

**UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

An exploration of non-specialist teachers' subject knowledge of English grammar  
and its relationship with changes in policy and expectation of teachers at KS4.

Olwen Wright

ORCID Number: 0000-0002-8609-7629

Doctor of Education

September 2016

This Thesis has been completed as a requirement of a postgraduate research degree of the  
University of Winchester.

## MPhil/PhD THESES

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**Author:**

**Olwen Wright**

**Supervisors:**

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**Abstract:**

The aim of this research was to discover the relationship that secondary teachers have with grammar. A policy shift between 2010 and 2015 upgraded the place of grammar teaching and assessing at Key Stage 4 and teachers of GCSEs in humanities subjects are now responsible for preparing pupils for marks in spelling, punctuation and grammar and in some cases, also assessing these marks.

The Literature Review charts the history of grammar teaching in secondary schools and the assessing of grammar at key stage 4. It presents evidence that demonstrates the lack of clarity and consensus between policy makers and educationalists in respect of how and whether grammar should be taught in schools. The Literature Review also considers how the implementation of the current marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) is based upon assumptions about teachers' knowledge and it explores the contentious nature of assessing SPaG as an adjunct to a humanities examination.

Qualitative research methodology was used to explore the thoughts and feelings about grammar that were held by the seven humanities teachers who participated in this research. This thesis presents their schooling experiences and reflections upon their

teaching practice. They were asked to describe their own educational journeys and their current classroom approaches towards the SPaG marks. The data from the case studies were generated using semi-structured interviews and each of the teachers was interviewed twice over the course of a year, between 2014 and 2015. The participants taught in a range of settings.

Constructivist Grounded Theory was employed as the research paradigm and this generated the themes and codes. Jefferson transcription notation was added to the transcripts so that the participants' voices were brought as close to the reader as possible. The work of Derrida was applied to the analysed data in order to uncover additional meanings and lay bare assumptions.

The findings show that the relationships teachers have with grammar are complex, both on a personal and professional level. The study highlights the dilemmas that the SPaG marks create for teachers and it exposes the challenges posed by grammar in the wider context of teachers' professional lives. It also challenges some of the assumptions that are made by policy makers about teachers' knowledge and it presents for consideration the notion that teachers' self-awareness and self-knowledge, in relation to grammar, are not necessarily accurate. Implications for both policy and practice are discussed in light of the findings and the importance of listening to teachers' voices is one of the central recommendations.

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**ABSTRACT**

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Overview

This thesis is a qualitative inquiry into the construction of teachers' beliefs, knowledge and experiences. It explores how teachers' feelings about teaching, learning and assessing grammar have been constructed in the context of their own education and working lives. It explores and interprets teachers' experiences as learners, at school and as trainee teachers, as well as their subsequent experiences in the profession and it examines how these experiences have shaped cognition and practice for secondary school teachers. It delineates examples of current practice amongst teachers of humanities subjects at key stage 4 (ages 14 -16 years) and it identifies influences which have led to such practice so that this can be explored further.

This chapter sets out the rationale for the research; its intended aims and research questions. It begins by providing a brief background and context for the research and then gives an overview of the assessment of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Discussion about secondary, non-specialist humanities teachers is followed by an account of the researcher's personal and professional background and motivation for conducting this research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of the thesis and focus of each chapter.

#### 1.2 Background and Context

The disadvantages faced by an adult who has low literacy levels are well documented, as is the impact on society: in 2008, 70% of pupils in the UK who were permanently removed from school had poor literacy skills (Dugdale & Clark, 2008) and in 2014, 48% of UK prisoners had literacy levels below that of an average eleven year old (Morrisroe, 2014). Literacy levels and how to raise them is controversial: the topic of much debate and the subject of much research. In 2013 the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) found that whilst the UK's mean literacy proficiency is around average for adults aged 16-65, it is in the bottom three countries for 16-24 year olds. Furthermore, in 2016, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills reported on a study of basic skills in the workplace and, amongst its findings on literacy levels, it was reported by 12% of businesses that a literacy skills gap amongst employees manifested itself in the inability to respond in writing to queries or complaints from clients or colleagues (BIS, 2016). Low literacy skills have provoked opinions by everyone from parents to employers and successive governments, and the skills connected to writing in particular have been the cause of a great deal of

this controversy. However, although the desire to improve literacy levels of school leavers unites all those who feel connected to the issue, the means of achieving this divides them.

The political initiatives of several, different governments do not appear to have helped pupils attain the levels of literacy that the respective administration considered to be the benchmark (Massey & Elliott, 1996; Massey & Dexter, 2002); sometimes official statistics have been mired in the controversy surrounding the collecting and reporting of literacy-related data. The evidence on standards from the 1990s onwards is considered to be highly unsatisfactory and contentious and issues have been raised about the methods used to collect data on illiteracy, the definition of poor literacy and how the statistics can be genuinely misunderstood and purposefully manipulated (Connelly, Sullivan & Jerrim, 2014). In 2015, the Director General of the UK Statistics Authority wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and the Schools Minister regarding erroneous claims that both had made, at different times and in different settings, about falling levels of literacy (UK Statistics Authority, 2015) and he sought to have Hansard amended to account for this. Nevertheless, despite perceived contentious approaches to the teaching of grammar, both the current Conservative Government and the previous Coalition Government have shown a strong commitment to trying to raise the literacy levels of school leavers; one of the ways in which they have sought to do this is through the assessing of spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) at the end of key stage 4.

A Coalition (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) Government (2010-2015) reintroduced the assessment of SPaG in a number of GCSE subjects at the same time as pledging to revamp the whole exam system. SPaG marks were added to GCSEs and are now being re-added to the new courses. These new courses have been devised and constructed in an entirely different framework: the changes have significantly altered the course content, the method of examination that now uses terminal exams instead of coursework and controlled assessments, and the assessment framework that uses numbers rather than letters. These wholesale changes represent a fundamental shift in focus; but GCSEs have actually been altered many times since they were first introduced, which has caused some disillusionment amongst the profession (Bates, Lewis & Pickard, 2011). The most recent changes to English GCSE were implemented at the start of the academic year 2015 and new assessment criteria and marking formats have been embedded which the majority of GCSEs will have to embrace from 2016/2017. A great deal of time and money has been invested in this process and it has been done in order to raise the overall attainment of school leavers and to make the higher levels at GCSE more difficult to reach: 'they demand more from all students and provide further challenge for those aiming to achieve top grades' (DfE, 2013). The challenge that they will

provide to pupils in future GCSEs is clear. The challenge that they might provide for teachers is less clear.

### **1.3 Personal and Professional Practice**

I am a practising English teacher and I prepare pupils for several different examinations, including GCSEs. A personal and professional curiosity surrounding teachers' knowledge and feelings about grammar was the starting point for this research, as was the specific national context that the assessment of SPaG, in subjects other than English, was being reintroduced to educational policy. This research is the result of my interest in language and grammar, and of specific interest to me is the discovery of how other teachers also feel about their own relationship with grammar. The research began at the point where GCSEs were under review and when the Coalition Government's White Paper, entitled 'The Importance of Teaching' (2010), was first published. I felt the need to gain a greater understanding of how non-specialist teachers of humanities subjects approach grammar and to present their experiences. Policymakers' voices are loud and clear but secondary school teachers have not voiced their opinions openly on the subject of SPaG or grammar. In addition, a research space existed in relation to discovering the thoughts and feelings of secondary school teachers and the changes to GCSEs. I felt compelled to fill it.

I am interested in all aspects of English and I teach language and literature at GCSE and A Level. However, I acknowledge that being interested in grammar is not the same as knowing very much about it and indeed whatever I may or may not know has never been questioned or tested. Whatever knowledge I have acquired about grammar was not learnt at school and did not form part of my BA, PGCE or MA. I took a short linguistics course alongside my main English studies at university, which whetted my appetite and introduced me to concepts such as morphology and pragmatics, and then some time later did a TEFL course so that I could go abroad and teach English. However, it was not until I took the TEFL course and taught non-native English speakers that I really had to think about grammar. Nevertheless, professing to have an interest in grammar has often meant that I am consulted on matters of syntax and deferred to whenever a colleague is unsure of punctuation. There is an assumption that because I am interested in grammar, I know all about it and must therefore, by extension, be happy to teach it. I believe that the assumptions made by policymakers, in relation to grammar awareness and the teaching of grammar, cannot be ignored. This research identifies several assumptions and presents the feelings of those teachers about whom the assumptions have been made.

#### 1.4 Research Aims

The specific aim of this research was to '*critically examine practising secondary teachers' experiences of learning language and grammar and their confidence in assessing these aspects of pupils' work in response to recent shifts in educational policy*'. This was supported by five sub-aims, shown in figure 1.1.

**Sub-aim 1:** to critically examine the learning experiences of secondary school teachers about English grammar.

**Sub-aim 2:** to identify and analyse these teachers' levels of confidence about supporting and assessing pupils' knowledge of grammar.

**Sub-aim 3:** to establish and critically analyse the differences that may exist between what is known about grammar by teachers with a range of specialisms and what policy requires in order for them to teach and assess grammar at GCSE.

**Sub-aim 4:** to identify and critically analyse the implications for professional development that arise from this examination of teachers' knowledge and confidence in relation to policy changes.

**Sub-aim 5:** to use Derrida's 'deconstruction' as a theoretical framework through which data were analysed to examine meaning in the teachers' stories about their subject knowledge.

*Figure 1.1: Sub-aims of the research project*

The purpose of the sub-aims was to further understand teachers' knowledge and the wider assumptions that are held on this subject. The research sought insights into the way in which 'non-specialist' teachers have approached this new assessment framework for their subject and what they thought about it in the context of their teaching. It also attempted to examine the complex area of non-specialists' feelings and knowledge regarding the grammar element of the SPaG marks. The approach offered a study of the lived experience of KS4 teachers as they prepared pupils for the exams, then reflected on the exams one year on and considered the changes that will be implemented in humanities subjects from September 2016. From the aims arose the questions that this research sought to answer (figure 1:2). The questions helped to guide the methods used to conduct the study of lived experiences and they framed the two sets of interviews.

1. What were teachers' experiences of learning about grammar and language in their own schooling?
2. Did teachers feel that any of their own education or professional development had given them knowledge and confidence regarding grammar?
3. What were teachers' feelings about the introduction of, and changes to, SPaG marks?
4. What importance did they attach to ensuring that pupils gained the additional SPaG marks?

*Figure 1.2: The research questions*

The responses to these research questions also helped to develop general theoretical insights and conclusions that go beyond the specifics of the particular cases. Their outcomes aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of how teachers feel about grammar in the classroom and the assessment of grammar in GCSE subjects. The intention of the questions was also to promote reflection on practice and policy, both for the teachers in the study and, through the recommendations of the study, to teachers in general.

### **1.5 Thesis Organisation and Content**

The thesis is organised as follows: Chapter 2 presents a historical overview of the study of grammar, in order to further the reader's understanding of the nature of language and literacy assessment and the way in which it has changed over time. It also presents relevant theories on language and literacy development in order to illustrate the relationship or dissonance between theory and policy making. Chapter 2 outlines previous and current policy approaches to raising standards of literacy in schools and finds that the link between SPaG assessments and raising literacy attainment is far from definitive. Teachers' knowledge of grammar and the approaches taken to teaching about language, both in Britain and other English-speaking countries, are presented in this chapter.

The research methods and theoretical framework are outlined in Chapter 3, where it can be seen that a case study approach was used to generate the data and to answer the research questions. The process of coding is presented and explored and Charmazian Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) is discussed in relation to the generation of codes and sub-codes. The way in which the data were transcribed plays a significant part in this research and Jefferson's transcription system (2004) is elucidated in this chapter. This method was employed to capture not only the thoughts and feelings of individual participants but also the context and the evolving political landscape in which they

work. The use of Jefferson notation also helped to bring the speakers as close to the written representation of their words as possible.

Derrida's theoretical and philosophical framework (1967; 2006) is also introduced in Chapter 3 and his concepts of binary opposites and deconstruction are summarised. Using Derridean theories and the application of his central philosophies provided interesting and unique ways of rereading the findings.

Chapter 4 presents the interviews and the findings. Here, Derrida's deconstruction and analysis, particularly his interest in language and the instability of meaning, allowed for the findings to be questioned and discussed using specific lenses and in particular to draw attention to contradictions and inconsistencies as a way of challenging the assumptions about what had been stated. Derridean deconstruction helped to expose some assumptions that were unveiled in the codes and sub-codes.

The final, summary chapter is the synthesis of all aspects of the research. It presents a number of implications for policy and practice that have relevance to the on-going debate about the assessment of SPaG at GCSE and also to the training needs of non-specialist teachers. This chapter responds to the aims and sub-aims of the research.

## Chapter 2

### THE SUBJECT OF GRAMMAR

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the historical and current approach to grammar teaching and also to the defining of grammar as a construct. The start of this chapter is focused on significant historical periods, where perceptions and understanding of grammar underwent changes and where appreciation of grammar, amongst those working with language and those in education, also developed. In this section, the way in which approaches to grammar teaching have been fashionable and politicised at different times is also presented. Particular emphasis is placed on the way in which grammar teaching changed from the 1960s onwards, and this chapter addresses the reasons why teachers might lack the grammatical knowledge and skills to instruct pupils at GCSE.

An international perspective is also offered, in relation to the experiences and grammatical knowledge that teachers in other English speaking countries possess. The current British political landscape is explored, both in relation to the teaching of grammar in schools and to the changes that are being made to GCSEs.

#### 2.2 A Chronological Account of our Understanding of the Nature of Grammar

Grammar is loosely understood to be the set of rules that governs language, and Crystal defines grammar as ‘the business of taking a language to pieces, to see how it works’ (Crystal, 1995, p 10). Crystal explains that, as with all enquiry, we have to begin by naming the parts in order to be able to talk about them. He presents us with the idea that there is no limit to what we can say or write but that all of our potential utterances are controlled by a set of rules that we have to try firstly to understand and then to describe (Crystal, 2004a, 2004b). The scholarly analysis and codification of the rules that govern how words in English are put together to create meaning has been evolving since the first written representations of sound.

The Enlightenment saw the beginnings of a scholarly appreciation of English language and grammar and a drive towards trying to codify its many aspects. John Wallis published his ‘Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae’ in 1653 and this provided the basis for a great number of books about language and grammar that followed through the 1700s. Despite Wallis’ work being published in Latin, the premise of his text was an appreciation of English grammar as separate and distinct from Latin rules and he shed light on the use of real speech patterns. Dr Samuel Johnson’s dictionary of 1755 uses many of Wallis’ grammar rules in its preface and provided the first systematic coding of English

words. Following this seminal publication, linguistic study really began to emerge as a serious and grammar-oriented pursuit in the latter part of the eighteenth century (Bas & McMahon, 2006).

As grammar was studied, notions of correctness and of formality became intrinsically bound up in observations that were made of language usage and much of what we now term 'Standard English' has its roots in the work of a small but influential number of eighteenth century grammarians (Blake, 1996). Lowth, Murray and Cobbett recorded their own observations and then established and developed their own rules about how sentences should be constructed. Lowth was a scholar of Hebrew poetry and he published his own views on correct English grammar in 1762, entitled 'A short introduction to English grammar: with critical notes'. Lowth's traditional influence can be seen in the work of his students at Oxford University, Murray and Cobbett, who prescribed exactly what they believed to constitute correct language usage and went on to become champions of 'prescriptive' grammar. In fact, Murray's books on grammar and spelling earned him the title of 'Father of English Grammar' (Cobbett, 1818). Together they saw language as fixed and immutable and they championed the cause of a standardised usage. Deviations from their prescribed grammatical structures were seen as errors to be corrected (Linn, 2006) but the standard forms that were presented were often based on subjective criteria and on the grammarian's own knowledge of other languages, particularly Latin (Lowth, 1762). Crystal explains that up until the eighteenth century, Latin was still being used as the language of scholarship and sophistication and was used, particularly in the sciences, to label new concepts (2005). Being a dead language, its lexemes were fixed and immutable which made its definitions reassuringly clear. No other language could match Latin's lack of dynamism and no other language could remain as impervious to change. Latin was trusted to be less ambiguous and less open to interpretation and the implications of this are that Latin has continued to hold its scholarly status.

The English grammar that was studied and championed by Lowth et al provided a record of the lexis used by educated, socially elite, metropolitan men who shared their knowledge of Latin, but it did not represent significant numbers of speakers at all. Knowledge about Latin has always been associated with academic study and elitism because even in the early twentieth century, when it was still a university requirement, only a quarter of all schools taught Latin (Cambridge Schools Classics Project, 2007). Then, as universities abandoned Latin as an entry requirement in the 1960s, fewer and fewer schools taught it, adding to its perception as an elite subject. In 2007/8 a study by the University of Cambridge School Classic Project found that 12.9% of all state secondary schools offered Latin and 59.9% of independent schools.

The fact that some independent and grammar schools continued to teach grammar and Latin, at a time when most comprehensive schools turned away from it, accounts for many of the reasons why 'correct' grammar and some knowledge about grammar have been seen as class-bound and the preserve of the wealthy and elite; but for the first time in a long time, this picture appears to be changing. Since 2000, the number of pupils studying Latin has slowly been increasing as a result of campaigns led by leading universities and on-line learning resources that have allowed pupils to learn in less conventional ways. The current Conservative Government and the previous Coalition Government have also tried to promote Latin and Greek by including them in the range of subjects that comprise the English Baccalaureate and in 2014 Oxford University received a grant from the Department of Education to train non-specialist teachers who were already teaching in state schools to become Latinists (DfE, 2014). The number of schools now teaching Latin is rising but the current picture is far from clear: the number of state schools offering Latin has increased but the numbers of pupils taking it as a GCSE subject has been falling every year (DfE, 2014).

For most early grammarians, the written form was the medium they considered worth studying and they paid little attention to regional variances in speech (Baugh & Cable, 2002) or to the grammatical differences between written and oral forms. Regional dialects were consistently neglected and sometimes dismissed as 'vulgar' and 'provincial' (Wright, 2000). The rules that governed the everyday speech and grammar of the majority of British English speakers was overlooked then and has continued to be contentious since, in the pursuit of adherence to rules of a standardised grammar. The notion of correct speech was given the title of Received Pronunciation (RP) by Ellis in 1869, although the term was not used more widely until the 1920s when there was a developing interest in speech and dialect. Received Pronunciation was adopted as the broadcasting standard by the BBC in 1922 because the first General Manager of the BBC, Lord Reith, considered that it would be the accent most widely understood. Today RP is still strongly associated with class, education, income and profession (Kerswill, 2006) and is as much to do with accent and the way things are said as it is to do with dialect and the grammar used to communicate. Examples of standard grammar which overlook regional and oral variations can be seen in the use of the verb 'to be', which has become regularised amongst speakers of 'Multicultural London English' (MLE) so that the whole of the past tense is conjugated using 'was': *I was; you was*, (Kerswill, 2007; 2013) and some areas of Northern England using 'were' for all subjects: *I were; you were* (Elmes, 2006).

Contemporary research in the field of sociolinguistics finds that standard forms of speech and grammar remain strongly correlated with perceived and actual prestige (Trudgill, 1999; Milroy & Milroy, 1993) and the current administration (2015 to present) remains committed to the idea of

unified spoken English. The 'Key Stage 3 English Programmes of Study' document (2013a) dictates that: 'pupils should be taught to control their speaking and writing consciously', 'understand why sentences are constructed as they are' and use 'Standard English'.

### **2.3 From Prescriptive to Descriptive**

A more descriptive approach to language, which challenged the most influential grammarians' assumptions and which studied oral and written language in use, as opposed to the strict rules of written grammar, began to emerge in the nineteenth century and has continued to evolve ever since (McArthur, 1998). According to descriptive grammarians, the aims of prescriptive grammar were to tell people what grammatical rules they should follow rather than to study language in use (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) and they were critical of a grammar which they saw as unchanging. New descriptive linguistic studies began to see the study of English as hugely complex and the study of language as speculative (Campbell, 2004). This led to a much greater appreciation of the richness of different grammars amongst those who studied them.

One of the earliest challenges to the prescriptivists came from Sweet, a leading British grammarian and phonetician who published the first part of his book entitled 'A New English Grammar: logical and historical' in 1892. This broke from some of the traditional views of grammar because it sought to describe more than just the relationships between words, but also how they are used to communicate the speaker's thoughts. Sweet's interest lay in the spoken word and language in use: in what he called 'practical grammar'. His view was that whatever was in common use was in fact 'correct grammar' and this view has been hugely influential in the development of theories about language and linguistics. The result of the challenge mounted against traditional grammarians was the rise in contemporary developments in the fields of linguistic and sociolinguistic theories.

Descriptivists rejected the study of language that was bound by rules and sought instead to collect data from studies of the actual usage of speakers, seeing the diversity of dialect, accent, gender and race as enriching and enlightening (van Gelderen, 2014; Hogg, 2006). Their central tenet still underpins contemporary research: the grammar of language used in speech or in writing cannot be considered right or wrong; it is simply grammar. Where sentences may flout the conventions of Standard English ('I aint seen nothing') they are viewed by descriptive grammarians as completely grammatical within the dialectic rules of the speaker or speakers (Huddleston, 2000). Crystal expresses the view that because grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves, it is necessarily complicated to discuss, but discuss it we should, since language is involved in almost everything we do as human beings. Nevertheless, in spite of widespread interest and research into

the fields of language study, notions of grammar correctness in the spheres of government and policy have not followed this more descriptive course and are still defined by prescriptive rules.

In 1957 Chomsky published his views on how we acquire language and how language is constructed. 'Syntactic Structures' was responsible for a new linguistic theory known as 'generative' grammar, which not only challenged assumptions about language acquisition but also sought to provide methods by which linguistic patterns can be tested to prove that they are understood, without having to be learnt or memorised. Chomsky's view was that grammar is part of the biological language faculty that humans possess. Its universality can be thought of as the system which specifies how particular grammars are organised in terms of their components and the different rules, construction and interaction of these components (1979). Chomsky's premise was that there is a universal grammar that is shared by all languages, and that speakers of any specific language know the natural order of words in a sentence because their brain possesses a language acquisition device (LAD).

Chomsky's universal grammar theory sought to prove that the users of a shared language, particularly children when they are learning to speak, know which words work together to produce meaning (Chomsky, 1957). Chomsky maintained that the similarity of the language acquisition stages across diverse peoples and languages showed how children are equipped with abilities to learn language in much the same way as they learn to walk. They do not have to be shown how to do this and they all learn at about the same age, and in a relatively short time they are entirely proficient. Chomsky's theories on universal grammar and syntax challenged the way in which grammar was studied and his thoughts about language learning were espoused by universities and researchers across the world. His work influenced that of Pinker, an American linguist and behavioral scientist, who developed Chomsky's theories into areas of natural selection and evolution (Pinker, 1994).

However, a number of philosophers and linguists continue to be divided on the question of whether there are universal properties that bind all human languages together in some way and evolutionary biologists have also challenged Chomsky's theories of language acquisition and generative grammar. Pinker shares with Chomsky the notion that there is a universal grammar but argues against Chomsky when he asserts that this language instinct is the result of an evolutionary process: 'Chomsky has puzzled many readers with his skepticism about whether Darwinian natural selection (as opposed to other evolutionary processes) can explain the origins of the language organ that he argues for; I think it is fruitful to consider language as an evolutionary adaptation, like the eye, its major parts designed to carry out important functions' (Pinker, 1994, p. 24).

Lieberman, a cognitive biologist, believes that to understand our language abilities it is necessary to see language as something learned rather than something innate, and he suggests that it may be only the brain's general abilities that are pre-wired and not specific language or grammar skills (Lieberman, 2007). He sees the development of grammatical language as a neurological system composed of several separate functional abilities and advocates that the human capacity for language is based not on a universal grammar but on a functional language system that has evolved in different parts of the brain. The implication of Lieberman's paradigm was that grammar began to be understood as something that is governed by meaning and context rather than being independent of these factors. This promoted the idea that grammar cannot be seen as something that can be studied in a vacuum, relying only on the syntax in order to make meaning (2007).

The notion that language cannot be studied out of the context in which it appears is also developed by Crystal (2003a; 2003b) who cautions the reader that to be able to say that a word is an adverb explains little and confuses much because of the range of disparate words that may all function as adverbs: tomorrow; however; yes; slowly; very; well; not. When talking about grammar, even for those people who know something about language, there is near-universal use of a very small number of labels, such as 'adjective' and 'clause', which Crystal argues are badly defined and used uncritically. In addition, he says that to try to define word classes at the start of a task, before then going on to analyse written or spoken language, almost ensures that grammar is seen as isolated and abstract (Crystal, 1967), thus leading to difficulty of understanding and of interpretation, and doing little to advance general appreciation of language.

In 1999 Derrida published his work on the French language entitled 'The Monolingualism of the Other', in which he talked about the concept of purity in language. He explained that we might yearn for purity in language because we desire ways of expressing ourselves that are so pure they fully capture our feelings. However, he then stated that the only way of doing this is to use descriptions and idioms which lose their meaning when translated into any other language and are therefore corrupted. Idioms also use language that is often ungrammatical and figurative and they cannot be considered pure in all their elements because they are contaminated by the words used to introduce or describe them. Using a Derridean framework to explore and analyse language exposes to us contradictions in the way in which we might see purity of meaning and grammar; grammar and language cannot be reduced down to one sense or concept or taken from one language to another so they can never be considered pure.

In summary, there can be no standardised meaning of a word or sentence for Derrida because meaning is not fixed between speakers and meanings shift constantly. Derrida challenges anyone

who conceives of language as pure or proper (1996, p.46). Yet, despite the research that continues to suggest language changes all the time and meanings remain open to a variety of interpretations, there is still a desire to find a set of rules that govern the way that language works and to call this list 'grammar'. This is evident in government policy and in school practice. The means of equipping children with this list of grammar rules is an unresolved debate, as is the requirement to test children's grammar knowledge in order that they might be better users of language.

#### **2.4 The Development of a Pedagogy for Teaching Grammar**

The Newbolt Report (1921) was evidence of a growing awareness that testing children's knowledge of grammar was not the most effective way to develop their communication skills. The report also presented the notion that a deep understanding of grammar could not be reduced to labelling parts of speech and it positioned the study of both language and literature at the heart of all learning about English. It contained an acknowledgement that emphasis should be on the effective use of language as a means of communication, rather than testing it under timed conditions or trying to gauge the skills and abilities of the pupil by looking only at their use of grammar (The Newbolt Report, 1921). It seemed to suggest that teachers should eschew the 'tedious task' of correcting the errors of punctuation, spelling and grammar because it is a stiling and unproductive activity: the 'teacher who limits his teaching to correction is asking for little, and he will get but little' (p. 75). There was also an acknowledgement in the report that the formative assessment of written work is problematic. However, the report went on to lay partial blame for the fruitlessness of marking for the skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar not on the concepts themselves, but rather on the fact that teachers' knowledge of what is important when marking was lacking: 'probably the most fruitful cause of waste of time in this subject is unskilful correction of written work. Failing to distinguish between what may usefully be corrected and what for the moment may wisely be overlooked, the teacher tries to correct everything' (p. 74). In addition, the report placed emphasis on the type of grammar that should be taught and it outlined how important the terminology and the use of phonetics both were, in spite of a more descriptive approach to the content and form of language.

In the decades after the Newbolt Report, more descriptive theories of grammar were being developed throughout higher education, and amongst many social researchers, and they included a wide range of approaches to grammar and language acquisition. However, schools seemed almost impervious to their reach and influence because the traditional approach to grammar had remained largely unchallenged for almost two hundred years (The Bullock Report, 1975). Until the end of the 1950s, British school pupils either spent a lot of time working through exercises that helped them to

identify parts of speech, correct grammatical errors and demonstrate their knowledge of syntax or they had no language instruction at all. Pupils were still being tested on their ability to analyse a sentence grammatically and the focus remained very firmly on the 'doctrine of correctness' (Walker, 2011) and with what has been termed a 'deficiency pedagogy' (Carter, 1997). A great deal of time in English lessons was spent adding missing punctuation to passages of written text or dictated prose and evidence of a prescriptive approach to English grammar can be seen in a GCE 'O' Level paper, taken in the summer of 1960, which asked children to read a prose passage and then identify 'an adjective in the comparative form', a 'relative (conjunction) pronoun' and to state what type of clauses are being used in a number of given sentences (Oxford Local Examinations, 1960). In similar exams, children had to show their ability to parse parts of speech and to correct incorrect sentences. However, when the Bullock Report was published in 1975 it found that English in secondary schools was often taught by teachers with 'inadequate qualifications' for the task and it recommended that 'more substantial specialist knowledge' was needed (p. 156). The teachers that the report commented upon received their education at a time before the decline of grammar teaching in the curriculum but they had not been equipped with the skills that were considered necessary in the teaching of language.

Throughout the 1960s, Britain and other English speaking countries gradually stopped teaching children explicit grammar rules for a number of reasons. Those in favour of dropping it from the curriculum argued hard that it had not been shown to raise literacy but the argument that won the day was made for the importance of teaching literature over language (Thouless, 1969; Whitehead, 1966). Literature was seen as the route to greater moral fibre and social understanding and teachers did little to resist the demise of grammatical study. At the same time, Latin teaching was also in decline when the majority of grammar schools became comprehensive, became independent or were abolished altogether (Dept. of Education and Science Circular, 10/65, 1965). After the 1960s, it was mostly grammar schools that continued to teach Latin and English grammar, and children in state education no longer had any systematic instruction in the grammar of either English or Latin. Pupils only came upon the idea of grammatical study when they were introduced to French, or another language, usually at senior school. In a lot of cases this was a lesson that might have taken place only a couple of times each week and sometimes as an optional subject. What this highlights is that the majority of pupils who were educated between the late 1950s and the late 1980s may have left school never having been taught anything about English grammar, and that at least a generation of British teachers of English and other subjects may have been left ignorant of everything to do with the structure of English (Hudson and Walmsley, 2005).

## **2.5 Grammar in Other Languages and in Other Countries**

This research asked teachers what their experiences were of learning about grammar in their first language, or in a second language, as a means to establishing their confidence when talking about points of grammar and their experiences of being a language learner themselves. Chapter 3 demonstrates that some of the teachers only found out about the meta-language of grammar from their study of the grammar in another language, and it is therefore significant to this study to note that as the prominence of grammar in schools has been inconsistent, so too has the study of a foreign language. Before the National Curriculum and the introduction of GCSEs in 1988, the taking of an examination in a second language had been optional, but the National Curriculum enforced the teaching and learning of a foreign language throughout key stages 3 and 4 and brought children back into contact with the study of grammar in another language. However, in 2002 the Labour Government removed the requirement to study a language at key stage 4; the effect of which was that in 2001, 78% of pupils took a foreign language GCSE and in 2011 the proportion was just 40%. This meant that some children studied neither the structure and lexis of their mother tongue, nor that of a second language.

In 2010 languages were once again being promoted by policy, although they were not made compulsory. This time they were counted as a subject in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) which is a GCSE performance indicator and in 2013 there was a rise in the numbers of pupils taking GCSEs in French, Spanish and German (DfE, 2014). Nevertheless, the future of languages in schools remains uncertain, particularly in view of the introduction of new and more rigorous GCSEs in 2017. Studying a language is perceived as difficult (Davies, 2004) and there have been problems recruiting qualified teachers, with 79% fewer teacher trainees registered for Initial Teacher Training Courses (ITT) than target places available in 2014/15 (DfE, 2015). This has implications for the number of pupils who leave school knowing very little about how languages are organised and formulated, and who lack the confidence to speak about grammar.

Throughout the twentieth century, debates about the meaning of grammar and the teaching of grammar were being held in other English-speaking countries in much the same way as they were in Britain. An interest in the way language works, together with how it should be taught, led to Hoyt (1906) and Rapeer (1913) questioning the instruction of formal grammar in the American elementary school curriculum, with both challenging the amount of time that was devoted to teaching grammar. Their suggestion was that grammar needed a different approach and in 1935 the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) recommended that grammar should be taught in connection with writing, rather than as an isolated subject. However, this functional approach was

not well received by teachers and was never fully implemented (Kolln and Hancock, 2005). Chomsky's theories on generative and transformational grammar held some influence on the teaching of grammar in American schools throughout the 1950s and 60s, but teachers were ill-prepared for a completely new approach to grammar. Although some text books adopted Chomsky's philosophies of language, over a fairly short period of time grammar teaching reverted to the Latin-based approach and the teaching and learning of parts of speech (Kolln and Hancock, 2005).

In 1963 NCTE released a statement in which it determined that grammar teaching 'has a negligible' and even 'a harmful' effect on the improvement of writing, which provided American teachers with one of the strongest anti-grammar endorsements (p.37). In accordance with this, the 1965 United States' Commission on English reported that 'traditional grammar, as conventionally taught, had relatively little effect on writing' (p.20). Throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s, much as in England, the teaching of English in America focused on composition and self-expression, rather than on correctness or standard grammar: the notion of a standard usage was often rejected on the grounds that it was elitist. In addition, teachers were warned that teaching grammar 'in the name of teaching writing' does pupils a 'gross disservice'; one which should not be tolerated 'by anyone concerned with the effective teaching of good writing' (Hillocks, 1986, p.248). Conversations about grammar disappeared from NCTE journals and conventions throughout the 1970s and 80s and many teacher-training programs certified secondary English teachers without the students having had a single course in modern grammar (Kolin & Hancock, 2005).

In Australia, the approach often taken to the teaching of English to non-native speakers was that offered by 'systemic functional linguistics' (SFL) which sees grammar as a tool for making meaning and for exploring the relationships between text and context, rather than a set of rules. This framework has been used for several decades to help EAL pupils learn English (Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, McKnight & Smith, 2003) but it is now informing the teaching of the new National English Curriculum for years 1-10 in school settings, to help teach English to all pupils (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). However, research shows that most mainstream teachers lack confidence surrounding the relations between text, context and grammar (Hammond and Macken-Horarik, 2001) and also that secondary school teachers in particular have no formal study of language on which to draw, which leaves them relying on 'partially remembered folklore' about language and grammar (Jones, Chen, Lewis & Derewianka, 2010).

By contrast to the on-going debates in other Anglophone countries, the situation in New Zealand reveals that there was relatively little focus on the teaching of grammar in the final decades of the twentieth century, despite a range of reforms to the curriculum. An 'Exploratory Language' project

was set up in 1996 with the aim of extending practices and building on teachers' existing knowledge base (Ministry of Education). However, the project lacked any associated professional development programme and was not fully implemented; the result of which was the failure to develop a coherent, usable and workable grammar for schools in New Zealand. To compound the problem, critics feel that current pedagogical practice is increasingly being shaped by the availability of cheap 'basic English' tests and testing regimes (Locke, 2005).

The differing political, social and geographical contexts obviously account for the way in which grammar and the study of language have been approached in schools across English-speaking countries. The conclusion is that none of them has had a successful history of teaching about language, enough that it equips pupils, or indeed their teachers, with a useful and comprehensive understanding of English grammar.

## **2.6 Children's Literacy**

Interest in children's literacy continued to feature in research even though grammar in schools had declined and, from 1964 until 1971, Halliday undertook a large-scale project which looked at linguistics and English teaching. He studied children's language and his work led eventually to the 'Breakthrough to Literacy' which heralded a new method of teaching children to read (Halliday, 1970). Emerging areas of literacy were studied in relation to grammar and language awareness, including discussions of the audience's views in prose; language used in society; patterns of usage; as well as content and style (Pearce 1994). The significant findings suggested that pupils did not need to master extensive ways of describing language features, or grammatical structures, in order to use them and that they learnt about language by using it. Their literacy abilities were found not to benefit from the decontextualised gap-fill exercises that had dominated prescriptive grammar approaches (Halliday, 1970).

Halliday's approach to linguistic study which was rooted in the function of language, particularly in social contexts, gave rise to systemic functional linguistics which concerned itself far more with the choices made by speakers and writers than with traditional grammar analysis. Language was seen as a resource for making meanings; as such, Halliday's linguistic interpretations could be applied to almost any kind of text, which was in contrast with more traditional prescriptive grammars which reflected specific genres such as great literature and poetry, but said very little about more mundane texts. His approach provoked a great deal of interest among English teachers, who typically had a background in literature and could relate to the study of texts much more easily than they could to the teaching of grammar (Halliday; 1977; 1985). A study by the Committee for Linguistics in Education (2010) found that there was a mismatch between some areas of the

curriculum and teachers' preparedness for teaching it if they held a traditional English degree. None of the university tutors in the study felt that a degree in Literature would have equipped the teacher with the requisite skills to teach English Language 'A' level. An implication of this is that the description of humanities teachers as 'non-specialists' may also need to be extended to English teachers.

Research continued to demonstrate that when traditional grammar was taught, it could not categorically be said to have affected language in operation (Dixon, 1975) and the assumed correlation between grammatical knowledge and English skills was comprehensively shown not to exist. In a longitudinal study of the secondary school curriculum involving traditional grammar, modern transformational grammar (associated with Chomsky) and a control group, the study showed that English grammar teaching, whether traditional or transformational, had virtually no influence on the language growth of typical secondary school students (Elley, Barham, Lamb & Wyllie, 1975). Many teachers were influenced by these studies, particularly by the work of Dixon and Halliday and looked to them for their evidence or to justify their position on grammar (Ellis, 2007; Goodwyn, 2012). Focus in the English classroom shifted towards a broader approach to language, more recently referred to as 'text linguistics' and 'genre linguistics', rather than on teaching explicit rules (Hasan, 1980).

The backlash against prescriptive grammar and structured approaches to language were also due to the notions of purity and 'Standard' English that were rejected by descriptive grammarians. Dixon advocated that grammatical concepts and terminology were there to be drawn upon by teachers as they discussed with pupils the meaning that was created in written texts, and how it was created. He believed this approach differed considerably from the assumption that pupils had to be taught the forms in order to be able to use them. Dixon also saw the work of the teacher as being to 'foster the kind of looking and the kind of talk and writing that direct observation of experience demands', not in the 'detached systematic way of a scientist' (Dixon, 1975). Underlining Dixon's philosophy was the idea that children learned language in real life, not in 'dummy runs'. For him, 'traditional' and 'explicit' grammar teaching was and is a waste of time. In fact, by 1975 Dixon had roundly condemned teachers of grammar 'both past and present' who have been among those 'most guilty of imposing a body of knowledge which never became a guide to action or a point of reference' (Dixon, 1975, p.55).

The Bullock Report (1975) and a number of other major reports on literacy standards and English teaching (The Kingman Report, 1988; The Cox Report, 1989), were significant because they drew attention to pupils' limited knowledge about language and raised concerns about the literacy of

school leavers and the work force. Pupils' written work used in the research for the Bullock Report 'contained numerous errors of spelling, punctuation and construction' and the teaching of grammar itself was held to be responsible for these weaknesses (Bullock, 1975). The Report also stated that 'In our discussions with secondary English teachers we found a good deal of uncertainty about the teaching of language' (p. 172) and its principal recommendation was that 'a system of monitoring should be introduced which will employ new instruments to assess a wider range of attainments than has been attempted in the past and allow new criteria to be established for the definition of literacy' (p. 513). However, the report's recommendations stopped just short of a complete return to prescriptive grammar, favouring instead something that appeared to be a compromise (Goodwyn & Fuller, 2011).

The Kingman Report and The Cox Report were later commissioned in order to provide a model for English as an explicit National Curriculum subject and to identify the type of grammar and the quantity that both pupils and teachers needed to know. Neither report advocated a return to decontextualised grammar learning and The Kingman Report highlighted the need to see language as dynamic and diverse, whilst simultaneously recommending that rules, conventions and knowledge about language needed to be taught. Some of the more progressive assertions meant that it was not well received by those who favoured a wholesale return to traditional grammar teaching (Goodwyn, 2012).

## **2.7 Teaching Children to Write**

During the 1980s, the emphasis on language instruction in the classroom was dominated by the teacher helping the children to discover what they already knew unconsciously about language, rather than the teacher instructing pupils about concepts and terminology that they had to learn (Hawkins, 1987). Theories and studies associated with child development continued to emerge and were predominantly focused on the way in which young children use and acquire language. Chomsky's earlier views on universal grammar (Chomsky, 1965) were being expounded; that children knew how to formulate complex sentences at a much younger age than they received any formal instruction about language and that they did not need to know that their language contained nouns and verbs in order to be able to use them with accuracy and precision. The aim of their education should have been to equip them with the skills to think critically and explore (Chomsky, 1986). The implication of an approach to teaching and learning that focused more on helping pupils to enquire about the world around them, rather than on the subject matter and material, was significant for teachers of English. Children were encouraged to learn about the language they used to communicate their ideas and emotions and this freed teachers from a strict adherence to a set of

grammatical codes. It allowed them to present language to pupils in a more abstract and creative way, with a focus on oral literacy (Britton, 1970).

Alongside the broadening of grammar exploration was the growth of interest in 'creative writing' and a strong classroom commitment to the 'personal, imaginative and creative' nature of language (Stierer & Maybin, 1994). Here the child's potential for creativity was nurtured through talking, reading and writing, and fluency was encouraged over accuracy (Martin, D'Arcy & Newton, 1973; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod & Rosen, 1975). Research on methods of assessing written work also showed that a great deal of marking was ineffectual in terms of raising literacy standards and in some cases caused pupils to become demoralised and dejected. A review by The Nuffield Foundation (Black & William, 1998) of over 250 studies into classroom assessment, showed that there was a tendency for teachers to assess the quantity of written work and its presentation, rather than assessing the learning that had taken place. Consequently, teachers were careful to avoid attempts to correct or improve children's writing, particularly their grammar (Black & William, 1998). This approach has a number of implications. One is that children might have no sense of how their work could be improved through making it more concise and focused or more ambitious in its vocabulary. Another is that more reluctant writers, who write less and have less sophisticated presentation skills, may avoid writing altogether.

## **2.8 Grammar in Schools: from 1980 onwards**

The Bullock Report paved the way for a revival in the teaching of English and for the eventual introduction of the National Curriculum (1988a). From 1984 until 1989 a series of booklets was published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate entitled 'Curriculum Matters' and the booklets were intended as contributions to the debate about education which focused on each subject in turn. 'English from 5 to 16' was the first of these (DES, 1984) and it outlined the aims, objectives and principles of English teaching, along with the assessments of pupils' progress in language. The second edition of all of the 'Curriculum Matters' publications contained a synthesis of feedback on the first edition, along with the HMI commentary.

The English document acknowledged that there had been 'much confusion over whether grammar should be explicitly taught' and that it had long been recognised that formal exercises in the 'analysis and classification of language contribute little or nothing to the ability to use it'. However, it then asserted that the consequence of not knowing about language is that pupils 'do not understand the nature of their mistakes or how to put them right'. In order to remedy this, it clearly outlined a prescriptive list of what school leavers should know: the 'functions and names of all the main parts of speech (noun, pronoun, adjective, article, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction)' and be able to

‘identify them in their own writing or in what they read, for the purpose of discussing language’. In addition, 16 years olds should be able to ‘distinguish between sentence, clause and phrase’ (p.12-14). It can be seen from this that a link was still being made between being able to label parts of speech and being a better writer. When the first ever National Curriculum for all primary and secondary schools was introduced (DfES, 1988a), in spite of all the research and contemporary thinking, the teaching of grammar was seen once again as part of a drive to improve literacy standards. By reintroducing a focus on grammar, the National Curriculum brought with it considerable discussion of the methodology of teaching, in addition to the actual form of grammar taught (Mason, Mason & Quale, 1992).

At the same time as the National Curriculum (1988) was being introduced into schools, research in the field of linguistics saw the number of interesting theories of grammar and language structure rise, and some included the study of grammar in the classroom. Such studies charted a move towards analysing how sentences are sequenced to produce stretches of language and meaning (Crystal, 1987) and an emphasis on the descriptive and socio-cultural functions of language used by society (McCarthy & Carter, 1994; Carter, 1990). Responding to the Knowledge about Language (KAL) methods of The Kingman and The Cox Reports, Carter (1994) and colleagues worked on a new approach to learning about language: Language in the National Curriculum (LINC), which advocated that KAL ‘requires a methodology which is not transmissive and teacher-centred but investigative and project-based’ (Carter, 1990. p.107). Their approach promoted the view that the process of making such knowledge explicit should not be imposed or engineered but rather fostered and supported as naturally as possible, as needed in specific contexts and in ways which reinforce the process as one of positive achievement with language.

These doctrines and philosophies were being explored throughout the 1980s and 1990s by linguistic anthropologists who saw children’s language use as part of the process of developing their sociability (Ochs, 1986; 1988). English instruction was still being influenced by larger, societal changes and by a great deal of the wider research occurring in psychology and child development, such as Erikson’s theories on active learning and Vygotsky’s theories on development and cognitive understanding. Vygotsky’s most influential theory was that of the Zone of Proximal Development in which he described how children acquire knowledge through problem solving with guidance and then independently, placing great emphasis on the role of the teacher or ‘More Knowledgeable Other’ in modelling behaviour and transferring instructions through language. Vygotsky held the view that central to a child’s language development is the role of the adult. The adult promotes the acquisition of speech and alongside it, thought (Vygotsky, 1978). This has had numerous implications

for the language classroom, in particular the scaffolding of writing, where models are used and where stages and support are given at the start and gently removed throughout the process, as well as collaborative learning and group work.

Despite the burgeoning international interest in linguistics, a range of different political approaches to education and research in the field of child development, the legacy of prescriptive grammar continued to be detected in education (Locke 2010). According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 2012) the tradition of prescriptivism in school grammar and teaching manuals is easy to identify and finds a large commercial market but it is not entirely clear whether it is teachers themselves who drive the production of prescriptive resources. What seems more clear is that linguists, who 'sought to build a grammar that would be adequate for describing the language', are contrasted with English teachers who 'have sought to apply a grammar that is already constructed' (Denham & Lobeck, 2010, p.3).

## **2.9 Literature in the Classroom**

The study of English became synonymous with the study of literature in many British schools as a result of the arguments made about the value of teaching grammar. Whitehead argued that not only did children dislike grammar, but children below the age of fifteen were unable to learn about it (Whitehead, 1966, p.216). He also advocated that it was of no use to children anyway, which was a sentiment echoed by O'Malley when he said that pupils would never confuse 'eager to please' with 'easy to please' so why should they bother to learn about the differences (O'Malley, 1966, p.206). As English Literature prevailed in the British classroom, various approaches to reading texts and teaching about them were adopted by teachers.

A literary movement known as New Criticism was influential from the end of the 1930s into the 1950s and it contributed to a change in the way literature is studied. New Criticism was a practice that advocated a very close reading of the text and distrusted the influence of context, believing the text to be autonomous and to contain within it all that was needed for its understanding (Eagleton, 1983). The approach New Criticism took to understanding and studying the text was to deconstruct it or to analyse it by taking it apart to see how it works (Matterson, p. 299). Deconstructing the text for its meanings and being able to arrive at multiple interpretations, none of which were considered any more or less significant than any other, influenced reading and analysis of texts at all levels and forms the basis for much of contemporary literary study. The notion that thorough textual appreciation is the product of detailed deconstruction highlights the influence that Derrida's theories have had on the study of literature and can be charted from the 1960s onwards. His search for meaning was not about labelling words and being satisfied that they fitted neatly into a

predetermined definition; it was about dismantling them and challenging them in order to see them from all sides.

In 'Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice' (1992), Derrida's preoccupation with turning assumptions about the nature of things on their heads can be seen clearly: 'a conjunction such as "and" dares to defy order, taxonomy, classificatory logic, no matter how it works: by analogy, distinction or opposition' (Derrida, 1992a, p.3). Derrida's theories of deconstruction challenged everything, including spellings and orthography, so that new ways of seeing words and their meanings could be encountered and this contributed to the focus on thinking creatively about language (1978a; 1988). The challenges mounted to the teaching of grammatical structures may have continued to liberate teachers from having to teach prescriptive forms of grammar but it may also have contributed to a dearth of detailed discussion in classrooms about the formation of sentences and the classification of words.

### **2.10 How Best to Teach Grammar**

In spite of the wider interest in language in use and the prevalence of theories about ways in which children learn language, there has remained an on-going, largely unresolved debate about how to teach grammar and whether to teach it at all, for over half a century. In spite of the research into language learning and approaches to pedagogy that suggest grammar teaching works best, if it works at all, where grammar is immersed in the context, the first National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (DfEE, 1998) and The Key Stage 3 Strategy (KS3) (DfEE, 2000), brought with them a more prescriptive approach to the teaching of English and its grammar and, particularly, one that sought to standardise the learning of all pupils. The KS3 Strategy Framework for English (DfEE, 2001) identified a set of correct forms which included technical terms such as modal verbs, possessive determiners and transitive and intransitive verbs which children had to be taught.

Nevertheless, a report in 2002 which looked at the effectiveness of the Literacy Strategy and the Framework (DFES, 2000) stated that for the teaching of grammar, it was difficult to link findings from the research to the strategy's recommendations for pedagogy. Further research into the link between the teaching of grammar and the writing of pupils has produced inconclusive findings. An EPPI review (2004) found that there was no evidence of a beneficial relationship between teaching grammar and writing but research into the relationship between contextualised and embedded grammar and its impact on writing, has shown some mixed outcomes. Studies have also shown positive impacts on writing outcomes when the grammar is intrinsically linked to the writing; when it is contextualised and where reading and writing activities are closely linked so that pupils imitate writing and copy its linguistic features (Myhill, 2011).

A study by the Department for Education (2012) found that teaching grammar which is embedded rather than explicit, relevant to the focus rather than the focus itself, showed a 'significant positive effect for pupils in the intervention group' who scored higher in the writing tests (p.8). This approach suited the most able so the benefits were not uniform, but the research found that the writers of the design study could not fully explain why the more able pupils saw the greatest improvement. The DfE study also states that 'very little evidence exists on effective ways to teach spelling' (p.6) but does highlight that there may be a positive impact on pupils' reading levels (Myhill, Lines & Watson, 2011; Myhill, Jones & Bailey, 2012; Jones, Myhill, Watson & Lines, 2013). However, Graham and Perin's study (2007) found some evidence of a negative correlation between knowing about grammar and improved writing skills and a study in 2005/6 showed that trying to teach formal grammar and syntax can actually have a deleterious effect on writing abilities (Andrews, 2005). The impact of different research findings can lead to confusion for secondary school teachers, especially those who may not have a sound grammar knowledge base themselves.

### **2.11 Assessing Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar**

The perception that there is an on-going decline in standards of literacy, both oral and written, is a feature of every generation and is often a criticism of young people by their elders. This can be traced back at least as far as the first printing press (Pinker, 2014) and is as contemporary an issue as it has always been. Not long after GCSEs were introduced in the late 1980s, the then regulatory body SCAA (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority) studied the exams taken by successive cohorts and decided that the literacy skills of GCSE candidates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland needed to be improved. By 1992 summative assessment was deemed to be the way of improving pupils' language usage and literacy skills and during the 1990s, 5% of marks on each GCSE exam paper in each written subject (excluding foreign languages) were specifically awarded for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SCAA, Department for Education, 1985).

From 1992, marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar were added to the end of the mark scheme, rather than awarded for specific questions or built into an overall assessment, and according to teachers and examiners these marks always felt as though they were an afterthought, despite how high profile their introduction had been. No changes were made to the content of the GCSEs based on this element and a paper in any subject that was marked out of 100 now had a mark out of 105, to reflect pupils' SPaG competencies. This made it feel as though assessing literacy in this way was simply to pay lip service to improving standards (Owen, 1992).

The continued focus on assessing grammar, by successive governments, has led to the generating of data relating to SPaG marks in external exams that now spans several decades. Candidates' writing in GCSEs was the focus of a study for Massey & Elliott (2002) and they looked at data generated by the Midland Examining Group for a period of time between 1994 and 1996 when there had been an allocation of marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar. They compared the vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and use of non-standard English by age and sex for each year. What they found was that in English Literature, for example, average SPaG marks were much lower than those for other subjects but overall subject content marks were not (p. 13). This may be to do with the papers being marked by English specialists, whose views on the accuracy of SPaG might be different to those held by teachers of other GCSE subjects, or it could be to do with Literature being an adjunct to Language GCSE but taught in the same class and therefore studied by pupils who may have better language skills but are unmotivated by the study of texts (p.13). They also found that correlations between SPaG marks and subject content totals were generally low.

Aspects of literacy, especially surrounding grammar, are not always straightforward or identifiable, and can be nebulous and difficult to explain to pupils even for teachers with a strong knowledge of language. When Massey and Elliot (1996) published their studies of SPaG marks their report made front-page headlines in 'The Times'. It then sparked a debate about what the researchers had classed as an error. The correspondence in the newspaper argued that 'alright' was correct and did not need to be corrected to 'all right': it was deemed to be a 'piece of pedantry long overdue for scrapping' (Charter, 1996). The Writer's Guide (2001) accepts 'alright' in the same way that 'already', 'altogether' and 'almost' are accepted. This is at odds with 'The New Fowler's Modern English Usage' (2000) which dismisses it as hardly ever being use by writers of standing. When QCA published 'The Grammar Papers' in 1998, it listed ten separate branches of grammar study, including semantics, lexis and morphology, which exemplifies how complex the study of language can be. This highlights the complexity of discussing and assessing grammar and, therefore, any additional guidance that might have assisted teachers of non-English based subjects to embed this into their teaching, would have been helpful and relevant but appears to have been limited.

As annual data were collected, teachers, pupils, examiners and governments were all able to identify the fact that SPaG assessment at GCSE needed to be rethought; nevertheless, this method of assessing literacy continued. Research showed that marking SPaG was estimated to have had an effect on the grades obtained by between 5% and 16% of all candidates; the percentages varying across the range of syllabuses observed (Adams, 1993). In some cases as many candidates received improved grades as worse ones. But in several examinations the numbers obtaining better grades as

a result of the introduction of SPaG assessments were substantial. However, there was no marked improvement in their actual writing (Massey, Elliott & Johnson, 2005).

Over a decade after its introduction, none of the research, including that produced by the policymakers, was able to report conclusively that simply assessing SPaG at GCSE had improved literacy amongst any school leavers. Findings from a study by the DFES, presented to a select committee on economic affairs, stated that the Skills for Life Survey of 2003 showed that many school leavers 'do not currently meet functional literacy and numeracy standards' (DfES, 2003, p.127). The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority finally acknowledged that SPaG assessment arrangements had not met the original, intended goal. In 2003 the marking of SPaG across all subjects was removed. The primary reasons given by the QCA for why SPaG assessment had both failed to improve learners' skills or to be applied meaningfully was that there was never any training or standardisation given to examiners in each subject that would help them apply the marks consistently. The implication was that if SPaG had been assessed uniformly and consistently, this would have been a successful enterprise: the question of whether it had actually improved anyone's English skills seemed less important.

## **2.12 Rethinking the Assessment of Grammar**

Disregarding the fact that no evidence has ever emerged that SPaG assessment could be linked to improved competencies in English usage, in 2006 the Labour Government introduced an assessment to 'A' Levels, which was similar to SPaG and was known as QWC (Quality of Written Communication). QWC was introduced for almost exactly the same reasons that SPaG assessments had first been introduced at GCSE; namely that concerns about school leavers' abilities to write in standard forms and express themselves clearly and accurately were raised by a range of interested parties after every exam series (Elwood & Comber, 1996).

A major study by the University of Sheffield (2010) looked at the levels of literacy and numeracy of 13 to 19 year olds between 1948 and 2009 and found that number skills dipped temporarily amongst 13 year olds approximately 20 years ago, but that writing dipped in all the years between 1980 and 1993 (Rashid & Brooks, 2010, p. 34). In spite of a great deal of research into the levels of literacy amongst school leavers, by 2009 the Labour Government had again introduced, or reintroduced, QWC to GCSEs. This was almost exactly six years after SPaG assessment had been abandoned at GCSE. Changes were made this time round; there were a couple of key differences between the old and the new assessments. The first was that additional marks were not awarded at the end, as they had been before, but instead were indicated against specific long-answer questions. QWC also contained more criteria, including legibility, appropriateness of form and style and

specialist vocabulary. Fewer than 5 years after the reintroduction of QWC at GCSE, the coalition's White Paper outlined another review. The Coalition Government was convinced that QWC did not go far enough and it cited the removal of specific SPaG assessment as a 'mistake' (p.49) because of the low literacy levels that still existed amongst some school leavers. Again this seemed to ignore the fact that no studies had shown any improvements to pupils' use of spelling, punctuation or grammar where SPaG had been assessed at the end of school leavers' exams.

There are a number of fundamental conceptual concerns with assessing SPaG at GCSE, distinct from the issues surrounding methods of assessment and teachers' preparation of pupils for these new exams. In addition to one of the most fundamental questions which asks whether it is at all valid to test writing skills as part of the examination of academic subjects other than English, there are other major considerations. SPaG marks can and do change the rank order of candidates who sit the exam. Teachers of subjects such as geography, often considered a science a few years beyond GCSE study, argue that the rank placing of candidates in a subject should be determined exclusively by their performance in and knowledge of that subject (Massey & Dexter, 2002). Candidates who know absolutely nothing can demonstrate excellent use of spelling, punctuation and grammar whilst getting the answers wrong. They could, nevertheless, obtain full marks for this component, thereby altering their overall achievement. Adams (1993a, 1993b) reported some of the statistical characteristics of SPaG marks, noting many differences between subjects and between groups in average marks awarded. There were variations relating to types of questions: long essay examination papers had lower SPaG marks than question papers requiring little extended writing. This implies that a candidate who answers in greater detail may be penalised because of the number of errors that become apparent in longer pieces of writing. Candidates who write less, or write less sophisticatedly, may well do better.

### **2.13 'The Importance of Teaching'**

'The Importance of Teaching' outlined the Coalition Government's plans to make a number of changes to education, particularly at Key Stage 4 (2010). According to the Government, reform was needed because the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published figures in 2006 that appeared to show the UK had fallen down the world rankings in Literacy, Maths and Science. The Government used its interpretation of the statistics to justify its changes to policy and it hailed its white paper as 'a radical reform', maintaining that it had no choice but to be radical if the British education system aimed to be world class. However, much of what the document contained, such as the scope and nature of assessments, did not appear to be very radical at all. Earlier documents and policies such as the 1988 Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum

promoted a very similar approach, in particular to pupils' literacy and the emphasis on assessment (DES, 1989, 1988a).

The Coalition Government's main initiative for trying to raise the overall educational standards of secondary aged pupils was to implement changes to assessments, particularly those of GCSEs, which have in fact been in a constant state of change since their inception. Many of the fundamental alterations proposed by the Coalition and Conservative Governments, and a great many of those that have come and gone since 1988, are concerned with the methods of assessment and course compilation, rather than the subject content. Some GCSEs, including English, were assessed by 100% coursework when GCSEs began, with much of the written work being done as project work in the pupils' own time. The amount of coursework in GCSEs and the way in which it can be undertaken has been the subject of one directive after another. Changes in 1992 meant that academic subjects were suddenly unable to offer more than 40% coursework and in 2009 coursework in several subjects was superseded by a method of examination called 'Controlled Assessment' (Ofqual, 2013). This was introduced with the aim of addressing issues that were believed to be compromising traditional coursework (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2013).

The White Paper drew comparisons between the UK education system and those of other countries and it outlined a commitment to improving the quality of teaching, assessment and pupils' levels of English language usage. A universal consensus recognises that accurate writing is a basic requirement for life outside and beyond school, especially in employment: 'good levels of English and Mathematics continue to be the most generally useful and valuable vocational skills on offer' to an employer (Wolf, 2011, p.10). Improving the written communication skills of secondary school pupils is a pillar of education and equipping school leavers with some standard literacy aptitudes benefits not only the pupils but society in general (Cree, Kay & Steward, 2012). The Coalition Government pledged a commitment to raising literacy by once again assessing the spelling, punctuation and grammar skills of sixteen year old pupils. It acted swiftly and the assessment of SPaG now consists of allocating extra marks to the external examination, totalling 5 per cent of the weighting for the qualification (5 per cent of the total raw marks). It is the same across each of the subjects in which it is targeted and in the first instance affects those subjects that constitute the English Baccalaureate, other than English and foreign languages, notably: English literature, geography, history and religious studies.

The Government's view was that literacy is bound to improve through this practice, not least because teachers, pupils and parents will be focused on the greatest possible number of marks and attainment of the highest grades at GCSE. However, trying to raise literacy by this method is in

opposition to research that tells us the assessing of grammar, especially where it is simply awarded a mark, does not raise levels of literacy and does nothing to improve school leaver's English (Myhill, Jones, Lines & Watson; 2012).

According to The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), who led the consultation on GCSE reform, the process of asking teachers and stakeholders for their views lasted 12 weeks, which is the minimum time recommended by parliamentary consultation principles: they advise that for new and contentious policies, more than 12 weeks might be appropriate. This consultation suggests that the Coalition Government did not seek to consider teachers' views in as much depth as it could have (DfE, 2013b). None of the questions in the consultation asked teachers how they might feel about assessing SPaG or changing the way they have to teach to include the use of language, yet this might have been one of the questions that teachers most wanted to answer. The consultation paper contained three questions relating to SPaG but they were all about the number of marks that should be allocated to each paper (Ofqual, 2013, p. 22). Overall, there were a total of 1,175 responses to the quantitative questions, but not all of the respondents answered each question, with some choosing specific aspects of the reform on which to comment. It is not easy to categorise all of the respondents but only 884 individual teachers responded, with awarding bodies, parents and trade unions making up the rest. The reforms were brought in with very little feedback from teachers, of whom there were approximately 451,000 at the time of the consultation (DfE, 2012) and therefore, the number who responded to the survey represents approximately one in every five hundred teachers.

The speed at which the new SPaG assessments were introduced and the lack of specific consultation that accompanied them suggests that assumptions may have been made about teachers' knowledge and ability to assess grammar. Research into secondary teachers' knowledge of grammar, especially secondary humanities teachers, is limited. Most of that which does exist is focused either on primary teachers or on EAL specialists and Brumfit et al note that in the UK, models for developing knowledge about language in the classroom 'have been informed by little empirical evidence' (Brumfit, Mitchell & Hooper, 1996). The literature that was produced by the exam boards and performance criteria from which examiners had to work was also unhelpfully vague and used words like 'limited' and 'good' to differentiate between the 3 levels: Threshold; Intermediate; High. No exemplars were provided. It is little wonder, therefore, that an evaluation of SPaG assessment over the ten years from 1992 to 2002 concluded that there was a variation in the application of the criteria across groups and across subjects within groups (Massey & Dexter, 2002). In addition, in 2015, Ofsted published a report into pupils' progress and learning at key stage 3 when they are

being taught by the same teachers who will teach them at GCSE and it was damningly entitled 'The Wasted Years'. Inspectors reported concerns about the progress made in English, particularly noting that pupils repeated work they had done at primary school and classes were taught by non-specialists: 'worse still, the rigour with which spelling, punctuation and grammar is being taught at primary stage is often not developed sufficiently at secondary stage, especially in the foundation subjects like history and geography' (Wilshaw, 2015).

In 2013, one of the UK's biggest exam boards, AQA, published a response to the GCSE reforms that have been implemented. They made the Coalition Government aware that most GCSEs are 'item-based' where a single examiner does not see a whole script. Therefore, it is impossible for an overall SPaG mark to be allocated (AQA, 2013, p. 4). The report also stated that the quality of pupils' written communication had not shown a strong correlation with the main knowledge and skills under examination, the consequence of which was that the SPaG marks failed to achieve their intended weighting so had little bearing on a candidate's final grade.

Another fundamental concern is that of discrimination. Massey and Elliott (1996) studied gender differences in language usage over a period of nearly 14 years and their findings suggest that this method of assessment might leave boys disadvantaged. Additional studies of writing during exams and at 16+ show that boys tend to use a slightly richer vocabulary and marginally more ambitious grammatical structures. Girls, on the other hand, make fewer errors and are less likely to make some specific punctuation errors than boys (Stobart, Elwood & Quinlan, 1992). Limited evidence gathered by the Midland Examining Group for the Inter-Group Research Committee (1993) reported that females slightly outperformed males of equivalent subject ability in SPaG assessments. Therefore, SPaG assessment in its new form could advantage girls at the expense of boys. This could also impact differently across the range of GCSE subjects involved in the first phase of implementation from September 2012, depending upon the gender breakdown of the cohorts of learners entered for these qualifications. In addition, the main determinant of SPaG marks will inevitably be spelling, rather than punctuation and grammar, because for most non-specialist teachers it is spelling that is easier to correct, to justify and to identify. This would be particularly unfortunate for boys (Elwood & Comber, 1996; Massey & Elliot, 2005).

Similarly, assessing SPaG may discriminate against pupils whose mother tongue is not English and may therefore prejudice specific linguistic groups. According to The National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC), minority ethnic and EAL pupils account for up to 13.6% of all secondary pupils but 'The Importance of Teaching' White Paper avoids mentioning them altogether (NALDIC, 2013). Research undertaken by Cummins alerts educators to the need to

distinguish between conversational fluency and academic language proficiency when working with children whose first language is not English (1980, 1981, 1984, 2000). Data from the various studies showed that on average it took a pupil about two years of exposure to English in order to be conversationally fluent but about 5-7 years to reach a level of academic English. This means that pupils whose first language is not English could be lagging some way behind native speakers throughout the whole of their senior schooling, yet they are being tested in exactly the same way. The written language skills of learners with a hearing impairment may also be less developed than those of their peers. A study by Gaines, Mandler and Bryant (1981; 463-469) found that only 1.4% of deaf 16 year olds read at an age-appropriate level. In these circumstances pupils may be more than capable of responding to the subject matter of a question, but find written language challenging. They will be disadvantaged if they are penalised on this factor. The Government's policy may inadvertently exacerbate some of the existing barriers to equal assessment and even create new ones (DfE, 2013a, 2013b).

#### **2.14 The Problem with Policy**

In spite of research into the merits of learning about grammar and its relationship with improved literacy, the Coalition Government (2010 to 2015) and the current Government in England and Wales have continued to focus a great deal of attention on spelling, punctuation and grammar by testing these formally in primary schools; firstly in 2013 and then with a new test which was introduced in 2016. The emergence of the new key stage 2 test was due in part to the data collected from the 2013 tests, which showed that a quarter of all 11 year olds did not meet the Government's own benchmarks in literacy and that children entering secondary school, at the start of key stage 3, were struggling to reach the expected levels (level 4) despite their seven years of primary schooling (DfE, 2013). The separate scores for SPaG were lower than the separate scores for Reading, Writing and Maths by almost ten percent. The 2013 exams were introduced quickly and concerns were raised by teaching unions, eminent researchers and schools before the tests were implemented because it was felt that they were flawed (Myhill, 2013) and the grammar decontextualized. Nevertheless, the current Department for Education interpreted the figures as showing that a quarter of primary school leavers did not know basic grammar and so introduced a more rigorous and longer test in 2016. The key stage 2 SPaG test contains short answer, decontextualized questions which take the form of gap fill and error correction and include sophisticated grammatical awareness of concepts such as active and passive verbs, and subordinate clauses. This is all in spite of the fact that there does not appear to be any conclusive evidence that shows a correlation

between assessing decontextualised grammar and pupils' improved literacy levels (Andrews, Torgerson, Beverton, Freeman, Locke, Low, Robinson & Zhu, 2006; Myhill, 2010a, 2012, 2014).

The newest National Curriculum for England and Wales (DfE, 2013) states that pupils at all key stages 'should develop the stamina and skills to write at length, with accurate spelling and punctuation' and they should be taught the 'correct use of grammar' (p.10). This suggests that the 'grammar' to which the document refers is a rule-bound, prescriptive one because it also proposes that for children in key stages 1 to 3 'explicit knowledge of grammar is, however, very important, as it gives us more conscious control and choice in our language' (p.66). The Framework Document for key stages 3 and 4 prescribes how children should be able to discuss writing with precise and confident use of linguistic terminology (DfE, 2014, p.17). At the same time, the document contains a glossary for the programme of study which it says is an aid for teachers and not a body of knowledge which children have to learn and it also says that pupils should 'expand the range of their writing and the variety of the grammar they use' (p.10). This potentially leaves teachers confused about what specific aspects of grammar they should know and what specific grammar children need to know.

Teachers of a wide range of subjects are now having to teach and assess grammar in order for pupils to achieve the highest spelling, punctuation and grammar marks at GCSE. However, socio-linguistics and language variation are vast areas of study and language evolves continuously, with old laws giving way to new ones and with the study of language amongst certain users allowing us to understand more about them and their identities (Cheshire & Milroy, 1993; Chambers & Trudgill, 1998; Cheshire, Edwards & Whittle, 1989). Research into the use of 'like', predominately by teenagers in sentences such as 'I was like, really happy' asserts a consciously youthful identity and convention which is understood by all receivers but flouts written and spoken rules. Even amongst 'specialists' in the field of language and linguistics there is still little consensus on what constitutes an 'error' in language and grammatical usage (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2007; Carter & McCarthy, 2006).

### **2.15 Teachers' Subject Knowledge for Teaching Grammar**

The discussions around how and whether to impart explicit knowledge about language to pupils leads to the related issue of teachers' linguistic knowledge. Lack of grammatical appreciation, inconsistent and even poor grammar usage amongst some teachers may lead to unreliable teaching and assessment of grammar. Teachers' regional variations and the interpretation of language amongst teachers from other English-speaking countries, or amongst non-native teachers, exacerbates this issue. Studies have shown that many new students entering teacher-training

courses believe they have very little 'knowledge about language' and lack the 'metalinguistic knowledge' to be able to talk about that which they do know (Williamson & Hardman, 1995). This is in spite of these recruits being of an age when they would have experienced grammar rules contained within the National Curriculum and Literacy Strategies. A study of practising teachers concludes that they do not know very much grammar and are also suspicious of methods to teach it (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005). Their lack of knowledge may be a serious obstacle to their grammar teaching. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are not always clearly identifiable concepts, and can be nebulous even for teachers of English. The difficulties may be manifold for a non-English specialist. Cajkler and Hislam (2002) record the difficulties trainee teachers of English experience in trying to demonstrate sufficient linguistic subject knowledge to meet the standards required to qualify as a teacher of English (DfES, 2000). Myhill also observes that for many teachers of English in England, their career pathway into teaching has not prepared them to be confident either about what they are teaching or how to teach it (Myhill, 2005). Blake and Shortis (2010) found that trainee English teachers worry about how little grammatical knowledge they possess and a recent study of trainee teachers found that they think they know more about language than they may actually do. During the research participants were unable to identify parts of speech and aspects of grammatical structures that their pupils are expected to know (Sangster, Anderson & O'Hara, 2012).

The debates about grammar often focus on whether or not there has been a decline in the knowledge that school leavers, undergraduates and teachers all possess compared to specific, or sometimes unspecified times in the past. Alderson reports findings from data collected in a test-based survey of British university graduates in 2009 and compared it with a similar survey conducted in 1986. He also compared the UK to other countries. Results show a general reduction in some areas of grammatical knowledge and in all cases UK students had weaker knowledge in 2009 than they had in 1986. Participants who had taken a foreign language A level performed better than other groups but interestingly, those with an 'A' level in English language did not.

In other Anglophone countries, teachers' lack of grammatical knowledge mirrors that found in the U.K. In Australia, systemic functional linguistics (SFL) has been influencing aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy for several decades but there are still questions being raised about the content of teacher education programs and beginning teachers' lack of preparedness to teach children about language (Louden, Rohl, Gore, Greaves, McIntosh, Wright, Siemon & House, 2005). SFL is concerned with describing conventions and looking at contexts but because it is a dynamic field of study it poses problems of its own. One of the problems for development of a 'good enough grammatics' (Macken-Horaik, 2012) is that the terminology takes a while to learn and has proved to be forbidding

for teachers. The linguistic framework of SFL is a specialised field, with a demanding conceptual architecture that requires induction into multiple linguistic systems. Many teachers find the associated and necessary metalanguage challenging to learn.

Australian teachers who were schooled in the 'post-traditional grammar' years, since the 1960s, feel positive about teaching language but lack the knowledge to do so (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005). Teachers express a lack of confidence about their knowledge levels and have little confidence in areas that are traditionally regarded as basic skills, such as the rules of standard grammar (Hammond & Macken-Horaik, 2001). A multi-modal design survey given to teachers in their first year of education degrees found that the majority could not answer questions about grammar that pupils in years 7, 10 and 11 were expected to know. The participants showed a generally poor knowledge about language and a superficial semantic level (Harper & Rennie, 2009). They struggled particularly when asked about how words might be presented as different parts of speech depending on how they were used and participants also displayed negative attitudes to non-standard usage. In conclusion, trainee teachers had limited abilities to analyse the language they saw and did not possess the metalanguage to discuss the relationship between form and meaning.

In America, the picture is similar to that in Britain and Australia. The lack of consensus on what should constitute language instruction, along with an absence of teaching methods that effectively teach English language, no matter how construed, leave the grammar textbooks as the default means of addressing English in the curriculum (Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O'Donnell-Allen & Konopak, 2007). However, even this traditional grammar instruction appears unable to fully enable students to write with the standardised version of English that is presumed to be the optimal in standardised assessments (Gere, Fairbanks, Howes, Roop & Schaafsma, 1992).

A recent survey undertaken in England by Safford, Messer, McLachlan and Walker (2015) into the impact on teachers and teaching of SPaG for the year 6 test found that the knowledge that teachers possessed when the assessments were introduced varied considerably from teacher to teacher. Some practitioners had English language degrees, the content of which was directly relatable, and some had completely unrelated degree specialisms. However, all of them had felt the need to hone their skills in order to teach the pupils and were aware of the high stakes of such an assessment. The most positive reports about pupils' improved grammar skills came from those teachers who had contextualised their teaching of the grammar in literature. The study hypothesised that 'contextualised grammar study is more likely to happen where teachers are confident about their own grammar knowledge and feel able to make time in the classroom to talk with pupils about texts and language' (Safford et al, 2015, p. 44). The fact that the majority of teachers in the survey disliked

the test more than the children did might be attributed to their concerns about their own subject knowledge. The participants said that they thought it was fairly easy to prepare pupils for the test, using regular practice and drills in bite-sized units that they could recall and spot in the exam. In addition, 75% of respondents said that they thought children's knowledge about grammar had improved and children had become more accurate users of language. However, teachers also said that the test contained few real life examples or examples from literature, where language might be used more creatively and that for many pupils, there was a mismatch between what they could identify on the test and their own use of language in writing, with aspects of the test simply being a test of memory. The implications are that overall children may become more adept at identifying parts of speech, but they might not be any more creative, be any more able to write with clarity or be any more able to express themselves clearly, than they were before they prepared for the test. Preparing pupils for high stakes testing at key stage 4 is the job of most secondary school teachers and from 2017 they will all be in a position where new assessments and a wholly revamped examination format is introduced nationally. The resources that accompany these changes are invaluable to teachers, especially if they feel less confident about the content of the courses. It would be impossible to produce an exhaustive list of the grammar mistakes that could be penalised at the point of assessment in GCSEs; nevertheless, Edexcel, one of the UK's largest examination boards, has published some guidelines to teachers of the subjects in which spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) will be assessed in exams. Its geography GCSE guide contains an overview of the reasons why this is being introduced and how it will be done (Edexcel Geography, 2012, 6). The guide asserts that examiners comment on the frequent use of 'would of' and 'should of' and lapses in the use of formal language, as what it describes as 'text messaging language' often creeps into exams (Edexcel Geography, 2012). An overview of grammatical constructions, or lapses in usage, are not detailed and no provision is made for teachers' lack of grammatical understanding. What this means is that teachers preparing pupils for exams do so without a clear idea of how the marks will be awarded, how pupils' work might be penalised or indeed how they themselves might judge their pupils' own knowledge.

One of the leading exam board's specifications for history GCSE (AQA, 2013) outlines the mark scheme for controlled assessments which are marked by the teacher and then moderated externally. In order to achieve marks in the highest band, candidates 'may communicate by demonstrating highly developed/complex understanding of the rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar' (p. 26). It does not go into any more detail about what these rules might be or how the candidate can show their complex understanding of the rules of grammar. It is difficult to work out

how a candidate could show that they possess a 'complex understanding' of something, almost as if the 'complex' has come adrift and the sentence should read 'show their understanding of the complex rules of grammar' instead. There are no examples from which teachers could work, which suggests that the Government feels teachers' knowledge enables them to make informed decisions about grammar. It also suggests that all teachers are able to apply their interpretations of pupils' 'complex understanding' of grammar in the same way when linked to the mark scheme.

The content of teacher training courses in secondary education for humanities subjects is focused on pedagogy and subject specialist content, but it seems that few programmes impart knowledge about language or grammar to aspiring teachers, other than the use of key terms. Of those institutions that do mention language explicitly, Manchester Metropolitan University is one example. Its 2015/2016 geography PGCE guide (MMU, Faculty of Education, Secondary Geography) tells trainees, who are near to the end of the course and undertaking a subject development task, to 'explore the importance of SPaG when marking GCSE questions and the usefulness of grammar such as "connectives" in attaining higher marks' (p. 49) but it says nothing else about SPaG. The Coalition Government's 2014 mandatory programme of study for key stage 3 geography does not mention SPaG at all. Similar pictures emerge from other English-speaking countries. Conclusions drawn from an American teacher's journey through college and initial teaching jobs found that the explication of theory on the usefulness of teaching grammar is not valuable; what is required is a dialectic between theory and practice that contributes to teachers' capacities to adapt either or both to their teaching (Smagorinsky et al, 2007).

Teachers of humanities subjects at KS4 are faced with a lack of information relating to grammar during their training and a subsequent lack of information from the exam boards once they start teaching. This is often combined with their own lack of knowledge. This study set out to discover how teachers feel about their own subject knowledge, the lack of information and how they approach their teaching and assessment of SPaG in view of this.

## **2.16 Summary**

This study into teachers' awareness and knowledge of grammar is significant because it comes at a time when SPaG is receiving a large political focus and when GCSEs are being fundamentally changed. The assessing of SPaG in humanities GCSEs has now been firmly established, alongside a newly designed marking system, when all of the literature suggests that the decontextualised assessing of SPaG is largely irrelevant when trying to raise literacy levels. Simply learning about grammar, when it is reduced to identifying parts of speech, or trying to adhere to a set of rules in order to use a standardised form of language, does nothing to promote literacy levels. All of the

reviewed literature suggests that an approach to language that teaches grammar and usage in the context of students' writing, literary texts and vernacular work, rather than one that insists on a single 'standard' version encourages a greater engagement with learners. Understanding of language gained through generative approaches, such as sentence combining, helps pupils to appreciate their own knowledge of language and helps to develop an awareness of non-standard forms.

The literature also exposes the notion that adding SPaG marks to exam questions might actually have a detrimental effect on the outcome. Nevertheless, aspects of the SPaG assessment are also being extended to a new group of GCSEs, including Maths and Science, in which pupils will receive additional marks for the correct spelling of key words and terms. What this shows is current policymakers' continued, strong commitment to SPaG and the belief that assessing it at the end of key stage 4 is one of the ways in which literacy levels will be raised.

Given the overhaul of the GCSE examinations, including the abandoning of continuous assessment in many subjects and the realigning of what is considered to be a 'pass' grade, it is too soon to say what the outcomes at GCSE will be in respect of the SPaG marks and what difference they may make over a period of time. However, the historical evidence of assessing SPaG as an add-on, by teachers who have received little training or clarity about how this should be done, suggests that literacy levels of 16 year olds will not be affected one way or another by the addition of SPaG marks.

The review of literature relating to teachers' knowledge shows that, in general, teachers do not know very much about grammar. Nevertheless, they now have to engage with it and their own experiences of and confidence with language in use are therefore extremely significant. Teachers' feelings and experiences are at the core of this research and the next chapter provides a detailed description of the research methods and methodology which were used to collect the data, respond to the research questions and pursue the aims and sub-aims.

## Chapter 3

### METHODS

#### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 examined the history of grammar teaching and highlighted the fact that assessing it as an adjunct to an external exam has never been shown to improve the literacy of school leavers.

Discussion also showed that different approaches to grammar teaching yield different results; but the prescriptive approach has been shown to be largely ineffective at equipping school leavers either with knowledge about grammar or with improved ability to use language. Teachers who have been educated during a range of different timeframes do not feel equipped to teach grammar, regardless of their personal experiences of learning it, and often feel that their own knowledge is inadequate. This feeling of being ill-prepared formed the basis for this research: with the research context being specific to recent policy changes to assessment of SPaG at key stage 4 and the attending need for non-specialist teachers to engage with SPaG.

In this chapter I discuss the conceptual paradigm of the research model and the methods by which the research questions were addressed. I present information from the pilot study that helped to shape and hone the research and I introduce the research participants. I also explain the methods used to collect, code, transcribe and analyse the data.

The case study approach used in this research explored what teachers knew about grammar as well as the way that they felt about preparing pupils for the SPaG marks. The research tool used to collect the data was repeated interviews with practising humanities teachers, and a combination of Jefferson transcription (Jefferson, 2004) and Charmazian Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) were used for data analysis. The work of Derrida, in particular his work on deconstruction (Derrida, 1967), gave the research its socio-cultural framework.

The research questions which grew from the research aims (p.4) and which the chosen methods of enquiry sought to answer were:

1. What were teachers' experiences of learning about grammar and language in their own schooling?
2. Did teachers feel that any of their own education or professional development had given them knowledge and confidence regarding grammar?
3. What were teachers' feelings about the introduction of, and changes to, SPaG marks?
4. What importance did they attach to ensuring that pupils gained the additional SPaG marks?

*Figure 3.1: The research questions*

### **3.2 Ontology and Epistemology**

The need to discover and present one's own perceptions of reality and human nature are a key feature of qualitative research and can be described as the 'study of being' (Blaikie, 1993). According to Guba (1990), one's chosen research paradigm can be characterised by the ontological position and the epistemological position because they create a holistic view of our appreciation of knowledge and how we position ourselves in relation to that knowledge. As ontological positions demonstrate researchers' views about the nature of social reality, epistemological positions reflect their opinion of what can be known about the world and how it can be studied, and together 'they shape the approach to theory and the methods' (Marsh & Furlong, 2002).

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2005), the main ontological questions include whether or not social reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretation; whether there is a commonly shared social reality and whether or not social behaviour is governed by laws. A researcher's ontological and epistemological positions can broadly be classified as either positivist and constructionist or interpretivist and relativist. A positivist position is considered to be more objective and sees reality as existing outside and apart from our own experience, waiting to be found: the relativist position, by contrast, is more subjective and sees reality as existing as it is constructed and interpreted by those involved. However, there are positions that exist between the two seemingly contrasting schools and Hudson and Ozanne (1989) place value on the importance of an interpretivist researcher needing to have some knowledge of the context in order to be able to understand motives, meanings and reasons; with the implication that within an overarching research paradigm there are often differing interpretations that may be needed in order to ensure a holistic understanding of the entire subject.

Qualitative researchers often take a relativist and interpretivist approach and in this research, the ontological premise was that there is no single, knowable, external reality and all that we can know about teachers' knowledge and experiences is reached through the open interpretation of the words they used and the way they chose to express themselves. The ontological assumptions were that participants' stories both shape their lives and are themselves shaped by their lives.

Epistemology is the examination of how knowledge is made and according to Crotty (1998), epistemology is about understanding 'how we know what we know'. It lays a philosophical foundation upon which the research is built and, in relation to teachers, is designed to yield insights without simplistic interpretations. My chosen research design arose from my own subjectivist position on the nature of grammar and grammar teaching. Subjectivist research is concerned with the position of the researcher in the research and not only with how the data are constructed but

also with how they are presented and analysed. It views the researcher and the participants as linked by the context.

The subjectivist researcher constructs an impression of what is seen and needs to be reflexive about the process (Charmaz, 2006) in order to address how far their own views and assumptions might have influenced the research, the data and the analysis. My own position with regards to grammar and grammar teaching is equivocal. I believe grammar is interesting and worthy of exploration and I teach what I can about it to GCSE pupils and to Sixth Form pupils, some of whom have English as an Additional Language (EAL). I also believe that it is culturally relevant and an important part of an individual's heritage to know about their mother tongue. On the other hand, I am aware that simply knowing about aspects of grammar will not automatically make a pupil better or more creative at using language. For that there needs to be exposure to a range of literature and text types, across a range of genres (Myhill, 2011; Safford, 2015). At times I am frustrated that my colleagues do not share my enthusiasm for language and are happy to consider themselves ignorant of anything to do with grammar. Simultaneously, I understand how difficult grammar can be both to learn about and to explain to others. When designing the questions that I posed during the interview, I was invariably wondering what my own answers to them would be if I were the interviewee instead of the interviewer. Sometimes, I did not know; sometimes I could have talked at length and in depth. This highlighted the complexity of the relationship that exists between the interviewer and interviewee, and is discussed further on in this chapter.

### **3.3 Case Study Methodology**

Few researchers in the field of qualitative educational research agree on precise procedures for data collection, analysis and reporting (Creswell, 1994, p. 143) but Silverman stresses the need for a theoretical underpinning of any research, with no excuses made for qualitative research undertakings (2004). The qualitative researcher is committed to a naturalistic perspective (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992, p.4) and for my research, in which the focus was on settings, people, policy and language, a qualitative approach seemed most able to provide the breadth of framework that was required. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In addition, qualitative frameworks help to emphasise institutional processes and use inductive analysis and Grounded Theory (Woods, 1992) in order to learn more about them.

Case study was employed as the research approach within this study. Case study research is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, designed to capture and show understanding of a social complexity. According to Merriam, the case encompasses the unit of analysis, the process

of study and outcome (2009). I decided to use a case study approach because according to the work of Nisbet and Watt (1980, 1984) case studies facilitate a broad and illuminative knowledge of the phenomenon under scrutiny and allow the researcher to gain a deep knowledge of not only the environment but also of the participants' experiences. Case studies are concerned with the interaction of factors, processes and events in a specific case, and the researcher's nearness to the situation and knowledge of the setting often allows them to answer the questions that lead to a more detailed understanding of the research context. Case studies also arise from the need to understand 'complex social phenomena' (Yin, 2009) which are prevalent in this study when working with the thoughts, feelings and life experiences of participants, alongside government policy, exam board specifications and school structures.

I teach GCSEs that have been affected by changes successive governments have made to assessing pupils' work and therefore shared a common experience with the participants. I saw my ability to empathise with all the participants as a means to gaining a better feel of how they interpret and construct ideas about their teaching and associated knowledge. Kvale (1996) presents the view that a qualitative interview is an attempt to understand the world of the subject, from their point of view. In these case studies, my understanding of working with changes at key stage 4, and sharing some of the skills participants need in relation to preparing pupils for new GCSEs, helped me gain access to participants' 'lived worlds'. I understood the political context within which they operated and had first-hand experience of the way in which recent policy has imposed new demands on them. I received no significant or meaningful grammatical instruction when I was at school, in common with many non-specialist teachers that I know. Therefore, I felt that my understanding of the case studies was enhanced by my closeness to a number of central aspects of the research and my understanding of teachers' lived experiences, from both a theoretical and a practical position. Each case study provided me with the opportunity to work intensively with the data that were generated in relation to a field in which I have a personal stake and understanding. The case study approach, as defined by Eisenhardt (1989), represents a strategy which focuses on the dynamics present within particular situations and lends itself to school settings.

There are a number of essential features of case study findings. One of the most important is that they not only provide descriptions but they also generate data which supports a grounded theory approach to analysis (Bruce, 2007; Harper, 2003; Mauthner, 2003). Case studies are highly reflexive undertakings and the multiple perspectives that are offered by the various participants can help to supply information on emerging concepts (Eisenhardt, 1989; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stake, 2005). A case study approach was the natural method for this research because case studies can move

beyond the specific case and its participants and can be used to infer potential next directions for the setting or wider context (Yin, 1994, p 31). The findings provided by case study research can be used to help improve institutional practice, policies and procedures and Bassey (1992a) presents the hypothesis that researchers in the field of education are doing one of two things: they are either trying to understand or are trying to change an aspect of education. As far as this research is concerned, ultimately it attempted to show an understanding of the experience of key stage 4 teachers at a time of change and uncertainty. On its own it is unlikely to change any aspect of education but it can play a part in raising awareness of teachers' experiences. It can also, potentially, contribute to training and development for teachers at GCSE.

Using a case study approach appeared to offer a way of meeting my aim of critically analysing the implications for professional development that might arise from this research. Yin (1994) and Hamel et al (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993) argue that despite some studies focusing simply on a small number of cases, or indeed one single case, as long as the objectives of the study are met there can be a general applicability outside of the localised study. Case study research aims to discover what the particular and specific details of the case are, and possibly also to discover those aspects that might be common to other cases and settings. In order to cover both the local and the global aspects of the case, careful and detailed accounts of the historical, political and institutional contexts, as well as the physical setting, need to be carefully analysed (Stake, 1998).

In this research, theories related to knowledge and experience of grammar may also resonate experientially with a broad cross-section of readers and may lead to what Yin (1994) calls 'analytic generalisation' that emerge from the research. This gives the opportunity for significant features of the data to be explored further (Stake, 2005, p 445). Such generalisations are acceptable because the focus is 'not on the uniqueness of a special case but on what can be taken away from it' (Stake, 2005, p 390). According to Stake (1993, p 8) a case study is likely to add credence to existing generalisations. Stake (1995) argues for an approach that is centred on intuitive, empirically-grounded generalizations which he describes as 'naturalistic'. This emerges from the case study method which allows researchers to retain the meaningful characteristics of real-life events as they are happening.

Bassey refers to generalisations that can replace scientific or empirical certainty as 'fuzzy logic' (1998b). He claims that on their own, fuzzy generalisations that suggest rather than claim, and imply a strong 'maybe' and possibility rather than certainty, may be no more than the researcher's own proposition. However, where it is supported by a research account that makes clear the context and the justifying evidence, it can contribute a great deal to educational research. Fuzzy generalisations

are accompanied by the notion of 'best-efforts-of-trustworthiness', where the researcher makes it clear that they are making an educated guess. When working with humans and their infinite variables this is a useful tool and although fuzzy generalisations may not be true in every case, they are powerful because they are likely to be true in most cases (Bassey, 1995; 1998b; 1999).

### **3.4 Interview Methods**

All of the interviews potentially allowed me to discover the detailed experiences, attitudes and grammatical knowledge possessed by teachers of humanities subjects. Participants were interviewed once in 2014 and once in 2015, and during the interviews teachers spent a lot of time describing their experiences and feelings, which is a significant tenet of case study research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Punch (1986) and Burgess (1989) agree that an accessible and equitable relationship between the researcher and the researched can be a key to undertaking an effective interview, thus encouraging honest responses (Punch, 1986, p12).

In the main research, interviewing teachers with whom I did not work, and therefore did not manage or appraise, allowed me to open up the potential to gain trust and possibly removed the hierarchical relationship that may be perceived to exist in my own work setting. I knew that the participants might have considered me to be an expert in English, because I am an English teacher, so I ensured that I told all of them that I had not been taught grammar at school and when it came up in discussions, I elaborated on this to tell them about my educational experience. More importantly perhaps, the fact that I had told the participants that the research was being undertaken independent of any funding body and without any alliance to either my school or their school, allowed me to present myself as a teacher and student, rather than a manager, inspector or critic. This enabled me, as far as possible, to remove the potential for a hierarchical relationship to manifest itself (Kvale, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews constituted the main technique and provide the corpus of the data collected. The interviews were aimed at stimulating the teachers to reflect on their life experiences and to tell their personal stories with regard to grammar. This biographical reflexivity is described by Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf (2000) as crucial to an understanding of the context in which participants have made choices and taken actions. Sharing a teacher's chronological history helps to contextualise their specific experiences and the loosely structured approach to questioning creates an emancipatory effect which allows the speaker freedom to explore their history (Perks & Thomson, 1998). The interviews were taped and transcribed and the data then coded; a process which is described in greater detail in later sections. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the type of open interviews with which I was engaged seek to obtain descriptions of the interviewee's

lived world, with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. They come close to an everyday conversation, but as a professional interview they have a purpose and involve a specific approach and technique. Their semi-structured nature means that they are neither an open, everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Interviews are managed verbal exchanges and their effectiveness, with regard to the usefulness of the data generated, also depends heavily on the communication skills of the interviewer (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). These skills include the preparedness of clearly structured, open and relevant questions and the ability to listen attentively and respond accordingly. Listening is an active phase of the interview rather than a passive one and it necessitates appropriate pauses, probing or prompting (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.141). Researchers need to encourage interviewees to talk freely whilst simultaneously ensuring that the conversations remain focused on the research questions. Fairclough draws on Halliday's approach to the enactment of meaning through the language used in conversation and sees this as simultaneously constitutive of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). An environment in which it is made easy for interviewees to respond naturally needs to be facilitated (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007) and interpersonal skills such as the ability to establish rapport, perhaps with humour and humility, are also important (Opie, 2004).

The justification for using semi-structured interviews was that it allowed for some structure to be applied to the conversations. The topics and issues that I wanted to address were specified in advance, in outline form. The semi-structured approach assisted me in my desire to treat all participants in the same way because I could begin by asking them all the same questions. However, the flexibility of the semi-structured method was that the sequence and appropriate wording of the questions could also be decided in the course of the interviews; the opportunities to change the words but not the meanings of questions or to rephrase them appropriately acknowledges the fact that not every word has the same meaning to every respondent and that not every respondent uses the same vocabulary (Treece & Treece, 1986). As this research was concerned with portraying and capturing the uniqueness of how individual cases felt about the assessment of grammar, questions were generally open-ended so as to acquire participants' unique perspectives. The interview questions were based on the original research questions, issues identified from the literature review and from my own observations. They were based around the themes of life stages, professional development and classroom practices in order to gain an understanding of how teachers are approaching the assessment of grammar. Questions allowed the interviewees to develop ideas and

'speak more widely on issues raised by the interviewer' (Denscombe, 2003, p. 167). They included the following:

- What were your experiences of learning grammar at school?
- Can you remember any teachers or university tutors correcting your grammar, and if so, how did they do that?
- When preparing for teaching (PGCE) did you receive any training or input on how to teach or assess aspects of language?
- How do you feel about the changes to GCSEs in relation to SPaG?
- How confident do you feel about having to prepare pupils for the extra marks that are now available?
- How do you/your department/your school approach these changes?

*Figure 3.2: Interview questions*

At interview, each participant discussed their experiences of education, including their earliest memories of school. As the participants told their stories and answered my questions, it became clear that thinking about when and how they had learnt about English was an intense and thought-provoking process. It was a time during which aspects of the participants' incompletely articulated experiences were explored. They were encouraged to develop the dialogue in ways relevant to their own lives (DeVault, 1990).

Although respondents were all asked similar questions which covered their experiences of being a language learner at school, through to their current classroom practices, the responses that emerged evolved in ways that could not have been predicted. According to the work of Gubrium and Holstein (1997), the objective of the interview is not to dictate interpretation, but to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues, and not to be confined by predetermined agendas. Considering their experiences and then trying to make sense of them and discern their meaning in relation to learning language, I believe the participants found the interviews self-informative (Bruner, 1990) and revealing.

The data that emerged from both sets of interviews were more personal than I had anticipated. My assumption had been that experiences would be more event-focussed when participants talked about aspects of language learning, more abstract when they talked about feelings or more detached when they talked about policy and exam boards. However, from the first interview it became clear to me that my position in the research often accounted for the personal responses

which were given by participants. My active experience of teaching GCSEs during this time of huge change, enabled me to sympathise in ways I had not wholly considered in the pre-interview stages and it allowed for a degree of empathetic understanding which contributed to the honesty and relevance of the interviews. Not only was I able to share with teachers the experience of teaching key stage 4 every day but I was also able to share with most of them the experience of having been taught very little about English grammar throughout my schooling. I took several opportunities to reassure participants that knowledge of grammar is not universal and I talked about my experience of working in English departments where teachers of many years' experience felt that they did not know very much about grammar. This surprised a number of the participants, who had told me that they use the English teachers as proof-readers and editors because of their perceived superior knowledge.

Kvale (1996) describes the position of the interviewer as paramount and the interviewee as the 'research instrument' at this stage. The interviewer necessarily activates the production of knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995); the interviewer provokes, directs, harnesses and develops responses. This requires the interviewer to be an expert in the subject matter and in interaction and communication, creating an atmosphere in which the interviewee feels secure and able to converse freely. I believe this collaboration enriched the interviews for everyone and whilst I had had initial difficulties setting up the interviews and finding participants for the study, by the time of my second interviews the participants were fully engaged, interested and hugely cooperative. Many offered to send me resources for my own use, planning documents that they used and data which I had not asked for. These acts of kindness and selflessness demonstrated teachers' willingness to support my academic undertakings and showed their genuine desires to facilitate and enable my studies. It may also have been their attempt to offer me something that they felt would be of benefit to me, if they had the impression that their knowledge of grammar was not something they could contribute or share with me.

The pilot study had clearly demonstrated that a 'grammar audit', which I had been in favour of initially, only served to make teachers feel worse about their levels of knowledge. I gave the participants in the pilot study a checklist and exercise sheet for them to comment on and discuss in the interview but none of them had done more than simply attempt it and it became an embarrassment for them. I considered modifying it for this research but after I had analysed the findings from the pilot study, I decided that I did not want to risk upsetting or alienating any of the teachers before I had met them so I did not send it to them in advance.

Adler and Adler place participants across a 'spectrum of reluctance' according to the subject matter and their own relationships with it but they also show that such reluctance or reticence is not a description of character and can be managed by the researcher through what they call careful 'stage management' (2003, p.153, 174). This management is a blend of humour, integrity, rapport and the normalising of the respondent's fears and concerns. In the case of these interviews, all of the transcripts suggest that rapport was established very early, even before the face-to-face meeting and that this allowed for concerns and fears to be allayed. Although I wanted the participants to engage with the question of their learning experiences from the outset of the interviews, I also made an explicit point of telling them about my own limited experiences of learning about grammar at school and my current experiences of teaching a subject that is at the fore of the changes being introduced to GCSEs. In this way I hoped to build a rapport and redress any hierarchical imbalance between the positions of interviewer and interviewee.

The rapport that had been established during the first interviews and which had spanned the intervening year, helped the respondents to feel a degree of trust in me and in the process. Opie (2004) argues that the ability to establish rapport, using humour and humility where appropriate, are important ingredients in the interview process and the transcripts show that teachers were more willing to talk about themselves with less prompting in the second interviews than during the first.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

When working with human subjects as part of the research, key ethical considerations are that no harm should be caused, no one should be exploited, voluntary consent must be sought and data must be treated with respect. Ethical considerations also cover the concept of reflexivity in relation to the role and power of the researcher and the 'politics of personality' (Soyini Madison, 2005), which is of particular importance when the research might induce participants to show weaknesses or failings. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines regarding participant consent were adhered to at all stages, in order to ensure ethical practice was followed (BERA, 2004).

Voluntary informed consent was needed and was given by all involved at the start of the process. The level of personal involvement between the subject and the researcher has always to be considered: knowing or not knowing the participants can pose ethical advantages and disadvantages which must be weighed, measured and declared. In each of my research cases, I had no personal involvement with the participants, never having met any of them before the first interview and not knowing anything about them, other than the school in which they worked and the subjects they taught. Participants replied to my initial contact without having spoken to me and our formative

communication was conducted via email, with electronic consent given. Participants were sent my letter and overview document so when they responded and agreed to participate in the research they knew exactly what sort of research I was hoping to undertake and what the context was for the study. From an ethical vantage point this meant that I began my relationship with all of them in the same way, by email, and I did nothing that increased the differences between their experiences of the research events. The starting points for my relationships with all of them were the same. I was able to explain in writing that the research and any of its findings were in no way funded by, or commissioned by, my school or by any other body and I reiterated this when I met the participants (BERA, 2011). This also addressed the principles and expectations of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2010). Although none of the participants expressed any concerns about what I might do with the data and the findings, I was able to assure them that I was undertaking the research first and foremost because it is of interest to me and I was also able to tell them that I would not be sharing any personal or specific findings with the wider school management or anyone else not directly involved.

There were a number of ethical considerations in this research which I was able to address early on, although the work of Homan (1991) and Punch (1998) reminds researchers that consent is not a piece of paper but a process. Although gaining consent might seem straightforward, in much social research it is far more complex than it might appear. The outcomes cannot be foretold and it is virtually impossible to predict what the consequences of participation might be, based on the data that emerges and the findings from other participants' involvement. This research contained two key ethical considerations: the first was that I was intruding into personal and deep experiences of childhood and education, which had the potential to provoke strong and negative emotions (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), and the second revolved around the fact that teachers were being asked to talk about possible areas of weakness relating to their knowledge (Payne, G., Dingwall, Payne, J. & Carter, 1980). I imagined that both of these could be difficult, at some point, for all of the teachers. The possibility that research might reveal information that is incriminating in some way, in the eyes of the participants, is frequently a source of sensitivity and may therefore affect the reliability of some data (Lee, 1993). In these situations, acceptance of the researcher is often dependent on the trustful relationships that have been established between the participant and the researcher and the promise that data will be collected and produced under highly anonymised conditions.

The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data should be considered the norm when conducting research (BERA, 2011). This aspect was particularly important in this research because in some cases the participants were members of a very small number of GCSE teachers in a

specific subject area, and anyone familiar with their school would know immediately who they were. It was, therefore, important that I told all participants that when writing about them I would anonymise them and I would not mention the schools in which they work. Descriptions of the courses they teach was more difficult to conceal because much of the data emerged from conversations about specific subjects, but without the reader's knowledge of where participants taught or who they were, I reassured them that it would be almost impossible to identify them.

BERA guidelines (2011) state that 'Educational researchers aim to extend knowledge and understanding in all areas of educational activity' and also that researchers 'have a responsibility to seek to make public the results of their research for the benefit of educational professionals, policymakers and a wider public understanding of educational policy and practice.' The findings of the research would ideally have been shared with schools so that they might have had the chance to organise training or development for their humanities teachers in the area of grammar. However, participants were told that their identities would be concealed and if I had shared any data with the schools then identities would almost certainly have been exposed. I believe that in each case the anonymity of both the school and the individual has remained intact.

Prior to undertaking the interviews, I did not know what the interviewees would impart so could not give precise reassurances about how I might view what I was being told. Striking an ethical balance between the pursuit of truth and the rights of the participants was a consideration throughout the research (BERA, 2011). At the end of each interview I asked the participants if they were happy with what had been discussed and explained what the next step in the process was for me. Interview transcriptions were sent to all participants and none of them responded with concerns or queries. In addition, at the stage of analysis, I believe that by using a detailed method of transcription, in the form of Jefferson notation, I helped to protect the integrity of participants' stories in the most honest way I could.

### **3.6 Validity and Reliability**

The validity of the research is a concern with the way in which results could be reproduced if the research were to be repeated. Validity is a contested term and means different things to different researchers but is broadly associated with how accurate the findings of the research are deemed to be and how strong the link is between the data and the conclusion (Silverman, 2005, 2006).

Determining the validity and integrity of case studies involves a series of different approaches but there are two main types of validity: internal and external. Internal validity relates to using different methods to check for the same outcomes, and external validity is centred upon whether the data could be applied to different settings outside of the original research setting (Myles & Huberman,

1994). The concept of reliability in case study research is concerned with the way in which bias can be reduced and rigour maintained. Case study researchers must seek to promote methodological rigour and reduce the possibility of bias at all times and at all stages of the process.

Threats to the validity in interview methods include the use of leading questions or the researcher's preconceived ideas influencing what is and is not worth discussing. However, the organic nature of semi-structured, face-to-face interviewing and the complexity of language in use mean that it is not always easy to avoid some of these threats because it is not always easy to control the flow of the dialogue. This same vulnerability and complexity can actually produce a richness and depth to data. Nevertheless, various principles and frameworks have been developed that help to promote the overall reliability and validity of case studies (Mays & Pope, 2000) and there are a number of ways in which bias can be reduced. Conway et al. (Conway, Jako & Goodman, 1995) showed that threats to reliability and validity were minimised in interviews when standardised questions were used and when interviewers were proficient in the interview process. Participants should all be asked the same questions, even in a semi-structured context, should all be given the same amount of time and should all be interviewed in settings that are the same or as similar as possible. In addition, to promote reliability, a strong literature review should be presented and all the data must be stored, managed and analysed correctly, according to the work of Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso and Guyatt (2005). For this research, interview questions were standardised and all the participants were interviewed in their own environments, rather than in mine. My proficiency as an interviewer had been honed through the experience of the pilot study, which had allowed me to work through and gain a deeper understanding of the methodological process and I felt well equipped to undertake both sets of interviews. Nevertheless, I understood and acknowledged the complexity of using interviews as a research tool and kept in mind at all times the need for integrity and transparency.

When assessing the overall validity and integrity of the construct, one of the fundamental concepts to be considered is the organisation of the research around the research question itself. The design of the study must be the most appropriate for the research question and Krefting (1991) reminds researchers that they should aim to have prolonged or intense exposure to the phenomenon under study in order to establish a firm rapport with the participants and in order to collect multiple perspectives. Social desirability responses can be particularly prevalent when participants are being asked about perceived weaknesses or deficiencies, but Denzin (1989) suggests that validity and reliability in semi-structured interviews can be maintained if the stimulus is standardised. This approach acknowledges several themes including the inconsistency of language, along with its multiple interpretations, and relies on the interviewer's ability to vary the questions and to choose

words that best befit the question. Being able to choose the right words in an interview that probes the participant's experiences is integral to its success (Hutchinson & Skodol-Wilson, 1992).

In this research, my shared experiences with the interviewees meant that I was able to talk about the phenomenon of SPaG with a clear knowledge of its impact on GCSEs at this time and this allowed me to obtain vital and complete data that might have been lost if I were less close to the context (Treece & Treece, 1986). Researchers also have a responsibility to present their studies in such a way as to allow readers to check the validity and reliability of the research and its findings. This is particularly important when working with the words that people use because the way in which their language is presented changes the way they are interpreted as subjects within the research. To promote validity, I integrated a process of 'member checking', where the transcriptions of the data were shared with the participants, and the participants had the opportunity to discuss and clarify my interpretation, and contribute new or additional perspectives to the issue under study. Jefferson transcription, discussed in detail later on in this chapter, was used to transcribe the interviews, in order to represent nuances and utterances as faithfully as possible.

### **3.7 Design of the Pilot Study**

The aim of the pilot study helped to ascertain the feasibility of undertaking the main research, in terms of designing a working research protocol and assessing whether the methods were appropriate and effective (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001). It enabled me to consider the more theoretical implications, particularly those of an ethical nature, and the more practical implications alongside them. I was able to work with Jefferson transcription and to consider and reflect upon the logistical experiences of the research design, such as time and resources. Using the pilot study as a test for the main research enabled me to refine the research question and make necessary revisions prior to the main study (Kvale, 2007).

The focus of the pilot study was *'to find out how teachers view the teaching and assessing of grammar in relation to changes that the Government has imposed on GCSEs, as well as their own experiences of teaching and learning grammar'*. Teachers of subjects other than English are perhaps tacitly considered by the Coalition Government and the exam boards as having a level of grammatical knowledge, and the related abilities to convey this knowledge; however, there is a lack of evidence that this is the case. The pilot study sought to discover what practising teachers' experiences were of learning language and grammar, across a range of secondary school subjects; what teachers felt about their knowledge and skills and whether or not they felt confident in imparting and assessing relevant language usage. I used my educational setting for the pilot study: an independent school that spans the age range from pre-school to sixth form. The senior section is

small and the ability profile of pupils is broadly in line with the mainstream sector. Pupils have a range of learning needs and most come from the local area, though some of the boarding pupils come from much further afield. Teachers in the pilot study were approached in person by me and asked to participate and I knew the three participants well. The criterion for inclusion was based upon them teaching subjects affected by changes to GCSEs in humanities subjects. Some of the humanities departments consist of only one or two teachers so from this point of view I had limited choices about which teachers to approach or include.

I hoped that my immersion in this research setting, as a practising teacher of GCSEs in the senior school, would enable me to have conversations in which there was a degree of empathy and understanding of the participants' approaches to preparing pupils for new exams. I hoped it would also allow me to share some of their concerns about the changes in policy and their classroom practices relating to spelling, punctuation and grammar. This shared perspective offered a way into an examination, through talk, of knowledge acquisition in my academic community. Fairclough states that 'Knowledge is transmitted in social contexts, through relationships, ... that are defined in the value systems and ideology of the culture' (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 5). In the pilot study, I believe that the fact that I taught many of the same children as my colleagues did, as well as sharing their working practices, provided this interactive relationship and enabled a rapport to be established.

For the pilot study, the ethics of interviewing colleagues could not be ignored. In the hierarchical structure of the school, it was my job to line manage all of the participants and I was aware of the way in which this might impact upon their openness, the level of detail which they chose to share and the way in which they might have felt about the power relationship between us. However, I believed that my ability to reassure participants that the study was instigated by me and was independent of the school helped to remove anxieties about any perceived or real power I might have over them. It was also, therefore, beholden upon me to present the findings in as honest a way as possible.

Participants gave their full consent after I had explained the study in detail and they were able to see that the undertaking of the research had nothing to do with our mutual workplace. In some senses, the 'asymmetrics' of power (Briggs, 2002; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005) in the interview setting can never be ignored because, as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) remind the researcher, the non-hierarchical position is reinforced when the interviewer knows what they will ask; determines the subject under discussion and crucially decides what to present as the findings. This was certainly true in the pilot study because I had prepared a number of questions that I wanted to ask. However, Kvale (2006)

asserts that interviewees and interviewers both wield power in an interview. There is a presupposition that the interviewee lacks power but they are in fact able to determine the outcomes, which is a hugely powerful position, because of what they choose to say or omit.

The pilot research used a case study approach, with each participant being interviewed for approximately half an hour. The semi-structured interviews were then transcribed using Jefferson transcription notation, in order to examine the data in as much detail as possible. The table below shows the characteristics of the pilot study.

	<b>Key Features</b>	<b>Date</b>
Pilot Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers in the same setting;</li> <li>• a 'good' independent school (ISI Inspectorate) with a mixed ability cohort in all year groups;</li> <li>• teachers of GCSE classes in humanities subjects;</li> <li>• groups not arranged into ability sets;</li> <li>• one male teacher and two female teachers;</li> <li>• teachers at various stages of their careers;</li> <li>• teachers of different ages.</li> </ul>	June 2013

*Table 3.1: The Pilot Study*

It was clear from analysing the data generated by the pilot study that teachers felt that they lacked sufficient knowledge to be able to talk to pupils about language; this was true even for those teachers who said that they knew something about aspects of grammar. Teachers who said they knew something about parts of speech had not learnt anything about language in preparation for teaching. They had either studied it at 'A' level, in the case of one participant, or had tried to improve their skills by working from a recent on-line course, in the case of another. Teachers expressed the view that they were unsupported by the exam boards and were unprepared for helping pupils to gain the SPaG marks available to them.

The responses that were gained during the pilot study and the themes that emerged from the data were used to inform the eventual design of the research project, particularly with regard to the questions that I asked. The most notable difference between the pilot study and the main study was the fact that, in the case of the latter, I had never met any of the participants prior to our first interview. In the pilot study, I contacted teachers directly and asked them if they would be involved and I only interviewed them once.

### 3.8 The Research Design

In the main research, I contacted more than a dozen schools by email and did not know which ones would respond and which subjects the teachers might represent. Mann and Steward (2000) outline how email dialogue can be an important means of maintaining trust and can itself be used as a form of data collection in qualitative research. I therefore ensured that my initial, introductory emails established exactly what it was I wanted to say and presented the information I wished to communicate as clearly and carefully as possible. Table 3.2 outlines the most significant features of the main research project.

Key Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 participants, all of whom were teaching humanities subjects at KS4 at the time of the interviews;</li><li>• subjects taught: religious studies/ethics (taught by 2 participants); geography (taught by 3 participants); history (taught by 2 participants);</li><li>• each participant was interviewed twice, first in May 2014 and then in June 2015;</li><li>• each interview lasted approximately 40 mins;</li><li>• teachers represented a range of ages and experiences within the profession;</li><li>• teachers were teaching in 5 different settings, one of which included a school with a sixth form;</li><li>• the schools were located in towns and cities in Hampshire and Berkshire;</li><li>• the schools were of different size and profile with a range of Ofsted ratings across the settings.</li></ul>

*Table 3.2: The research context*

The main research was a series of interviews with seven participants. This involved an initial face-to-face interview and then a second interview in the same mode, approximately a year later. The first interview was one in which I learnt about participants' experiences and feelings about teaching and assessing grammar. The second set of interviews was undertaken so that I could see whether there had been any changes to the participants' positions with regards to SPaG in the intervening year. I asked participants about the way in which the context might have changed in their own subjects; I discussed with them the impact of any policy changes and they critically evaluated the way in which SPaG assessments had impacted upon the GCSE results of the year 11 cohort that they were teaching at the time of the first interviews. The gap of a year between the two sets of interviews

allowed us to reflect on the experiences of a whole cohort of pupils that were being prepared for the GCSEs that contained SPaG marks.

An enquiry into the meaning and value of language is at the centre of this research, the scope of which was an exploration of secondary school humanities teachers' thoughts and feelings regarding SPaG assessments at GCSE. The central aim of this research was to *'critically examine practising secondary teachers' experiences of learning language and grammar and their confidence in assessing these aspects of pupils' work in response to recent shifts in educational policy'*. The interview questions were designed to discover practising teachers' experiences of learning language and grammar, across a range of secondary school subjects and whether or not they felt confident to impart and assess language usage, in response to the recent changes to educational policy. The study also sought to respond to the sub-aims of the research (figure 1.1, p.4).

### **3.9 The Participants**

The seven practising teachers who responded to my initial contact worked in four different maintained schools in two different counties. The participants came from a range of backgrounds, were different ages, held different subject specialisms and were all at different stages in their careers, with two being experienced Heads of Department and one being an NQT. All of the participants held undergraduate degrees as well as PGCEs in secondary subjects. Three of the participants also held Masters Degrees. Teachers were familiar with a wide range of curricular, including the National Curriculum, various exam board specifications and their own school's schemes of work.

Participants were not entirely representative of the teaching profession; however, neither were they exceptions. Their inclusion in the corpus of the research was not consciously selective, beyond the fact that they taught humanities subjects. Nevertheless, they ended up representing the whole in many ways. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the seven participants in the study. Each teacher was interviewed twice and, with only one exception, they were all still teaching at the same school when I interviewed them in 2015 as they were in 2014. The teacher who had moved on (P4) had done so to further her career and had taken on a greater management role but she was still teaching in the same county. Two of the teachers (P1 and P3) took on slightly different roles in September 2014 and started teaching some English, but for all other participants, roles had remained largely the same at the time of the second interviews. The central characteristics of the participants are shown in the following table.

Teacher	School	Number on roll	Number of years Teaching and additional responsibilities	Experience of teaching English or SpaG prior to first interview	Additional experience of SpaG by the second interview
<b>P1:</b> Head of geography; teaching KS3 and 4.	<b>S1:</b> Rural setting; southern England. A 'good' school (Ofsted, 2012).	Over-subscribed, with 1193 pupils on roll in years 7 to 11.	Teaching for more than 3 years. P1 managed several other staff.	P1 had taught English abroad	In 2014-2015, P1 was teaching a year 7 English class due to staffing issues.
<b>P2:</b> Head of religious studies (RS); teaching KS3 and 4. RS is mandatory at KS4.	<b>S2:</b> Town: southern England. Was rated 'good' by Ofsted in 2012 but had been in 'special measures' during the last five years.	706 pupils on roll from years 7 to 11.	Teaching for more than 3 years. P2 managed one other full-time member of the RS department (P3).	None	None
<b>P3:</b> RS teacher, teaching KS3 and KS4.	<b>S2:</b> see above	706 pupils on roll from years 7 to 11.	In second year of teaching.	None. P3 was an NQT at time of first interview.	In 2015, at the end of her second year, P3 was teaching a few lessons of English to some weaker year 7 pupils, alongside the RS that she taught to all year groups.
<b>P4:</b> In 2014, P4 was a history teacher, in the Humanities Department at S3. Taught KS3 and 4. Changed jobs at the end of 2014. She became Humanities Coordinator in a school closer to where she lived (S5).	<b>S3:</b> Central Southern England. In 2014, the school required improvement (Ofsted, 2014) and was placed in 'special measures'. <b>S5:</b> City: southern England. This school was placed in 'special measures' in 2013. In 2015 S5 was rated 'good' (Ofsted).	<b>S3:</b> Number of pupils on roll has fallen from 710 in 2010, to 467 in 2014. <b>S5:</b> In 2013 there were 424 on roll and in 2015 there were 317.	Teaching for more than 3 years.	None.	None.
<b>P5:</b> History teacher at S3. She taught KS3 and 4. However, she was taking up a new role, in an inner-city academy, at the start of September 2015.	<b>S3:</b> see above.	<b>S3:</b> Number of pupils on roll has fallen from 710 in 2010, to 467 in 2014.	Teaching for more than 3 years.	None.	None.
<b>P6:</b> Geography teacher in S3. Held a management position on the SLT. She taught KS3 and 4.	<b>S3:</b> see above	<b>S3:</b> Number of pupils on roll has fallen from 710 in 2010, to 467 in 2014.	Teaching for more than 3 years.	None – was educated partly through the medium of Welsh.	None.
<b>P7:</b> Head of history. She taught KS3, 4 and 5 in S4.	<b>S4:</b> City: southern England. The school 'required improvement' in 2013 but was rated as 'good' in 2015 (Ofsted).	<b>S4:</b> There are 1289 pupils on roll from years 7 to 13.	Teaching for more than 3 years. Head of a Department that contains 7 teachers.	None.	None.

Table 3.3: The research participants

### 3.10 Grounded Theory

At the end of each interview, in both the first and second series, I transcribed the interviews immediately and at that point began the ground up, iterative process of analysis that defines Grounded Theory. Charmaz (2006) advises users of Grounded Theory to begin working with the data straightaway as a means of staying close to it and of working through the coding processes quickly, constantly comparing texts. Charmaz defines the coding process as a mental and physical activity and suggests the use of gerunds in the codes, where appropriate, as a means of building action into them. The transcripts were coded line by line and I highlighted words and excerpts that linked particularly to my research questions, listening to them multiple times in order to add pertinent Jefferson notation where appropriate. The table below (table 3.4) shows the main codes and the sub-codes that emerged from the data.

<b>Main Theoretical Codes</b>	<b>Sub-Codes</b>
<b>Code 1: Teacher as Pupil</b>	Sub-code 1.1: Remembering and experiencing language Sub-code 1.2: Grammar and other languages
<b>Code 2: Preparing the Professional</b>	Sub-code 2.1: Feeling Confidence and Assuredness on the Job Sub-code 2.2: Missing Opportunities Sub-code 2.3: Awareness and Importance
<b>Code 3: SPaG in Practice</b>	Sub-code 3.1: In the Classroom Sub-code 3.2: In the Department Sub-code 3.3: In the School
<b>Code 4: Impacting on Pupils</b>	Sub-code 4.1: Levels of Literacy Sub-code 4.2: Learning Support and SEN Sub-code 4.3: EAL
<b>Code 5: Support</b>	Sub-code 5.1: Giving Support Sub-code 5.2: Critical Colleagues Sub-code 5.3: The School's Position Sub-code 5.4: The Exam Boards
<b>Code 6: Politics and Policy</b>	Sub-code 6.1: The National Picture Sub-code 6.2: Changing Policies; Marking Guidance Sub-code 6.3: Constant Shifts
<b>Code 7: Outcomes</b>	Sub-code 7.1: Assessing the Impact on Grades Sub-code 7.2: Signs of Improvements Sub-code 7.3: One Year On: Looking Back

*Table 3.4: Main codes and sub-codes*

Charmaz' Constructivist Grounded Theory model provided the working practices for approaching the data, through the process of coding, memo writing, theoretical sampling and saturation. Her method of analysing the data, where theory is constructed from the very words that are used, already implies an interest on the researcher's part in the language of the interview (Charmaz, 2000). My notes sometimes took the form of a commentary about the language and the voice, as much as about the themes and ideas. The codes that emerged across the data were often as the response to questions I had asked, but not in every case. Sometimes a question would provoke an expected response but in other cases it took the participant's thoughts in an entirely different direction.

Grounded Theory seeks to find out as much as possible about what is happening within the research setting, as well as to explain the processes and interactions under study (Glaser, 1978) and it therefore works well as a method for exploring cases that contribute to a whole. In the 1960s, Glaser and Strauss developed their Grounded Theory method and in doing so fought the dominance of positivistic quantitative research. By the 1990s Grounded Theory had gained acceptance from quantitative and qualitative researchers who find it useful in mixed method research (Glaser, 1992; 2002). There are a number of interpretations of and variations on classic Grounded Theory that seek to remodel the original 'Discovery of Grounded Theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and have evolved over time. Both Glaser and Strauss have been central to later interpretations, with Strauss and Corbin developing a stricter and more complex method of coding which was a departure from Glaser's original model. Glaser advocated a greater degree of interpretation and less insistence on highly detailed matrixes (Melia, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded Theory was well-matched to this research because it was my aim to discover, rather than assume, as much as I could about teachers' feelings towards grammar in each of the schools I visited. There were a number of social interactions that I explored during the research; most notably the relationship between the teacher and the GCSE pupil, but also the relationships that exist within departments, within the school and with the exam boards. Charmaz's interpretation provided the most appropriate analytical framework for this research because it is described as 'systematic yet flexible' (2006) and outlines the active role that it is necessary for the researcher to take. Theory that is developed from and generated by the data, rather than from hypotheses drawn from existing theories, aligned itself well to my research (Charmaz, 2006) and Charmaz's acknowledgement of the significance of the role played by the interviewer supported the case study approach. Charmaz sees the shaping of participants' realities as being formed alongside those of the researcher and her Grounded Theory framework helps to narrate the dynamics and dilemmas of people's active sense making (2006). Her model helps to generate concepts that explain the way participants interact with

and construct their situations. She offers an alternative, a 'middle ground', by advancing a constructivist version of the traditional approach (Charmaz, 2003, p. 250).

Grounded theory is not necessarily attached to any one theoretical perspective and is sometimes described as essentially ontologically and epistemologically neutral, although this is refuted by Charmaz who suggests that, 'Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the "discovered" reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts' (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). The data generated by a Grounded Theory study are not simply about people, but are also about the settings in which they live and work. Therefore, the purpose of Grounded Theory goes beyond the telling of participants' stories and moves towards identifying and explaining behaviour and concepts which seek to illuminate or resolve an important concern. This approach allows the theorist to draw together multiple perspectives that emerge from the different data sources (Glaser, 2005). Yin (1984) provides a framework for inducing theory from case study material, typically combining data from a number of parallel sources and data types, such as interviews and questionnaires.

For Charmaz, Grounded Theory coding generates the core of the analysis and consists of a number of key phases which categorise and sort the data. The coding moves from initial, broad categories to those that are more focused and the data continues to be questioned by the researcher throughout. According to Charmaz, language plays a crucial role in how and what we code because coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain the data. Kvale (1996) and Mishler (1991) point out that transcriptions are themselves interpretive constructions and the analysis begins during transcription, when the researcher is faced with procedural and methodological decisions. The use of Jefferson transcription aims to explore the layered meanings at all stages of the coding process and I was able to synthesise Jefferson's transcription and Charmaz's coding framework together to provide not only detail but also rigour in the process.

This post-structural approach to understanding the data sees meaning not as fixed but as culturally and contextually specific. Charmaz stresses that the use of language reflects the views and values of participants and researchers and in this sense no analysis of what is said can ever be neutral. All 'speech-acts' and especially those that are written down contain an 'iterability', according to Derrida's 'Signature, Event, Context', which means that anything spoken is open to endless analytical possibilities (1988). Language confers more than just the meaning contained in the words and this is partly because we utilise a range of different 'languages' according to which of our peers we are with and who our audience happens to be. The analysis of a person's language inevitably leads to inconsistencies, ambiguities and uncertainties of meaning which can never be fully addressed (Green

& Weade, 1987).

People do things with words. They account for, explain, blame, make excuses, construct facts, use cultural categories, and present themselves to others in specific ways, taking the interpretive context into account (Austin 1962). Tannen, through her work on verbalisation in oral narratives, outlines a number of useful key concepts for asking questions of data and describes them as 'structures of expectation'. These structures help to explore tacitly understood meanings in spoken interaction, focusing on what is meant and not just on what is said: *What do the participants produce as relevant in this account? How do participants interpret what is being asked? Why this particular category/ detail/ silence here or there? Why do I feel that some topic is avoided or only alluded to? What are participants orienting to in their talk?* (Tannen, 1993a, p.21; 1993b).

The researcher's close reading of the language ultimately gives rise to the codes that we need in order to shape our understanding. Charmaz impresses upon the researcher that we should aim to make our participants' language problematic in order to render an analysis of it. By this she means that coding should inspire us to examine hidden assumptions in our own use of language as well as that of our participants. The mode of analysis is open-ended and generative and the concepts, relations and their properties are decided by the data rather than imposed from outside (Agar,1980).

The coding journey for this research is shown in figure 3.3 and, as can be seen, the process was not simply one of a chronological movement through a set of prescribed steps but was rather a reflexive and re-evaluative journey. The coding and memo writing started as soon as the data collection finished in the case of both the first and second set of interviews. I began working with Jefferson transcription at the early stages because I was listening to the recordings repeatedly and was able to add notation to the transcripts. Themes and concepts began to emerge from the first set of interviews in the year before the second set were conducted and I worked with these as initial, open codes throughout the year. The themes and concepts were explored and defined further and then when the second set of interviews was conducted, many new codes also emerged, although there were some that overlapped with the first interview codes, such as when participants started to talk about their lack of knowledge again. All of these open codes, taken from the fourteen interviews, were then honed and saturated before the main theoretical codes and their sub-codes were fully realised. The journey can be defined as: 'an integrative process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships by searching for and confirming and disconfirming examples, and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further detailed information relating to the codes is

presented in Chapter 4, where the emergent ideas are presented and discussed.

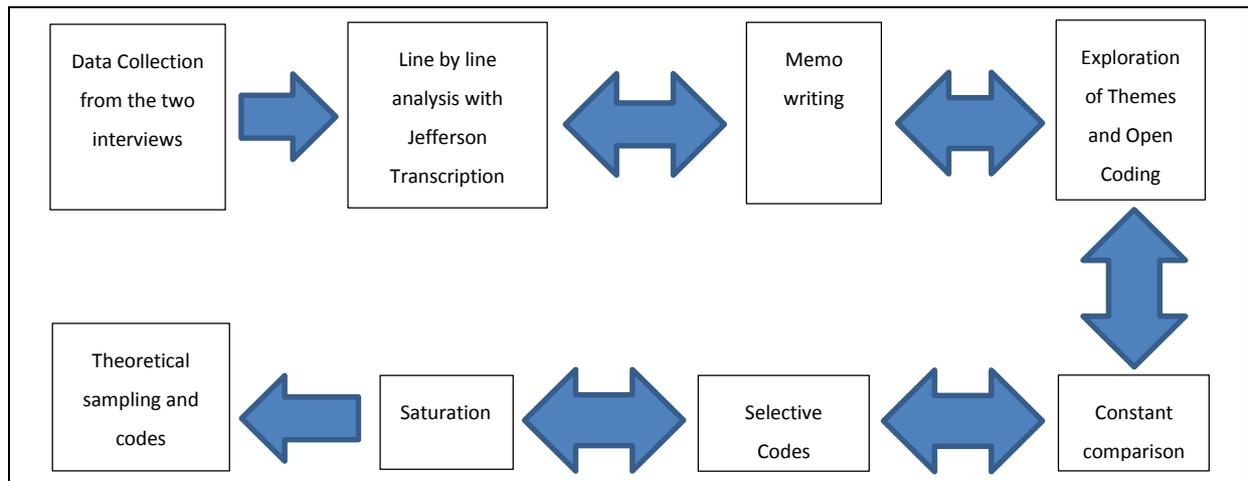


Figure 3.3: The coding journey

### 3.11 Methodology of Data Transcription and Analysis

My method of enquiry throughout the transcribing, coding and analysis stages drew on a number of traditions and approaches from the field of sociolinguistics, with its focus on meaning making and language analysis. Interpretations, understandings and findings rely fundamentally on the close reading of language in social interactions (Potter, 2003). This research used a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach (Charmaz, 2003; 2006) to data analysis, and as such it was crucial that data analysis began from the earliest stage of data collection. My approach to data analysis started with the transcription itself because ‘texts, spoken or written, comprise much of the empirical foundation of society: they help to construct social reality’ (Stubbs, 1996, p.20-21) and the talk generated through case study interviews helps to shape the feelings and day to day realities of the participants and the interviewer in such research (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997).

One of the key assumptions underlying a traditional, positivist approach to transcription is that talk can be objectively presented and the interpretive nature of the process need not feature in the collected data (Duranti, 2007). This positivist method can usually be seen in traditional orthographic transcripts, where written features of discourse have primacy over the oral and where the transcription exhibits many features that do not occur in spoken talk. The interview is formalised into sentences that follow the rules of conventional punctuation and grammar, using features such as commas, full stops and paragraphing. Usually in such literacised transcripts, non-verbal communication and observational data are often overlooked altogether (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). By contrast, an interpretivist perspective takes transcripts and transcription to be a representational and interpretive process whereby researchers are bound to make choices about what to record, and

how (Lapadat, 2000). Charmaz (2006) reminds interviewers to “look for the ‘ums’ and ‘you knows’ ” and to explore what they indicate. She endorses the idea that pauses carry meaning and that a ‘*you know*’ might be significant in signalling a taken-for-granted meaning, may seek the interviewer’s concurrence or might suggest a meaning that is difficult to articulate. Studying the data, according to Charmaz, prompts the researcher to learn nuances of their research participants’ language. Derrida also reminds us that language is at all times problematic and that there is never the possibility of linguistic certainty no matter how we choose to interpret it. Thus texts, whatever their form and function and however they are analysed, show only a multiplicity of interpretations.

In view of my concerns that transcription should be as much a part of the analysis as coding the transcripts, I employed the technique defined by Jefferson who was the major figure in the development of interview transcription for conversation and discourse analysis (Jefferson, 1985; 1991; 1992; 2004). A close analysis of the content, language choices and context helped to elucidate what could be learnt about participants’ experiences of grammar and terminology, as well as the detail of their practices of accounting for and explaining their knowledge. The careful analysis of language and the care taken over its presentation effectively shed light on the creation and maintenance of social norms, the construction of personal and group identities, and the negotiation of social interaction (Gee 2005).

Jefferson was an undergraduate student of Harvey Sacks, later becoming his secretary, and she had the responsibility of typing all of his taped conversations. She developed a detailed method of transcribing the data and presenting the interactions so as to record as much of the communication, happening at all levels, as possible. Jefferson’s denaturalised approach to transcription seeks to preserve features of oral language, such as the fillers (‘uums’ and ‘ers’) and the ‘idiosyncratic’ elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalizations) (Green, Franquiz & Dixon, 1997). It also encompasses time (timed pauses) and can incorporate aspects such as the non-linguistic but highly communicative value of bodily and facial expressions and non-verbal interactions: smiles; laughter, pauses and sighs. The influences of this postmodernist perspective on human interaction became an important part of my findings.

Aspects of Jefferson’s system are employed almost universally by those working in conversational analysis and have become ‘a near-globalized set of instructions for transcription’ (Slembrouck, 2007, p. 823). Jefferson notation has been influential more broadly too (Gumperz & Berenz, 1993; Ochs, 1979), being used by researchers outside the field of conversation analysis who wish to demonstrate the essential and real nature of communication. An increasing number of researchers working with qualitative data argue that the transcription stage is ‘a key phase of data analysis within

interpretative qualitative methodology' (Bird, 2005) and I subscribe to this view. However, the transcription process is always a selective one because at every word or every pause, I found myself posing questions about exactly what to include, the necessary level of detail needed in order to convey the sense within the utterance and the value or importance that may be attached to every speech act.

Duranti's work on transcription conventions (2007) finds that although the argument exists for one standardized approach to transcription (Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming & Paolino, 1993) most researchers develop a hybrid system of transcription, often using Jefferson's codes but adapting and developing other systems alongside it. Most of Jefferson's notation uses familiar and intuitive symbols, such as arrows for rising or falling intonation and capital letters for louder utterances. However, the varying theoretical and methodological perspectives of individual researchers mean that they present transcripts that necessarily differ from those of others (Lapadat, 2000). During the transcriptions of my interviews, I utilised a number of more straightforward notations, recommended by Wood and Kroger (2000) which are taken from a much wider range. Fully phonetic transcriptions are not only hugely time consuming but they are also beyond the capabilities of non-linguistic writers and readers of the research. The notation that I used is presented in table 3.5.

Symbol	Jefferson Notation Description
(0.5)	Number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.)	A dot enclosed in brackets indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second.
=	'Equals' sign indicates 'latching' between utterances.
[ ]	Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk.
(( ))	A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non- verbal activity.
-	A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior sound or word.
:	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter.
(inaudible)	Indicates speech that is difficult to make out. Details may also be given with regards to the nature of this speech (e.g. shouting).
.	A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone. It does not necessarily indicate the end of a sentence.
?	A question mark indicates a rising inflection. It does not necessarily indicate a question.
↑↓	Pointed arrows indicate a marked falling or rising intonational shift. They are placed immediately before the onset of the shift.
<u>Under</u>	Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis.
CAPITALS	Words in capitals mark a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
° °	Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk.
< >	'Less than' and 'More than' signs indicate that the talk they encompass was produced noticeable slower than the surrounding talk.

*Table 3.5: Jefferson notation*

Transcription is a time-consuming process which, according to Potter and Hepburn (2012) involves a recording- to- transcription time ratio of about 1 hour to 20 hours. All of my interviews were transcribed and presented with a level of detail that conveyed line numbers, time-in-minutes references and some key features of dialogue, such as overlapping talk or important non-verbal utterances including levels of laughter. My main aim was to apply Jefferson notation to the key quotations and themes, rather than to the whole interview. The following two examples show the

way in which the texts were explored and transcribed, using Jefferson notation where appropriate, and where codes emerged from the data.

The first example, (figure 3.4), is an excerpt from the first interview with P3 and it can be seen that there is a wide range of hearable and interactional features within the talk which are potentially consequential. The rising and falling intonation, raised volume, stretched vowel sounds and emphasis on significant words all help to show the importance of a word or words and the emotions that might have prompted them. This piece of dialogue demonstrates how the text segment was saturated with notes which gave rise to themes and which then led to the emergence of the codes. In this example, the participant is responding to a direct question about her experiences of learning language and is exploring how, in year 9, she was taught one lesson on grammar. She remembers nothing about the content, but she can recall in detail what the teacher said about the importance of grammar.

Text segment	Notes	Main Codes	Sub-Codes
<p>P3 : u::m (,) that's as I remember it (.2)= I do remember in year nine (.3) my teacher &gt; who was also our head of year&lt; sitting us down one day and going 'I'm going to TEACH you a lesson on <u>grammar</u>'(.) I can't remember what he taught us or (.) u::m (4 mins) or what the purpose of it was (.1) I ↑just remember him saying it's <u>not</u> as important as it should be so I'm going to teach you a lesson on <u>grammar</u> (.2) . that's all I remember</p> <p>OW: well (.) °a one off lesson° (.) &lt;you're not <u>going</u> to remember VERY much about that&gt; are you (.2) that's interesting actually</p>	Hesitancy 'um' then recall specifics.	Remembering and experiencing  Grammar and other languages	Teacher as pupil
	Is the detail of seniority important for grammar? Maybe shows interest?	Experiencing	Teacher as pupil
	Can't remember details but remembers teacher and lesson.  Significant memory of what teacher said about grammar.	Remembering and experiencing  Missing opportunities	Teacher as Pupil  Preparing the Professional
	Interviewer agreement and empathy– to elicit more recall  Engagement	Missing opportunities/remembering-agreement	

Figure 3.4: Extract from first interview with P3

Figure 3.5, shown on page 68, is an excerpt from P7's second interview and alongside the transcription and coding processes, it demonstrates the way in which the data was explored and the way that a number of main, theoretical codes emerged. At the start of this excerpt, P7 told me how the GCSE marking is constructed but she quickly moved on to telling me that she has not spent any time looking at the marks that are awarded for SPaG. She then told me again, almost word for word a couple of seconds later, that she has not looked at the criteria and she explained that she thinks it would be a useful thing to do. After this, she paused for 3 seconds and told me that she sees the awarding of the extra marks as a matter of basic punctuation and sentence construction.

At the end of the text segment P7 appeared to reduce the SPaG marks to something that seems inconsequential: *'it's ju::st (.) you (.) general things (.) like you've ↑ got to remember to put capital letters where they belong (.) and you've ↑got to remember to write proper prose.'* The transcription notation shows how she lingered over the 'ju::st' as if it were something dull or marginal and then she struggles to put into words what the SPaG marks mean to her. The pauses after 'ju::st' and then again after 'you' perhaps show that she was hesitating or struggling to verbalise her feelings and then when she does say what she thinks, she does so with a strong emphasis on the repeated use of 'got', which she said in a tone as if she were talking to the children in her class.

P7's reactions appear to be the result of not having engaged with the SPaG marks and this could be attributed to a number of factors. It might be that she has received little information about them and lacks confidence to engage with them or it could be that she genuinely does not think they are worth spending a great deal of time preparing for. In either case, she was unable to comment on them meaningfully and her apparent dismissal of them may have a direct impact on the children whom she teaches, despite how useful she says it would be to study them in more detail.

Text segment	Themes and notes	Main codes	Sub-Codes
<p>P7: <i>they know it's there (.) like (.) they know that there's this THREE essay questions at GCSE and they know that it's twelve plus three (.) the three is for SPaG (.) um (.2) but &lt;partly cos of time limits and everyth::ing&gt; (.) we just haven't spent time even looking at (1 mins) (.2)</i></p>	<p>Pupil position highlighted and emphasised.</p>	In the classroom	SPaG in Practice
	<p>'they know' x 3</p>	In the classroom	SPaG in Practice
	<p>'but' and '/ just' – apologetic? Feelings of guilt that pupils are not better prepared.</p>	In the classroom	SPaG in Practice
<p>OW: <i>it would be a really useful thing to do (.) we haven't really spent time looking at the criteria for it even (.3)</i></p>	<p>Acknowledging importance to pupils and also issue of own integrity? Where is the professional in this? Fulfilling role?  Pronoun choice –we.</p>	<p>In the classroom  Awareness and Importance</p>	<p>SPaG in Practice  Preparing the Professional</p>
<p>P7: <i>it's ju:st (.) you (.) general things like =you've ↑ got to remember to put <u>capital letters</u> where they belong (.) and you've ↑got to remember to write <u>proper</u> prose</i></p>	<p>Addressing the pupil here. Becoming emotive. Defensive?</p>	Importance	Preparing the Professional
	<p>Does remind pupils of key literacy features but not teaching for SPaG</p>	<p>In the Classroom  Levels of Literacy</p>	<p>SPaG in Practice  Impacting on Pupils</p>

Figure 3.5: Extract from second interview with P7

### 3.12 Further Analysis Using Derridean Concepts

Having transcribed and coded my data, I used Derridean social theory in order to support later stages of interpretive coding. Derrida's thinking provided a particularly interesting framework for exploring the role of writing in language and communication; the medium of speech and the analysis of texts, including transcripts; the significance of structures and constructs such as grammar and

assessments, and the concept and role of knowledge. This framework clearly linked to my aim of examining the overall significance of grammar teaching and it also assisted in the exploration of assumptions made about the importance of teachers' grammatical knowledge.

Derrida's work also provided a valuable tool with which to discover more about the impact that new policies about grammar have had on teachers. Critics and commentators observe Derrida's writing and philosophy as difficult to understand and unnecessarily obscure (Allan, 2008, p.71) and Derrida himself thanked the readers for their patience in 'Aporia' (1993, p. ix). The use of Derrida in this research was primarily in order to further question assumptions and meaning, where appropriate in the transcribed text, not to obscure or complicate gratuitously.

### **3.12.1 Deconstruction**

Attributing a neat definition to the idea of deconstruction is problematic because deconstruction is essentially opposed to reducing ideas to single meanings and in any case Derrida insisted that deconstruction is not a 'theory' 'nor a philosophy' and is neither a school nor a method.

Nevertheless, applying Derrida's ideas to case study research has the potential to provide a radical rereading and interpretation of the data and helps to challenge assumptions explicitly or implicitly contained therein: the information that participants provide during an interview is already considered to be a reconstruction of their initial experience and its meaning, and in this sense, deconstruction and reconstruction have begun to happen at the very earliest stages. Derrida's deconstruction may be interpreted as a philosophy that destroys rather than expounds or generates. However, deconstruction does not mean destroying ideas, but rather pushing them to the point where they begin to come apart and expose their latent contradictions and it is certainly not a 'technical set of discursive procedures' (Derrida, 1992).

Deconstruction is often seen as Derrida's reaction to what he considered to be the primary goal of Western metaphysics: to seek the truth contained within words. In his collection of essays in 'Writing and Difference', Derrida expressed the view that no word, however finite its meaning may appear, can ever hold one definition: 'language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique, deconstructive criticism aims to show that any text inevitably undermines its own claims to have a determinate meaning, and licenses the reader to produce his own meanings' (Derrida, 1978, p. 358). When working with Derrida the researcher has to accept and anticipate that the process of rereading and the reinterpretation which the text undergoes may actually be never-ending: it was not Derrida's objective that the text arrive at any conclusive or finite position.

Derrida argued that all meaning is constantly unfixed and deferred, whether the text originated in the written form or in the spoken form. Deconstruction can be applied to even the most seemingly

precise and scientific of texts and in his introduction to Husserl's 'Origin of Geometry', Derrida argues that meaning is a feature of interpretation that readers apply to all texts irrespective of their scientific or mathematical content (Derrida, 1978). Since most words are read by more than one reader, read by one reader more than once or even just read once by one person, there can be no uniformity or 'univocity' of meaning (Derrida, 1967, p. 104). For Derrida, although the graphic and phonic forms may be repeatable, the meaning can never be.

Derrida's concept of 'deconstruction' is a form of enquiry that can be applied to any and all texts, including any speech situation: 'When you deconstruct the subject, you analyse all the hidden assumptions which are implied in the philosophical, or the ethical, or the juridical, or the political use of the concept of subject' (Biesta & Egéa, 2001, p.177). However, to try to present 'deconstruction' as if it were a method of analysis or a fixed blueprint for analysis would be to deliberately mislead the reader or misunderstand the concept itself. Deconstruction is a process of reading and rereading in order to gain further understanding and to challenge the text but it does not offer a definitive position in relation to meaning. Deconstruction is more of a project than an analytical framework because it promises no fixed borders or neat conclusions. In 'Writing and Difference', Derrida was careful to point out that deconstruction should not be mistaken for destruction or demolition (Derrida, 1978). A Derridean reading aims to lay bare the 'aporia' that exist just below the surface of all texts and all rhetoric and in doing so, to expose the inconsistencies and contradictions they contain (Rolfe, 2005), but the purpose is not so much to arrive as it is to travel.

Derrida engaged with questions of pedagogy and considered what it means to think, to learn, to teach and to know, and his work asserted a desire to shed light on some of the complex areas of teacher knowledge. Derrida addressed fundamental issues of control and freedom in education, as well as ethical and political considerations: 'Reading Derrida in the context of education calls for an engagement of his forms of reasoning and analysing with educational issues. It needs an attentive and respectful reading' (Biesta & Egéa-Kuehne, 2001). The philosophical challenge of re-thinking aspects of education, of deconstructing education, does not consist of changing, replacing, or abandoning education. As far as deconstruction is concerned, to deconstruct educational philosophy and policy would be first and foremost to undo its existing construction with infinite patience; to take apart a prevailing system in order to understand all of its mechanisms.

### **3.12.2 Derrida and Charmaz**

Using Derrida's approach to the deconstruction of the text complemented the use of Charmazian Grounded Theory because it forced the researcher to continuously challenge the language and the

ideas that emerge through the coding work and through the interpretation of the data. The process of deconstruction is one which does not end at the point of transcription or coding or analysing the data: it is present at all stages. Therefore, application of Derrida's ideas to Grounded Theory is an attempt to show that a final, conclusive reading can never truly be reached because meaning is always deferred. Derrida's desire to deconstruct the political and ethical positions that emerged in the codes gave Grounded Theory a further dimension that challenged the status quo and assumptions made about teachers and their knowledge by governments and the exam boards.

Much of Derrida's early work was centred on criticisms of the French structuralists and their notions of stability and of fixedness in meaning and context. In his writings of the 1960s Derrida sought to reveal what he saw as their flawed concepts and he addressed the way in which we try to use language and writing to stabilize meaning (Derrida, 1967a; 1967b). For Derrida, 'everyday language' is not innocent or neutral, it is the language of Western metaphysics and carries with it a considerable number of presuppositions about the nature of reality and interpretation (Derrida, 1967b). The Derridean approach of constantly critiquing the assumptions of a text, married to the Charmazian Grounded Theory approach that sees the language of case studies as something to be challenged, united to promote closer listening and rigorous reading. They both allowed for interpretations that questioned anything superficial or immediate. By using Derridean ideas in Grounded Theory research of this sort, I had to consider the participant and their story as incomplete and infinite, and to see the text as something that could not, on its own, control the reading or the interpretation of that reading.

Derrida advocated that there can be no immutable truth: meaning is not fixed but is culturally and contextually specific: 'Philosophy is written and spoken in a natural language whose modes are multiple and conflictual' (Derrida, 2006, p. 219). The research act of deconstructing places first the researcher and then the reader in an active role in deriving meaning, rejecting the possibility of a knowing subject providing a fixed origin of meaning. None of us can be objective nor can we stand outside our own contexts when talking about them. For Derrida, language cannot reflect reality: all we have is the language with no access to the past because the past has gone forever. There can therefore be no universal historical truths to be discovered by the researcher and, as far as the participant is concerned, Derrida and deconstructionists deny the possibility of there being a single narrative that human reason can impose on past experiences. However, whilst there can be no fixed meaning, there can be several; and it is this multiplicity of possibilities that guided the analysis in this research towards trying to find one meaning whilst simultaneously acknowledging that a wealth of other interpretations were possible and probable.

### 3.12.3 Différance and Trace

Derrida explored the relationship between what is heard and what is read when he offered the words 'difference' and his coined 'différance' as examples. His conception of différance sees language as at all times problematic: there is never the possibility of linguistic certainty because the inconsistencies, ambiguities and uncertainties of meaning can never be fully addressed. Derrida explored the shifting, multifaceted interpretations of words and sought to show that their definitions can only be known by their difference to and distinction from other words. He aimed to show that language is always fluid and unfixed. Along with individual words, texts of all types, where they are analysed, show only a multiplicity of interpretations, borne from our 'activity of semantic freerplay' (Writing and Difference, 1978, p.369).

Derrida promoted reading against the grain of supposedly 'self-evident' truths, rather than taking them for granted, to see something of their intricacy. For Derrida, there was no deep meaning in any text because meaning is not present and is not carried within the word or words. His objective was to show how meaning is always deferred because it is always unfixed; but it was also to highlight the relationships that exist between signs and sounds or the graphemes and the phonemes: 'it is true, and one cannot ignore it, that the appearance of certain systems of writing three or four thousand years ago was an extraordinary leap in the history of life. All the more extraordinary because a prodigious expansion of the power of difference was not accompanied, at least during these millennia, by any notable transformation of the organism' (Of Grammatology, 1967b, p. 142).

Derrida believed that language enabled the mobility of all linguistic signs in infinite combinations and the result of this is a meaning that is always on the move. The signs may be the same but they are different every time they are used because on their own they mean different things to each thinker, reader or speaker and used together they are contaminated by the trace of other words as well. Derrida's 'trace' is the reference to the impact that has been left behind of the concept that makes up the missing part.

Despite working with the knowledge that 'trace' exists, the researcher can be partially comforted by Derrida's acceptance that in order to criticise any prevailing traditions, writing has to be granted some form of 'presence' of the originator, otherwise there would be no form or meaning to deconstruct. He also concluded that by placing overt value on writing or on any signs of speech, meaning can be lost but can also be gained. As meaning is unstable in its original form; putting it through a process of transcribing it can have the effect of stripping it of its effects but it can also imbue it with any amount of other meaning at each stage. The findings kept in mind the balance between speech and writing, favoring neither one nor the other. However, this presented a constant

conflict; knowing that the medium of communicating the findings is through written language. Notation was therefore used in order to confer upon speech the same importance as the writing assumes.

Derrida's concept of 'trace' also described the speaker's absence from the system of signs that constitute writing, which are used in an attempt to capture the speech and its meaning. These absences are evident in all texts but are a particular feature in interviews, where the original thought became a speech act, which then became a graphic act captured by another person and presented to yet another or infinite others. Derrida challenged the importance that we have attributed to speech in our culture and the position that we have allowed it to assume in our understanding of meaning and context. Derrida was broadly critical of 'Platonism', which he viewed as favouring speech over writing and assuming that speech is somehow a purer representation of an individual's thought (1972) and he urged all philosophers to avoid this dominant 'logocentric' Western position.

#### **3.12.4 Logocentricity**

Derrida advocated the need for a fundamental realignment of the way in which we value both the immediate, spoken word and the written word, by refuting the assumption that speech is the closest representation of thought. Derrida challenged the tendency to assume that speech is more authentic than writing and believed that to hail language as the product of thought was a fallacy. The tradition of ascribing originality and therefore superiority to the act of speech, was described by Derrida as 'logocentric', and was rejected in his theories of grammatology. For Derrida, no single way of communicating, whether in speech or writing, is more or less direct. No way of communicating is unequivocally better for obtaining a convergence of minds than any other. His desire was to challenge Western philosophical traditions by exposing their binary oppositions, especially those which favour speech over writing, masculine over feminine and the meta-physical aspect of presence within words (Biesta & Egéa-Kuehne, 2001). For Derrida, privileging the spoken word over the written word is misguided but is the result of the fact that speech can function in the presence or absence of the sender or receiver, and is usually more spontaneous and more immediate than writing. For this reason it has been seen as closer to the 'logos' or truth.

Writing, by contrast, is viewed as a necessary but dangerous method for transmitting the spoken word: dangerous because the speaker is often not present to respond to inaccuracies. In the context of this study, this is particularly important when working with a transcription that started as a speech act and became a text. When researching teachers' feelings about grammar and their respective knowledge of language, it was important to spend time and effort using a form of transcription, in this case working with Jefferson notation, which, although highly detailed, allowed

for some of the complexities of speech and meaning to be addressed. This deconstruction and reconstruction took place 'through work which actually requires time, discipline, and patience, work that requires several readings, new types of reading, too' (Derrida, 1995; Egéa-Huehne & Biesta, 2001, p.401).

The 'Logocentrism' of which Derrida was so critical is interesting and important in gaining a greater understanding of the teachers' positions in this research. Western philosophy privileges speech over writing, believing it to be the purer and truer account which is closer to the speaker. Derrida challenged the belief that there is any more presence of truth within the immediacy of the spoken word than there is in any other manifestation of the word. In practical terms, looking at the findings with a logocentric appreciation enables the researcher to acknowledge that both speech and the written word are as equals and in fact that the linguistic signifier, whether that sign be found in speech or in writing, is only equal to the signified meaning.

### **3.12.5 Binary Opposites**

A Derridean reading of a text seeks to expose and challenge the binary oppositions that pervade all relationships and contexts. Derrida proposed that in the Western philosophical tradition of viewing all situations and metaphysical concepts in binary pairs, one will always be the weaker, the less desired or the less profitable. However, the stronger or more desirable one only exists in relation to the 'other' and this is Derrida's concern when deconstructing the text. Questions about truth and authenticity, proximity and distance, self and other have often been part of the discussions about, and research into, educational practice and identity. A Derridean reading seeks not only to find and challenge the opposites but also to reread the text or texts from new vantage points, turning the old order on its head.

In this research, the binary oppositions are clearly exposed in a number of ways throughout the data and particularly in the themes that emerged during the coding stages: the teacher as educator and educated; the knowledge of grammar and the lack of knowledge; the power of the exam boards and the powerlessness of the teacher. A deconstructing of these binary opposites aimed to expose them and to dismantle them through challenges to their status quo. Derrida referred to this as 'play'. As language users, we want language to have a fixed meaning and a lack of 'play' because the alternative is ambiguity and uncertainty. Nevertheless, once the oppositions become exposed and the alternatives considered, the 'play' is inevitable. Deconstruction, then, is a questioning of all assumptions, not as an act of demolition, but as a striving for an awareness of what is involved in understanding a text.

### **3.12.6 Truth**

Just as Derrida was critical of the assumption made by some that speech is closer to truth than writing, so he was also critical of the assumptions made in the field of linguistics and phonetics that imagine writing can ever be the true manifestation of thought, or that we can analyse it as such. Derrida defined our attempt to arrive at the 'truth' contained in any form of text as simply being a 'condition of possibility' because truth is necessarily fragmented and fragile. Nevertheless, the search for some kind of truth, which implies a realness and integrity, is at the heart of this research. The notion of, the difficulty with and the quest for 'truth' were made manifold at each stage. The research aimed to uncover something of the truth about teachers' reactions to the SPaG marks and to do so through truthful codes and truthful transcription. Yet, Derrida argued that because language expresses thoughts which cannot be fixed and language's meaning is constantly shifting, truth is always rendered contingent and open. Trying to use words, spoken or written, to express truth will never accomplish its ends because truth is an unfinished business. It is contingent upon time, place, the medium and the details of the transaction.

A Derridean approach to analysis takes the meaning of any text as subject to a continuous process of meaning deferral, as each word leads to another: there is no reality against which a transcribed text, or any other, can be judged as true. In 'Of Grammatology', published in 1976, Derrida argued that as soon as a word or a sign is understood, its meaning changes. This philosophy renders all language uncertain, so the knowledge gained through it can only be tentative. For researchers therefore, there can be no truthful narratives or explanations arising from written interviews or transcripts, just interpretations. Derrida's view of the text was that it can also derive its meaning from other texts. In terms of case study analysis, this allows for participants' experiences to be seen in relation to one another, enabling the identification of common connections between texts and the ideologies contained within them.

### **3.13 Summary**

Derrida's reflections on deconstruction and his concepts such as 'différance' and binary opposites provide a powerful paradigm to develop a greater awareness of current issues in education. Much of present day educational discourse and ideology is fixed and politicised, with changes to GCSEs and grammar as no exception. According to a Derridean philosophy, when education becomes the handmaiden of the state and serves the state's programmes of political intent, this is regarded as an aberration of education. The Derridean, deconstructionist view of education is that it should not be viewed as a mere information transfer or as any kind of uniform programme and the key to preventing this is through educational discourse. However, according to Aronowitz, educational

discourse no longer interrogates the givens of education, or the social and political contexts in which education functions. As a result, nearly all discourse is reduced to what is described as the application of ‘... technologies of managing consent, where teaching is increasingly a function of training for test taking’ (2001, p. 16-17). It is therefore beholden upon educators and researchers to identify and deconstruct the systems and binary oppositions that are imposed upon them, such as the assessing of grammar and the assumptions made by politicians about what teachers know, and to challenge their impact upon education.

This study, then, aimed to explore humanities teachers’ experiences of learning about grammar and their knowledge and confidence in the context of the SPaG marks, in an effort to understand how this has shaped their current practice. It also aimed to discover what teachers think and feel about grammar and what they think and feel about the SPaG marks. The research aimed to interact with the participants, through the use of semi-structured interviews, in ways that provided opportunities for discussion. The research sought to give a voice to teachers who may have felt voiceless, by using a detailed transcription method. The importance of the words used in this research can be seen throughout the next chapter. The meaning carried within the words is explored through a Derridean filter which allowed for the opening up and the revelation of meaning.

There is much that is unknown about the impact of the SPaG marks and this research provided participants with the space to voice their insecurities about policy and their own practice. I wanted to explore the wider implications of the teachers’ confidence and knowledge in order to develop as holistic and reflexive an understanding as possible.

Chapter four commences the analysis with an exploration of the data in the codes and sub-codes. It offers further evaluation using Derrida’s key theories and takes a more discursive turn as it develops, due to the imprecise and fluid nature of deconstruction. This openness and unwillingness to offer precise diagnoses also reflected the nature of the interviews and the fact that the policy on which this research was centered was not fully grounded in the lives of the teachers. It was new and in some cases unknown. The aim of the following chapter is to give as comprehensive an account as possible of the complexity of practitioners’ stories in a way which, for me, made better sense of their situation for all of us.

## Chapter 4

### ACTIVE VOICES: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF TEACHERS' STORIES

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter uses the codes and sub-codes that emerged from the data in order to present the voices of the participants. A Derridean lens was shone on each of the coded segments and this provided an additional layer of exploration. The exploration of words and their meaning demonstrated how we are constructing our stories when we speak at the same time as the reader or listener is constructing our story for themselves. We both strive for meaning but Derrida challenges us to accept that this can only ever be an infinite set of possibilities.

#### 4.2 A Derridean Reading of the Coded Data

The seven theoretical codes (table 3.4, p.57) emerged as an integrated framework for the sub-codes but only after a lengthy process of memo writing, describing the data and working with themes and open codes. The initial, descriptive codes were generated from the start of the work with the first data set but they were not finalised until well after the second set of interviews was transcribed, over a year later. The process of arriving at a definitive set of sub-codes and theoretical main codes involved the constant comparisons and saturation that are needed to avoid the eventual codes from being limited by preconceptions or restrained by a lack of thoroughness through the coding journey.

Derrida's value as part of the research methodology is demonstrated through the particular way in which his theories can be used to contribute to a greater or broader understanding of the manifold meanings of language. A Derridean approach supported my enquiry into the meaning and value of language because it allowed for a deeper reading of the transcripts and provoked subsequent challenges to be mounted against the assumptions contained in the texts. It called for a peeling away of the layers of meaning in order to expose the most significant features of the discourse. According to an interview Derrida gave to Francois Ewald, deconstruction is everywhere. It is not a process of 'disqualifying, negating, disavowing or surpassing' but of thinking about the possibilities of the text and its meaning 'from another border, from the genealogy of judgment, will, consciousness or activity'. Deconstruction is a more powerful tool than the 'techniques, rules and procedures' that are evident in 'philosophical, juridico-political and esthetic' research and Derrida defines it as a broader and more obscure process 'between the earth and the world' (Biesta & Egéa-Kuehne, 2001).

### 4.3 Code 1: Teacher as Pupil

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
<b>Code 1: Teacher as Pupil</b>	Sub-Code 1.1: Remembering and experiencing language Sub-Code 1.2: Grammar and other languages

*Table 4.1: Code 1 and sub-codes*

This code emerged clearly from the data provided by all the participants in both sets of interviews. Throughout the initial coding stages it was clear that the educational experiences of the teachers themselves were vital in understanding how they approached the theoretical concept of grammar and also the teaching and assessing of it in relation to SPaG. The opening questions in the first set of interviews were centred on participants' experiences of being language learners themselves: I wanted to discover the extent to which they had learned about English language and particularly the rules that govern Standard English grammar, as well as the grammar of foreign languages, and at what stage in their education.

In order to address my first sub-aim, I wanted participants to reflect on being the recipient of grammar instruction as a way of exploring their own current practices and I also wanted to discover how they had felt about learning grammar then and how they feel about those experiences now, looking back. I asked questions to discover the specific details that participants felt they could remember and whether any of the knowledge about language that they had gained as a pupil was useful to them in their classrooms. My desire to gain insights into how teachers might have been shaped by their own experiences was sometimes thwarted by the respondent's inability to give me much information, at least at the start of the interview. Nevertheless, changing direction and asking different questions allowed me to open up the dialogue and move further into the discussions or to return to the same aspects later on, when rapport was more firmly established.

In the second set of interviews, I did not ask about early experiences again but participants revisited these memories more than once when discussing their current skills and confidences. It was interesting to consider that the way teachers felt about their own experiences of learning at school was often related to how they felt as adults instructing pupils. Being able to use their own experiences of learning in order to reflect upon how their own pupils might feel, or seeing themselves as a child learner and now as an adult learner, also emerged through this code.

Derrida recognised that all forms of knowledge arise out of the relations between things and people but that these relationships are usually characterised by opposition. The traditional relationships

between the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as the teacher and pupil, can be viewed as hierarchical and examples of binary opposites within the text. Derrida invited us to challenge the way these traditional relationships might be seen in ‘The Right To Philosophy’ when he reminds us that a master, who himself must have been previously formed, introduced and initiated must represent the word, the thought or the knowledge of the other...’ (Derrida, 1990). The teacher must also be the learner.

Historically, teachers have been seen by others, and have perhaps seen themselves, as figures of authority, with the powers of position and knowledge over pupils. Pupils are historically seen as lacking in power and knowledge. A Derridean lens reminds us to reconsider this oppositional relationship in education and ultimately frees the teacher to learn alongside the pupil and to become the learner. It also allows us to consider that a lack of grammar experiences for the teachers in this research does not equate to a current lack of knowledge because it has prompted within them a reflexivity which, when properly constituted, could allow the teacher to become more aware of the importance of learning about grammar, more open to the idea of it and a more willing learner now.

There were a couple of instances in the interviews where teachers told me that they had learnt from the pupils but, disappointingly, this was either joked about as if it were uncomfortable or was so rare that only one or two very specific examples could be given. P5’s traditional role as educator was challenged when I asked her whether she would feel confident to answer a grammar question that a pupil might ask. Her response showed her hesitation and lack of confidence in her hypothetical reply and the emphatic use of ‘no’ showed how the hierarchical structure of teacher and pupil was equalised: teacher became pupil.

P5:	<i>no (.) if it's a <u>grammar</u> question (.) no</i>
OW:	<i>woul::d they ask a grammar question</i>
P5:	<i>no (.) &gt;I don't think they would&lt;</i>
OW:	<i>they might say 'why can't you say that, Miss?' [or]</i>
P5:	<i>[yer] (.) um (.1) yer (.) ok (.1) so = they <b>possibly</b> might say that (.1) um (.) I couldn't (.) like think</i>

Figure 4.1: P5 and the teacher/pupil opposition

The overall impact of teachers’ knowledge of SPaG on the pupils that they teach can be deconstructed in multiple ways that expose assumptions about teaching, pupils and transferring knowledge. A single, fixed correlation between teachers’ feelings and SPaG outcomes may never be

established and Derrida would have cautioned against trying to find one. The most important aspects of this code are the assumptions that are contained within the classrooms, the relationships and the memories; that they may be explored for the benefit of both teachers and pupils. For children to learn, we can deconstruct the status quo and consider the overall impact that teachers do in fact have and the way in which children can provide knowledge to the teacher.

#### **4.3.1 Sub-Code 1.1: Remembering and Experiencing Language**

Within the *Teacher as Pupil* code, it became clear that participants' experiences of learning languages varied hugely from candidate to candidate and when they were asked about it, appeared to be a really thought-provoking question for them all. The sub-code of *Remembering and Experiencing Language* represented the grouping together of participants' recall of learning simple parts of speech but few could remember much more than that, and in some cases this memory was of only one lesson. P3 said that the only time in her education when she ever focused on grammar was when she had to pass the skills test before her PGCE course. The data in this code came largely, but not exclusively, from the first set of interviews.

The ability to recall details varied considerably, with some candidates suggesting that the fact that they could not remember anything was the likely consequence of not having studied any grammar. For some participants, they assumed they had learnt something about grammar but had forgotten what. P5 summed up the feelings of several of the participants when she said: '*I couldn't ↑ really remember doing ↑ anything literacy based (.) I know I would've but it just doesn't se:em (.3)*'. She did not fully vocalise what it was that '*doesn't seem*' but she implied that it did not seem as though she had learnt very much. P2 also felt that as a result of being able to recall some parts of speech, she was probably exposed to more grammar than she can now remember and she said that she could '*remember little bits of (.) you know (.1) ↑ hearing the word noun and adjectives and verbs*' but she did not '*really ↓ ever remember >retaining that information enough to be able to teach somebody else about it< (.) for example*'.

These partial memories and the vagueness of what was learnt is interesting to reflect upon because most of the participants, none of whom said they struggled with any other notable aspect of school life, could not recall much about grammar at all, including those who said that they had actually been told something about English language at some point. As well as sharing with me their early memories, participants also revealed their feelings regarding the importance of learning about language as a young child and they talked about the impact that their school's ethos had on them. The value of learning about grammar was explored even by those teachers who did not feel as though they had learnt very much at school. P5 shared with me her feeling that one of the two

primary schools she went to *'encouraged'* reading and comprehension but the other one did not. As a result of this she reflected on the fact that *'actually that's had quite a big impact on how I have (.) you know where I am today really because I've always been more mathematical (.) you know (.) minded than literacy based.'* She explained that she *'was never into reading and I just think that's because from an early age (.) you know (.) despite mum doing stuff (.) we just didn't do it at school as much, you know'*. Her duplicate use of the tag *'you know'* invited me to share this life event with her, perhaps to empathise or perhaps to lessen the impact of what she was saying. There was a sense here of just how significant this was in her life as she was recounting it and it was evident that she held the school very much responsible for the fact that she did not have greater literacy skills.

The value placed upon language learning was interesting because only two teachers, P1 and P7, felt as though they had received any meaningful teaching about grammar and both of them were later identified as being those who now feel confident to impart some of their own grammar knowledge to pupils. However, they are also characterised by their shared memory of negative teaching and learning experiences at school; with one notable exception all of the participants felt as though their own grammar-learning experiences had been boring at best and non-existent at worst.

P1 was the exception because she went to an independent school and was taught Latin and English grammar. The Literature Review chapter evaluated how the formal teaching of grammar continued in independent education at a time when it stopped being taught in state schools and so ended up being associated with wealth and class and certainly with selective schooling. P1 asserted that her experiences of learning parts of speech in a very traditional setting made a *'massive difference'* to her general understanding of grammar, even though it was learnt *'under duress'*. She spoke in highly emotive language about the loathing she felt for its dryness but she seemed, nevertheless, to be acutely grateful that she knows something about parts of speech, particularly verbs, now. She thought her spelling ability could also be traced to this aspect of her education.

P7 shared with P1 the experience of having to learn Latin but she did not talk about it as a subject with quite the same reverence. In fact, she too told me she hated it then but can now see the value it holds for her and she went as far as to say she wished she could relearn it. However, unlike P1, she did not say that because of having learnt some Latin she was now confident with English grammar. The desire to go back and learn about language was revealed by other participants too but more often when they were speaking about learning a foreign language. The strong reactions and responses provoked by my questions about grammar learning at school demonstrated that teachers would really like to know more about language now. For the most part, there was a sense that they felt they had been short-changed by their early experiences.

There has been a great deal of research into the psychological aspects of learning a language, with conclusions proposed that learning a language can have very specific anxieties attached to it, which are not found in other spheres of learning or experienced by the individual in any other capacity (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a & 1991b; Gregerson & MacIntyre, 2014). Such anxieties can interfere with achievement and attainment as well as retention and it may be some of these anxieties that are partly responsible for the participants' general lack of memory and collective ambivalence or negativity towards grammar at school. Research in the field of language learning, but also in a wider educational context, suggests that teachers' own experiences of learning, particularly of negative situations, can transfer themselves into their later classroom practices and from these interviews it can be seen that those teachers who had positive experiences on which to draw, felt confident and positive about teaching about language; whilst those who lacked grammatical knowledge or had negative experiences were limited by their retention of information and their ability to pass on enthusiasm for or understanding of grammar (Brownlee, Boulton-Lewis & Purdie, 2002; Pickering, 2005).

Deconstructing the sub-code it was clear that teachers were also deconstructing their memories in relation to languages as we spoke, in order to ascertain the position that grammar held in their lives and in the lives of the schools in which they worked. One of the binary oppositions associated with Derridean theory was most evident when talking about the experience of learning about grammar and language. The hierarchical position of teachers who knew something about grammar was clear. The teachers who believed that they knew less than their peers demonstrated less self-confidence and felt that they had less to offer the children, often deferring to colleagues whom it was assumed knew more or appearing apologetic. Only one of the teachers, P3, really felt as though her confidence with language had grown in the year between the first and second set of interviews but for everyone else, their professional position with respect to grammar had either been formed by their schooling or it had not.

The way in which teachers accounted for their backgrounds as being directly responsible for both their knowledge and their confidence was clear. The teachers whose schools had provided them with a traditional education, in whatever learning context, thought they possessed greater knowledge about grammar, whether or not they did, and this gave them confidence when talking to me about it. However, Derrida reminds us to challenge the assumptions contained within this experience: it is not necessarily true that being more confident in the classroom made the teachers better at using language or at helping children to arrive at an understanding of it for themselves.

A Derridean reading seeks to explore the inherent truth and therefore the value of teachers' memories of their education and was critical to this study because it allowed for a challenge to be mounted in relation to what might hold truth and what might not. It was hugely interesting to hear what teachers had to say about their experiences but it is difficult to arrive at any fixed idea about its actual meaning or the truth it contained. A Derridean approach does not seek to determine what is 'truth' because there is no way of knowing this: it cannot be assumed that what I was told was the truth or even part of the truth, not least because memory can be partial and contextual and repositioned in the recounting. Teachers were asked to look back on things that happened to most of them over a decade ago and to some, several decades ago, and this led inevitably to fragmentation and incomplete memories. Nevertheless, when the majority of them suggested that they had been let down by their own teachers because they had been taught very little about grammar, none of them stopped to reflect on the fact that the children they teach may say similar things about them in the future. Even the two teachers who said they possessed some knowledge really had not enjoyed learning about language at school and did not consider how their pupils might feel. None of them really saw it as their responsibility as practising teachers to learn about grammar for themselves and no one suggested that they could be the conduit through which pupils could arrive at their own enhanced understanding.

#### **4.3.2 Sub-Code 1.2: Grammar and Other Languages**

When talking about learning other languages, those participants who had learnt Latin at school were the ones who generally felt more confident with their current understanding of English grammar. This could be because Latin shares much of its grammar with English and therefore teachers felt able to transfer aspects of their grammatical knowledge and their knowledge of the meta-language between the two languages (Cunningham & Graham, 2000), or it could be due to the fact that learning other languages has been shown to enhance knowledge of grammar in one's first language (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). However, as can be seen in sub-code 1.1, even those teachers who had learnt Latin did not enjoy it at the time and this negative memory of learning a second language was expressed by all participants at some point during their interviews. When this was discussed further, those who had not enjoyed learning a European language often bemoaned how little effort they had expended at the time, perhaps feeling that more application when they were younger would have provided them with a deeper understanding of English grammar now. P2 said that learning another language was something she was '*always afraid of*' and she then added that she was '*frightened and s:care*d' of learning French or German. When I encouraged her to explain a bit more about this, she told me that she could not understand the grammar of another language because she did not

understand it in English and she was unable to 'make the links'. Sadly, she said that she just 'muddled through'.

Just muddling through and not taking advantage of language-learning opportunities were themes also explored by P4 in relation to Spanish. Figure 4.2 shows P4's regrets about not having committed to her studies as a child but it also shows that her attitude and attainment then have contributed to how she has felt all her life about being a language learner. She acknowledged that her attainment was due in large part to her attitude at the time but she also felt that this was the cause of her shortcomings now. The lack of understanding of parts of speech and grammatical terms in English may have had a direct impact on the ease of understanding parts of speech in a foreign language but even if it did not, the combination of grammatical limitations in a first and second language may be the cause of teachers' uneasiness with grammar now.

P4:       *s::o I didn't put any effort into it ((laughter)) ↓ which is awful ↓ (.) cos if I'd ACTUALLY done effort (.) I'd could've gone into Spanish in year nine but (.) <I was just one of those stereotypical stroppy teenagers (.) who didn't think of that>*

OW:                               *((laughter))*

P4:                               *[so yer (.) ] I didn't (.1) languages is always something I've never been very good at . (.) um (.1) ° which is a shame really ° cos I think that if I'd had a different attitude (.2) <I'd have probably done better> (.) but yer*

Figure 4.2: Language limitations; second interview with P4

P6's experience differed considerably from that of the other participants because she was educated through the medium of Welsh from a younger age than most pupils are when they start to learn another language. However, despite knowing Welsh and being instructed in its grammar, P6 did not think that this had had a positive impact on her understanding of English grammar.

When teachers talked about grammar, they demonstrated an assumption and a desire for grammar to be a fixed, finite list of rules that could neatly be learnt. However, linguists know that as much as this may be desirable, it is not possible because there is a significant lack of agreement between grammarians and linguists about what the rules of correct grammar actually are. Pinker highlights the way in which rules are rendered meaningless when they are broken by great writers for great effect. He looks at the work of Orwell and Austen and uses their work to articulate the complexities of language. He also rejects the grammar and style guides of his contemporaries, saying that they are both misleading and in some cases wrong (Pinker, 1999; 2014). Although he does not argue that in a number of contexts a specific mode or style of writing is preferable to aid the reader, he does rail against those grammarians whose ideas are so fixed that they are unfit for purpose.

Derrida wrote at length about the relationship between grammar and rhetoric, closely associated with the linguistic difference between semantics and pragmatics. He was interested in the way in which meaning shifts with context and with speaker and this is mirrored by the approach taken by descriptive grammarians and linguists who are also interested in exploring the active and evolving use of words. However, amongst grammarians of all persuasions and ordinary users of language, there is an unsettled debate about what is and what is not grammatical; the result of a complex range of historical and sociological factors. These factors include an approach to the promotion of a language which is class and status-bound and can also be referred to as ‘linguistic imperialism’, combined with different interpretations of the way in which language is used and the way in which it changes (Crystal, 1997; Halliday, 2006).

For grammarians, the goal is to reveal meaning by analysing or presenting the language, the speaker and the setting. A Derridean reading reminds us that even if we were able to arrive at a ‘goal’ we cannot assume that one, simple truth will be revealed when the text is deconstructed. There is an acknowledgement by many that grammar is simply an infinite range of possibilities of meaning and that words that might be a verb in one sentence (*I cut it*) may function like a noun in another (*he has a cut on his finger*) and something literal (the imperative function, given as an instruction in an art lesson: ‘*now, cut it out, children*’) or figurative in yet another, to teenagers who never stop talking (*‘I said, cut it out!’*) (Pinker, 2004; Hall 2005).

#### 4.4 Code 2: Preparing the Professional

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
<b>Code 2: Preparing the Professional</b>	Sub-Code 2.1: Feeling Confidence and Assuredness on the Job Sub-Code 2.2: Missing Opportunities Sub-Code 2.3: Awareness and Importance

Table 4.2: Code 2 and sub-codes

*Preparing the Professional* emerged as a code whilst teachers started talking about what they understood by the term SPaG; what it meant to them in their classroom and how and whether they prepared pupils for the marks. They moved away from talking specifically about their early experiences of education but the concepts of teacher as both learner and educator remained extremely closely related for all of the participants throughout the interviews. None of the teachers said or even suggested they knew all there was to know about grammar or SPaG marks and they all

gave the impression that they were learners too. As they talked, in both sets of interviews, it became clear that their confidence in meeting the requirements of the GCSE SPaG components was, in most cases, the result of what they had learned, or thought they had learned, about grammar at school.

In this study, the participants' responses to their language learning experiences at school told me a great deal about their current relationship with grammar in the classroom. Participants who could remember the detail about what they learnt and could name some parts of speech in order to provide examples were the participants who had the highest levels of confidence with grammar. This was true even when the language experience about which they are talking took place at primary school. However, most participants could remember very little and P2 summed up the relationship between what was learnt and what is taught when she said: *'so I've always learnt <as and when> (.) and I suppose that still continues today (.) cos I never re::member being told (.1) and the only rule that's ever stuck with me is the (.) um (.) it's '.*

Although the deconstruction lens is not a critical one, in the exposition of the text's ideas it is inevitable that some concepts may be open to unwelcome scrutiny, or observed with their contradictions laid bare. One such notion is that of the starting point for this research: successive governments' interest in raising the literacy levels of school leavers. This was viewed by teachers as a positive goal within the context of GCSEs and participants said that they fundamentally applauded the mission of raising standards of literacy. P1 told me, early in her first interview, that if *'you ca::n't spell and write correctly (.1) you will have a ↑massive disadvantage'.* However, deconstructing what the teaching of grammar and the SPaG marks meant to the teachers showed that rather than being a positive thing, SPaG marks were actually seen as a distraction from the main teaching focus and were viewed quizzically in some interviews. A number of participants said that they lacked time to help improve literacy levels, despite acknowledging this as critical to the future success of the child and more important than almost anything else. Teachers could not see how linking SPaG marks to some questions on parts of either the exam or the coursework, or both, could really help to raise literacy levels but none of the teachers supplied any reasonable alternative. This contradiction between what teachers would like to do and what they actually do is evident throughout the transcripts.

#### **4.4.1 Sub-Code 2.1: Feeling Confidence and Assuredness on the Job**

This sub-code emerged within the *Preparing the Professional* code because the confidence which teachers felt towards language and grammar fed directly into the way that they appeared to see themselves as teachers. Grammar was often seen by participants as a corpus of knowledge that had either been gained at some point or had not, but rarely as something that they could take it upon

themselves to learn or as a process of their evolving professional knowledge acquisition. An example of grammar expressed as something with near-mythical qualities came close to the start of my first interview with P1. She mentioned the '*subjunctive*' and shared the memory that she had heard the term when she was at school but did not know what it was; she recounted that she thought the teachers were trying to make it sound like something mystical, which left her with the impression that grammar learning could only be approached when the time was right and by chosen people. This is in accordance with the assertion made in Chapter 1 that knowing about English grammar has often been seen as a preserve of the elite (Lowth, 1762).

Research into self-confidence and competence amongst GCSE examination markers revealed that teachers often wrongly assess their own ability levels and that self-assessment is a poor indicator of actual competency (Dunning, Johnson, Ehrlinger & Kruger, 2003). In the first set of interviews, the confidence that teachers presented to me about their own grammatical knowledge was low for the majority of the teachers but at the early stages of the coding I did not know if this was actually the case or whether some of it might be false modesty or an assumption that I had superior knowledge and no one wanted to be challenged by me. Equally, it could have been the case that teachers knew more than they thought they did but the notable exception to this status quo was P1 who told me that she was seen as the '*go-to person for grammar*'. She returned to her '*traditional*' education on a number of occasions, specifically mentioning it a couple of times within the first minute, thereby emphasising her point. Whether her colleagues were aware of her educational background remained unclear but it was evident that P1 saw her own schooling as the primary reason why she felt confident in the classroom and why she felt able to offer a level of grammatical support to colleagues. This was in stark contrast to most of the other interviewees who expressed levels of doubt and a lack of self-confidence.

In opposition to P1's position, P3 told me before three minutes of our first interview had elapsed that she was '*not confident with grammar (.) at all*' and that '<To this day> I <sup>↑</sup>*still don't know how to use a semi-colon properly*'. Her use of the post-modifying '*at all*' reinforced her lack of knowledge and perhaps her desire to make it clear to me, right from the outset, that she felt she had nothing much to say about grammar or punctuation, in case I probed her to answer questions. She demonstrated an honesty and vulnerability here which was shared by other participants, many of whom seemed to have a compulsion to tell me how little they knew.

Other participants positioned themselves somewhere between P1 and P3. P5 felt as though she had some limited knowledge of grammar but when talking about it she quickly asserted that if a pupil asked her a question in a lesson she '*wouldn't be able to say "o::h this is because"*'. The feeling that

pupils may know more about language than the teacher was emphasised during several interviews but P2 saw this status quo as a learning opportunity and was not embarrassed to give me an example of this in practice: 'so (.) AFFECT EFFECT (.1) you know (.) or I'll say to the kids (.1) <"what is that again? Which one is which?>" and then they'll explain it to me (.) you know (.) and I'll learn th:at way.' Her willingness to provide me with a concrete example, one that could be considered to be an elementary point of language and one that she would reasonably be expected to know in her role as a KS4 teacher, underpinned the level of trust that existed during the interview. It also demonstrated how confusing some aspects of English grammar and language are for some teachers and, as discussed in Chapter 2, how complex the study of grammar can be (Campbell, 2004).

Although a number of teachers were ready to accede to their lack of knowledge, they did not necessarily acknowledge a lack of interest or a lack of openness towards learning more. P2 continued to tell me that she knew very little about language but she had a willingness to acquire new skills and awareness: *I don't want <to look like an idiot> and not know (.) so it's a little bit of that but I do (.) generally just want to know (.) as I get older (.) really'. For P2 and for other participants, not knowing about one's own language was viewed by them, and as far as they are concerned, by some of the children they teach, as a failing. The use of the word 'idiot' to describe this lack of knowledge of language bears witness to the strength of feeling that accompanied it.*

The levels of confidence that were seen during the second interviews were greater than those expressed during the first set and one of the reasons for this was that two of the teachers (P1 and P3) were teaching key stage 3 English alongside their humanities subjects at the time of the second interviews. P1 had had high levels of confidence with grammar and a more detailed knowledge base from the start but P3 had expressed her complete lack of confidence and skills in English the first time round. P3's new-found enthusiasm for and confidence in English were the result of a course she has been undertaking in the year between the two interviews. The course was a literacy initiative set up for teachers of English and other essay-writing subjects and was run in conjunction with the local primary school. She told me that she loved the training: she used 'brilliant' to describe the course and the trainer. However, she did say that at the start of the course there were a number of technical terms being used to talk about language which she could not remember or did not know, but this did not discourage her, and it appeared that the course had a positive impact on her language teaching because she described several approaches and activities that she was able to put to use in the classroom.

When I asked her about her experiences of teaching English, P3 told me that she had been able to apply the skills that she acquired on the course when in the year 7 classroom. The technical

terminology that she had learnt had enabled her to be *'more confident <with picking kids up on things> (.) like homophones and um (.) punctuation'*. She acknowledged what a challenge it had been and how she had not been looking forward to some aspects at all: she said she was *'absolutely dreading'* the Shakespeare component but it turned out to be fine because she did not concentrate on the language and focused more on the context and plot. However, the major challenge had been that she thought year 7 English was skills-based, in contrast to the geography she usually taught, which was knowledge-based: *'it seems a lot like catching mist ((laughter)) (.) there's nothing to actually >kind of pin< that= at the end of the lesson <you need to have got to this point and you should understand that (.) and you must know that>'*. Working with a perceived lack of subject content did not worry her and she laughed and joked about this in a way that teachers who are less confident might not have been able to do and in a way that she was not able to at the time of the first interviews.

By the time of the second interviews, P3 was no longer an NQT and was feeling more settled anyway, but the new confidence with English appeared to have been the direct result of the course that she attended. When I asked her whether the course had helped her in the teaching of RS or just English, she told me that *'the course has helped both of them (.) I definitely feel different to how I did last year.'* Teachers' confidence in matters of grammar and assuredness in their language skills was always related to their self-assessed knowledge of grammar. There were no instances where teachers told me they felt that they knew quite a lot but lacked confidence: the more that teachers felt that they knew, the more confident they were as practitioners. P5 also said that as the intervening year had unfolded, she had become a *'different practitioner'* and when I asked her if she was now more confident with grammar questions when they were posed by pupils, she replied *'Yer (.) I would say I'm more confident um (.) I'd like to think that they probably would (0.3) um (.) yer (.) it's difficult to say (.) really'*.

One of the central assumptions which could be drawn from codes 1 and 2, but which a Derridean approach would seek to challenge, would be to conclude that a lack of grammatical knowledge and/or awareness of the grammar of a second language makes a teacher less likely to be successful at exploring language in the classroom. It cannot be held true that those teachers who said they knew more were any better at explaining or deconstructing their own use of language in the KS4 classroom, or were any better at sparking an interest in language amongst pupils. Neither can it be assumed that just because teachers said they knew more than their colleagues, they actually did.

#### 4.4.2 Sub-Code 2.2: Missing Opportunities

The sense that there was a missed opportunity in the participants' own education was not simply something that appeared to be regretted for its own sake when looking back; it was also expressed as a missed opportunity to help pupils understand more about language. P5 said that '<it's not until I've come into teaching (.) that I've wanted to learn ↓more about literacy> and improve other children's literacy.' and she went on to say that she feared the pupils she taught did not understand how important it was to learn about language, just as she had not done either. The feeling that something had been missed out in the participants' school experiences had the effect for some of them of creating a desire to learn more and by extension, to be able to share more:

P5: um (.) and so like (.) when I'm teaching here and we have the various initiatives to try and encourage children to read (.) I just find it s:o important and ↓ they just don't understand ↓ you know (.1) what impact

Figure 4.3: P5 expressed pupils' missing opportunities

P4 also expanded on this idea of missed opportunities when she explained to me, in a tone of frustration, that one of the reasons that she might not be able to get the best written work out of pupils was because her teacher training course did not emphasise this aspect of their learning:

P4: got trained up doing all of how to teach HISTORY (.) how to do card sorts (.) how to do Venn diagrams and so on (.) I've ↑ never been shown how to get students (.3) < I think I'd one lesson actually> (.) ° of how to get students to write°

Figure 4.4: Writing opportunities in history;; P4

Applying a Derridean reading to the transcripts meant working with the knowledge that the speaker was not present at the transcription stage so the writing was only an imitation of their words and thoughts, whatever pains were taken to present the findings as an honest representation. The mediation of meaning through recording technologies, seen in interview transcription, has the positive ability to enable the dispersal of discourse beyond the immediate interaction and context and out to an infinite number of people, but the reality for Derrida was that this can further decouple the communication from the speaker. This is a particular consideration in the writing of a thesis which aims to influence practice in some way because it is of paramount importance that the meaning and messages to the reader are clear and unequivocal. The researcher must bear in mind that the findings can be read by anyone and of course by people who may not know the detailed

significance of what is being discussed. The trace of the speaker must find its way into the writing of the researcher.

Reading the findings through a Derridean lens revealed a number of ‘absences’, or what Derrida described as ‘trace’, which is the consideration of the gulf that can exist between the speaker and their original thought. This is particularly interesting in the code of *Missing Opportunities* because ‘trace’ is the realisation that there is something missing and a gap that might need to be filled for the sake of our understanding or a more complete reading. Within the code, the opportunities for learning represent something of a trace element, and in the Derridean reading, the trace is the determination of what is meant by an utterance or what is omitted. This is particularly important to the researcher who is at pains to determine what was specifically meant by an utterance and is also trying to decide what the gaps in speech might mean. Figure 4.5 shows an interchange at a point at which P7 was discussing missed opportunities to exploit the SPaG marks explicitly. The data were really valuable and the trace between the thought and the language can be seen as P7 struggles to say what she is thinking and to explain herself. She is vague (*‘and stuff’*); she is unclear and imprecise (*I mean; you know*) but is in reality an eloquent, educated and clear thinker. Her trace might reveal a guilt at favouring the content over the literacy or an awareness of the fact that more could have been done, or perhaps something else altogether:

P7:	<i>we looked at (.) &lt;which papers were better&gt; (.) and where we needed to ↑focus our attention//</i>
OW:	<i>//okay//</i>
P7:	<i>// - and stuff (.1) in terms of content (.2) I mean (.) I don't (.) even though we have said (.) you know (.) this is <u>important</u> (.1) and this you (.) they <u>mi:::qht</u> get two out of three</i>

Figure 4.5: The missing trace between thought and language; P7

Figure 4.6 demonstrates how the analysis of the findings was more than just a focus on key topic words but was at the level of working out trace meanings within non-verbal and verbal utterances. It challenged the assumptions that non-verbal acts are less important than verbal ones by trying to present both, and it restored the binary opposition. It also demonstrated the missed opportunities within the data. In this excerpt it can be seen that although there was not a lot of new information shared, a strong degree of acknowledgement took place along with a significant amount of thinking time given to children’s understanding of language.

OW:	<i>they'll understand (.) <u>much</u> later (.1) won't they (.1) when=</i>
P5:	<i>[Mmm]=Yer, you know (.) just (.1) you know (.) how I've learnt (.) [really]</i>
OW:	<i>((mm)) [yer]</i>
P5:	<i>[um] (.1) but yer (.) I do remember (.) I do remember some</i>

Figure 4.6: Non-verbal utterances and trace revelations: P5

**4.4.3 Sub-Code 2.3: Awareness and Importance**

This sub-code became apparent when teachers were discussing their teaching practice and their own focus on SPaG marks in particular and grammar more generally. In a number of cases, the way in which grammar and SPaG were perceived by teachers had a direct bearing on how they approached them within the classroom, but not in every case. For some, grammar was discussed as being of great importance but the teacher's own lack of knowledge about language was a barrier to it being brought into the classroom. For others, grammar itself was seen as important but the SPaG marks were not. As can be seen in figure 4.7, P7 knew that the way that she felt about grammar, and her confidence with using language accurately, were not shared by everyone:

P7:	<i>I also know that it's something that I find (.) <u>incredibly</u> easy (.1) not <u>INCREDIBLY</u> (.1) °that's completely <u>arrogant</u> ° (.1) ↓<u>you</u> know what I mean ↓ like it (.) just (.) I don't need= it's not something I have to <u>think</u> about par::ticularly (.) but I wish people <u>would</u> think about it</i>
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Figure 4.7: P7's awareness of grammatical understanding

Interestingly, preparing pupils specifically for the SPaG marks was not an explicit target for any of the participants, either in the first or second series of interviews. Teachers were all aware of the marks but did not incorporate them into their planning, other than at the more general level of literacy. This was especially true for the grammar component of SPaG, separate from the spelling or punctuation aspect, because teachers felt that they could more easily work with spelling and punctuation. Spelling mistakes are easier to identify and correct than awkward or erroneous grammar, which remains, for most teachers in this research, difficult to explain and discuss. Nobody I interviewed questioned the importance of good grammar in writing and in different ways they all identified and discussed children's weaknesses with literacy. P1 voiced her concerns about the quality of children's writing across the school: 'it is a (.) it is a worry (.) the ↑*quality of their written work* < because it's rare you see one that hasn't got any errors>.' However, trying to

ascertain the value that teachers placed on the actual SPaG marks was not straightforward and P3 told me that she defined herself as *'one of those teachers that goes (.) "SENTENCE STRUCTURE IS FOR THE ENGLISH TEACHERS" (.1) which is really bad (.) ↑ isn't it? ↑'*. This was said in a light-hearted way and she was mocking herself to some extent because she had told me earlier on that she was not confident with grammar. Nevertheless, even if she had thought grammar was the business of all teachers, rather than just those who taught English, she did not feel that she had much to contribute in the classroom.

Deconstructing the meaning within P3's words, it was difficult to know whether she held the view that grammar was for the English department because she was not very knowledgeable herself, or whether she would have held this assumption in any case. What did become clear was that other teachers, and not only those who had a greater understanding of grammar, did not hold this view, even if the extent to which they prepared for the SPaG marks was limited. By complete contrast to P3's position, P5 told me explicitly that she saw it as everyone's job to support literacy, rather than leaving it solely to the English department.

None of the teachers posited the view that children learn about language by looking at it in detail and by using it in different and subtle ways, rather than by learning what parts of speech are called and by decontextualizing language in order to analyse it. Chapter 2 presented Halliday's findings from a longitudinal study undertaken during the late 1960s, in which he found that being able to describe language did not mean that children were more adept at using it. The teachers in this study assumed that because they did not know how to describe language, they could not help their pupils to become more proficient at writing. In fact, their own expansive experiences of reading and studying and writing with different purposes for different audiences would be of enormous aid to the development of children's literacy, whether they could name parts of speech or not.

One of the two teachers who had a more detailed knowledge of grammatical terms, P1, appeared anxious to use them to help her pupils understand language but it was to tell them what to do and then to label constructions. Figure 4.8 shows how hesitant she was and how defensive she appeared when trying to explain what she was struggling to articulate. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that she was fully in favour of positioning grammar in terms of it being either right or wrong. Despite her own trepidation, she was clear that pupils needed to know exactly how to form their correct responses and how they needed to know the name of the verb function they had to use.

P1: //no (.) no it is (.) you know (.) <cos it's only when they said> (.1) you know (.) and I'd say  
 ↑ 'oh, write in the passive tense' and they'd look (.1) 'what's the passive tense?'  
 OW: ((mmm))  
 P1: and then it'd be like (.) <you'd give them an example and they go> 'oh, ok' (.) but because  
 (.) unless you put a label on it (.) it doesn't kind of work

Figure 4.8: Excerpt showing P1's desire to label parts of speech

The vast fields of diverse and evolving linguistic and grammatical study, the essence of which are the life-time pursuit of some professional linguists, suggest that for the non-English specialist, trying to precisely describe or analyse grammar is an impossibility. During the interviews, most of the participants hinted at an interest in language but some also seemed overwhelmed with the idea of learning about it. In all cases, grammar was seen as the rules of standard structure and none of the interviewees had any interest in championing teenagers' actual grammar in use. The participants' views on grammar suggested a very prescriptive approach and certainly none of them moved to defend the active grammar used by pupils or sought to argue for its inherent value. All of them saw grammar in terms of its binary opposition: rightness or wrongness.

**4.5 Code 3: SPaG in Practice**

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
Code 3: SPaG in Practice	Sub-Code 3.1: In the Classroom
	Sub-Code 3.2: In the Department
	Sub-Code 3.3: In the School

Table 4.3: Code 3 and sub-codes

This code emerged as teachers talked more and more about how they saw their roles in relation to SPaG, in the contexts of their own classrooms and also the departments in which they worked and the wider fabric of the school. This code was one of the most significant in terms of the relevance to the research questions and the data that were clustered around the notion of how SPaG works in the classroom. The questions I asked about preparing for SPaG marks generated as many responses about how teachers felt as they yielded factual information about planning and literacy initiatives. As can be seen in this code and in others, for some teachers SPaG was simply viewed as a couple of extra marks to which they paid little heed: the participants were all secondary level trained and practising teachers who were teaching in their chosen areas of interest and expertise, and the

content of their curriculum subjects was their prime area of focus. P5 summarised the position of most of the participants when she said, ‘*yer I mean (.) I guess (.) really the content is always the impor:tant part.*’ However, a number of the interviews demonstrated how torn some teachers feel about having to prepare pupils for SPaG marks because they are awarded for competencies that these same teachers do not feel that they can help to develop in the pupils: “*cos what quite often (.1) when they say their answer (.) sometimes they’ll say it wrong (.) and I may ↑then correct the tense (.) ↓or whatever (.) u::m (.) but you know(.) > I wouldn’t be able to say ‘oh this is because<’ ” (P5).*

The sub codes in this section reflect the three critical areas in which SPaG is most pertinent for teachers: their classrooms; their departments and their schools. In a number of cases the participants presented a holistic approach to SPaG, where its importance could be equally seen across the three distinct areas. However, there were also a couple of interviews which demonstrated how there are differences of opinion about grammar and SPaG between the individual teacher and the school in which they work.

Figure 4.9 shows P1 talking about how children write in geography, contrasted with how they write in English. Her speech acts here are interesting because she tells us something of potential significance through the use of a quotation, as if she were talking directly to the children. This is part of the logocentric position which Derrida would argue against, since P1 is trying to restore to the words the presence of the speaker at the time of her speaking to her classes, or the presence of the children as if she were speaking directly to them. In either case, P1 is playing with the ‘metaphysics of presence’. Her hesitancy and her pausing in the build-up suggest reluctance or a lack of surety and then her direct speech has the effect of distancing herself from talking to me directly, but it simultaneously makes her speech a first person, and therefore personal, account. Her spoken words are removed from her but are also directly attached to her. The result is an instability in her meaning and a lack of clarity, resulting from the illusion of logocentricity and the belief that there can somehow be a presence and a stable meaning in language. The assumptions, inconsistencies and potential flaws in the text can be traced backwards and forwards, rather than working with the western tradition of analysis which sees the speech utterances as an end in themselves. In practice, we can ask questions of the speech act and then we can deconstruct further by asking questions of the words.

P1: *I'm not su:re whether they (.2) I've not had anyone (.) kind of asking me < as far as from a geography point of view> (.) but I know that I kind of go through and I'll say 'you know (.1) this is a report one (.) so make sure (.) don't fall foul of the (.) you know (.) have it in paragraphs =have it as this (.1) to go through and just make sure (.) that's the back of your head (.) cos sometimes they'll do paragraphs ° if it's in En::glish° (.) but as soon as it goes to geography or history (.) then it's just like (11 mins) phhh <put it in on just a page> of kind of we:ird writing (.2) ((mmum))*

Figure 4.9: P1 discussed writing in geography

The system of words, and particularly of written words, uses a standardised, immutable code which Derrida believed tried to force the concept of truth into a defined and determined place. In practical terms, however, this does not mean that truth within the interview is something that is rendered irrelevant or unnecessary, but rather that there are multiple truths and none is more or less significant than any other. In her first interview, P2 told me that she felt 'as a ↑teacher you need to be a step ahead of the k::ids (.1) so you need to know' but for her this truth was expressed as something of a pressure because she had said that she did not feel competent regarding grammar. A Derridean reading challenges the assumptions inherent within such a statement from a number of angles: all children will understand different things from whatever they read or hear; teachers do not hold the 'truth' or the exhaustive, finite knowledge on any topic; knowledge is contextualised and open to a deconstructive evaluation and meanings of all assumed data are deferred when passed from teacher to pupil. The truth that was being expressed by P2 could be seen simply as an assumption: a teacher does not have to be one step ahead of the children in order to be effective.

#### 4.5.1 Sub-Code 3.1: In the Classroom

Pupils' preparation for the SPaG marks happens in the classroom and it is here that teachers feel the challenges of imparting their knowledge or perhaps revealing their weaknesses. A great number of different studies consider the importance of teachers' subject knowledge and various paradigmatic approaches reveal the extent to which what is known by one person can effectively be transferred to another. According to the work of Baumert and Kunter (2006), professional competence is a crucial factor in pupils' success and in accordance with this, participants demonstrated the feeling that through their competencies, they were responsible for the successful outcomes of their KS4 pupils. Teachers also felt their competencies were held to account because when GCSE results are analysed by the Senior Management Team and the Head of Department they are looked at by subject and they are also scrutinised by teacher; resulting in the justification of particular grades and value added scores. The classroom becomes the focus for the successes and failures of the pupils in their public exams.

During the early minutes of the first interviews, most of the participants shared the fact that SPaG marks did not form part of the planning or delivery of their GCSE courses and pupils were not explicitly prepared for them or assessed on them during the course, except in mock exams. In addition, the SPaG marks did not form part of the training of staff by the schools or by the exam boards. P7 acknowledged the various grammar-based initiatives in her school but this still did not transfer into her own planning or focus on SPaG and when she talked about the resources that were generated to support the initiative tasks, she echoed the sentiments of other participants when she commented that *'you've got lots of other priorities (.) I find it quite difficult to ↑bother (.) reading the bit about connectives.'*

In view of the fact that content remains the over-riding emphasis for these teachers, who are judged on the basis of their GCSE pupils' outcomes, there was a sense from some amongst them that it is unfair for emphasis to be placed on skills that are not integral to the understanding of the subject itself. In terms of geography, *'it's about what they write down on PAPER because that's how they (.) that's how they're assessed (.2) so verbally (.) they actually might be able to give me quite a strong answer (.) but to get that down on paper (.) some people find that so difficult'* (P5). The notion that some children are prevented from attaining the highest marks by the weaknesses in their writing, even when their subject knowledge is good, was consistently raised across a number of interviews and P4 went as far as to say that she did not *'see the point of <making a child write when they can't speak properly>'*.

In addition, it was also clear that of the three SPaG components, grammar was still the most difficult to define and mark. Games in class and marking in books focused on spelling or punctuation and when it came to standardising and moderating the marks that teachers awarded to pupils for SPaG, because it was a 'best-fit' mark, they were awarded for good spelling and punctuation, rather than deducted for poor grammar.

OW:	<i>would that be a combination of their spelling (.) punctuation [and]</i>
P5:	<i>[spelling] yer (.) lack of capital letters</i>
OW:	<i>[okay]</i>
P5:	<i>[um] (.) sometimes the grammar (.) um</i>

Figure 4.10: Discussion with P4 about SPaG marks

Overall, during the first set of interviews, teachers did not appear to be overly concerned about or interested in the extra SPaG marks. However, by the end of some conversations, when we had pondered the percentage of marks available for SPaG and the difference it could make to some

children, different views were expressed. P5 ended by agreeing with me that '*it's massively important really (.) ↑ isn't it? ↑ to get those children to understand*' but she was talking as much about the concept of grammar as she was about the extra SPaG marks. This overall position had altered slightly by the time of the second interviews, due in part to pupils' evolved awareness of SPaG marks across all subjects and in part to some of the teachers now feeling more confident.

In this code, a number of assumptions about language and teaching were exposed which were founded upon the notion that the meaning of words can be pinned down and conveyed precisely by teachers to children. Academic research, particularly that which focuses on language learning, argues that teachers' subject knowledge, which can include factual information as well as the principles and concepts of the profession, guides and shapes their choice of resources and materials, course structure and mode of instruction (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 1989). However, for Derrida, the idea that meaning is contained within words and that this meaning can be neatly transferred between people is a logocentric illusion (Derrida, 1967b). Counter to the wealth of academic philosophy and teaching pedagogy is Derrida's view that the truth about meaning can never be reached so teachers cannot simply or neatly impart truth or fixed meaning to children. This is particularly significant as far as SPaG in practice is concerned, because most recent policy developments suggest an emphasis on the teaching and learning of rules. Even if teaching standard grammar rules was proven beyond doubt to be beneficial to children, a Derridean approach challenges the ability of teachers to be able to simply transfer knowledge because of the instability of meaning contained within words. A logocentric position can also be taken against the idea that the standard grammar of writing is any less significant than the non-standard grammar of speech.

In figure 4.11, the overlapping talk and the latching that occurred between the interactions shows how immediate and important the topic of writing in exams was to both of us and how immersed we were in the conversation, and it preceded a close analysis of the words themselves. It also demonstrated the symbiotic nature of the interview by drawing attention to the responses to utterances that occurred and to the way in which the conclusion of this part of the interchange was arrived at simultaneously by the two participants. The graphological features of the transcript support a Derridean focus on the language exchange by drawing attention to the speakers' use of multiple adverbs to illuminate their position. Using '*never*', '*hugely*' and '*entirely*' intensify the meaning and sentiment but they also highlight Derrida's 'aporia' because they are unfinished utterances which are full of uncertainty. They are not limited to clearly defined and neatly balanced sentences but they are rather moments of urgency and something undeniable (Derrida, 1993). Much of what teachers told me about how they felt towards grammar in the classroom was done using

intense emotion found in incomplete or unsettled utterances. This suggests that teachers were aware of their shortcomings but recognised the significance of engaging with grammar. It also suggests that they were discovering how they felt about some concepts whilst they were discussing them and they had not hitherto considered aspects of SPaG.

P4:	<i>I've <sup>↑</sup>never been shown how to get students (.1) I think I'd one lesson (.) actually of how to get students to write</i>
OW:	<i>and [yet]</i>
P4:	<i>[it's <sup>↑</sup>hugely important]</i>
OW:	<i>[their assessment] is based entirely=</i>
P4:	<i>=yer</i>
OW:	<i>on what they produce in <b>writing</b> (.1) in that [hour and a half]</i>
P4:	<i>[and teaching's] a that <u>really</u></i>

Figure 4.11: Interview with P4, showing features of discourse

A Derridean openness with language is in opposition to the role that teachers have to embrace when they assign marks to coursework and controlled assessment. The very concept of SPaG marks assumes that grammar is something that can be assessed or that there is something correct or incorrect about it. A deconstructive view of language would challenge the assumptions about grammar that exist at all stages, particularly the notion that grammar is held to be an intrinsically important concept or that knowing about it is superior to not knowing about it. The philosophical position of grammar was not discussed in depth in any of the interviews but it was touched upon in one or two. In her first interview, P3 told me that she felt '<sup>↓</sup>*slightly hypocritical*' telling pupils where specifically they should focus their attention on literacy because she did not feel that good writing should be marked in some questions but not in others: '*because that's not a life skill (.) that's learning for the <sup>↑</sup>sake of getting a grade.*' Other teachers struggled with this element too, feeling that in their classrooms, they had to promote an awareness of something with which they did not feel comfortable.

#### 4.5.2 Sub-Code 3.2: In the Department

P4 acknowledged all of the skills that her departmental colleagues possess and highlighted their range of attributes. She empathised with colleagues who did not have grammatical understanding but as a Head of Department, the feeling that she did not have the skills to be able to support the

development needs of other staff, or the pupils in their pursuit of the top grades at GCSE, was a cause of concern for her. Similarly, P2 readily pointed out that within the department, she thought P3 was better at marking work for its literacy, especially spelling, than she was. P2 also said that when she read pupils' work, she saw what she expected to see, whereas P3 was more detailed and more focused as well as having better spelling. Interestingly, in almost complete contradiction, when I interviewed P3 she told me that she was not confident with grammar, that she did not like writing and that the way in which she marked was to, *'look at it and go >"that doesn't look right"< or >"that doesn't read right"< and then sort of (.) correct them as it goes (.) yer (.) and I don't think it's that specific (.) if I'm honest'*.

It emerged in several interviews that the response to the SPaG marks at departmental level was limited. P3 said that in her department, they *'haven't spent that much time trying to improve their SPaG in RS (.1) other than (.) <making them a:ware of it> and looking at key words and how you spell them.'* The SPaG marks were seen as separate to content marks and *'it's content that is still more important'*. Nevertheless, P6 told me that her department had introduced a SPaG element to the year 9 exams in an attempt to familiarise pupils with the concept of the extra marks as early as possible and before they got to the GCSE stage.

The feeling that there was scope for so much more emphasis on SPaG and planning for the extra marks emerged in a number of interviews. For example, P6 explained that the department's schemes of work mentioned *'key words'* but that was the extent of planning for SPaG. The school's lesson plans were detailed and contained a wealth of other information because the school had been in 'special measures' and was being monitored by Ofsted, but the teachers' preparation for the teaching of SPaG was limited to a glossary of subject terms. As with P6, P4's experience was that the school now had a greater focus on language but again it was unclear whether this was attributable to being in 'special measures' and under Ofsted's scrutiny, or whether it was because of the SPaG marks themselves. P4 told me that *'if there is a sentence that hasn't made sense (.1) so one thing that a lot of our kids do (.) say "would of" instead of "have" so we get (.) they have to rewrite the whole sentence underneath where they've written it (.1)< so that's how the grammar is kind of picked up>'. She did not explain whether pupils corrected the sentence themselves or whether it was corrected first by the teachers, or whether this policy was in any way monitored for its efficacy in raising literacy standards. She did not tell me whether she would be able to explain why the sentence may not have made sense.*

This code demonstrated how teachers within departments hypothesised about the things that they might say to children if they were challenged by a grammar-related question, or the things they

might teach but lack the time to discuss, and even the kinds of things that children say to them. Their position seemed to assume that imparting knowledge about grammar would be the best way for pupils to gain their own knowledge. Their focus was on the transfer of their knowledge to the pupils. It is a commonly held view that the most powerful resource that teachers possess is their voice and oral communication with pupils is regarded as one of the primary measures by which a teacher is judged to be proficient. Emphasis is routinely placed on types of oral questioning and engagement, and the word of the teacher is held in high regard. Yet, this assumption is challenged by a Derridean analysis which overturns the hierarchical position of the spoken word and the assumption that learning needs the transfer of knowledge offered by teachers. In addition to Derrida's theoretical lens on teaching and knowledge, technological advancements now confirm that in practice learning does not need to be in a classroom guided by the voice of a teacher. Hitherto seemingly progressive or even extreme views on the nature of teaching and learning have, in part, come to pass. Children learn and demonstrate their knowledge in a range of different, technological ways but for many teachers, despite the proliferation of technical advancements in the classroom, a very traditional approach to the transfer of information still seems to prevail.

#### **4.5.3 Sub-Code 3.3: In the School**

Literacy initiatives were discussed a number of times in different interviews as teachers told me about the various ways that pupils learn about grammar and the emphasis that different environments placed upon it. When P5 was reiterating how important she thought literacy was for all pupils we discussed her school's literacy policy and she demonstrated how her school's ethos mirrored her own. She said that her school had always tried to encourage cross-curricular literacy initiatives and there had been a number of different campaigns. However, from what she could recall, there was nothing in the school's current literacy policy that specifically highlighted grammar. Nevertheless, she told me that she was sure the document must have mentioned grammar because teachers had to use the abbreviation of '*gr*' in the margin of pupils' books if they came across grammatical errors. When we talked about whether pupils were good at identifying their own SPaG errors and correcting them, P5 said that there was a school-wide focus on reflective marking but for her this concept was in its infancy and the extent to which pupils questioned their errors depended upon the ability levels of the class.

In other schools, such as S3, it was clear that there was also a desire to raise levels of literacy but they were generally not focused on grammar. School-wide literacy policies were discussed and there were regular initiatives such as 'challenges' that demonstrated the teaching of key words and spellings. The teachers from S3 all talked about the way in which literacy was embedded into the

children's days during tutor time and into the curriculum during lessons and they saw this as a positive and worthwhile initiative. There was a similar theme in S5 where the school had been placed in 'special measures': there were several literacy approaches across the whole school. However, P4 told me that most of it was concerned with key-word usage and spellings, rather than grammar.

In discussions about SPaG across the whole school, P6 identified an idea that was prevalent in the other interviews and other codes, to do with literacy initiatives only every being temporary. She said that her school used to have a '*literacy episode*' every week but that ended when the person whose responsibility it was left. She also told me that a literacy project had been implemented by a couple of Assistant Heads but that it was no longer running and she went on to say that last year a university had contacted the school, asking teachers and pupils to participate in a literacy scheme, but nothing ever came of it, which she deemed to be '*a shame*'. The fact that literacy initiatives appeared not to be sustained and were so dependent upon the responsibilities or interests of specific personnel, did not reassure teachers that schools were wholly committed to raising pupils' SPaG levels.

The way in which different schools responded to the SPaG components that have been introduced to GCSEs was also interesting to deconstruct. In S3, a school that had been placed in 'special measures', teachers had to reference literacy and numeracy on their formal lesson plans, in addition to having to include specific articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). However, when I asked P3 whether there had to be references to SPaG on lesson plans in her school, she said: '*<do you know (0.1) I don't think we do> (.) trying to picture it (.) in my head (.1) no (.1) I don't think we do (.) u:mm (.) it's ↑definitely not on our proforma lesson plan*'. Her equivocation and hesitation suggested not only that she had not used this document recently but also that it was not something she was expected to complete; she did not pay great attention to it therefore. Deconstructing the different approaches taken towards planning in general and for SPaG in particular allows us to see that there is no coherence across settings that may, on the surface, be quite similar institutions. The implications of a lack of consistency between schools that offer the same subjects at GCSE is that pupils could be differently prepared as a result. S3 had chosen to focus explicitly on the human rights of the child, particularly on article 29, so that children achieved to the best of their ability but the lack of similar planning strategies in other schools might contribute to some pupils not attaining the best marks of which they are capable.

For a number of the teachers, one of the central ways in which policy impacted upon them was where staffing and personnel were concerned. The current Conservative Government and the

previous Coalition Government have both been committed to making GCSEs more rigorous and the higher grades more difficult to attain; yet a deconstruction of the situation in relation to humanities subjects suggests that this may actually never be achieved. Having non-specialists teaching in some departments and having unfilled posts, as well as a high turnover of staff, did not give any of the teachers the feeling that they were able to do justice to their subjects or to the children. This was articulated clearly in P5's second interview, shown in figure 4.12, where she was talking about how it has been decided in her school that religious studies will no longer be offered as a GCSE and she described the situation as 'hopeless'. It is unclear what effect this might have on the RS teachers themselves, though she had told me earlier in the interview that apart from her, none of the other teachers was a specialist. However, if a similar decision were to be taken in S1, where both of the participants were full-time RS teachers, the consequences of this decision on them would be significant.

P5: *because of the Government changes (.) we won't be bringing in GCSE RE because it's just  
 ↓horrendous (.1) <they have to learn all about scripture now (.) and the key words are  
 very v:ery difficult (.) and there's nothing to do really with> (.) like they used to learn  
 about life issues and that's all ba::sically been removed*

Figure 4.12: P5 explained the removal of RS GCSE

In this code, SPaG in practice often appeared to represent something intangible and teachers gave the impression that they wanted to but just could not find the time or the wherewithal to actually grapple with it. A Derridean analysis of this equivocal approach revealed the 'trace' within the text because in figure 4.13 P3 told me that she lacked the time to help a specific pupil to improve and we find ourselves wondering what this means. Maybe she prioritised other aspects of her teaching above that which she is talking about. We wonder whether the pupil needed to be told whatever P3 feels that he did; perhaps he could have worked it out for himself. We question whether the fact that she only saw him twice a fortnight really meant that she could not tell him. Twice a fortnight is the equivalent to once a week and is her disclosing of this somehow important? P3 said she had tried to help the pupil but most of what she said suggested she had not really done so. We have to consider whether our conclusion, if we reach one, might be a misrepresentation of what P3 was trying to convey. Most importantly perhaps, we ponder if P3 knew exactly what she was trying to say or whether she was actually as confused about it as the reader might be. Derrida's trace reminds us that there is an undeniable gap between speaker and meaning, however we might draw our conclusions:

P3: -and I TRY to help him < as much as I can> but perhaps don't have as much time as I would like (.). to sit down and go r:ight (.) this is how we point (.) evidence (.) explain and this is where you need to do this and this is how you justify (.1) um (.1)° I've tried to° but ↑you know I see him twice a fortnight so it's always (.1) it's not always possible

Figure 4.13: P3's time constraints

**4.6 Code 4: Impacting on Pupils**

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
<b>Code 4: Impacting on Pupils</b>	Sub-Code 4.1: Levels of Literacy Sub-Code 4.2: Learning Support and SEN Sub-Code 4.3: EAL

Table 4.4: Code 4 and sub-codes

The Literature Review chapter examined the way in which learning about grammar is often viewed prescriptively and when talking about and thinking about what is correct or not, most people refer to a set of rules and codes, rather than the consideration of language in use and systems of communication. There has been a huge interest in the study of language over the last half century and a great deal of work has focused on the active grammar of different societal groupings: teenagers, ethnic groups, teachers (Finnegan, 2012). Most linguists presuppose that all language is equal and worthy of study. However, teachers still appear to be bound by the idea that grammar is the set of rules that govern standard forms of verbs, sentence structures and agreements. This makes their assessing of SPaG contentious from a linguistic point of view and difficult for them from a teaching point of view because they often lack the detailed knowledge of the prescriptive, standard grammar system. Teachers were deeply concerned about the lack of information they had been given about SPaG and grammar by the exam boards and were concerned about the expectation that they were to prepare for marks they do not fully understand.

P6 articulated her thoughts and frustrations at great length on the topic of the impact of SPaG on pupils. The following long quotation demonstrates how opposed she was to the idea of trying to assess literacy in a history GCSE. She explored the idea that children should be using technology to

answer questions, rather than hand-writing an exam under timed conditions, which seemed to be an out-dated mode of assessment even before the idea of SPaG marks were taken into account.

P6: *and um the fact of (.) you know (.) a lot of these students (.) they don't write anywhere other than in the classroom (.) the (.) and actually when they go into a lot of jobs (.) they'll never write again (.2) they will just be doing things on a computer and I think (.) well (.) for a kid that is their main thing (.1) actually sure:ly that (.3) schools are almost lagging behind and we're trying to do <all of these skills with them> that they won't necessarily use (.)↑ that's not to say I don't think it's important ↑ (19 mins) (.) they do need to know how to write (.) but to be testing a student in an hour and forty five minute exam (.) ° where they've got to° (.3) the history exam is s:o tightly packed (.3) so actually (.) <they're really having to write fast> (.1) well that's when you make mistakes and you're not going to be concentrating as much on the grammar – (and?) on the literacy (.) u:::m and I think even the best of students will make mistakes (.) so therefore the LOWER students (.) you know (.) it's going to become a ↑ bigger apparent problem ↑ (.) and I think (.) I don't know that it's (.2) I du:::no (.) I just don't think it's the right way to encourage students*

Figure 4.14: P6 explored writing in GCSEs

Derrida's views on the way in which learning is transmitted explores a concept of teaching that appeared absent from the thoughts of the teachers in my study. Derrida suggested that a teacher's job is not to impart or teach information but rather to facilitate and enable the 'disciple to learn' (Derrida, 1990). However, none of the teachers in the study felt that they were simply the 'mediator' where any aspects of their teaching were concerned. Instead, they all felt that they were looked to for their knowledge and that if they did not possess it then pupils could not learn from them. All of the participants were subject specialists and none of them displayed any reservations about their subject knowledge, but their relationship with grammar was entirely different. Most of them considered that they could not engage pupils with grammar or lead them towards more engagement with it unless they knew about it themselves and many of them appeared to feel vulnerable in their lack of knowledge. P5 told me that she felt under-confident in her knowledge of English grammar but said that she would sometimes go into a French lesson, just to be able to use a bit of the language: 'to try and > look like I know a little bit about it< in front of the kids'. This suggests that teachers need a sense of affirmation that they feel is generated by being able to display knowledge in front of children, even if, as in this case, it is not entirely relevant.

#### 4.6.1 Sub-Code 4.1: Levels of Literacy

Teachers who worked in the more challenging environments, in schools that had been placed in 'special measures' and where pupils' literacy levels were lower to begin with, appeared to have the greatest challenges in relation to SPaG. Their work was not so much focused on raising literacy for the sake of the extra SPaG marks but more on raising literacy so that it was at a functional level to enable pupils to engage with and access the GCSE curriculum. Notwithstanding the pressure to get pupils to pass their GCSEs, P4 felt that if teachers were not focusing on language as well then '*we're kind of doing them a disservice*' but the pressure to get pupils to pass their GCSEs is the criteria by which teachers' success is judged. They are not judged on the SPaG component or the literacy levels that pupils attain in humanities subjects.

Disadvantaging pupils by assessing their SPaG, when their literacy levels are already low, pained a number of participants and the shift in policy that sees the removal of retakes and modules and a return to fully summative assessment is viewed as '*just a barrier*' (P4) for many pupils. Participants told me that overall pupils were now more aware of the extra marks but some pupils' levels of literacy were still so weak when they entered year 10 and the start of their GCSEs, that they were unlikely to gain them. This was particularly important in S5 because the school was in a deprived area and there were high levels of communication difficulties amongst the pupils throughout the school. P4 contrasted her experience of addressing SPaG in a previous school, where literacy levels were higher and good SPaG was taken for granted, with that of her current school where pupils needed to be equipped with basic skills before they could begin to think about their GCSEs. It was clear when looking at the data for this code that none of the teachers shared the policymakers' views that simply adding SPaG marks to GCSEs will improve school-leavers' literacy levels; the marks either appeared not to be worth worrying about to start with or the literacy levels of pupils were low enough to need far greater focus than the SPaG marks imply. It was felt that the SPaG marks were not subtle or detailed enough to really address weak pupils' literacy difficulties.

P1 and P6 talked about their consciousness not to over-mark written work because errors were all children focused on when the marked work was handed back. However, this did not mean that mistakes were overlooked and P6 told me that she targeted common spelling and grammar errors all the time: '*there's obviously you know the common words then (.) and lots of errors that they'll make (.) with like "their/there" and those kinds or errors that (.) that*'. P1 went further and said that unless she identified SPaG mistakes for the children, she did not feel as though she was doing her job properly, but she too accepted that this had to be weighed against the harm done to the

pupils' self-confidence if all they saw were their errors: *'but then you don't want to de:motivate somebody and say (.) "well it was a brilliant answer b::ut (.)"'*

As highlighted in Chapter 2, as early as 1921 The Newbolt Report considered the unskilful correction of written work to be at best a complete waste of time, but all of the participants felt that they had to correct work when they came across what they considered to be an error. How and what to mark in relation to grammar is a real dilemma for teachers because whilst they are aware that it is their job to prepare pupils for all of the available marks at GCSE, including the SPaG marks, they also know that their own knowledge of the rules of grammar may not be adequately informed; they may not be able to explain the causes of the mistake; the marking may not be understood by children who have no clear understanding of the rules of standard grammar themselves and in addition to all of this, KS4 teachers know that teenagers can react emotionally to criticism and can be vulnerable to any perceived challenges to their self-confidence and self-esteem. The way in which P1's sentence was left unfinished and the way that the *'b::ut'* was repeated to show the different points of view, emphasised her challenge.

The binary pairs that can be seen throughout the findings in this code often revealed real inconsistencies and assumptions. Teachers talked a great deal about how SPaG was secondary to the emphasis on content, whilst at the same time acknowledging that without a sufficient level of literacy, a pupil would not be able to answer the question at all. It would seem that for a number of the participants, once they felt that pupils had achieved a functioning ability to make themselves understood, SPaG then became less important. Yet, in discussions with P2 in her second interview, she explained how she felt she was doing pupils a *'disservice'* when they come up from primary school because they already knew a lot about SPaG and had well-developed literacy levels which were not as honed and augmented as they could be by secondary school teachers, who are all driven by their own subject's content. Figure 4.15 shows how P2 also felt driven by content and SPaG was reduced to the most basic aspects of communication. She did go on to explain that this has altered to some extent but only because Ofsted inspectors are now looking at presentation of work as well as content.

P2: *focused (.) so focused on content (.) it (.) they come to RS (.) you know um (.1) we can  
↑potentially fall into the trap of (.) I don't really care what it looks like (.) as long as you  
under:stand and <manage to get the work done>*

Figure 4.15: P2 talked about the impact of SPaG on pupils' RS writing

In 'The Principle of Reason' Derrida urged educators to strive 'to transform modes of writing, approaches to pedagogy, the procedures of academic exchange, the relations to other languages, to other disciplines, to the institution in general, to its inside and its outside' (Derrida, 1986, p.321). A Derridean approach promotes the exposure of assumptions and allows for the reader to question and challenge the thoughts and the meaning of the words, in order to pass through the stages of continuous understanding. In practice this means that it is the educational researcher's job to pose questions of the teacher's transcripts at all levels; questioning the meanings contained in words, phrases and the whole text and analysing such things as the frequency and usage of words and phrases, alongside the use of figurative language and words from different semantic fields. This posing of questions and challenging of meaning is both an insightful and a frustrating tool to use during interviews, when participants are struggling to articulate themselves in the pressure of the moment, when they are faced with an interrogative and when the discussion is being recorded. A Derridean appraisal of word choices may lead to unintended inferences. For example, in figure 4.15, P2's use of the 'trap' metaphor may reveal how strongly she feels about being utterly restricted and without hope of escape from the strictures of the course. By the same token however, if she were asked specifically what she had meant by this turn of phrase, she might just say that it was the first thing that she could think of to explain a degree of frustration.

#### **4.6.2 Sub-Code 4.2: Learning Support and Special Educational Needs**

Many of the learning support challenges, and in some cases the behaviour challenges, that children present and that teachers have to manage, are concerned with literacy. In 2014 over a third of all school leavers did not get a grade 'C' or above in GCSE English, which means that at any time in a GCSE humanities class of 30 pupils there could well be a third of the group who have significant struggles with English. P1 told me that a number of her pupils know all about their own '*dyslexia, their spelling, punctuation and grammar*' and how it impacts upon their writing but according to 'Dyslexia Action', 74% of teachers did not feel that their initial teacher training equipped them with the skills needed to fully meet the needs of children with dyslexia.

When talking about the impact of SPaG marks, several of the participants drew attention to the way in which the marks actually disadvantaged some pupils, as was discussed in Chapter 2. With the changes to all GCSEs, it has become more and more difficult to be granted 'special consideration' by the exam boards and P1 told me that being diagnosed with dyslexia was not considered to be enough of a barrier to education to have an access arrangement, such as extra time or a scribe, afforded it. According to P1, pupils with dyslexia were doubly disadvantaged because not only were their difficulties no longer being considered but their literacy skills were actually being marked in

subjects other than English. P7 also said that if a pupil did not get to the specific questions which attract the SPaG marks, then their overall mark would suffer, even if they had written well throughout the paper.

P1 also told me that recent changes to the GCSEs meant that pupils who struggled with literacy and who used to be able to do part of their geography GCSE as an oral exam, could now no longer do so: *'particularly for students that we had where dyslexia was a big issue (.1) where actually just the kind of oration (.) >they could talk us through why Antarctica should or shouldn't be developed< (.2) what was about it (.) what was bad about it (.2) and we could record it and that massively helped students= that their literacy held them back'*. This form of assessment is no longer offered in any GCSE and to compound the punitive impact of the removal, SPaG marks have now been added so these pupils' literacy difficulties are not only demonstrated but are also assessed.

An exploration of binary positions in this code can be undertaken in relation to teachers' discussions about knowledge and attainment. Pupils' grammatical errors, and those of colleagues, were exemplified by a number of teachers and were generally condemned. Some of the participants viewed the addition of the SPaG marks as unfair and prejudicial towards pupils with specific learning difficulties or non-native English speakers, but none of the participants expressed a strong opposition to the policymakers' assumption that grammar is all about a standard form and a set of rules that should be learnt and applied by all pupils, regardless of ethnicity, heritage or ability profile. They rejected the SPaG marks for reasons that included their irrelevancy when tagged onto the end of the GCSE, the notion that they were too little too late and their frustrations with having no support, but they did not reject the concept of improving pupils' literacy by trying to teach them something about grammar. Grammatical knowledge was seen as worthy, which is why all of the participants who did not feel that they knew very much, often appeared apologetic and insecure. In addition, P7's strongly expressed views on whether teachers either did or did not possess grammatical knowledge, can be viewed as part of Derrida's concept of binary structures. P7 was at her most passionate when talking about how frustrated she was with her colleagues' punctuation and grammatical lapses; nothing else during either of the interviews provoked such an emotional reaction. As far as grammatical prowess is concerned, privilege was always given to teachers and pupils who knew about grammar and those who did not were seen as less accomplished. This was true despite the fact that P7 told me she sometimes had to check spellings and meanings herself. She saw herself in opposition to her colleagues, favoring her knowledge above theirs but knowing and accepting that she was actually deficient in some areas herself.

#### 4.6.3 Sub-Code 4.3: English as an Additional Language

The issues of SPaG for children whose first language is not English was a feature in some of the interviews; notably for teachers who worked in the more challenging environments. Children who grappled with English and also with trying to learn the subject content at GCSE faced a huge challenge but were assessed for the SPaG marks in the same way as native speakers. Their English as an Additional Language (EAL) status was not given any special weighting as far as SPaG was concerned and P1 tried to put into words how she felt that this disadvantaged her pupils:

P1:	<i>you know (.) some had ve:ry good ↑literacy in their own home language(.) . but with the change to GCSEs (.1) they're going to be even worse [down the]</i>
OW:	<i>[yer (.) yer]</i>
P1:	<i>[the pecking order] than they would've been before (.) because the fact that they're (.) the <u>way</u> they phrase it (.) it means they lose out those that <u>five</u> percent</i>

Figure 4.16: Assessing pupils with EAL: P1

Espousing the 'doctrine of correctness' (Walker 2011) discussed in Chapter 2, teachers might be disadvantaging all pupils whose work they mark. Teachers' over-insistence on one standard grammatical form, at the expense of more creative modes of expression, might disproportionately disadvantage those pupils whose first language is not English. Chapter 2 also outlined the impact of Noam Chomsky's work on our understanding of children's grammatical awareness and language acquisition. He demonstrated how young children learn the syntax of sentences in their native language, which enables them to make clear and generally accurate meaning and is the reason why a speaker over the age of five or six will make relatively few errors with most of their grammar. However, despite the fact that pupils with EAL may be more aware of English grammar than children whose first language is English, most of them will make grammatical mistakes that native children would never make and they may well make them over and over again. Cummins' work reminds teachers that they should not assume that non-native speakers, even those who have attained a high degree of fluency and accuracy in everyday English, have the corresponding academic language proficiency (Cummins, 1984, 2000). Children who might even be deemed to have special educational needs, because of their slowness to process language, may simply need more time when working in a second language. Errors made by non-native speakers may be striking, in contrast to those made by non-EAL pupils and may mean harsher SPaG marking, despite pupils' understanding of a myriad grammar rules and structures. Some of the schools in this research had relatively few EAL children

but in others, numbers were more significant. However, no provision in the SPaG marking has been made for pupils who speak a second language.

Exploring the impact of SPaG on pupils with EAL, we are reminded of Derrida’s consideration of the ‘other’ within the given situation. In the ambiguous phrase, ‘*tout autre est tout autre*’ (Derrida, 1997, p.82), Derrida expresses the view that no ‘others’ are completely knowable. Things we think we know about others are fragmented and contextual. In addition, trying to determine the needs of any one person means that this is unjust to any of the others. Any situation where a pupil might be sought out for special privileges or treated differently necessitates that others within the context receive a lesser or different treatment. In relation to this code, Derrida’s view is not that a child who needs it should not receive the support, but that all children might benefit. Derrida points to the dilemma that arises when trying to be ‘just’ might conflict with the ethics of justice towards everyone within the same principle. A child whose first language is not English might make certain mistakes at GCSE but any child might also make them if they are not familiar with particular grammar or punctuation rules and in this case, all children should perhaps be treated as ‘other’. In ‘The Gift of Death’ Derrida reasons that as ‘soon as I enter into a relation with the other....I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all of the others’ (Derrida, 1995, p. 68). The Derridean implication here is that all children, in one way or another, could be disadvantaged by the SPaG marks: the SPaG marks appear unjust for so many GCSE candidates.

#### 4.7 Code 5: Support

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
<b>Code 5: Support</b>	Sub-Code 5.1: Giving Support Sub-Code 5.2: Critical Colleagues Sub-Code 5.3: The School’s Position Sub-Code 5.4: The Exam Boards

Table 4.5: Code 5 and sub-codes

Giving and receiving support emerged as one of the largest codes and it emerged from all of the interviews. The code itself highlighted the way in which teachers as professionals assess the support they need and the support they can give. It also demonstrated teachers’ awareness, whatever their capabilities, that SPaG and KAL are becoming increasingly important in their roles. A couple of teachers felt that they did not require any support but they were happy to proffer it. However, most

of the other teachers did feel that they would benefit from and would welcome additional support with understanding grammar.

Teachers talked at length about how they felt either supported or unsupported when working with grammar, and this exposed a stark Derridean binary opposition. Being the person asking for support was not viewed as a positive experience on the whole, although some participants seemed more at ease with this than others. Teachers who felt that they had to ask for help from colleagues were self-deprecating and approached this lack of knowledge as a deficiency. In addition, being in a position such as that of a Head of Department, where one might be looked to for support but where one felt unable to offer it, was seen as negative. However, the most highly-charged and direct criticisms were made by the teachers who felt that they had greater knowledge than those who they felt did not. Having the ability to be able to give or offer support, by those teachers who felt that they knew something about grammar, was seen as a positive thing to do and for them, support was generally viewed as good and worthy, but the need that had arisen for the support itself was viewed pejoratively. Knowledgeable teachers seemed to call into question their colleagues' general knowledge and even their abilities to do the job of teaching. It was not seen as an opportunity to further their colleagues' awareness, but rather to expose their weaknesses to me. It was unclear to me why this was the case but I had the strong feeling that they would not have spoken so openly to anyone who was connected to the school or who knew them or their colleagues in any other capacity. It may also have been based on their assumption that because I was interested in grammar, I must have been a kindred spirit who shared their frustrations with their less grammatically aware colleagues.

#### **4.7.1 Sub-Code 5.1: Giving Support**

P1 did not feel that she needed any support but she offered it, by way of proof reading, to colleagues whose skills were less well-honed than hers. P1 told me that she was the '*go-to*' person for all questions grammatical but she mocked herself when she told me that this made her the '*nasty one*' and the teacher that pupils felt they had to impress with their levels of literacy. In the first interview she expressed how poor she thought were the literacy levels of some of her colleagues and she told me that when revision guides or letters were going out to parents, she was the proof-reader, despite this not being a formally acknowledged part of her job. We agreed that checking all of the communication for errors would be a full-time job and she implied that there was a lot of checking to be done.

As a Head of Department, P4 was aware that she was looked to as someone who could provide support and who possessed knowledge on a range of matters and she was clear to point out her

view that 'you know (.) n:o one is the finished product'. She wanted her departmental colleagues to know that they could come and say if they needed help, which touched upon the idea that some colleagues might be embarrassed or ashamed to admit to not having the literacy skills they would like. She shared some of her philosophy of teachers' necessary skills and attributes, saying that she thought they:

P4: are expected to do an awful - massive skills set um (.) which isn't always kind of noted (.) and yer (.1) I think ↑ even with training and things ↑ (.) people don't always >think about what a teacher needs< (.1)it's like (.) "o::h let's just do a tick box almost exercise" (.) rather than this is a really important (.2) cos like you say (.) SPaG is going to be a huge thing in exams (.2) I haven't had any training on it

Figure 4.17: P4's assessment of teachers' skills

P7 acknowledged that not all teachers find grammar easy. However, she had the strong notion that a gentle approach towards those teachers' shortcomings did nothing to help them or to provide them with the skills they need. She was critical of a member of the management team at her school who tried to provide reassurance to a teacher:

P7: you don't feel completely confident °in their hands° but yer it's (.1) I think people like K was trying to (32 mins) you know (.1) reassure people but actually reassurance isn't (.2) it MATTERS (.) so reassurance isn't what they need (.1) what they need is to say it does matter (.) you've GOT to get better at it

Figure 4.18: P7 explained her thoughts on teachers' lack of grammatical knowledge

#### 4.7.2 Sub-Code 5.2: Critical Colleagues

P6 reflected on her experiences of writing essays at university and told me that she relied on someone she shared a house with to do her proof-reading: 'and (.) kind of (.) make amendments because my English skills are not fantastic um (.) and so I a::lways made sure that somebody proof read m:y work'. For many of the teachers, this need to rely on other mechanisms has continued, with technology providing some assistance with written work but with colleagues at school being called on to help.

Both P1 and P7 shared the fact that they knew more about grammar than their colleagues and both talked in detail, in the first and second interviews, about their concerns surrounding colleagues' SPaG skills. They were both very critical: '*I am pretty AMAZED by some of my colleagues who are very competent (.) very able (.2) but their grammar is ↑amazingly bad ↑*' (P1). On the one hand it was surprising that they were so vehement in their criticism of close colleagues but it was unsurprising on the other because they were also the only participants who felt confident enough with grammar to be able to explain why something might be wrong. One of the key areas where poor grammar was clearly exposed was in the making of departmental resources and when talking about this, P7 was extremely exasperated.

P7: you come across um (.) powerpoints that are just (.) you know (.1) awful (.) it's right up there (.) on the ↑ (.3) <this is spelling more than grammar> but um (.) kind of grammar (.) on the (.) ↓ on one of my colleague's walls (.) she had a display on the domino theory and do::mino had an 'e' on the end'=

P7: every s::ingle time (.) bombs was written in the assessment (.1) ↑ it was written with an apostrophe (.) but it wasn't just on a Word document (.) it was a PDF (.) so I had to remake the WHOLE thing (.) I couldn't bear it (.) I thought (.1) I'm **not** giving that out (.) I **can't** give that out (.) <nobody can> (.) ° so I've had° (.) I've changed it (.) but (.) [um]

Figure 4:19: P7 explained her frustration with her colleagues

P7's frustration can be seen in the adjectives she uses, such as 'awful', and descriptions such as 'couldn't bear it'. As a Head of Department she felt responsible for correcting these mistakes, demonstrated in part by the repetition of the pronoun 'I', used seven times in quick succession, but neither P1 nor P7 really felt that they knew how to address the errors they encountered. P7 felt bad for raising this with her colleagues but she felt that this had to be discussed:

P7: no ↓ I haven't mentioned it to them (.) I do need (.) it's something (.) this is (.) it's <such a difficult thing> and it's (.) we have so many priorities all the time and I ask quite a lot of people and specially many other roles they have

OW: [sure]

P7: [and to] sit in our meeting and go "THE GRAMMAR IN THIS DEPARTMENT IS APPALLING" (.2) ↑ is like

Figure 4:20: How to tackle poor grammar: P7

P4 told me that she thought other teachers within her department did not share her feelings about the importance of language and grammar but throughout the interviews, amongst the teachers who acknowledged their own grammatical weaknesses, I did not encounter any resistance to them being supported by colleagues. In fact, P2 made the clear and valid point that unless someone tells you that you are making mistakes, then your mistakes will continue, and her willingness to engage with support and assistance appeared genuine, as did her desire to improve. She explored this notion in relation to the pupils too when she told me that one of the girls in her class:

P2: *was um explaining to me (.2) was it affect and effect? I think it was actually (.) I think that's how it came about (.) and she put it on a BIG bit of paper and she said um (.2) er (.2) verb a:adjective and noun (5mins) (.1) and she actually wrote them down and <I sort of pinned it up somewhere> (.) °I don't quite know what I did with it°*

Figure 4.21: P2 outlined how she is supported by pupils

What could be considered to be an elementary confusion between two high frequency words was not considered to be anything akin to embarrassing for P2. She was matter-of-fact about her weakness and grateful for the help, in spite of it coming in the form of correction by a pupil and a visual display to remind her. She was still unsure about the nature of the grammar point itself when she was telling me about it and she hesitated when trying to remember the parts of speech but she gave me the undeniable feeling that she wanted to improve.

#### 4.7.3 Sub-Code 5.3: The School's Position

Using the English department's expertise to help non-specialist teachers with their own grammar resonated with a number of participants and P2 used a light-hearted, rhetorical device, 'what's that all about', when she talked about not knowing the differences between the use of some nouns and verbs:

P2: *↑what's that all about? ↑ and if I do staff presentations now (.) in meetings >which I do quite a lot< (.) I always run down to the English department first (.) or send them my presentation to say (.) you know (.) >quickly check through this< (.) cos English teachers specifically can get quite irritated if something isn't right (.) which (.) you know (.) if you don't know it's wrong (.) then . you carry on with it*

Figure 4.22: Using the support of colleagues: P2

In P1's school, an outstanding, high achieving and over-subscribed school, there appeared to be a number of initiatives designed to help teachers improve their knowledge of language and grammar. There was regular, whole-school training delivered to staff on INSET days and the training included input from some primary teachers from the local feeder schools who were able to advise secondary teachers on the way in which the teaching of SPaG is being approached at key stage 2. P1 also told me that a 'super six' group of teachers had been appointed, one of whom was overseeing literacy:

P1: *so basically <to kind of try and get staff to be confident with it and then to also pick up that in their teaching> (.) that when they go(.) through (.)so the kind of >common ones as to when you would use various words< (.) so your classic is the fact that there is no verb 'to of' and so things like that (.) where they've got examples and >they've got little kind of ca: rds they put in everyone's pigeon holes that people could keep< (.2) and particularly for those people who may (4 mins) not have had the more grammar-rich or traditional teaching themselves (.) they often (.) they re:ally enjoy it (.) say "oh that makes so much more sense" and it helped them feel ↑confident to be able to talk knowledgeably about it*

Figure 4.23: P1 explained S1's literacy initiatives

The way in which different schools have helped staff to prepare for the changes can be deconstructed to reveal a localised political response. An examination of the extent to which assumptions are made about what is needed and who might benefit allows for schools to approach SPaG, particularly grammar, differently. P7 told me that her school's leadership team 'make this ↑massive assumption when they say <"we're doing literacy day"> that the staff know what they're doing with lit::eracy day.' This assumption at the local level may well be the same as the assumption made at a national level. On the other hand, it may be that because P7 sees her own understanding of grammar as superior to that of her colleagues, she is also making assumptions about what others need. Her use of 'the staff' rather than an inclusive pronoun, tends to suggest that she does not see her own needs as being the same as those of her peers and reflects the binary opposition she takes with regard to her own knowledge.

#### 4.7.4 Sub-Code 5.4: The Exam Boards

As far as P2 was concerned, she had not been on any courses to further her skills or prepare her for future teaching and assessing of SPaG. There had certainly not been any courses offered by the exam boards. Nevertheless, she did feel that her teaching 'has changed in some way' 'because of having to prepare for the SPaG marks.' She explained that although she did not have a specific

grammar focus in every lesson, she now had some new technology that allowed her to share pupils' writing with the rest of the class and to comment on the use of language. P5 revealed that she had been to an exam board training conference but SPaG was not mentioned.

The lack of information provided by the exam boards made it extremely difficult for teachers to prepare for the SPaG marks because they did not know specifically what was being marked or how much emphasis was placed on grammar, as opposed to spelling or punctuation. Similarly, for P4, the exam board had provided scant information and had certainly not offered any appropriate training which would have helped her to prepare pupils for the SPaG marks:

P4: =they'll just say ° like for one ° (.) this (.) the student will generally do this (.) for two (.) this (.) but that's it (.) I've not had any ↑further training↑ or anything else and I'm not (.2) I've received quite a lot of paperwork and there's nothing specifically on that (.1) it's mainly (2 mins) still the content or how they mark the papers

Figure 4.24: P4 explained the exam board's position

When I asked P5 what training she had received from the exam board or what support she had had in implementing the new changes to policy with regards to SPaG, she replied with: *well (.) I went on the exam board conference (.) um (.) but there wasn't any emphasis what= WHATSOEVER (.) nothing was mentioned really about (.) =I mean it may have been brought up (.) but I don't ever (.1) we didn't spend any time going through what was expected'.*

The concept of support opened up a number of inconsistencies and ambiguities within the findings when teachers talked about a lack of support from the exam boards. Deconstructing the words used by the participants in this sub-code it became clear that they had not considered the real value of the support they were talking about: the fact that their time might be better spent acquiring the knowledge they felt they lacked, rather than waiting to be told something about grammar on a one-day course. The support they talked about was always seen as something external to their role and none of the teachers seemed particularly proactive in their pursuit of information from the boards. In P5's second interview, we discussed the support that the examiner's report might have given to teachers and I asked whether P5 had studied the marks for SPaG. This seemed to be something she had not considered and she said, 'oh (.1) in terms of the marks (.) that's very true (.2) I never looked at them'. Her position in relation to the potential support was one of distance: she told me that the exam board did not support her, but equally she had not sought any support that might actually have been proffered. The reasons for her seeming antipathy were not clear but a Derridean reading supports a multi-faceted interpretation. P5 was actually happy not to find out what might have been

said by the examiner or offered by the exam board because she had already told me earlier she felt inadequate where grammar was concerned and she did not want to expose a lack of knowledge or add to her feelings of inadequacy. It is also possible that she had not looked at the information because she did not think it was important enough; her primary concern was for the content marks.

#### 4.8 Code 6: Politics and Policy

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
<b>Code 6: Politics and Policy</b>	Sub-Code 6.1: The National Picture Sub-Code 6.2: Changing Policies: Marking Guidance Sub-Code 6.3: Constant Shifts

Table 4.6: Code 6 and sub-codes

One of the primary codes that emerged from all interviews was that of the impact that politics and policy have had on teachers in the past year. This code emerged in response to the research question that examined teachers' feelings about the introduction of, and changes to, SPaG marks (figure 1.2). As outlined in Chapter 2, the consultation process, during which time teachers were able to comment on the proposals for change, was shorter than it could have been and the documentation outlining the changes was not followed up with meaningful training or advice, which would have been welcomed '*without doubt*' (P5) by all of the teachers. I encountered no lack of willingness to embrace changes, nor any reluctance to accommodate new skills into teaching practices: teachers did not appear to be opposed to worthwhile improvements and no one I interviewed complained of having to do more training or learn new skills.

Applying a Derridean approach to the reading of the transcripts enabled a closer scrutiny of the political landscape than Grounded Theory on its own provided. Close attention can be paid to the politics of education and what Derrida termed the 'capitalisation of learning' in 'Of Grammatology' (1967), in order to deconstruct the complex laws which impact upon teaching and educating. As part of this deconstruction process, Derrida's original notion of deconstructing the relationship between text and meaning shifted towards the relationship between law and justice. Derrida promoted his idea of justice as being the freedoms found in society and he contemplated whether we are free to make any of our own decisions if we are in fact bound by laws. In order to realign the hierarchy that Derrida exposed between the lawmakers and the upholders of justice, he forced educators to think not only about what is being done within the law but also about what is within the bounds of justice.

Teachers must not do simply what is right but also what is just. In order to do this, Derrida impressed upon those making the rules to continuously 're-institute' them, whilst simultaneously believing them to be just (Cornell, Rosenfeld & Carson, 1992).

#### **4.8.1 Sub-Code 6.1: The National Picture**

One of the sub-codes that emerged in the second interviews was that of the national picture. This encompassed the notion of where the teacher, the subject and the department sit within the Government's framework and vision for GCSEs and where the Government's impact of policy can be felt in the classroom. The lack of information supplied by the exam boards was a point of contention for all teachers during the first set of interviews and it remained so during the second but teachers could also empathise with the position in which the boards find themselves. They too are at the mercy of policy changes and were not themselves directly responsible for the speed at which a number of things had happened. However, even if at the point of my first interviews the exam boards had been acting on time-bound instructions from the Coalition Government in 2014, a whole year had passed between the two sets of interviews. Participants told me that there was still scant communication regarding SPaG and still no offer of training or support. A scrutiny of the training courses available to teachers, all of which were detailed on the various exam board websites, showed that the majority of courses were linked to preparing to teach the brand new GCSEs with the wholly new marking system, rather than looking at the detailed awarding of marks for SPaG. Some of the policy changes that have already been introduced, such as SPaG marks, or are being introduced during 2016, such as the 9-1 assessment system that replaces A\*-F grades, mean that teachers are often teaching two different syllabi concurrently; sometimes more than two. The adoption of new curricular and assessment frameworks can lead to a state of confusion for teachers because they are not always completely familiar with one change before another is introduced. The DfE website states that *'Reforms to GCSE and A level qualifications are already underway. New GCSEs, AS and A levels started to be taught from September 2015 in some subjects, and further subjects will be taught from September 2016. Revised content for these subjects has been published by the department. Content is being developed for a further set of GCSEs, AS and A levels to be taught from 2017. Content is currently under consultation for some of these subjects.'* (www.gov.uk; accessed 20.4.2016). This state of change leads to feelings amongst teachers of a lack of permanency and surety, and was most evident when I spoke to P5 about her plans for September; she returned several times to our dialogue about whether it was year 9 or 10 that would be starting the new course with a new grading system and this demonstrated how confusing the changes have been and how worried teachers are about aspects of the new courses.

Based on teachers' recent experiences of implementing changes, it would be easy to see why they might worry about the lack of information they could find themselves facing when the major 9-1 grading system changes are introduced .

P5: *so I'm now thinking (.2) have I got this ↑right (.) my (.2) yes they will be (.2) from twenty sixteen (.) =so the current year nines (.) do the::y need to start the new GCSE (.) I can't remember now (.) oh God=*

OW: *= think the year nines will be [starting]*

P5: *[the new] (.) yer*

OW: *[will be starting] (.) the new GCSE*

P5: *so I need to decide NOW*

OW: *for some subjects (.) yes*

P5: *I think geography*

OW: *okay*

P5: *no (.) >no no no< (.) that's next year (.2) I beg your pardon (.)the school that I'm going to (.) the year nines are going to start their GCSEs so (3 mins) they basically have (.) we have to make a decision*

Figure 4.25: P5 expressed her confusion about changes to GCSEs

P5 went on to talk about how she thought specific political decisions were made and then partially rescinded in the face of teachers' feedback but some major changes remained. One example of such far-reaching alterations was to religious studies (RS) GCSE which she said had become so theoretical, scripture-based and challenging that it is now being removed altogether from teaching at KS4 in S5. Figure 4.26 demonstrates the strength of feeling when P5 quotes someone else, in order to reinforce her perspective and to show an element of solidarity, but it further serves to demonstrate that governmental positions may have had an opposite and unintentional consequence. It might be that successive, recent governments want to make the GCSE harder so that fewer children are drawn to it and so that as a course it self-selects more literate pupils. However, if it is being deemed so difficult that teachers have turned their back on it, then it cannot help to improve anyone's literacy. Furthermore, children are disadvantaged because they are not even offered it as an option.

P5: *Gove apparently wanted to remove ALL of it (20 mins) and then he's (.) because the RE backlash was ↑so much (.1) they kept twenty five percent (.)...<.even the RE specialists that I went and visited in other schools>(.) who get outst::anding results for them (.) was one of the best in the country (.) was like "I don't even know how I'd go about teaching this"*

Figure 4.26: P5 explained her school's position relating to RS

The way in which current policies impact upon the teaching of humanities subjects at KS4 cannot be underestimated. A Derridean lens looks at the relationship between what has to happen by law and what should happen by justice and examines the relative space between these two ideologies. Changes to GCSE have been so extensive since the White Paper on the impact of teaching (2010) that the image in the lens is constantly changing. The new 9-1 marking grid is the next big change that teachers of humanities subjects face, which means not only a new assessment framework but also entirely new schemes of work, plans and resources.

Deconstruction of the political framework for SPaG highlights the way in which, far from being a positive move towards improved literacy and greater attainment in exams, teachers see it as an additional burden, detrimental to some pupils and an unwelcome shift in focus away from subject content at GCSE. SPaG marks were viewed as a particularly unnecessary hurdle for pupils whose first language was not English, or who struggled with dyslexia. Therefore the impact appears to have had the opposite effect of that which the Coalition Government had wanted. Teachers said that adding the marks to the longer answer questions at the end of some papers may have adversely affected the overall grades of some pupils. This is because some pupils did not reach those questions in an exam setting, at the end of the paper. Children might simply have run out of time but in doing so had squandered all of their SPaG marks. A Derridean lens highlights the contradiction between the desire for children to achieve positive SPaG marks and the potential for them to be disadvantaged either because they failed to reach the specific questions when working through the exam or because they had not been aware of them or prepared for them in the first place.

#### **4.8.2 Sub-Code 6.2: Changing Policies; Marking Guidance**

According to all the teachers in the study, the exam boards have either been slow to communicate or completely unresponsive. When I interviewed her in May, P5 told me she was still waiting for some feedback from the moderators for the last set of GCSEs: '*I think we had FIFTY students this year (.) I sent off ten (.) I've not heard anything back (.2) but apparently ↑no news is good news ↑'. The lack of general information is frustrating and does not allow for any dialogue about areas for*

improvement. Moreover, the lack of information relating to how the SPaG marks were awarded on the paper gives teachers the impression that the exam boards themselves are not very interested in the SPaG marks.

A key document provided by the exam board is the examiner's report, sent to schools after the exams have been marked. This comments on the strengths and weaknesses that are noted by the examiner in terms of the preparation of the pupils for the exam. It covers controlled assessment work where appropriate, and gives guidance to teachers on the way in which they might approach a task in the future, in order that pupils gain more marks and achieve greater success. It comments on questions that were answered well and questions that proved more difficult for pupils and it can help to clear up ambiguities and uncertainties. I asked the interview participants about the feedback they had received from the exam board following the 2014 summer exams and how they had used this information. P1 told me that the examiner's report is a '*massive document*', implying its general unhelpfulness. By contrast P1 did note that it included information pertaining to the overall marks and the questions that were done well or not so well, as appropriate. However, she said of SPaG that it '*wasn't mentioned at all, if I remember rightly*'. This lack of feedback on the awarding by teachers of controlled assessment marks and the lack of commentary relating to the pupils' use of accurate SPaG, compounds the dearth of information facing teachers. P3 simply stated that they had received nothing whatsoever from the exam boards relating to SPaG.

P1 told me that there has been no additional clarification from the exam boards on how to award the marks or prepare pupils for them; in fact no specific SPaG information at all. In view of the fact that there was a general election between the first time and the second time we met, P1 remarked that she felt sorry for the exam boards because they would not have known who was going to win the election and so would not have known what different priorities a new administration might have had. She remarked that for '*those who are teaching Maths (.) for example (.) ((?is terrible)) but that they still don't know what they will be teaching in September (3 mins) because it depended on who won the election*'.

P5 echoed this when she told me that it is hard to apply the marks for SPaG to the pupils' work because of the lack of clear or detailed criteria. The exam boards have not clarified how exactly to grade pupils' work in the controlled assessments and how specifically to break the marks down into spelling, punctuation and grammar:

OW: *yes (.) that's right (.) it still doesn't give very much*

P5: *it doesn't (.) [does it?]*

OW: *=[idea]*

P5: *it doesn't say (.) no (.) that you'll get this mark for you know (.) spelling everything correctly or*

OW: *(( )) no*

P5: *- you know (.)↑immaculate grammar↑ or . whatever*

OW: *no*

P5: *no (19 mins) so it's just kind of (.) where you think*

*Figure 4.27: Applying the SPaG marks: P5*

The lack of detail regarding aspects of the SPaG marks creates problems for teachers because they have to interpret the application of the marks for the parts they assess and also try to work out how the examiners will apply the marks on the exam papers. The SPaG marks fall into different bands and a Derridean reading of the language reveals how ambiguous and open to degrees of interpretation they are. Derrida asserts that the meaning contained within the words, in this case words whose meanings are assumed by the exam boards to be clear, nevertheless signify and defer to other signified meanings. Teachers have to try to decide where the differences in grammar (spelling and punctuation) lie between communication that has, 'considerable accuracy'; 'consistent accuracy'; 'reasonable accuracy'; 'some accuracy'. The key words, 'reasonable' and 'some', on their own carry little actual meaning because both can express vagueness and expansiveness. The use of the word 'logical' in the same descriptors, when referring to English spelling and grammar, is beset with problematic interpretation. Standard English usage may be deemed correct without being in the slightest bit logical (Crystal, 2004a).

In order to deconstruct the logocentricity of texts, words and concepts have to be erased, either metaphorically or actually, and re-established. Derrida refers to this process as one of 'sous rature' where the old word or concept is written, crossed out and then both are represented to show that the original word in itself is not enough to present meaning (Caputo, 1997). The application of this approach to the research is about remembering and reminding oneself and the reader that meaning is not entirely present in anything that is written, or indeed spoken. In addition, all meanings actually rely on other meanings outside the immediacy of the setting or context to make them fully apparent. Since the other words are not present, the meaning is not present either (Caputo, 1997).

When applied to the exam specification, P1 and I agreed that the only way in which a teacher could reasonably apply these vague categories and terms would be if they had examples to which they could refer and P1 acknowledged that it was hard to know where the boundaries lay; *“where does your ‘reasonable’ become ‘considerable’ become ‘consistent?’ ”*. P1’s personal response to this was to undertake her own deconstruction of the text and reappraise the meaning of the bands in light of what she knows and what the pupil produces.

P7 told me that because the qualifications are new, little exists by way of exemplar material. She is using a new exam board; one which has supplied her with an exemplar of a ‘good’ and a ‘less good’ exam answer as a model of how the marks are awarded but P2 told me that *‘it’s down (.1) >sort of down< to your o:wn discretion (.) there’ll be level descriptors as to how many marks you can award them’*. In terms of trying to work out exactly what is considered to be grammar worthy of awarding extra marks, it is simply a best-fit approach. When I asked P2 if it is *‘broken down in any way (.) between the spelling (.) punctuation and grammar’* her response was an emphatic ‘No’. P7 found the mark scheme useless and shared with me her feeling that the documents provided by the boards, such that they are, were a waste of time: *‘I can honestly say I’ve never (.) >apart from right at the beginning when they brought it in< (.) I’ve never really used the mark scheme for SPaG’*.

#### **4.8.3 Sub-Code 6.3: Constant Shifts**

Changes to teachers’ working environments and practices was revealed as a sub-code in each of the interviews and expressed as a cause for concern. In some cases teachers were working in challenging environments that were under intense Ofsted-related scrutiny; this had had an impact upon their classroom practice and may have affected the way that they approached their lessons at GCSE. In other cases, even though the context might have been different, teachers were either managing other staff or teaching outside of their own areas of expertise. In all cases, the teachers presented themselves as stretched and challenged by the expectations on them, although it appeared that their frustration lay not so much with the changes themselves or the work load but with the lack of support, information and the overall rate of change.

P7 said there have been four new GCSE specifications in the last five years and trying to keep up with them was *‘horrendous’*. P5 explained that along with the changes that teachers know are coming, there are also the changes that are made mid-course, with which they have to contend.

P5: °another thing that happened this year is° um (.) >most marks um< other than case study questions (.) that students have to write um (.) are worth five (.1) but because of the changes the Government want (.) um (.)↑without even notifying us ↑ (.) there was THREE (.) - six mark questions (.2) well we've never taught (.) we've never had any six mark questions in (.3) you know and there was nothing sent out to us to say that this is (26 mins) the way it's going to change (.) so it threw a few of our students (.1) cos the most they've ever answered is a five mark question (P5)

Figure 4.28: P5 discussed the rate of change

When talking about the future and the changes that are on the horizon, teachers expressed a feeling not just of frustration but also confusion about what exactly the changes will mean. There is a lack of clarity about which parts might be staying and which going and this makes planning for the courses very difficult. Planning for SPaG is made more difficult still because teachers do not know how SPaG will be affected. The degree to which the different departments and the schools are trying to stay abreast of new initiatives has an impact on the way in which they are espoused by the teachers.

P4 and P7 both teach history and both were uncertain about whether SPaG marks will be affected when the new GCSEs begin. Figure 4.29 clearly shows the anguish that P7 felt when talking about something over which she has so little control and about which she has so little knowledge. She did not know how the SPaG marks would be awarded or which questions would be weighted: 'that's not in any of the draft specifications (.) and such that I've got (.) it's a very good point.' Keeping up with the changes appeared to be such a difficult process and one which required so much effort and attention, P7 demonstrated how she had not really thought about the effect that any changes might have on future SPaG marks at all.

P7: oh (.) controlled assessment (.) I think they're keeping (.2) no actually I don't know=I don't [know]  
 OW: [no (.) no]  
 P7: um (.) they might well be getting rid of [that]  
 OW: [I think] they are (.) in some subjects

Figure 4.29: P7's lack of surety regarding changes to assessments

The way in which weighting for some SPaG marks was changed when children were part way through their GCSE courses was one of the participants' main causes for concern and gave rise to this sub-code. These changes to SPaG marks mirrored other last-minute changes that teachers have experienced in areas of coursework and controlled assessments. Preparing pupils for a set of marks

that were then altered, disadvantaged not only the staff who were teaching them but also the children:

P4: ... which is a little bit frustrating in the sense that it all happens very very um (.) so when um (.) I think it was literally we found out ↑possibly the summer of last year ↓ to get ready for teaching it this year (.) it's all been very drip fed in because <I think Ofqual weren't sure what they were expecting> and the exam board didn't know -but then all of a sudden it's like= well the current year tens (.) we've just got to have adapted to it and for some people (.2) they've not necessarily taught those things before or need to get their heads round it (.) so I don't think it was very well planned in that way

Figure 4.30: P4 shared her views on the changes to exams

Despite the on-going lack of detailed information, P5 expressed the hope that when more changes to GCSEs are introduced in 2016, there will be a greater level of detail supplied relating to the SPaG marks, but based on the exam boards' track records she conceded that this seemed unlikely to happen. She told me that it's all 'unclear' at the moment and therefore does nothing to help teachers. Preparing for changes to GCSEs is a constant in the lives of key stage 4 teachers. The willingness and ability to embrace the changes depends upon a number of factors and SPaG marks are no exception to this. The pace and nature of changes that have been made to GCSEs in the three years since the study's pilot scheme are both clear and dizzying. In Ofqual's annual survey on perceptions of 'A' levels and GCSEs, conducted in early 2015, teachers and head teachers stood out against all other groups of respondents (including parents and pupils) with 74% of head teachers and 86% of teachers believing that there is too much change. These findings show that concerns over the constant alterations to all aspects of the examination system remain high (Ofqual, 2015).

In addition, constant changes to the personnel within each of the schools I visited has had a direct impact on the preparedness of teachers. The humanities departments, even in the larger schools, were not big departments. Two or three teachers per curriculum subject was the norm and P1 (S1) told me that one of the department was on maternity leave with another going on maternity leave in the following term. Also during the following term, one member of the team was leaving to take up a promotion and one was retiring. In S2, one of the team was due to go on maternity leave at the end of the summer term. P5 and P6 both work in a school which has faced challenges over the course of the last couple of years and there have been school-wide staffing changes. In the humanities team, one of the teachers left in 2014 (P4) and the school appointed a new Head of Department. P5 was also going to start a new position in September 2015 and an NQT was joining

S3. The impact that the changes bring is often heightened when a Head of Department wants to change the exam specification because each of the boards, and therefore each of the exams, differs from one to another. This means that preparing schemes of work and plans that reflect changes to exam criteria can be in a constant state of flux and do not have time to become established before there is another change, either at the school level or at the exam board level.

DfE figures show that in the 12 months to November 2014 (the year in which the first interviews were conducted) almost 50,000 qualified teachers in England left the state sector. This represents a rate of one in ten teachers and is the highest rate of attrition for a decade. One of the impacts of this is that some vacancies, especially in secondary schools, cannot be filled (DfE statistics, 2014). P4 told me that RS in her school was taught almost exclusively by non-specialists who were simply covering the classes. How well they might be able to prepare pupils for SPaG marks will depend upon several factors but if RS is not their main subject, their focus on developing schemes and plans that drive up standards of SPaG in RS might not be at the fore of their thinking or professional development.

Teachers in this research were all in favour of the political desire to raise literacy levels but none of them saw SPaG marks as the way to achieve this. Their opinions were largely supported by the research into grammar teaching, presented in Chapter 2, which demonstrated that the decontextualized teaching and assessing of grammar does not improve literacy and that previous governments' attempts to improve the literacy of school leavers by adding SPaG marks to high stakes assessments had failed (Andrews, Torgerson, Beverton, Locke, Low, Robinson & Zhu, 2004; Massey & Elliot, 1996). They did not believe that the political decisions behind the awarding of marks for SPaG were just for a number of reasons. In the first instance, teachers felt that the way in which the changes had been introduced had been too hasty and done without enough consultation. What followed was then a period of change and uncertainty where SPaG was introduced to some GCSEs and some parts of GCSEs, whilst at the same time GCSEs were changing considerably in other ways.

In her second interview, P4 told me about the changes to geography and history and the changes that are being introduced to SPaG too. There are going to be radical departures in the history GCSE but not such clear amendments to the geography course and SPaG is being altered to SPGST, which sees the awarding of marks for 'Specialist Terminology' alongside spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, despite these far-reaching changes P4 notes that, *'it's not ↑completely clear 'cos they're all draft exams at the moment (.) but there's (.1) <on ones that I've looked at> there's an extra ten available marks for spelling (.) punctuation and specialised terminology and grammar.'* The removal of coursework and changes to assessment options meant that some pupils were

disadvantaged firstly by the assessing of SPaG in some subjects and also by the overall approach to the course. Again, it can be seen that there is an unjust degree of consistency between subjects in relation to SPaG and overall changes, but teachers felt powerless to do anything about it.

#### 4.9 Code 7: Outcomes

Main Theoretical Codes	Sub-Codes
<b>Code 7: Outcomes</b>	Sub-Code 7.1: Assessing the Impact on Grades Sub-Code 7.2: Signs of Improvements Sub-Code 7.3: One Year On: Looking Back

*Table 4.7: Code 7 and sub-codes*

The reflective nature of the interviews allowed teachers to discuss and analyse their exam results and this code emerged as the result. I was then able to deconstruct the transcripts further by trying to expose the contradictions and assumptions that might have been made in respect of the GCSE data. At the time of the second interviews, all the schools that I visited had had a full set of summer GCSE results; a fact that provided me with a useful discussion point regarding the specific information that had been gleaned relating to SPaG and the way in which this might be used during the next academic year in order to prepare for the SPaG marks. The ‘Outcomes’ code emerged as teachers wanted to talk about what they had learnt, along with what they would have liked to know and what they thought could have been better.

As expected, the GCSE results varied greatly from school to school. The table below shows the five schools’ key statistics:

School	% of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C	% of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C including English and Maths	Total number of year 11 pupils
S1	84	74	238
S2	64	57	117
S3	60	53	126
S4	74	64	208
S5	49	46	80

*Table 4.8: GCSE results in 2015 across the 5 schools*

#### **4.9.1 Sub-Code 7.1: Assessing the Impact on Grades**

P1 was proud of the GCSE results pupils obtained in 2014 and she told me that the overall results showed an increase on the previous year's outcomes. She told me that the results went up not just in geography but across the school. This was in contrast to the national picture which showed overall that GCSE passes dipped. P1 was not sure exactly what the rise could be attributed to and wondered whether it was down to the '*amazing exam preparation*' that pupils received or whether they worked harder and showed a greater work ethic. She also explained how she thought the year group that left at the end of year 11 in 2014 were brighter than the current year 11 group; a fact which was reflected in the statistics that were gathered when they came into the school. However, the mock results seemed to show how the current group were actually doing better than the leavers were at the same point on the course. P1 was not sure to what extent this had to do with the way in which the staff in her department were marking the pupils' work and applying the mark schemes and she told me that '*it's the politics that seem to get in the way.*'

The 2015 YouGov survey, commissioned by Ofqual, asked teachers how they felt about the accuracy of the marking at GCSE and whether they felt it had deteriorated in the last year. 34% of teachers and 52% of head teachers agreed that they thought it had and in accordance with this view, the participants in my study were all dismissive of the exam board's relationship with their schools and they shared the more widely held view that the marking and the application of marks were not held closely enough to account (Ofqual, 2015).

There was no doubt amongst teachers that pupils now talked more about SPaG and were more aware of it, but there was no evidence to make a link between this awareness and exam success, especially in view of the fact that the participants had not looked at the SPaG marks on the exams. The impact of governmental policy changes can be heard from the pupils themselves but despite a number of participants telling me that pupils now discuss SPaG more openly, none of them told me what grammar means to children. Teachers may have assumed that because pupils are talking about it, they are more likely to focus on literacy in their exams, but none of the teachers could categorically say that this had made any difference to the GCSE attainment in their subject or their school.

#### **4.9.2 Sub-Code 7.2: Signs of Improvements**

P4 told me that she wanted to get a number of the papers back from the exam board, to see how pupils did on specific questions, but there is a cost involved with this and the school would not pay so the scripts were not recalled. She did not think that SPaG marks adversely affected the GCSE grades in history but would have had no way of being sure about this without analysing the specific

awarding of marks for each question. The fact that P4 was not able to gain an insight into this suggested that the school did not think that the SPaG marks, or any other marks, were worth more detailed scrutiny, or that anything notable could be gained from the experience of analysing them. In general, papers will only be recalled when there is a significant mismatch between the predicted grade and the actual grade. For P4, the overall history GCSE pass rate in 2014 (grades of C or above) was 52% and in S3 was 57%: neither of these was a shock.

P7, working in a higher achieving environment, said that her department did have a look at some of the exam papers after last year's GCSEs but they did not spend any time looking at how the SPaG marks were awarded. The papers were analysed so that P7's department could learn more about where to improve on delivery of the content marks, rather than the SPaG. Again, what this shows is the low priority given to the SPaG marks and a continuing perspective that they are not really worth engaging with more thoroughly.

P5 told me that the 2014 GCSEs in geography were not as good as they could have been. The paper contained a greater number of questions requiring longer answers than the teachers or pupils had anticipated. However, this did not precipitate a detailed analysis of the awarding of the marks. Likewise, when P2 talked about last year's exams, she told me that the department was hoping for 72% A\*-C but they got 68%. She remarked that this statistic was considered to be acceptable by the Head Teacher and '*there or thereabouts*' in relation to the prediction. For her school, the examiner's report contained nothing relating specifically to SPaG and the fact that 68% was acceptable meant that the specific break down of marks was not scrutinised.

#### **4.9.3 Sub-Code 7.3: One Year On: Looking Back**

The second series of interviews sought to discover whether or not there was a greater degree of engagement with the SPaG marks one year on and emerged as a sub-code because of the way in which participants engaged with the reflexive process. The questions were also aimed at eliciting information pertaining to the likelihood of pupils now asking specific questions about the marks, in an attempt to gauge whether they saw them as worth preparing for.

It was the case that teachers who had now been teaching towards a new mark scheme for more than one year were more familiar with the weighting for SPaG. This might have made them more likely to focus on SPaG when practising exam-style questions. As a result of their more regular reminders of the need for accurate literacy, pupils may have responded to this stimulus by asking questions about it themselves. P3 said that pupils in her school were now more aware of SPaG marks and that SPaG had '*gained notoriety*', which she attributed in part to the fact that pupils were hearing about it in other subjects too. P6 also said that pupils were now more familiar with the

concept of SPaG in exams and were *'conscious of getting that right'*. P4, P5 and P6 all told me that pupils were now definitely more attuned to the SPaG marks in lessons, with P5 adding that, *'our students were aware but there is definitely a greater emphasis now'*. This she attributed to changes that are being introduced to GCSEs from next year and also to the fact that other subjects are discussing SPaG.

When I asked P2 about the pupils' awareness of SPaG marks, she told me emphatically that there was now a *'massive change (.) massive (.) massive shift'*. Her use of such a strong adjective reinforced the strength of her feeling and her repetition of *'massive'* emphasised just how significant she thinks SPaG marks now are in the KS4 classroom. She thought that the reason for this was clear: the exam papers themselves state the number of SPaG marks available and she said that because of this, pupils have *'picked up on that before you've even highlighted it'*.

P1 was also clear that a greater awareness of SPaG amongst pupils was evident, though she also accepted that she might simply be more aware of SPaG herself and therefore more likely to pick up on pupils' perceptions: *'I think so (.) because certainly (.2) =and maybe it's my consciousness'*. Her assumptions about greater awareness were based upon hearing pupils talking about SPaG but there did not appear to be any clarity about what SPaG meant to the pupils: the place and value of each of the SPaG elements on the paper and in general.

P5 acknowledged the importance of the marks and agreed with me, using the acknowledgement token *'without a doubt'* (Clayman and Heritage, 2000), when I mentioned the part they play in determining a pupil's final mark. However, this agreement that the marks were important had not changed P5's approach to preparing for them or analysing where they might be gained or lost on an exam paper, for the benefit of her own teaching or the results of the next cohort.

OW: *yer (.) cos those marks are still the difference [aren't they]*

P5: *[oh yer]*

OW: *between a grade and another (20 mins)*

P5: *yer=without a doubt*

Figure 4.31: Extract from second interview with P5.

P7 told me that she did not think much had changed in a year because she had not focused her attention on SPaG. She clearly felt that this was something she would have liked to have covered but did not, when she said, *'yer(.) it's more like a gen = I ought (.1) it's something'*. She also told me that due to constraints in other areas of her work, she had not spent any time even looking at the

criteria. Despite her reminding pupils that SPaG is worth a small but significant percent of the marks, she did not think they took it seriously when they compared it to how many other marks they are hoping to gain. However, from the first interview, I know that P7 had an understanding of language and raised points of interest in her lessons and as the second interview progressed, in spite of what she had initially said, it was clear that she did engage with the concepts of SPaG in the classroom, irrespective of the marks at GCSE. P7 was the only teacher who also taught 'A' levels and she made some interesting observations about how SPaG is assessed further on in pupils' education. What she made clear is that she did not think the addition of the SPaG marks had improved anyone's literacy levels, which was the Coalition Government's reason for reintroducing them to start with. She felt that although the marks could make the difference between one grade and another, and crucially between a C and a D, they rarely seemed to because of the way that other marks were awarded.

P3 talked about knowing that she had potentially prevented pupils from acquiring a greater interest in language when she told me about her weaker year 7 English group not looking at the language of Shakespeare: *'we didn't focus too much on analysing the language (.) be::cause I just don't think >they would've been able to get their heads around it< (.1) which is really bad because I've ↑immediately limited them'*. P3 acknowledged straightaway that the pupils' learning might have been capped by her decisions about their capabilities, as she focused the attention on the pupils rather than on herself, but she had already told me that she was not confident with language or grammar in general and where Shakespeare was concerned, as a non-specialist, she was *'dreading'* it. P3's views about children's abilities seem to have been made in the full knowledge that this may not have been a just position: P3's use of *'really bad'* to analyse her own actions reveals this. It may also have been made in order for the teacher not to expose her weaknesses, yet paradoxically this teacher had told me that she was happy to learn from the pupils and had given me a specific example of this in her first interview.

#### **4.10 Summary**

The findings of the interviews and analysis of the codes and sub-codes highlighted a number of significant aspects of the data. Teachers' lack of confidence where grammar is concerned; their concerns about not having enough time to worry about the SPaG marks when they know they should and the way in which they feel overwhelmed by the pace and level of change all emerged strongly from the data. Each of the cases and each of the sub-codes presented its own pertinent insights into the way in which secondary humanities teachers are currently feeling.

Teachers were unsure about how they could prepare the pupils for the marks when they had so little information from the exam boards. Teachers intuitively felt that the marks represented a waste of

time as far as raising literacy levels was concerned but this did not mean that they wanted to ignore them. The combination of not having enough time and not having enough knowledge, meant that pupils did very little in the classroom in relation to SPaG and to grammar in particular. Teachers knew that they could test spellings, especially of key words, and they told me that they helped pupils to paragraph their work, but they did nothing as far as grammar was concerned. Where sentences sounded wrong, they told pupils to rewrite them or they wrote them for the pupil. They did not engage with any teaching of any grammar and did not feel confident to assess it. In one case, where SPaG was being assessed as part of a controlled assessment, all the teacher felt they could award was simply a 'best fit' mark (P3).

Using Derrida's central philosophies to explore the data is contributed to a more detailed, and simultaneously more expansive understanding of the way in which teachers talked about SPaG and grammar and the way in which they expressed their ideas. Derridean deconstruction challenged the enquiry to see beyond the words and to play with meanings, rather than to fix on one. His notion of 'other' applies to teachers' knowledge and feelings towards grammar (The Gift of Death, 1995) and throughout the transcripts the teachers' voices seemed to be saying that grammar was the ambiguous 'other' for all of them. It was expressed as a different and separate thing, whilst simultaneously being familiar. It was unknowable for the teachers in this research because it was largely outside of their own educational experiences but their feelings of being the 'other' or the one who is without the knowledge was actually the thing that united them.

Derridean analysis promoted a detailed exploration of teachers' awareness of what they thought they did and did not know; we are left to question why the SPaG marks, which are relatively few in number despite their significance, preoccupied seven teachers in fourteen separate and lengthy interviews. Teachers who knew very little about grammar actually ended up saying a lot about it.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

#### 5.1 Overview

This inquiry introduces new knowledge into educational research because it was focused entirely on the voices of practising secondary school teachers at a time of great change. The way in which the voices were presented added to the relationship created between the reader and the original speaker and helped to capitalise on the experiences of the teachers themselves. The particular form of analysis highlighted the significance of the GCSE teachers' histories; their experiences of school and university as well as their relationships with their profession and their pupils. The methodological approach used Derridean deconstruction in order to challenge assumptions and suggest alternative interpretations.

In this concluding chapter I return to the research questions and aims, linking them to the key findings emergent from the data. The findings are considered in light of the contribution they make collectively to the knowledge base of teachers' confidence and competency relating to SPaG and to grammar in particular. The methodological approaches are analysed and recommendations are suggested for further research, policy and practice.

#### 5.2 Question 1: What were teachers' experiences of learning about grammar and language in their own schooling?

The review of the literature, in response to this question, revealed that most practising teachers would probably not have received much in the way of grammar instruction. Hudson and Warmsley's study (2005) showed that pupils who were educated between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, would have left school having never been taught very much about grammar. The youngest teacher in the study was in her early/mid-20s and left school approximately eight years ago and certainly before 2010. In the decades between the early 1990s and 2010, the teaching of grammar was still not prevalent in schools and where it did exist, was shown to be ineffective at raising children's writing abilities (EPPI, 2004; Myhill, 2011).

Two of the teachers expressed an active interest in and engagement with grammar but their knowledge and experiences had not been gained in mainstream school settings. One of the teachers went to an independent girls' convent school and then went to teach English abroad and the other had gained an interest in language from her grandfather, who used to help her write and who taught her how to read and to spell.

All of the teachers expressed an interest in knowing more about grammar. Some of them regretted not being more knowledgeable and some bemoaned not having applied themselves more to learning about grammar, even that of a foreign language, at school. None of the participants learnt about language or grammar at university, with all of them saying that nothing on their teacher training courses was grammar-orientated. They talked about literacy and writing essays and some said that they were not very confident when it came to writing in their first language.

### **5.3 Question 2: Did teachers feel that any of their own education or professional development had given them knowledge and confidence regarding grammar?**

In response to question 2, it was revealed through a study by Williamson and Hardman (1995) that trainee teachers feel they know very little about grammar and do not have the vocabulary to talk about it. In 2002, even trainees wishing to qualify as English teachers found it difficult to demonstrate linguistic competencies (Cajkler & Hislam, 2002). The review of literature also found that teachers' confidence with grammar is low. Safford (2015) hypothesised that the best type of grammar teaching, that which is contextualized, is most likely to take place when teachers feel confident. However, a study in 2012 revealed that teachers think they know more about grammar and language than they actually do (Sangster et al, 2012). This suggests that even the two teachers who said they knew something about grammar might actually know less than they think they do.

Many teachers recognised their lack of knowledge throughout this study and apologised for it at different points. Teachers in this study had not learnt very much about grammar at school and those who could remember something did not feel that it was in any way useful. Some respondents recalled specific detail about identifying parts of speech but this was limited by the lack of experience itself and by the lack of ability to recall. Of the seven, P6 had been partially taught a range of subjects through the medium of a second language but it had not been a wholly positive experience. P1 knew something about grammar but it was when she went abroad that she really learnt about and appreciated English grammar. For the others, the meta-language of grammar was something they were not exposed to, other than in a really limited capacity when learning a second language at some point in secondary school.

The result of not studying anything to do with grammar at school or later on in their education was that teachers did not think they had much to offer in the GCSE classroom and lacked confidence with grammar. The literature review and the case study interviews both highlighted how little information exists that might help non-specialist teachers to gain knowledge about grammar. The different exam boards are hugely influential to teachers and in general offer support, information and resources at KS4. However, where the SPaG marks are concerned, very little exists by way of on-

going training and development. Despite all of the teachers being competent subject specialists at GCSE, five of them expressed a significant lack of confidence in their abilities to answer grammar-related questions or to know how to teach a grammar point if it were raised. Teachers' lack of knowledge had also manifested itself in a lack of confidence with their own writing, with many of the teachers saying that they had to defer letters, resources and PowerPoint presentations to the English department for them to check before they were made public.

#### **5.4 Question 3: What were teachers' feelings about the introduction of, and changes to, SPaG marks?**

SPaG marks are not new and have been introduced, abandoned and then reintroduced a number of times since GCSEs began in the late 1980s. The literature demonstrated that SPaG marks have never been shown to improve children's literacy, which accounts for the reasons why they were abandoned at various points. Yet, successive governments have reintroduced them because they are still seen as a way to improve literacy amongst school leavers. Massey, Elliott and Johnson (2005) demonstrated that where SPaG marks were awarded in terminal examinations, they could not be shown to have improved pupils' writing.

Teachers had mixed feelings about the reintroduction of SPaG marks or the changes to marking criteria in relation to SPaG. Universally they saw improving children's writing as wholly worthwhile and agreed that it was the job of all teachers, not just the English department. However, none of them saw the SPaG marks as the way to achieve this aim. At the time of my interviews, teachers were also in the midst of great changes to GCSEs that will potentially have numerous and significant impacts upon pupils' outcomes. The context of the reintroduction of SPaG marks is a wider one. It is part of an agenda to abolish coursework, controlled assessments and re-sits. Teachers were, in some cases, also facing challenging circumstances in their schools. SPaG marks felt, to a lot of the respondents, like paying lip-service to improved literacy. The feeling that resounded amongst them was that they did not have time to worry about some additional marks when they had a breadth of new course content to look at and different modes of assessment to assimilate. They also knew that although some GCSEs changed in 2013, they are all changing again in 2016/17. The rate of change has felt so relentless that some interviewees seemed almost overwhelmed by it.

#### **5.5 Question 4: What importance did teachers attach to ensuring that pupils gained the additional SPaG marks?**

The SPaG marks represent 5% of the total marks and could influence the grade a child receives. However, in a number of interviews it seemed as though teachers had not considered how impactful the marks could be until I discussed it with them. Teachers all talked about how they sought to

improve children's literacy, which included spelling strategies and content organisation and structure, but they did not do anything to actively improve children's understanding of or knowledge of grammar. Some said they would start to pay more attention to the marks following our discussions, but in the second series of interviews the same teachers had done very little to address this. The focus for most of the teachers in the year between the first and second interviews was on the new courses that are being introduced. They were, understandably, far more concerned with how they were going to cover the content of the course than they were about working with the SPaG marks.

The literature review outlined how the addition of SPaG marks at GCSE had not improved literacy at any point when it was in place; and whether or not teachers know of the research, they appeared to know instinctively that as far as better skills are concerned, SPaG marks are not the answer.

## **5.6 Review of Methodology**

This research used a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, methodology because the findings of different teachers' childhoods, teaching experiences and feelings about the future were impossible to neatly quantify or empirically tally. The use of a small number of intense case studies to explore the teachers' experiences did not readily lend itself to any type of analysis of quantitative data. What was more important was to try to capture the detail of teachers' feelings and experiences of grammar and SPaG assessment.

The selection of participants was one of the most challenging aspects of this research and an initial difficulty which I had not anticipated. At the start of the process, I contacted local schools several times and through different mediums but usually I had no response. When I did receive a response, it was often the end of the trail. Finding the seven eventual participants, who were all teaching GCSEs and who were all willing to be interviewed twice in their own time, took me longer than I had expected and a great deal more effort. However, once the participants had responded positively to my initial enquiries, the logistical arrangements all proved fairly straightforward and the first and second phase of interviews were conducted in a positive context.

In the early stages of the interviews it was likely that the constructed and unnatural presence of an interviewer in the teachers' classroom had an impact on what they told me and how they felt. Chapter 3 explored ways in which this was mediated, but it was inevitable that when asking teachers about their real or supposed lack of proficiency, they might appear hesitant, embarrassed or simply unsure of what to say and how to respond (Goffman, 1990). The use of Jefferson transcription helped to capture these moments and to account for them through an appreciation of the non-verbal utterances and the importance of pauses. These pauses were minutely calculated and

considered so that the reader is able to understand more of how they arose and what they might mean (Green et al, 1997).

The reliability and validity of a study such as this are threatened by what the interviewee chooses to disclose, how they might be feeling, how they want to present themselves and a range of other factors. It is important that the researcher bears this in mind and where possible, acknowledges this. I do not know how much teachers actually knew or did not know and I certainly had no way of knowing if they were telling me the truth about their educational experiences. However, steps can be taken to promote reliability across the whole project and they include maintaining high levels of integrity when working with the data and the analysis that accompanies it (Russell, Gregory et al, 2005). In this study, the detailed coding of the data and the transcription notation together contributed to the reduction of researcher bias (Mays and Pope, 2000) and the maintenance of integrity because they established the voice of the interviewee as present in the thesis.

There are acknowledged limitations when trying to use the signs and symbols of orthography to present meaning, and a researcher working within a Derridean framework is necessarily cautious of any transcript that tries to present itself as a true representation of a speaker's words. Transcripts often have a tendency to become far removed from the speaker because the transcriber has turned the speech into writing which ends up denaturalised; with standard grammar and punctuation replacing significant utterances and non-verbal communication. Nevertheless, in this study Jefferson notation for key parts of the interviews opened up the dialogue and the utterances by highlighting significant data and by allowing the voice of the speaker to be brought a little closer to the reader.

The use of Charmazian Grounded Theory was apt because it presented not only teachers' stories but it illuminated behavior, settings and concepts that are hugely relevant to their work. The codes that emerged showed how significant the wider context is for teachers: the departments in which they work; their colleagues; the exam board literature; the school's policies. Charmaz (2000) reminded the researcher to focus on the words and this approach, together with a Jefferson transcription of the data, provided a unique insight into the very real experience of practising teachers. However, the attendant difficulties for the researcher are manifold: difficult decisions needed to be made about the level of coding required. I chose to use a standard framework and to apply it to the most significant excerpts that best illustrated the code or the sub-code, but at times I felt that this limited the voices of the participants because I had made a conscious decision not to present the words phonetically. I had to balance a desire to capture the accents and idiolects with a pragmatic approach: writing the excerpts phonetically might have satisfied my desire but would have been even more time-consuming and would risk the reader feeling alienated. In the end, the compromise

I reached was to honestly and dutifully transcribe the data using some relatively straightforward and accessible notation.

My desire to analyse the findings using Derrida's key concepts meant that I was always grappling with something that was at times difficult and obscure, to the point where the simplicity of an utterance might have been lost in a tangle of never-ending rhetoric. The fact that Derrida believed no meanings are ever what they seem on the one hand frees the researcher to draw any conclusions of any sort, but on the other opens up the findings to a multitude of ambiguities and contradictions where no clear findings can ever be reached. The commitment to ensuring that the voices of teachers are heard means that several possible implications and interpretations are presented and acknowledged.

All of Derrida's concepts provided useful tools with which to explore the data but some of his key tenets were more useful and visible than others. The notion of deconstruction provided the overarching approach to the textual analysis because it can be applied to all utterances and can help to challenge all assumptions and offer other explanations. Binary pairs also emerged from much of the data, where teachers felt knowledge about grammar was on one side and directly opposed to it was lack of knowledge, with nothing in the middle. A Derridean reading helped to explore these features of the interviews and to shed new light on teachers' experiences as a result. Likewise the notion of logocentricity, where the written word is assumed to be less pure and less close to the speaker, can be challenged by the use of notation which keeps the speaker close to the words.

In order to raise the literacy levels of school leavers, current examination policy is concentrated on creating a more challenging key stage 4 exam curriculum and one in which SPaG plays a central part. Ultimately, this research was an exploration of teachers' knowledge of grammar because this is directly related to the policy that was responsible for reintroducing SPaG marks to GCSEs; despite all of the evidence that it never improved school leavers' literacy at any point at which it was formerly attached to exams. As the results' data are collected from humanities subjects over time, it may be possible to see trends in the SPaG marks and even perhaps a rise in the overall literacy levels of pupils taking GCSEs but it will be very difficult to ever fully ascertain to what this potential improvement might be attributable. It might be that children know more about prescriptive grammar because of the focus it now has at key stage 2 but it could be that teachers have gained some knowledge which they feel enhances the learning of pupils. It may even be to do with the markers and the marking itself. None of the teachers I interviewed were able to say with any degree of certainty that SPaG marks had influenced the GCSE outcomes and none were able to say

conclusively that their own knowledge or skills had contributed positively or negatively to pupils' knowledge of grammar at key stage 4.

In the context of this research, my intention was that case study findings about teachers' knowledge and relationships with grammar might help to reveal a general pattern in teaching GCSEs across humanities subjects. Therefore, as far as the main research is concerned, the findings could be shared with the schools, so that training and support could be organised which would help teachers to approach grammar from a position of increased confidence and knowledge. This is particularly important in light of the number of references made to the lack of training offered by the exam boards and the feelings of inadequacy that some participants expressed. The findings from this research suggest a number of recommendations for teachers and policy makers. The findings are also of benefit to pupils and hopefully their future employers. This research also seeks to contribute to the debate on the value of assessing grammar through GCSE exams and hopes to inform the professional development of teachers. Finally, it should also be of interest to policymakers who are constantly revising the assessment framework at key stage 4.

### **5.7 Implications and recommendations: teachers**

In this research, teachers often seemed apologetic for their lack of focus on grammar in the classroom or on SPaG, but without being aware of it, they were aligning themselves with the body of evidence that finds no strong correlation between the SPaG marks and better grammar use, or between knowledge of decontextualised grammar and better literacy. Chapter 2 identified a number of studies which show that when SPaG marks have been part of KS4 assessment before, the levels of literacy amongst school leavers has not risen as a result. Even if teachers did lack knowledge of grammatical nomenclature, the review of the literature suggests they should not be spending time worrying about this because the ability to identify parts of speech is not the determiner in whether or not children have greater or lesser literacy levels when they leave school (Halliday, 1970; Rashid & Brooks, 2010).

Some of the teachers in the research did not appear to want to engage with the complexities of grammar, preferring to think of it as a set of rules that they felt they simply did not know. The application of a Derridean lens to the findings revealed teachers' truths about grammar and also their assumptions about their lack of abilities. They assumed that because they may not have the technical terms to describe some aspects of language, this meant they could not teach children about it. However, it is true that children do not need to know the terms for a great many things in order to be interested in them or to explore the practical application such things may have.

Additionally, it is true that teachers and children are already highly proficient users of grammar without necessarily possessing the terms needed to talk about it (Crystal, 2004a; 2004b).

Teachers also assumed that if children did know more about grammar then they would get higher SPaG marks but this was clearly an assumption and lacked evidence because the teachers did not know anything specific about the actual SPaG marks that were being awarded in the exams.

Nevertheless, when talking about exam success, teachers' focus on SPaG demonstrated that they believed greater knowledge about language would result in greater SPaG marks.

Derrida tried to expose the trace assumptions within rhetoric and urged all users of language to aim to understand it better, or at least to be aware of its infinite possibilities alongside its limitations.

Derrida also advocated a method of understanding language by deconstructing it; to be open to it and all of its meanings. In practice, this underpins the view that there is no weakness in not having all of the answers or possessing all of the knowledge because this is neither possible nor desirable.

Sometimes the answers to questions about grammar will present themselves in ways that might be creative or different to any preconceived or learnt concepts but they will be no less valuable.

Teachers should be aware that their real or perceived lack of grammatical knowledge does not appear to present a barrier to the enjoyment of words and the study of language. A detailed survey by Keele University of 6000 pupils' attitudes to English, maths and science at secondary school showed that in almost every category of question, ranging from interest and relationships with teachers, through to homework, the use of ICT and confidence in the subject, English was favoured above either maths or science (Miller, Parkhouse, Eagle & Evans, 1999).

Teachers should challenge the assumptions they make about grammar and the feelings they have towards it. They may have assumed that grammar means the same thing to all the pupils they teach but Derrida's views on the way in which learning is transmitted explores a concept of teaching that appeared absent from the thoughts of the teachers in this study. Derrida suggested that a teacher's job is not to impart or teach information but rather to facilitate and enable the 'disciple to learn' (1990). However, none of the teachers in the study felt that they were simply the 'mediator' where any aspects of their teaching were concerned. Instead, they all felt that they were looked to for their knowledge and that if they did not possess it then pupils could not learn from them. All of the participants were subject specialists and none of them displayed any reservations about their subject knowledge but their relationship with grammar was entirely different. Participants considered that they could only engage pupils with grammar or lead them towards more engagement with it if they knew about it themselves, and many of them appeared to feel vulnerable in their lack of knowledge.

I too may have assumed that teachers have made these assumptions: it is therefore impossible for us to reach a conclusive position on the impact that teachers' grammatical knowledge has on the SPaG marks. What we can do is to continue to deconstruct the assumptions we make and to help identify where assumptions have arisen in method, policy and pedagogy in the KS4 classroom.

To make a recommendation based on assumptions about grammar is a challenge for the researcher who is interested in what the unstable words might reveal about the participants; it is a challenge for the teacher who is trying to establish what is important in terms of the lesson content and the style and it is also a challenge for the pupils who are, at KS4, generally focused on content. The findings hint at the idea of some teachers being so preoccupied with their lack of grammatical knowledge that they may miss the opportunity to simply erase the idea of fixed meaning and just allow children to play freely; experimenting with language in an entirely different way. The implications of teachers taking a much more laissez-faire approach to grammar would be hard to quantify. Pupils could take tests which measured their ability to use language effectively but the marking of it would contain a high level of subjectivity. They could be spared from testing altogether but then it would be almost impossible to determine the effects that different teaching approaches had had on them.

The impact of teachers' knowledge of grammar on pupils' outcomes at GCSE may never be clear and in some ways may not be the most important or interesting question. The impact of teachers' confidence on the outcomes at GCSE may be the more pressing debate. A Derridean deconstruction of the outcomes allows for all of the possibilities to be examined and for a conclusive correlation not to be reached. Pupils' lack of knowledge about grammar does not mean that they will not get full marks for SPaG: they may write exceptionally well without a detailed knowledge of prescriptive grammar, just as their teachers might. Equally, a comprehensive knowledge of grammar would not mean that they were bound to gain all of the available marks either. If teachers were aware of the research by Myhill and Safford, outlined in Chapter 2, surrounding decontextualised grammatical knowledge and its link to language abilities, they may worry less about their own perceived shortcomings, and use their proficiency with language to help pupils gain greater skills and confidence in general and with subject specific literacy.

### **5.8 Implications and recommendations: policy makers**

The most recent document framework for The National Curriculum in England (2014) states that pupils must be 'taught the correct use of grammar' and must write at length with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, other than in the statutory programmes of study and attainment for English, SPaG is not mentioned again in the document.

The Bullock Report (1975) outlined the rationale and guidance for literacy as a priority for all departments in secondary schools, rather than it just being the preserve of the English department and the report stated that secondary schools needed to outline the role and responsibility to develop literacy that was held by all teachers. However, several decades later it was acknowledged that there had not been the anticipated rise in writing abilities and that this was due in part to the fact that cross-curricular policies were either not effective or had not been implemented at all (DfES, 2001:1). In the 2016 programmes of study, English is still the only subject in which it is mandatory to teach children about English grammar at KS3 and therefore the teachers of humanities subjects may not focus any attention on aspects of SPaG at all. When children reach GCSE, they may find it strange to be looking at grammar in their history lessons after not having done so for the three preceding years. Pupils and teachers, along with the current and previous governments, may also find that if an awareness of grammar is not reinforced across all subjects before GCSE, what was learnt at KS2 may be partially forgotten by the time children get to their exam years. The pupils that are now being instructed at KS4 are unlikely to remember very much about grammar when they leave school if little of it is being taught to them in secondary school. Leaving pupils' continued awareness of language to the English department during KS3, coupled with the vagueness of SPaG details in humanities subjects at KS4, might mean that the history of the participants is in danger of repeating itself: the producing of young adults who do not feel that they know much about grammar or have forgotten whatever it was they were told.

A key recommendation from this research is that the usefulness of adding marks for grammar to humanities GCSEs is reconsidered by policy makers. If SPaG marks continue to be a feature of GCSEs then the voices of teachers must be heard and must be central to policy making. Educational policy should consider much more closely how best to address what it sees as the low levels of literacy amongst some school leavers. Policy should acknowledge that simply adding some, seemingly arbitrary, marks to the end of some questions and some parts of controlled assessment, is not likely to improve literacy levels. This research recommends that a reassessing of the weighting of SPaG needs to occur, so that marks are not simply added to longer questions towards the end of the exam. Policy development must not disadvantage those pupils whose first language is not English, those who have a special educational need or, importantly, those whose teachers are unfamiliar with the rules of Standard English grammar. Policy should focus on the training of teachers so that they feel more skilled and more confident.

The central debates in raising literacy levels of school leavers must realign the number of assumptions and presumptions that are currently being made about how to approach the teaching

of grammar, how to assess it and how teachers feel about it. The field of GCSE education, and in particular the field of humanities subjects, has become increasingly uncompromising. Exams are now largely terminal and methods of assessment demand the same approach from all pupils. In addition, teachers' careers can be determined by them and humanities subjects are key performance targets within the EBacc. Therefore, teachers' feelings and experiences need to be considered far more in the formatting of the curriculum and the exam assessment, especially in view of the fact that the delivery of the first of the new courses is now underway.

There needs to be a more optimistic and useful relationship established between teachers and the exam boards. The exam boards need to provide more useful assessment materials that consider the gap between what is assumed and what is known and needed in practice. Practical support means more training or a different kind of training and greater dialogue. From both the policy makers and the exam boards there needs to be a greater appreciation of the current situation. Whatever changes take place from now on, it is important that they are made with the weight of evidence and research behind them so that schools and teachers can have confidence that changes are not being made for change's sake. The rationale for including SPaG marks in high stakes exams is at best inconclusive. Development of relevant curricular should be considered within the remit of strategic development of the schools themselves. In many of the interviews, such literacy or grammar-related initiatives as there were, were expressed in disappointed tones. There was a lack of stability relating to whole-school literacy programmes and a lack of dedicated personnel, which gave rise to resentment and disillusionment.

It must be viable for the schools to train teachers, if this is what is required. It is recommended that a form of mentoring or support service is put in place so that teachers who feel more confident with grammar might support those who feel less so, especially in their formative years in the profession. It is also recommended that PGCE courses look towards greater dialogue about SPaG, even if it is not seen as appropriate to teach trainees about grammar. Opening up communication about the additional marks would provide teachers with greater awareness of their existence and potentially equip them with some confidence to make clear their feelings in respect of them.

## **5.9 Summary**

The narratives expressed within this research are significant because they add to the theory base for designing future studies by highlighting multifactorial, complex issues and challenges faced by teachers of GCSEs; looking in particular at how their experiences shape their teaching. At a time of recruitment crises in a number of subject areas at secondary level, it has never been more important to listen to the views of these teachers.

Further educational research should examine not only the relevance of SPaG marks and teachers' knowledge, but it should also find ways to explore teachers' views on the transfer of knowledge and approaches to teaching, especially after they have been in post for several years. The pedagogical practices of shared learning amongst the teachers of humanities subjects might be an area that would benefit from greater focus because none of the participants had seen any of their colleagues teach a grammar point.

This concluding chapter highlighted the key findings of this study and sought to give voices to secondary school teachers. The critical considerations identified through the narratives were that most teachers do not feel knowledgeable or confident with grammar and the majority do not teach any of it in order for pupils to gain the SPaG marks. The findings informed the recommendations that are relevant to teachers themselves and to policy development, so that neither pupils nor teachers are disadvantaged by these marks.

This small scale but productive inquiry has highlighted many issues in relation to humanities teachers and their experiences of learning and teaching about grammar. The issues surrounding grammar and raising literacy amongst school leavers are multi-causal and complex and deserve responses in relation to development of policy and pedagogical practice that are innovative and creative. I recommend that the voices of secondary school humanities teachers need to be listened to a great deal more, in order to encourage their engagement with grammar, the SPaG marks and the on-going changes to GCSEs. This is paramount in view of recruitment and retention of secondary school teachers. If policy makers are serious about raising the literacy levels of school leavers, they cannot afford not to have KS4 teachers' full commitment to this ideal.

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<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Outline of Research Project for Schools

#### Outline of Research Project

Title of Research Project: An exploration of non-specialist Teachers' subject knowledge of English grammar and its relationship with changes in policy and expectation of teachers at KS4.

The proposed study is an examination of the grammatical knowledge that secondary teachers possess. The study will examine the impact of the history of grammar teaching in England in relation to the place that grammar currently occupies in the curricular for key stages 3, 4 and 5 but particularly at GCSE level.

Most schools in Britain stopped teaching grammar rules in the 1960s. This means that many practising teachers were never taught explicit grammar and have very little grammatical awareness. They are, nevertheless, expected to assess the Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) of GCSE pupils across many subjects.

This study will seek to identify what the gap is between teachers' perceptions of their own grammar subject knowledge and the expectations of policy in relation to teaching at KS4. The study will collect data from teachers about their own experiences of learning grammar and language at school and examine their current levels of knowledge through an audit that they will be asked to complete in advance of the interviews. This data will be discussed during the interview and will contribute to the information provided by participants about their abilities to teach and assess grammar in the various subject areas.

The proposed study intends to use a sample of teachers from different subjects and settings with differing backgrounds and ages. Exploring the historical context of teaching and learning grammar in schools during participants' own education will assist the exploration of commonalities between these participants with regards to their current knowledge.

In addition, the study aims to analyse the implications for professional development that arise from this examination of teachers' knowledge and confidence in relation to policy changes.

Olwen Wright

## Appendix B: Letter to Head Teachers

Ms Olwen Wright  
38 Clere Gardens  
Chineham  
Hants  
RG24 8LZ  
07792 962693

Dear

My name is Olwen Wright and I am currently undertaking doctoral research at the University of Winchester, in the faculty of Education. I am writing to you to outline my research and to request that three of your staff be involved in my project. Their involvement would take the form of two interviews over the academic year 2014/2015.

The study is an exploration of non-specialists teachers' subject knowledge of English grammar and its relationship with changes in policy and expectation of teachers at KS4. As teachers are now expected to assess the spelling, punctuation and grammar of pupils taking their GCSEs, the study will seek to identify what the gap might be between teachers' perceptions of their own grammar and the expectations of recent Government policy.

The aims of the research are to explore teachers' own learning experiences of grammar, and to identify not only their knowledge but also their confidence in relation to English grammar. In addition, the research aims to identify and critically analyse the implications for professional development that arise from the data.

I would be most grateful if I could use your school as one of the research settings and work with three of your staff. The participants' involvement in this research is entirely voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Their identity will be completely concealed, as will that of the school, as pseudonyms will be used throughout the eventual thesis.

The school in which I work, Sherfield School, plays no part in the research and the project is entirely self-funded.

I will follow this letter with a phone call and hope that we will be able to discuss this project further. In the meantime, if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the number or the email address above. My supervisor at Winchester University is

Dr Naomi Flynn, Senior Lecturer in Education, and she can be contacted on 01962 827474.

Yours sincerely,



Ms Olwen Wright

## Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

### Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: An exploration of non-specialist Teachers' subject knowledge of English grammar and its relationship with changes in policy and expectation of teachers at KS4.

Involvement in this research will be in three parts. The first will be to complete an audit of your grammatical awareness, which will form the basis for part of the discussion during the interview. The second and third parts involve an interview in which we will discuss your experiences of learning grammar and your current knowledge and confidence relating to assessing pupils' language.

Your involvement in this research is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Your identity will be completely concealed as pseudonyms will be used throughout the eventual thesis. Details of the audit and discussions will not be passed to the school.

The school in which you work plays no part in this research and neither does the school in which I work. My research is self-funded and is being undertaken on an entirely self-motivated basis.

Please tick the box below to give your consent to involvement in this research.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information regarding the research and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I am happy to be involved with this research.

Name:.....Signature:.....

Date: .....