

Title:

“A Crooked Mark” - An Examination of the Effectiveness of Using Authentic Materials in Teaching Apostrophe Use in an ELT Context.

Author: Deborah Mary Tobin

Award: MA in Applied Linguistics

University: Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

Supervisors: Dr. Joan O’Sullivan and Ms. Geraldine Mark

External Examiner: Professor Steve Walsh

Author’s Declaration:

- *I declare that I have read and adhered to the MIC Academic Integrity Policy (available at www.mic.ul.ie/academicintegrity).*
- *I hereby declare that this is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any other awards at this or at any other academic establishment. Where use has been made of the work of other people, it has been fully acknowledged and referenced.*
- *I agree that this work will be scanned using plagiarism detection software and held on a database.*
- *I understand that this dissertation will be available to MIC staff and students in paper or electronic form for viewing and possible research, subject to MIC’s Data Protection Policy, (available at www.mic.ul.ie/adminservices/icrm/Pages/default.aspx).*

Signed: 

Date: _August 26th, 2016_____

Submitted to Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, August 2016.

Abstract:

Author: Deborah Tobin

Title: “A Crooked Mark”- An Examination of the Effectiveness of Using Authentic Materials in Teaching Apostrophe Use in an ELT Context.

This thesis focuses on two types of teaching intervention, prescriptive and descriptive, to determine which type may be more beneficial to English language learners in learning correct apostrophe application. The role of authentic texts, defined by Morrow (1977: 13) as “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to carry a real message of some sort”, is also examined, especially their value as an aid to teaching correct apostrophe use. The study shows that the prescriptive manner in which the apostrophe is presented in learner textbooks and grammars is often at odds with the way in which it appears in real-life and authentic-text examples. The ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ phenomenon (Beal 2010), and misuse in genitive forms (Hook 1999) are examples of how everyday use contradicts prescriptive rules of use, causing confusion for students and teachers alike. Academic writing particularly demands high prescriptive punctuation awareness of both native and non-native university-level students, and presents challenges for both (Wray 1996; Al Fadda 2012). Thus this study aims to focus on inconsistency in apostrophe application. Three B2-level groups of students participated in a pre-test/post-test intervention study, to determine whether prescriptive or descriptive-type intervention would be of greater benefit to them in apostrophe use. Statistical analysis of pre/post-test scores for two of the groups found that there was no significant difference between the intervention types, hence one could not be said to be superior to the other. However, all three groups recorded difficulties with similar types of apostrophe use, including contracted and genitive singular forms. A questionnaire was also used to determine student attitudes towards various kinds of apostrophe errors, revealing contraction errors to be judged most harshly by the participants, yet demonstrating cross-nationality difficulties with contractions and genitive singular apostrophe use.

Word Count: 20,510 words.

Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my husband, Eamon, and two sons, Aaron Richard and Devon Mel, without whose love, understanding, words of support and endless patience this dream could not have been achieved. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for being there, even when I was absent during so much of the past year.

This is also for my mother and father, Janet and Ted, who have always been rocks of support and to whom I owe a debt of gratitude, and my grandmother, Dorothy, a model of strength and dignity.

Finally, this is for Richard, who will never be forgotten. You are always in my heart.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Joan O'Sullivan and Ms. Geraldine Mark, and to Dr. Deirdre Ryan, all of whom were unwavering in their support and advice throughout the composition of this thesis. Their generosity with their time and knowledge I will always be deeply grateful for.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1 Background and Rationale	9
1.1.1 Original Idea for Study.....	9
1.1.2 Results of the Students' School Survey	10
1.1.3 The Role of Authentic Texts in Promoting Authenticity in the L2 Lesson	11
1.1.4 The Role of Task-Based Learning in Authenticity	12
1.1.5 Four Criteria for Authenticity	13
1.1.6 Subsequent Issues Raised by the Students' Survey	14
1.2 Rationale of Thesis Study	15
1.2.1 Prescriptive Apostrophe Use.....	15
1.2.2 The Apostrophe in Academic English	17
1.2.3 The Apostrophe in Authentic Materials: Points for Investigation	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review	19
2.1 Authentic Materials.....	19
2.2 The Apostrophe	23
2.2.1 Definitions of the Apostrophe.....	23
2.2.2 The History and Evolution of the Apostrophe	24
2.2.3 The Apostrophe in a Modern Context.....	29
2.2.4 Erroneous Apostrophe Usage in Everyday Life.....	30
2.3 The Presentation of the Apostrophe in Learner Textbooks and Grammars.....	36
2.4 Studies Conducted on Learner Apostrophe Use	37
2.5 The Printers' Questionnaire	39
3.1 Choice of Methodology.....	41
3.2 Research Question.....	44
3.3 Research Design and Methodology	45
3.4 Ethical Considerations	47
3.5 The Models for the Intervention Study	47
3.6 Conducting the Intervention Study	50
4.1.1 Description of Test Content	56

4.1.2 Analysis and Results of Pre-Test/Post-Test	58
4.1.3 Raw Test Scores Analysis	59
4.1.4 Statistical Analysis	61
4.1.5 Error Types Made in Pre/Post-Test.....	62
4.2 Analysis of Student Questionnaires on Attitudes to Apostrophe Error	66
4.2.1 Description of Questionnaire Content.....	66
4.2.2 Breakdown of Student Responses to Questionnaire	68
4.2.3 Observations on the Student Questionnaires	75
4.3 The Limitations of the Study	78
5.1 Examples of Local Irregularities in Apostrophe Use.....	81
5.2 Authentic Materials and Impact on Native Speakers.....	82
5.3 The Argument for Corpus-Based Research	85
5.4 The Future of the Apostrophe ... or the Apostrophe's Future?	86
References	88
Appendices.....	94

List of Figures

- Figure 1 (p.24)** *A “crooked mark”- the apostrophe.*
- Figure 2 (p.31)** *Example of apostrophe “insecurity in usage”; correct application in an Irish surname, yet omission in the genitive.*
- Figure 3 (p.32)** *Examples of incorrect genitive apostrophe use in regular plural genitive forms in advertising.*
- Figures 4 / 5 (p.33)** *Examples of the ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ of a more permanent kind.*
- Figure 5 (p.34)** *Example of the ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ on a medical form.*

List of Tables

- Table 1 (p.54)** Table of non-randomised Control Group Pre-Test / Post-test Design.
- Table 2 (p.59)** Descriptive statistics for EG1, EG2 and the CG.
- Table 3 (p.60)** Pre/Post-test raw score distinctions.
- Table 4 (p.67)** Distribution of nationalities across EG1, EG2 and the CG in the questionnaire.
- Table 5 (p.67)** Breakdown of question types and numbers of questions in each category.
- Table 6 (p.71)** Mean scores out of 24 for the corrections in the students’ questionnaire.
- Table 7 (p.74)** Breakdown of marks deducted by EG1 cohort.
- Table 8 (p.74)** Breakdown of marks deducted by EG2 cohort.
- Table 9 (p.75)** Breakdown of marks deducted by the CG.

List of Charts

Chart 1 (p.60)	Pre/Post-test results for all three groups based on raw scores.
Chart 2 (p.64)	Error types made by all three groups in the pre-test.
Chart 3 (p.65)	Error types made by all three groups in the pre-test continued.
Chart 4 (p.65)	Error types made by all three groups in the post-test.
Chart 5 (p.66)	Error types made by all three groups in the post-test continued.
Chart 6 (p.71)	Breakdown of number and error type made by group in the student questionnaire.
Chart 7 (p.72)	Breakdown of number and error type made by group in the student questionnaire continued.
Chart 8 (Ap Q p.6)	Percentage breakdown of printers' responses to questions 1 and 2 in the questionnaire.
Chart 9 (Ap Q p.6)	Percentage breakdown of printers' responses to question 3.
Chart 10: (Ap Q p.7)	Breakdown of printers' responses to question 4.

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Pre /Post Test on the Apostrophe administered to EG1, EG2 and the CG.
Appendix B	Researcher's set of completed Pre / Post Test questions.
Appendix C	Questionnaire distributed to EG1, EG2 and the CG after their post test.
Appendix D	Prescriptive lesson intervention for EG1.
Appendix E	Photocopy of prescriptive rules given to EG1.
Appendix F	Photocopy of workbook exercise used with EG1.
Appendix G	Descriptive lesson intervention for EG2.
Appendix H	Worksheet used with EG2.

Appendix I	Magazines used with EG2.
Appendix J	Cover letters sent to printers.
Appendix K	The printers' questionnaire.
Appendix L	Consent form for participants in study in EG1, EG2 and the CG.
Appendix M	Information sheet for EG1.
Appendix N	Information sheet for EG2.
Appendix O	Information sheet for the CG.
Appendix P	Consent form for the school Director.
Appendix Q	Analysis of the printers' questionnaire.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

1.1.1 Original Idea for Study

The use of authentic materials basically stems from the desire to give learners ‘real’ language [...] a case of preparing learners for real communication via materials that relate to the situations that they might experience in the target language.

(Duda and Tyne 2010: 87)

It is the intention of this thesis to investigate the role of a certain type of authentic material, specifically authentic texts, in learner language, and to examine their value as an aid to teaching correct apostrophe use.

The idea originated at the researcher’s language school, where a survey conducted through 2015 produced 100 student feedback questionnaires, from which 50 were selected to act as a representation of the core student body. Feedback on areas such as social activities, student accommodation and general information provided during their course was collected.

Of greatest relevance, from a pedagogical viewpoint, was the feedback regarding the students’ language programmes. This section contained 10 questions in total, ranging from how well students felt their lessons had been planned, how clear they had found their teachers’ grammatical explanations and use of language in class, and the overall quality of their language programme, to the extent to which they felt their L2 had developed on completion of their course.

1.1.2 Results of the Students' School Survey

One question posed related to students' opinions on the range of 'realia' used in the classroom. A conscious decision had been taken at management level two years previously to encourage greater teacher engagement with and use of realia, in order to make language learning "as real to life as possible" (Honan and Sheahan 2015). Hence this question was to gain an insight as to whether students felt that realia were being actively used.

It was of significance that in the language school student survey, while 84% of students found the use of realia to be either very good or good, 12% found their use to be only average, with 2% reporting a poor use. Therefore the school stated one of its primary objectives for 2016 to be a vigorous promotion of the use of realia in the classroom, as a negotiated syllabus is in line with best pedagogical practice for any language school catering for adult learners.

A follow-up list of questions devised in 2016 for a student focus group included a shift in focus from the narrower realia to the broader authentic materials, such as "What types of authentic materials do you think are beneficial towards your learning in the classroom?" and "In your opinion, are there enough authentic materials being used?" The school therefore pledged a commitment to continue encouraging its teachers not only in the active use of realia, which may be defined as "objects from real-life used in classroom instruction, by educators, to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real-life situations" (Harmer 2007: 177) but also in the broader use of authentic materials.

While the use of realia in the classroom would traditionally have included concrete resources, permitting “tactile and multi-dimensional connection between learned material and the object of the lesson,” technology has now impacted upon this by permitting a virtual realia option (ibid). It may be said that the main purpose of realia in a classroom is to bring a certain *authenticity* to the language lesson for the learner.

It is not the intention of this study, however, to investigate realia as a teaching resource, but rather to examine their relationship to the broader notion of authenticity. The promotion of authenticity in the language classroom through, as Mishan (2005: 25-6) states, the “linguistically rich, culturally faithful and potentially emotive input” to be found in *authentic texts*, is what concerns the focus of this thesis, and this is what shall now be examined further.

1.1.3 The Role of Authentic Texts in Promoting Authenticity in the L2 Lesson

Rahman (2014: 209) endorses the active use of authentic texts, as they “lead the learners to discover rules, their usual and routine application and most importantly their deviant, though accepted use as well.” This ‘deviant use’ aspect is of particular significance to this thesis, as it is the ‘deviant use’ of the apostrophe, as presented in everyday life text examples, that will be explored in the Literature Review (see Section 2.2.4).

Recognition of the benefit of using authentic texts in pedagogy and language teaching is outlined as far back as the turn of the 19th century by Henry Sweet, regarded as one of the first linguists:

The great advantage of natural, idiomatic texts over artificial ‘methods’ or ‘series’ is that they do justice to every feature of the language.

(Sweet 1899 in Gilmore 2008: 67)

Furthermore, authenticity in texts is defined by Morrow in the following way:

An authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort.

(Morrow 1977: 13)

However, the debate over the role of authenticity, and what exactly it means for something to be authentic, has become in Gilmore's words, "increasingly sophisticated and complex" (Gilmore 2008: 68). Thus an examination of different interpretations can be helpful, some of which shall now be explored.

1.1.4 The Role of Task-Based Learning in Authenticity

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has played a prominent role in the promotion of authentic texts in the language classroom, as a means of encouraging active learner language production. Ellis gives an overview of what TBLT actually entails, outlining that it is firstly a meaning-centred methodology, providing an authentic, purposeful and intentional background for comprehending and using language which is encouraging for EFL learners (Ellis 2003).

Prahbu outlined examples of classroom tasks which bring authenticity to the language classroom, through the use of authentic texts in the form of train timetables (Prahbu 1987: 32-33). Learners were required, through active consultation of train timetables given to them in their classroom setting, to negotiate departure and arrival times of trains and types of train

(e.g. whether the train was non-stop, or an overnight sleeper). Prahbu believed that task-based learning of this nature, and authentic tasks that would be beneficial in a real-life context (i.e. catching a train), were an integral part of second language acquisition, with “teacher-class negotiation [being] both feasible and desirable” (Prahbu 1987: 24). More importantly, he felt that pedagogy needed primarily to be concerned with “creating conditions for coping with meaning in the classroom” (Prahbu 1987: 2), and that “language ability develops in direct relation to communicational effort” (Prahbu 1987: 5). Guariento and Morley (2001) raise a similar issue about the necessity of task relevance to everyday language. Windeatt (1981 in Anderson and Lynch 1988: 88) wonders when it is that, in real-life, “people listen to the news with the purpose of noting down how many items are covered?” whilst Guariento and Morley posit that authenticity lies not only in the genuineness of text, “but has much to do with the notion of task” (2001: 349). This belief is furthered by Ellis (1990: 195) who believes that “real operating conditions” are essential if learners are to gain control over linguistic knowledge when performing in language activities that focus on meaning.

1.1.5 Four Criteria for Authenticity

It is with this in mind that Guariento and Morley offer four criteria for consideration when regarding task authenticity: these are namely authenticity through “a genuine purpose,” authenticity through “real world targets,” authenticity through “classroom interaction” and authenticity through “engagement” (2001: 350-1).

The first criterion of “genuine purpose” is of crucial importance, the belief being that for real communication to occur, language must be used for a real reason and it is imperative that classroom tasks “replicate the process of communication in the real world”. They expand on this in the second criterion, claiming that a task is authentic if “it has a clear relationship with real-world needs,” such as renting an apartment, or taking lecture notes (Guariento and Morley 2001: 350). Fanselow (1982: 180) also illustrates this point when he questions the authenticity of a Chinese chef being taught the Present Continuous tense to accurately describe what he is doing at the moment, when in reality, more useful language for the chef may involve taking a telephone order or an inventory of kitchen stock. In classroom interaction, Guariento and Morley highlight the fact that learners must make choices and negotiate, and they feel that “it is this very process of negotiation which is authentic” (2001: 350). However, it is the final criterion of engagement which they concur to be the most critical one; unless a learner is suitably engaged by the task presented to him or her, “genuinely interested in its topic and its purpose” and understands the real relevance of it, the other types of authenticity “may count for very little” (Guariento and Morley 2001: 350-1).

1.1.6 Subsequent Issues Raised by the Students’ Survey

The students in the feedback survey stated a clear preference for the use of authentic materials and naturally-occurring language in their classes. Nevertheless, while learners often prefer native-speaker models, feel more motivated by them and believe these models communicate something more interesting rather than simply highlighting target language, these same models can actually be de-motivating for students if the language is inaccessible (Timmis

2002). Mishan (2005) raises the point that what may be authentic, absorbing or even relevant for one learner may simply not be for another, while Widdowson (1998) uses a rather extreme example of a newspaper article with very idiomatic, low frequency lexis to emphasize that language which is authentic for native speakers often cannot possibly be so for learners. A linguistic parallel universe seems to exist, one in which the native speaker resides with the language they use, the other where the learner receives a different type of language detached from native-speaker norms. (Mark 2015).

Peacock asks whether the fact that a text is authentic automatically makes it the best kind for the learner. He believes many authors attest to the superiority of authentic texts over inauthentic ones, yet in his experience these notions are rarely, if ever, tested (Peacock 1997: 144-5). When this question is extended to learner grammar, the issue of whether learner textbooks present and reflect natural, native grammar arises. How the apostrophe is presented in learner textbooks and grammars (typically in a manner which tends to be prescriptive), contrasted with how it appears in both authentic texts and real-life situations, is a case in point. This will be elaborated upon in the Literature Review (see Section 2.3).

1.2 Rationale of Thesis Study

1.2.1 Prescriptive Apostrophe Use

The rationale behind investigating this particular grammar point is that as it is a piece of punctuation, prescriptive rules are generally required by learners on its correct application in

contracted and possessive forms in English, in both the singular and plural genitive. It is also considered by other language speakers to be a characteristic feature of English, which makes it distinct from other languages, “a sign of prestige, style and modernity” (Ross 1997: 33). Therefore, it may be argued that for many learners, the apostrophe is uniquely associated with the English language in its multiple uses. In authentic texts, non-standard apostrophe usage, which by prescriptive standards would be considered misuse, is apparent in everyday examples such as advertising, where a phenomenon known as “the greengrocer’s apostrophe” exists (Beal 2010: 102), meaning apostrophes are inserted incorrectly into plural nouns (e.g. banana’s 50p per kilo). Precise data on the frequency of misuse in this regard is difficult to source; however, reference was made to the “ubiquitous greengrocer’s apostrophe” as early as 1970 (Beal 2010: 58).

It is this researcher’s contention that while this is problematic for native speakers, it is of immense concern for teachers trying to choose authentic materials to use in class, as they run the risk of exposing students not only to non-standard but incorrect English forms, by prescriptive standards. This may cause learners confusion and frustration, thus posing a pedagogical difficulty, if indeed the exposure to authentic non-standard examples has a negative effect.

1.2.2 The Apostrophe in Academic English

Although it is arguably of importance for General English students to understand prescriptively correct apostrophe application, of perhaps more concern is the need of Academic English (EAP) students, particularly those engaged in study for the IELTS examination. Most universities require a minimum IELTS Band Score 6-6.5 for entry to tertiary level education. It has been this researcher's observation that in the Reading and Listening sections of the IELTS exam, Band 5.5 has proved to be a very difficult level for certain students to rise above, particularly in Listening, as a range of five marks exists (the only band to have such a wide range in the Listening section of the exam). Hence one mark has been the crucial difference between a Band 5.5 and a coveted Band 6 during in-house Progress Assessments. Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) more significantly describe Band 6 as a threshold level, where candidates re-taking the IELTS exam had less than a 50% chance of increasing their previous overall score. On more than one occasion in this researcher's experience, a misplaced or omitted apostrophe has cost candidates this precious mark.

Three specific questions from an IELTS book of past examination papers each include examples of apostrophe use for possession: "two weeks' / a fortnight's/ 14 days' time" as acceptable options in one example, all requiring the apostrophe. In two other examples, "ladies' fans" and "Students' Union" appear (Cambridge IELTS Examination Papers 2002: 149-157). This exemplifies the necessity for both Academic and General IELTS candidates to be aware of how the apostrophe is correctly, prescriptively applied in written English, as both groups sit the same listening exam. If the apostrophe is omitted, the mark is not and cannot be

awarded by an examiner correcting a paper. The answer keys for each clearly state: “Please note! Correct spelling needed in all answers,” which, the above examples fully indicate, also includes punctuation, in each case the apostrophe in possessive forms (ibid).

1.2.3 The Apostrophe in Authentic Materials: Points for Investigation

If therefore authentic materials are to be offered on curricula, in response to student requests for same, the apostrophe and its presence in real-life materials needs to be examined closely, and the impact that its potential misuse might have on learner language acquisition is worth investigating. The prescriptive manner in which it is presented in learner texts, compared with its actual or descriptive appearance in real-life texts, merits further analysis.

An earlier but separate study conducted by the researcher of printers in the Limerick City area investigated the attitudes and experiences of printers towards apostrophe use in print media, by means of a questionnaire (Tobin 2016). The results of this survey (see Section 2.5 and Appendix Q) prompted the focus of this thesis, on how the apostrophe is commonly presented in authentic texts, and any subsequent impact this may have upon learners.

To conclude, it is this researcher’s contention that the nature of error which learners are more prone to making in apostrophe use lies in possessive forms rather than with contractions or plural noun forms ending in -s, and more likely with possessive plural forms rather than possessive singular forms. It is uncertain whether the phenomenon known as ‘the greengrocer’s apostrophe’ applies to learner language at this point in the study, but this will be investigated later in the Analysis of Data (Chapter 4).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A good literature review is defined by Leedy and Ormrod (2015:70) as being one which “*evaluates, organizes and synthesizes what others have done*” (Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 85). They advocate an inverted pyramid approach (Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 86) which this literature review will be taking, focusing firstly on a broad-end exploration of authentic materials and the apostrophe, gradually tapering down toward more specific details on each area.

Three research areas are particularly key to this study: the use of authentic materials to augment learner language acquisition and overall learning experience, the evolution of the apostrophe throughout the history of the English language to its present-day state of existence, and the prescriptive presentation of the apostrophe in learner textbooks and grammars. An appropriate starting point is therefore with an examination of authentic materials.

2.1 Authentic Materials

Gilmore (2008) suggests the primary issue at stake for a teacher when choosing and using classroom materials is what it is that the teacher is trying to achieve by their use, and in response he offers a simple, single explanation: “communicatively competent learners” (Gilmore 2008: 72). He explains that it was the advent of Communicative Language Teaching which largely paved the way for increased use of authentic materials such as authentic texts, as they “were valued for the ideas they were communicating rather than the linguistic forms they illustrated” (Gilmore 2008: 68).

Opinion would nonetheless appear to be divided as to the usefulness of such materials in a language classroom context. An ongoing debate divides detractors, who believe that authentic texts present too much focus on native speaker levels of English beyond what learners can hope to aspire to (Alptekin 2002; MacDonald et al 2006), from proponents, who feel that authentic texts, coupled with the activities and tasks built around their classroom application, can in fact enhance the learning experience, even at lower levels (Prahbu 1987; Guariento and Morley 2001). For instance, MacDonald suggests that use of authentic materials can lead to “a poverty of language” in certain cases (2006: 254) and Peacock (1997) feels they can serve to de-motivate learners at worst, or provide little motivation at best.

On the other hand, in his five-year study of task-based teaching and learning using authentic materials (known as the Bangalore Project), Prahbu found classroom tasks and the interaction prompted by them to be “a powerful support to the learner’s effort to infer meaning [and] the acquisition of target language resources” (Prahbu 1987: 30). He emphasises what he sees as an essential strength of authentic materials when used in conjunction with classroom tasks, in creating “a need to communicate” (ibid), and he is convinced that even at beginner level, a learner is not excluded from or immune to this need to communicate:

When focused on communication, they are able to deploy non-linguistic resources and [...] not only achieve some degree of communication but, in the process, some new resources, however small, in the target language.

(Prahbu 1987: 30)

Guariento and Morley (2001) also mention the low-level learner, and feel that a simplification of texts is justified to “give the learner the feeling that he or she is learning the ‘real’

language” (Guariento and Morley 2001: 347). They also concur that even at such low levels, there is some scope for genuine student input in the teaching-learning process and that relatively basic pedagogic tasks using authentic materials with such learners can still be deemed to be authentic.

However, they also stress the need for such texts to be chosen very carefully, for “lexical and syntactic simplicity and/or content familiarity/predictability” (ibid: 348) and in truth, largely recommend the use of authentic texts for post-intermediate levels. They do acknowledge, however, that partial comprehension of a text is adequate for learners, and total understanding is not held to be essential, on the basis that even native speakers can typically operate with less than total comprehension (ibid).

Counter to Guariento and Morley are Prabhu (1987) and Willis (1996), who are both of the opinion that controlling for difficulty in authentic texts means varying the task itself, whilst preserving the text in its original, presumably authentic form. Interestingly, Gilmore (2008) holds the view that neither text nor task is more significant than the other; he feels that “all levels of learner can cope with authentic materials if the texts and tasks are carefully selected” (Gilmore 2008: 88). Thus in Gilmore’s view, both text and task hold equal importance in classroom practice.

It has been argued that the authenticity of a text may be measured according to how the learner responds to or engages with the text (Mishan 2005; Widdowson 1978). Widdowson for example makes a distinction between “genuineness,” where texts are viewed in isolation of a classroom context, and “authenticity,” where, not having been originally designed and

modified or simplified for learners, texts are used in a pedagogical context, and learners' responses to them can be observed:

Genuineness is characteristic of the [text] passage itself and is an absolute quality. Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response.

(Widdowson 1978: 80)

This focus on materials is given further support by Mishan (2005) who, along with the necessity for a materials-focused approach, advocates an authentic approach that is communicative and humanistic. Gilmore (2008) would support such a view, feeling that the success of any chosen authentic materials would largely depend on how appropriate they are for the subjects and the tasks selected for their application, and the teacher's effectiveness in mediating between these materials and the learners (Gilmore 2008: 84).

The use of authentic materials can also be viewed as a source of "rich input" enabling the learner to access natural vocabulary patterns (Rahman 2014; Mishan 2005: 41). Gilmore (2008) would particularly hold the view that exposure to such rich input allows each learner to "take different things from the lesson to suit their own particular interlanguage development" (Gilmore 2008: 95) which, taking apostrophe application into account, suggests different learners have different needs (see Section 1.2.2). He continues by attributing a "superiority" to authentic materials, and their richness of input (Gilmore 2008: 98), which he feels would be "more likely to cater to the different stages of development and individual differences that exist within any classroom population". This is of key significance to an EFL teacher, who has learners with a range of motivations from integrative to

instrumental. The instrumental motivation of achieving a particular IELTS Band score (see Section 1.2.2) also resonates closely with Gilmore's view.

A strong advocate of the use of authentic materials, Rahman nonetheless stresses the need for tasks to be designed "that are linked with actual communicative needs" (Rahman 2014: 212). At the heart of this is the fact that, as Bygate states (Bygate et al 2001: 7), "a learner invests a task with a personal importance," and teachers should always acknowledge this when choosing and using authentic materials. If teachers thus acknowledge that learner needs and input are real, it could be argued that the choice of authentic texts must cater to such needs. If a learner has the added pressure of acquiring a particular test score, which a feature within authentic texts has the potential to inversely impact upon (i.e. the apostrophe), it is essential to explore this feature in depth, which shall now be done in the following sub-sections.

2.2 The Apostrophe

2.2.1 Definitions of the Apostrophe

Cavella and Kernodle (2003: 1) define the word 'apostrophe' as originating from the Greek "apostrophein," meaning "to turn away." It was a rhetorical device whereby a speaker quite literally turned away from the audience to address another person, real or imaginary, while facing in a different direction. Thus the term evolved to express "the concept of something missing" (ibid). This definition is in keeping with one of Allen's (2000) interpretations of the word 'apostrophe':

The rhetorical addressing of a person, usually absent, or a personified thing, as in 'O death, where is thy sting?'

(Allen 2000: 60)

It is, however, Allen's main definition of the apostrophe which is central to this thesis, that of "a punctuation mark, used to indicate the omission of letters or figures, [or] the possessive case" (ibid). As a dictionary entry, this paints a rather impartial image of what is essentially a piece of punctuation, fulfilling certain specific, grammatical functions, "usually seen but not heard ... a device for the eye rather than for the ear" (Sklar 1976: 175). Sklar outlines this further by linking it to other punctuation marks like the hyphen, the asterisk or the quotation mark, "which have no reflex in the spoken language" (ibid).

It is nevertheless apparent that the humble apostrophe has had "a remarkable and somewhat convoluted history" (Cavella and Kernodle 2003: 1). Partridge (1969 in Austin 1989: 4) describes the use of the apostrophe in the possessive genitive 's' as "a simple flexional device that took three hundred years to evolve", indicating that it has had something of an arduous journey in its evolution through the English language; "a long and confused history" (Crystal 1995: 203) and a "curious and unstable history" (Little 1986). Furthermore, labels such as "aberrant" (Crystal 1995: 203), "abnegated" (Barfoot 1991: 134), "crooked" (Sklar 1976) and "ambivalent" (Little 1986) have been levelled at the apostrophe, with Hook (1999: 42) referring to it as "a troublesome symbol."

The question this study now wishes to pose is whether such denigration of this little piece of punctuation is truly merited.

2.2.2 The History and Evolution of the Apostrophe



Figure 1: A "crooked mark" – the apostrophe. (Source: www.likelihoodofconfusion.com).

In order to understand the present position of the apostrophe in English, it would be useful to examine its origins and historical context.

There is a general consensus that the apostrophe was imported into written English from the French language in the sixteenth century (Blake 1996; Sklar 1976; Cavella and Kernodle 2003; Crystal 1995), although Little (1986) suggests that the mark was introduced into English during the same epoch via post-medieval Latin, where it had been used to indicate that a word had been “shortened or abbreviated in some way” (Little 1986: 15). Austin (1989) outlines the fact that Old English (449-1100 A.D.) showed “clear, inflected differences between genitive and plural cases” (Austin 1989: 5) while Blake indicates that in similar Old English, punctuation was generally used in “an erratic way” which seemed to be more rhetorical than grammatical in function (Blake 1996: 101). As examples of this, Blake mentions interchangeable use of the full stop and semi-colon, while the “virgule” (i.e. the forward slash) fulfilled “where a pause in reading should occur” (Blake 1996: 161-2). It was not until the early fifteenth century that Culpeper (2005: 87) suggests “the standardisation of written English gets under way.” He furthers this by describing the sixteenth century’s standardisation of English as “intense”, being “more or less complete” by the eighteenth century (Culpeper 2005: 87). Austin concurs with this and expands even more by attributing three fifteenth-century developments with facilitating “the advent of both the apostrophe and the genitive apostrophe” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: rapid phonetic changes in the English language at this time, the introduction of printing by William Caxton into Britain (circa 1496), and the development of the Renaissance with input from the Italian language (Austin 1989: 12-15). Blake suggests that the sixteenth century was a time of “experimental

usage” of punctuation (Blake 1996: 207) and “consistency was not attained” (ibid).

Interestingly, the caret (^) was used at this time to indicate omission of letters.

A reverence for Latin, and the tendency of this language towards rhetoric, is what Blake suggests influenced the printed word in English until the mid 1600s, with punctuation used for dramatic effect in oral delivery (Blake 1996). It was Latin’s subsequent fall from grace among Puritan and post-Restoration writers, who preferred the more “transparent and clear” language of rational discourse to rhetoric, which created a new importance and increased need for punctuation (Blake 1996: 242). To further this point, Carey (1955) cites the essayist and dramatist Joseph Addison, in a contribution to *The Spectator*, No. 135 dated 4 August 1711:

The same natural Aversion to Loquacity has of late Years made a very considerable Alteration in our language.

(Addison 1711 in Carey 1955: 8-9)

It is nevertheless worth noting that, as Culpeper (2005: 87) reminds us, “sometimes the progress of standardisation is less than smooth,” with indecision and lack of consensus on the use of the apostrophe seeming to prevail right through to the nineteenth century (Sklar 1976: 175; Beal 2009: 44; Crystal 1995; Hook 1999: 44).

Cavella and Kernodle indicate that initially, English printers used the apostrophe in the sixteenth century to demonstrate “the elision of a vowel,” or the fact that the vowel sound had been “omitted, assimilated or slurred in pronunciation,” as in “th’ inevitable end.” (Cavella and Kernodle 2003: 2). Little (1986: 15) gives further examples of such elision in “o’er” for ‘over’ and “wher’s” for ‘where is.’ Little (1986: 15) indicates that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the apostrophe marked omission in “a wide range of forms”

especially in past simple tense verbs where the vowel was not pronounced as the separate syllable /id/, such as “lov’d,” “forc’d,” and “teem’d.”

Hook (1999: 44) goes so far as to dismiss the apostrophe as “a mere printer’s gimmick, doubtless born of a mistaken notion that the genitive ending was a contraction of his.” By this he means that the early Middle English genitive -es ending, which was often spelled and pronounced “-ies” or “-ys,” was confused as early as the thirteenth century with “his” (i.e. the possessive form of ‘he’) (Hook 1999: 44). Examples offered to illustrate this include “the count his galley” or “my sister her watch.” Hook suggests, therefore, that the apostrophe was ultimately a “compromise” to indicate the missing ‘e’ in the genitive -es ending, or the hi-part of the possessive indicator ‘his’, which also transferred to ‘her.’ (Hook 1999; Sklar 1976). It would seem that consistent use of the genitive singular form was recorded by the end of the seventeenth century, with Shakespeare’s Fourth Folio of Works (1685) cited as demonstrating “consistent genitive singular apostrophe use” (Sklar 1976).

Yet rules governing apostrophe use appear to have remained sketchy and inconsistent throughout this time. Sklar makes mention of the two facts that “its position was not securely established as a genitive marker” in the seventeenth century (Sklar 1976: 176) and that eighteenth century grammarians, in this Age of Reason “parsed sentences on Latin models” and used “the periphrastic *-of* construction” for the genitive case (ibid). Inconsistencies prevailed through the first half of the eighteenth century, with apostrophe use restricted to possessive singular forms, the same form confusingly being suggested for both singular and plural forms at one stage (Greenwood 1711 in Sklar 1976). Another claim made by Buchanan (1762 in Sklar 1976) was that “Plurals ending in -s have no genitives,” while Luckombe (1771: ibid) felt that the apostrophe should be used for the nominative of plural nouns (e.g.

“Comma’s are used to distinguish ...”) setting a historic precedent for use of the apostrophe which prevails to this day, controversially, as “the greengrocer’s apostrophe” (Barber 1993: 200).

Seemingly, the first eighteenth century grammarian acknowledged as having stated a clear apostrophe rule for both singular and plural constructions, in the modern sense, was Joseph Priestly:

The Genitive case [...] is formed by adding [s] with an apostrophe before it to the nominative; as in Solomon’s wisdom; The Men’s wit; Venus’s beauty; or the apostrophe only in the plural number when the nominative ends in [s] as , the Stationers’ arms.

(Priestly 1761 in Sklar 1976: 179)

Priestly was not, however, without his critics, including Lowth (1763) and Buchanan (1767) (both in Sklar 1976), grammarian contemporaries who disagreed with him. Little (1986: 15) reveals that “variation persisted well into the eighteenth century as grammarians couldn’t agree”, although Austin (1989: 26) highlights that by the final decade of the eighteenth century, the singular genitive apostrophe is described “in virtually its modern form.”(Austin1989: 26). Little (1986) summarises this by stating it took until the end of the nineteenth century before agreement was finally reached between grammarians and printers as to the possessive singular and plural, and contraction uses of the apostrophe in English. He nonetheless finishes on an ominous note:

Agreement about the conventions detailing the use of the apostrophe seemed to erode almost as soon as it was reached.

(Little 1986: 16)

It is on this note that a leap forward to an examination of the apostrophe in its present day state of use is appropriate.

2.2.3 The Apostrophe in a Modern Context

The apostrophe belongs to the overall English punctuation system (Hook 1999), enjoying a status with other punctuation marks whose purposes are “the clear representation of speech in standard orthography and the reduction of ambiguity” (Hook 1999: 42). Steve Jenner, representing ‘The Plain English Campaign’ in *The Guardian* newspaper interview three years ago, succinctly states:

The whole purpose of punctuation is to make language easier to understand.

(Jenner in Morris 2013)

Although it also exists in a modern context in languages such as Catalan, French and Italian, Ross (1997), speaking about his own personal observations made as an English native-speaker living in Milan, describes a “plethora of English signs” existing in the Milan neighbourhood in which he was residing, “up to fifty percent on some blocks” by his calculations (Ross 1997: 31). His view is that the apostrophe ‘s’ is often regarded by foreigners as “fashionable” and “esoterically English,” with the use of Anglicised possessive forms on shop fronts, such as “Paul’s Bar” or “Peter’s Shoes,” considered to be “particularly flash” (Ross 1997: 32). Beal (2010) mentions the fact that the best-selling non-fiction book of 2003 was a guide to punctuation, written by Lynn Truss, entitled “Eats, Shoots and Leaves,” which goes some way to indicating that there is an interest among the general public in at least reading about how the English punctuation system works. With an entire chapter

dedicated to “The Tractable Apostrophe,” (Truss 2003:35-67) it can be said that the apostrophe has had, as a result of the success of this guide, a reasonable degree of media exposure in the past two decades.

Unfortunately, whilst prescriptive rules now exist, owing to compromises made by nineteenth century grammarians on rules for its use in contractions and possessive forms, the misuse of the apostrophe continues to be prevalent in modern, everyday English (Beal 2010; Hook 1999). Hook cites Crystal (1992: 205 in Hook 1999: 42) as stating:

Standard primary use of the apostrophe is as a mark of grammatical possession or close relationships. Other uses include the plural formation of some figures and letters and the omission of one or more letters from a word or phrase.

(Crystal 1992 in Hook 1999: 42)

So far, so clear, one could argue; this explanation would appear to offer straightforward enough guidelines for written English. Yet Hook laments the fact that misuse of the apostrophe is prevalent and uncovers “so many odd uses [...] by both descriptive and prescriptive criteria” (Hook 1999: 42). It seems, therefore, that its application is anything but straightforward. One could ask at this point exactly what sort of “odd uses” Hook might be referring to, and these are now worth examining.

2.2.4 Erroneous Apostrophe Usage in Everyday Life

It is doubtless that the apostrophe finds itself used in a variety of manners, many of which lie outside the boundary of the strictly prescriptive rules on its application; as Sklar says, “it is regularly embarrassed in public places” (Sklar 1976: 175).

Prescriptive rules suggest that for the expression of singular possessive forms of regular nouns, (e.g. boy) and for irregular plural nouns not ending in ‘s’ (e.g. children), an apostrophe is added before the ‘s’ ending (the boy’s bicycle, the children’s playground). For possessive forms of regular plural nouns, an apostrophe is added after the ‘s’ ending (the boys’ bicycles) (Eastwood 1992: 166). This possessive form extends to time expressions (last week’s concert, in two months’ time) (ibid). The apostrophe also denotes contracted forms of words, being inserted at the point where letters have been omitted (I’ll = I will, we’d = we would or had). (Eastwood 1992: 52). Truss (2003) gives further examples of such omission: in dates (‘the summer of ’68’), in longer words (‘Jo’burg’ for ‘Johannesburg’), in Irish surnames (‘O’Neill’, ‘O’Casey’) and non-standard British English regional dialects such as Cockney, as well as highlighting that ‘its’ is used for possession, while ‘it’s’ is a contracted form of ‘it is’ (Truss 2003: 49-52).



Figure 2: Example of apostrophe “insecurity in usage”: correct application in an Irish surname, yet omission in the genitive (Source: Researcher’s own photo).

Despite these rules, examples such as “Taxi’s stop” and “Bus’ across the street” are but a few of what Hook offers as “misstimuli” and frequent examples of errors occurring in the various

print media (Hook 1999: 49), while Truss offers “It need’nt be a pane” on a van advertising discounted glass, and “ The Peoples Princess’ ” on a memorial mug (Truss 2003: 52). To compound the situation, Truss gives an example from a BBC website advertising a grammar course for children, which promises to examine “nouns and apostrophe’s!” (2003: 50). Little (1986) raises similar concerns, and wonders about learners being “bombarded with visual stimuli which often only give them confusing evidence” (Little 1986: 17). It is extremely problematic for the English language learner, who finds himself or herself immersed in authentic, everyday life examples of apostrophe use and ends up, in Sklar’s words, so “understandably confused” that it is inevitable they will “alternately abuse [the apostrophe], and feel abused by it” (Sklar 1976: 175). Battistella (1999:97-8) justifies Sklar’s sentiments in raising the valid issue that somehow learners might “assume that apostrophes would be used correctly by corporate authorities.”

Perhaps the most striking example of apostrophe misuse is to be found in the phenomenon of what has come to be commonly known as “the greengrocer’s apostrophe,” a “bête noir of popular prescriptivism” (Beal 2010: 57), involving the insertion of an apostrophe in plural nominative and accusative nouns which have no possessive reference.



Figure3: Examples of incorrect genitive apostrophe use in advertising. (Source: Kindergym, Delta Sports Dome, Limerick).

Although Beal cites Alford from the nineteenth century (1864 in Beal 2010: 60) as having seen “an omnibus with RAILWAY STATION’S painted in emblazonry on its side,” being indignant about the presence of “the intruder” (i.e. the apostrophe), it is not until the mid-twentieth century that *Fowler’s Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, in 1965, suggests that “to insert an apostrophe in the plural of an ordinary noun is a fatuous vulgarism” (Beal 2010: 60). This is lent further credence by Waterhouse (1991) who observes:

Greengrocers, for some reason, are extremely generous with their apostrophe - banana’s, tomatoe’s (or tom’s), orange’s, etc. Perhaps these come over in crates of fruit, like exotic spiders.

(Waterhouse 1991 in Beal 2010: 58)



Figure 4



Figure 5

Figures 4 and 5: Examples of the 'greengrocer's apostrophe' of a more permanent kind.

(Sources :<https://www.offthemapattoo.com> ; <https://www.googlesearch.ie>)

If yes, please list medication separately

Is your child allergic to any substance eg. Medicine's, Material's or Foods YE

Has your child ever had a bad reaction to a Local or General Anaesthetic YI

Does your child have communication issues involving any of the following;
 Understanding _____ Vision _____ Hearing _____ Speech _____ Y

Does your child have Autism Y

Does your child have Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder Y

Does your child have a bleeding disorder

Figure 6: Example of the 'greengrocer's apostrophe' on a medical form. (Source: HSE).

Even more mysterious is the total absence of an apostrophe when it should be present. Truss (2003: 51) offers "Citizens Advice Bureau," "mens toilets" and "Britains Biggest Junction (Clapham)" as examples of where she feels an apostrophe is wrongly omitted.

In a paper examining the synthetic genitive (i.e. the possessive 's' as in "Bell's Palsy" or "Down's Syndrome") and the analytic genitive (i.e. using 'of' to express possession as in "the organ of Corti") in medical eponyms, Dirckx (2001) proposes a strong case in defence of the continued use of the synthetic genitive. He argues that while "eponyms are more prevalent in the terminology of medicine than in any other discipline," with synthetic genitives the most numerous in medical English until recently, the language has recently been undergoing a change, resulting in variants such as "Bell Palsy," "Down Syndrome," "the Krebs Cycle," and "addisonian anemia," which concerns him. He believes the apostrophe to be "as indispensable in writing English as the dot on the (letter) 'i'," illustrating this further by saying that we can capitalise the letter 'i' to 'I', thus dispensing of the dot, but "omitting the apostrophe, either in

lower case or capitals, changes ‘he’ll’ to ‘hell’ and ‘who’re’ to ‘whore’” (Dirckx 2001: 15). Thus the dilemma of when to use ‘s’ + *a noun phrase*, as against the *of* + *a noun phrase* construction can also carry over to a non-medical context.

This constant demonstration of non-standard apostrophe usage in plural nominative and accusative nouns, in genitive forms and in contractions (Beal 2010; Truss 2003; Hook 1999; Ross 1997) or its total absence when prescriptively required (Dirckx 2001, Truss 2003) has not only led to constant condemnation of the apostrophe’s very existence, but also to calls for its total removal from the language (Dirckx 2001; Sklar 1976; Ross 1997).

Such “controversy” and “emotionalism” surrounding the apostrophe are surprising to Cavella and Kernodle, who defend this punctuation mark: “Surely the apostrophe intends no harm?” (2003: 1). *The Guardian* newspaper reports on a local authority in Devon which planned to “do away with [apostrophes] altogether [...] to avoid confusion” in signs for new street names, only to be met with “howls of condemnation from champions of plain English, fans of grammar and politicians” (Morris 2013). Interviewed in the same newspaper article, an Exeter University lecturer in English literature expresses concern about the removal of apostrophes from everyday life examples, as she feels that the best way to teach about punctuation “is to show practical examples of it” (Harris in Morris 2013), while Jenner, equally concerned, states that children are learning punctuation use at school “only to see it not being used correctly on street signs” (Jenner: *ibid*).

These contradictions which exist between use and usage, or prescriptive as opposed to descriptive presentation of the apostrophe in authentic language, pose enormous challenges for learners, as clearly even native speakers are in disagreement as to how to use it. It would

therefore be of interest to examine what kind of prescriptive exposure learners receive in English language textbooks and grammars on apostrophe use.

2.3 The Presentation of the Apostrophe in Learner Textbooks and Grammars

Textbook language presented to students often falls short of authenticity, in that there is a “substantial mismatch” between what is presented to learners as target language in the classroom, and the actual language they encounter outside it. (Yule 1995: 18).

Prescriptive rules and exercises to practise these rules are offered in a range of lower-level student textbooks (i.e. A1 – A2) (Latham-Koenig et al, 2012; Soars and Soars, 2011; Kay et al, 2002, 2007), while its presentation and the explanation of its use appears to decline in higher level textbooks. This could be because the Independent User (B1 and B2) and Proficient User (C1 and C2) CEFR descriptors of these levels suggest learners can take greater responsibility for their own learning and understanding of how the apostrophe works prescriptively in English. Grammars provide a detailed explanation of these uses for higher-level (i.e. B2-C2) students (Swan 1980: 466-467; Hewings 1999 : 106-107; Carter et al 2011: 101, 121-122) and students aiming to enter university, (Murphy 2009; the UefAP website 2016). Carter and McCarthy (2006) offer an extremely comprehensive explanation of the apostrophe for use in possession, contraction and “special plurals” (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 361, 383, 386, 848).

2.4 Studies Conducted on Learner Apostrophe Use

Despite its prescriptive presentation to students, confusion remains over apostrophe application amongst native and non-native speaking learners alike (Al Fadda 2012; Lasota 2008; Wray 1996; Bryant et al 1997; Garrett and Austin 1993). Austin describes this concisely as “an insecurity in usage” (Austin 1989). To give some examples, Al Fadda’s study of 50 university-level students from non-Anglicized, predominantly Asian linguistic and cultural backgrounds, found that to master academic writing, certain rules must be followed, “including punctuation guidelines,” among which was listed apostrophe use (Al Fadda 2012: 124). Part of the difficulty here was that the lecturers of these students, whilst acknowledging the need to offer students assistance and advice on how to improve their written academic English, “regarded themselves as unclear about what the advice should be” (Arkoudis and Tran 2010 in Al Fadda 2012: 125). In a European context, Lasota carried out a corpus-based study of apostrophe misuse among Swedish university and upper-secondary level students, where similar types of errors were found to have been committed by both groups studied, with omissions being numerous, the most common error-type being in genitive constructions (Lasota 2008). Hook (1999: 49) would not have been surprised by this, as he says that the category of possession is syntactically “the more frequent,” while Pyles and Algeo (1970 in Hook 1999: 44) claim that about sixty percent of all nouns encountered in reading form the genitive singular form. Interestingly, Lasota’s findings were in direct contrast to the intuitive belief of the Swedish secondary group’s English teacher in the study, who felt that contracted forms would have been most problematic, hence strengthening the argument for corpus-based research in this area (see Section 5.3).

In another study of academic writing at university-level among native-speaking students, a survey conducted found that 72% of native-speaker respondents made one or more errors with the apostrophe, although the breakdown of precise error-type is not provided (Wray 1996: 94). Bryant et al (1997) conducted two intervention studies on British primary-aged children from 9-11, which demonstrated that these children had “striking difficulties” with genitive apostrophe use, yet improvement in this use was documented when intervention was offered and awareness of correct genitive apostrophe use was raised (Bryant et al 1997: 91). Garrett and Austin (1993) compared attitudes towards seriousness of EGA (English Genitive Apostrophe) misuse among native-speaking British university students, post-graduate EFL teacher trainees and German English-language undergraduates. Their findings indicated that the female students judged more severely than the males, while the German students “recognised and attached more gravity to errors in apostrophe misuse” in genitives and plurals than did their British counterparts, which was attributed to the extensive prescriptive input the Germans would have received in English lessons in their school-system:

It would appear that explicit and conscious formulation of the EGA rules is more likely to lead to such learning than simply expecting these rules to be unconsciously ‘absorbed’ from the language environment.

(Garrett and Austin 1993: 70)

Hook reinforces this idea, in his feeling that punctuation practice is “governed primarily by grammatical considerations” and must be therefore, in turn, “related to grammatical distinctions (Hook 1999: 42). Allen warns that if teachers demonstrate correct apostrophe use in their own writing, but fail to teach this correct use to their students, the apostrophe will become “a shibboleth for sorting classes of knowers according to their various levels of initiation” (Allen 1997: 84).

2.5 The Printers' Questionnaire

It is appropriate at this point to examine one group who, it may be argued, could unwittingly contribute to the aforementioned 'shibboleth' status of the apostrophe, namely printers. In a separate study conducted by the researcher, thirty-one printers were randomly selected from two websites offering contact names and addresses of print companies within the Limerick City region (Tobin 2016). The purpose of this study was to examine printers' perceptions of apostrophe use here in Limerick, in order to determine whether printers' attitudes contribute to apostrophe 'insecurity in use' in print media, which in turn can impact negatively upon learners. In his MA thesis on the "Origins and Insecurity in Usage of the EGA," Austin conducted a similar study in 1989, sending questionnaires with four open-ended questions to printing companies in the United Kingdom, and a decision was taken to replicate this, in a more contemporary Irish context.

An email was first sent to the selected printers with information sheets about the study and researcher, along with a copy of the questionnaire sample. This questionnaire was modelled on Austin's study, consisting of four yes/no type questions with an opportunity for expansion (see sample in Appendix D). A follow-up questionnaire was either posted or hand-delivered to each printer within three weeks of the initial email contact. Self-addressed envelopes were provided to all printers to encourage maximum response and minimise inconvenience in the return of their completed questionnaires. Results may be viewed in Appendix Q (Tobin 2016).

To sum up, the confusion caused by inconsistent apostrophe use in English for the non-native speaker is the primary focus of this study. How can the L2 learner be satisfactorily exposed to a real world of English which does not appear to play by the prescriptive rules, at least where the apostrophe is concerned? How can we train learners to be confident, competent users of the apostrophe in an English-speaking world which is, itself, riddled with “insecurities in usage?” (Austin 1989).

In an attempt to address this, two distinct methodologies for teaching correct apostrophe use were devised and presented as intervention to two different B2-level learner groups, with a third B2-level control group receiving no intervention. The procedures for the study, as well as the observations and results which were documented, will now be explored in the Methodology and Analysis of Data (Chapters 3 and 4) respectively.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Choice of Methodology

Research is defined as ‘a systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information - *data* - in order to increase our understanding of a phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned’ (Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 20-1).

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of one type of teaching methodology over another, one prescriptive and one descriptive, in presenting the use of the apostrophe to English language learners. The objective of the study was ultimately to increase learners’ proficiency in the use of this item of punctuation. Thus the study was designed to determine if one teaching methodology of the apostrophe (i.e. a deductive, prescriptive approach) would make a more significant contribution to raising learner awareness of the accurate use of this punctuation mark in written English than another methodology (i.e. an inductive approach, encouraging the active noticing of apostrophe usage in everyday contexts, and eliciting ideas on its use.) Incorporated into the examination of these two methodologies was an investigation into how the apostrophe has appeared in authentic texts, both historically and in a more contemporary context. The type of study chosen was a mixed-methods approach.

Such interest in these two types of methodologies was largely prompted by observation of an on-going prescriptive/descriptive dichotomy presented in apostrophe-related journal articles and other texts, leading to the belief that an investigation of the two branches of this dichotomy in relation to the treatment of the apostrophe could be worthwhile. Beal (2009: 35) claims linguistics to be “descriptive, not prescriptive” and Crystal concurs with her view

when he says “... on the whole, the term prescriptivism is pejorative in linguistic contexts” (Crystal 1980: 282-3). Cameron paints a picture of a prescriptive menace of the most dramatic kind, stating that prescriptivism represents “the threatening other, the forbidden; it is a spectre that haunts linguists” (Cameron 1995: 5). Contrastingly, with the tremendous success of Lynn Truss’s humorous prescriptive guide “Eats, Shoots and Leaves” in 2003, Beal (2009: 43) alludes to an age of “new prescriptivism,” where Truss states categorically:

I want apostrophes where they should be, and I will not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand [...] until everyone knows the difference between ‘it’s’ and ‘its.’

(Truss 2003: 44)

Beal (2009: 45) furthers her discussion on this “new prescriptivism” with reference to an article from *The Guardian*, reporting on “a grammatically toxic product” for sale in a well-known British department store, whereby “an entire range of children’s clothes with ‘Baby Giraffe’s’,” complete with erroneous apostrophe printed on them, sparked an irate customer response at the “glaring grammatical gaffe” (Mullan 2006). It is perhaps Prendergast (2009: 44) whose comment on apostrophe misuse is the most alarming, in stating “it’s about the end of a bright and purposeful past, the premonition of a threatening and murky future.”

Moreover, Hook’s assertion that “prescriptivism should rule the day with punctuation, although, in most instances, it should adhere to a descriptive analysis of speech” (Hook 1999: 43) reinforced the researcher’s conviction that a prescriptive/descriptive examination of apostrophe use, and methodologies in how best to approach it for learners, merited investigation.

The article in which the prescriptive/descriptive debate was found to be of greatest relevance for this thesis was that of Garrett and Austin, in which, to begin, they make the extremely

valid point that “the prescriptive rules aimed at teachers and learners are frequently not followed in written English in the natural environment”(Garrett and Austin 1993: 61). This poses a dilemma for teachers, who must decide whether it is best to present grammar deductively (i.e. learning by receiving rules, followed by examples and then by practice exercises) or inductively (i.e. learning through discovery or, alternately, through absorption from “the natural, language-rich environment” (ibid: 63). Garrett and Austin describe three routes towards “linguistic knowledge becoming explicit,” and contend that while the first, a deductive approach, “necessarily leads to this”, the second, a discovery-based route, needs to be guided by a teacher, who leads the learners to “conscious formulation of a rule” (ibid). The third route, absorbing from the environment, challenges the learner to recognise forms from the input they receive. The question raised here is whether the learner actually actively recognises such formal features of language (Swain 1985) or not (Van Patten 1990: 294). From this, Garrett and Austin suggested that when learning how the apostrophe is used in genitive forms (the EGA or English Genitive Apostrophe), routes one and two are the preferred options, both of which are subject to rule adherence, albeit to varying degrees. It was their research on these two approaches, deductive and inductive, which influenced this study. Whilst they concluded that there was nothing to be found in work they had reviewed to suggest the superiority of one approach over the other, they nonetheless felt that “explicit conscious learning of the EGA ... is likely to be required,” regardless of the approach chosen by either teacher or learner. (ibid: 64), but curiously also added that “the use of a variety of authentic materials may well also create more obstacles for the learner.”

Therefore, the research for this thesis sought to investigate these two approaches, to examine whether in fact one type could be more beneficial to learners than the other. This was

achieved by undertaking research of two kinds. The first was in the form of an intervention study on three groups of adult L2 learners, during the final week of May 2016, the aim of which was to compare deductive, inductive and no-intervention strategies and their effect, if any, on learner apostrophe use. The second was to investigate learner perceptions of the level of seriousness regarding apostrophe misuse in authentic examples.

3.2 Research Question

The research question for this study is as follows:

“Does the use of deductive strategies, derived from grammar and textbook examples, to present prescriptive, rule-bound use of the apostrophe in English, raise greater student awareness of correct apostrophe production than an inductive approach, which encourages noticing through reference to authentic text examples in everyday life?”

It must be acknowledged that the two approaches are distinct from one another. The prescriptive approach is more teacher-led with as many apostrophe rules as possible offered to the students, while the descriptive approach aims to be more student-driven, with the onus on the learner to produce their own apostrophe examples from real-life, authentic texts they find. To ensure that Experimental Group 2 (EG2 with a descriptive approach) received exposure of similar content and context as Experimental Group 1 (EG1 with a prescriptive approach), it was important for the researcher to have back-up examples of her own to make up for any potential shortfall in examples produced by EG2. As EG1 were to be provided with handouts of rules to study, while EG2 received no such handout, it could be deemed that the approach and the input combined for each method assisted in increased apostrophe

understanding and accurate production. All the student participants were B2 level (see Section 3.2), and the pre-test aimed to serve as an indicator of the extent of prior knowledge of apostrophe use on each individual's part before undertaking any intervention.

Three sub-questions also to be examined are:

- 1) To what extent do learners recognise apostrophe error in written English?
- 2) If they do, to what extent do they perceive apostrophe error to be serious, in genitive singular, genitive plural and contraction forms?
- 3) Does the concept of 'the greengrocer's apostrophe' apply to learner apostrophe misuse?

3.3 Research Design and Methodology

The research for this thesis took the form of a mixed-methods between-groups approach, comprising a quasi-experimental intervention study, involving three classes of B2 level students in a language school in Limerick City. It was anticipated that the intervention study would yield more quantitative-type data, with the open-ended questions in the student questionnaire providing an opportunity for richer, qualitative data collection.

Creswell (2014) indicates that in experimental-design research, the basic intent is to test the impact of a treatment or intervention or an outcome, "controlling for all other factors that might influence that outcome" (Creswell 2014: 201). Howitt and Cramer (2011) concur with this belief, highlighting the importance of trying to keep all factors constant "other than the variables to be manipulated" (i.e. the intervention offered) and offer examples of such factors: "a purpose-built room (i.e. a classroom) ... is ideal: light, temperature and distractions can be controlled" (Howitt and Cramer 2011:166). Whilst expressing some reservations about the

artificiality of such a classroom environment, in that “it may not reflect what happens in more natural or realistic settings,” they nevertheless acknowledge that “most research is to a degree a compromise between a number of considerations” (ibid: 167).

Salkind (2012: 246) refers to the superiority of true experimental designs (i.e. those which contain experimental and control groups with participants assigned randomly to each), as the researcher can exercise a greater degree of control, and he believes this design has a greater degree of internal validity. In contrast, quasi-experimental design dictates “a pre-assignment to groups based on some characteristic or experience of the group” (Salkind 2012: 245). In other words, group assignment has in effect already taken place, typically due to practical reasons such as the participants being in a school setting (Howitt and Cramer 2011; Salkind 2012; Leedy and Ormrod 2015). While true experimental designs have greater internal validity, Salkind (2012) nonetheless accepts a strength of quasi-experimental designs as having “a higher level of internal validity than pre-experimental designs” (i.e. those with no control group at all), and “substantial levels of external validity” on a par with true experimental design models (Salkind 2012: 246).

In the language-school setting of this study, the three groups were comprised exclusively of B2 level students, all of whom had completed the Oxford Placement Test as part of school protocol to ascertain their level on arrival, and would have had to receive a score of between 66-80 out of 100 (Allan 2004). Hence an assumption that could be made of all students who participated was that they had had a B2- level English experience to date. This is also in keeping with Leedy and Ormrod’s recommendation that if random assignment is not possible, then there is a need to assess other variables and determine whether those groups are similar

with respect to those variables, thus reducing the probability “that such variables could account for any future group differences” (Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 200).

The student participants themselves were chosen from three distinct classes, each following a different B2 level course-book, due to the larger numbers of students in the school before the time of the study. B2 was the level chosen for investigation, as this is the level which corresponds most closely to the IELTS Band Scores of 6-6.5, identified as problematic for certain B2 level students to attain (see Section 1.2.2).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The student participants in this study were all over 18 years of age, gave their written consent to take part (see Appendices L-O) and were each given detailed information sheets explaining their role in the study. They were free to withdraw from participation at any time. The Control Group, who received no intervention during the study, were offered both interventions post-study during a normal timetabled lesson, by the researcher, as a goodwill gesture.

3.5 The Models for the Intervention Study

The intervention study in this chapter is based on two previous studies conducted in the 1990s, one by Garrett and Austin (1993), the other by Bryant et al (1997).

Garrett and Austin (1993) studied three groups comprising German English-language undergraduates, who, in their English language classes in their native country, would have been exposed to prescriptive rules in EGA application, British undergraduates, who would

not have had prescriptive exposure to EGA as the British education system did not encourage it at this time, and postgraduate EFL trainee teachers, who would have had some prescriptive EGA exposure. Garrett and Austin examined the use of the English genitive apostrophe (EGA) (the term they used consistently in their paper in reference to the apostrophe, even in plural, ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ examples) in three categories of errors made by native-speakers:

- 1) Omission of EGA (mens fashions)
- 2) Inclusion of EGA (i.e. the ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’) before final ‘s’ in plurals (old telephone’s)
- 3) Use of EGA with third person pronouns (her’s)

A judgement task was designed and administered to the three groups whereby thirty-three sentences were presented, twenty-nine of which were malformed with EGA omission, erroneous usage in regular plural and with non-personal possessive pronoun use, while four were error-free. The participants were asked to identify errors, grade errors for degrees of seriousness on a 0 - 5 scale, and correct errors. The findings indicated that the German English-language students showed signs of more successful EGA learning and understanding of its use than their British counterparts. This led the researchers to conclude:

The input coming at acquirers from the natural environment may be so inconsistent or at variance with the prescriptive rules, that deductive or controlled discovery teaching approaches appear more likely to lead to the acquisition of these rules

(Garrett and Austin 1993: 61)

It was thus their belief that the rules for EGA use were less likely to be “unconsciously absorbed from the language environment” (Garrett and Austin 1993:70).

In a different study, Bryant et al (1997) conducted two intervention studies in British primary schools on children between 9-11 years of age, to determine how well these children understood that apostrophes were used to denote possession before and after being taught this at school, how sensitive this knowledge was to intervention and the relationship between this knowledge and the children's grammatical awareness. Children were divided into experimental, taught control and untaught control groups, with the experimental and taught control groups receiving different types of intervention on apostrophe use.

In their first study, the Experimental group was taught to use apostrophes with genitive nouns, and to omit them from non-genitive plural nouns. The Taught Control group was given the same material in the same manner as the Experimental group, but given no instruction on the use of the apostrophe. Instead, they were taught to distinguish between homophone words based on their meaning. The Untaught Control group received no intervention of any kind (Bryant et al 1997: 94). In their second study, again with three distinct groups, the Experimental group received the same intervention as the Experimental group in Study 1, with contraction examples added as well as a metalinguistic task asking the children to identify odd-ones-out in lists of three sentences. The Taught Control group also had contraction examples and a different metalinguistic task involving sentence transformation with ownership examples, whilst again the Untaught Group received no intervention (Bryant et al 1997: 101). Identical pre-tests and post-tests on apostrophe use were administered to all three groups. Results showed a significant difference between pre- and post-test results in the experimental group, but not in either of the two control groups, which indicated the success of the prescriptive-type of intervention offered to them on apostrophe use (Bryant et al 1997: 98). This led the researcher to consider the implications of

Bryant et al's study for adult EFL learners, and to speculate as to whether textbooks and grammars are addressing this apostrophe issue adequately, and providing enough exposure to prescriptive-type explanations and examples.

Having read these two seminal articles, a synthesis of ideas from both seemed to be the most appropriate strategy for application to the study in this thesis: to use the prescriptive intervention of Bryant et al's study, the descriptive noticing of Garrett and Austin's questionnaire, and to compare which type of intervention could best suit B2-level learners who might have issues with correct apostrophe production.

3.6 Conducting the Intervention Study

Permission to carry out the intervention study was sought and granted from the school director, with the appropriate consent form signed (see Appendix P).

The participants were all non-native speaking, adult learners of English, a fundamental difference between Bryant et al (1997) who only studied native-speaking children, and Garrett and Austin (1993), whose study included both adult native and non-native speakers. The sample was taken from the student population within the researcher's school, members of three distinct B2 level classes, with EG1 comprising nine participants, EG2 comprising four participants while the CG comprised seven participants (see Section 4.3). Hence a total of twenty B2 level students took part in the study, admittedly a small cohort for a between-groups study.

As the school caters for adult learners, the minimum age participants could be was 18, with the youngest in the study aged 18 and 19 respectively, the oldest participant aged 58, and the average age 26. The participants ranged from those still in high school (one participant) to those already attending university (five participants), whilst the vast majority identified themselves as outside of education in their home countries.

The pre/post-tests and questionnaires were piloted by means of distribution to colleagues, who graciously provided their time and input, so that essential adjustments could be made where necessary prior to administration to the participants in the study. Samples of the pre/post-test which students received and researchers used, as well as the questionnaire students completed post-testing, may be found in Appendix A and B.

The pre-/post-tests were administered to all three groups on the same day at the same time (11.30am-12.30pm), with the researcher conducting the test for EG1 and EG2 combined, and a researcher's assistant conducting the test for the CG in a different location. This was to reduce the possibility of social desirability bias (Dornyei, 2007: 54; Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 188), as all of the students in the CG had been previously taught by the principal researcher. This was facilitated through the kind cooperation of the Academic Director of Studies and a colleague, both of whom assisted with administration of tests and questionnaires to the students, following a thorough briefing in the procedure.

Thirty sentences were read out to the participants, one-by-one, containing gaps. They listened and filled the gaps with appropriate words. The word apostrophe was purposely never mentioned during this process, with instructions on their photocopies reading "You will

hear the following sentences read out, one-by-one, in their completed form. Listen to each sentence and fill in the missing words you hear.”

It was decided before the study began that the three B2 classes would be divided as follows:

The first B2 class was to be called Experimental Group (EG1), and would receive one deductive -strategy intervention lesson on the apostrophe, which was prescriptive (i.e. rule-based) and text-based (see Appendices D-F).

The second B2 class was deemed to be Experimental Group (EG2), and would be encouraged to locate example uses of the apostrophe in their out-of-school environment (e.g. on shop signs, in magazines or newspapers, etc.) which they would be asked to photograph using whatever devices they had at their disposal, and email these to the researcher or bring them to the next session as a hard copy sample. This idea was influenced by Breen, who felt that students should participate in the selection of authentic texts at different points in the learning process, and believed their input, in this way, to be “as justified and ultimately as valuable as our own” (Breen 1985: 63). These examples chosen by the participants would be used to employ inductive questioning strategies to raise their awareness of how the apostrophe is used in real-life. Hence intervention was to be provided again in one lesson (see Appendices G-I).

The third B2 class was designated as a Control Group (CG) and would receive no added intervention prior to their post-test completion.

The study took the form of a non-randomised, Control-Group / Pre-test / Post-test design, based on a synthesis of ideas stemming from Bryant et al (1997) and Garrett and Austin (1993). The three groups of B2 level students were administered pre- and post-tests on their

knowledge of the use of the apostrophe in English for genitive singular and genitive plural forms, contracted forms, inclusion where not needed and omission when needed. The pre- and post- tests were identical, comprising thirty sentences each. This is consistent with the study by Bryant et al (1997) with the same tests being given to all three groups, so that quantitative data could be collected and a comparative analysis of the corrected tests compiled.

On completion of the pre-test, the student participants were briefed as to when their next session would be. EG1 received their one deductive-strategy, prescriptive intervention lesson on the apostrophe the very next day, which took about one hour (see Appendices D-F for lesson plan).

As EG2 had been encouraged after their pre-test to locate example uses of the apostrophe in their out-of-school environment and photograph them, they were given their intervention two days after their pre-test, allowing extra time to collect ideas to bring to the lesson. Hence intervention was to be provided again in one lesson, supplemented by other examples to ensure as wide a range of coverage as EG1 had received (see Appendices G-I).

Group 3 were designated as a Control Group (CG) and received no added intervention prior to their post-test completion.

Table 1: Outline of Non-Randomised Control Group/Pre-Test/Post-Test Design.

GROUP	Test 1	INTERVENTION	Test 2
EG1	Obs: Pre-test	Txp	Obs: Post-test
EG2	Obs: Pre-test	Txd	Obs: Post-test
CG	Obs: Pre-test	None	Obs: Post-test

Tx = Intervention type

Txp = prescriptive

Txd = descriptive

The post-test was administered to all three groups on the same day, three days after their pre-test. Immediately afterwards, participants were asked to complete a survey, containing twenty-four sentences, some of which contained apostrophe errors, with others being error-free. Participants were asked first to identify whether an error was actually present, and if so, to offer a corrected form and to suggest how serious they felt the error to be. A Likert Scale with the following range was used:

-5 (very serious) - 4 (serious) - 3 (quite serious) - 2 (not serious) - 1 (a minor mistake) (these indicate numbers of marks deducted for a mistake)

In this questionnaire, the questions posed were: “How serious do you think this error is? How many marks should be lost?” It was hoped that the use of a questionnaire would bring a more qualitative, richer dimension to the study in its consideration of students’ opinions (see Appendix C) for the Analysis of Data (Chapter 4) to follow.

Therefore, having outlined the methodology for this study, it is now appropriate to analyse the data collected, which shall now be examined in detail to determine the effectiveness of the two types of intervention offered to the cohort.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

There is a need for the researcher to look “carefully, inquiringly,[and] critically” at the nature of data collected; how these data are prepared for inspection or interpretation will affect the meaning that they reveal (Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 229-31). Analysing data in only one way will yield an incomplete view of those data, hence different statistical techniques suit different purposes. (Leedy and Ormrod 2015: 235).

This was a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were gathered using a between within groups design (see Appendices A and B). Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered using a questionnaire containing a Likert scale and open-ended questions (see Appendix C).

4.1 Intervention Study: Mixed Between Within Groups Design

Part one of the study, the administration of the pre-tests and post-tests to EG1, EG2 and the CG within the same week, will first be discussed.

4.1.1 Description of Test Content

Both the pre-tests and post-tests administered to the three groups were identical in content, a conscious decision taken based on Bryant et al (1997) on which this study was based with several variations (see Section 3.3). By repeating the same test, it was easier to ascertain whether intervention could be credited with contributing to improvement, by comparing pre-test and post-test scores, rather than improvement simply occurring by chance.

This study sought to determine what kind of outcome would result from a similar type of testing/ intervention/non-intervention and re-testing model in adult, non-native-speaking B2

learners in use of the apostrophe. However, the pre-tests and post-tests for this study did not focus entirely on the genitive form, but on a broader range of apostrophe uses (a significant difference from Bryant et al's tests), to gain a better perspective on a wider range of ability on the students' part in prescriptively correct apostrophe application. Nonetheless, the division of the entire cohort into three distinct groups was similar to their study, with the slight difference of two experimental groups receiving intervention and an untaught control group receiving none, as opposed to their one experimental group, one taught control group and one untaught control group.

Also of similarity was the reading out of questions by the researcher (or researcher's assistants) for the participants to listen to and complete gaps with appropriate single words. Despite the apostrophe itself having no sound (Bryant et al 1997: 93) the listening aspect of the test was felt to be of importance as the IELTS listening exam had been particularly singled out earlier in this study as having caused difficulties for students in relation to the apostrophe (see Section 1.2.2), hence it was felt to be appropriate to include listening skills in the assessment. The correct gap-fill words contained genitive singular and regular genitive plural examples, irregular genitive plurals, contractions including the 'whose/who's' and 'its/it's' distinctions, an adjectival use ("that Beatles/Beatles' song"), -s ending first names ("James, Thomas"), an -s ending expression ("for goodness' sake!") and straightforward plural forms of regular nouns (See Appendices A and B).

It was this range of examples that was used to examine what these adult learners understood about apostrophe use, whether performance could be improved with intervention and if so, which kind of intervention would be more effective, prescriptive or descriptive.

4.1.2 Analysis and Results of Pre-Test/Post-Test

The data collected from the pre- and post-tests fit a multi-group data description, (Leedy and Ormrod (2015: 237), whereby administering identical pre- and post-tests to three distinct groups yielded parallel sets of data. Discrete variables characteristic to every group included each being B2 level, with nationalities for all three within an eleven-country range: Spain, Italy, Korea, Japan, Lithuania, Libya Ecuador, Brazil, Switzerland, Peru and China. The independent variable in this study was the nature of the methodology employed in the intervention, deductive for EG1, inductive for EG2 and none for the CG. The dependent variable was the student participants' percentage increase in correct scoring in their post-test, after intervention. Thus the participants' post-test score is used to indicate the effectiveness of the particular intervention.

The main hypothesis posed for this study is two-fold, and may be outlined as follows:

H1 = Both intervention groups (EG1 and EG2) will perform better (i.e. have a better percentage gain) on their post-test raw scores than the Control Group (CG).

H2 = EG1 (the prescriptive intervention group) will perform better (i.e. have a better percentage gain) than EG2 (the descriptive intervention group) on the post-test raw scores.

The testing of a null hypothesis is defined by Leedy and Ormrod as involving “a statistical comparison of two distributions of data – one hypothetical (i.e. a theoretical idea) and one real (i.e. the distribution of data from a research sample)” (Leedy and Ormrod 2015:258).

The null hypothesis posed for this study is as follows:

H0 = There will be no difference in percentage gain on the post-test raw scores for all three groups.

4.1.3 Raw Test Scores Analysis

The pre- and post-test scores for each student were recorded and the average of each group was then calculated, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Descriptive Statistics				
	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre-Test	Deductive Group	19.1111	3.55121	9
	Inductive Group	18.2500	3.86221	4
	Total	18.8462	3.50823	13
Post-Test	Deductive Group	22.0000	3.80789	9
	Inductive Group	20.0000	3.36650	4
	Total	21.3846	3.66375	13

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for EG1, EG2 and the CG.

The raw score range for EG1 in the pre-test was from 16-26 out of 30, giving the group a mean score of 19.11, while the standard deviation (SD) calculated was 3.55. After a prescriptive (i.e. deductive) intervention session and administration of the post-test, the score range was 18-28 out of 30, giving the group a mean score of 22. The post-test SD was 3.81.

In EG2, the raw score range recorded in the pre-test was 13-22 out of 30, with a mean score of 18.25, giving the group a SD of 3.86. After a descriptive (i.e. inductive) intervention session and administration of the post-test, EG2 had a raw score range of 15-22, resulting in a mean score of 20, a SD of 3.37.

The CG produced the most telling results, with a raw score range of 16-24 out of 30 in their pre-test, giving a mean score of 18.2, with a SD of 3.27. Having received no intervention, post-test raw scores remained fixed at 16-24 out of 30, with the mean and SD identical to the pre-test measures.

Thus EG2 recorded the lowest pre-test raw score of 13, and EG1 the highest of 26. The post-test range remained constant for EG1 at ten marks, dropping to seven for EG2 and remaining constant for the CG. It can be said definitively that the CG showed no difference in pre-test and post-test mean scores, outlined here in Table 3 and in Chart 1.

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Core Difference
EG1	19.11	22	+ 2.9
EG2	18.25	20	+ 1.75
CG	18.2	18.2	0

Table 3: Pre/Post test raw score distinctions.

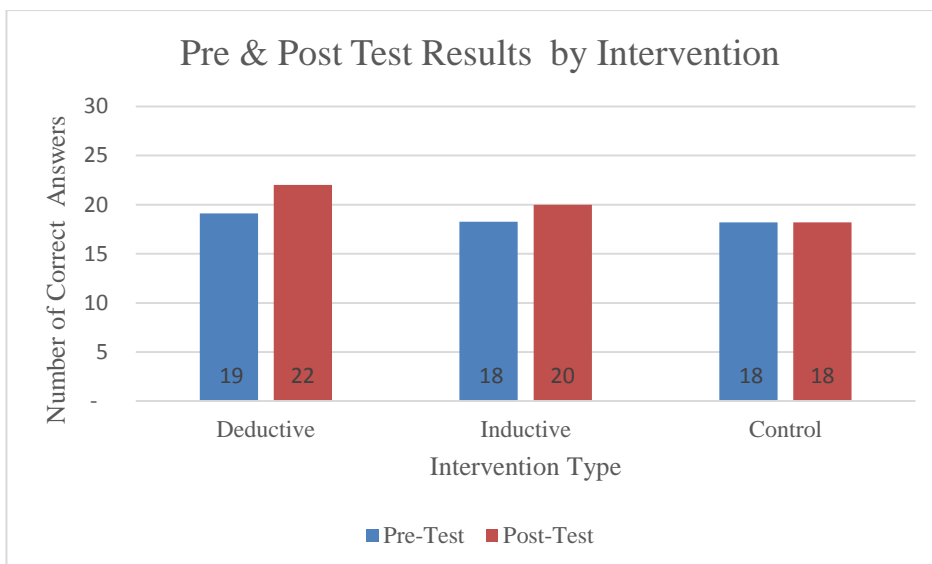


Chart 1: Pre/Post-Test results for all three groups based on raw scores.

Comparing the raw scores of all three groups, it is clear that both EG1 and EG2 made greater gains in their overall raw test scores than did the CG, which made none. EG1 scored an average increase of 3 marks out of 30 (i.e. 10%) while EG2 scored an average increase of 2 marks out of 30 (i.e. 7%). This would suggest that based on raw test-scores only, the deductive, prescriptive intervention received by EG1 was more beneficial than the inductive, descriptive intervention that EG2 received.

4.1.4 Statistical Analysis

However, to determine whether these increases carried any statistical significance, a mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance was conducted, using SPSS, to assess the impact of the two different interventions on the participants' scores, across the two pre- and post-intervention time periods. The CG was eliminated from this analysis, owing to no change between its pre/post-test scores, leaving EG1 and EG2 as the two groups analysed.

The analysis showed there was no significant interaction between intervention type and time (Wilks Lambda = .935, $F(1,11) = .765$, $p = .400$ partial eta = .065). There was a substantial main effect for pre and post-intervention scores (Wilks Lambda = .464, $F(1,11) = 12.694$, $p = .004$ partial eta = .536), with both groups showing an improvement on test scores (see Table10). The main effect, however, comparing the two types of intervention, was not significant ($F(1,11) = .462$, $p = .511$ partial eta squared = .040), suggesting no difference in the effectiveness of the two intervention approaches.

Thus there was a significant gain between pre- and post-test scores for EG1 and EG2, whereas there was no difference in scores for the control group (CG). Therefore, the null

hypothesis can be rejected, while H1, which states that EG1 and EG2 will have a greater percentage gain than the CG, can be accepted. However, H2 must be rejected, as the results suggest that there was no significant difference between EG1 and EG2 in terms of percentage gains, hence both interventions appeared to work. The small sample size of this cohort must be acknowledged here, making it difficult to draw any general conclusions from this analysis.

4.1.5 Error Types Made in Pre/Post-Test

The following observations regarding error types made by EG1, EG2 and the CG in their tests were made. It must be stressed again that this small sample makes the drawing of general conclusions difficult. Nevertheless, errors made by this cohort, illustrated in Charts 2-5, may be identified as follows.

Areas of apostrophe use which caused difficulty appeared to span the three groups evenly in the pre-test. Regular genitive plural errors were more frequent than irregular genitive plural (e.g. “an all boys’ school”). Also, an interesting observation with many of the participants, particularly those who were Spanish speaking, was the tendency to write the full form of verbs (e.g. the baby is getting tired” instead of “the baby’s getting tired”) when the researcher had in fact called out a contracted form.

Elsewhere, confusion could be observed particularly in the example requiring the possessive “its”, whereby five participants mistakenly wrote “his” and six wrote “it’s”. Only two participants opted for the apostrophe in “for goodness’ sake”, while -s ending first names caused similar confusion, with twelve participants omitting apostrophes in both names

(“James,” “Thomas”) and seven in at least one. Finally, the adjectival use (“that Beatles’/Beatles song”) was written as ‘Beatle’s’ by seven participants, ‘Beatle’ by one and ‘Peter’s’ by another, hence this too caused difficulties.

In the post-test correcting of the papers, regular genitive plurals continued to cause difficulty across the three groups, but EG1 showed the greatest score improvement in that error numbers for this category dropped from 19 to 11, in EG2 from 5 to 3 and in the CG from 11 to 9. Full rather than contracted forms were still offered but some improvement was noted in all three groups: EG1 dropped from 31 errors to 26, EG2 dropped from 16 to 13 and the CG dropped from 28 to 22 in this category. Fewer possessive ‘its’ errors were recorded for EG1 and EG2 after intervention, with two participants in each group persisting in using “his”, and three CG participants continuing to use “it’s”. The -s ending expression “goodness” in “for goodness’ sake” (see Section 5.3) continued to cause problems for all but one participant, in EG1.

Regarding the s-ending first names “James” and “Thomas”, interestingly, EG1 and the CG recorded fewer errors in the post-test, from 14 to 9 and from 9 to 5 respectively, but EG2 scored no improvement whatsoever with these examples, with all four participants omitting apostrophes in both tests. This pattern was repeated in the adjectival example of “that Beatles’/Beatles song” whereby EG1 went from 7 to 5 errors and the CG from 4 to 3, but EG2 stayed the same at 1 error in both tests, despite having two correct options to choose from.

Thus the quantitative data provided in the pre/post-test raw scores enabled a comparison between the three groups EG1, EG2 and the CG to see whether one particular type of

intervention, or indeed no intervention at all, could have had a greater bearing on recognition of correct prescriptive apostrophe application in English.

It is at this point that the questionnaire, distributed to the cohort after the administration of the post-test, needs investigating to see whether, in this mixed-methods approach, the qualitative data provided in it could help further explain and elaborate on its quantitative findings.

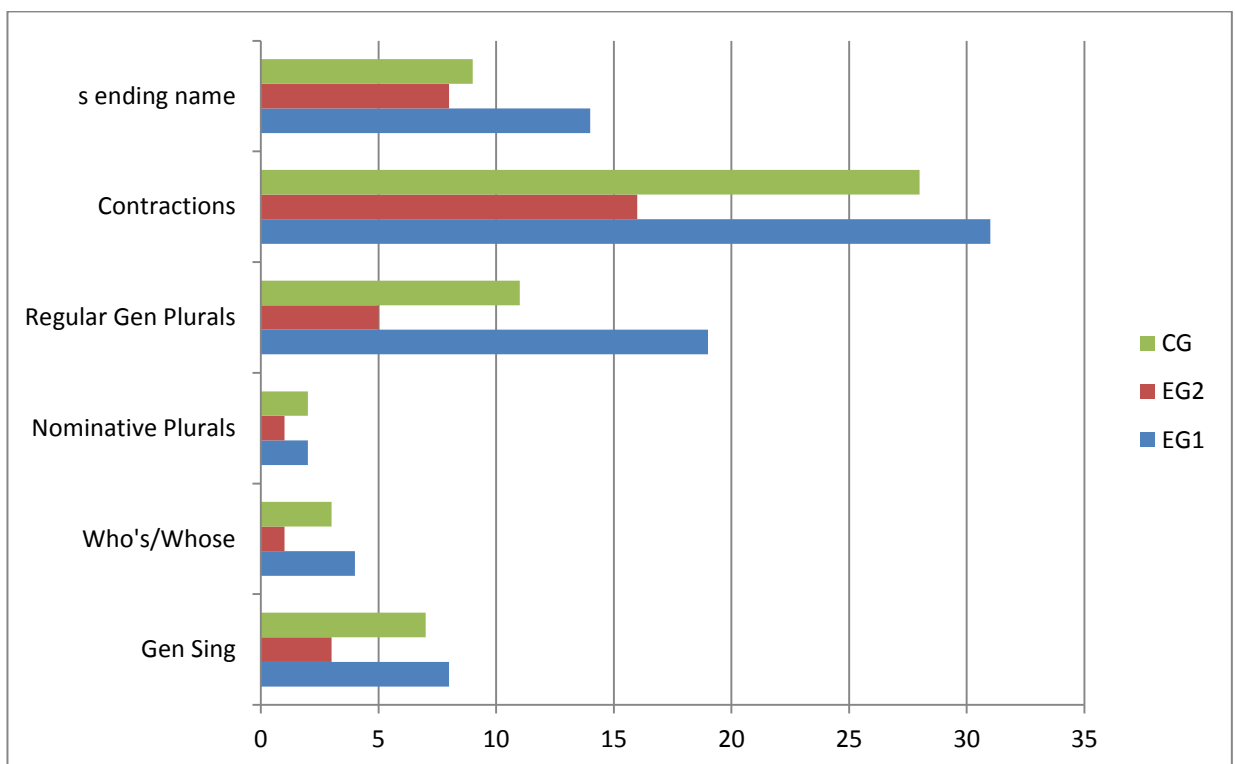


Chart 2: Error types made by all three groups in pre-test.

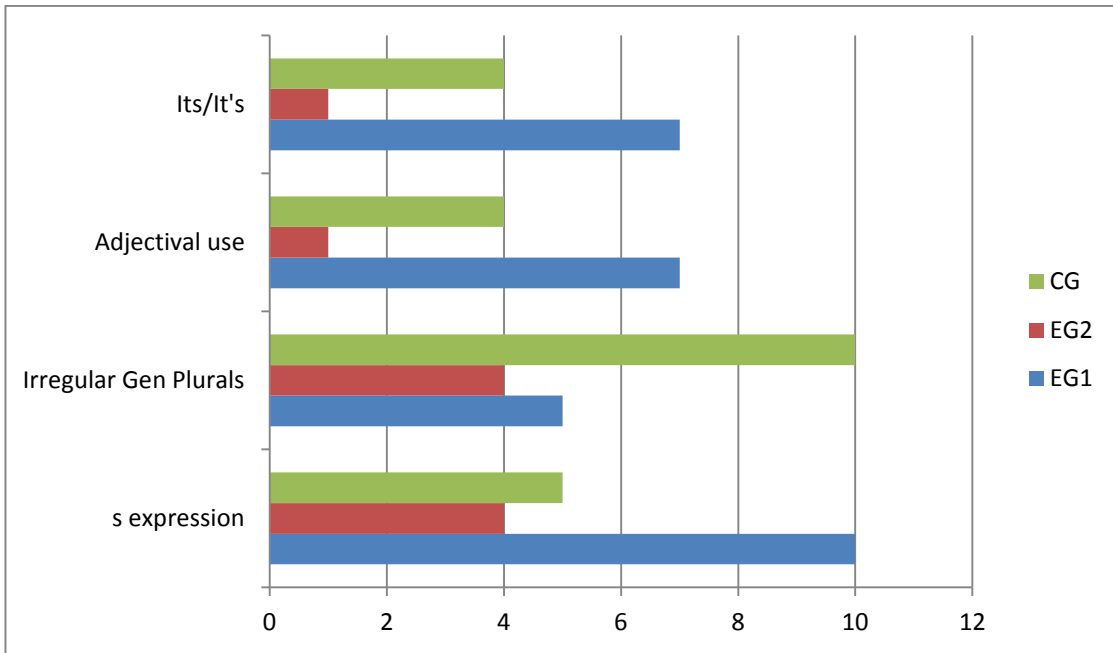


Chart 3: Error types made by all three groups in pre-test continued.

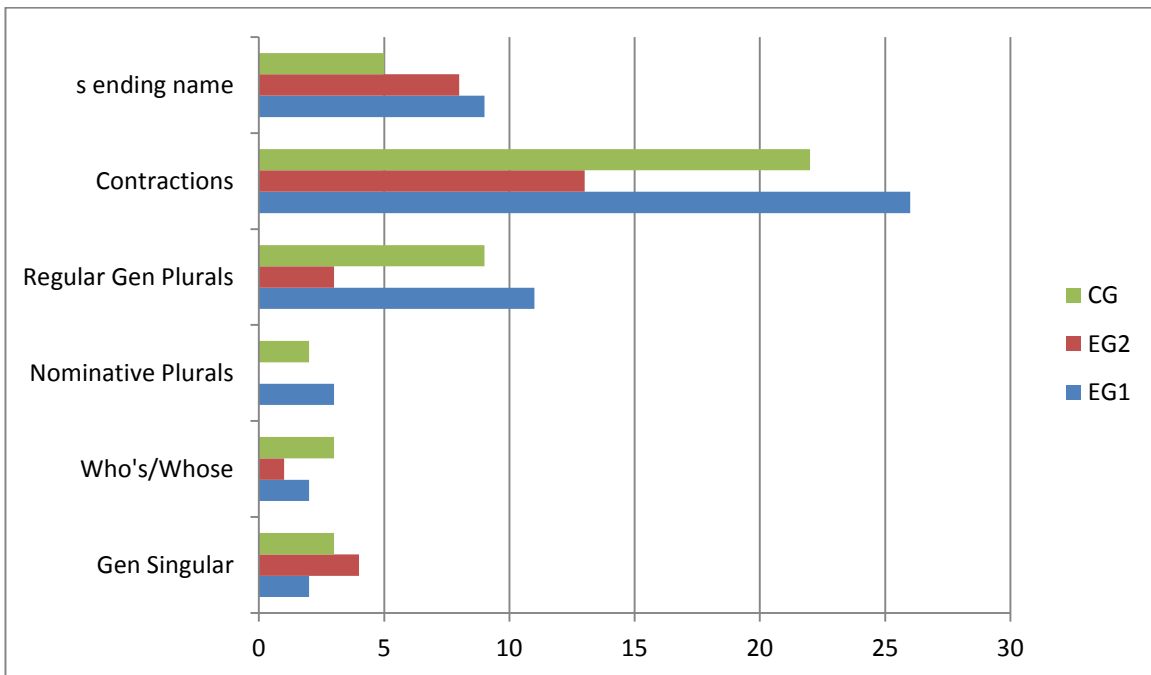


Chart 4: Error types made by all three groups in the post-test.

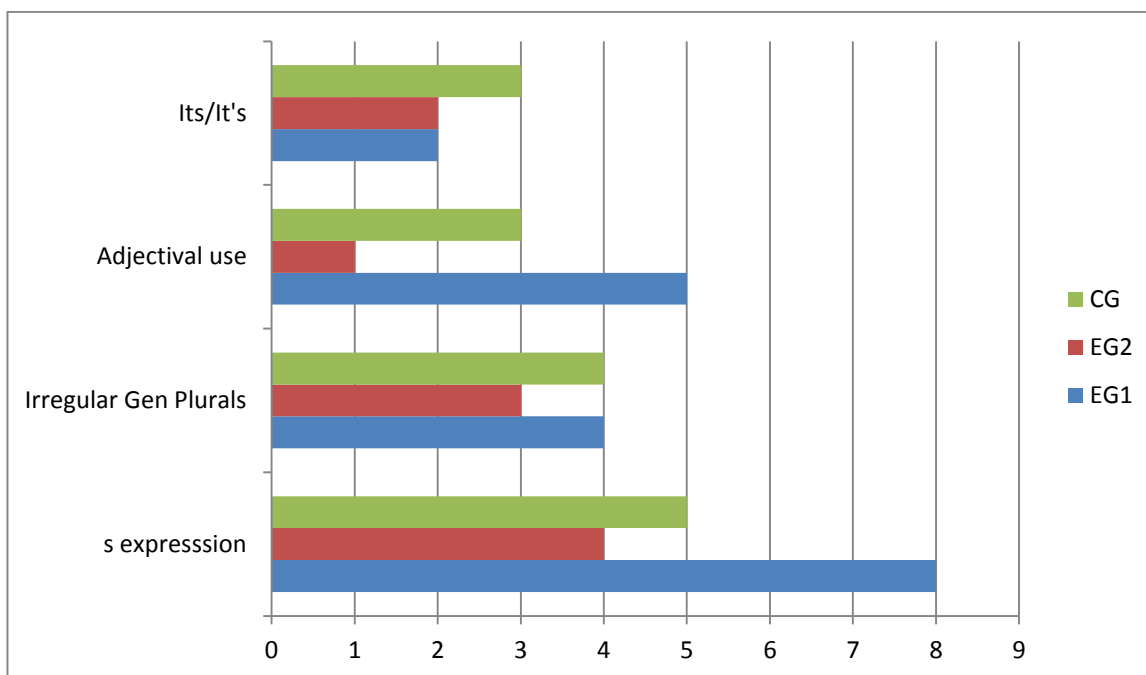


Chart 5: Error types made by all three groups in the post-test continued.

4.2 Analysis of Student Questionnaires on Attitudes to Apostrophe Error

4.2.1 Description of Questionnaire Content

Three sub-questions posed in relation to the overall study were:

- 1) To what extent do learners recognise apostrophe error in written English?
- 2) If they do, to what extent do they perceive apostrophe error to be serious, in genitive singular, genitive plural and contraction forms?
- 3) Does the concept of the 'greengrocer's apostrophe' apply to learner apostrophe misuse?

The purpose of the student questionnaire was to determine possible answers to these three sub-questions.

NATIONALITY RANGE

<u>Group</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<u>EG1</u>	√√√	√	√	√	√	√			
<u>EG2</u>	√√						√		
<u>CG</u>	√√	√√		√				√	√

Table 4: Distribution of nationalities across EG1, EG2 and the CG in the questionnaire. (√ = one student)

1 = Spanish 2 = Korean 3 = Japanese 4 = Italian 5 = Ecuadorian 6 = Chinese 7 = Brazilian 8 = Lithuanian 9 = Libyan

The questionnaire was modelled on the one used in Garrett and Austin (1993) (see Section 3.3) but in contrast to theirs, presented only twenty-four questions to the participants (see Appendix C), each of which contained apostrophe errors of a broader range than in their study. This was a recommendation made by Garrett and Austin in their findings, that “future work might include other types of apostrophe errors to gain a fuller picture” (Garrett and Austin 1993: 71). For a breakdown of question types and number of each, see Table 5. A total of eighteen of the questionnaire sentences contained errors, with the remaining six requiring no correcting.

Type	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Number of questions	4	2	3	5	3	2	2	1	1	1

Table 5: Breakdown of question types and numbers of questions in each category.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| A) Genitive Singular | F) Its or It’s |
| B) Regular Genitive Plural | G) Regular Plurals |
| C) Irregular Genitive Plurals | H) - s ending surname |

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| D) Contractions | I) 'of' construction |
| E) 'Greengrocer's apostrophe' for plural | J) Adjectival use |

Table 5: Key to question types.

4.2.2 Breakdown of Student Responses to Questionnaire

In Leedy and Ormrod's view, "numbers are meaningless unless we can find the patterns that lie beneath them" (Leedy and Ormrod 2015:229); therefore an examination of the patterns that emerged on analysis of the participants' questionnaires is of importance here.

4.2.2.1 Analysis of Experimental Group 1 (EG1) Responses

The first Experimental Group (EG1), consisting of nine participants of nationalities ranging from Spanish, Korean, Japanese, and Italian to Ecuadorian and Chinese, scored a mean score of 16.111 out of the 24 questions on the questionnaire. Interestingly in this group, four participants of different nationalities made corrections for the same sentence alluding to 'car radios' which in fact needed no correction. Modifications ranged from "car's radios" and "cars's radios" to "car radio's." This would suggest confusion among some of the participants in adjectival references and in plural forms, with a hint of a greengrocer's apostrophe in the latter example. However, only one error was recorded in EG1 regarding the other three 'greengrocer's apostrophe' plural examples, by an Ecuadorian student; all the other students corrected erroneous 'greengrocer's apostrophe' successfully.

Another significant pattern to emerge from this group was confusion with the regular genitive plural example provided "in two weeks time," whereby six out of the nine participants failed

to notice the lack of and necessity for the apostrophe after the word “weeks” (i.e. “in two weeks’ time”). In the light of the IELTS exam reference made in Section 1.2.2, and a mark lost for apostrophe omission in a similar example, this may be viewed as noteworthy.

Of greatest interest, however, were the attitudes expressed in terms of marks deducted for errors in the students’ opinions. This group deemed the error with “its” to be the most serious, with five participants scoring – 4 (very serious) or - 5 (extremely serious) if the contracted “it’s” was used incorrectly in the place of the possessive “its”. Overall, this shared opinion dominated EG1’s error judgements, as contraction errors in general all scored -4 or -5, with the most serious contraction error identified by five participants as “were” (instead of the correct “we’re”). Tellingly, only one student, an Italian, recognised the error in “might of”, the only participant in all of the three groups to do so. The student realised it was a contraction of ‘have’, yet curiously corrected it to “should’ve” rather than “might’ve.”

4.2.2.2 Analysis of Experimental Group 2 (EG2) Responses

The second Experimental Group (EG2) had four participants, three of whom were Spanish, with one Brazilian, and this group scored a mean score of 15.25 out of 24 on the questionnaire. The Brazilian student was the only one to make irregular genitive plural errors in this group. All four students identified ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ errors, but confusion arose for some in fixing the errors (e.g. the singular ‘banana’ rather than “bananas” used, or the singular ‘string’ rather than “strings”, presumably due to the use of the preceding phrase “one of the...”). Despite their confusion in correcting these examples, they deemed such errors to have seriousness values of -4 and -5. None of the four students recognised the error with “each others” and the absent apostrophe (i.e. each other’s), while all four interestingly

displayed L1 influence by judging “a partner of my father” as correct, without considering the apostrophe options of either ‘my father’s partner’ or ‘a partner of my father’s’, nor did they recognise the “in two weeks time” error. Nevertheless, the possessive ‘its’ error was identified by all four students.

All in all, this group also judged contraction errors the most harshly, particularly with a Present Continuous example (“my daughters travelling” rather than ‘my daughter’s travelling’), whereby adjectival use (“a Rolling Stones album”) was seen as the least serious error, which is significant given that this is an accepted prescriptive option.

4.2.2.3 Analysis of the Control Group (CG) Responses

The final cohort, the Control Group (CG) was the group which had received no intervention between their pre-tests and post-tests. The mean score of the CG was 11.571 out of 24 on their questionnaire questions, considerably lower than either EG1 or EG2. This group had a wider nationality range than did EG2, with Spanish, Italian, Korean, Lithuanian and Libyan students, seven individuals in total. Adjectival use of the apostrophe caused confusion for many members of this group (a Rolling Stones album) with corrections such as ‘Stone’s’ and ‘Stone’ offered, where no correction was in fact necessary.

GROUP	Mean Score (out of 24)
EG1	16.11
EG2	15.25
CG	11.57

Table 6: Mean scores out of 24 for the corrections in the student questionnaires.

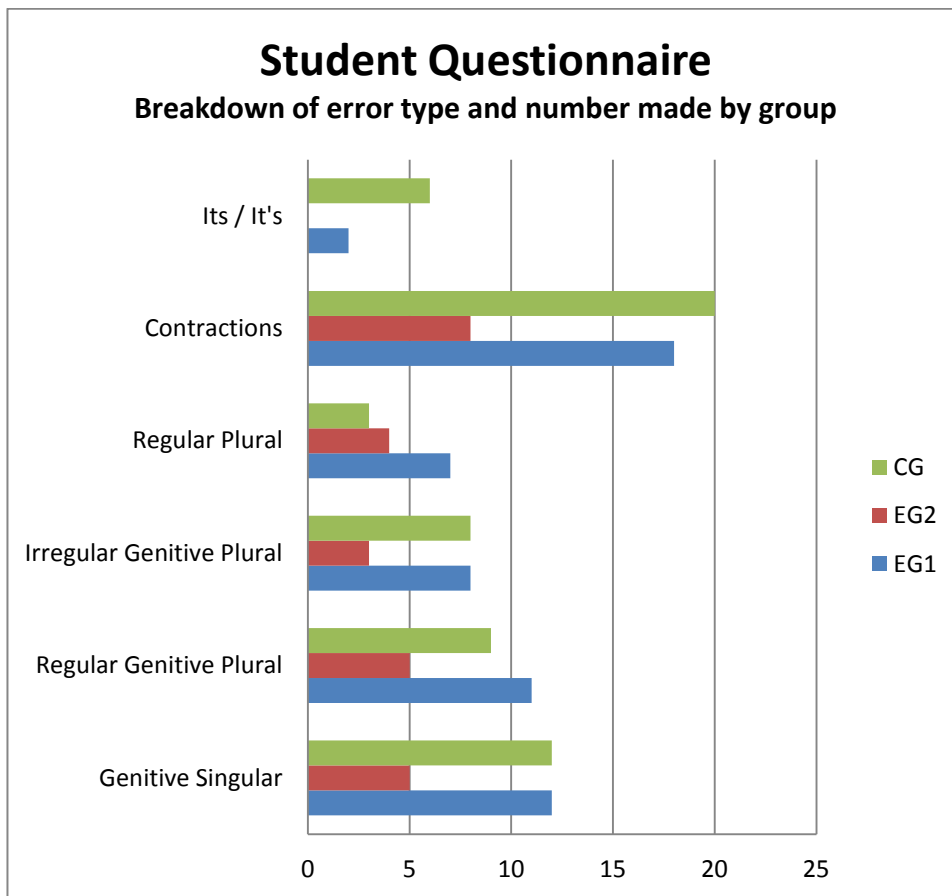


Chart 6: Breakdown of the number and type of errors made by EG1, EG2 and the CG in the student questionnaire (out of 24 questions).

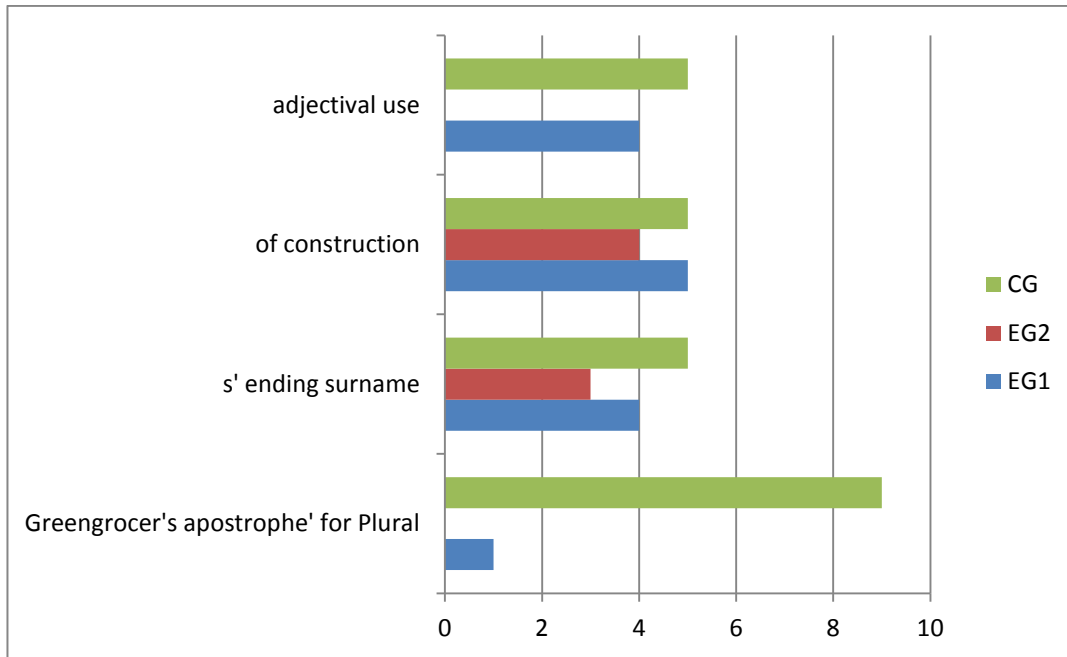


Chart 7: Breakdown of the number and type of errors made by EG1, EG2 and the CG in the student questionnaire continued (out of 24 questions).

The ambiguous nature of this example means two possible options: ‘a Rolling Stones album’ (i.e. without an apostrophe), where ‘Stones’ describes the type of album, hence acting adjectivally (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 320) and which happens to be plural as there are four band members, or ‘a Rolling Stones’ album’ (i.e. regular genitive plural use of the apostrophe) where the apostrophe is acknowledging “a close relationship with something” (Carter, McCarthy, Mark and O’Keeffe 2011: 69). Students received a mark for either contribution, yet despite having two choices, five of the students still made errors in this example.

Only one of the seven participants offered an apostrophe alternative to “a partner of my father” and corrected it to “father’s” (see Section 5.3) while only two out of the seven students identified “it’s” as an error for possession. Contraction errors caused considerable

difficulties for four members of this group, with one student either failing to recognise any erroneous use in the five contraction examples or offering other incorrect versions, while two other students had a similar outcome with four of the five contraction examples.

The regular genitive plural example “in two weeks time” was not recognised as erroneous by three out of the seven students. The ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ caused difficulty for two students only, one of whom corrected the given examples with a regular genitive plural form (bananas’, strings’) and also unnecessarily added s’ to regular plurals in other examples (husbands’, bats’). These same two students, Lithuanian and Libyan, also had greater difficulty with genitive singular forms than did the other nationalities.

With regard to error serious judgement, two of the students did not offer any scales. Three of the remaining students graded all errors either -4 or -5 throughout, with greengrocer’s apostrophe, genitive singular and contraction errors scoring -5 consistently. Only one student, a Korean, scored lower for errors, -2 or -3 throughout their questionnaire.

Tables 7, 8 and 9 provide a breakdown of the marks that the student participants saw fit to deduct from each question in the questionnaire, by group and country of origin. A blank square indicates the student deducted no marks for the question. The red numbers signify questions which were error-free.

Group																								
EG1-01 Ecu	5	3	2	3	3	4			4	3	4	3		3	3								2	
EG1-02 Spain	3	2	4	4	4	3	2			2	4		3		5	2					3		2	
EG1-03 Spain	3	4	4	4		4	4		4	4	3	4	4	4	5		4				3		3	
EG1-04 China	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3			4		4	3	3		3				4	4	4	4
EG1-06 Korea	2	1	1	1	2	1	3		2		3		3	3	1		4				2	5	2	
EG1-07 Japan	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3					3		2	5	3	4	1		1		3	
EG1-08 Spain		3	4		3	4	3				4	5	3	3	3	5	3					3		
EG1-09 Italy	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	3			4	5	4	3	5	5		4			4	3	3	
EG1-10 Spain		3	2	4	3	2		2			2	2	1	3	5						3	4	2	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24

Question Numbers

Table 7: Breakdown of marks deducted by EG1. ‘Ecu’ = Ecuador.

Group																								
EG2-01 Brazil	2	3	2		3	3		3	3					3	4		3				3	3		
EG2-02 Spain	4	3	3	4	4	4	4			4	3		4	4	3						4		2	
EG2-03 Spain	2	5	5	3	5	5	4	4	2	2		4	5		2	5	2		4		3	3	3	
EG-05 Spain	3	4	4	5	4	4	4				3	4		3	5	4		3			4		2	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24

Question Numbers

Table 8: Breakdown of marks deducted by EG2.

Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
CG-01 Korea		2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	2		2	2	2	2					
CG-02 Spain			4	4	4	5	4	2	5				5	4	4	5		4	5	4				4
CG-03 Lithuania																								
CG-04 Libya																								
CG-05 Spain		4		4		4	4	4	4			4		4	4		4					4		
CG-08 Italy		4	5	5			5	4			4	4		4	5	4		4				4	5	4
CG-09 Korea		4	5	4	4	5	5	4			4		4	4	5	5		5		5	4			5

Table 9: Breakdown of marks deducted by the CG.

4.2.3 Observations on the Student Questionnaires

Taking all three groups, EG1, EG2 and the CG, and analysing their results as one complete cohort, it would appear that certain patterns emerge in their responses to the questionnaire. It is clear that the mean scores of all three groups differ, in descending order, between the EG1 who received prescriptive intervention, the EG2 who received descriptive-type intervention and the CG who received no intervention.

Returning to two of the sub-questions posed regarding learner error recognition and seriousness in grading of same, the most striking error across all three groups was the “in two weeks time” example, which caused confusion for thirteen of the twenty participants irrespective of intervention (or none) received. This is significant in terms of the point raised in Section 1.2.2 regarding IELTS test questions containing similar examples.

A second observation is in contraction forms, where the erroneous “might of” was noticed by only one student out of twenty, who nonetheless offered “should’ve” as the corrected version. A need for a contracted form of ‘have’ was recognised by this student, yet the ability to contract with ‘might’ was not, curiously enough. This error was emphasising a pronunciation and grammatical issue which nonetheless also impacts upon apostrophe application. This could have implications for examination candidates in the listening sections of exams like IELTS. Whilst both the contracted and full forms of answers are generally accepted, if a candidate misunderstands the speakers, and writes the erroneous ‘might/could/should/would of’, which a native-speaker may also do, or chooses to use the contracted form and cannot contract correctly (i.e. ‘migh’tve, couldv’e) a lost mark could be the consequence.

A third observation was the confusion with adjectival forms, namely the “car radios” and “Rolling Stones album” examples, neither of which were erroneous as such, yet many variations of unnecessary solutions were offered, suggesting an uncertainty in use here among more than half the cohort.

All in all it would seem that the greatest number of errors occurred in the category with the biggest number of examples (i.e. contractions), contrary to both what the researcher’s initial belief was, i.e., that the nature of the errors of this student cohort would have occurred in possessive forms rather than in contractions, and to the findings of Lasota (2008), which identified genitive constructions as being most problematic. Interestingly, students judged errors in many of these contraction type structures most harshly (we’re, daughter’s, it’s). Perhaps it is that students feel that contraction know-how should be common knowledge to them by B2 level. In contrast, many of the adjectival uses were given low scores (-3 or -2), reflecting either a lack of awareness of their importance or simply not seeing this use as

significant enough to warrant greater seriousness. For future research, it could be helpful to delve further and ask students to explain why they believe a certain use is erroneous, and why they would grade it a certain way, to collect more detailed data on their attitudes.

It was also interesting to note that in general, errors with irregular genitive plural forms were fewer than with regular genitive plural or genitive singular, again somewhat contrary to the researcher's original belief that all possessive plurals would cause greater difficulty than possessive singular forms. This could be due to increased attention given to these forms in classes, and subsequent noticing (children's shoes, People's Park), whereby certain regular nouns, such as -y ending words like 'baby' or 'lady' in the plural ('babies' 'ladies') cause momentary slips in judgement in what possessive forms are required.

In addition, fifteen out of the twenty students did not see an issue with an "of" form being used for possession for a person, perhaps owing to L1 interference. Low scores to no scores were offered for this, reflecting the attitude clearly amongst this cohort that this simply was not an issue to be concerned about. Given the vagueness of general rules about when to use apostrophe 's' and when to use 'of', this is hardly surprising: "there are many cases where both are possible" (Carter, McCarthy, Mark and O'Keeffe 2006: 393).

In conclusion, and to answer the third and final sub-question regarding whether the phenomenon of the 'greengrocer's apostrophe' applied to this group of learners, it would seem that, despite two students having great difficulty discerning errors of this type, the vast majority of the cohort had no difficulty recognising and correcting such errors and also judged them with harsh scores of -4 or -5. It would therefore seem that this group did not

appear to have the kind of “insecurity in use” of the apostrophe in regular plurals that native speakers can often display.

4.3 The Limitations of the Study

The pre-/post-test/ and questionnaire research was conducted at the researcher’s school, where every effort was made to prevent social desirability bias (see Section 3.4). The sample size in this study must once again be highlighted and acknowledged as a limitation, resulting in a difficulty making generalisations about findings.

Although ideally an equal number of participants should have been in each group (Howitt and Cramer 2011: 172), with six being aimed for, circumstances did not permit this, a limitation which may have had some bearing on any outcome, and would be a consideration for a similar study.

Following a meeting with the school director, it was felt that late May was a better time of year in which to collect the data, when typically the General English student population expands, resulting in a greater potential pool of willing participants from which to draw. Student numbers in the winter/early spring semester can be lower. The original intention of the study was to focus solely on students hoping to enter tertiary education or on existing university students hoping to embark on postgraduate courses, as the IELTS examination is of particular relevance to this demographic, but this was not an option. Future studies, working exclusively with IELTS examination candidates, could be worth undertaking. The school does not normally run an IELTS course through the summer semester, hence it would have been more difficult to choose students from this demographic.

Ideally, none of the student participants would have had any contact with the other groups in the intervening days between their pre-tests and post-tests. In a small school- setting, however, this was difficult to ensure; many of the students socialise together outside class (e.g. during their break, at lunchtime, in extra- curricular activities and in shared accommodation). It was therefore difficult to prevent possible exchanges of intervention material between the groups being discussed, which may have had some influence on post-test and questionnaire results, particularly in the CG, which was meant to have been intervention-free.

While the student samples for both the pre/post-tests and questionnaires were sufficiently similar in being comprised of B2-level students, attrition caused EG1 to lose one participant between the pre/post-test phase and for the questionnaire, while the CG was to lose two participants from pre- to post-test. This was accounted for in the statistical analysis. However, the CG gained two participants for the questionnaire. Hence this change in sample size may have impacted on the validity of results, as well as the fact that overall, the sample size was small.

In the reading out of questions in the pre/post-tests, the researchers' (Irish) accents may have caused difficulty for participants, resulting in full forms rather than contracted forms being filled in gaps. Also noted was "will" written in place of "we'll", which could lead to the conclusion that some students had difficulty with the listening aspect of the pre/post-tests. Of further note is that a range of accents is to be found in listening examinations like IELTS, so perhaps this exposure is beneficial to students.

In the intervention stage of the study, EG2 were encouraged to collect examples of apostrophe use that they could find out and about, to encourage them to gather authentic text examples. Breen's recommendation that students themselves should be involved in an authentic text selection process was being adhered to here, as being "at least as justified and ultimately as valuable as our own" (Breen 1985: 63). However, not one of the four EG2 participants produced an example of their own from outside the classroom, relying solely on posters on the classroom wall for apostrophe examples, hence the researcher's own authentic photos found in and around the Limerick City environs had to be used exclusively. Perhaps a longer time span between the pre-test and intervention would have encouraged richer voluntary input from the cohort, and is a recommendation for future related studies. It must be considered, therefore, that the type of input received by EG1 was of a broader, perhaps subsequently more beneficial nature than that received by EG2.

From the analysis of the tests and questionnaire used in this study, it is now appropriate to discuss conclusions that can be drawn on general apostrophe use in English, its impact on the learner and implications for teaching. What conclusions, if any, may be drawn from the study conducted on this cohort and subsequent findings? These shall be examined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

For Breen, the primary function of a piece of text is to illustrate and exemplify the workings of language (Breen 1985: 62) therefore, learners should be exposed to authentic texts to have “immediate and direct contact with input data which reflect genuine communication in the target language,” allowing the activation of prior knowledge about the workings of language use and structures (Breen 1985: 63). Nonetheless, while Breen states clearly that any text engaging the learner, drawing out “the use and discovery of those conventions of communication which the text exploits” is of intrinsic worth, he also admits that “precision in human affairs ... is a relative matter” (ibid).

In language terms, such precision is challenged hugely by apostrophe misuse in authentic texts, to the extent that Sklar claimed the genitive apostrophe to be no longer “a convenience”, lamenting the loss of both its grammatical significance and its utility, as inappropriate use corrupts “heretofore stable forms, such as [...] nominative plurals” (i.e. the greengrocer’s apostrophe) resulting in “haphazard usage.” (Sklar 1976: 183).

5.1 Examples of Local Irregularities in Apostrophe Use

A case of such haphazardness is on one sign in a city-central park near the researcher’s school, welcoming visitors to “Peoples’ Park” (erroneous use of irregular genitive plural), dedicated to one of “Limerick’s wealthiest merchants” (correct genitive singular and nominative plural use), with a “Childrens’ Playground” and a “Childrens’ Memorial” (erroneous irregular genitive plural) on which can be seen tiny “Children’s Footprints”

(correct use), with further references to “Christopher Colles’ map” and “the city’s coat of arms” (both prescriptively correct use). Of interest is that the irregular genitive plural causes the problems in the apostrophe use in this sign, which if designed by a native speaker would be contrary to the test findings in the study, which indicated a certain confidence in use in irregular genitive plurals among the student cohort.

5.2 Authentic Materials and Impact on Native Speakers

Of similar interest is the type of reading material that many native children are exposed to at primary-school level. The “Captain Underpants” series of books by Dav Pilkey , interspersed with conventional and unconventional English in terms of grammar, spelling and punctuation, has proved hugely popular with its 8-10 year-old target audience. Curiously, at points in the books when unconventional, misspelt language dominates the plot and dialogue, the only punctuation which disappears completely is the apostrophe: capital letters, commas, full stops, ellipses, exclamation and question marks are all present, but no apostrophes. In 2012 and 2013, the “Captain Underpants” books were reported by the American Library Association to be those most frequently complained about, with parents accusing the books as having “language inappropriate for the target audience” (i.e. elementary school children) and received more complaints in those two years than ‘Fifty Shades of Grey.’ (Engel 2013)

Strikingly, the complaints were neither levelled at the poor standard of spelling or non-existent apostrophes in parts of the books, but rather at the “offensive language” of referring to the character of the school principal as “that old guy” and “Mean Old Mr. Krupp”, at the partial nudity of the hero as he flies around in his underpants, at the violence of “evil robots being whacked” and at prank-playing being construed as “bullying” (Engel 2013). Engel

concludes by saying what was most shocking to him was such parental opposition to a book “that gets young boys excited about reading” (ibid).

An article in an Irish newspaper, the *Irish Times*, outlines issues in this regard closer to home, with a secondary teacher who “regularly ploughs through students’ essays”, admitting their written production frequently comes with either “little, if any, punctuation ... confetti-style efforts with punctuation everywhere which does not make sense ... or text-speak” (O’Brien:2016: 9). A UCD professor interviewed in the same article describes an “epidemic of grammatically poor students,” while Tony Donohue, the head of education with IBEC, voices the concerns of businesses, citing “simple grammatical errors in CVs, poor writing standards and casual emails,” with more than 25% of employers surveyed being dissatisfied with graduates’ ability to communicate in writing (ibid).

Beal (2010: 62) alludes to a “golden age” of traditional grammar teaching before 1965, after which the basic rules of grammar were eclipsed by a preference for a focus on creativity and creative thinking in writing (O’Brien 2016: 9). This would concur with Austin’s findings in the United Kingdom at primary level, where a teacher he interviewed admitted that it was actually “common practice” among his colleagues to advise pupils to omit the genitive apostrophe totally if they “had any difficulty with it” (Austin 1989: 35). Furthermore, this appears to have been the policy of the time, that at primary school level “there should very rarely be any explicit study of language” and at secondary-level “an awareness of how language works in society is more beneficial than a knowledge of the grammar” (Austin 1989: 35). The fact now remains that, despite being the only English-speaking country in the EU post-Brexit, “foreign students often have better grammar than Irish students” (O’Brien

2016: 9). Nevertheless, the tests and questionnaires presented to the B2 student cohort in this study indicated clear issues with apostrophe use, even after intervention.

Also evident in this study was that, after statistical analysis of the cohort pre/post-test scores, there was no evidence to support the superiority of prescriptive intervention over descriptive intervention, or vice versa. This is consistent with the findings of Garrett and Austin (1993:64) in their research on the learning of the EGA. The observations of the researcher, however, having taught both intervention lessons, were that the students in the prescriptive intervention lesson (EG1) sat, listened and asked questions only where and when relevant, in what was largely a traditional, teacher-led lesson, with teacher talking time at a premium. In contrast, the descriptive group (EG2) demonstrated far greater engagement with the lesson material presented to them (despite their own lack of contributions), more active involvement and enjoyment of their lesson. Hence an eclectic approach could be considered by teachers for maximum student benefit, using the combined strengths of both methods, in imparting effective apostrophe use.

Why should apostrophe insecurity still exist among learners? For those for whom traditional, paper-based grammars may be too cumbersome to consult, the internet now gives access to a myriad of websites to assist both native and non-native learners in apostrophe application. Twitter has sites such as '*Grammargarda*', and '*Grammarly*', which highlight grammatical blunders in a light-hearted way, the apostrophe being a particular favourite, while websites such as '*Proofreading.ie*' are available giving detailed explanations of prescriptively correct apostrophe uses. For EAP students, the *uefap.com* website offers examples and practice exercises in apostrophe use, although it was of note that only one example of the regular genitive plural occurred in these practice exercises, while multiple genitive singular examples

were used. This concurs with Pyles and Algeo's findings (in Hook 1999: 44) of a higher frequency of genitive singular use over genitive plural in the language, which, although outside the scope of this study, could warrant further investigation. Also noted was that in a handbook offered online to students containing academic writing tips, there was no mention of irregular genitive plurals, which many native speakers appear to have difficulty with (Murphy 2009). Only three main points about apostrophe use are made, of a rudimentary nature, where perhaps more detail could be helpful for natives and non-natives alike.

5.3 The Argument for Corpus-Based Research

A final consideration should be corpus-based evidence of apostrophe application. Certain examples used in the pre/post-tests, the questionnaire and the handout of prescriptive rules offered to EG1 (see Appendices A-C and G) increasingly have a range of accepted versions in authentic texts, if their prescriptive rules of use are cast aside or bent. 'For goodness' sake', it may be argued, is a lower-frequency chunk of language now than it was previously, and increasingly found without the apostrophe. An examination of similar fixed phrases containing the apostrophe was outside the scope of this study, but could be worthwhile in future work. The genitive/adjectival debate ('an all boys' school/an all boys school') lends further credence to the belief for more corpus-based analysis of how the apostrophe actually appears in authentic texts, where perhaps greater tolerance of other examples (e.g. the periphrastic 'of' as in 'a partner of my father') is permitted outside the more rigid prescriptive domain. Maybe the time has come for a relaxing of such rigidity, particularly when it comes to examination English, with corpora playing a more supportive role in prescriptive

apostrophe application. As a recent case in point, Specsavers, a British chain of opticians famous for its slogan “Should’ve gone to Specsavers”, has applied to the UK’s Intellectual Property Office to trademark both the terms ‘should’ve’ and ‘shouldve’ (i.e. with and without the apostrophe) “to protect its well-known catchphrase” (Monaghan 2016).

5.4 The Future of the Apostrophe ... or the Apostrophe’s Future?

Thus the question that remains is what is to become of the apostrophe, and of the learners struggling to use it? Is the best thing to do, in fact, to take Sklar’s advice, in which she believes firmly that “we cannot, nor should we wish to preserve it indefinitely” and that we have no option but to relegate the apostrophe to being “a relic of times past?” (Sklar 1976: 183). It is worth noting that the residents of Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts felt compelled to sue the US Board of Geographic Names, which will not in principle allow the apostrophe officially on American maps, as it takes issue with the notion of “ownership” it denotes (Hook 1999: 46). The residents won the right to keep the apostrophe in their town’s name (making it one of only four US place names which can officially carry the apostrophe) indicating that there is clearly a desire to hold on to this mark for the time being, at least in some quarters.

Or is there simply a need to be more positive about the apostrophe? An accusation often levelled at those who misuse the apostrophe, according to Beal, is that they are “illiterate,” but she disputes this by outlining the fact that if they were truly illiterate, they would not be writing in the first place (Beal 2010: 62). Could it be therefore, that the greengrocer’s apostrophe, in Beal’s optimistic words, “far from being a symptom of a decline in literacy, is a consequence of universal education” (ibid), hence something to be celebrated?

Or could it be that maybe at best, and on a final note, all that can be done is to have a measure of acceptance about the apostrophe and how it regularly appears in authentic texts? That perhaps all that remains is to maintain such stoic resignation as voiced by Little who, on asking whether the apostrophe will survive, reminds us:

At almost no time in its history has there been complete agreement about how it is to be used. Why should the future be any different?

(Little 1986: 17)

References

- Al Fadda, H. (2012) 'Difficulties in Academic Writing: from the perspective of King Saud University postgraduate students', *English Language Teaching*, 5(3) , 123-130.
- Allan, D. (2004) *Oxford Placement Test 1 - Grammar Test*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allen, R. (2000) *The Penguin English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Allen, V. (1997) 'The Organic Approach to the Apostrophe: An Unwarranted Consensus', *Composition Studies*, 25(1), 83-99.
- Alptekin, C. (2002) 'Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT ', *ELT Journal*, 56(1), 57-64.
- Anderson, T., and Lynch, T. (1988) *Listening*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Austin, C. (1989) *The English Genitive Apostrophe - Origins and Insecurity in Usage*, unpublished thesis (MA), University of Bangor.[accessed through inter-library loan, MaryImmaculate College, April 15-May 11, 2016].
- Barber, C. (1993) *The English Language: a Historical Introduction* , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barfoot, C. (1991) 'Trouble with the Apostrophe, Or 'You Know What Hairdresser's Are Like' in van Ostede, I.T. ed., *Language Usage and Description: Studies Presented to N.E. Osselton on the Occasion of His Retirement*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 121-137.
- Battistella, E. (1999) 'A Peircean Approach to the Apostrophe'. *The Peirce Seminar Papers*, 4, 87-119.
- Beal, J. (2010) 'The grocer's apostrophe: popular prescriptivism in the 21st century '. *English Today*, 26(26), 57-64.
- Beal, J. (2009) 'Three Hundred Years of Prescriptivism (and Counting)' in: *Current Issues in Late Modern English* in: Van Ostede, I.T. and van der Wurff, W., eds., *Linguistic Insights-Studies in Language and Communication*, 77, 35-49.
- Blake, N. F. (1996) *A History of the English Language*, Palgrave.
- Breen, M. (1985) 'Authenticity in the language classroom', *Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 60-70.
- Bryant, P., Devine, M., Ledward, A. and Nunes, T. (1997) 'Spelling with apostrophes and understanding possession', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 67(1), 91-110.
- Bygate, M., Skehan, P. & Swain, M. (2001) *Researching Pedagogic Tasks*. Harlow, England: Longman.

- Cambridge IELTS Examination Papers from the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations - Book 3* (2002) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, D. (1995) *Verbal Hygiene*, London: Routledge.
- Carey, J. (1955) *New Senior Prose*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006) *Cambridge Grammar of English*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R., McCarthy, M., Mark, G. and O'Keeffe, A. (2011) *English Grammar Today- An A-Z of Spoken and Written Grammar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R., McCarthy, M., Mark, G. and O'Keeffe, A. (2011) *English Grammar Today Workbook*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cavella, C. and Kernodle, R.A. (2003) 'How the past affects the future: the story of the apostrophe', *TESOL Working Papers*, 2, 1-11.
- Creswell, J. (2014) *Research Design*, 4th ed., London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Crystal, D. (1980) *A First Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, London: Deutsch.
- Crystal, D. (1995) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, J. (2005) *History of English*, 2nd ed., Routledge.
- Darling, C. (1999) *The Mighty Apostrophe* [online image], Capital Community Technical College, Hartford, Connecticut.: available at:
<http://cctc.commnet.edu/HP/pages/darling/grammar/marks.htm#apostrophe> [accessed 5 May 2016].
- Dictionary.com and Thesaurus app.* [online][accessed 3 March, 2016].
- Dirckx, J. (2001) 'The synthetic genitive in medical eponyms: is it doomed to extinction?', *Pance@*, 2,(5), 15-24.
- Dornyei, Z. (2007) *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed-methodologies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duda, R., and Tyne, H. (2010) 'Authenticity and autonomy in language learning', *Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquee*, 92, 86-106.
- Eastwood, J. (1992) *Oxford Practice Grammar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elder, C. and O'Loughlin, K. (2003) ' Investigating the relationship between intensive English language study and band score gain on IELTS' in Tulloh, R. (ed.) *International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Research Reports*, 4, 207-254.

- Ellis, R. (1990) *Instructed Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ellis, R. (2003) *Task-based Language Teaching and Learning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Engel, P. (2013) 'Why Captain Underpants is the Most Banned Book in America', *Business Insider* [online], 26 Sept, available: <http://www.businessinsider.com/why-captain-underpants-is-the-most-banned-book-in-america-2013-9> [accessed 13 January 2016].
- Exam English - The IELTS Band Score Calculator* [online].
http://www.examenglish.com/IELTS/IELTS_Band_Score_Calculator.html. [accessed January 29, 2012].
- Fanselow, J. (1982) *Breaking Rules*, London: Longman.
- Garrett, P. and Austin, C. (1993) 'The English Genitive Apostrophe: Judgements of errors and implications for teaching', *Language Awareness*, 2(2), 61-75.
- Gilmore, A. (2007) 'Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language teaching', *Language Teaching*, 40(2), 97-118.
- Gilmore, A. (2008) *Getting Real in the Language Classroom: Developing Japanese Students' Communicative Competence with Authentic Materials*, unpublished thesis (PhD), University of Nottingham. available at: <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11928/1/478936>. [accessed 5 May 2016].
- Google Images (2016) *Best of 2012: Apostrophe now | LIKELIHOOD OF CONFUSION*, [online image], available at: <http://www.likelihoodofconfusion.com> [accessed 26 April 2016].
- Google Images (2016) *Nothing Last's Forever tattoo*, [online image], available at: https://www.google.ie/search?q=nothing+last's+forever+tattoo&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-gb&client=safari#imgrc=E7zA3_ptJLAMvM%3A [accessed 20 August 2016].
- Google Images (2016) *Loser's Sometimes Win tattoo*, [online image], available at: http://www.offthemapattoo.com/tattoos/Zam/tattoos_23587.html. [accessed 16 May 2016].
- Guariento, W. and Morley, J. (2001) 'Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom', *ELT Journal*, 55(4), 347-353.
- Harmer, J. (2007) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, 4th ed., *Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers*, Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Health Service Executive (2016) Primary School Dental Consent Form, HSE, available at: hse.ie/eng/services/list/dental.
- Hewings, M. (1999) *Advanced Grammar in Use*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Honan, D. and Sheahan, A. (2015) *Student Feedback Report*, Limerick: Limerick Language Centre.
- Honan, D. and Sheahan, A. (2016) *Student Focus Group Questions*, Limerick: Limerick Language Centre.

- Hook, D. (1999) 'The apostrophe: use and misuse', *English Today*, 15(3), 42-49.
- Kay, S. and Jones, V. (2007) *New Inside Out Elementary Workbook.*, Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Kay, S., Jones, V. and Kerr, P. (2002) *Inside Out Student's Book Pre-Intermediate*, Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Kindergym (2016) Advertisement, Delta Sports Dome, Limerick, available at: www.kindergym.ie.
- Lasota, J. (2008) 'The Apostrophe Revisited : attitudes, errors and implications for teaching in an upper secondary school', *Svenska Akademiens Spraklara - Svenska Akademien, Stockholm*, 1-34.
- Latham-Koenig, C., Oxenden, C. and Seligson, P. (2012) *English File Elementary Student's Book*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Latham-Koenig, C., Oxenden, C. and Seligson, P. with Hudson, J. (2012) *English File Elementary Workbook*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Latham-Koenig, C., Oxenden, C. and Seligson, P. with Lowy, A. and Hamilton, G. (2012) *English File Elementary Teacher's Book*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leedy, P. and Ormrod, J. (2015) *Practical Research*, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Little, G. (1986) 'The ambivalent apostrophe', *English Today*, 8, 15-17.
- MacDonald, M., Badger, R. & Dasli, M. (2005) 'Authenticity, culture and language learning', *Language and International Communication*, 6(3-4), 250-261.
- Mark, G. (2015) 'Authentic Materials', *AL6731: Issues in Applied Linguistics* [online], available on Moodle <http://www.mic.ul.ie> [accessed January 4, 2016].
- McCarthy, M. & Carter, C. (2006) *Cambridge Grammar of English - A Comprehensive Guide : Spoken and Written English Grammar Usage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mishan, F. (2005) *Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials*, UK: Intellect Books.
- Monaghan, A. (2016) 'Specsavers' application to trademark 'should've' approved', *The Guardian* [online], 16 Aug, available: http://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/aug/16/specsavers-application-to-trademark-shouldve-approved?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other
- Morris, S. (2013) 'Outrage at local authority plans to abolish apostrophe', *The Guardian* [online], 15 March, available : <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/15/council-ban-apostrophe> [accessed 21 Feb 2016].
- Morrow, K. (1977) 'Authentic texts and ESP', in Holden, S., ed., *English for Specific Purposes*, London: Modern English Publications , 13 - 17.
- Mullan, J. (2006 October 6) 'M and S: the pedant's store.' *The Guardian* [online], 6 Oct, available: <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2006/oct/06/marksspencer.retail> [accessed 3 June 2016].

- Murphy, A. (2009) *General Guide for Academic Writing and Presentation of Written Assignments*. Dublin Institute of Technology [online], available at: <https://www.dit.ie>study>matuarestudents> [accessed 29 Jan 2016].
- O'Brien, C. (2016) 'Universities offer 'literacy clinics' for students'. *The Irish Times*, 30 Jan, 9.
- Oxenden, C. and Latham-Koenig, C. (2009) *New English File Beginner Student's Book*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peacock, M. (1997) 'The affect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners', *ELT Journal*, 51(2), 144-156.
- Prahbu, N. (1987) *Second Language Pedagogy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Printing Services in Limerick City* (2016) [goldenpages.ie](http://www.goldenpages.ie), available at: <http://www.goldenpages.ie/printing-services/limerick-city-limerick-county/> [accessed 31 May 2016].
- Rahman, R. (2014) 'A case for authentic materials in language teaching', *The Dialogue*, 9(2), 205-215.
- Ross, N. (1997) 'Signs of International English', *English Today*, 13(2), 29-33.
- Salkind, N. (2012) *Exploring Research*, 8th ed., USA: Pearson Education Inc.
- Sarani, A. and Sahebi, L. (2012) 'The impact of task-based approach on vocabulary learning in ESP courses', *English Language Teaching*, 5(10), 118-128.
- Sklar, E. R. (1976) 'The possessive apostrophe: the development and decline of a crooked mark', *College English*, 38(2), 175-183.
- Soars, J. and Soars, L. (2007) *New Headway Pre-Intermediate Student's Book*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soars, L. and Soars, J. (2011) *New Headway Beginner Student's Book*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Soars, L. and Soars, J. (2011) *New Headway Elementary Student's Book*, 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swain, M. (1985) 'Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development', in Gass, S. and Madden, C., eds., *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Swan, M. (1980) *Practical English Usage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Timmis, I. (2002) 'Native-speaker norms and international English : a classroom view', *ELT Journal*, 56 (3), 240-249.

- Tobin, D. (2016) 'A survey of printers' attitudes to apostrophe use in print media in the Limerick City region', *AL6712: Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick: Department of Applied Linguistics, unpublished.
- Tobin, D. (2016) O'Sullivan's Pharmacy exterior, Edward Street, Limerick, [photograph] (Deborah Tobin's own private collection).
- Truss, L. (2003) *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, UK: Profile Books.
- UEfAP website :*Using English for Academic Purposes* (2016), available at: <http://www.uefap.com>: <http://www.uefap.net>. [accessed February 12, 2016].
- Van Lier, L. (2014) 'Interaction in the language curriculum: awareness, autonomy and authenticity', *Language 1*, 73(3) , 655.
- Van Patten, W. (1990) 'Attending to form and content in input', *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 12, 287-299.
- Watchyn-Jones, P. (1982) *Start Testing Your Vocabulary*, London: Penguin.
- Widdowson, H. (1998) 'Context, community and authentic language', *TESOL Quarterly*, 32(4) , 705-716.
- Widdowson, H. (1978) *Teaching Language as Communication*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Willis, J. (1996) *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*, Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Wray, A. (1996) 'The Occurrence of 'Occurance' (and 'Alot' of Other Things 'Aswell') : patterns of error in undergraduate English', *Papers from the Annual General Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics* , University of Southampton, 94-123, available at: http://books.google.ie/books?id=_YmxTmWIHnOc&site [accessed 7 February, 2016].
- Yule, G. (1995) 'The paralinguistics of reference : representation in reported discourse' in Cook G. and Seidhofer, B., eds., *Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics* , 185-196.

Appendices

Appendix A- Pre/Post Test on the Apostrophe administered to EG1, EG2 and the CG

MAAL Research Questions

Students' Set

You will hear the following sentences read out, one by one, in their completed form.

Listen to each sentence and fill in the missing words you hear.

1. The _____ are cooking dinner today.
2. Tim goes to an all _____ school.
3. I think the _____ getting tired.
4. _____ never too late to start a new hobby.
5. The _____ tails are wagging.
6. The _____ flew past.
7. She bought some new, black, high-heeled _____.
8. My _____ heel has broken.
9. _____ lost my wallet.
10. _____ pen is this?
11. _____ a beautiful day.
12. Are those _____ candles?
13. Sequoia _____ grow to great heights.
14. Look at those _____ way over there playing basketball!
15. We used the _____ changing room.
16. _____ going to the cinema with him?
17. _____ Park is in Limerick City.
18. The cat hurt _____ paws quite badly.
19. The _____ been emptied of all the fluid.
20. I think _____ have to be leaving soon.
21. The _____ toilets are over there.
22. They _____ live in Dublin anymore.

23. _____ been studying medicine for three years.
24. The _____ hospital near us is the best one in the country.
25. _____ go early, shall we?
26. Joe really _____ called to say he was going to be late.
27. Close the door for _____ sake!
28. I really like that _____ song.
29. A friend of my _____ took that photo.
30. _____ father works in the local factory.

Thank you for completing the sentences.

Before finishing, can you please provide the following information:

- Nationality :
- Are you : (please tick) male female
- Age :
- English language level :
- In your country, are you a student? (please tick) Yes No
- If yes, are you in: (please tick one)
 - second level education (e.g. high school)
 - third level education (e.g. university)

Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix B- Researcher's set of completed Pre/Post test questions

MAAL Thesis Research Questions – the apostrophe

Researcher's list of sentences:

1. The boys are cooking dinner today.
2. Tim goes to an all boys' school.
3. I think the baby's getting tired.
4. It's never too late to start a new hobby.
5. The dogs' tails are wagging.
6. The birds flew past.
7. She bought some new, black, high-heeled shoes.
8. My shoe's heel has broken.
9. I've lost my wallet.
10. Whose pen is this?
11. It's a beautiful day.
12. Are those James's candles?
13. Sequoia trees grow to great heights.
14. Look at those girls way over there playing basketball!
15. We used the women's changing room.
16. Who's going to the cinema with him?
17. People's Park is in Limerick City.
18. The cat hurt its paws quite badly.
19. The cup's been emptied of all the fluid.
20. I think we'll have to be leaving soon.
21. The men's toilets are over there.
22. They don't live in Dublin anymore.
23. He's been studying medicine for three years.
24. The children's hospital near us is the best one in the country.
25. Let's go early, shall we?
26. Joe really should've called to say he was going to be late.
27. Close the door for goodness' sake!

28. I really like that Beatles song.
29. A friend of my mother's took that photo.
30. Thomas's father works in the local factory.

Appendix C– Questionnaire distributed to EG1, EG2 and the CG after their post-test

MAAL Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to discover your attitude to mistakes in English apostrophe use.

It is NOT a test, and is completely anonymous. However, for statistical use only, can you please give the following information about yourself:

a) AGE :

b) GENDER : (Please circle) Male Female

c) NATIONALITY :

d) NATIVE LANGUAGE :

e) LEVEL : (Please circle one) B2 C1

Thank you for giving this information. Now please read the INSTRUCTIONS on the next page before you answer the questions.

INSTRUCTIONS

You will read 20 sentences. Some of the sentences have apostrophe errors, while some have no errors at all.

If you think a sentence has an apostrophe error, please underline the mistake. Then write the correct form **clearly** in the CORRECTION space provided. If you think the sentence has no mistake, please circle NONE.

Example: The bicycle was Marys but she gave it to her best friend.

CORRECTION **Mary's** NONE SERIOUSNESS

If there is a mistake, please show how serious you think the mistake is by writing a number: -1, -2, -3, -4 or -5 in the SERIOUSNESS space to show how many points you think should be lost for this mistake.

-5 extremely serious | -4 very serious | -3 serious | -2 a little serious | -1 not serious at all

SENTENCES

1. My mother owns a ladies' boutique.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

2. A cat can use its whiskers to check if a space is big enough to go into.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

3. One of the string's broke while I was playing my guitar.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

4. I need to eat soon, lets have an early dinner today.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

5. My daughters travelling to Indonesia next week.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

6. I hope to study English for the next few year's – at least until I pass the CAE.

- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
- 7.I last met Bob at my cousins wedding.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
- 8.Peoples' Park in Limerick is a wonderful place to go for a walk.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
- 9.Last Friday's weather was particularly bad.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
10. He told the police that all the car radios in his basement were his.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
11. If you cook, I'll set the table and wash up.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
12. The childrens' footwear department is on the second floor of this store.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
13. Its a well-known fact that bats fly at night.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
14. Although Maria and Ann are best friends, they find it difficult to like each others husbands.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
15. In Ireland, hurling and rugby are two really popular mens' sports.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
16. Our local market sells banana's at 50 cents per kilo – not bad!
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|
17. This summer were taking a long vacation in the South of France.
- | | | |
|------------|------|-------------|
| CORRECTION | NONE | SERIOUSNESS |
|------------|------|-------------|

18. Shall we stop working for today and meet again in two weeks time?

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

19. A pilots' training involves practical and theoretical tests on flying.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

20. In the past, people would write "Roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet and so are you" in a card to say "I love you."

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

21. Where are they? Do you suppose they might of got lost?

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

22. Have you read any of Dickenses novels?

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

23. Let me introduce you to Tom, a partner of my father.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

24. An early Rolling Stones album is worth a lot nowadays.

CORRECTION NONE SERIOUSNESS

That is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for taking part.

Appendix D Prescriptive Lesson Intervention for EG1

Tues May 24, 2016

11.30-12.30 am

Number of students: 10

Mixed-nationality group

Lesson Stages

- 1) Ss were introduced to the comma and the apostrophe on the board, with distinctions between the two punctuation marks outlined in terms of their position on a line (i.e. , rather than ') and that the apostrophe often accompanies the letter s ('s).
- 2) Ss were asked if the apostrophe exist in their language and it was established to exist in Catalan, Italian and French for reasons of omission, especially in the use of articles (e.g. le, la) preceding a vowel (e.g. the tree = l'arbre in French and Catalan, l'albero in Italian).
- 3) Ss were shown a PowerPoint presentation of apostrophe rules and examples of when it is used, which the researcher talked them through. This was a ten-slide presentation giving examples of apostrophe use in creating possessives, showing contractions and some special plural forms. Possessive forms included singular and plural regular and irregular animate nouns, nouns ending in 's' and inanimate nouns. Contractions included short (I'm) and longer examples (could've been), with 'its' and 'it's' being highlighted. Special plural forms included the plural of digits and letters (She got three A's and two B's last semester).
- 4) Ss were then given photocopies of four pages containing apostrophe rules with examples. They were invited to read through the copies and questions were taken with answers provided by the researcher.
- 5) Finally, Ss were given a photocopy with exercises (from *English Grammar Today Workbook*, p.100) to complete, which we talked through together as a group.

Of note in this lesson:

No ideas or rules were elicited from the Ss. Only once were they asked if they recognised the apostrophe as a mark, knew its name and whether it existed in their native language.

No noticing was encouraged.

Rules were deductively presented through the PowerPoint presentation and photocopies, and practised with the exercises in Stage 5 (example pages and references provided).

Appendix E Photocopy of Prescriptive Rules given to EG1

Rules for Apostrophe use in English

Apostrophes are used for two main purposes:

- To mark letters that have been omitted in contracted forms;
- To mark possessive forms of nouns and pronouns.

Apostrophes can also be used to mark special plurals.

Apostrophes for CONTRACTIONS

Common contractions include the following examples. The apostrophe is placed where a letter or letters have been removed.

I'm = I am we/you/they're = are he/she/it/one/who/where/what/how's = is or has

I/you/we/they/would/should/could've = have

I/we/you/he/she/it/one/they'd = had or would * Let's = us

can't = cannot won't = will not don't = do not isn't = is not aren't = are not

Apostrophes for POSSESSION

- For a singular noun, use 's :

the cat's milk

my boss's son

Linda's brother

Mr. Murphy's car

this year's Eurovision

a butterfly's wing

- For a plural noun which does not end in -s, use 's :
(This will include irregular plurals such as men, women, children, people).

the police's actions

a children's book

the men's changing rooms

people's attitudes

- For a plural noun which ends in -s, use s' :

My parents' house has a large front garden.

Her colleagues' proposals are interesting.
I'll see you in three days' time.

These are relatively straightforward uses of the apostrophe. There are, however, some unusual uses worth looking at.

- When first names end in -s, 's is generally used:

Marcus's laptop	Iris's pen	Jesus's disciples
Socrates's writings	St. James's Road	

- With surnames, there are two options:

Dickens's novels or Dickens' novels

Keats's poems or Keats' poems

Mr. Jones's key or Mr. Jones' key

The second column seems to be more popular in modern use.

- In special cases of forming the plural of a word that is not normally a noun, an apostrophe is used to prevent confusion in reading it:

What are the do's and don'ts of living in a foreign country?

My a's look more like e's when I write quickly.

With decades, this is optional:

In the 1990's / 1990s / 90's / 90s not '90's

- Shop and company names vary in their use or non-use of the apostrophe:

Dunnes (Irish supermarket) Boots (British chemist) Starbucks

Claire's (Irish accessories shop) bb's (Irish coffee shop) McDonald's

- In complex noun phrases or compound nouns, 's is used:

The people next door's dog is a nuisance.

We went to Jake's aunt's funeral.

Gary is her youngest daughter's boyfriend.

Rachel and Jerry's new car is a Ford.

My sister-in-law's husband is a lawyer.

- If the reference is clear, possessives are often used without a following noun:

I'm going to the hairdresser's after work. (i. e. the hairdresser's salon)

We're staying at Dave's tonight. (i. e. Dave's house)

- 's is used with certain indefinite pronouns. If the word "else" is used, 's comes after "else":

This must be someone else's jacket.

Nobody's saying, but somebody's guilty of breaking the window!

- The indefinite pronoun "other" takes 's in singular forms, and s' in plurals:

Two best friends always share each other's secrets.

My room is here, but the others' rooms are down the hall.

- Possessive pronouns ending in -s (yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs) NEVER take an apostrophe:

The house we passed by was theirs.

The car lost one of its wheels. (Be careful! * it's = it is)

- Possessive noun phrases with "of" keep the same apostrophe form they would have if they came before the noun:

That's another son of Marie's, isn't it?

Anthony is a friend of my cousin's.

- Certain fixed expressions take a single apostrophe:

For goodness' sake!

He wouldn't cry for appearance' sake.

- An apostrophe is used to show time and duration. A singular time noun takes 's and a plural takes s':

I have an hour's walk to school every morning.

This is yesterday's paper. Where's today's?

We'll meet you in three weeks' time.

Remember: o'clock ("of the clock")

- The apostrophe is not normally used with objects:

the door handle a shop window our kitchen table

- The apostrophe is not normally used with a noun that is not a person, animal, country or organisation, or when a noun phrase is very long:

The name of the spaceship was "Voyager 1."

That's the house of the tallest man in the country.

*Sometimes when a noun is first mentioned, the “of” form is used, and later mentions use ’s:

The mountains of Pakistan are mainly in the north of the country...Many of Pakistan’s mountains are over 7000 metres high.

- When talking about things that belong to us, relationships and characteristics of people, animals, countries, categories, groups and organisations consisting of people, it is more normal to use ’s:

The men’s changing room is down the corridor.

The rabbit’s paw was badly hurt.

- Finally, we NEVER use an apostrophe to make nouns plural:
Bananas and apples are cheaper than strawberries and cherries in Ireland.
They had to rebuild the roads after the floods.

References:

Carter, R., McCarthy, M., Mark, G. and O’Keeffe, A. (2011) *English Grammar Today*.

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp. 68-69; 390-393.

Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006) *Cambridge Grammar of English*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp. 319, 360-361, 383, 386, 425-426, 848-850.

Darling, C. (1999) <http://cctc.commnet.edu/HP/pages/darling/grammar/marks.htm#apostrophe>

Capital Community College power point presentation on the apostrophe [accessed May 5, 2016]

Appendix F

Photocopy of Workbook Exercise used with EG1: from: Carter,R., McCarthy, M., Mark, G. and O’Keeffe, A. (2011) *English Grammar Today Workbook*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.100.

Possession:

Six of these sentences have mistakes. Correct each mistake and tick (✓) the correct sentences.

- 1) Where is the childrens’ clothing department?
- 2) The boy’s bikes are in the garden shed.
- 3) I agree with the old saying that a dog is man’s best friend.
- 4) The mens’ changing room at the pool is closed because they are painting it.
- 5) Lillian’s favourite author is Anita Shreve.
- 6) Ben Nevis is Britains’ highest mountain.
- 7) The workers’ pay has been increased since the strike.
- 8) Rhys’s sister is called Emily.
- 9) Brendan’s mothers’ friend owns the house that we stayed in.
- 10) In the end , it was the governments’ decision.

Rewrite each sentence using ‘s.

- 1) The car belonged to John. It was.....
- 2) She borrowed a jacket which belonged to her sister. She borrowed.....
- 3) Richard and my mother are brother and sister. Richard is my
- 4) Ellen owns the laptop but she has lent it to me for a week. I’ve borrowed
- 5) Fluffy is the name of the dog which belongs to Linda and Owen. Fluffy is the name of.....
- 6) Westminster Abbey is one of the oldest buildings in London. Westminster Abbey is one of

Tick (✓) the correct sentence, a or b.

- 1) a) I’ve only had one hour’s sleep. b) I’ve only had one hours’ sleep.
- 2) a) Have you read todays’ paper? b) Have you read today’s paper?
- 3) a) My house is five minutes’ walk from here. b) My house is five minute’s walk from here.
- 4) a) There is at least another week’s work to do on the house.
b) There is at least another weeks’ work to do on the house.

Appendix G Descriptive Lesson Intervention for EG2

Wed. May 25, 2016

11.30-12.30 am

4 students

Nationality mix: three Spanish, one Brazilian

Lesson Stages

- 1) Ss were presented with ‘Shops, etc.’ Photocopy and asked what they noticed about the words in the right-hand column of the page, what each word contained to elicit the word ‘apostrophe’, what the apostrophe was combined with to elicit ‘s’, where it is situated to elicit ‘before the ‘s’ and why it was placed there, to elicit acknowledgement of possession (e.g. the optician’s = the shop/ base of the optician).
- 2) Researcher presented other words on the board to the Ss (boy, bicycle) and asked “How many?” to elicit recognition of singular forms, then asked Ss how we would show that the bicycle belongs to this one boy to elicit use of ‘s. This was extended to (boys, bicycles) and Ss were asked how to show that a group of boys each have bicycles to elicit s’, and (children, bicycles) to elicit use of s’ for irregular plurals. Ss were asked to give other examples of irregular plurals, and provided (men and women).
- 3) Ss were invited to show researcher examples they had found of apostrophe use while out and about over the previous two days. Ss then examined everyday examples of apostrophe use from authentic signs, notices and letters in and around the Limerick area, provided by the researcher. These were displayed on an iPad screen, which this small group could examine closely and comment upon. Correct and prescriptively incorrect apostrophe examples were shown to the Ss to see whether they would notice erroneous

use, recognise why it was erroneous by prescriptive standards and be able to offer a correct form. The researcher waited for Ss response before offering any comment, answering any queries Ss had.

- 4) Ss were given a magazine each (*Hello!* x 2, *National Geographic* x 1, the *Irish Examiner Feelgood* x 1) and asked to find examples of apostrophe use in magazine articles, indicate how the apostrophe was being used (i.e. for possession, or contraction, or is it a different use?)
- 5) Finally, Ss were asked to sum up what they would regard as important to remember when using the apostrophe in English.

Of note in this lesson:

Only contributions the Ss offered were taken with no added input from the researcher offered.

The point was raised to this group that native speaker confusion has existed around the use of this mark for centuries, and that inconsistencies in use have existed for just as long. This was not pointed out to EG1.

Appendix H Worksheet used with EG2 from: Watchyn -Jones, P. (1982) *Start Testing Your Vocabulary*, Penguin, London, p. 39.

Shops, etc.

Write down where you would go in order to buy or do the things on the left. Choose from the places on the right.

YOU WANT

1. a pair of shoes or boots
2. medicine, make-up
3. fish, a crab
4. sausages, meat
5. a haircut (men)
6. potatoes, apples
7. butter, cheese
8. whisky, wine
9. a bunch of roses
10. a newspaper, a magazine
11. cigarettes, matches
12. a loaf of bread, cakes
13. stamps
14. a new hair-do (women)
15. a sofa, a bed
16. the latest fashion
17. a ring, a watch
18. to clean a jacket or a skirt
19. a hammer, a screwdriver
20. a new pair of glasses
21. to cash a cheque
22. to do the weekly washing
23. a cup of tea, a sandwich
24. to book a holiday
25. a pen, envelopes

GO TO THE

- florist's
- post office
- boutique
- optician's
- shoe shop
- chemist's
- barber's
- baker's
- dry-cleaner's
- stationer's
- fishmonger's
- grocer's
- furniture shop
- ironmonger's
- launderette
- butcher's
- off-licence
- hairdresser's
- cafe
- greengrocer's
- jeweller's
- travel agency
- newsagent's
- bank
- tobbaconist's

Appendix I Magazines used with EG 2

National Geographic April 2016 Vol. 229 No.4

Hello! April 25, 2016 No. 1427

Hello! May, 2, 2016 No.1428

Irish Examiner Feelgood Magazine May 13, 2016

(Ss examples chosen from random pages and articles).

Appendix J Cover letter sent to printers



Limerick Language Centre,
16 Mallow Street,
Limerick.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am an MA student based here in Limerick, and I am conducting research on the use of the apostrophe in the English language. I am contacting you to ask for your assistance, as I would be most appreciative of your expertise on the use of this piece of punctuation in print media.

Please find enclosed information about my study and a short questionnaire, which I hope should take about ten minutes maximum of your time; I appreciate how busy you are in your industry. I would be extremely grateful to receive your insights. Please also find a self-addressed envelope for your convenience in returning the completed questionnaire to me.

Should you wish your company to remain anonymous, this will be respected. Company names provided would be used only for statistical purposes.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this and I do hope you can provide me with your valued feedback.

Yours faithfully,

Deborah Tobin

A Crooked Mark: An examination of the apostrophe, its use and misuse in the English language and its role in learner language.

Appendix J - Participant Information Sheet

What is the project about?

My aim is to examine the apostrophe and how it appears in the media and advertising in the English language.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a taught MA in the Department of English Language and Literature under the supervision of Dr. Joan O'Sullivan and Ms Geraldine Mark. The current study will form part of my Master's dissertation.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to determine learner use of the apostrophe in written English. As apostrophe use is confusingly inconsistent even among native speakers, it is the aim of the study to understand the unique challenges faced by learners of English, particularly those at higher levels hoping to undertake academic English courses, where correct apostrophe use by prescriptive standards is a necessity.

What are the benefits of this research?

To examine how the apostrophe as a punctuation mark appears in everyday, written English. From this, the ultimate, long-term aim is to understand the challenges faced by higher-level English language students in production of the apostrophe.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)?

A questionnaire containing four questions for you to answer on your experience of apostrophe use in a printing context. Your feedback would be greatly appreciated.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from participation at any time without giving a reason and without consequence. It would be helpful if the company name could be used as acknowledgment of response, but no individual name will be used.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your questionnaire will be analysed with that of the other participants (i.e. printers) in this study and used to form the results section of my dissertation.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with data to maintain anonymity. Again, it would be helpful if the company name could be used as acknowledgement of response.

What will happen to the data after the research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact Details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Deborah Tobin

eamondeb@eircom.net

00353 87 9646778

If you have any concerns about this study, you may contact:

**Dr. Joan O'Sullivan,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road,
Limerick.**

Tel: +353 61 774735

Joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie

Further information/comments:

(Questions adapted from Austin, C. (1989) *The English Genitive Apostrophe - Origins and Insecurity in Usage*. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Bangor, p.150.

Accessed through inter-library loans, Mary Immaculate College, April - May 2016.)

Any additional comments:

(This is entirely at your discretion).

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix L – Consent form for Participants in study in EG1, EG2 and CG



A Crooked Mark: An examination of the effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching punctuation use in an ELT context. **Appendix L - Informed Consent Form**

Dear Participant,

As you read in the **participant information sheet** the current study will investigate punctuation in authentic and learner texts, and the use of punctuation by B2-C1 level students in English.

The participant information sheet should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the research.

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **participant information sheet**.
- I understand what the study is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of **all** of the procedures involving myself, and that my results and any materials I supply will be kept confidential.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

Name
(PRINTED) :

Name
(Signature) :

Appendix M Information Sheet for EG1



A Crooked Mark: An examination of the effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching punctuation use in an ELT context.

Appendix M - Participant Information Sheet (EG1)

What is the project about?

My aim is to investigate the effectiveness of different teaching methods in assisting learner use of punctuation in English.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a taught MA in the Department of English Language and Literature under the supervision of Dr. Joan O'Sullivan and Ms Geraldine Mark. The current study will form part of my Master's dissertation.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to examine learner use of punctuation in written English, and investigate two different types of teaching intervention to assist learners in its use. As punctuation use can be confusingly inconsistent even among native speakers, it is the aim of the study to understand the unique challenges faced by learners of English, particularly those at higher levels hoping to undertake academic English courses, where correct punctuation use by prescriptive standards is a necessity.

What are the benefits of this research?

The ultimate, long-term aim is it to understand the challenges faced by higher-level students in the production of punctuation, to gain a better idea of their specific needs, and to understand how they can be properly supported in pedagogical terms.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)?

You will be placed in a mixed-nationality group. You will then be needed for three sessions in total, over three different days.

Day 1: You will take a test on punctuation production. This will take 30 minutes.

Day 2: You will have a 60-minute teaching session on punctuation use in English.

Day 3: You will re-take the test you had on Day 1. This will take 30 minutes. After the test, you will be given a list of sentences which have punctuation errors. You will be asked to decide how serious you think the errors are, on a scale of 1-5. This will also take 30 minutes. The total session will take 1 hour.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your tests will be combined and analysed with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my dissertation.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with data to maintain anonymity.

What will happen to the data after the research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact Details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Deborah Tobin

15139468@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

00353 87 9646778

If you have any concerns about this study, you may contact:

Dr. Joan O'Sullivan,

Mary Immaculate College,

South Circular Road,

Limerick.

Tel: +353 61 774735

Joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie

Appendix N Information Sheet for EG2



A Crooked Mark: An examination of the effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching punctuation use in an ELT context.

Appendix N - Participant Information Sheet (EG 2)

What is the project about?

My aim is to investigate the effectiveness of different teaching methods in assisting learner use of punctuation in English.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a taught MA in the Department of English Language and Literature under the supervision of Dr. Joan O'Sullivan and Ms Geraldine Mark. The current study will form part of my Master's dissertation.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to examine learner use of punctuation in written English, and investigate two different types of teaching intervention to assist learners in its use. As punctuation use can be confusingly inconsistent even among native speakers, it is the aim of the study to understand the unique challenges faced by learners of English, particularly those at higher levels hoping to undertake academic English courses, where correct punctuation use by prescriptive standards is a necessity.

What are the benefits of this research?

The ultimate, long-term aim is it to understand the challenges faced by higher-level students in the production of punctuation, to gain a better idea of their specific needs, and to understand how they can be properly supported in pedagogical terms.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)?

You will be placed in a mixed-nationality group. You will then be needed for three sessions in total, over three different days.

Day 1: You will take a test on punctuation production. This will take 30 minutes.

Day 2: You will have a 60-minute teaching session on punctuation use in English.

Day 3: You will re-take the test you had on Day 1. This will take 30 minutes. After the test, you will be given a list of sentences which have punctuation errors. You will be asked to decide how serious you think these errors are, on a scale of 1-5. This will also take 30 minutes. The total session will take 1 hour.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your tests will be combined and analysed with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my dissertation.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with data to maintain anonymity.

What will happen to the data after the research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact Details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Deborah Tobin

15139468@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

00353 87 9646778

If you have any concerns about this study, you may contact:

Dr. Joan O'Sullivan,

Mary Immaculate College,

South Circular Road,

Limerick.

Tel: +353 61 774735

Joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie

Appendix O - Information Sheet for the CG



A Crooked Mark: An examination of the effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching punctuation use in an ELT context.

Appendix O - Participant Information Sheet (CG)

What is the project about?

My aim is to investigate the effectiveness of different teaching methods in assisting learner use of punctuation in English.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a taught MA in the Department of English Language and Literature under the supervision of Dr. Joan O'Sullivan and Ms Geraldine Mark. The current study will form part of my Master's dissertation.

Why is it being undertaken?

The objective of the study is to examine learner use of punctuation in written English, and to investigate two different types of teaching intervention to assist learners in its use. As punctuation use can be confusingly inconsistent even among native speakers, it is the aim of the study to understand the unique challenges faced by learners of English, particularly those at higher levels hoping to undertake academic English courses, where correct punctuation use by prescriptive standards is a necessity.

What are the benefits of this research?

The ultimate, long-term aim is it to understand the challenges faced by higher-level students in the production of punctuation, to gain a better idea of their specific needs, and to understand how they can be properly supported in pedagogical terms.

Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)?

You will be placed in a mixed-nationality group. You will then be needed for two sessions in total, over two different days.

Day 1: You will take a test on punctuation production. This will take 30 minutes.

Day 2: You will re-take the test you had on Day 1. This will take 30 minutes. After the test, you will be given a list of sentences which have punctuation errors. You will be asked to decide how serious you

think these errors are, on a scale of 1-5. This will also take 30 minutes. The total session will take 1 hour.

Right to withdraw

Your anonymity is assured and you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used / disseminated?

The data from your tests will be combined and analysed with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my dissertation.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with data to maintain anonymity.

What will happen to the data after the research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

Contact Details:

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Deborah Tobin

15139468@micstudent.mic.ul.ie

00353 87 9646778

If you have any concerns about this study, you may contact:

**Dr. Joan O'Sullivan,
Mary Immaculate College,
South Circular Road,
Limerick.
Tel: +353 61 774735
Joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie**

Appendix P Consent form for the School Director



A Crooked Mark: An examination of the apostrophe, its use and misuse in authentic materials and its role in learner language acquisition.

Appendix P - Informed Consent Form

Dear Director,

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a student at Mary Immaculate College University of Limerick, studying for a Masters in Applied Linguistics. I am preparing my research project for my dissertation on prescriptive and descriptive presentations of the apostrophe in authentic and learner texts, and will examine two teaching methodologies of the apostrophe. My supervisors for this dissertation are Dr. Joan O'Sullivan (email: joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie) and Ms Geraldine Mark (email: gmark@germark.org). My research aim is to study three small groups of B2-C1 level students in order to examine their apostrophe use proficiency. Participants will take part in two or three sessions in which they will be pre- and post-tested to determine their understanding of various aspects of apostrophe use, with intervention of different types offered to two groups, and with all three groups asked for their opinions on level of seriousness of errors. Details of the nature of the tests and opinion questions are provided in the **participant instruction sheets**.

If you are happy to allow your students to participate in this research project, please read the following statements and give your consent by signing this form below.

- I have read and understood the **participant information sheet** and do not object to students in my school being approached to participate or participating in this study on a voluntary basis.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.

Name

(PRINTED) :

Name (Signature):

Date:

Appendix Q

Analysis of Printers' Questionnaires

In 1989, Christopher Austin conducted a survey of ten printing companies in Essex and Bangor, in which he tried to determine the attitudes and experiences of printers in these companies towards the use of the apostrophe (or EGA as he referred to it throughout his thesis on inconsistent apostrophe use in the UK). His aim was to ascertain why the apostrophe appeared as misused in printed matter, particularly as, he reasoned, that by 1989 'modern equipment' was being used, indicating that there was no reason for erroneous English genitive apostrophe omission in particular, and that "only traditional printing equipment would produce erroneous [apostrophe] usage as a plural marker" (Austin 1989: 117).

He posed four questions to printers, two on the relationship between the use of the apostrophe and its effect on typography, one on the justifying of text and one on whether the printers would point out an obvious error to a client prior to printing. The results showed overwhelmingly that there were no typographical reasons for the omission of a genitive apostrophe (Austin 1989: 118), including "cost implication" (Austin 1989: 121), and that six out of the ten companies would point out an error to a client, three would make amends if needed during the typesetting process, while one company would discern "the client, time and project" before pointing out an error (Austin 1989: 120). His overall conclusion was that EGA omission, according to the experience of these companies, was not due to technological changes in printing in 1989, but rather "a lack of awareness of...rules on the part of printing companies' clients and users of desk-top

publishing” (Austin 1989: 122).

By contacting printers in the Limerick City region, it was hoped to replicate Austin’s study in a more contemporary Irish context, and to focus on apostrophe use in a wider sense, rather than limit it to EGA use only. The aim was to compare whether apostrophe insecurity in use could be attributed to technological advances in 2016, and to examine printers’ perceptions of apostrophe use here in Limerick, in order to determine whether printers’ attitudes contribute to apostrophe ‘insecurity in use’ in print media, which in turn can impact negatively upon learners.

Of curious note was the fact that email notification with soft copies of the questionnaire and an explanation of the study were initially sent to all the printers, as it was thought to be less of an inconvenience to the printers. Not one reply was received via email. As a result, the decision was taken to visit the printers’ firms in person where physically possible, and to post the remaining questionnaires, providing self-addressed envelopes for each and every one. Exactly the same information about the study was provided in each envelope as was in the emails.

From thirty-one questionnaires that were either hand-delivered or posted to printers in Limerick City, (see Appendices J-K), eleven replied. It was interesting to note that in this digital age, face-to-face or traditional post appeared to be the printers’ preferred form of communication and response, and this could have relevance for future researchers. To those who were happy to identify their company, courtesy thank you letters were sent by post.

In response to the first and second questions regarding typography, and whether there was any typographical reason for a shop advert, poster, magazine, newspaper, brochure or book to be printed without an apostrophe, nine out of the eleven printers answered in the negative, with one printer indicating that “there should not be, unless the font used did not have an apostrophe,” and “I haven’t come across any such examples.” Two respondents felt, however, that there were typographical reasons and replied “yes” to both questions. While one respondent did not elaborate any further, the other outlined the fact that “one is ownership, the other is plural” and quipped that “there are no two Enda Kennys, I hope” in response to the examples in question two of ‘Enda Kennys speech’ or ‘Enda Kenny’s speech’ as correct genitive singular apostrophe choices.

For question three, which asked whether the apostrophe helped to justify a text, made justifying a printed text more difficult or made no difference at all, one printer answered that the apostrophe’s presence affected none of these while two printers felt that apostrophes in fact help to justify a printed text, one printer felt that apostrophes make justifying a text more difficult, with the remainder feeling that the use of apostrophes makes no difference to justifying a text. Interestingly, one of the printers was of Eastern European origin, and explained that his company only worked with computer graphics rather than printers’ more traditional typography. Although no mention was made of the term ‘genitive’ in this questionnaire, so as not to narrow the uses of the apostrophe to genitive forms only, he himself commented on the “genitive apostrophe in English” and was adamant that there was “no reason for it to be left out in singular or plural genitive forms” in printing.

Finally, question four asked printers whether they would point out an erroneous plural use of the apostrophe to a client. The erroneous forms included an example of the greengrocer's apostrophe (Banana's fifty cent per kilo) and in regular genitive plural use with a -y ending noun (babies's clothes). Every respondent replied that yes, they would point out erroneous use to a client. Further comments offered on this included "we would point out any errors we saw," and "the banana doesn't have a fifty cent coin," with one respondent admitting openly that "the misuse of the apostrophe is a particular bugbear of mine."

However, another slightly confusing contribution was that "baby's is another plural" with "not that important" added to emphasize, and "these are plural possessives" describing both the examples in question four. Perhaps this serves to emphasize that the "insecurity in use" that Austin observed in the use of the apostrophe in the English language in the United Kingdom in 1989 is still alive and well, at least amongst some of the printing fraternity in Limerick.

Printers' responses to questions 1 and 2

"Is there any typographical reason for printing a shop advertisement, poster, magazine, newspaper, brochure or book text without an apostrophe?"

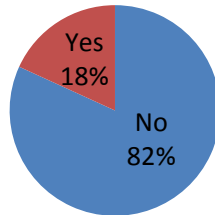


Chart 8: Percentage breakdown of printers' responses to questions 1 and 2 in questionnaire.

Printers' responses to question 3: "Do apostrophes...?"

- Make no difference to justifying a text
- Help to justify a printed text
- Make justifying a printed text more difficult
- None of the above

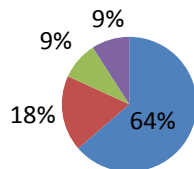


Chart 9: Percentage breakdown of printers' responses to question 3.

Response to question 4

"Would you point out an apostrophe error to a client?" (e.g. 'banana's fifty cent per kilo' or 'babies's clothes')

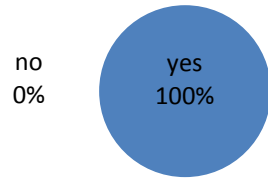


Chart 10: Breakdown of printers' responses to question 4.