variety, those who had solely named British English responded as displayed in figure 18:
Contrary to the general result for this question, the majority among the British English correctors proved to be more willing to accept deviation. 48.1% of informants stated they would mark the structure wrong, while 51.9% would accept it. This result necessarily means that the figures for the participants who base their correction on both British and American English must be dramatically different. And indeed, figure 19 displays a massive shift towards less acceptance among those who had claimed they used the combination as a basis: 77.3% stated they would mark a deviant structure as wrong. Only 22.7% let the pupils get away with structures that were not in compliance with their correction varieties of British and American English.
These figures tally with the findings I presented for oral correction practice. Those participants who had first stated they used more than one variety (i.e. the combination of British and American English) as a basis for correction and thus created the suspicion that they were more tolerant, turned out to be the stricter correctors when actually facing deviation. The interpretation I offered in the context of oral correction applies here, too. Having named only one variety, the supporters of British English probably felt their approach was too narrow, which led them to believe they ought to compensate for it by accepting more forms as ‘right’. Those, on the other hand, who had already claimed they based their correction on two varieties, i.e. a wider frame, did not feel the need to accept anything beyond this as correct English.

One thing one must not forget when reading these figures is the fact that they are all the result of self-evaluation whose results may always be distorted by the idealised image each participant has of themselves. In order to have a watertight interpretation one must look at genuine correction. This is exactly what I will do now. Keeping these preliminary interpretations about the correction of writing in mind, I will now turn to the results of the real corrections that the participants were asked to carry out.

**3.3.5. Identifying mistakes**

My overriding thesis – now carefully backed up by the self-assessment results – is still that teachers too often leap in when a student says something in the TL and remind them, for instance, that the pronunciation of *privacy* is ['praɪvəsɪ] and not ['prɪvəsɪ], as the student may have said. Why is this a problem? This handling actually entails a whole host of problems. To begin with, in this case both manners of pronunciation can be found in reality, so it simply does not matter which form the student uses. Should a student ever end up in a real-life situation where they use a genuinely wrong pronunciation, they will get the chance to negotiate it, in other words: their interlocutor will ask for repetition and clarification. But generally speaking their interlocutor will primarily listen to what the student attempts to get across. Communicative teaching is modelled largely on real-life interaction, so correction would only be an unnecessary interruption of what really matters: to take the students’ remarks seriously and respond
appropriately. Apart from that, it is debatable whether a correction would, in fact, bring about an immediate change. Hence a ‘normal’ reaction would indeed be sufficient. If the teacher is unable to understand the student, they will have to ask for repetition, reformulation or clearer pronunciation, and if it turns out to be genuinely wrong they may even have to correct. At the same time, formal direct intervention does not become entirely obsolete, but has to be used in a well-directed fashion.

I put forward the same thesis for the correction of written work: teachers simply mark too many forms as ‘wrong’. My prime example here is the use of the past tense in combination with not yet as in He did not see that movie yet. This usage is generally marked as ‘wrong’ although it is a form that is used regularly by speakers from North America. Teachers insist here on the use of the present perfect and count this as a full mistake against the grade. Again, this handling does not suggest a veritable interest in communication, but the pure insistence on the obedience to some rules that seem straightforward and easy to apply. Of course, teachers may have a firm grasp of rules like the one quoted. In order, however, to have students comprehend writing as one pillar of communication which can serve many different functions, they must refrain from the inflexible application of rules. They should instead respond positively by explaining nuances of different usages. I have argued above that in writing, much would be gained if the grading system was changed. Up to that point, though, teachers could begin to make a difference by adopting a different perspective on written work.

Taking for granted that my assumption that teachers correct too often and too much is true, I believe that the line of argument is quite clear and logical. Only one cannot take this assumption for granted. It remains merely a thesis that the position formal correctness currently holds is overrated. What is needed is hard evidence that proves that correction occurs too often and at inappropriate places and times. This was the point of departure for my decision to integrate the section with the sentences for correction into my survey. With its help I want to prove that the initial assumption is, in fact, true. Only then can I uphold my suggestions for change. If it turned out to be false one important argument of this thesis would collapse and indeed the call for change would rightfully die away unheard.
In this section I present the results of the second section of the survey material. In it, participants were given 30 sentences for each of which they had to decide whether it contained a mistake or not. So they could either put down ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Or if they were unable to decide, they had the option to write down ‘can’t say’.

The reason for integrating this section was not, I ought to stress, to test the participants’ competence in the foreign language or to test their competence in finding mistakes and thus to assess whether they are good or bad teachers. On the contrary, as I emphasised before, I strongly argue against the assessment of teachers based on their ability to find mistakes. But the reason I am stressing this so fervently is the fact that quite a few participants who returned the material to me had added to this section comments that suggested they felt tested and highly uncomfortable with it. One participant remarked bitterly: “I have the suspicion that you quoted exclusively sentences you found in texts written or spoken by native English speakers. Apparently you consider all the sentences to be correct (or possible) but hope that (stupid, incompetent) German teachers will find fault with them.” Somebody else commented: “Erfahrene Lehrer sollten nicht ‘Can’t say’ sagen.” This, of course, backs up my previous assumption that many teachers have adopted the view that their personal competence as English teachers depends on their ability to find mistakes. Again: I strongly disagree with this view. I did not intend to test teachers with this task. Nor did I hope to find evidence for the incompetence of the non-NEST.

Having explained in detail what I did not aim at, I would now like to move on to explain what I did intend to examine with it. Before starting on this project I had a more or less precise picture in mind of present-day ELT, its flaws, and its potential for improvement. This picture, though, was based on my own experience as a pupil, personal exchange with other teacher students and teachers, the media, and maybe the odd didactics class with the reading it entailed. In other words, I used to be one of those people I have mentioned repeatedly: those who think they are authorised and competent enough to assess the school system, here in particular ELT practice. I may have been able to ground my arguments on some academic expertise or genuine reports, but at the end of the day I was barely more competent than anyone who took a layman’s interest in the topic. And I could definitely not make reliable general
statements about the current nature of ELT. Yet I felt pretty sure that much of what I thought was correct and that the novelties I thought up ought to be implemented. The results I have presented above have indeed shown that – even according to the potentially distorted since idealised self-assessment – teachers correct too often and too much, if rated against the model of ELT that I suggest. But the emerging results have not been as bad as I expected, in other words: the self-assessment left only a little room for improvement advice. Therefore I needed information and hard evidence showing that the vague assumptions were in fact true, or, if they turned out to be false, to show what was true instead. So this section’s main aim is to disclose the distortion and to evaluate from there whether there is, in fact, so little improvement potential.

I should say a few words about the sentences I chose for this experiment in order to wipe away some biased interpretations on the part of the participants. Except for no. 10 they were all taken from the German didactic quarterly *Praxis des neusprachlichen Unterrichts*, which regularly contains the column “Would you have marked it wrong?” In it its editor Stephen Speight discusses the correctness of structures that teachers have come across during their marking of class tests. This implies that all sentences, except for no. 10 which I picked from Bartram and Walton (1991: 7), are original sentences that were written by German students in class tests or other pieces of writing. Nothing is made up. No example is meant to play a trick on the informant. I may have turned them into a complete sentence when only a fragment was given in the journal. Other than that I did not change them, or deprive them of their context, or distort them. The manner in which they appear in the survey was the manner in which I found them in the journal. For the entire section of the questionnaire see Appendix 2.

I would like to take the mention of “Would you have marked it wrong?” as an opportunity to insert a side note here with which I want to back up my initial assumption about correction. Apparently, the column is highly popular with English language teachers at German schools. The mere existence of, the demand for and, obviously, the impact of such a column support my assumption that the role of marking and correction is tremendously prominent. This, on the one hand, and my remarks from chapter 2, compellingly lead to the conclusion that currently something is fundamentally wrong with EFL teaching. The profession seems to be obsessed with correctness to the point that a genuine
contest is in place, where teachers send in queries to a journal and wait for the right answer, which either confirms their initial view or denies it.

The most alarming thing, however, is the fact that this column brings to light a pervasive flaw in teacher training. I cannot think of any other profession in which the people who have been trained to work in this job in a six-year university course plus a one-and-a-half-year training-on-the-job unit require additional help to do the basic work of their job. I suppose that this is a somewhat polemic view of things because, in fact, it is not the teachers who are badly trained, but teaching practice that has failed to adapt to new challenges. Correctness and ‘the mistake’ need to be removed from the centre of teaching.

Convincing as this all may sound, the thesis’ point of departure, i.e. the assumption that teachers correct too much and too often, still requires backing up through empirical evidence. Therefore, I will now present the findings of the second section of my survey. I will begin by providing the general results in summary. Afterwards I will discuss individual sentences in this section and the teachers’ reaction to them. In this context I will also comment on the sentences from my point of view. This will serve to illustrate the phenomenon of overcorrection with the help of concrete examples.

Out of 115 participants, 109 completed this section of the examination. The best way to obtain an impression of the results is to look at mean values for the three rubrics of reaction to the sentences. Participants were asked whether the sentence contained an error. If so they had to put down ‘yes’. If they found the sentence to be entirely correct, they had to put down ‘no’, and if they were unable to decide, they had the option to fill in ‘can’t say’. There were 30 sentences for analysis.

On average 14.8 structures, i.e. just below 50%, were considered to be correct. One informant believed that all 30 were correct, especially when taking into account present-day literature and media language: “Alle Sätze sind inzwischen akzeptiert, besonders wenn man englischsprachigen Journalismus und aktuelle Romane mit berücksichtigt.” In second rank came another participant who decided 28 out of 30 were correct. At the other end, one participant found that just one sentence out of the very same 30 sentences did not contain a mistake.

One comment I would like to mention here was: “I suppose these sentences were taken from ‘Oberstufe’ [which they were indeed; HE]. I’d be more
‘correct’ with younger students (elementary level).” The underlying idea is, of course, to achieve a certain level of competence before the teacher allows the students more leeway in language production. I am not entirely hostile to this idea, even though I advocate a communicative approach with younger students too. Unless there is a particular focus on correctness, younger students should also be taken seriously when they try to communicate meaning.

On average 12.5 structures out of 30 were marked as wrong. Again the spectrum is tremendously wide. One participant thought that no single sentence had a mistake in it. That is obviously the same informant who thought that 30 sentences were correct. The one teacher who identified most mistakes found 26 out of 30.

Interestedly, there were no comments on the questionnaires of those teachers who had identified many mistakes. For them, this was apparently just a clinical and neat job that needed to be done. In other words: adding no comments is very telling, too. They did not see a need for explanation. For them the marking is the whole job. This is, of course, the most undesirable way of handling the matter.

The option of writing down ‘can’t say’ was rarely used. On average 2.3 structures out of 30 led the participants to admit they did not know how to categorise them. One participant was brave enough to put down ‘can’t say’ 16 times. 31 participants, on the other hand, did not use this option even once. The participants who put down ‘can’t say’ more than 15 times were asked to explain as to why they found it difficult to decide. The one teacher who had 16 instances commented: “Unsure, different varieties of English, no experience with correction so far. No use of a grammar book or English-English dictionary, just based on personal impressions/feelings.” This comment at least suggests that thorough correction training should be required in teacher education. To date there is no such thing. Also, as I will point out, it is a strength to admit that one is unsure. The only thing that one needs on top of the confession of uncertainty is self-confident handling of the matter. So rather than feeling timid and guilty about this fact, it would be appropriate to say: “I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter”, especially when communication works perfectly. Another useful comment that nicely captures what I have just put forward was: “In some cases it is difficult, as the expression sounds weird but is understandable; on the other hand English does sometimes sound weird… Still, when you mark texts you will have (sic!) to
decide!” Exactly! One has to decide when marking. The decision I recommend for most of these cases is then to look upon the structure favourably.

The most striking thing is the discrepancy between the individual teachers’ reactions: 30 out of 30 correct as opposed to 1 out of 30 correct. These results are particularly alarming when considering that all teachers were correcting the same sentences, that many of these teachers indeed claim to refer to the same notion of standard, and that it must be imperative to create fairness for the students. The last argument is weakened through the facts a) that teachers, of course, try to create fairness across one class where they would not mark one structure in one paper and ignore it in another, and b) that the same test is never corrected by several teachers so that these discrepancies do not figure in reality.

The trouble is that many teachers believe that language consists of a set of rules and that the categories ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ can and must be applied at all times. What these results show, however, is that language is not a unified body following unalterable and invariant rules like mathematics. The individual perception of language bits and pieces does play an important role. And it is not surprising that some teachers see sentences differently than others. Not only is it not surprising, but it is not a problem either. It only becomes a problem with the teachers’ attempt to press language into these strict patterns. Therefore, I am saying teachers should accept the fact that language can take many shapes. What matters most is the ability to communicate. And that is what all these sentences basically manage to do. At the same time I do not advocate happily accepting anything that vaguely communicates the intended meaning. It is important to train accuracy. Teachers should not refrain from marking things as ‘wrong’ if they believe that they truly are. However, coming back to the sentences under scrutiny here, I would suggest exercising the greatest possible degree of tolerance. Nothing in them would stir my anger to an extent that justifies telling a student that something is genuinely ‘wrong’. What should be done with quite a number of these sentences is add a comment that suggests reformulation or offers alternative ways of putting the intended meaning.

Of course, the analytic marking system, which is still used in most federal states, has conditioned teachers to act the way they do. Ideally they ought not to be forced to classify everything into ‘error’ or ‘no error’ and, in a second step, to categorise and count the errors. At the moment most teachers still feel obliged to decide upon ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, which triggers the logic of counting. This is backed
up by the participants’ unwillingness and the abstention from jotting down ‘can’t say’. The comment mentioned above ("Erfahrene Lehrer sollten nicht ‘Can’t say’ sagen.") also supports this mistake-finding pressure. This is a feature I strongly argue against. The only thing, however, that teachers can do currently is mark fewer structures as ‘wrong’ in the first place, because as soon as they do they have to count them. This will require some self-confidence and a conscious decision. It should be possible for teachers, however, to mark errors but not have to count them. This should be turned into an obligatory mode of correction which ought to replace the current analytic system. I will discuss this again in the context of the class test results in the next section.

Before looking at the results in detail, I would like to recall one result from the previous sections: the teachers who claimed to base their marking on only British English also asserted that they were more tolerant than those markers who based their ‘right’/’wrong’ decision on two varieties.

One way of finding out how teachers really react to language production with the help of my material is the section under discussion here, i.e. where the teachers had to look at 30 sentences and decide upon correctness. Those participants who asserted that they used British English as the basis of their marking procedures were the ever so slightly stricter group. On average 14.7 sentences out of 30 were considered to be correct, 12.8 were marked as ‘wrong’. The ‘can’t say’ rate lies at 2.3. The opposing group, who use British and American English for written correction, arrive at 14.8 correct sentences out of 30. They marked 12.5 sentences as wrong while refraining from making a judgement in 2.4 sentences.

I suppose that these figures are useless in shedding more light on the matter, which is why I will refrain from dwelling on them any further. There is basically no difference between the two groups, no matter what variety they base their marking on. This is actually good news, because one central demand I make in this thesis is that all varieties be treated as equal. The degree of strictness seems more or less the same, which basically backs up the results of the self-evaluation. Both groups arrive at the same degree of strictness, only by taking different paths. I will look at a few selected sentences to find out whether there are particular forms that are treated differently depending on the variety. An overall evaluation has to acknowledge, though, that there is no superior variety for marking. One conclusion I can already draw at this stage goes for all
correctors, no matter what variety they prefer for marking. They may all correct more less the same number of sentences, but then they all correct too much. This is a thesis that I set out with and that I see confirmed here.

As I mentioned above, the sentences that are under scrutiny in this section were all taken from Stephen Speight’s column “Would you have marked it wrong?” Speight himself is a native speaker of English and has set himself the task to discuss debatable issues with regard to the correctness of individual structures that teachers have come across in students’ papers. Due to this background, Speight’s opinion has become accepted as a reliable source when it comes to decisions on the correctness of structures. Taking this for granted, one ought to know that the highly esteemed Stephen Speight thought that only nine out of these 30 structures needed correction. Mind you, there is no ‘can’t say’ option in this game, so 21 were considered to be correct. In any case, 21 structures are thought of as ‘right’ by an acknowledged expert, while only 14.8 were given this very assessment by my informants. This is already reason enough to denounce the restrictive correction practice on purely linguistic grounds. All the answers that Speight provides are based on a profound understanding of the workings of the language. I do stress this, because beyond the purely linguistic level there are other factors that need to be contemplated in correction, too, factors that may lead to an even more lenient way of handling the structures. I will come back to this very soon. Before that, though, I would like to present some of the structures in question and their Speightian answers.

The structure “Somebody is out of their mind” (WYHMIW 1995/1: 33), which was sent in as a case for comment in 1995, is of course completely normal language use nowadays. Stephen Speight (1995a: 52) commented that “this is one of the cases where their provides a neat solution to the perennial problem of avoiding sexist possessive adjectives.” In other words: the use of their in this sentence displays gender awareness and sensitivity to the issue, and should therefore be imperative.

The structure appeared as example no. 15 in my questionnaire. 54.2% of teachers marked it wrong. 38.3% considered it to be correct, while 7.5% could not say whether it was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

“I had a good time in the cinema” (WYHMIW 1997/2) was posted to Speight in 1997 for discussion and appeared as example no. 17 in my
questionnaire. The teacher who had sent it in, had marked it wrong and suggested *at* instead of *in* as preposition. Speight commented:

> Both acceptable. However, the student's version could be interpreted to mean that he was smooching in the back seats rather than watching the film! *At the cinema* is standard, and implies going there for the standard purpose. (Speight 1997: 165)

So even though he explains that the teacher's correction is standard usage, he does not advocate marking it wrong. He finds it acceptable.

40.7% of my informants would have marked it wrong again. On the other hand, 52.8% stated they saw no mistake in this structure. 6.5% were unable to decide. These are better figures than before, yet 40.7% is still a considerable percentage.

The same problem was posed by example no. 19: “He knocked on the door” (WYHMIW 1997/3: 261). The comment was:

> *To knock at the door* is standard British English for the specific situation when someone wants the door to be opened, but I would not want to imply that *knock on never* occurs. It would be perfectly normal, for example, if the speaker is drawing attention to the noisy contact between fist and woodwork: “There’s someone banging/knocking on our door.” (Speight 1997a: 265)

So Speight once again explains that the student’s version is possible, while there are, of course, other, maybe even better – if standard usage is considered better – ways of expressing the same thought.

32.1% of my informants marked the structure wrong and 65.1% accepted it. 2.8% chose ‘can’t say’. Again, the smaller percentage for those who found fault with this expression is good news. Yet, 32.1% of language teachers who mark something wrong that is linguistically impeccable is worrying.

What I am dealing with here is wrong and all too frequent correction from a linguistic perspective. The comments Speight makes are all based on linguistic knowledge and experience, and above all his undisputed authority as a native speaker of the TL. In other words: these structures must be accepted because they are in fact correct, so it is not about exercising tolerance, it is about expertise. The term correctness here implies the traditional notion of it as a normative and objective criterion. This traditional way of looking at language in ELT classes has always seen the educated native speaker as the ultimate authority when it comes to these issues of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Even in a prescriptive approach to teaching, the native speaker was an influential institution, although
the non-native teacher would secretly feel joy when they caught the native speaker violating a ‘rule’. In a descriptive approach to teaching it goes without saying that the native speaker is unchallenged in language assessment.

The point I am trying to illustrate here is that even when applying a traditional ELT correction model in which everything is a mistake that violates the rules of what the teacher cannot verify according to their own linguistic competence, a great many things are, in fact, correct. This phenomenon is, of course, caused by a significant lack of linguistic competence on the part of the teachers. This is not meant to be an insult at all, because it is the most natural thing for a non-native speaker to be subject to limitations with regard to the TL. What I am describing is the competence gap between native speakers and non-native speakers, which has been negotiated by Claus Gnutzmann and Péter Medgyes.

Teachers may ask quite rightly: But how are we supposed to know? They are not. But then they should simply stop correcting this kind of stuff! I am not accusing teachers of having a lack of competence. I am, however, accusing them of correcting too much while pretending not to have this lack of competence. In fact, correction, which displays apparent assuredness and expertise about the language, is used as a means to cover up for personal deficits. As a rule of thumb one can probably put down for the record: the more teachers correct, the greater the individual competence gap.

The trouble is that teachers do not accept this competence gap and try hard to cover up for it. This is where the “inferiority complex” (Medgyes 1999: 38) kicks in. Non-NESTs should simply respect the fact that they are unlikely to ever achieve the competence levels of the NEST. In that case, however, it is all the more important to refrain from correction. Non-NESTs are well-advised to take on the same laid-back attitude towards mistakes as NESTs. I should stress that these remarks only refer to a linguistic assessment. Many structures that teachers mark wrong are in fact correct, so their assessment is faulty and could as a worst-case scenario result in a technical quarrel with fellow colleagues, native speaker friends, or relatives of the student. So from the professional point of view alone it makes sense to exercise much more tolerance than teachers seem to do currently.

I would like to present one more comparison to illustrate the gap. If I take the figures that I mentioned above as being representative of this entire
phenomenon, I will reach the following conclusion: teachers on average found 14.8 structures to be correct, while Speight accepted 21 out of 30. That is a ratio of 49.3% to 70%, in other words: there is a potential of 20.7% of mistakes that could just be ignored without having a bad linguistic conscience. When looking at it from the opposing angle, i.e. the structures that were marked as ‘wrong’, the following picture emerges. The teachers marked 12.5 structures out of 30 as ‘wrong’ on average, while Speight only identified 9. The ratio here is 41.6% to 30%. Marginally less discrepant, but still 11.6% that need not necessarily be marked on linguistic grounds.

Speight’s comments are exclusively driven by linguistic considerations and thus they are rooted in the traditional binary ‘right’/’wrong’ system. They show that even in this traditional system a lot more is correct and possible than teachers may imagine. I am, however, unwilling to accept Speight’s remarks as the ultimate verdict on linguistic production. As I am trying to tear ELT correction practice away from the purely linguistic assessment – actually from the ‘right’/’wrong’ paradigm altogether – I can hardly ignore that there is a much more powerful layer beyond the layer of linguistic correctness, one that should decisively determine correction procedures. The layer I am talking about is, of course, communicative effectiveness.

If I were to assess the 30 sentences that are under scrutiny in this section I would arrive at a result of 26 correct sentences and merely 4 that need a correction. That is a ‘right’/’wrong’ ratio of 86.6% to 13.3%. (For comparison: Speight’s ‘right’/’wrong’ ratio is 21 to 9 or 70% to 30%. The average figures of the informants of the survey were 14.8 to 12.5. Adding the ‘can’t says’ of 2.3, which lead to a non-correction, to the ‘rights’ I get a ratio of 17.1 to 12.5.) Thus I would accept even more structures as ‘right’ or at least as unworthy of correction than Stephen Speight. The grounds on which I dare to contradict the professional assessment of Stephen Speight are the supremacy of communication over correctness. I do not assess correctness. I assess communicative effectiveness.

“From my point of view, violence is always the wrong means to an end” (WYHMIW 1996/2: 160) was sent in, accompanied by the suggestion of replacing From my point of view by In my opinion. I think that this is a sentence that does not need a correction at all. It appeared as example no. 23 in the survey. Interestingly, 58.7% of informants found it to be ‘right’. Speight, on the other hand, who advocated a correction for this sentence, commented:
The teacher’s suggestion is definitely preferable. I think the difference between the two expressions is that with point of view the speaker expects the listener to realise that the (sic!) is speaking from a particular standpoint as a politician, member of a particular profession or whatever. In my opinion is more likely to preface a more personal view. (Speight 1996: 169)

I would never dare to question or even doubt Speight’s explanation as to the existence of nuanced differences between the two expressions and their usages. I have tremendous doubts, though, that they are relevant for this situation. Even if From my point of view sounds politician-like, it perfectly conveys the intended meaning. Communication works fine and there is no troubling violation of any norms. So why not just concentrate on the issue that is being negotiated here: the use of violence. It is such a waste of time and energy to find and write down the Speightian explanation, let alone to attempt to get it across to the student. Not only will it definitely not be acquired by the student, but it does not even contribute to an improvement of the initial utterance either.

If it was oral interaction this interruption would even break down communication. As it is ‘just’ written correction the process of finding an answer to this question would look somewhat like this: the marker interrupts the reading process; then the marker becomes annoyed because they find that they lack the necessary competence to decide off the top of their head whether this is right or wrong; the annoyance increases because the dictionary entries do not resolve the problem entirely; so the problem then triggers a couple of phone calls to colleagues and native speaker acquaintances who are – unfortunately – unavailable or disagree over the issue; so eventually it leads to the writing of a letter to the editor of Would you have marked it wrong? who, maybe, answers the query in the next issue of the quarterly. If this was true for many teachers’ everyday work, I dare say that it does not come as a surprise to me that teachers suffer from burn-out. Why not just keep reading and not make this a problem in the first place? There is absolutely no barrier to communication.

Another sentence I found it unnecessary to correct was: “Once again only the negative is mentioned.” (WYHMIW 1996/3: 255) It was example no. 30 from my survey and was labelled as ‘wrong’ by 57.9% of my informants. Stephen Speight voiced this opinion, too, for the following reasons:

There are some uses of negative as a noun in the dictionaries, but most of them, with the exception of a photographic negative are fairly rare. In fact, I think most native speakers would assume that the candidate’s version
I suppose that one could challenge Speight here even on technical grounds. The sentence that was sent in for analysis did, of course, have a context to begin with. So it does not make sense to assess it as being ‘wrong’ by arguing it could be misread, when it is out of context.

That is, by the way, one of the fundamental flaws of this whole column. Sentences are deprived of their context so that it is actually impossible to decide whether the structure did make sense when it was part of a larger unit. It was also the major criticism that I received from my informants when they were confronted with the structures. And I have to admit I cannot blame them for it.

Secondly, the fact that an expression occurs rarely does not make it ‘wrong’. The recognition alone that the noun *negative* exists must lead to its acceptance. One might argue on the level of usage that this is uncommon and should therefore be used by the learner in those cases only when the native speaker would use it too. But then again, uncommon does not mean ‘wrong’. Adopting this stance would stifle any creativity on the part of the learner. So even in the traditional ‘right’/‘wrong’ paradigm the structure should be considered correct.

Learning about finer shades of usage can actually only occur at a later stage. It requires quite a profound knowledge of and competence in the TL to deal with issues such as those much nuanced differences in usage. At school the paramount objective must be to encourage creativity for the sake of communication. Even if the usage is not fully in agreement with regular usage, it does not inhibit communication at all. On the contrary, the entire structure quite precisely gets across the intended meaning. So there is definitely no reason for correction from the point of view of communicative effectiveness. As this is the overriding criterion that first and foremost determines correction, I cannot but contradict Speight’s assessment of the case.

Now finally, one may have arrived at the point once again when one starts to wonder whether there is any sentence among those of my survey or, in fact, anything that should be corrected according to my model of ELT. Yes, there is! Even if I run the risk of appearing repetitive, I am happy to stress again that my general guideline for correction is intelligibility. Anything that is unintelligible must without a doubt be corrected. That is not the case with any of the sentences from
my list. Strictly speaking, all 30 sentences live up to the requirement of communicating the intended meaning. So why would I correct some sentences then? I will provide two examples.

"Most of the participants in that protest march were rightists engaging in the issue" (WYHMIW 1996/3: 255) was sentence no. 28 on the survey. It was judged as ‘right’ by 42.1% of informants, while 43.9% marked it ‘wrong’. Interestingly, it is a sentence that received one of the highest ‘can’t say’ rates, at 14%. The teachers who sent this query to Stephen Speight suggested getting involved as an alternative to engaging. In this issue of the journal there was an additional comment on the structure in question provided by an American native speaker. This person insisted that the structure was correct. Speight himself, however, found that a correction was necessary:

I disagree with the American NS here. I don't think it is possible *to engage in an issue. Engage collocates with conflicts of various kinds in my view. My dictionaries also mention engaging in sports. I think the examiners' correction is necessary. (Speight 1996a: 275f.)

To begin with, the disagreement between the two native speakers shows the absurdity of the whole ‘right’-or-‘wrong’ debate. They quarrel over the correctness of a structure apparently on grounds of linguistic expertise. Both believe they are right. Should one put it down to differences in the two varieties that create the disagreement? A non-native speaker is lost in this debate. So here is another reason why non-NESTs should rid themselves of the shackles they have imposed on themselves. They need to emancipate themselves from the assessment criteria of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ in this traditional, seemingly objective fashion. And in doing so they could get rid of the inferiority complex in the face of the native speaker at one stroke. In return they need to introduce criteria that they can control themselves and that make sense for EFL teaching these days. I suggest communicative effectiveness. The lack of it in the case under scrutiny at present leads me to mark this sentence ‘wrong’. Linguistically I would probably agree with Speight here, although being a non-native speaker I cannot offer the same assuredness about collocations. I would have trouble understanding the meaning of it because I would stumble over the combination of engage and issue. Technically, that is of course a matter of collocation. My reason, however, for intervention would not be motivated by the violation of a formal rule, but by a communication problem. In oral interaction I would ask for clarification, in other
words: intelligibility is slightly inhibited here. Granted, one may nicely see the intricate link between communication and formal language correctness, but it should be the failure of the former that triggers intervention, not the violation of the latter. As this is a piece of writing, however, I cannot ask for clarification, so I have to mark this wrong. Besides, clarity is more important in writing than in speaking, which means that even slight communicative difficulties can be marked ‘wrong’ in scripts. The intelligibility problem is one reason for correction. The second one is a long-term consideration. One must bear in mind that whatever motivation underlies the correction of an item, it will hardly lead to acquisition right away. So one cannot expect the student to get the structure right next time and penalise them even harder if they do not. As correction, however, is also one cornerstone of formal teaching – especially when combined with the repetition of grammar explanations – it will lead to higher levels of ultimate language competence in the long-run. Here one may even take into account issues of usage where nuances in difference are concerned. So basically the intended impact of correction is always a secondary goal, one that may justify correction, though.

I also felt the urge to intervene in the case that has just been discussed because I suspected the student of having been influenced by German interference. German interference may not be problem but can also be highly disturbing. It hinders idiomaticity, which is a prerequisite to easy communication and the core and the aim of teaching lexicogrammar. Another example of this phenomenon was sentence no. 20: “In order to know what it means to be unemployed one must make this experience oneself.” (WYHMIW 1996/3: 254) 50.5% of my informants found this structure to be correct, while 44% marked it wrong. This instant of German interference is so blatant that it really is disturbing even for somebody with the limited competence in the TL of a non-native speaker. Those who now reproach me of correcting on linguistic grounds are wrong. I correct this because it may become an obstacle in communicating with the native speaker. Probably communication will not break down, but the interlocutor is likely to frown upon this usage. Besides, this is definitely an easily identifiable case where the student has used an ELF norm instead of an EFL norm, the latter of which still is the target norm. In any case, this sentence is not idiomatic at all and should therefore be corrected. Instead, the chunk to have an experience should be taught as one.
If some people find that I have turned out to be just as correction-obsessed as any other teacher, only using different criteria, I would like to reassure them that this is not the case. In free class interaction I would not even correct the last two structures but concentrate on the content that is being negotiated. In writing, the correctness issue is more important, and I cannot entirely exclude that I would also correct the odd form that is incorrect according to traditional correction procedures. The crucial thing to do is to lean back and adopt a more relaxed attitude towards one’s students’ language production. One teacher I interviewed for a different project said: “I don’t want to have sleepless nights over a preposition.” This precisely captures the mental attitude I am trying to get across, especially in the face of the correction excesses that I described above where several incredibly time-consuming steps are taken merely to verify a preposition or the like.

3.3.6. The grading of a class test

Apart from the individual sentences that the participants had to check for mistakes, I asked them to properly correct a piece of writing, as teachers do constantly when marking class tests. This part of the experiment was meant to provide a second piece of hard evidence that allows for inferences about actual correction practice. The participants were asked to genuinely grade the script using the grading scale of German prefinal classes (i.e. Oberstufe/Kurstufe) classes from 0 to 15 points. The grading of the script was the third and final section of the survey.

I pursued two aims with this part of the survey. First of all on a very general level, I obviously wanted to further the data that provide information on correction habits. These data I will compare with the self-assessments the teachers had to do. This makes all the data I am presenting, and in particular the interpretations, more reliable than just using the self-assessments. Potential discrepancies between the two perspectives will disclose weaknesses of current approaches to EFL teaching. On a more specific level, I will analyse how the self-declared adherence to one or more varieties of English materialises in correction strictness. When dealing with spoken English and teacher feedback in the preceding sections, I was forced to realise that there exists a complex
relationship between the variety/varieties taught, the variety/varieties used as a basis for correction and the actual handling of deviation in oral interaction. All results, however, were based on the information that the informants were willing to give about themselves, i.e. their perception of themselves and of their teaching and correction habits. I did not have any spoken material for verification, simply because it is tremendously difficult to gather. I did not have access to classrooms where I could have taken notes, which also would have been a highly subjective and time consuming activity anyway. Nor did I have any recordings whose evaluations would have been just as time consuming and difficult to carry out. So I decided to use written material as a basis for my empirical analysis, which is, of course, so much more convenient to obtain and easier to evaluate. But in any case it is just as telling! The results of the marking process, i.e. the grades, will allow a conclusion as to whether there is a correlation between the information given by the participants and their actual handling of correction with regard to deviation, and, if so, determine the parameters of this relationship. Taking it from there I will, once again, point out the potential for improvement.

The second aim of this section of the survey was to illustrate the inconsistency of the grading system that German schools are using these days. This issue will be dealt with thoroughly in the next section of this thesis, where I will elaborate on the appropriateness of correction. In this context I will compare two approaches to grading in greater detail. Here, however, I will concentrate on the first of these two aims.

The text I chose as a script given out for marking was a genuine class test which I wrote myself when I was a twelfth-year pupil many years ago. In order to create experimental conditions all participants received the same script for marking. The correction situation was, of course, highly artificial, as none of the teachers had taught the class that had to write this test. The implication is that the participants could not know how the topic negotiated in the script had been covered in class, in other words they could not know what they could expect from their students. For the class test and the additional material see Appendix 5.

Another problem was that I could not anticipate the degree of knowledge on the part of the participants with regard to the topic of the test, i.e. short stories of initiation. Some may not have dealt with it ever before, and others may have done it in class only recently. So in order to create a common basis for everyone regarding the topic, I added a compilation of issues that could be expected to be
covered by the pupil in the class test and some suggestions as to how the pupil should have solved the tasks. Additionally, the participants were given detailed information on the formal criteria of the marking process, i.e. a scoring guide. This scoring guide, which was either analytic or holistic, explained the two modes of correction and provided the requirements for the grade levels so that every participant had the same formal basis for the grading process. All volatility with regard to the final mark was thus down to the individual marker. However, it is not volatility and inconsistency I want to deal with in this section but the relationship between variation and correction practice as reflected in the grades. For this analysis the mode of correction does not matter, since both groups of markers, analytic as well as holistic, had representatives of all varieties among them.

For the moment I would like to ignore the wide spectrum of marks given and only look at the results with regard to varieties. Figure 20 provides an overview of the distribution of marks for the individual varieties on which the correction was based.

![Figure 20](image)

Quite naturally, the overwhelming majority (= 94.5%) is clustered either at British English only or at the combination of British and American English. This has been the scenario so far for all those variables whose focus was varieties of
English. The hypothesis to be tested – and to be finalised since it still rests on the self-assessment figures of the participants – states that markers who solely use British English as a basis for their correction are more lenient than markers whose basis consists of two varieties (British and American English). Figure 20 merely shows that the range of marks covered by the users of British English stretches from 5 to 12 points, while the users of the combination have gone down to 4 points but also up to 14. The table, however, is unable to show which group of markers has been more reluctant to mark mistakes and may be misleading anyway, because the number of participants who use two varieties is considerably higher than the number of ‘pure’ Brits. An appropriate instrument to measure which group has given the higher or lower grades would be the calculation of a mean value.

The mean value of the grade given for the paper by those who only use British English is 9.45 points, while the mean value of the grade given by the users of the British/American combination is 9.66 points, i.e. slightly higher and better. The grade discrepancy is so minimal that this result is entirely negligible. At the end of the day I have to acknowledge that which variety a teacher uses for the marking process hardly plays any role at all.

One might raise the objection that the results may be distorted after all, as there were two distinct correction modes at work. If one mode tends to produce higher grades than the other and has been overrepresented in one group, it may have had an influence on the mean values presented just now. Therefore I will have to include a test that both checks the share of holistic and analytic scoring for the two varieties and checks which of the two modes produces the higher grades.

The latter of these two checks produces clear results. The holistic correctors arrive at an average mark of 9.42 points, which is worse than the one of the analytic markers at 9.87 points. Now if it turned out that the ratio of holistic markers among the adherents of solely British English was higher than among the correctors who used British and American as their correction basis, the newly established insight, according to which the former of the two groups are the stricter markers, would have to be questioned yet again. Because then, the lower average grade awarded by the markers using British English as their only variety may also be due to the overrepresentation of the holistic marking mode, which apparently produces lower grades as an immanent feature. Indeed, a look at the
figures confirms this suspicion. 80% of those informants who claim to base their correction on British English marked the test holistically. Only 20% of this group used the analytic mode. The ratio in the group of markers who use both British and American English as a basis for their marking is very different. Here 62.7% marked holistically while 37.3% used the analytic mode. So after these tests I am back at a stage where I cannot say for sure in what way an adherence to either one single or two varieties influences the eventual outcome.

I am thus left with the chi-square test as a means to check if there is a dependency between the two variables. Simply combining the variables of variety and mark awarded in a cross-tabulation, the chi-square test indicates that the grade is definitely not independent from the variety on which the marking process is based. Those participants who use British and American English are the ones giving higher grades.

Yet splitting up the data file into holistic and analytic markers and carrying out a chi-square test again leads to a much differentiated picture: if the correction mode is holistic there seems to be an even stronger dependency of the mark on the variety, while an analytic mode is apparently independent of the variety. In other words, for the group of holistic markers the significance test worked, but for the analytic ones I have to content myself with a tendency. I should add that the group of analytic markers is considerably smaller than the holistic one, which implies the possibility of simply too small a sample to bear any significant results. This, however, is not really problematic since many statistical tests I have carried out for this project do not demonstrate dependencies in the chi-square analysis. The reason is that it is difficult even for a sample of 115 participants to pass any significance test since it is rather small. Keeping this in mind, a sample of 31 is hardly worth mentioning. Therefore, mostly I can only provide a tendency which might be of significance if the sample was larger. This explanation applies for varieties in relation to marks, too.

Doing the chi-square test for the variables scoring mode and grade establishes a similar picture. Simply combining the two variables regardless of the varieties used suggests that the mark is dependent on the scoring mode. Taking the variety into account, though, one learns that if British English was used, the mark is apparently independent of the scoring mode, while for British and American English a strong dependency exists. Again, one must remember to consider the group size of British English markers at 20 informants, which is not
sufficient to establish any dependency. So I can but assume that there is a tendency which would be significant if only the sample were larger. I will come back to this issue in the context of the next section. Here, this test was just done in the attempt to eliminate the possibility of the marking mode determining the grade, since the actual subject of discussion here is the role that the variety the teacher has chosen for correction plays in the grade. This possibility could not be ruled out.

In conclusion one must keep in mind several things. The factors variety and marking mode seem to interrelate and interact in a complex way in the marking process. Both seem to exert a certain amount of influence on the third variable under scrutiny here: the grade. Therefore, I cannot provide a definitive answer to the actual question of the extent to which the grade and, therefore, the strictness of the marker depend on the marker's preferred variety of English. Yet I can at least state that the variable variety does have an influence on the grade. I can offer one last analysis in this context that, once more, illustrates the dependencies. If I cross-combine the variables variety and correction mode and then calculate the average mark for each column I get the following interesting ranking: the lowest grade (9.38 points) was given by the group that only used British English as a basis for correction and marked the test holistically. In third rank (9.55 points) came the holistic markers who used the two varieties of British and American English. The highest marks were given by the analytic markers, in second position the ones who used only British English at 9.75 points and the top position at 9.84 points is held by the correctors referring to both British and American English.

This should finally suffice to show that the previously held assumption according to which the teachers who solely use British English as a basis for their correction are not more tolerant than those who base their marking on two varieties is untrue. They provide for less leeway with regard to deviation, at least in written correction.

In any case, one must definitely keep one’s feet on the ground here. These statistics are a pretty toy to play with but definitely no substantial groundbreaking news, since they are about marginal figures. They must not be overestimated. In fact the figures are so ambiguous that they actually tell us to completely neglect this question in school reality. It does not really matter what variety teachers use when they mark a class test. It does matter, however, what
correction mode they use! This will be examined in the following section on correction. Having established these insights I will now take a brief look at written correction with regard to age and gender.

3.3.7. Gender and age as distinguishing variables?

In the context of oral correction, looking at the variable gender has not enriched our understanding of the workings of ELT in general and correction in particular. The very same is true for gender in relation to written correction. Hence I decided to refrain from simply boring the reader with the results in greater detail, even though this time around the results also include the extensive part of real correction. These results can be looked up in Appendix 7 to the thesis.

Instead I will straight move on to the variable of age, which promises to have more interesting results in store. I would just like to mention once again the results for oral correction in this area. I introduced the hypothesis that older teachers are stricter and more focused on British English while younger ones accept more varieties and are thus more tolerant. According to the responses to questions on oral language correction, the teachers’ self-assessment seemed to confirm these hypotheses. I will now present the results for teachers’ self-assessment in the area of written correction, which will still lack definitiveness. Afterwards I will, however, check the age categories against the results for the real correction tasks which the participants had to carry out.

![Age and correction variety](image-url)

**Figure 21**

What is the national variety of English (grammar) according to which you correct written performance?

- Standard English (British)
- Other
- BrE and AmE
- BrE, AmE and IntE
- BrE and IntE
- All varieties except Indian, International and Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 55</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 plus</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 21 shows the distribution of correction varieties for the four age groups. At first sight the graph seems to display a steady rise of British English as the only variety as one moves along the age axis. The youngest group appears to constitute an exception from this development, though. At the same time, the combination of British and American English as the only other important reference basis steadily declines with increasing age. The graph, however, must be read carefully because it shows absolute figures rather than a percentage distribution.

In the age group under 35 years of age, participants who solely use British English as a basis for their written correction constitute 20.6%. 73.5% of this same group base their marking on both British and American English. The other choices are entirely negligible for a quantitative analysis. Among the second age group only 17.2% claimed to correct according to British English. The ratio of informants who ticked the combination of British and American English rises to 79.3%, although the absolute number of informants is lower in comparison to the previous group. In the age group between 45 and 55 the share of informants using British English alone rises to 26.1%, while the popular combination of British and American only receives 69.6%. Just as with oral correction, in the oldest age group the ratio of participants who only ticked British English is highest. This subgroup receives 40.7%. This age group accordingly expressed the weakest support of all age groups for the combination of British and American English, which was nevertheless still indicated by a majority of 55.6%.

Looking at the data from the percentage angle, one has to acknowledge that, in fact, the second age group is the odd one out and not the first one, which the absolute figures suggested. The second group resists the overall development. Actually the trajectory for British English rises as one proceeds along the age axis and declines for the combination of the two varieties. The second group, however, pushes bumps into the harmonious picture since, contrary to expectation, its members display a lower level of support for British English than the first group, yet a higher one for the combination of British and American English.

It is clear that these data are not sufficient to tell whether the oldest group is also the strictest one when it comes to actual correction. Hence the follow-up self-assessment question addressing the issue as to how deviation in writing is
handled. Figure 22 displays the results for this question with regard to the four age groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Below 35</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>71,0%</td>
<td>29,0%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>71,4%</td>
<td>28,6%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 55</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>62,5%</td>
<td>37,5%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 plus</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>66,7%</td>
<td>33,3%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>68,2%</td>
<td>31,8%</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 22

This table does not help at all in finding regularities, let alone answers to the still unresolved question as to which age group is strictest and which is most lenient. On the contrary, it challenges the carefully (and in the context of oral correction weakly) constructed assumption that the older participants tend to be stricter. According to their self-assessment at least, the two advanced age groups are below the average value when it comes to marking a deviant form as ‘wrong’. The two younger ones, on the other hand, turn out to be the stricter ones. On top of that, one should note that age group two, which had the highest percentage of participants claiming to use British and American English as a basis for correction – an indicator of a fairly tolerant attitude in my opinion – presents the highest percentage of teachers who claim to mark deviant structures wrong. The implication is that at the end of the day these tests have not brought about any clarity with regard to the question I am investigating.

When summing up the development of my findings with regard to age I have to admit that this path has taken quite a few turns. It has been marked by apparent explanations, seeming correlations, several hold-ups, reconfirmation of initially assumed truths, and yet again the questioning of these truths.

I started by looking at the results of the participants’ self-assessment regarding their correction practice of oral performance in class in relation to
grammar and accent varieties. I was forced to realise that the users of one single variety, in this case British Standard English, claimed to be more tolerant towards students’ linguistic production than those teachers who claimed to use two varieties (British and American English) to base their correction on. I interpreted this result as compensation on the part of the users of only British English, who try to make up for the narrower scope of one single variety in comparison to the users who allow for two in the first place.

Looking at the same issue from the angle of age group provided some interesting insights. I set out with the assumption that the older the participants, the more they would focus on British English, implying that the younger the participants, the more prone to use two varieties, which turned out to be true. Following the newly acquired insights, the older ones should be the more tolerant ones because that is what the users of British English had claimed to be. Correlating age with the question as to how teachers handled deviation, however, did not provide the expected results. All age groups arrived at about the same distribution for grammar correction, meaning that the older ones do not exercise more tolerance although they tend to use one variety only. They are stricter. Turning to pronunciation confirmed this trend explicitly. Here the older groups even claimed to be less tolerant towards deviation than the younger ones. I concluded this section with the very unstable but apparently propped-up thesis that older teachers are stricter. I am saying unstable because no clear dependencies could be established and all the information rested on self-assessment.

As I moved on to the correction of written language, I found the same general results that figured for spoken performance. In other words, the users of British English again presented themselves as the more tolerant markers than the teachers who based their correction on two varieties. This time the answer to the question as to how deviation was handled even statistically depended on the variety used, meaning that there was a clear link between British English and tolerance, on the one hand, in comparison to British/American English and strictness on the other. I guessed that the compensation hypothesis applied once more.

Bringing age into the equation, however, once more confounded the findings to that point. Again, the oldest group had most teachers who claimed to correct through British English only, while the younger ones were happy to use
British and American English. However, the outcome that – analogously to spoken correction – the older ones were the stricter teachers did not materialise. On the contrary, written correction seems to present the link that I first had in mind when dealing with spoken correction, namely: the older markers, who favour British English, are thus the more tolerant correctors, in other words their self-claimed tolerance turned out to be true.

Indeed, this result could be read into the answers to the question on how deviation was handled. The older ones turned out to be marginally more tolerant to deviation, without any clear dependencies, though. One must note in addition that all this is again just based on self-assessment. Thus it is also a very unstable result, yet at least it raises some more flickers of doubt with regard to the previously established – though weak – hypothesis.

The only way out of the dilemma and, in fact, the last chance for me to find out which age group is the most tolerant, which is an important prerequisite for making suggestions for improvement, is to look at hard evidence, i.e. real correction. This is what I will do now.

In the second section of the survey teachers were presented with 30 sentences. They had to imagine that these were part of a written class test and thus had to decide whether they contained a mistake or not. The youngest age group (below 35) found on average 13.8 sentences out of 30 to be correct. Among this group 11.9 sentences were marked as ‘wrong’, while 3.8 out of 30 sentences were not classified at all because the participants were unable to decide whether there was a mistake or not.

The second age group identified an average of 15 correct sentences among the 30 while 12.5 sentences were regarded as containing an error. Among the 35-44-year-olds the average value for the ‘can’t say’ rubric was at 2.3 out of 30.

With 14.8 correct sentences out of 30 the second eldest age group (45-55) arrives at almost the same value for ‘right’ sentences as the previous one. Instead the number of sentences marked as ‘wrong’ rises to 13.7 out of 30 while the number of sentences that remains unmarked drops to an all time low at 1.2 out of 30.

Finally, the oldest group of participants (55 plus) even decided that on average 15.9 sentences out of 30 did not show an error while 12.3 sentences
did. Here the ‘can’t say’ rate lies at 1.5 sentences. Figure 23 illustrates the distribution for the three categories in the age groups.

One recognisable tendency could roughly be described as: the older the participants were the higher the rate of correct sentences. Are older teachers the more tolerant ones? It does not seem so because the second tendency, with the oldest age group dropping out of the pattern, runs as follows: the older, the higher the rate of sentences marked ‘wrong’. So maybe older teachers do tolerate a larger number of sentences and structures, but, on the other hand, it is also the older teachers who most frequently decide that sentences or structures are ‘wrong’. This does not help in the search for an answer to the question towering above this section. It just leaves me with the disappointing insight that I am stuck in the search for the strictest and, conversely, the most lenient age group of markers.

However, this part of the survey may not have been entirely fruitless with regard to age after all, since the above results necessarily imply that the oldest group also shows the lowest ‘can’t say’ figure. Unless informants did not fill in anything for a sentence, in which case I had to count it as a missing value, an abstention from saying either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ actually implies a ‘can’t say’. And
indeed the ‘can’t say’ rate proves to be the most telling figure of the three. Putting down ‘can’t say’ is a conscious non-decision. It means that the person does not know whether the sentence in question is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ and that they are ready to admit this fact. Contrary to the assumption one of the participants voiced that experienced teachers should not have to admit ‘can’t say’, I would like to describe this behaviour as exclusively positive. Recalling the sentences that formed the basis of the correction experiment, one cannot but recognise that almost every sentence had the potential to sow the seeds of doubt in every teacher’s mind as regards its correctness. However, nearly all the sentences were far from clearly violating any typical ‘Gymnasium grammar rules’ but at the same time just as far from completely meeting Gymnasium correctness criteria. Mostly, I suppose, participants decided on the basis of their EFL instinct. At the back of their minds though, the deeply rooted Gymnasium practice, according to which one must make a decision because language can always be categorised into ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, was tugging at their consciousness.

I am judging ‘can’t say’ as a positive reaction because it conveys a notion of uncertainty with regard to correctness in language. From a linguistic point of view the ‘right’/‘wrong’ dichotomy is completely unsuitable to describe language. For a detailed discussion see chapter 2 section 3. Therefore, uncertainty must be an inherent feature of language assessment if one wants to apply the ‘right’/‘wrong’ paradigm under any circumstances. Ideally, though, one would abandon this practice altogether. Currently, however, the linguistic reality is persistently being ignored, an artificial construction of language is upheld and taught, and social or professional pressure is exerted on teachers to apply the ‘right’/‘wrong’ paradigm. This is how an assessment like “Erfahrene Lehrer sollten nicht ‘Can’t say’ sagen” comes into existence and is stubbornly and continuously perpetuated.

Bearing this in mind, the decision to fill in ‘can’t say’ must be considered quite a brave one because it violates a kind of unwritten ‘code of conduct’ among teachers and apparently exposes a lack of competence in the foreign language. Sadly enough, I am sure, many of the teachers who have filled in ‘can’t say’ would not even object to this interpretation, although there would be sufficient reason for it. In reality, language does not function along any ‘right’/‘wrong’ pattern and, therefore, should not be pressed into one. Not knowing about the correctness of a sentence is actually a much more natural and realistic
appreciation of language. Rather than checking for correctness teachers ought to focus on communicative efficiency when judging their students’ language production.

Obviously, the task I asked the participants to accomplish contradicts the beliefs about EFL teaching which I have been putting forward throughout this study. Within the confines I left the participants when tackling the section in which sentences had to be corrected, ‘can’t say’ is a highly valuable reaction, even more so under the pressure of having to avoid admitting it. Once again, I am not saying that marking something ‘wrong’ is forbidden. As soon as something becomes entirely unintelligible it is definitely wrong. I am just saying that language allows for many things that we cannot fit into convenient rules. So, the general attitude towards students’ language production needs to be tolerant with a focus on communicative training rather than correctness. Following this argument, it is perfectly fine to be unable to decide whether something is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in traditional terms, especially since in many cases it simply does not matter whether a rule can be applied. Subsequently, the ‘right’/’wrong’ debate should cease to be a time-consuming issue in the classroom at all, and, furthermore, the ability to decide must never be the basis on which the overall competence of a teacher is assessed.

A comparison of the ‘can’t say’ figures for the different age groups shows a relatively clear tendency. In the youngest group the average number of sentences for which no decision could be made was 3.8. From here one faces a steady decline for this figure as one moves up the age ladder. The second group left 2.3 sentences out of 30 undecided. For the third group the figure drops to even 1.2 sentences, which signifies the highest degree of compulsion to make a decision. The oldest age group is marginally more laid-back with a rate of 1.5 out of 30.

These figures, distinctive as they are, are all somewhat close to one another, so that they may not appear that impressive. The difference in the span of sentences that remained unclassified in the individual age groups is more interesting. In the two oldest groups the maximum of sentences that received the qualification ‘can’t say’ lies at 6 out of 30 for individual participants. For the oldest group only one informant (3.7%), while two (8.7%) for the second oldest group arrived at these 6 sentences. Instead, these two groups in turn present 10 (37%)
and 11 (47.8%) informants that can claim they did not leave any sentence undecided.

In the second youngest group two participants (7.7%) put down ‘can’t say’ next to 7 sentences, which was the maximum in this age group. 6 informants (23.1%) never used the ‘can’t say’ option. In the youngest age group one participant (3%) put down ‘can’t say’ in 16 out of 30 sentences, which was also the maximum of sentences that received this marking. Four markers (12.1%) did not leave one single sentence without a ‘right’/’wrong’ judgement.

This distribution of the ‘can’t say’ reaction requires the following interpretation: the youngest group of teachers appears to be the most flexible of all the groups. Traditionally, their greater reluctance to make clear judgements about the correctness of structures and sentences would have been interpreted as a weakness or a lack of competence on their part. I, on the other hand, would like to reassess this behaviour as a positive feature. Obviously, if the abstention from making decisions was indeed caused by a lack of competence in the foreign language, it definitely must be considered a flaw. However, the likelihood of this being the case is comparably low as all people who have entered this job have completed an academic course in English and most probably spent time in an English-speaking country. Therefore, one can safely assume that the majority of teachers are in possession of a fairly high level of competence. Taking this for granted, the abstention from applying the ‘right’/’wrong’ paradigm mirrors caution and respect towards the language but above all towards the students and their language production. It also mirrors the desire to concentrate on something other than mistakes, in other words it leaves room for communication. This should be viewed as a positive approach to this core area of ELT in an age that primarily focuses on communication.

Having said this, the ‘can’t say’ reaction should actually be considered an example of particular competence rather than the lack of it. As I explained above, language – especially from a functionalist perspective – should not be pressed into the ‘right’/’wrong’ pattern. Therefore, refraining from doing so reflects a deeper understanding of the foreign language than the belief that every structure can be assessed in these terms. However, I do not intend to question any teacher’s competence. What I am criticising is a systemic weakness that must be tackled on the systemic level. The norms of teaching and of correction must be adapted to the requirements of present-day life and to linguistic reality.
In this section I should also stress that I do not intend to abolish correction in the traditional manner altogether. It must be used sensibly as a tool to accomplish certain tasks and to achieve goals, but not randomly or uncritically across the board. All I am saying is that the younger teachers manage to live up to these expectations to a greater extent than the older ones, according to the data. It is not that the younger ones do not correct at all. But there are fewer among them who have managed to categorise every single sentence of the 30 presented into the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ dichotomy. They have dared to leave the issue open. Among the older ones some have left it open, too, though fewer. Leaving it open is a good feature which does not imply in turn that making a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ decision is necessarily a bad one. I will leave it at that.

The third section of the questionnaire material, which consisted of the class test, brought about highly interesting results, too. If it was not for the second age group, which entirely drops out of the pattern, these results would unrestrictedly confirm my previous remarks. The youngest age group rated the script on average with 10.3 points, which is the highest mark that has been given among all the groups. The third group (45-55) gave 9.82 points for the same script, while the oldest group saw it at 9.75 points on average. As I indicated, the second group (35-44) does not fit the curve. It rated the script with only 8.77 points.

Once again, one must take into account the ratio of holistic to analytic scorers in the individual age groups. If analytic scoring, which overall produces higher marks, is overrepresented in some age groups, these groups may also present a higher average mark due to this. Looking at the ratios one realises indeed that the youngest age group contains the highest percentage of analytic raters. There is, therefore, reason to believe that the higher average mark in this group may result from the distribution of the marking mode. Then again, however, there is an unprecedented phenomenon to be observed in the two oldest age groups. In these groups it is the holistic scorers that surprisingly produce better marks than the analytic ones. In the fourth age group, for example, the ratio of holistic to analytic scorers is 64.7% to 35.3%. There is a majority of holistic scorers over analytic ones. The average holistic mark in this age group lies at exactly 10 points, while the analytic markers gave an average mark of 9.5. The point I am trying to make is: had the marking in this age group followed the normal pattern, i.e. holistic marking bringing about the lower grades,
then its overrepresentation would have led to a significantly lower average grade for this age group and thus to a wider difference between this group’s average mark and the youngest one’s. In other words, despite the confounding of the regular distribution pattern, the third age group produces a lower mark on average than the first one, which abides by the established rule. Therefore, I would like to conclude by saying that the older age groups, in fact, mark class tests more strictly than the younger ones. Even though the chi-square test does not indicate dependency of the mark on the age group, the tendencies are, nevertheless, recognisable. I consider the behaviour of group two an exception. Figure 24 below provides a comprehensive overview of the average marks and the marking mode distribution ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Below 35</th>
<th>35 to 44</th>
<th>45 to 55</th>
<th>55 plus</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average grade</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td>8.72</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average grade</td>
<td>10.85</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>9.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Age</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average grade</td>
<td>10.03</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>9.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 24

In Appendix 8 overviews of differences between the sexes as regards the identification of mistakes and the given grades in the class test are provided as diagrams.

3.4. Correction and appropriateness

Leaving the issue of varieties behind me, I will present in the following section survey results that reflect general attitudes of teachers towards EFL notions such as mistakes and error ‘therapy’ as well as features surrounding their general
correction habits, e.g. correction priorities, the frequency of intervention and their use of reference works. I will then draw links between these and the results of the real corrections, i.e. sections two and three of the survey. The aim is to find out the principles by which teachers are guided, or to be more precise, the underlying ideas that they entertain when they correct their students. I will then assess whether these principles are appropriate and the resulting practices are effective by comparing them to the normative model of ELT I devised in chapter 2 of this thesis. In the context of appropriateness I will once again resume the two correction modes and have them contest one another. This time I will look at them detached from the question of varieties. The aim is to determine which one suits the new model of ELT better.

3.4.1. The mistake and correction – concepts and ideas

In chapter 2 of the thesis I elaborated extensively on the concept of ‘the mistake’ by presenting the latest findings of SLA research. Taking it from there I have also established ways and manners of dealing with mistakes that meet three requirements:

1. To serve the stated goals of present-day ELT.
2. To respect the existence and value of language variation.
3. To work with rather than against the natural paths of SLA.

In order to find out how ‘the mistake’ is currently viewed by German teachers of English I included a couple of questions in the questionnaire that directly addressed the issue. I will now present and discuss the answers that were given.

The first question dealing with this issue was question 6 in the first section of the field study material. The question read: “What is your general notion of ‘mistake’?” I provided nine possible answers that I considered to be within the realm of the conceivable as I had encountered in the literature about mistakes, in my personal experience and exchanges with teachers and the generally prevalent notion of the mistake in popular representations. Additionally, I left the opportunity to tick the rubric “Other”. The following table (Figure 25) shows the percentage of informants that ticked each option:
A sign of the student’s lack of concentration 53.9%
A necessary step on the student’s path towards mastery of the target language 70.4%
An indicator of the student’s level of competence in the target language 80.9%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s carelessness</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s lack of concentration</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A necessary step on the student’s path towards mastery of the target language</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An indicator of the student’s level of competence in the target language</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be avoided under any circumstances</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be ignored</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be discussed</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be encouraged</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 0.9% for “Other” represents one participant who specified this choice as “Something that is ‘normal’ in every learning process.” Fair enough!

The answer option “An indicator of the student’s level of competence in the target language” was ticked by 80.9% of all participants. In second place one finds “A necessary step on the student’s path towards mastery of the target language” at 70.4%. I should express satisfaction with regard to the high percentages that these two answers have scored. Both answer options, of course, represent the cornerstone of a deeper understanding of SLA: the concept of interlanguage. Depending on the wording 80.9% and 70.4% of the informants respectively seem to have already heard of IL. It is an indispensable prerequisite for teachers to take into account the existence of IL because it entails massive implications for correction. In chapter 2 section 4 I explained the immediately related teachability hypothesis. Linguistic items can only be acquired when the learner’s IL has reached the stage that allows for acquisition. Subsequently, it is useless to correct learners’ mistakes that are way beyond their current IL levels. The time spent on these useless corrections could be used otherwise, more efficiently. Obviously, the apparent awareness of IL on the part of the teachers does not necessarily mean that they do not correct every mistake, but it is at least an important precondition for it.

In third place came “Something to be discussed” with 56.5%, which is indeed satisfactory. If the mistake is taken as an opportunity to stimulate communication in which the students interact with one another as well as with the teachers, which is the intended meaning of “Something to be discussed”, then there are no objections on my part. On the contrary, this fictitious setting
absolutely fulfils the requirements I have put forward in 2.5. as one desirable way of providing correction. ELT should mainly consist of negotiation of meaning. The implication is that rather than correcting, teachers ought to provide feedback on students’ performance. One imaginable situation can be the feedback conference in small groups. If, in this setting, the mistake becomes the subject of the interaction process, i.e. the matter which is negotiated, there is hardly reason to criticise teachers for it. Of course, the discussion of a mistake can also happen on a larger scale, in other words with the entire class. This, of course, requires the class to have an established and agreed notion of mistakes as something harmless as well as a climate of benevolence and self-confidence among the students. Furthermore, the teacher must make sure that all the students in class take an interest in or, better still, participate in the discussion. In short, from the very beginning the teacher must establish an EFL culture that is open to and not hostile towards ‘the mistake’.

If “Something to be discussed”, however, means that the teacher simply points out the mistake and tells the class what he/she considers to be ‘correct’ without engaging in any kind of interaction, there is no justification for it. In that case the mistake would be better ignored. “Something to be ignored” was, in fact, given as an option, too. Yet, it was not considered to be a valuable one at all. Only one participant (= 0.9%) decided it was even possible to ignore mistakes. The implications of this figure can hardly be overestimated. This figure confirms the central hypothesis of my entire thesis: ‘the mistake’ is at the centre of attention in foreign language teaching. It cannot be ignored but must be dealt with. And often the process of dealing with the mistake is correcting it. Here, it also becomes clear that teachers correct too much and too often. Only 0.9% can imagine the possibility of ignoring mistakes. I would like to speak up for this way of ‘handling’ mistakes, not as a general rule, but as a viable option. Ignoring a mistake can indeed be the best way of mastering a teaching situation. Let us just recall the example from Bartram and Walton (1991: 41), which I have already cited once:

T What about house prices in the city centre?
S I don’t know exactly how much cost a house in city centre, but I think it’s very expensive.
T Yeah. Don’t forget you have to invert verb and subject in an indirect question.
S Sorry?
The correction by the teacher, who certainly means well, is utterly useless. Worse even: not only does the intervention in the area of grammar go unnoticed by the student and certainly does not have any impact, but it also leads to a total breakdown of communication. This should not happen, especially since the continuation of communication is under the control of the teacher and can in fact be avoided, while the effectiveness of the correction is beyond the teacher’s reach. Even if the correction meant that the student acquired the new structure on the spot and did not get it wrong ever again, the breakdown of communication would be too high a price. As, however, the correction remains ineffective anyway, the breakdown of communication lacks even the slightest bit of justification. The teacher’s reaction just produces irreparable damage to this teaching situation. It is like a crash in two different fields at the same time, where one could have been averted. It was certainly impossible to avert both, but it would have worked to get around the communication breakdown. How could this have been done? By simply ignoring the mistake and carrying on talking about the subject in question: i.e. house prices. For the intelligibility of the student’s utterance the word order did not really matter. What mattered, though, was the content of his/her utterance. The teacher should have taken the student’s contribution seriously, in which case he/she would have had to react to the content somehow or to pass the floor to another student after making an encouraging gesture, etc. If the teacher had found it necessary to repeat syntax for indirect questions he/she should have done so after the communicative exercise, which features in the dialogue. At the very moment of the dialogue the most sensible and professional way of dealing with the mistake would have been to ignore it. The conclusion I draw from the virtually non-existent acceptance of ‘ignoring’ mistakes but the abundant existence of teaching situations like the one mentioned is simple: here is an area in which I call for immediate change. This is a feature where the intention of my whole project becomes extremely prominent. Theory and practice are far apart. This gap needs to be closed in the direction of the theory, in other words: ignoring mistakes must become an everyday tool of the EFL teacher when the class is involved in communicative activities.

I stated that the intention of my project becomes prominent when one looks at this feature. The thesis first and foremost serves practical and applied
purposes. I would like to see it impact on EFL teaching reality. In this area not much training or profound understanding are required. Nor are any authorities or other institutions involved. Change could be procured immediately, as all it takes is a minor change of behaviour on the part of the teachers. They ought to accept that mistakes can just as well be ignored at times!

Pleasingly, the option “Something to be avoided under any circumstances” was only ticked once (= 0.9%), too. Of course, no student will ever manage to completely avoid every mistake. Not only is it unrealistic but it is also a remnant from the times of the audiolingual method in foreign language teaching, when rote learning and the eradication of mistakes reigned supreme. In return “Something to be encouraged” – which is on an imaginary scale probably located at the opposing end of “Something to be avoided under any circumstances” – received 12.2%. This is a result which I acknowledge quite favourably because it reflects the recognition that no language learning can happen without mistakes. Personally, I would not go so far as to encourage mistakes. Yet there are some authors, e.g. Bartram and Walton, who support the idea that mistakes should, in fact, be encouraged. I do not disagree with the reasoning behind their argument, but I think that class time could be used better than to encourage mistakes. Yet I understand that the adherence to IL may entail this notion, so I think that teachers who have ticked this option at least acknowledge that working against the innate syllabus cannot work. The option is probably quite well represented at 12.2%, which gives it the status it deserves.

The result I find most alarming among the figures for this question is that 9.6% believe mistakes are “A sign of the student’s lack of intelligence”. One participant attached a personal letter to the completed questionnaire on returning it to me. In it she quite vigorously criticised the setup of the questionnaire and discarded some of the answer options I had provided as outdated and, therefore, inappropriate:

Ich frage mich, was Ankreuzungsmöglichkeiten wie [..]
Fehler als ‘a sign of the student’s lack of intelligence’ in einer Lehrerbefragung des 21. Jahrhunderts zu suchen haben. Was für ein Schülerbild wird da unterlegt?

I agree! I wish this option had not been used at all. Of course, I did not insinuate a particular image of pupils. I tried to find out what ideas teachers have of ‘the mistake’, for which purpose I offered quite a wide variety of options. Some of them suggest that mistakes originate in the student. Others see them inherent in
the nature of SLA. The rest are options that suggest ways of dealing with the mistake. So the subject of this inquiry was the notion of ‘the mistake’ and certainly not my image of pupils.

If some informants tick an option that sees the mistake as something originating in the student such as “A sign of the student’s lack of intelligence”, one may well draw conclusions about that person’s image of pupils in general. But, first and foremost, this choice answers the question about these teachers’ idea of ‘the mistake’. I am quite sure that the teacher whose comment I just quoted would absolutely agree with me in saying that she did not expect anyone to tick that box at all. A total of 9.6% did, though! Admittedly, this is a small minority of just below one tenth. Yet it is too large a group to be ignored. One cannot but infer that teachers who ticked this choice have not understood that learning a foreign language necessarily entails the making of mistakes, no matter what the person’s IQ is. On the other hand, there is, of course, still the issue of talent. There are definitely students who have a greater talent than others for language learning. The more gifted may pick up new structures sooner and may progress faster, which implies that they will sooner abandon mistakes which others, who have received the same amount and quality of teaching, continue to make. If the people who ticked that box tried to express this idea, one can hardly deny it.

Then again, some students may have an extremely high IQ and perform brilliantly in physics, yet they may have little talent for languages. They will struggle with mistakes even though they are highly intelligent. And even the most gifted linguistic talents will make mistakes, if they are non-native speakers of that language. So, at the end of the day, there is hardly any justification for seeing mistakes as “A sign of the student’s lack of intelligence”. Therefore, I would like to end this discussion on a serious note by advising all teachers – even if it is just a minority – to abandon this notion.

The remaining two options “A sign of the student’s carelessness” and “A sign of the student’s lack of concentration” received 46.1% and 53.9%, respectively. Obviously, both may be possible causes for students’ mistakes in an EFL class. They may materialise, for instance, as the famous ‘slip of the tongue’. These causes, however, must also be treated like any other mistake. They ought to be corrected when focusing on form, ignored when negotiating meaning. In any case, it makes sense to bear in mind that ‘the mistake’ can
easily be the result of carelessness or a lack of concentration, in which cases the teacher ought to insist that the student pay attention. The trouble is that a great many mistakes that are, in fact, not caused by a lack of concentration are misjudged as being of that kind, while really they are mistakes caused by the restrictions of the student’s current IL level. That being the case, of course, they ought to be treated carefully and ought not to be blindly corrected. So the misjudgement on the part of the teacher at the beginning triggers a chain of wrong steps and consequences.

I would not bother to discuss this in detail if it were not for the rather high percentages for these two options. These figures imply that teachers all too often take it for granted that mistakes are the result of carelessness or a lack of concentration and so they react accordingly. Actually, however, most of these mistakes are not the result of these causes and should thus be treated differently, if at all. In order to put ‘the mistake’ into perspective I suggest dropping these notions, too. In general, teachers should assume that mistakes are the result of a particular IL level rather than take it for granted that they result from carelessness. In the rare event of a mistake resulting from a lack of concentration the teacher will surely notice and can then take immediate action.

This last section with the advice to entirely drop these two particular notions of ‘the mistake’ may sound somewhat exaggerated. The reason for this drastic cut is highly pragmatic. In teaching situations teachers must decide on the spot. And the overall ‘road map’ I am devising in this thesis calls for a reduction of correction. So in order to fit this issue into the general scheme of things I chose to give this simplistic piece of advice.

One should note that the questionnaire question I have discussed here addressed the idea that teachers have of ‘the mistake’ in general. Further down in the questionnaire I asked the same question again, providing the same answer options, this time directed to the specific idea teachers have of ‘the mistake’ in oral performance. Not wishing to bore the reader with the same arguments in just a slightly different context, I will refrain from discussing the results of this question in greater detail here. Figure 26 shows the results:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s carelessness</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s lack of concentration</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s lack of intelligence</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A necessary step on the student’s path towards mastery of the target language</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An indicator of the student’s level of competence in the target language</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be avoided under any circumstances</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be ignored</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be discussed</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be encouraged</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 26

Compared to the results explored above, the general tendency within this set of results is more pronounced. In other words: all the arguments I put forward in interpreting the above question remain unaltered, only backed by clearer figures. In my view, these answers reflect a deeper thought on the nature of language and language learning, which was probably triggered by the specificity of the question.

The two answers that suggest mistakes are signs of IL levels have received even higher percentages, while the percentage for “A sign of the student’s lack of intelligence” has dropped significantly. Further good news is that not one single participant ticked the box for “Something to be avoided under any circumstances”, whereas “Something to be ignored” has risen by more than 5%.

Considering these results, the criticism I have uttered about the seemingly false perception of language or the alarming views of SLA as a result of the figures above could be weakened here, since the deeper reflection about language and language learning show that the same teachers do have a more realistic notion of mistakes than the first question suggested. Yet, one must bear in mind that my intention is to change teaching practice. So even if teachers have this more realistic view when they carefully think about language learning, their habits are still shaped by on-the-spot reactions that are not based on careful thinking. Therefore, I uphold the strong advice I have given.

Having looked at the ideas that teachers have of ‘the mistake’ it would be highly interesting to know how they view the role of the correction of mistakes. These two issues are, of course, immediately related to one another, and should ideally be compatible. Therefore, I inquired about the driving force behind
correction. The question addressing this issue went quite simply: “What is the aim of correction?” The question was meant to investigate the motivation teachers have when they correct their students’ mistakes. Sure enough, many teachers simply correct a large number of mistakes because they were trained to do so when they first started teaching. The result is an unreflected or even blind sort of correction. At the same time, though, many teachers correct mistakes because they want to achieve certain goals. Primarily, they want their students to speak and write good and correct English, and they believe or were told that correction is the way to get there. Other motivations, which may be of secondary importance, or even of primary importance but concealed under a false pretense, are conceivable too. In fact, many academics claim that this logic is dominant over the wish to improve the students’ EFL competence.

This question forced the participants to think about their personal attitudes towards and motivations for correction. Again, I offered a wide array of answer options that seemed to cover the majority of imaginable possibilities. Obviously, I have to rely on the informants’ willingness to be honest, and I have to consider that self-assessments may contain a certain distortion of the truth. Figure 27 shows the distribution of answers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To create awareness of mistakes</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create awareness of the language</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enhance self-monitoring</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To penalise the students</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create authority</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the students’ competence in English</td>
<td>89.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make students avoid the mistake in the future</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with the students</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide information for the entire class so that they all gain from the mistake made by the classmate</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 27**

The first two options mentioned, “To create awareness of mistakes” and “To create awareness of the language”, received 48.7% and 59.1%, respectively. I am dealing with these two options in one argument because they both entertain one concept: awareness-raising. Awareness of the workings of the foreign
language can be obtained through formal instruction. Recalling my remarks from 2.4., one will also remember that the power of formal instruction is limited to this creation of awareness, which in turn means that the actual acquisition occurs at a later stage. Rod Ellis (1990: 15f) explains that “consciousness-raising aims to facilitate acquisition, not to bring it about directly”. In the same vein, I put forward the idea that correction is an essential part of formal instruction. Quintessentially, the role of correction can only be to aid the awareness-raising process. Through correction, the student will learn about the language, but hardly the language itself.

Seeing correction in this light is, therefore, the most realistic and sensible notion of it. For this reason it is problematic that only just below half or slightly more than half of the participants indeed uphold this idea of correction. Everybody should acknowledge that, in general, awareness-raising is all that can be achieved through correction.

It is all the more problematic because large majorities do in fact believe that correction has the power to improve the students’ competence in the foreign language. 79.1% of teachers believe that the aim of correction is to make students avoid the mistake in the future, which means an error-free version of English. A staggering 89.6% agree with the same idea on a more general level. They think that correction has the capacity to improve the students’ competence in the foreign language. It would hardly be problematic if those participants who ticked this choice had in mind a long-term perspective. As I have mentioned repeatedly, referring to authors like Ellis and Gass/Selinker, learners who receive form-focused instruction – contrary to some early assumptions of communicative language teaching – eventually achieve higher levels of competence than those who do not. Thus correction as one manner of form-focused instruction can contribute its little bit to the ultimate success of learners. The very unspecific wording “To improve the students’ competence in English” could, of course, cover this long-term notion, too. I suspect, however, that hardly any participant had this in mind when they ticked this box. The prevalent way of teaching nowadays still entails the expectation of errors immediately being eradicated after having been corrected in class or in a test. So rather than hoping for the slim chance that the participants may have understood the last two answer options as referring to correct language production in the distant future, I suggest dropping this particular idea as an aim of correction. Instead, one ought to
attribute to correction the position that it deserves as a result of its limited impact on the future re-occurrence of mistakes: it is just a way of creating awareness of the language.

Since I took it for granted that the participants would see correction as a way of achieving immediate improvement, I retained this idea for another question. In it the participants were asked to state the likelihood they saw for the student making the same mistake again after having been corrected. The question asked informally for the participants’ impression: “Your impression: When you have corrected a mistake, the likelihood of the student making the same mistake again is”. The answer options were percentage slots reaching from below 20% via 20% steps through 80% or higher. Figure 28 shows the distribution of answers:

![Figure 28: Distribution of answers regarding the likelihood of students making a mistake again after correction.]

The distribution gives rise to the hope that teachers do have quite a realistic impression of this phenomenon after all. The likelihood is indeed very high, obviously depending on the individual student, but certainly ranging in the upper areas in general. A total of 90.7% estimated it to be in the top three answer options, i.e. at least 40%. A relative majority of 44.9% located it between 40-60%, which is probably still quite optimistic. 31.8% thought it between 60-80% while 14% even estimated that the chances are 80% or higher. Only 7.5% trusted that the likelihood lay between 20-40%. 1.9% stated that they believed one correction
was sufficient to reduce the chances to less than 20% that the same student would make the same mistake again. Of course, it happens occasionally that correcting an erroneous structure once suffices to have the student never make the same mistake again, in other words: to help him/her acquire the structure. This is a rare case, though. In general, correction remains ineffective. Having these figures allows for the careful interpretation that teachers are largely aware of the inefficiency of correction. Taking this for granted, it should go without saying that they ought to refrain from employing traditional patterns of correction. It is all the more surprising and irrational, then, that teachers cling to these traditional patterns of correction, especially since an overwhelming 89.6% declared that correction was meant to serve the improvement of the students’ competence in the foreign language. And by this they did not mean long-term improvement because of increased awareness. If they did, they would not give bad grades for language production that contained errors and mistakes. They do indeed think of short-term improvement.

My suspicion that teachers tend to think of correction as having an immediate impact rather than being the seeds for future acquisition is further backed by the low percentage of 8.7% which were given in the rubric “To communicate with the students”. This proves that correction is not seen as a manner of communication. At the same time it implies that correction is still seen in the traditional way as teacher intervention. Ideally, formal correction would be embedded in a negotiation process in which the student gets as much chance to speak as the teacher, e.g. in a feedback conference (See 2.5.). Especially teachers who strongly believe that correction is an important tool to improve students’ competence must adopt this concept of correction as communication. If they do not, the results will be even poorer than if they do. If they do, they will additionally have to accept the fact that even so, correction works in the long run and does not bring about immediate improvement. Correction which directly brings about acquisition of a structure hardly exists, and is even rarer if it is done as simply intervention. Correction as negotiation of meaning has better chances of achieving this goal. Yet it still is only a manner of creating awareness so that the learner may sooner be ready for acquisition.

In the same vein, the option “To provide information for the entire class so that they all gain from the mistake made by the classmate”, which got 62.6%, can only have little relevance for the immediate improvement of all students’
competence. An instant of correction may contribute to the overall awareness-raising process. I dare say it is the individual rather than the whole class who will build up awareness as a result of correction. Obviously, the interaction process occurs between the teacher and the student who has made the mistake, implying that this student is involved in the interaction which is necessary for achieving consciousness. If the teacher is very versatile in communicating, he/she may manage to involve the whole class in this process, crucially without humiliating the student in question. In any case, consciousness once again is the most that the class can gain from a corrective intervention.

I should probably express my gratitude that the two options “To penalise the students” and “To create authority” were not even ticked once. Indeed, I do, because those are the worst imaginable motivations for corrections. The trouble is – once again – that some questions on the survey, this being one of them, are entirely based on self-assessment. Many authors, e.g. Claus Gnutzmann (cf. 1999: 160ff.) and Péter Medgyes (cf. 1999: 42ff.), do actually see the desire for authority at work in plenty of situations where teachers correct their students’ language production. I cannot prove this with the help of these results. The suspicion, however, remains that teachers, although they always see their noble ambition at work to help students improve their English, do in fact correct to create authority. The reason is that some teachers do not have any other source of authority at their disposal. This behaviour is understandable to some extent because authority is indispensable for teaching. Its absence is worse than the misuse of correction.

Having repeatedly pointed out that correction – ideally carried out in a negotiation process – can at most achieve the establishment of consciousness with regard to new language items, I should like to discuss the answer option “To enhance self-monitoring” in this context, too. 46.1% of the informants believe that correction is meant to enhance self-monitoring on the part of the pupils. Self-monitoring is the subsequent checking of one’s utterances in a foreign language against the rules and knowledge one has acquired about the language. If one notices a lack of congruence between the utterance and the rule, it is obviously too late to get it right first time. But one can either have a second go or try to memorise it for the next time one uses this structure. Sure enough, there is no guarantee that one will get it right next time. Eventually, though, one will manage to incorporate the new structure into one’s EFL body.
In 2.4. I presented quite a few SLA hypotheses. One of them was Stephen Krashen’s monitor hypothesis, which is basically the very same thing that I have just outlined under the keyword ‘self-monitoring’. The monitor hypothesis is based on the belief that learners of a foreign language learn the rules of that language while they simultaneously acquire language structures. According to Krashen these are two distinct and unrelated processes. It is agreed today that this strict separation is unlikely. Yet the precise interlacement of the two processes has not been determined. It is certain, though, that explicit and formal teaching of rules have the described effect according to which learners monitor their own output. In other words, they need formal rules to be able to do so. Having established correction as one way of formal teaching, it is self-explanatory that it is one path that contributes to the student’s body of formal knowledge about the foreign language which he/she needs for self-monitoring. Formal teaching, which entails correction, enables monitoring. Self-monitoring boils down to just one particular way of using the language awareness that has been produced through correction. Taking this for granted, the option “To enhance self-monitoring” is definitely one aim of correction. Yet again, the necessity for time on the part of the students must not be underestimated. The ability for self-monitoring must not be confused with competence in the foreign language.

Having investigated and commented on the prevailing concepts of ‘the mistake’ and of correction, I will now move on to another highly important and intricately related aspect: the frequency of correction.

3.4.2. Frequency of correction

So far I have continually questioned and renegotiated the basis for the decision as to whether a structure is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, or in other words, the concept of ‘the mistake’. My motivation was to broaden the basis of assessment in order to introduce more flexibility for teachers to make that decision, or in fact refrain from doing so. From now I will shift the focus to another level, namely the level of frequency. The question underlying this section is not whether the structure in question is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but whether it is counted as a mistake or not, i.e. how – not on what grounds – the teacher reacts to a deviant form. Considering
that there is a mistake, it is still up to the teacher to decide on how to react to it, i.e. correct it or not to do so. This becomes all the more relevant when dealing with the marking of a class test under analytic conditions, because there the number of mistakes identified immediately translates into a grade. Before turning to that specific issue, though, I will deal with the frequency of correction in general.

One block of questions in the first section of the questionnaire addressed the frequency of oral correction in class. Once again I had to rely on the teachers’ self-assessment. The first of the three questions asked about the informants’ own impression as to how often they corrected students in class. The reason I addressed this is, of course, my previously mentioned thesis that teachers correct too often. Here I asked straight to the point. The answer categories I created may appear vague but should provide some rough idea on this issue. The question went: “According to your own impression, how often do you correct oral performance in class?” The answer options were arranged on a continuum reaching from “I correct every mistake” to “I rarely correct oral performance” with three scalar steps inbetween. Hence every participant was supposed to tick one box only. Figure 29 shows the distribution of answers.

![Figure 29](image-url)
The most interesting result of this question is the uneven distribution of answer options. A normal distribution would have meant most mentions for the middle option, significantly fewer ones for the two options next to it and very few mentions for the two marginal ones. Another typical distribution could have had most mentions for the fourth option for instance with steady decline in both directions. Here, however, the middle option “I correct about half of all mistakes” received 16.7%, which is just more than half the percentage that the second choice “I do not correct every mistake but rather frequently” got at 31.5%. The fourth option, which read “I only correct a mistake when it is necessary”, even received 48.1%. So the conspicuous result is the dent in the middle.

My interpretation is that participants have probably made an effort to answer as vaguely as possible. There are two sides to this interpretation. One answers the question of why the middle option has received so little support. The two options at the edges were too extreme and maybe also too specific. Nobody can sensibly claim to correct every mistake because a) they probably do not notice each and every one, and b) even the strictest teacher will occasionally ignore the odd mistake for the sake of continuing a dialogue. At the other end, hardly anyone will admit that they do not correct oral performance at all. The reasons have been listed in the introduction to this thesis. Nowadays the notion most people have of foreign language teaching entails the correction of mistakes as one constitutive element. This, in turn, means that teachers who do not correct do not do their job properly. But then again, why did more people not take advantage of the middle choice? Because the choice is quite specific. Correcting “about half of all mistakes” would mean teachers make a balance, calculate carefully and count their interventions in order to be able to make such a statement. Furthermore, teachers probably did not want to give such a specific answer since the amount of correction, of course, also depends on the classroom context and the individual student, so that their correction behaviour varies with regard to these variables. So even though it seems quite a moderate answer, which would by its nature attract more informants, it received little support due to its specificity.

The flip-side of this interpretation is the result of the two answers built around the middle one. They received higher percentages because they catered for the need to remain vague. “I do not correct every mistake but rather frequently” is vaguer than the first and the third option. Even more so the option “I
only correct a mistake when it is necessary” leaves much room for any option whatsoever. At the same time, though, it sounds very sensible to correct when it is necessary. The open question therefore is: when is it necessary?

I should mention that this question was merely meant to be an introductory question to the issue of frequency. The answer options I offered were not watertight. The only possible interpretation has been mentioned. However, I presumed that the most interesting issue in this context would be the question of necessity that only figured in the fourth – and foreseeable most popular – choice of this introductory question. Hence, I resumed it again in the two follow-up questions in which I fixed a setting and specified the question towards the issue of necessity of correction. Varying ideas on the necessity issue were likely to emerge. This, in turn, would also allow inferences – more precise ones – about the frequency of correction. So the first of the two questions investigating the estimated necessity of correction was: “When, do you think, is it necessary to correct oral performance in free class interaction?” Five answer options were offered on a cline. Figure 30 shows the distribution of answers.

![Figure 30](image)

The continuum is self-explanatory. The left-most option is the strictest one, with lessening strictness as one moves to the right end of the cline. After the fourth
choice there was the chance to check a fifth option (= “Correction is unnecessary”), which was not used at all.

The teaching situation I suggested was free interaction, in other words: some communicative exercise or some debate about a topic. Clearly, this imaginary setting represents the ideal teaching situation of present-day ELT with a focus on communicative competence, the situation which is meant to take up the lion’s share of class time according to my remarks in chapter 2. In this chapter I also dealt with the issue of correction and devised a system of correction that fits into the overall pattern of ELT. According to that, the only instant that allows for correction – not least because it is the only useful and effective form of correcting – is when the intelligibility of the student’s utterance is inhibited. This scenario is represented by answer number four to the question here. An overwhelming majority of 71.2% checked this box. Another 21.2% ticked the option “When the utterance is not in accordance with StE or some accepted variety”. This leaves only 7.7% for the other two choices towards the stricter end of the scale. These figures are indeed very satisfactory from my point of view. There is hardly any room for criticism on this front. Only language production that is unintelligible should be corrected, in which case the correction takes the very natural shape of a normal negotiating process. The middle option should be treated with care. If taken seriously, however, it means that the teacher will accept most spoken English because he/she takes into account the IL levels as varieties of English. The trouble is that the teacher will probably spend too much time checking students’ utterances against the varieties he/she knows. So it would make more sense to simply take on a more laid-back attitude towards students’ language production in general. The other two options that were ticked should not be allowed to be the standard for correction.

Does this mean that all is well? Despite my approval for these results I cannot but suspect that the answers merely reflect the informants’ theoretical knowledge rather than their actual correction practice. Once again the test is flawed by the self-assessment procedure. Unfortunately, I have no hard data on real correction of spoken English. Therefore, I will have to rely on the real correction of written English, data which I gathered in sections two and three of my material, in order to describe potential discrepancies between the self-assessment and real correction. I will deal with this further on in this section.
Before doing so I will briefly look at the second follow-up question I asked in the context of oral correction. It presented a different imaginary teaching situation: “When, do you think, is it necessary to correct oral performance in focus-on-accuracy/pattern-drill classes?” The distribution of answers differed considerably from the one before, as Figure 31 shows.

The diagram shows that teachers are much stricter when it comes to focus-on-form exercises. Clearly, this is a good thing. Once again the right-most option (= “Correction is unnecessary”) was not ticked at all, which needs no comment in this context. The fourth option, though, which was felt to be the most sensible answer in the previous question and there also received the most support (71.2%), has decreased to 8.1%. The middle option “When the utterance is not in accordance with StE or some accepted variety” scored 26.3%, which is just below the 28.3% that the first and strictest choice “Always, i.e. for every deviation from any known rule” got. Most support in this context was given to option two (= “When the utterance violates a rule that I taught”) at 37.4%.

What one can observe here, especially in comparison to the preceding question, is a shift in the criteria or principles that underlie the correction decision. Intelligibility as a guideline has been given up in favour of a much narrower set of norms. Despite the fact that I am a great adherent of communicative competence and of utmost flexibility in handling mistakes, and
despite the fact that I have been calling for a reduction of correction throughout 
this thesis, i.e. from the point of view of today’s practice, I totally agree with 
intervening at each and every mistake in this context. My personal choice of 
answer to this question would have been the second one (= “When the utterance 
violates a rule that I taught”). This is slightly less strict than the first option but 
does not leave much leeway either. The explanation for my seemingly 
incongruent advice here is fairly simple and is entirely in agreement with my 
overall model of ELT and the correction it should entail.

Once again I need to refer back to my remarks of chapter 2 section 5, 
where I set the parameters for correction. The most important reason for my 
calling for less correction is a reminder to teachers that they must take their 
students seriously. In other words: if they do a communicative exercise they must 
genuinely focus on communication and thus the content of the discussion, not on 
linguistic formalities. By the same token, however, if they do a focus-on-form 
exercise, they must correct each and every mistake because that is the way of 
taking students seriously in this context. More crucial even: only if teachers 
correct all mistakes in this type of exercise will they be taken seriously as a 
teacher and a person. As the suggested setting here was a focus-on-form 
exercise it is indispensable to act along these requirements, and it does not even 
mean that one leaves the ELT path that I have been advocating all along. 
Correcting every mistake is reserved for focus-on-form classes. Otherwise, 
negotiation of meaning and intelligibility are the keywords.

If teachers now feel enticed to correct as much as they used to do, 
because one may do so in focus-on-form classes, and understand these remarks 
as an encouragement to simply increase the amount of this type of classes, then 
there is a kind of misunderstanding, and a fundamental one at that. Just to put 
everything into perspective: In general I do not merely demand that less be 
corrected. I actually call for an overhaul of ELT which sees the training of 
communicative competence at its heart. Focus-on-form classes remain 
necessary as a supportive element. In them strict correction is necessary for the 
reasons given. But these classes receive a minor share of the overall ELT time. 
And it is not optional to raise them as one pleases. In general, one works 
communicatively with a major focus on issues of real life relevance for the 
students. This is the background against which I have explained the necessity of 
strict correction.
As regards writing, the results do not need much interpretation. They are absolutely clear and helpfully provide a deep insight into the idea that teachers have of writing these days. Figure 32 displays the distribution of choices.

![Figure 32](image)

The overwhelming majority (62.6%) claimed that they corrected every mistake. Another 30.4% did not correct not every mistake but most of them. That is a total of 93% for whom formal correctness is of utmost importance. The option “About half of all mistakes” was only ticked by 2.6%, probably for the same reasons as above, where I considered the specificity of this option an alienating factor. The most alarming result, however, is the 4.3% for the option “In a script I correct a mistake only when it is necessary”. From my point of view this is actually once again the most convincing option and thus the one everybody should adopt for themselves as a guideline. One might argue that the notion of necessity leaves a great deal of leeway for interpretation. But in fact, it carries a very restrictive connotation. Necessity can certainly not be ‘every mistake’. Nor any other option towards the stricter end of the cline. Yet, it does leave some room for the individual marker. From that angle it is even more telling that so few teachers opted for that choice.
This is most convincing because necessity not only allows for flexibility but it also fits into the general approach of ELT and correction I am advocating here. I do not want to go through the details as to when it is necessary to correct all over again. This has been done so many times that it is quite evident now. The general guideline for correction should be intelligibility. In form-focused classes, however, any deviant forms ought to be corrected. On top of that, accuracy is valued much more highly in writing than it is in speaking. Yet, the criterion of necessity still retains its validity. It may have to be adapted to the situation of writing, but it must not be given up in favour of something else, even for writing. Simply advising all participants, however, to adopt a different strategy of correction falls short of the problem. These results are but a symptom of an underlying problem.

These results provide for an insight into the participants' concept of writing. Writing has apparently not yet been accepted as an interactive process. It is the product that seems to count rather than the communicative element in writing. It is certainly true that at the end of the writing process, the final product must display the highest possible degree of formal correctness. During that process, however, many other issues must be addressed in the feedback that the teacher provides. Accuracy is just one of them.

In the approach to writing I suggest there are several drafts and revisions before a final product is achieved. Every stage, however, must entail an instance of feedback. And in every stage the issue of correctness can be addressed to varying degrees. Taking this model of writing for granted there can be no other approach to correction than the one that is based on necessity, because this is the only one that allows for the flexibility needed. Correcting each and every mistake does not have any long-term effects on the students. Nor does it do justice to writing as a manner of negotiation of meaning. Besides, as a matter of fact, process-oriented writing, in which issues of correctness are discussed as one among many, eventually automatically achieves final texts that contain very few mistakes only.

So actually it is the model of writing that needs to be reviewed and not only the manner of correction, because the underlying idea of writing has led to this kind of correction in the first place. It may take a while, however, to introduce an entirely new model of writing, especially since the one I am suggesting is much more time-consuming than the one that is practised now. Whatever the
model of writing, though, one can already start changing the correction manner by simply focusing on the most prominent mistakes and the ones which may be relevant for the student's IL level, while leaving others to time for resolution. In other words: some mistakes have priority over others. That would be a gradual move in the direction of intelligibility as the guiding principle for intervention. This also takes me straight to the next issue in correction: priorities.

3.4.3. Priorities in correction

This brief section is less about individual mistakes that have priorities over others but about fields of language learning that are most often subject to correction. The question I asked only addresses spoken performance. It went: “When providing feedback on oral performance, what do you focus on?” As answer options I offered seven fields of language and thus areas for EFL teachers to work upon. Participants could either just tick individual fields or rank them on a scale from 1 to 7. I will analyse the two answering paths separately. 35 informants opted not to rank the options but to state in general what their priorities were in correction.

Grammar and content arise as the two contenders for the topmost priority in the non-ranking group. Either one was checked by 77.2% of those informants who only checked options without ranking them. These two are immediately followed by pronunciation with 74.3%. In fourth position is vocabulary at 60%. Only then comes fluency at 42.9%. Positions six and seven are held by German interference at 31.5% and idiomaticity at only 22.9%. My interpretation of these results is very straightforward. Once again, too much emphasis is placed on formal schooling, such as grammar and pronunciation. Interestingly, here pronunciation comes after grammar. Yet the two phenomena are still widely overrated and receive too much attention which would be better invested elsewhere, e.g. for the practice of fluency. I am most disappointed by the percentage that fluency got. It should be the most important issue of an ELT approach whose main goal is communicative competence. What I found surprising, though, is the fact that German interference only came in sixth position. In my experience mistakes like “He wants that his wife accompanies him” arouse teachers’ anger most of all, because they seem to signify a certain
amount of resistance on the part of the student to enter the grounds of the foreign language. In the same vein, it is a pity that idiomaticity received comparatively little attention. Considering that a) EFL is still the target and not ELF and b) interaction with the native speaker rather than any speaker with a different mother tongue is the aim, it is surprising that idiomaticity has such a low standing. That would be a truly useful path towards the end of achieving EFL competence, especially since the teaching of 'chunks' or lexicogrammar is meant to be one concrete element of present-day ELT.

Teaching a whole unit that conveys a particular meaning but that would never translate on a word-by-word basis into German actually seems the most desirable goal. The two issues of idiomaticity and German interference are, of course, directly linked. For the example I used, the proper way to express the desired meaning would be of course “He wants his wife to accompany him”. Teaching this as a chunk would be an attempt at circumventing the whole problem potential. I suppose in reality teachers even do it. All the more, I am surprised by the low figures that these two areas received.

In the model of ELT that I am suggesting, content would of course mainly be the subject of the interaction process. Languagewise, however, fluency and idiomaticity (German interference as its counterpart) would range in the two top positions, backed up by grammar and vocabulary. Pronunciation would not be neglected but would get much less attention. This evaluation cannot but observe that present-day ELT correction, according to the teachers’ self-assessment, needs some readjustment or a new balance of its components.

A most interesting result emerges as one looks at the group of informants who did rank the answers on a scale from 1 to 7, 1 being the topmost priority. They produced a very different picture. Calculating the arithmetic mean brings about the following order: fluency (2.08), content (2.67), pronunciation (2.84), grammar (3.12), vocabulary (3.26), German interference (4.4) and idiomaticity (5.32).

Again, the rubrics of German interference and idiomaticity are considered least important. Thus, they simply seem to be of little perceived relevance for ELT at school. This is great a pity because they ought to receive more attention, for reasons given in the preceding paragraphs. Their lack of attributed importance must be interpreted as a structural deficit of present-day ELT. So the surprise I uttered above has given way to the recognition that this must be a
deliberate decision on the part of the teachers who do not see much point in focusing on these areas. My assessment that it is a pity and should be reversed remains true, though.

The interesting phenomenon is the order of the other components at the top of the scale, which is not congruent with the order they received from those participants who simply ticked the areas without attributing them a rank. The two formal areas of grammar and pronunciation are clearly behind fluency and content in their ranking. That is a good thing at first sight.

Taking the results of both ways of responding to that question into account, one needs to realise that teachers hold on to what they have and what they can do. In other words, they first of all – sensibly enough – dump things that they are not sure of or that they consider too complex. Idiomaticity is such an area that apparently does not get more attention for these reasons. German interference should also get more attention as an error source, because it is just the other side of the same coin.

The second thing we can derive from these results is a vague idea that some of the formal areas do get too much attention in relation to the really important things of communicative EFL teaching. Fluency and content are to be rated more highly than grammar and a certain pronunciation.

3.4.4. Holistic vs. analytic scoring

The aim of this last sub-section of 3.4. is to compare two different modes of marking by testing them empirically for consistency and fairness. These two notions are equal to the essential requirement of reliability that any scoring practice must meet. I will also comment on validity and practicality. The basis of my analysis is provided by the results of the third section of my survey. In it, the participants had to mark a class test. In the section on grading in chapter 3 section 3 I introduced this part of the survey. I will thus refrain from giving another account of the details of the experiment here. It is only important to remember that all informants were given the same text for correction. They also had all received the same outline of the expected results the student was meant to produce in terms of content. The only thing that split the participants into two groups was the marking mode and the instruction sheets on how it worked. One
group was instructed to mark the test holistically and the other one analytically. Unfortunately, only 92 informants provided usable results in this section of the survey. 61 of them marked the test in a holistic manner, while 31 used the analytic mode. For the task of the class test, the script, the instruction sheets and additional material see Appendix 5.

The average mark holistic scoring has brought about is 9.43 points (with 15 being the maximum). The range covered stretches from 13 to 4 points. Figure 33 shows the distribution of marks:

![Marks and holistic scoring](image)

Considering this span of marks, the comments which were provided by the teachers can be expected to be extremely divergent. On a linguistic level they are indeed different, yet not as far apart as they are on the level of content. One teacher who marked it to 13 points wrote: “A good knowledge of vocabulary and grammar rules is shown in parts 2 + 3”. Another one who also gave 13 points stated: “Well done! […] Your English was fluent, natural and you used appropriate vocabulary”, while the one who only gave 4 points commented: “You show some competence concerning the language aspect of your paper. There is a spelling mistake or two and a few mistakes with regard to grammar and expression.” It would not make sense to mention the comments on content here
because they refer to very specific bits and pieces of the script in much detail. It is sufficient to know that very different comments on the content were given.

Divergence is also the prevailing impression one takes home from the results of the holistic rating experiment. The diagram shows a slight clustering at the 10-points mark, but otherwise a fairly even distribution thinning out towards the two ends of the spectrum. The holistic marks display no consistency whatsoever, which was what I had hoped for. Hence my assumption according to which holistic scoring was more reliable and thus fairer has already been toppled before I have even looked at the analytic scoring results. ‘Those could be even more diffuse,’ one might interject at this point. Even so, a span from 13 to 4 can by no means count as consistent, no matter what the opposing model presents as results. Converted into traditional grades in the German school system 13 to 4 covers grades 1 minus to 4 minus, whereby a 4 minus is considered a fail in the final classes.

The average analytic mark at 9.87 points is a bit higher than the holistic one. The analytic results in general, however, proved to be similarly spread out as the holistic results. This time the marks range from 14 to 5 points. Figure 34 shows the distribution:

![Diagram showing marks distribution](image_url)
Unfortunately, the person who gave 5 points did not add a comment. The person just marked the mistakes, counted them, graded the other two categories of style and content and calculated the final grade. The marker who gave 6 points merely indicated that he/she lacked additional detailed information. This person at least criticised a few things on the content level and complained, just as the person who awarded the script 7 points, that the student had apparently learned the words by heart and not used his own. The teacher who gave 14 points for the same class test commented more extensively: “Your style was very good and you are able to use the literary terms we discussed in class. You could, however, try to work with participle constructions and more linkers more often.” It is impossible to establish a useful juxtaposition of comments here. So I will just concentrate on the marks.

Once again the marks diverge widely. The concentration for analytic marks lies at 11 points, with a decline towards both sides and a thinning out at the ends. The most important insight of this experiment, however, is that this correction mode is not in any way fairer or more consistent than holistic scoring. The marks – if converted into classical marks – range from 1 to 4 as well. There is no reliability whatsoever. The objectivity which analytic scoring suggests, since everything can be expressed through numbers, is an illusion. It is created with the help of numbers, which are supposed to remind one of sciences and maths where objectivity is an important and feasible criterion. My examination, however, has brought to light that this procedure is unable to create objectivity. And maybe scientific objectivity is, in fact, the wrong way to approach language assessment. What is definitely needed, though, is fairness, because marks are not merely an assessment of some random piece of writing. They are also perceived as a way of assessing personalities and people. Hence a procedure that guarantees equal treatment is necessary.

At the same time, however, students maybe also desire diagnostic information. Contrary to the popular belief, analytic scoring cannot deliver this, so much has been shown by the analysis. The fact that the participants did not feel obliged to comment with words on a) the grade given and b) the quality of the script allows the inference that analytic scoring results, i.e. numbers alone, are obviously considered to be satisfactorily expressive and explanatory by many teachers. The three grading categories are apparently sufficient for the student to derive a diagnosis of their writing abilities. This is not true, of course. What
information do students obtain if they see their style has received 8 points? If the
8 points are not turned into words there is hardly a chance of knowing what they
mean.

Having said that analytic scoring is unable to provide for the basic
necessities of written assessment, the logical consequence would be to do away
with it. It seems as though the old Churchillian proverb about democracy is
applicable to analytic scoring in this debate: Analytic scoring is the worst form of
scoring, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Not quite. There is another form which is indeed preferable: holistic
scoring. This may come as a surprise. Why should holistic scoring be any better
than its analytic counterpart, considering that it proved to be just as inconsistent?
The results I got from the holistic scorers were inconsistent. At the same time,
however, the results suggested that the actual underlying idea of holistic scoring
had not been fully understood, let alone applied. The idea of holistic scoring is to
argue for a particular mark with the help of the abstract descriptors, ideally in a
global manner. What happened, though, was that the markers rarely referred
back to the holistic scoring guide that I had provided. Neither did most of the
comments or the marks show a direct link to the descriptions for the grade levels
of the scoring guide. Instead, most of the markers split up their comments into
three areas. The three areas were mistakes, style and content, in other words:
the areas that analytic scoring uses nowadays, too. The comments certainly did
make sense, but they could not be consistent because they hardly used the
scoring guide as a basis of reference. So it was more the way in which the
holistic scoring principle had not been applied than the scoring mode itself that
was flawed. Maybe, however, my informants, in fact, understood the system but
as they had not had enough training or experience with it, they were caught
between this system and their traditional one. Or they just lacked the routine
which is necessary to operate this system to make it work according to plan.

If it had been fully understood and presented in training beforehand, I dare
say that the degree of consistency would have been higher, in other words: the
marks that were given would have been closer to one another. But one must be
careful about understanding holistic scoring as a universal remedy to this
problem. Even if holistic scoring is strictly applied, a certain amount of leeway
will, of course, always remain, depending on the individual teacher’s standards.
One indispensable advantage holistic scoring has over analytic scoring as it is practised is its true diagnostic ability. As I stated above, analytic scoring as it is currently practised with its numbers can never deliver any useful information on the student’s writing or language weaknesses, contrary to what many supporters claim. It is, in fact, holistic scoring whose main property and asset is the description of qualities and weaknesses in words. Words immediately tell the person what is good and what is bad.

I would like to end this comparative analysis on a conciliatory note with regard to the two approaches. Holistic scoring can be done in many ways. The way I had my informants do the field study was certainly not the ideal manner of holistic scoring. The descriptors were unified, very restricted and thus very general. So the diagnostic information was truly across-the-board. There was just one mark for the whole script. The diagnostic power of this approach was rather limited. This was done for practical purposes. Instead, one could introduce this one analytic element by creating several categories that are rated in a holistic manner. It should certainly not be the categories that are in place now, but maybe those put forward in the CEF. Then each category would get a holistic mark so that the student could look up what the descriptors say about their qualities in each category. The crucial improvement would be a mark that immediately translates into words. For a holistic scoring guide of that kind, see Appendix 9.

Two other great benefits that holistic scoring entails are validity and practicality. I need not comment on practicality because it is pretty obvious that analytic scoring as it is done today takes ages, especially since the counting of mistakes (and words!) has to be done for each test. Analytic scoring also means going through the script several times. EFL teachers mainly complain about the marking load and its time-consuming nature. For many this is the nightmare par excellence of their job. Holistic scoring, especially once teachers have gained enough experience and routine with it, will be an enormous relief to this.

In terms of validity, holistic scoring with its descriptors is largely superior to its analytic counterpart. Once again, the descriptors which consist of words, i.e. abstract descriptions of what a text is, give immediate information on the quality of a script. The most important aspect with regard to validity is the fact that these descriptors are in place before somebody writes a text. They can be looked up and students will know in theory what they have to do in order to fulfil the criteria.
of a certain grade level. The application of descriptors makes sure that students are tested on what they are supposed to be tested. The analytic scoring system, on the other hand, does not test writing ability or language competence. The counting of mistakes is such an arbitrary business to start with, and provides absolutely no information on writing ability or language competence. From the perspective of validity analytic scoring is not even close to being a match to holistic scoring.

There are obvious limitations to the concept of writing and scoring which I have outlined. Most of these limitations are due to the systemic nature of current ELT. Putting this concept into practice would require a revolution in ELT. The norms which I have suggested mutually depend on one another to a large extent. So does their change. They are considerably intertwined because the model I am suggesting is a comprehensive model strictly oriented towards the goals that are given in the Bildungsstandards and the CEF.

A new concept of writing would require the recognition that it takes time to develop writing skills. It would also entail the recognition that writing is a skill that must be developed as part of a greater scheme in which pupils are led continuously towards a superordinate goal. In detail, this would mean turning away from writing practice which has short-term developments in mind. It would mean turning away from a test practice which abuses writing in order to test various other skills, above all accuracy. It would be impossible to claim that a mark on a written piece of work reflected the quality of the pupil’s communicative competence or writing ability, if this written product had not been preceded by a composition process in the first place. It would not be possible even if the product was scored holistically. If a product lacks the component of the process of composition, i.e. as long as a written piece of work has come into being in the traditional fashion in which the first draft is also the final product, it also lacks the entire dimension of communication and a learning process, the two of which in turn constitute the pillars of ELT at large. So, basically, if one major component is missing the whole model cannot work. But is it either all or nothing?

It is indeed possible to introduce some alterations on a smaller scale without revolutionising the whole existing system of ELT. It would be possible to practise scoring the way I have suggested it in the final years at school when pupils have to write free texts anyway. There would be room for writing as composition, with several stages of revising, feedback and re-writing. And then,
of course, there would be room for holistic scoring. Holistic scoring can also be applied to the traditional timed essays in the final years at school. Another element that could be introduced or further enforced right away throughout the complete system of ELT is to carry out teaching as interaction. From an early age it would be possible to create continual opportunities for the negotiation of meaning. Finally, there would also be the possibility of attempting to accept errors as an integral part of EFL learning. That would in turn enable a far better, especially more positive mistake management which would then prove more effective for the process of language learning.
4. Conclusion – To what extent does teaching practice need an overhaul?

4.1. Teaching revisited – what is appropriate and sensible?

As far as varieties of the English language are concerned, there is little need for criticism on my part. Most teachers concentrate on the two major varieties – British and American English. This is sensible from the point of view of pragmaticism as well as from the point of view of the didactic requirements which are laid out in the document that rules teachers’ everyday lives, the Bildungsstandards.

One tiny area, however, deserves some final comment. When I analysed the survey results which stated the preferred varieties of teaching, I could not help noticing the discrepancy that the informants ascribed to grammar and accent respectively. On the grammar front it was far more consensual to use British English or a combination of British and American English. The area of accent proved to be more controversial. Here American English as a sole feature gained a much larger share, so that accents taught encompass British English, American English or the two combined. I have offered a set of explanations which all boil down to the fact that German teachers of English attribute more importance to accent distinction than to grammar distinction.

Looking at the issue from this empirical angle, accent appears to be a strangely overrated phenomenon, especially in our time, when communicative competence is the top goal teachers ought to be aiming to get across. Instead of putting so much effort into ‘good’ pronunciation, teachers should rather use their classroom time to teach and practise the use of idiomatic units, ideally tied to typical lexical usages with the structure in question. In other words: lexicogrammar!

This advice should not be misunderstood as a call for more formal grammar teaching (in order to even out the misbalance between grammar and accent). Lexicogrammar must be considered a typical concept of communicative language teaching. It can thus only be achieved if grammatical structures are introduced as chunks, i.e. filled with typical lexical units. Those chunks must then be used in interactive exercises to allow acquisition.
4.2. **Correction revisited – what is appropriate, effective and feasible?**

In the following two sections I will make a final assessment of current correction procedures. Here I will look at them through the lenses of varieties of English and judge whether the handling routines of deviations are acceptable in that respect. In order to decide ‘What is good correction?’ one needs to address several aspects. The point of departure for my assessment is, of course, the parameters that I laid out in chapter 2, where I described how the norms of the target language have developed over the past decades. This development must surely have an impact on the correction of learners’ language production. Most likely this would lead to the conclusion that most deviant forms – as long as they are understandable – will have to be counted as correct.

At the same time, however, it would be insufficient for EFL to adopt present-day linguistic approaches that do not provide for any guidelines at all. Teaching EFL at school cannot deal with a purely scholarly approach to language norms. The organisation of EFL teaching at school – even with a strict focus on the acquisition of communicative competence – must follow more pragmatic principles, too. So beside the need to consider descriptive linguistics, error correction must be appropriate, effective and comprehensible. This last aspect of comprehensibility is hard to achieve.

Having been in the teaching business myself for a while now, I have figured out that most students going through the schooling system right now have been brought up with the ‘right’/‘wrong’ pattern in foreign language learning. They can hardly deal with a freer approach to foreign languages. So in this current phase of transition, in which we move from strictly correctness-based EFL learning to the negotiation of meaning in the target language, teachers must fulfil this balancing act to serve the needs of both sides. As soon as they start teaching in beginners’ classes, however, teachers ought to establish the communication-based model from the very beginning so that future students of English will create awareness for the diversity of the target language norms.

In any case my remarks must be read against the background that a) we are in a period of transition as far as EFL teaching is concerned and b) language learners at school need more normative guidance than the empirical linguist at university, solely for pragmatic reasons. For the overall assessment of correction
procedures I will resume the areas which I analysed in my survey: the correction of spoken language, the correction of written language, a glimpse at how deviant structures are in fact treated with the help of specifically chosen forms, and, finally, how grading is handled with the help of a class test.

4.2.1. Spoken Correction

When teachers are asked to state according to which varieties they correct the spoken English of their students the focus is clearly on the two major varieties of British and American English. Again, there seems to be a slightly more distinctive attitude towards the correction of accent than that of grammar. With grammar, teachers seem to allow more leeway: a majority accepts language production as long as it sticks to either of the two major varieties; in accent, where teachers seem to have clearer ideas of the distinctness of their preferred accent, there is less support for the combination of the two. It should be either British or American English with accent.

When confronted with the actual situation of deviation in their students’ speech, a majority of teachers in both cases (i.e. grammar and accent) stated that they would refrain from interfering. Here, however, a deviating accent was looked upon more benevolently, while deviating grammar aroused more suspicion. For these discrepancies in both cases the same reasons can be brought up as in the previous section. There is simply less teacher awareness of grammar differences than of accent differences. At the same time, teachers seem to believe that grammar deviations must be accidental and therefore need to be corrected, while accent deviations come through choice. Even though the first assumption is erroneous, this approach seems to be sensible under the circumstances.

In chapter 3 I interpreted the results as fairly progressive and suggested that an even broader basis of varieties be used for correction of spoken English. Reverting to my remarks from the beginning of this very section, where I insisted on checking all error handling routines for appropriateness and effectiveness too, I would like to reinforce this call for a broader basis, simply for purely pragmatic reasons. Especially with regard to spoken performance, teachers ought to make sure that students work in an angst-free climate where the desire to express their
thoughts is at the heart of it all. If students have the impression that their remarks are continuously checked for errors, they will be very reluctant to speak at all. If a climate of cooperation and mutual interest has been established, it may be acceptable to look at the odd mistake in oral performance, but before this has been achieved, time spent on the correction of oral mistakes is wasted. It should rather be spent on efforts to establish sensible and polite ways of interacting with each other.

An issue that was brought up by some of the participants in the survey deserves some final comment here too: the issue of consistency. Teachers have claimed that they do not mind if students speak a variety that differs from their own, as long as they do it consistently. After a certain length of time and experience in the job, in which I have felt the pressures of sparse time and huge workloads and topics to cover, I dare say that hardly any teacher will have the capacities to check their students’ consistency in the area of varieties. Teachers who take the demand for a high amount of student-centred interaction seriously would do very well to disregard language variation for the benefit of a good classroom atmosphere that encourages students to speak at all. Also, I feel quite sure that many teachers lack the knowledge to determine which structure belongs to which variety, especially in the area of grammar and idiomaticity. They might be able to classify some accent features and thus determine the variety, but rather than wasting their time on ‘correcting’ a student’s utterance for the sake of alleged consistency, they should rather deal with the utterance as a valuable contribution to an ongoing discussion.

These remarks must, of course, be taken with a grain of salt. If the specific exercise that is carried out in class requires the perfect imitation of an American accent, the teacher must certainly correct every single deviation from it. If, however, the exercise is a discussion about plastic surgery, the teacher is well-advised not to pick on utterances that display inconsistency in pronunciation as regards the variety.

Nick Shepherd believes that native-like pronunciation is not only useless but even undesirable. He comments on the issue as follows:

Pronunciation touches very deep chords in the mind. Big implications lie behind weak forms, stress, intonation, rhythm, elision and so on: you can’t produce native-like forms unless you have surrendered in some way to the culture behind the language. [...But] what is wrong with being yourself? We don’t need cheap imitation native speakers [...]; what we need are students who are confident
in their use of language, able to communicate effectively, and happy that their speech will reveal their origins. (Shepherd 2009: 16f.)

I would not go that far. Native-like competence – also in the area of pronunciation – remains a long-term goal, if the native standard is measured by ways of usage-based descriptions (see 2.2.). However, one must remain realistic: at schools, the majority of students will not “surrender in some way to” (Shepherd 2009: 16) English/American culture. The majority will not be future university students, or teachers. Nor will they live in these countries. At schools we have to teach communicative competence; the accent is secondary as long as comprehensibility is guaranteed.

Before concluding this section I would finally like to comment on the general situation in which EFL teaching, and within it more specifically the correction of spoken performance, finds itself as a result of the sociolinguistic variable of age. The survey results have, though weakly, backed up the thesis that older teachers correct in a stricter fashion than younger ones. Older teachers also seem to insist on individual varieties, whereas younger ones allow their students to speak a wider range of Englishes. For a communicative approach to ELT, therefore, the younger teachers seem to be more suited. Should older teachers quit service then? Should they be sent into an early pension scheme? Of course not! Yet considering that the survey can at least claim to show tendencies, one has to acknowledge that older teachers seem to allow for less tolerance towards students’ language production. German schools, which hire their teachers in generational waves, are currently undergoing a period of transition. Those teachers who dominated school life for the past 30 years were hired in the early 1970s. After that time slot, few teachers entered service. Now there is a massive turnover, because these teachers are gradually all reaching their retirement age, so that schools are about to hire many new teachers. Of course, the old ones were trained in a very different way both linguistically and didactically. Some of them may have continued to expand and modify their teaching competence, but they mainly adhere to more formal ways of teaching. So the current transitional period could indeed bear a great potential for implementing the new communicative approach to teaching. Younger teachers or trainees would have to be trained to teach accordingly. Unfortunately, – this I say having just completed the teacher traineeship (i.e. Referendariat) – this is done very hesitantly only.
Thus it would simply be wrong to blame it all on the older teachers and to hail the young ones as the saviours of a new mode of ELT. There are indeed teachers across the board who do not live up to the expectations of communicative foreign language teaching. Among my own colleagues I have met several – i.e. younger ones – whom I involved in a conversation about this thesis project. Some of them expressed that they exercise zero tolerance towards deviating forms of English, even though I specifically pushed them towards examples that simply stem from a different variety than their preferred one.

Even if people raise an eyebrow in doubt, it is important to know that students can also be a tenacious obstacle on the way to adopting the communicative approach to teaching instantly. Especially the older students who have already spent a lot of EFL time with the ‘right’/’wrong’ paradigm, or, worse even, with the threat of being penalised for deviation, strongly believe in the power of correction. They do not even recognise that they keep making the same mistake over and over again, in other words that correction is useless. They just see it as an integral part of the teacher’s job. At the end of the day, one just has to recognise that teachers are only one factor, though an important one, in a highly complex and change-resistant system. In this way, student views also perpetuate the traditional teaching methods. Hence, it is more than a teachers’ issue, it is a systemic problem. But it is one that teachers must tackle! The only way to make a change is to start establishing communicative teaching from beginners’ classes. And even then, it will still require time and patience and the power of conviction to slowly establish variation as an everyday phenomenon that must be part of classroom teaching and correction, especially in spoken language.

4.2.2. Written Correction

Deviation is penalised more strictly in writing than in speaking. That is a good thing! Not only is it necessary to ensure that one’s intended message gets across through the structure one uses, but it is also necessary to write accurately since it is a general consensus that writing ought to be formally correct.

Two aspects, however, should be considered in spite of all this. First, written language is also a mode of communication, in other words the top goal of
providing students with communicative competence stretches to written pieces, too. One implication is that writing competence is more than writing correct texts. It is the ability to convey messages in written form. In today’s world this includes text messages, online chats and emails, where a completely different mode of writing is used than in formal letters, essays, class tests and academic papers. The teaching of writing must thus create an awareness of the wide range of text production opportunities and their individual appropriate language use. And teachers must also understand writing first and foremost as a form of communication whose actual goal is comprehensibility. Looking at writing from this angle would suggest alternative teaching methods to train this competence: e.g. writing conferences, frequent essay writing with teacher or peer feedback. These approaches to the teaching of writing ultimately also contribute to higher degrees of correctness because the sheer amount of practice and the confrontation with the necessities of the different writing modes become internalised. But just to be clear about this issue: simply having students write large amounts of text will not suffice to make them write correctly. The issue of correctness, or appropriateness rather, will have to be focused on whenever text production is practised. Depending on the sort of text, it will have to be emphasised more strongly or less so. Hence, if the practised forms of writing are indeed formal pieces such as academic papers, it will be necessary to draw the students’ attention to language flaws at all times. Less so in emails.

Second, the survey asked for deviation from varieties, so that participants probably imagined a text in which the student mixes British and American English, for instance. It did not ask for a form of deviation such as in errors that are typical of German learners, such as interference errors. Under these premises the answers given provide an insight into too harsh a mindset on the part of the teachers who disapprove of the mixing of varieties. Mixing varieties, however, hardly impairs communication. It may show that students are adopting something like a trans-Atlantic variety, International English as it were, which is very common among young people from all over the world. This, however, is not deficient English. German interference errors, on the other hand, trigger particular annoyance in some teachers because they apparently show the learner’s reluctance to step onto the foreign soil of the target language. If these errors were vigorously marked as wrong it would be more understandable. A mere mix of varieties, e.g. in spelling or lexis, is not reason enough to see
language use as wrong. So here again, I would like to ask for a reduction of correction and instead an increase of awareness raising.

4.2.3. Identifying mistakes

My remarks in the specific section on this were extensive, so there is not much to add. I will just very succinctly resume some major issues. Basically, the assumption that too much is corrected has been supported. The participants in my study have marked considerably more structures as wrong than the editor Stephen Speight, who merely considers linguistic reasons for his assessment. This alone asks for a reduction in correction. I would even like to include pedagogical and communicative criteria in the assessment, which would necessitate the acceptance of even more structures as correct. So, generally speaking, one can safely assume that my thesis of overcorrection is right. At the same time one can safely and without a guilty conscience let students get away with many more forms than one does at the moment.

Beside the aforementioned aspects, this part of the survey brought to light two other problems which are related to the matter of correction. There is a huge discrepancy between the participants as to what is correct and what is wrong. This results from the effort – or the claim thereof – of using linguistic criteria as a basis for correction. Linguistic criteria are, however, the vaguest imaginable basis. They depend on the teachers’ command of the foreign language, their works of reference, their understanding of how a language works, the literature or journalism they read etc. In other words: they are entirely unreliable.

The second issue here, which adds to the problem, is the fact that many teachers are highly reluctant to admit that they are unable to decide whether a structure is right or wrong. They do not want to confess this weakness. Hence, they make a decision based on whatever they can get hold of. This tendency is increasingly existent the older teachers are. So maybe this is another phenomenon which will die out as the oldest generation retires.

In order to get around this problem in the first place, however, I suggest once again using a different set of criteria to assess language: the degree of communicative effectiveness should be a teacher’s guideline when correcting. Taking it from there, other criteria, such as correctness and appropriateness
apply, of course. The descriptors provided in the CEF can serve as a basis for an assessment catalogue. They take all the aspects mentioned into account, – giving most weight to what is most important – so that one has a well-balanced and far more complete notion of language than one would have if one used a system of error counting as a basis for assessment. A system of descriptors, which I have suggested here as a general reference frame, is also the core element for the marking of class tests.

4.2.4. Grading of a class test

I carried out quite a few tests, trying to establish some statistical truths. I set out to explore the relationship between language variation in grammar and accent, the teachers’ age and sex and their marking results, in other words: their strictness and tolerance towards students’ TL use. Despite all efforts, I had to acknowledge that no dependencies could be found between these variables. Most important among all the insights gained here were probably the opaque results in the area of varieties. Far from there being any clear results, one must conclude that it simply does not matter which variety teachers use as a basis for their correction procedures. That is a good result, because the students’ grades do not depend on it.

There have arisen a couple of tendencies that are somewhat interesting. One of them seems to be the tendency for older teachers to give lower grades, i.e. to mark more strictly. At the same time, it was possible to detect a tendency towards greater flexibility among younger teachers. Flexibility here means the concession that they may not know whether to judge a structure as right or wrong. Older teachers seem to disavow this option much more vigorously than younger ones. Negatively interpreted, one might arrive at the conclusion that older teachers force themselves to make a decision whether or not they have the competence, and younger teachers just do not care whether students make mistakes.

On a more positive note, there may also just be different concepts of diligence at work. Older teachers think it is a must to tell the student what is right and wrong, while younger ones may think it is less relevant. I am with the younger ones here, for reasons I have discussed in multiple places all over this
thesis. I will even label the younger teachers’ attitude an ability which ought to be acquired by all teachers. It goes without saying that this is, again, the rule of thumb which ought to be applied in general. Whenever teachers teach or mark focus-on-form exercises they must definitely make a decision about each and every sentence the student produces. If, however, they are teaching and marking a communicative exercise, such as a discussion or a report where the focus is on the contents and meaningful expression, it is advisable to ignore commenting on structures that one does not know to be right or wrong.

The only variable which seemed to show clear results in this area was the mode of correction. That, therefore, is of greater interest and will be finally evaluated in the section below.

4.3. Concepts, habits and modes

In this final section of chapter 4 I will briefly resume the notion of ‘the mistake’. Depending on the idea teachers have of ‘the mistake’, they will probably exercise their specific correction procedures accordingly. In other words, it is the interplay of mistakes and correction that is at the heart of foreign language teaching. It is here I primarily want to home in, to pinpoint where genuinely effective changes could be made. Other areas are interesting, too, and have been dealt with thoroughly, but none is as fundamental and far-reaching as these two areas that are intricately and inseparably linked.

Using the survey data as an instance of comparison I will, if necessary, rectify the existing general ideas of the mistake. My aim is to point out how a simple but useful concept can serve the everyday purposes of modern communicative ELT.

4.3.1. The concept of the mistake and of correction

Mistakes are inevitable and must not be frowned upon. Do they need to be corrected? Yes, occasionally.

If this became the general guideline for how to deal with mistakes, much would be gained. This is surely not a comprehensive view and not a greatly differentiated piece of advice, but it would be fully appropriate as a general
orientation. In any case, students must never be stigmatised when they make mistakes. In general, their interlocutors, mainly the teacher, ought to respond to faulty sentences on the level of the content, in other words: disregard the mistake altogether. If teachers followed this guideline in the majority of cases, they would do a sensible job.

The reasoning behind this simplistic approach is, of course, the underlying concept of the mistake. Mistakes are inevitable during a learning process. They cannot be avoided. Instead they show what step on the ladder of the TL the student has reached. If the utterance requires competence of a level beyond the current one, the student will necessarily not be able to get it right. But one ought to remember that it is in those cases that the student attempts to express thoughts that require more complex linguistic means than those that he/she has at hand at the time. So he/she will automatically aim for the next step on the language ladder. It would, therefore, be sensible to help the student by giving them a firmer grasp of that step of the ladder rather than telling them that their attempt to climb onto it has been faulty. This would surely only increase their insecurity and definitely not contribute to their willingness to perform better.

The image of the language ladder also elucidates the notion of the mistake. Mistakes that are made show the teacher on which step of the ladder the student stands. It is what I earlier called the natural path of SLA. Steps on the ladder cannot be jumped or skipped. Nor can they be taken in a different order than the innate syllabus dictates. Teachers’ responses to mistakes should, therefore, be fine-tuned to meet this recognition.

At the same time, fine-tuning means that there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Using the language ladder as a basis on which we act, there is the need for teachers to get used to acting differently on different occasions. Teachers must intervene when intelligibility is impaired. This goes for both writing and speaking. Intervention should be encouraging rather than destructive. This is the general rule of thumb. In speaking, i.e. during classroom time, teachers must again distinguish between free interaction, in which case only unintelligible utterances should be subject to correction. On all other occasions it is sufficient to focus on the content. If classroom time is spent on focus-on-form activities, all student utterances that are not in accordance with the rules taught in advance must be corrected. In writing – for reasons discussed above – correction must be
handled more strictly, without losing the general aim that communication is most important here as well.

If correction were handled in this manner, students would feel that their attempts at communicating messages in the foreign language were indeed taken seriously. They would retain a positive attitude towards the foreign language and would thus more quickly, and ultimately more successfully, acquire the TL. Most importantly, though, approaching correction like this would also guarantee more functionality. The question as to why EFL teachers correct language performance at all must be answered by saying “to improve the competence of the students.” If we check the success of correction against this goal, we cannot but acknowledge that it has been minimal so far. So, we must a) accept the limits of correction as a means to improve students and b) find ways that optimise the process in some way or other. My suggestions to serve this purpose were put forward in chapter 2 section 5.

With regard to correction, the survey has shown that teachers in fact do believe in that notion. They correct in order to improve the competence of their students. It is slightly problematic, though, that they also believe an improvement in competence means that learners stop making the just-corrected mistake in the future, as they stated in the survey. Good English does not mean error-free English! Instead, the view that correction is a tool to create language awareness ought to become more widespread than it is these days. Awareness instead of perfection! Awareness can trigger so-called self-monitoring, which is a procedure that makes learners reflect on their performance retrospectively. This will eventually lead to higher levels of competence. The idea of immediate improvement should be dropped. Language learning is a long-term process.

Along those lines, teachers ought to view mistakes as indicators of the students’ IL levels. The data of the survey show that indeed teachers do have a fairly good idea as to what mistakes are. The overwhelming majority stated they viewed mistakes as an expression of IL levels. They also considered mistakes necessary implications of language learning. A few misconceptions were expressed too, e.g. that mistakes must be avoided or that they showed the student’s lack of concentration or intelligence. The view that mistakes were an opportunity to discuss language issues was frequently expressed, too. This is definitely a useful idea, especially if that discussion is done agreeably and favourably for the student. In the same vein, though, teachers did not consider it
an option at all to ignore mistakes. This is something I would like to stress here again, though: mistakes must be ignored in many cases! If there is free content-based classroom interaction in the TL, teachers should never interfere. So, this option should definitely be added to a teacher’s repertoire. Other than that, however, the conceptions that teachers have of the mistake seem to be up-to-date.

It is all the more surprising, then, that many teachers still do correct as though mistakes could be eliminated by frequent repetitions and constant pinpointing. Despite all the survey material, this is something that I have witnessed pervasively in everyday school life during my recently completed Referendariat. Of course, hardly any teacher trainee has read a large amount of literature on error correction. Then again, the approach trainees are taught in the Referendariat are close to what I am advocating in this thesis. And yet some trainees just go back to the classroom, disregarding all the didactic theory and just go on correcting in a manner that they experienced when they were students learning EFL. I call this behaviour self-perpetuating bad habits.

4.3.2. Correction habits

In the context of correction habits I was particularly interested in frequency and priority. When interpreting the survey, it soon became clear that teachers nowadays consider the criterion of necessity the decisive one when it comes to correction habits. In a self-assessment a large majority state necessity as the decisive factor that apparently guides them when correcting mistakes in oral performance. That should indeed be regarded as an appropriate way of handling the situation. Better still, teachers should clearly distinguish between two types of teaching situations: formal and informal teaching. In general they name necessity as the trigger for their intervention. When they specify the flexible and vague notion of necessity, they adapt it to the requirements of the teaching situation. In informal teaching situations, i.e. communicative exercises, they claim to intervene only when they cannot understand the student’s utterance, whereas in form-focused classes they claim to correct whenever rules are violated. So if one trusts the self-assessment qualities of teachers, error correction in spoken English is handled sensibly.
My personal experience, though, tells me that in everyday practice teachers still tend to correct their students in unnecessary cases, too. They do not always check their drive to intervene in communicative phases against the factor of necessity. Taking into account the data as well as my experience through observation, I conclude that teachers still correct slightly too often. The amount of class time where negotiation of meaning is exercised must still be increased, which in turn means that the amount of class time where the focus is on errors needs to diminish.

A different picture arises when talking about the frequency of error correction in written English. It springs to mind that most teachers do not consider writing a genuine form of communication. Therefore, they feel it is necessary to correct every single mistake in a script, which is what the overwhelming majority claims to do.

This corroborates my personal experience. Teachers believe that it is necessary to mark as diligently and thoroughly as possible, which translates into the correction of every mistake they notice. I would like to call a halt to this routine. Teachers ought to use their time more sensibly than by spending hours over one script. They ought to mark the most conspicuous and distorting mistakes and just leave the rest as it is. First, it is useless to mark everything, because the student simply cannot take it all in. Second, if the script is covered in red ink it will only be discouraging for the learner. Third, most students do not even read all the remarks teachers scribble in the margins. Fourth, this all would become easier and make more sense if teachers began to comprehend writing as a form of communication, too, where it is priority number one to get across thoughts and ideas. If this was accepted, the rough guideline for marking could once again be intelligibility. The necessity to correct more in writing than in speaking remains untouched by this understanding.

Before I close this section let me just make a few remarks about priorities in the correction process. I was most interested to see in which fields teachers see the greatest need for correction. Though weakly expressed, there still seems to be a tendency to give too much attention to errors that occur on the levels of grammar and pronunciation. Fluency and content should be the centre of attention in ELT classes, especially when dealing with spoken performance. In a wider scope this simply means that quite a few formal teaching situations should give way to informal ones. The latter enable acquisition more smoothly and
successfully. At the same time, this is again a call for the lexicogrammatic approach to teaching the TL in ‘chunks’. This would greatly enhance idiomaticity and thus rid the students of tedious German interference errors.

4.3.3. Correction modes

Despite all the weaknesses that the two modes of correction showed in my experiment, I dare say it is the holistic scoring mode which is far superior to its analytic counterpart. Neither of the two modes showed a higher degree of consistency in marks. However, holistic scoring was, of course, alien to most participants, so that there are no notions of standards by experience as yet. This in turn means it is likely that once this mode has been used for a while, its users will get a better grasp of how to apply it.

What I am saying is that holistic scoring will eventually outperform the analytic mode in the area of consistency as well. Besides, holistic scoring is definitely superior to analytic scoring regarding the two other requirements that scoring procedures must meet: validity and practicality. These two latter issues must not be underestimated. Validity is, of course, the quality that expresses to what extent a scoring process can measure what it is meant to measure. Holistic scoring, where there is a self-explanatory description of each attainable level, thus provides a detailed diagnosis of the script’s strengths and weaknesses. The analytic process lacks this quality altogether. So if teachers abstain from writing individual comments at the bottom of the script, the student will not get any information, useful information that is, on how he/she has performed. Moreover, these comments would not be standardised so that they have no comparative explanatory power. Holistic descriptors are standardised so that students can compare their scripts against external a priori criteria. This benefit would be in the area of reliability, though.

The quality of practicality – from a scholarly perspective probably the least important – is of topmost priority to teachers in everyday school reality. Marking processes have long been identified as the Achilles heel of language teaching in general, simply for devouring so much time and for seemingly having so little impact. Besides, EFL teachers think it is veritably unfair that their workload is so significantly higher than that of science teachers, just because of marking. In this
area, holistic scoring is absolutely unbeatable as opposed to its analytic counterpart. Marking a test holistically means you appreciate it as a whole. It may entail going through it more than once, though once could be sufficient. Analytic marking definitely requires more than one go because calculating the mistake index alone includes counting the words and the mistakes which must have been found before. Only then can the marker look at the content.

Luckily, the school authorities in Baden-Württemberg have at least already realised that holistic scoring is more useful and more practical than the traditional analytic variant. They have, therefore, recently introduced this mode as mandatory for the final exam (i.e. Abitur) scripts, and they advise teachers to mark holistically in the run-up to the Abitur and even before that. So there is some good news. After having completed my first year with an English class in year 12, which has included marking class tests according to the holistic mode, I have already learnt that most colleagues do prefer the new mode, too, for reasons discussed above. Some, especially older colleagues, assert that they still have occasional difficulties and that they are still in the process of getting used to it, but I have not found any significant resistance to this mode among the EFL teachers. One older colleague voiced some criticism of holistic scoring, namely that it was sometimes too vague a procedure. Rating a script against formulations in the descriptors was not watertight, so it was supposedly possible to claim that a certain style or language use was worth 10 points, though it might also be rated at 7 points. Apparently, it was only a matter of explaining the grade well enough to the student. I do appreciate that some people see this as a problem. Then again, however, I put it down to a still existent lack of experience with and mutual exchange about the new marking system.

Thus I reassert my claims made above that it will only be a matter of time, routine and experience until all EFL teachers have adapted well to that mode. Then, I dare say, it will fully live up to its expectations as the superior mode of marking in the areas of validity, practicality and eventually even in the area of reliability.
5. Outlook

5.1. Task-based language learning

In this section of the thesis I will briefly introduce two elements that may serve to meet the requirements of present-day ELT. These elements, however, are not just stand-alone methods that can be applied every once in a while. They require that the change in norms be taken seriously by teachers, and by the authorities at that. A method as such cannot impose much change on such a massive enterprise as teaching. It must, therefore, be embedded in an overall philosophy that breathes the necessary spirit into the methods, or in other words lays the foundation on which these methods can be operated.

The term task-based language teaching is largely self-explanatory. Instead of using an ordered list of linguistic items, which the teacher then presents one after the other and makes the learners practise and reproduce, he or she uses a collection of tasks as the basis of their language teaching. SLA research has proved that setting “tasks encouraging learners to negotiate meaning are healthy for acquisition” (Nunan 2001: 91). These must not be any random tasks, but tasks that require learners to enter the process of negotiation of meaning. Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2004: 39) even go as far as claiming that “the task-based approach is part and parcel of the underlying learning theory of the communicative approach to language learning”. They argue that this is the only way to teach a foreign language with regard to the change in norms that has taken place with the adoption of the goal of achieving intercultural communicative competence in ELT. The aim is to make the pupils negotiate meaning in the target language. This will only occur, furthermore, when the tasks are meaningful to the pupils. It would not suffice to have them carry out any artificially made up exercises because they would simply not identify with what they need to say: “Only meaningful use of the targeted forms will help learners to acquire new language items, that is, integrate them into their grammar.” (Müller-Hartmann/Schocker-von Ditfurth 2004: 46) Obviously, meaningful use of the target language correlates with the pupils’ desire formulated earlier to communicate real meaning.
As I mentioned earlier, SLA research results apply to both classroom and naturalistic learning. They are, furthermore, divided into formal and informal learning. A model of teaching in which opportunities to negotiate meaning are at the centre of classroom activities is in full accordance with the results that certain SLA research has produced. This model of teaching would cover those strands of SLA research that see informal learning as most beneficial. The input-oriented hypotheses, which place meaningful interaction at the forefront of SLA, would agree to this kind of teaching, especially when task-based learning is supported. The output-oriented hypotheses, on the other hand, are put into practice to an equally high degree. Classroom activities which involve meaningful communication on the part of the pupils, which entices them to produce a lot of output, potentially on a topic of which he or she is in control, fully comply with the core results that the output-oriented hypotheses provide.

In summary, pupils would greatly benefit from informal teaching in the way I suggested, at least in terms of those strands of SLA research which see meaningful interaction at the centre. Not only would informal teaching fully comply with the results of SLA research, it would, hence, also serve the paramount goals that the Bildungsstandards or the CEF define. That being the case, does this mean that, after all, there is no room left for formal instruction, if informal teaching seems to cover everything that is necessary? Obviously not, since there is evidence that learners who receive formal instruction learn more rapidly in the long-run and achieve higher levels of competence in the end. The trouble is that formal instruction and interaction are usually considered as mutually exclusive alternatives. Those instructional sequences, however, in which the focus is on form can, at the same time, be sequences in which the teacher and the learners both engage in communication. In other words, the two seemingly opposing teaching strategies are combined into ways of teaching formal items in an interactive communicative way. Before digging into this matter in more detail, I will argue that the general view that the two notions stand in direct opposition to one another appears highly artificial.

In chapter 2 section 3 I discussed possible reasons why it was possible for this distorted view to actually come into being and also why it seems resistant to change. In the preceding section, though scrutinising the issue on a solely linguistic level, I argued that there can be no separation between grammar and communicative competence. On the contrary, the two depend on each other.
Grammar and meaning are by nature inextricably linked, because a person is driven by the wish to communicate an idea, which then needs a certain accurate grammatical structure in order to be transmitted. Even though I am anticipating the result of the discussion which is to follow, I want to point out that, linguistically, there can be no separation between formal grammar and communicative competence. So why should one desperately create such a separation when it comes to teaching? The unresolved question is thus: How can ELT be organised if the view I suggest, in which formal and communicative teaching are to merge, is adopted?

5.1.1. The merging of interactional and formal instruction

The notion which most people involved in ELT still have of formal instruction is one that associates it with a fashion of teaching that is based on a lecture-like presentation by the teacher which keeps the pupils ‘unemployed’ most of the time. Their active part begins afterwards, when they are supposed to practise the item that has been the subject of the preceding lecture. Eventually, they are expected to produce the item. Thus formal instruction still evokes a connotation that does not only involve the teaching of formal items but, primarily, a formal manner of teaching, such as the PPP (presentation, practice, production) approach, which I discussed at the beginning. This is not the intended notion of teaching in my concept. As I have outlined, teaching is primarily meant to be an interactive process. Hence, if the manner of teaching remains interactive, by all means a focus on form in some instructional sequences is highly desirable. Ellis (1990: 94) thus correctly infers that

we need to recognize that teaching intended as formal instruction also serves as ‘interaction’. 'Formal instruction' does more than teach a specific item; it also exposes learners to features which are not the focus of the lesson.

According to this view, instruction is interaction inside the classroom and certainly does not exclude formal language teaching. Form-focused language work is simply a particular kind of interaction. So the notion of formal instruction has shifted. Formal instruction means that the teaching sequence adopts a focus on form, in an interactional manner, though.
Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2004: 101) even bring up another valuable argument as to why a focus on form must under no circumstances be neglected or even skipped:

The institutionalised learning context of the foreign language classroom asks for teacher guidance to improve language awareness and language accuracy because exposure time to the target language is short.

The crucial term is ‘teacher guidance’. In a context in which pupils are meant to achieve competence in a TL, an end which occurs after going through different stages of an interlanguage, there must be a model of orientation, because the first stage of interlanguage is marked by zero competence in the TL in question. So the pupils’ utterances are bound to be highly deviant in the early stages of learning EFL. They will draw on all the resources they possess to produce communication in the foreign language. Even though this is highly desirable because there is supposed to be interaction and as much active involvement as possible on the part of the pupils, the teacher cannot accept any random construction which is entirely deviant from the TL. As the interlocutor with the higher level of competence, which is most probably a stage of interlanguage, too, the teacher will have to assume the role of a model guiding the pupils on their interlanguage path. This nicely ties in with the output-oriented hypothesis of scaffolding. The teacher pushes the pupils to their proficiency limits and beyond, which means he or she ought to “encourage learners to reformulate their own utterances that cause comprehension problems” (Ellis 1990: 127). This also goes in under the general heading of how to organise form-focused instruction without being in conflict with the concept of interaction.

What should have become apparent is that there is no clear cut-off line that separates informal from formal instruction. Whatever the focus of the teaching sequence, whether form-focused or not, teachers and learners have to make an effort to be understood. They develop interactional strategies so that comprehension is ensured. They negotiate meaning.

5.1.2. Incorporating culture

Before concluding this section I would like to raise one final issue which I find extremely important for successful EFL learning and which includes one more SLA hypothesis in a conception of ideal ELT. It is the role the culture of the target
language plays in the whole process of ELT. Königs attributes great significance to the target culture in which the TL is rooted. He suggests “Vermittlungskonzepte stärker dahingehend auszurichten, dass sie die Lerninhalte zielkulturell verankert darbietet (sic!)” (Königs 2003: 438). This concept of teaching which involves the target culture recalls, of course, the acculturation hypothesis, which claims that the closer the learner feels to the target culture the more successful he or she will be in learning the TL. If teachers managed to incorporate the cultural aspect into ELT on top of the concept of classroom discourse, which I outlined above, the results of SLA research on how EFL could be learned ideally, considering the background of the goals that have been defined for ELT, would be put into practice to a truly very high degree.

A way of incorporating this cultural aspect, so that it does not simply appear as an appendix, might be to run a strict TL policy, meaning that no other language except the TL is allowed in class at any time. So the classroom interaction takes place in the TL as the means of communication. It could for instance involve a high degree of colloquial language usage, since this contributes to authenticity in genuine real-life communication. The reason I am discussing this aspect separately is that it does not strictly belong to the dichotomy of input-oriented and output-oriented learning that I covered above. Still, it is too important to be left out.

5.1.3. **SLA as a ‘flower garden’. Understanding ELT as a complex process**

The major recognition that can be gained from the results of SLA and the importance they bear for teaching is the fact that there is no one single theory that entirely captures the process of SLA. The approaches to explain this phenomenon and the implications for teaching are manifold. However, all approaches contain some truth and explain a particular feature of the process of SLA. David Nunan (2001: 91) has managed to press this whole issue into words that can remain almost uncommented, since they concisely and metaphorically illustrate how SLA should be viewed:

Current SLA research orientations can be captured by a single word: complexity. Researchers have begun to realise that there are social and interpersonal as well as psychological dimensions to acquisition, that input and
output are both important, that form and meaning are ultimately inseparable, and that acquisition is an organic rather than a linear process.

He expresses the strong conviction that “the adoption of an 'organic' perspective can greatly enrich our understanding of language acquisition and use” (Nunan 2001: 91). I find this metaphor more than appropriate and, therefore, suggest transferring it to a classroom context for EFL teaching. Nunan (2001: 91f) goes on to explain that

without such a perspective, our understanding of other dimensions of language (such as the notion of ‘grammaticality’) will be piecemeal and incomplete, as will any attempt at understanding and interpreting utterances in isolation from the contexts in which they occur. The organic metaphor sees SLA more like growing a garden than building a wall. From such a perspective, learners do not learn one thing perfectly one item at a time, but learn numerous things simultaneously (and imperfectly). The linguistic flowers do not all appear at the same time, nor do they all grow at the same rate.

An adoption of this view for the classroom context, as it seems to me, would not only do justice to the area of SLA, but also to the new understanding of ELT at school. ELT in secondary education in Germany used to be marked by a high degree of concentration on grammar. Grammatical accuracy, as one specific kind of formal accuracy, used to be of highest priority. Above all, the teaching of English used to be considered a “linear” process, assuming that an item that has once been taught has certainly been acquired, too. The new understanding of ELT, however, as the Bildungsstandards require, as the corpus-based notion of standard English demands and as the results of SLA confirm, exactly matches the image of the flower garden, in which organic structures live a life that is to some degree, though a limited one, controllable by the gardener.

In summary, the picture of ideal ELT that has emerged at this stage is best described by the terms – other than “organic” – multidimensional and complex. For reasons of clarity I will once more break down the components which constitute the complex concept of ELT these days. Three components have been touched upon and need to be considered when designing ideal present-day TESOL:

1. The goals that have been formulated and laid down in the relevant pieces of legislation. They determine the results that follow.
2. The question of standard English. Corpus linguistics allows one to determine a fairly reliable description of the notion of standard, which is
quite different from what used to be considered standard. This has highly relevant implications in two major areas in ELT, i.e. teaching and marking:

*Is the English that teachers teach also the English that is used in reality? What are the criteria that teachers use to decide whether an item is right or wrong?*

3. The area of SLA. In order to teach as efficiently and successfully as possible teachers need to be aware of the way in which a foreign language is learnt best.

Having arrived at this intermediate record I will move on to an area on which I will focus in the further context of this thesis: written work. Against the background I have explored so far, I will now discuss one specific field which is part of any EFL education, namely the area of writing.

### 5.1.4. ‘Bilingual’ Teaching

Finally, I will briefly sketch another approach that serves the needs of present-day EFL teaching. Its benefits for the acquisition of communicative competence in the target language and culture are undoubted. In Germany it has become known as *bilingualer Sachfachunterricht*, which means teaching a subject – other than a foreign language – bilingually. In a certain way, this label is misleading because this kind of teaching is not done bilingually at all, i.e. by switching back and forth between two languages. On the contrary, the content of the subject is negotiated steadily in the target language. English is thus the conference and working language for these subjects. In English it has hence become known as content-and-language-integrated learning (CLIL). Other labels are available too.

Frank Haß offers a brief introductory synopsis of the phenomenon:

> Bilingualer Sachfachunterricht, kurz BILI, bedeutet nicht etwa zweisprachig geführter Unterricht. BILI, auch CLIL, TCFL oder EAA, bezeichnet den Unterricht eines Sachfaches mit Unterrichtssprache = Fremdsprache, meist Englisch oder Französisch. (Haß 2006: 62)

At German schools nowadays this kind of teaching is organised according to different models. There are full-fledged CLIL departments which offer bilingual classes from the beginning of the fifth grade until students reach the *Abitur*. Though rare, this seems to be a model that is continually gaining ground. The other form that is being implemented is by ways of temporary CLIL units every
now and then by teachers who have had the necessary training. These programmes are called ‘islands’ or modules.

Die ‘fremde’ Sprache kommt für eine begrenzte Zeit (zwischen 2-6 Wochen) als Arbeitssprache in einem themenzentrierten und of auch fächerübergreifenden Unterrichtsvorhaben zum Einsatz. (Zydatiß 2007: 34)

CLIL departments or programmes are mainly on offer for the humanities. Sciences have been less popular for CLIL teaching so far.

5.1.5. A theory of CLIL

There is constant dispute over the question as to where CLIL has to be located in the didactic arena. Different adherents see it as serving different purposes. Helmut J. Vollmer (2005: 57ff.) has listed the three aims that CLIL can possibly attempt to achieve:

a) Bilingualer Unterricht als Erweiterung des fremdsprachlichen Lernens
b) Bilingualer Unterricht als Fachunterricht in der Fremdsprache
c) Bilingualer Unterricht zwischen inhaltlichem und sprachlichem Lernen

The adherents of the individual subjects would like to uphold the supremacy of the subject, e.g. history, political science etc. They believe CLIL should be nothing but teaching the subject in a foreign language, with a clear focus on the scholarly approach to the subject. Foreign language teachers, on the other hand, cannot but notice the language competence benefits that this kind of teaching brings along, because it enables the acquisition of fluency and vocabulary in an informal setting. Others take a more compromise-oriented view by seeing CLIL as being located somewhere inbetween.

I will follow the third view here. I understand that teachers who primarily teach history – and maybe not even a foreign language at all – are afraid of losing a reasonable basis for achieving the aims of their specific subject. They rightfully claim that history is of significant importance in its own right. At the same time I acknowledge that CLIL – whether some people like it or not – massively contributes to an increase in competence on the part of the TL learners. I would, therefore, suggest a theoretical basis that names intercultural communicative competence as the primary goal of CLIL. This view would definitely take into account the fact that CLIL positively shapes the learners’
competence of the TL. It would, on the other hand, necessitate the view that all reality is linguistically encoded. There is no objectivity outside the self. And the self can only voice his/her notions of the world through language. Seemingly objective truths can only be established if many selves share the same notions. Therefore, the negotiation of and eventual agreement on certain meanings and notions is essential for all conveyance of input in teaching processes. It is this particular core issue that makes CLIL an ideal way of putting into practice the goals of present-day EFL teaching.

This was laid down in more detail by Stephan Breidbach in a contribution to the bilingual debate in 2005. In it he describes how the use of language creates our notion of reality:


This is fully congruent with the view that meaning is created through negotiation processes, which is a general principle that also rules the entirety of EFL teaching in a communicative mode. CLIL seems to be a method that can do justice to this principle to a high degree.

[Bilingualer Sachfachunterricht könnte somit zu einem Ort werden; HE], an dem die Diskursivität von gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit auf der einen und die Sprachlichkeit von Diskursivität auf der anderen Seite verhandelt werden können. (Breidbach 2005: 173)

On top of that, theorists of CLIL emphasise the importance of cultural awareness of the target culture for success in acquisition. In the context of SLA theory I have already stressed the newly acknowledged necessity for the inclusion of culture into the EFL learning process so that here again, there is fundamental support for the approach to EFL teaching which has been championed. CLIL demands that varying perspectives be taken by the learner so that they assess issues from different angles, thus develop profound acceptance and understanding of foreign cultures and habits by seeing through the eyes of the speaker of the TL. To illustrate the potential of perspectivisation that CLIL offers, Wolfgang Hallet introduced the so-called bilingual triangle. CLIL will enable students to create meaning in a linguistically appropriate manner about three spheres of life and society:

I. über ihre eigenen Erfahrungen, ihre eigene Lebenswelt und ihren eigenen Kulturraum (z.B.
By assuming the different perspectives, the learner’s mindset is supposed to gain new dimensions that greatly enhance cultural awareness. In the negotiation process of the issues under discussion, the learner will pick up target language competence more or less as a side-effect. It is inevitable that they will pick up new structures and lexicogrammatical items, because those are necessary for the learner to create the desired meanings of the target culture. At the same time, it is just as inevitable that one will acquire new structures to express phenomena of one’s own culture when wanting to communicate those to a native speaker of the TL community as precisely as possible.

The idea on which the bilingual triangle rests is rooted in the belief that language builds reality. And a foreign language thus builds a foreign reality. (cf. Hallet 1997: 7) I would like to close this section with another explanation by Stephan Breidbach, who clearly illustrates the constitutive character of the discourse with particular regard to culture:

Die Auffassung von der Konstituierung von Kultur(en) im diskursiven Vollzug beinhaltet ein apriorisches Bewusstsein von kulturellen Differenzen und Zuschreibungen als Konstrukte. Eine um interkulturelles Lernen bemühte Didaktik hätte demnach zu berücksichtigen, dass bereits das lernende Handeln die Teilnahme an eben derjenigen diskursiven Praxis darstellt, die den Lerngegenstand überhaupt erst konstituiert. (Breidbach 2005: 173)

This explanation contains two significances which give teachers specific advice on how to act in CLIL classes: a) CLIL is action-oriented and b) language errors are irrelevant. In a final section I would like to outline a few specifics for the CLIL classroom, touching upon the two aforementioned ones as well.
5.1.6. How is it done?

Basically, one should assume, CLIL just means teaching a subject, other than the foreign language itself, in the foreign language. And basically, this is true. Still, there are a few implications that must not be neglected.

In CLIL the foreign language is never the subject of teaching, but only a tool to fulfil the aim of teaching. It should thus never be the subject of testing and grading as such. Certainly, there is a correlation between the command of the TL and the quality of output on the part of the student, but this is only because effective communication is easier if the command of the TL is good. If, however, students make strong efforts at communicating their ideas in the TL by using flawed structures, reformulation and the odd gap filling with the help of the mother tongue, they must never receive lower grades than students whose language command is considerably higher but whose content is at the same quality level. The assessment of content is at the centre of attention in CLIL, not that of language.

The most significant implication of this fact is, of course, the status of the mistake. It should not play any role at all. In CLIL, the dividing line between right and wrong in language matters truly is intelligibility. I have suggested this as an orientation mark for regular EFL teaching, too. Here, however, it is an absolute and immovable criterion. In EFL teaching there are certain restrictions to this principle, which I have repeatedly explained and stressed throughout this thesis. CLIL teachers, on the other hand, enjoy the desirable benefit of not having to deal with language mistakes at all, unless they destroy the intended meaning. In that case, there must be some kind of intervention, best exercised as a negotiation process in which the student gets new chances to utter their ideas in the TL.

There are a couple of principles which must be considered when teaching a subject as CLIL. Gunther Volk (unpubl.) has drawn up a list of these which has not been published and which could only be accessed by me when I was participating in one of his courses.

The most important principle – in my view – is message-before-accuracy. It simply means that student contributions must not be checked for correct use of language but for the content they try to get across. This has been
explained extensively above and throughout the whole thesis, so I will not dwell on it any further.

While EFL courses usually follow a progressive order that gradually builds up language competence especially in the area of vocabulary, CLIL does not offer this option. The syllabus is determined by the subject that is taught through the foreign language. Thus it is very likely that students will come across specific or technical terminology that is way beyond their current IL level. It is, therefore, imperative to progress along the lines of a bit-by-bit approach that works with significant simplifications. Little steps must be taken, ideally by tying the material taught to the students’ everyday world. Alongside the principle of student orientation it is useful to work with visualising techniques that secure student comprehension on a second channel next to the linguistic one.

In order to achieve active participation on the part of the students, CLIL teachers must always provide communicative means for the students, ideally as speech units that serve the lexicogrammatical view of acquisition. This is called the input-before-output principle.

Wishing to avoid getting into too much detail here, I would finally like to mention one last principle: in reference to Butzkamm’s “enlightened monolingualism” it has been labelled enlightened bilingualism. It allows the use of the mother tongue to serve certain functions. In my view this perfectly ties in with the concept of plurilingualism that I introduced towards the beginning of the thesis. Students are supposed to draw on any available resources to create meaning. Plurilingualism, as it is explained in the CEF, is a cornerstone of CLIL because it has in mind exactly the kind of speaker that present-day EFL teaching aims to produce: an international, linguistically proficient individual that calls him-/herself at home in the world.
6. Appendices

6.1. Appendix 1: The Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was given to all participants to fill out. It was the core of the survey.

The research is geared at finding out more about current habits and practices of English language teachers at German ‘Gymnasien’, especially with regard to error correction. The goal is to gather reliable and valid data on types and varieties of feedback as practised today. Please read the questions and explanations carefully, especially when you have the impression that questions seem to appear repetitively. They are indeed directed at different specific fields such as, for instance, the distinction between the correction of oral and written performance or the distinction between accent and grammar.

Please fill in the following questionnaire spontaneously. It should not take you longer than 30 minutes. Tick only one box per question unless it says that several answers are possible.

I. Section: Information about the informant

- Native speaker of
  - German
  - English
  - Other

- Gender
  - Male
  - Female

- Age group
  - Below 35
  - 35-45
  - 45-55
  - 55+
II. Section: Standard English

- What is the (national) variety of English according to which you teach English as a foreign language? Please distinguish between grammar and accent/pronunciation. Please note: this is meant to be an introductory and fairly general question. The same question will appear again, then focusing on finer differentiations, such as between oral and written performance. (If one single variety is not sufficient you may tick a combination.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Accent/Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard English (British)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard English (American)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>South African English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give reasons for your choice of answer. (If you wish you may add other comments):

- How do you find out whether a structure or expression is in accordance with that variety? (Several answers possible.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I rely on my personal competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I check a monolingual dictionary, such as the OALD, DCE etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I google it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a corpus, such as the BNC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask a non-native speaker colleague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask a native speaker (colleague or other)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is your general notion of ‘mistake’? (Several answers possible.)

- A sign of the student’s carelessness
- A sign of the student’s lack of concentration
- A necessary step on the student’s path towards mastery of the target language
- An indicator of the student’s level of competence in the target language
- Something to be avoided under any circumstances
- Something to be ignored
- Something to be discussed
- Something to be encouraged
- Other (please specify):

III. Section: Correction of oral performance

What is the (national) variety (i.e. grammar) of English according to which you correct oral performance in class? (If one single variety is not sufficient you may tick a combination.)

- Standard English (British)
- Standard English (American)
- Australian English
- New Zealand English
- South African English
- Indian English
- Scottish English
- Irish English
- International English
- Other (please specify):

Please give reasons for your choice of answer:

What do you do if a structure or expression is not in accordance with that variety but clearly understandable?

- I correct it
- I do not correct it

Please give reasons for your answer:
• What is the *accent/pronunciation* according to which you correct oral performance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give reasons for your choice of answer:

• If a student chooses to speak a different accent and variety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I correct him/her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not correct him/her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give reasons for your answer:

• Do you conduct your classes entirely in the target language?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5 – 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8 – 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11/12/13</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give reasons for your answer:
• According to your own impression, how often do you correct oral performance in class? Tick one box on the following continuum.

| I correct every mistake                                                                 |
| I do not correct every mistake but rather frequently                                   |
| I correct about half of all mistakes                                                    |
| I only correct a mistake if I think it is necessary                                    |
| I rarely correct oral performance                                                      |

• When, do you think, is it necessary to correct oral performance
  a) in free class interaction? Tick one box on the following continuum.

| Always, i.e. for every deviation from any known rule                                     |
| When the utterance violates a rule that I taught                                       |
| When the utterance is not in accordance with Standard English or some accepted variety |
| When the intelligibility of the utterance is inhibited                                  |
| Correction is unnecessary                                                               |

Please give reasons for your answer:

b) in focus-on-accuracy/pattern drill classes? Tick one box on the following continuum.

| Always, i.e. for every deviation from any known rule                                     |
| When the utterance violates the rules I taught                                         |
| When the utterance is not in accordance with Standard English or some accepted variety |
| When the intelligibility of the utterance is inhibited                                  |
| Correction is unnecessary                                                               |

Please give reasons for your answer:

• When providing feedback on oral performance, what do you focus on? (Several answers possible. You may rank them. 1 = topmost priority)

| Pronunciation                          |
| Fluency                                |
| Content                                |
| Grammar                                |
| German interference                    |
| Vocabulary                             |
| Idioms                                 |
- **What is the aim of correction?** (Several answers possible.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To create awareness of mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create awareness of the language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enhance self-monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To penalise the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the students’ competence in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make students avoid the mistake in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide information for the entire class so that they all gain from the mistake made by the classmate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Your impression: When you have corrected a mistake, the likelihood of the student making the same mistake again is**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80% or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% or lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **What is a mistake in oral performance?** (Several answers possible.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s carelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s lack of concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sign of the student’s lack of intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A necessary step on the student’s path towards mastery of the target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An indicator of the student’s level of competence in the target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be avoided under any circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be ignored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to be encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Section: Correction of written performance

- What is the (national) variety (i.e. grammar) of English according to which you correct written performance? (If one single variety is not sufficient you may tick a combination.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard English (British)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard English (American)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give reasons for your choice of answer:

- How do you find out whether a structure or expression is in accordance with that standard/variety? (Several answers possible. You may rank them. 1 = first priority)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I rely on my personal competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I check a monolingual dictionary, such as the OALD, DCE etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I google it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use a corpus, such as the BNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask a non-native speaker colleague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask a native speaker (colleague or other)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What do you do if a structure or expression is not in accordance with that standard but clearly understandable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I mark it wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not mark it wrong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please give reasons for your answer:
There are two major types of scoring, analytic scoring (i.e. going through the script several times, each time marking a different category; each category receives an individual mark; the overall mark of the script evolves as a weighted balance of the categorial marks) and holistic scoring (i.e. rating a script as a whole against a set of descriptors that, in an abstract manner, determine the quality of texts). I prefer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic</th>
<th>Holistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please give reasons for your answer:

- In a script I correct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Every mistake</th>
<th>Not every mistake but most of them</th>
<th>About half of all mistakes</th>
<th>A mistake only when it is necessary</th>
<th>I hardly correct any mistakes at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please give reasons for your answer:

- If a mistake occurs repeatedly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I mark it the first time it occurs</th>
<th>I mark it every time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- What in your view counts as a mistake in a written script? Tick one box on the following continuum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anything that deviates from what I taught</th>
<th>Anything that deviates from the grammar book I use for teaching</th>
<th>Anything that deviates from Standard English or some accepted variety</th>
<th>Anything that is unintelligible</th>
<th>Any structure that has never been used before, i.e. that cannot even be found in Google</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
- **What grammar book(s) do you consult for teaching?** (Several answers possible. If you use others additionally or exclusively you may enter them in the box provided.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Klett – Learning English Green Line NEW (Grammatisches Beiheft)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornelsen – English G21 (Grammar File in the <em>Nachschlageteil</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langenscheidt – Real English Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langenscheidt – Live English Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **If I do not manage to verify or falsify a structure for sure**

| I mark it wrong |
| I accept it |

Please give reasons for your answer:

- **If a student produces a complex sentence/structure that contains mistakes but is understandable**

| I penalise him/her for making mistakes (i.e. count it as a mistake against the grade) |
| I reward him/her for running the risk (i.e. do not count it as a mistake against the grade) |
| Other (please specify): |

Please give reasons for your answer:

Thank you very much for your cooperation!!! 😊
6.2. **Appendix 2: The “Right or Wrong” Questions**

This questionnaire was also given to all participants of the survey.

**Right or wrong?**

Imagine the following sentences and structures appear in a script you have to mark. Decide whether there is a mistake in the structure in question and, if so, categorise it, please (i.e. grammar, expression/lexical mistake, punctuation etc.). If there is no mistake just put down ‘No’, and if you are unable to decide fill in ‘Can’t say’.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Error? yes / no / can’t say</td>
<td>Type of error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>This is the first and last time I go roller-skating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What do I do now?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>People who are flying for the first time often try to get a window seat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>So no mortal can make him abdicate and no other than him has the right to wear the crown.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The people of the Elizabethan Age also thought that God chooses the rightful King and helps him to deal with difficulties at all times.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>His reaction was somewhat forceful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The government made great efforts to better integrate ethnic minorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>You shouldn’t leave your bike outside when it is raining.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>There are many friends at the festivities they celebrate in this tall house.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>His friend, however, didn’t see that movie yet.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>But with the birth of their fifth child their whole life takes a radical change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Both Mr Uppingham and the tramp like their life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I have done a boat ride.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Let’s have our meal before they begin with their noise.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Somebody is out of their mind.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>She made her husband write them how grateful she was.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I had a good time in the cinema.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>The idea is that the children talk a lot.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>He knocked on the door.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>In order to know what it means to be unemployed one must make this experience oneself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Tourism means also a danger to the Australian way of life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Would you like to have such a bike?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>From my point of view, violence is always the wrong means to an end.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>He ended up having great difficulties trying to adjust to life in Jamaica.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>They think that it is the wrong way to go.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Looking at the article, about the first thing one notices is the determined tone the author uses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>The authors of this article want to show the flip-side of a booming economy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Most of the participants in that protest march were rightists engaging in the issue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Lucentio and Petruchio, however, come to Padua, one to continue his education, the other to experience life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Once again only the negative is mentioned.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have filled in “Can’t say” more than 15 times, could you briefly explain why you find it difficult to make a clear decision?
6.3. **Appendix 3: Results of the teaching of varieties with regard to age and sex**

What is the national variety of English according to which you teach EFL grammar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>BrE and International</th>
<th>BrE, AmE and International</th>
<th>British and American</th>
<th>International English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is the national variety of English according to which you teach EFL grammar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>BrE and International</th>
<th>BrE, AmE and International</th>
<th>British and American</th>
<th>International English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 plus</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4. **Appendix 4: The Class Test**

The following material is a class test which was written by a student in year 12 at a German Gymnasium. It was the script that had to be marked by every participant. Depending on whether it had to be marked holistically or analytically, the participants received the respective instructions, which can be looked up in appendices 6 and 7. Below the text, one finds prefabricated boxes that already indicate which procedure was required. They had to be filled out. Participants only received either the holistic one or the analytic one. Here both are provided.

Ernest Hemingway, *The End of Something*

Tasks:

1. Write a summary in not more than 90 words.
2. Analyse the relationship between Nick and Marjorie.
3. Explain why this story can be considered a story of initiation. Compare it with the other stories we have read. (Note for external marker: Other stories were e.g. Hemingway’s *Indian Camp* and de Maupassant’s *The Grave*).

1. In Hemingway’s short story “The End of Something” Nick and Marjorie go out to do some fishing near the former mill. When they get out of the boat, they start a fire. Marjorie thinks that Nick behaves rather oddly that night. Firstly Nick hesitates to say something when asked but later he admits that he thinks that their relation “isn’t fun any more”. So Marjorie takes the boat alone and rows back. In the end Nick who seems depressed is still at the fire when Bill, whom he advises to go away turns up for a moment.

2. You can already see in first few sentences of their dialogue that something is wrong with Nick. Marjorie says or asks something and Nick answers with the same words e.g. “Can you remember when it was a mill?”, “I can just remember.” He doesn’t try to start a conversation himself because their relation has lost its meaning to him. On the other hand Marjorie is still in love with him. She tries to get the conversation going and wants to know the problems Nick has got. She shows that she cares about Nick especially when she asks him: “What is the matter, Nick?” In the first place he isn’t sure whether to say something or not, so he conceals his thoughts. Later when Marjorie asks him again and again he suddenly says that their relation had lost importance to him and that “it isn’t fun
any more.” Marjorie reacts very calmly and lets him give his reasons. Afterwards she asks if love isn’t fun. As Nick just replies with a short “No” Marjorie takes the boat and sets off. From then on it appears to me that Marjorie has accepted Nick’s decision. To sum it up I would say that their relationship existed only from Marjorie’s point of view in the end.

3. It can be considered a story of initiation because one person in this case Marjorie undergoes a process that leads her from innocence to experience. She experiences how abruptly love can be over. She also makes the painful discovery of the disparity between appearance and reality. As all the stories of initiation this one culminates in recognition or an insight namely Marjorie gets to know the other side of Nick.

Although there are some aspects that indicate it is a story of initiation I would say it is not a typical one. Normally the protagonist belongs to the transitory phase of adolescence or childhood which we don’t know in this story. In the stories we read like “Indian Camp” or “The Grave” the protagonist was also the initiate, but in this story I would consider Marjorie the initiate although Nick is obviously the protagonist. We also do not have any internal action in this story which was part of all the other ones. We don’t know any of the thoughts Marjorie and Nick have.

Words: 486

For the analytic result:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy (Fehlerindex):</th>
<th>(50 %)</th>
<th>Overall mark:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Style (Stil/Ausdruckvermögen):</td>
<td>(10 %)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents (Inhalt):</td>
<td>(40 %)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments/Feedback for the student:
6.5. Appendix 5: Holistic Scoring Instructions and Guide

The following remarks are the introductory instructions that participants were given for the marking process. Below there is the scoring guide that had to be used as a basis for assessment.

Marking a class test holistically

What is this about?
- In this part of the experiment you are asked to mark and grade the attached text as though it was a class test from a student in one of your ‘Oberstufe’/‘Kursstufe’ classes.

Detailed instructions
- Please, mark it **holistically** using the attached scoring guide. Holistic scoring means giving one single grade to a script. It is, however, not any random grade that comes to mind as a result of the general impression the rater has of the script. The rater must be able to explain and justify his/her mark by referring to the descriptors of the holistic scoring scale. The rater must decide which descriptors can be applied to the text. It may be the case that the rater thinks the script fits one grade for the majority of descriptors but another (one grade up or down) for one single descriptor. Hence I allocated one descriptor to a grade level (e.g. 9, 8, 7) rather than to each individual grade in order to give the rater a certain amount of leeway in the final assessment of the script.
- Thus the decision-making process as regards the grade will consist of two steps. First, the rater decides – using the descriptors as a basis – which grade level the script fits. In a second step he/she has to decide whether individual aspects of the script exceed the descriptors or fall short of them. Depending on that he/she can either raise or lower the grade by one point.

How can I assess the content?
- Obviously this is an experimental situation in which you (as the actual rater of the script) cannot be aware of what has been done in class before this test and what the focus was on. In order to give you an idea as to what has been done in terms of contents during class time preparing for this test, please read through the attached ‘Erwartungshorizont’.
- Not only can this fill you in as to what the teacher has laid emphasis on during class time, it can also help you to decide whether the student has addressed the right issues etc., i.e. help you to decide upon the final grade.
- Please bear in mind that, of course, the ‘Erwartungshorizont’ is extremely comprehensive and addresses the tasks in an ideal manner.

Final steps
- Below the class test I provided a box for one mark only. Please, give only one mark. In the ‘Comment/Feedback’ section you may explain your decision by referring back to the scale. When rating, mistakes may be marked, but – crucially – they are not counted because there is no single grade category for mistakes.
Holistic Scoring Guide

The following scoring guide is modelled on the scoring guide which is used to evaluate the TOEFL Test of Written English. It was published in the book by Liz Hamp-Lyons, *Newbury House TOEFL Preparation Kit, Preparing for the Test of Written English*. This TWE Scoring Guide is almost used as a rubric for a summative score because it doesn’t specifically identify strengths and weaknesses. I adjusted it so that it can be used as a holistic scoring guide for rating scripts of 12th and 13th grade students at German ‘Gymnasien’. Please use this as a basis for rating the attached script (pages 2+3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Clearly demonstrates competence on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both. A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Demonstrates incompetence in writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A paper in this category is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses: 

- failure to organise or develop
- little or no detail or relevant specifics
- serious and frequent errors in usage or sentence structure
- serious problems with focus

A paper in this category will contain serious and persistent writing errors, may be illogical or incoherent, or may reveal the writer’s inability to comprehend the question. A paper that is severely underdeveloped, or one that exhibits no response at all, also falls into this category.
6.6. **Appendix 6: Analytic Scoring Instructions and Guide**

The following remarks are the introductory instructions that participants were given for the marking process. Below there is the scoring guide that had to be used as a basis for assessment.

**Marking a class test analytically**

**What is this about?**
- In this part of the experiment you are asked to mark and grade the attached text as though it was a class test from a student in one of your ‘Oberstufe’/‘Kursstufe’ classes.

**Detailed instructions**
- Please, mark it **analytically** using the attached scoring guide. Analytic scoring is the manner in which foreign language scripts are graded nowadays at German ‘Gymnasien’. It means going through the text several times and allocating an individual grade to the categories accuracy, style and contents. Eventually the rater arrives at the final grade by weighting the three individual grades depending on the percentage set for that category and then dividing that figure by 100. For further details, please see the scoring guide. Please, use this scoring guide in order to guarantee reliability, even though you might be teaching in a ‘Bundesland’ or at a school that uses a slightly different one.

**How can I assess the content?**
- Obviously this is an experimental situation in which you (as the actual rater of the script) cannot be aware of what has been done in class before this test and what the focus was on. In order to give you an idea as to what has been done in terms of contents during class time preparing for this test, please read through the attached ‘Erwartungshorizont’.
- Not only can this fill you in as to what the teacher has laid emphasis on during class time, it can also help you to decide whether the student has addressed the right issues etc., i.e. help you to decide upon the contents grade.
- Please bear in mind that, of course, the ‘Erwartungshorizont’ is extremely comprehensive and addresses the tasks in an ideal manner.

**Final steps**
- Below the class test I provided boxes for the individual marks only. Please, give one mark for each category and then proceed from there as explained above and in the scoring guide. In the ‘Comment/Feedback’ section you may add further comments.
Analytic Scoring Guide

1. The first area to assess is accuracy (‘Fehlerindex’). The table below is used in one German ‘Bundesland’ in order to rate ‘Oberstufe/Kursstufe’ and ‘Abitur’ scripts in English in the category of accuracy. Please, use it as a basis for rating the attached script in this area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fehlerindex in %</th>
<th>Notenpunkte</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0,0 – 0,2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0,3 – 0,6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0,7 – 1,0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,1 – 1,3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,4 – 1,6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,7 – 1,9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,0 – 2,2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,3 – 2,5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,6 – 2,8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,9 – 3,1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,2 – 3,4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,5 – 3,7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,8 – 4,0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,1 – 4,3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,4 – 4,6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mehr als 4,6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reminder of how the figure of ‘Fehlerindex’ comes into being: multiply the mistakes you marked by 100 and divide that figure by the number of words of the script. Then look up the mark for the category ‘Fehlerindex’ for that figure in the above scale.

2. When rating the style (‘Ausdrucksvermögen’/’Stilnote’), use the standards you usually apply, i.e. the way you normally make up style grades when marking real scripts. The only guideline can be very general: readability and clarity must be relevant criteria. If these are impaired and contents cannot be inferred, the grade for this category must drop below the pass mark.

3. For rating the third area, i.e. that of content, use the attached key word analysis (page 5) as a guideline. This is a kind of ‘Erwartungshorizont’ that is meant to make up for the fact that you cannot know what has been done during class time, what the focus was on and what can therefore be expected from your students. Thus, use this detailed analysis to bring yourself ‘up to date’ as to what has been subject of classes in the run up to this test. Of course, the ‘Erwartungshorizont’ is extremely comprehensive and addresses the tasks in an ideal manner. Hence, if a student mentions most of the issues touched upon, he/she should be scoring 15 points in this category. Against this background it is up to you to decide upon the final grade in that category for the attached script.

Final assessment:

Eventually, the three grades are weighted as follows:
- Accuracy makes up 50 %
- Style makes up 10 %
- Content makes up 40 %
of the overall grade.

Therefore, you’ll have to multiply the three grades with their respective percentage and divide the sum of the three resulting figures by 100. (Imagine, for example, the grades were accuracy 9, style 9 and contents 11 points => 9x50 + 9x10 + 11x40 = 980 => 980/100 = 9,8 => the final grade would thus be 10 points)
6.7. **Appendix 7: Gender and the correction of written work**

The bar chart below provides an overview on how the sexes differ in choosing a preferred variety for correcting scripts.

The chi-square analysis does not see a dependency between these two variables. The distribution is indeed fairly even with 28.6% of men correcting written language on the basis of British English. The percentage of women in this category is marginally lower at 23.4%. The combination of British and American English achieved 67.3% among the men and 71.9% among the women. All other choices that came up in this test got one vote only and are entirely negligible.
6.8. Appendix 8: The identification of mistakes and grades split up according to genders

The bar chart below shows the gender distribution of structures that had to be assessed as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Alternatively participants could state that they were unable to make a decision by ticking ‘can’t say’. Men appear to have accepted more forms as ‘right’ and fewer as ‘wrong’ than women. So in this test men seemed to be the more lenient of the sexes.
In marking no difference between the sexes could be found looking at the grades that were given to the script which had to be marked. The bar chart below sees men at a mean value of 9.54 points while women gave 9.6 points for the same script.

Splitting up the issue into holistic and analytic scores shows the following results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Holistic grade (mean value)</th>
<th>Analytic grade (mean value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>9.6 pts</td>
<td>9.51 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9.34 pts</td>
<td>10 pts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 6.9. Appendix 9: Holistic Scoring Guide from the CEF.

This holistic scoring guide is taken from the CEF. It provides assessment categories for oral performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANGE</th>
<th>ACCURACY</th>
<th>FLUENCY</th>
<th>INTERACTION</th>
<th>COHERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.</td>
<td>Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).</td>
<td>Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.</td>
<td>Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.</td>
<td>Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy: errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.</td>
<td>Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural smooth flow of language.</td>
<td>Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much</td>
<td>Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.</td>
<td>Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions. There are few</td>
<td>Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence form to do so.</th>
<th>Noticeably long pauses.</th>
<th>Elegant. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.</th>
<th>A long contribution.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.</td>
<td>Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.</td>
<td>Can keep going comprehensively, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.</td>
<td>Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.</td>
<td>Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.</td>
<td>Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.</td>
<td>Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.</td>
<td>Can answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.</td>
<td>Can link groups of words with simple connectors like 'and' and 'because'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.</td>
<td>Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.</td>
<td>Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.</td>
<td>Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair.</td>
<td>Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like 'and' or 'then'.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.10. **Appendix 10: Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache**

**Changing Norms in English Language Teaching:**
The Present and Future of Foreign Language Education at German ‘Gymnasien’.


die nur nie – oder nie nachhaltig – ihren Weg in den Unterrichtsalltag gefunden haben. Die Zweitspracherwerbsforschung hält bereits seit den 70er Jahren Erkenntnisse bereit, die aufzeigen, dass Spracherwerb am ehesten durch informelle Erwerbssituationen entstehen kann. Als dritte Säule sollen nun also wesentliche Aspekte dieses Forschungsbereichs genutzt werden, um den skizzierten Anforderungen der Säulen I und II gerecht zu werden.

Die Drei-Säulen-Struktur ist eine schematische Vereinfachung zur Erfassung des Komplexes „Fremdsprachenunterricht“. Sie soll als Modell dienen, an dem sich sowohl Lehrer orientieren können wie auch als idealisierte Modellstruktur, anhand der im weiteren Verlauf der Arbeit die Unterrichtspraxis gemessen werden soll.


7. Bibliography:

7.1. **Print sources:**


7.2. Non-print sources:


