

LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTE
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**PRACTISING QUESTION FORMATION SKILLS
AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

JAUTĀJUMU VEIDOŠANAS PRASMJU VINGRINĀŠANA PAMATSKOLĀ

DIPLOMDARBS

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Abstract

The subject of the present research is teaching question formation skills at pre-intermediate level.

The goal of the study is to define the main problems in teaching questions to pre-intermediate students and state the effectiveness of various types of activities in practising and developing the learners' skills in asking questions.

The author of the relevant paper has performed *action research* based on theoretical and practical methods.

The theoretical method involves the survey of the theories studied: it discovers different perspectives on the subject of grammar, analyzes various concepts of knowing grammar and approaches to teaching the subject referred to as well as describes the status of grammar in language acquisition. The significance of effective grammar practice organisation and the principles of successful activities are examined. The researcher on the theme investigates the importance of syntax in knowing grammar including diverse types of sentences. The sources used in the study refer to the experience of such authorities on the field as Harmer, Thornbury, Ur etc.

The practical part of the diploma paper is based on the researcher's teaching experience at elementary school, the results of the questionnaires for the students of the experimental group and the teachers of English as well as the results of the learners' preliminary testing.

The present research proves that diverse and absorbing practice types can improve learners' understanding of question formation and use.

The diploma paper consists of three chapters with subchapters and relevant conclusions. Theses reflect the main findings presented in the study. Appendices involve the additional materials used during the experiment.

The study might be of interest to teachers in planning the English grammar lessons in order to make the process of question acquisition more effective and enjoyable.

Anotācija

Diplomdarba tēma ir jautājumu veidošanas prasmju vingrināšana pamatskolā.

Pētnieciskā darba mērķis ir noteikt galvenās problēmas, kas saistās ar jautājumu veidošanas apguvi pamatskolā un konstatēt daudzveidīgu uzdevumu efektivitāti jautājumu veidošanas prasmju vingrināšanā un attīstīšanā.

Pētījums balstās uz teorētisko un praktiskajām metodēm.

Teorētiskā metode ietver studētās literatūras apskatu. Tajā atklāti dažādi gramatikas aspekti, analizētas koncepcijas attiecībā uz gramatikas pārzināšanu un pieejas gramatikas mācīšanā, kā arī ieskicēta gramatikas statusa lomu valodas apguves procesā. Diplomdarbā atsegts gramatikas vingrinājumu efektīvas organizācijas un atlases principu izvēles nozīmīgums. Pētījuma autore uzsver sintakses, tai skaitā dažādu teikumu veidu, nozīmīgumu sekmīgā gramatikas apgūvē. Diplomdarbā ietvertas atsauces uz tādu nozīmīgu attiecīgās jomas speciālistu pieredzi kā Hārmers, Ūra u.c.

Pētījuma praktiskā daļa balstās uz diplomdarba autores mācīšanas pieredzi pamatskolā, eksperimentālās grupas skolēnu un angļu valodas skolotāju anketēšanas rezultātiem, kā arī audzēkņu diagnostiskā testa analīzi.

Pētnieciskajā darbā pierādīts, ka daudzveidīgi un saistoši vingrinājumi uzlabo skolēnu jautājumu veidošanas prasmes un to pielietojumu.

Diplomdarbs ietver trīs nodaļas ar apakšnodaļām, kā arī atbilstošus secinājumus. Pielikumā pievienoti materiāli, kas izmantoti pētījuma praktiskās daļas realizēšanas laikā.

Pētnieciskais darbs varētu kalpot angļu valodas skolotājiem pamatskolā, lai jautājumu veidošanas prasmju apguves procesu veidotu efektīvāku un aizraujošāku.

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INTRODUCTION

Thinking is a process of asking and answering questions. People should ask the right questions to get the right answers and consequently the right results. The researcher shares the view of Tony Robbins referred to by Steve Pavlina who also points out that lousy questions bring crippled results – the focus of the questions is turned away from what is wanted and towards more of what is not wanted. (<http://www.stevepavlina.com/blog/2006/02/asking-the-right-questions/>)

Asking questions is a powerful action. Questions direct the flow of conversation, select the next speaker, compel attention and channel the listener's thought. For a foreign language learner asking questions is also an expression of power over the language both in form (interrogatives are far from straightforward English) and in function (as power over the situation and over the language users). (Morgan, Rinvoluceri, 1988: 9)

It should be admitted that asking and answering questions forms a high percentage of classroom activities. It occurs not only in classroom interactions but also in tests and quizzes.

Language learning is a dialogue between the teacher and the learner. Both of them ask questions for different purposes. Teachers are interested in gaining information, giving instructions and commands, checking information. Students gain information, make requests, check information with the help of questions.

Teachers acknowledge that there is much pressure forcing students not to ask questions. Learners tend to feel stupid when forming questions. Human beings do not want to admit that they are unskilful in doing something. The large number of students in the class as well as time pressure discourages dialogues and questions.

The attitude or the personality of the teacher can also work against the wish to inquire. (<http://www.bugpub.com/est/eot2htm/>)

The classroom could be a safe and encouraging environment for students to have an opportunity to create and recreate meanings through language with the help of teachers as their advisers. Learners could practice things that they have to ask, they want to ask and they are able to ask. The age of students is a major factor in our decisions what and how to teach. The widespread stereotype that adolescents are unmotivated and poor language learners is misleading. Each student has different experience both in and outside the classroom. If the learners are exposed to texts and situations in which their own thoughts and experience are involved, they have a great capacity to learn. The teachers' job is to direct language teaching closer to the learners' everyday life, to provoke students' engagement thus building a bridge between what they want and have to teach and the students' world and experience. At the same time teachers should be conscious of important factors for adolescent students, namely, a

need for identity and peer approval. “A good question asking environment is a fragile and delicate thing. It must be nurtured every day”. (<http://www.bugpub.com/est/eot2htm/>)

There are different individuals in our classes. Some of them respond better to discovery activities, some prefer a more directed approach, and others feel enthusiastic about creative tasks. Different intelligence predominates in different people. Teachers need to balance the interests of individuals. They should choose and adapt a variety of activities to ensure that they pay attention to different learning styles thus giving an opportunity to various types of learners in the course of teaching/learning.

The author of the present diploma paper as well as the target audience of the questionnaires for the students of the target group and twelve teachers of English working at elementary school admit that students often make mistakes when they ask questions. According to Sela (2003: 21), question formation is a source of difficulty for learners of English. Whether to invert the word order or to use DO insertion may seem haphazard to the beginner, and even advanced learners make errors in question formation. Sometimes students' mistakes regarding asking questions are just slips which are corrected after the teacher points them out to the learners. In some cases the above-mentioned errors are deeply ingrained and need additional teaching.

The author of the present study has reflected on the problem how to avoid the widespread myths that teaching grammar means just repeating models in a mindless way, memorizing rules, drilling contentless structures. How should the teacher deal with grammar in a way that engages the learners by exploiting creativity, modern thinking and new experiences? What activities should the teacher use to help students practice both aspects of questions: getting the grammar right and reaching the communicative purpose? How can the language teacher reshape the process of question formation acquisition and achieve the main goal, i. e., make the learners trust the flow of words they are using. J. Scrivener (2003: 2) confirms that humans learn by having a lot of opportunities to practice a new language. Learners get things wrong quite a few times before they get them right. It may take a long time for a newly studied language to become part of the learner's own repertoire. If students ask questions unconsciously and achieve their communicative aims, they are self-motivated learners. That is the behaviour that we, language teachers, are trying to reach.

The above mentioned problems and the ways of their solution as well as personal interest in the subject have been the reason for the author to do research on the **theme “Practising Question Formation Skills at Elementary School”**. The experiment took place

in Cesis Primary School. The target group involved sixteen mixed-ability learners of pre-intermediate language level whose competence of English was rather unreliable.

The **goal** of the study is to define the main problems in teaching questions to pre-intermediate students and state the effectiveness of various types of activities in practising and developing the learners` skills in asking questions.

The researcher has worked out the following **hypothesis**: students` understanding of question formation and use is improved, if the teacher applies diverse and absorbing practice types in the teaching/learning process.

To prove the above mentioned hypothesis, the author of the diploma paper has set the following **enabling objectives**:

1. To investigate the pedagogical, methodological and psychological literature concerning the theme of the research.
2. To adapt the theories to the specific classroom situation.
3. To define the main problems in asking questions by performing a diagnostic test.
4. To select and design grammar materials including examples of diverse question formation practice activities.
5. To design and administer questionnaires for students and teachers of English.
6. To carry out pilot teaching.
7. To realize language development examination through the designed and administered achievement test.
8. To analyse the results of the questionnaires and the achievement test.
9. To sum up the findings and draw relevant conclusions.

The **research methods** are as follows:

1. The theoretical method is the survey of the theories studied.
2. The practical methods are classroom observation, questionnaires, pilot teaching, testing.

The present diploma paper consists of three main chapters with subchapters, conclusions, theses, a list of bibliography and appendices.

In **Chapter 1** the author of the present study investigates the theoretical background of teaching grammar. The researcher gives an overview of different perspectives on grammar and various concepts on knowing it. The place of grammar in various teaching approaches and the status of grammar as one of the means of acquiring mastery of the language are described. The role of the teacher in planning, monitoring and supporting the students` performance is explored. In this chapter the organisation of grammar teaching and the principles of effective grammar practice activities for consolidating students` knowledge are analyzed. Tests are looked at as instruments for purposeful language assessment. The author of the present paper considers the recent approach to errors and corrective feedback.

In **Chapter 2** the researcher discusses the question of syntax as an important part of knowing grammar and treats the sentence as an essential syntactic structure in acquisition the subject referred to. The four types of sentences are described. The author of the present diploma paper also discusses the features of interrogative sentences and their role in everyday communication.

In **Chapter 3** the practical part of the study is presented. A description of the target group is offered. The author of the present study describes the research method, topic, techniques and the approach to the data collected. The chapter sums up the main problems on asking questions diagnosed through the pre-testing and the questionnaires for the students of the target group and the teachers of English. The author of the present paper provides a review of the question formation practice in the teaching aid used in the classroom. The main considerations of practice organisation are described and the principles of the practical application of selected question formation activities are presented.

The author chapter also deals with the **learning outcomes** of the research carried out and draws relevant **conclusions**. The **appendices** supply a great number of study materials which can be used when practising question formation at elementary and pre-intermediate level.

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF TEACHING GRAMMAR

The first chapter provides the survey of the theories studied: it discovers different perspectives on grammar, examines various concepts on knowing the subject referred to and approaches to teaching it as well as considers the status of grammar in language acquisition. The significance of effective grammar practice organisation and the principles of successful activities are analyzed. The researcher investigates the importance of syntax in knowing grammar including diverse types of sentences.

1.1 Different Perspectives on the Subject of Grammar

In ancient Greece grammar was taught in conjunction with rhetoric. Joyce and Burns (2001) refer to Ijsseling`s definition that rhetoric was the art of speaking and writing. It included the practical skill of delivering a good speech together with the theoretical science formulating the rules and conditions for a beautiful and sound exposition. This subject was considered to be an important component of a good education. When rhetoric was abandoned as a field of study in the educational institutes at the end of the 19th century, the importance of grammar in helping to develop speaking and writing skills diminished (ibid.: 9).

The author of the present research has explored diverse *definitions* and widespread *assumptions* regarding the subject of grammar. Ridgway (1998: 13) mentions a very general definition, expressed by Thornbury that grammar is the imposition of order and the maintenance of power both at the level of the global culture of ELT and in the culture of the ELT classroom. According to Harmer (1991: 1), grammar is the way in which words change their forms and are combined into sentences. Ur (2001) expresses a similar view that grammar may be defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words or bits of words in order to form longer units of meaning. In addition, "a learner who knows grammar is one who has mastered and can apply these rules to express him or herself in what would be considered acceptable language forms" (ibid.: 4). Furthermore, Joyce and Burns (2001) reflect on two different definitions revealing two different perspectives on the subject of grammar. One of them views grammar as a system stating that grammar involves features of a language (sounds, words, formation and arrangement of words, etc.) considered as a whole with reference to their mutual contrasts and relations. The other definition describes grammar as the rules by which words are combined into sentences. The authors of the book conclude that grammar is essentially about the systems and patterns we use to select and combine words in

order to communicate. Joyce and Burns mention the components of the language system: words (lexis), the way we change words (morphology) and the way we order words (syntax). The author of the present research completely supports the assumption of Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1986) who disagree with the widespread point of view that grammar is a rather boring school subject, a dead language such as Latin, learning how to write `good English` or learning how to speak properly. The authors of the book point out that the previously-named ideas do not represent the whole picture. The term `grammar` involves the mechanism according to which language works when it is used to communicate. The researchers referred to see grammar as a central part of a language which involves sound and meaning. Thus, it is concluded that the meaning of a message is converted into words, words, in their turn, are put together according to the grammatical rules, and words are then conveyed by sound. Moreover, the authors of the book add that grammar not only reflects how a language works but it is also useful for such purposes as teaching a language to foreigners, working out how a foreign language is different from our own, learning to criticize and improve our own style of writing etc. The description of grammar given by Just and Carpenter (referred to by Ridgway, 1998: 13) seems particularly poetic and precise to the researcher: "If we take the image of language as a tree growing out of the ground of meaning, then grammar is the trunk and branches, and words are thousands of twigs and leaves which grow on them".

The author of the current study is going to survey various *types* of grammar proposed by different educators. As Joyce and Burns (2001) point out, there are three types of grammar: *traditional*, *formal* and *functional* regarding how they view language, language use and learning.

The authors of the book note that *traditional* grammar concentrates on the rules of language. It is concerned with the problem whether the instances of language are grammatical or ungrammatical. Traditional grammar is acknowledged as the most familiar type of grammar which provides a vocabulary for naming parts of the language but does not help us to understand the roles of these components in the construction of spoken and written discourse (ibid.: 10).

Joyce and Burns (2001) consider that *formal* grammar sees grammaticality as separate from meaning. In general, formal grammar is based on the concept of a universal grammar which is seen as the framework on which all language is constructed. It is explained that through a set of finite rules people can generate an infinite number of sentences. Thus, Joyce and Burns conclude that the disadvantage of formal grammar is the separation of grammar from meaning in social contexts. However, it is important to admit that using formal grammar

to provide explanations for certain grammatical features of the language is very helpful for teachers.

Functional grammar focuses on people as social beings and learning as a social activity. In other words, functional grammar sees the language in use. Joyce and Burns (ibid.) consider that language is viewed as a systemised resource which people use differentially depending on their goals to achieve in different social and cultural contexts. Therefore, functional grammarians deal with the data from authentic texts in written and spoken language. It is important to note that they view ungrammatical sentences from a perspective of the language varieties of different speakers. The author of the diploma paper supports the opinion of the above-mentioned authors that this is a non-judgemental approach towards language usage and can cause carelessness and irresponsibility at early levels of language acquisition.

According to the *written* and *spoken* aspects of a language relating to grammar, points of view differ. Joyce and Burns (ibid.) regard that for a long time spoken language had been seen as too chaotic to be analyzed grammatically. Traditional grammar ignores spoken language and draws its rules from written language seen as the standard form of the language. Nevertheless, Joyce and Burns remark that functional grammar provides many insights into the grammatical characteristics of spoken and written language. The above-mentioned researchers refer to Halliday that spoken language is acknowledged to be grammatically intricate “because spoken language is generally jointly created by a number of speakers and represents the world as a process” (ibid.: 64). Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1986), on their part, agree that the written form of a language should be viewed as secondary to its spoken equivalent (ibid.: 4).

Finally, Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1986) deal with such terms as *`descriptive`* and *`prescriptive`* grammar. The researchers point out that the descriptive grammar analyzes how the language is used. On the contrary, the task of the prescriptive grammar is to state how language should be used.

Grammar is a powerful universal and generative tool that empowers learners to put words together to make meanings. “A human characteristic is to learn and think organisationally as well as by associations”. (Ridgway, 1998: 14) According to Joyce and Burns (2001), grammar is a resource that is utilised to represent experiences of the world, to establish and maintain social relationship, to express values, attitudes, opinions and to create texts.

1.2 Diverse Concepts on Knowing Grammar

Many educators consider that native speakers often disclaim their knowledge of grammar. Nevertheless, Joyce and Burns (2001: 4) admit that the same people are able to put words in order when they write and when they speak, put endings on words, substitute pronouns for names, indicate whether they are talking about events in the past, present or future, show doubt or probability through elements of modality, link information in a piece of discourse through conjunctions etc.

It is acknowledged by many researchers on the field that there are two ways of knowing grammar. The first involves unconscious grammatical knowledge that people gain as they learn the language as children in order to use it. The second way of knowing grammar provides a conscious knowledge gained through conscious learning in order to explain how the language works. Therefore, many foreigners can speak about English grammar more confidently because they have acquired their grammatical knowledge in a conscious way. On the other hand, many native speakers cannot describe their grammatical knowledge at all (ibid.). Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988: 16) note that native speakers certainly know when the grammar rules are violated.

The author of the present paper recognizes that the question of how to encourage the learners to develop their theoretical knowledge regarding grammar is a challenge for a language teacher.

1.3 Place of Grammar in Various Teaching Approaches

The teaching of a foreign language has been carried out in various ways at different times. Joyce and Burns (2001) refer to van Lier that over the last century two major approaches towards language content characterize the second language teaching: “The first views language as a `system` consisting of rules that can be separately identified and taught in a sequence” (ibid.: 34). Thus, if teaching is done according to `the right method`, learning will follow. This approach focuses on grammar and the concern for error analysis and correction. The second consideration is that language is functionally related to its contexts of use: the kinds of discourses and texts that people need to produce for different purposes in different social contexts are regarded to determine grammar (ibid.). So, the emphasis of this more recent approach focuses on the use of language in everyday communication. These two major trends towards language content involve different views on the role of grammar in the

teaching/learning process. Furthermore, the above-mentioned approaches can be seen as a basis regarding various methods of teaching second and foreign languages (ibid.).

The author of the present diploma paper is going to present a short review of the main features of diverse methods regarding teaching a foreign language.

Grammar translation methods. Joyce and Burns (2001) note that grammar translation methods were used in the early twentieth century. These approaches were based on the traditions of classical humanism and the study of the grammars used in the teaching of Latin and Greek. The basis of grammar translation approach involved knowing the grammatical items of a language and applying them to text extracts which were often of a literary or classical nature. The language was viewed decontextualised. Moreover, grammatical items were learned one at a time in a `building block` approach. Teachers had to ensure a gradual coverage of all major grammatical items of a language. The emphasis was put on the accuracy of production. Actually, students showed their competence in the language in being able to reproduce in written form correct grammatical translations. Joyce and Burns state that it was a sentence-based approach encouraging a word-by-word construction or deconstruction of sentences. The researchers conclude that grammatical knowledge was opposed to grammatical use.

Structural and situational approaches. According to Joyce and Burns (ibid.), the signs of the *structural* approaches began to overtake grammar-translation methods in the 1920s. The structural approach was initiated by Palmer and developed by Bloomfield and Fries from the USA. It is no exaggeration to say that language teaching approaches were mostly based on the ideas of structural linguists by the 1950s. The above-mentioned approaches were influential well into the 1960s. In general, structural language teaching was interested in the oral production of the language. It was believed that pattern practice could lead to fluent language habits. Joyce and Burns refer to Howatt who mentioned three central characteristics of the structural approach:

- language system consists of a finite set of patterns or `structures` which act as models for the production of an infinite number of similarly constructed sentences;
- repetition and practice result in the formation of accurate and fluent foreign language habits;
- teaching `the basics` before encouraging learners to communicate on their own.

The structural approach emphasized identifying basic grammatical patterns and the step-by-step mastery of them. In addition, Joyce and Burns point out, that structural linguists were interested in `contrastive analysis`. They compared and contrasted grammatical categories in

different languages to predict in advance particular areas of difficulty for learners. The researchers referred to admit that the ideas of the structural linguists were reinforced by behavioural psychologists on how language was acquired, that is, primarily through processes of stimulus-response and repetition and mimicry. Thus, linguistic behaviour was explained as a matter of habit and practice.

As Joyce and Burns (ibid.) point out, in the 1970s a different track from the structural approach emerged, which laid the foundation for *situational* approaches. “Known as ‘audio-visual’ methods, these approaches combined visual stimuli in the form of film strips depicting different settings with audio-recordings of scripted dialogues” (ibid.: 38-39). The emphasis of situational approaches was not so much on basic patterns of a language in general as in structural approaches but on the language items in particular situations. It’s important to note that the stress was put on a more learner-centred teaching approach.

Joyce and Burns (ibid.) state that alongside the audio-visual approaches in Europe, the *audio-lingual* method developed in the USA. It involved the presentation and practice of structures with the goal to achieve complete accuracy and native-like proficiency in the language. The four macroskills of English: listening, speaking, reading and writing were practised separately and introduced in a fixed order (ibid.: 40). It should be added that in its extreme form this approach became a tedious process of repetition and pattern practice through drills, substitution exercises and rote learning and, although for a time audio-lingualism was taken up enthusiastically, its popularity was not long.

Transformational-generative linguistics. In the 1970s Chomsky’s theories started to have an impact on language teaching. His ‘transformational grammar’ dealing with core kernel sentences that were transformed through the operation of rules to produce more complex sentences seemed to offer an exciting new key to grammar teaching. (<http://www.professorjackrichards.com/pages/questions-content.htm>) Joyce and Burns (2001) remark that Chomsky in his publication “Aspects of the theory of syntax” (1965) called for an understanding of the underlying mental systems used by native learners to generate language structures thus underlining the cognitive dimension of language acquisition. The learner was seen as an active generator of hypotheses about language, rather than a passive absorber of language structures. By the way, errors were viewed as inevitable part of the mental processes involved. Chomsky distinguished two notions – *competence* (the knowledge of the language that the idealised native speaker has) and *performance* (the actual language that is produced by the native speaker). Emphasis was put on teaching grammatical rules. Language learning was seen as a linear process of acquiring one structure after another. However, Chomsky’s ideas were not easily translatable into practical methods useful for teachers. Therefore, the

question of which structures and grammatical patterns should be taught before others became less certain (ibid.).

Communicative approaches. Gradually throughout the seventies the sentence as the central unit of focus was replaced by an emphasis on language in use. The notion of communicative competence emerged. Joyce and Burns (2001) refer to the view expressed by an American anthropologist and linguist Hymes that the notion of competence includes appropriate language use as well as grammatical knowledge. Hymes emphasizes that effective language users need to combine their linguistic competence with such kinds of knowledge as the communicative setting, the participants, purposes, channel of communication and topics (ibid.: 41). The following approaches reflecting the shift towards communicative language teaching were practised over the last thirty years:

Functional-notional approach. In the late 1960s there was a demand in society for more functionally and purposefully based language courses. Modern language was regarded as an instrument of information and culture available for all people. According to Joyce and Burns (2001), van Ek specified the `threshold level` of language for basic communication. Besides, Wilkins defined the common core of functions and notions of language for communication. On the whole, functions were seen as practical categories of a language while notions included semantic-grammatical concepts. Wilkin`s work is considered to give the basis of a new functional-notional approach to syllabus development (ibid.: 41, 43).

Discourse-based and functional approaches. As Joyce and Burns (2001) point out, the work of Malinowski (1923) explaining the relationship between a language and the situation in which it is used gave rise to a sociological perspective on language use which was developed by Firth and Halliday. In essence, they evolved functional approaches based on text linguistics, known as `register studies`. Actually, the concept of `register` involves the types of language appropriate for different contexts. Furthermore, to exchange meanings within these contexts, grammar should be connected in particular ways to language use. According to Joyce and Burns, grammatical selections defined by Halliday as three register variables are the field, or topic of communication; the tenor, or the relationship of the participants involved in the interaction; the mode, or the channel of communication. Finally, discourse and text based theories of language supplied by Halliday and his colleagues developed the ***genre-based*** teaching approach which focused on teaching grammar that was contextualised within whole texts (ibid.: 44).

Grammatical consciousness-raising. Joyce and Burns (2001) state that in the late 1980s Rutherford made a distinction between the description of grammar and the learning of grammar. The key point about the above-mentioned approach is that the language

development is viewed as organic and cyclical rather than sequential and fixed. In general, the learners' attention is focused on salient grammatical features and recurring patterns. Therefore, Rutherford proposes different ways of raising grammatical consciousness starting from observation to the articulation of actual rules. Moreover, Rutherford's follower Long confirms that focusing on form in language learning counteracts the learners' potential reliance on a restricted and fossilised form of language use. In addition, Ellis stresses that focusing on form facilitates noticing and identifying forms when they occur in natural contexts (ibid.: 45-46). To sum up, progressive and 'discovery' approaches of the 1980s contributed to the situation where the explicit grammar was supposed as a hindrance in developing communicative competence. Thus, many methods emphasizing psychological and affective processes of learning emerged such as Suggestopedia, The Natural Approach, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response etc. According to Krashen and Prabhu, a non-interventionist approach to grammar teaching should take place: "Krashen distinguished between *acquisition* and *learning* and argued that language acquisition takes place through exposure to comprehensible input" (ibid.: 45). Krashen's view implies that language proficiency is acquired naturally rather than learned formally. Acquisition is considered to follow naturally as long as the necessary input is provided. To conclude, Prabhu's assumption was that learning takes place only by communicating (ibid.).

According to Joyce and Burns, by the mid-1980s calls for a more coherent role for grammar within communicative language teaching emerged. Moreover, Celce-Murcia and Hilles note that the communicative approach can lead to the development of a broken, ungrammatical, pidginized form of the language. (1988: 6-7) Therefore, many linguists started to insist on the importance of grammar in linguistic analysis. (Joyce and Burns, 2001) As a matter of fact, theoretical and practical views on the role of grammar in language teaching are still changing. There is a renewed interest in the relation of grammar to discourse and whole texts, and the purposes for which learners are studying the language. On the other hand, the emphasis is also on using communicative and inductive approaches to suit learners' growing grammatical competence (ibid.: 47).

After considering all the previously-named approaches to teaching grammar, the researcher found reasonable and well-founded the belief of a teacher of English from Ukraine: teachers should not be tied to a certain teaching approach, be it modern and unfamiliar or old and comfortable. It is advised to choose an appropriate approach for every specific lesson, for every specific topic. Different aspects may influence the teacher's choice: the time available,

the level of the complexity of the new grammar concept, analogies in the mother tongue etc. (http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/talk/questions/grammar_first.html)

To sum up, the way of teaching grammar has experienced major shifts at different times. One extreme claims that grammar together with error analysis and correction should be the basis of language teaching. The second approach views grammar as determined by its contexts of use. To suit learners' grammatical competence and communicative needs, educators acknowledge a cohesive role of grammar in language teaching nowadays.

1.4 Status of Grammar in Acquiring Mastery of the Language

Research on the field shows that the status of grammar in language study has been the subject of much controversy. There was a time when grammatical knowledge was acknowledged as an essential part of a person's education and few people tried to deny it. Furthermore, the study of grammar has continued through the centuries since the time of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. (Joyce, Burns, 2001: 22) Moreover, Richards mentions that up to the 1970s grammar had a controlling influence on language teaching therefore syllabuses were essentially grammar-based. (<http://www.proffessorjackrichards.com/pages/questions-content.htm>) As Joyce and Burns (2001) point out, currently there is a movement towards a position which recognizes the importance of grammar in general education.

The researcher shares Palmer's (1973) view that grammar is significant in language learning: "few areas of our experience are closer to us or more continuously with us, than our language. The central part of a language (its mechanics, its `calculus` - other metaphors will do) is its grammar, and this should be of vital interest to any intelligent educated person" (ibid.: 7-8). It is grammar that makes language so essentially a human characteristic. Actually, grammar is a link between sound and meaning. Palmer concludes that „Man is...*homo grammaticus*” (ibid.: 8) By the way, nowadays people often talk about grammar when they feel other men using the words or structures deviating from some standard of the language. (Joyce and Burns, 2001: 22), Thus, public debates in the media often touch upon English language literacy teaching that is adopted in schools. In general, the present system of teaching the English language at school is criticised because people have their concepts of proper language. Even more, there are calls to abandon the new ways of teaching and to get back to the basics (ibid.). "Quite active and articulate people are `trumpeting` about `the return of grammar`". (Strange (1988:17) However, the author of the present research shares the view of Joyce and Burns (2001: 23) that society and culture have changed. Such factors as the growth

of new technologies and expansion of human knowledge as well as communities in the world that grow closer together lead to enormous changes in language itself.

Joyce and Burns (2001) touch upon the question regarding the English language *standard*. As a matter of fact, a call for a standard was prompted in the 17th century by a chaos in various aspects of the English language. Furthermore, in the 18th century the demand for a standard language continued. Actually, there was a division between those who saw grammar as a prescription and those who saw grammar as a description. By the way, the above-mentioned division is also continuing today. In general, a standard refers to the form of the language used by a powerful group within society. Even more, educational institutions often dismiss varieties of a language and promote only one of them as a standard. Therefore, an enormous language variation existing in the community is ignored. Moreover, advocates of a standard language often write to newspapers and lament the degradation of the language thus trying to reject national languages, and they are not content to alternate. It's hard to agree with Joyce and Burns that the desire for standardisation is an attempt to suppress language variation. The author of the present study holds the view that both language types can coexist in society. According to Joyce and Burns (ibid.), today British English is successfully promoted as the standard from which all the other forms of English degenerate. Nevertheless, the author of the present paper finds reasonable and advisable the claim of the researchers referred to that nowadays the study of grammar should focus on the diversity of a language rather than the standard form of it. Language users should be made more conscious of the choices they make to serve their social goals. It seems significant for the author of the present study to support the assumption provided by the above-mentioned researchers that a competent speaker or writer is able to control the resources in the language and adjust them to suit different contexts.

To sum up, the status of grammar in a language study varied during the centuries. Nowadays enormous changes in society and culture have caused alterations in language itself. Language users should be conscious of the diversity of the language and adjust it to suit their social goals.

1.5 Role of the Teacher in Grammar Lesson

Various assumptions treat the concept of the language teacher. Crookes and Chaudron (http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/marcharticles_sc.php) suggest that the teacher is someone faced with a great number of decisions to be made at every moment of classroom instruction.

Peck (ibid.) holds a view that the teacher should individualize the process of language acquisition and teach in the ways in which students learn. Murcia and Goodwin (ibid.) characterize the desired quality of the teacher by saying that an ideal teacher should be a native or near native speaker of the target language thus excluding the possibility that a non-native speaker can teach pronunciation.

We must not hesitate that the task of the language teacher is to adjust his/her teaching to the needs of students. The teacher has to evaluate his teaching style. According to Pickert, learners “want a teacher who is systematic, and logical, and easy to understand, but rather take charge of their own learning than have the teacher to control this aspect, thus treating them as ‘informants’ rather than a stereotypical teacher” (ibid.). By the way, Ridgway refers to Thornbury that the status of a language teacher is often felt to be dodgy, to say the least. (1998: 13) Furthermore, Harmer (2005) refers to many researchers who deal with such roles of the language teacher as an organiser, an assessor, a resource, an interpreter, a designer, a supporter, a reader, a participant, a prompter, a tutor, an observer, a teaching aid etc. It’s significant to note that our effectiveness as teachers greatly depends on our ability to switch between the various roles to facilitate the students’ progress (ibid.).

According to the research on the field, over the past eighty years the notion of the teacher as ‘facilitator’ predominated the teacher’s role as an authority in the classroom to meet students’ needs and autonomy. The afore-mentioned student-centred approach “stresses the importance of learner autonomy and responsibility for the learning process, and attributes greater value to the learners’ experience and knowledge”. (<http://www-writingberkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/ej36/a2.html>)

Nevertheless, the student-centred approach to language teaching cannot completely displace a teacher-centred, authoritative approach that involves assumptions about how knowledge is generated in linguistic practice. Many educators argue that the technical and practical knowledge of a language is transmitted from teachers to students in classroom settings though teachers are only one of a number of possible agents of transmission. It seems important to note that student-centred approaches to English language education should complement rather than conflict with an understanding of the teacher as an authority (ibid.). Considering the position of the teacher’s role, Wood (1994: 8) assumes that the teacher can become dominant in the classroom, if the learners have little knowledge, but this factor does not prevent the students from an active participation in the learning process.

It’s reasonable to admit that the teacher’s role can also vary over the lesson. The teacher should find precise ways of involving the students and encouraging the individuals towards such involvement (ibid.: 9).

To sum up, the changing role of the teacher in the classroom should be aimed at promoting the learners` progress towards language acquisition. Teachers can act as both authorities and facilitators in the English language classroom. Each separate language lesson requires a precise and appropriate decision of the teacher on the ways of drawing in the learners.

1.6 Organisation of Grammar Teaching

According to the ways of teaching grammar, researchers on the field deal with various kinds of techniques and procedures that can be arranged in a diverse order.

Basing on the personal working experience, the author of the present research considers the general framework for teaching grammar proposed by Ur (2001: 7) well-founded and appropriate:

- *Presentation*
- *Isolation and explanation*
- *Practice*
- *Test*

According to Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988: 27), during the *presentation* of grammatical items a variety of resources can be used. It should be noted that the selection of them depends on the teacher`s strength, students` preferences and the nature of the grammatical structure. Harmer (1991) characterizes presentation as the stage of teaching grammar at which the students are introduced to the form, meaning and use of a new piece of language. Therefore, a good presentation should be clear, efficient and lively to get learners interested. In addition, the stage of teaching grammar referred to should also be appropriate and productive allowing the students to make a lot of utterances with the new language. At the focused presentation stage the learner manipulates the structure in question to gain control of the form without the added pressure and distraction of trying to use the form for communication. Moreover, the teacher should not proceed to the next step until most learners have mastered the form of the structure. (Celce-Murcia and Hilles, 1988: 27) As Ur (2001) points out, the main task of the presentation stage is to get the learners to perceive the form and meaning of the new structure in speech and writing. Therefore, diverse grammar practice procedures are necessary for the students to “transform what they know from short term to long term memory” (ibid.: 7). Hence, perceiving of the new structures should be fostered by

seeing, reading, repeating, reproducing from memory, copying out the instances of the grammatical item etc. Harmer (1991), on his part, offers such kinds of presentation as using charts, dialogues, creating mini-situations, using appropriate texts, exploiting visuals, introducing personalization etc. The researcher's experience proves that personalization of the new language as soon as the grammar structure is introduced is an effective factor of successful presentation. Even more, Harmer regards that sometimes personalization can take place immediately at the presentation stage: students and their lives can be used by the teacher to introduce the new language (ibid.).

Both Harmer and Ur consider isolation and explanation as sometimes necessary for clarifying language items. According to Harmer (1991), the teachers frequently isolate parts of the sentence to give them special emphasis. Ur (2001) explains that the goal of the isolation and explanation stage is to make the students aware of various aspects of the grammar structure. Harmer concludes that such obvious techniques as isolation and demonstration are better handled with beginner and elementary level students (ibid.). The working experience of the researcher coincides with Ur's opinion that it is possible to omit the above-mentioned stage of teaching grammar if the language item is easy to acquire. It should be noted that in some classes extensive use of the native language is necessary for explaining, translating and making generalisations (ibid.).

Ur admits that practice is a very important stage in teaching grammar during which the material is most thoroughly and permanently learnt. In general, the practice stage comes after the presentation and isolation when the learner has perceived the material, but cannot be considered to have really mastered it. Actually, practice is any kind of engaging with the language on the part of the learner whose primary goal is to consolidate learning (ibid.: 11). Due to effective practice, the learners understand and produce examples of the new grammar with gradually lessening support. Ur considers that "not every grammar practice procedure can cover all aspects of the structure" (ibid.: 7). Therefore, a series of varied exercises are needed which complement each other and together provide thorough coverage (ibid.). Besides, Harmer (1991: 41) points out that some types of practice are straightforward – like drills, others are more engaging (interaction activities, involving the personality, games, quizzes etc.).

According to Ur (2001), practice techniques vary from receptive (‘passive’) exposure to spoken or written input to ‘active’ production of language items and discourse. So, complicated grammar structures should be treated gradually.

To begin with, *form-based* grammar practice involves dealing with the grammatical structures to learn the rules of form more thoroughly with the help of such activities as various

slot-fillers, transformation tasks etc. Nevertheless, form-based exercises are of limited usefulness because they do not give practice in making meanings (ibid.).

Both Harmer (1991) and Ur urge the teacher to move on to *meaning-based* practice if the students have grasped the rules of form and their application. Ur (2001) points out that the next category of grammar practice pays attention to the perception and production of correct forms, it also involves meanings though unlinked to any general situational context. The above-mentioned tasks do not tend to be open-ended. However, they cannot be done without comprehension. Considering the practice in question, Ur advises the teacher to concentrate on such tasks as translation, slot-filling, multiple-choice, matching etc. To sum up, this type of grammar practice is more involving thus providing more learning value. Nevertheless, the language used still remains passive, that is, it is not employed for doing things (it is not communicative) (ibid.: 8-9).

There is a general opinion provided by Ur that the next type of grammar practice is the most productive and involving. In essence, the stress is on comprehension or production of meanings for some non-linguistic purpose while observing the way the structures are being manipulated in the process of practice. Ur recommends employing various information- or opinion-gap tasks, activities based on the production of entertaining ideas etc. (ibid.: 9). Also Harmer (1991: 46-47) advises the teacher to use interaction activities to make controlled language practice more meaningful and enjoyable. The techniques that involve the personality are considered particularly meaningful and involving types of grammar practice.

The author of the current study shares Ur's (2001) point of view that all the above-mentioned grammar practice categories are likely to come in the order they have been laid out. Nevertheless, exceptions are possible. If the particular grammar structure is easily mastered, some kinds of practice can be omitted. On the contrary, if the teacher notices that the students are making consistent mistakes in the course of a communicative activity, it is advisable to return temporarily to the exercises that focus on the usage of correct forms.

1.7 Main Principles of Effective Grammar Practice Activities

To make the language practice effective, the teacher should take into consideration some important factors.

In fact, much time at the lesson is wasted on correcting unacceptable responses and explaining incomprehension because the language material has not been clearly perceived and

taken into short-term memory. (Ur, 2001: 11) To lengthen the time available for practice, the teacher should perform sufficient PRE-LEARNING of the new grammar structure during the presentation stage. The exceptions to the principle of pre-learning are allowed, if the form and meaning of the grammar item are very straightforward or consist of a simple variation of something already learnt and the students are able to grasp it after being exposed to only one or two examples (ibid). It is true that also *discovery* techniques can help to find out how structures are used in a text and to acquire grammar rules. According to Harmer (1991: 29), puzzling through the information and solving the problem in front of them concentrates students' cognitive powers on discovering facts about grammar and grammatical usage. However, the discovery techniques are not suitable for all students on all occasions. Again, the teacher's task is to decide when to use these activities, with what grammar and with which students (ibid.).

According to Ur (2001), the function of the TASK is to activate the language in such a way as to get the students engaged with the material to be practised. A good grammar practice task should have a clear objective accompanied by the necessity for active language use. To get more learning value, Ur advises the teacher to combine linguistic and non-linguistic task objectives. Moreover, it is easy to define the task, if the result to be achieved, is tangible. Therefore, in such cases the non-linguistic objective can be explained in terms of the end product rather than in terms of the process (ibid.: 17-18).

As a matter of fact, the more comprehensible language the students are exposed to or produce (spoken, heard, read, written), the more they are likely to learn. When the learners practice the non-specific material, it's a good idea to use the language in general but for specific topics (new grammar structures) most volume of the time should be devoted to repetition of the items to be learnt. Repeated reception and production of the form and meaning of the structure in speech and writing ensures the factors that contribute to a successful grammar practice: VOLUME and REPETITION (ibid.: 12).

It seems important to support Ur's view that correction of mistakes contributes towards learning on a conscious, intellectual plane and that the teacher can achieve a thorough, semi-intuitive absorption of material if the learners have plenty of experience of 'doing it right' after mistakes have been eliminated. To sum up, the practice of grammar structures should be based on more or less successful performance because the students need to develop a positive self-image as language learners. It is observed that SUCCESS ORIENTATION contributes significantly to a positive environment of relaxation, confidence and motivation (ibid.: 12-13).

Ur recommends designing practice tasks that can be interpreted and performed at whatever level the individual student feels appropriate. Some learners will do more than others

in terms of both quality and quantity. HETEROGENEOUS exercises ensure that all students can succeed at the same time therefore a higher proportion of the class get learning value out of the practice (ibid.: 13-14).

Concerning the TEACHER ASSISTANCE, it should be directed towards supporting and assisting the students in their production of accurate responses rather than towards assessing and correcting. Furthermore, the teacher should always be alert: when, where and how to help the learners (ibid.: 14-15).

Many researchers such as Doff (1997), Harmer (1991), Scrivener (2003), Ur (2001), Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1994) hold the view that the process of language acquisition can be fostered by students' *INTEREST*. It is a generally acknowledged fact that bored students find it difficult to concentrate, they behave unruly and their attention wanders. Therefore, the teacher needs to consider different aspects to rouse students' interest and attention.

For example, the *topic* of the activity should be an important factor to hold the learners' interest. (Ur, 2001) To begin with, the teacher should clarify the subject matters the students are interested in as well as cover a wide range of them. The author of the present study has experienced in her teaching practice that a frequent change of topics makes it more likely that sooner or later every student can get to something that interests him/her. On the other hand, sometimes the importance of the topic as a focus of the task can be relatively unimportant. If the emphasis is on problem solving or creating amusing juxtapositions in a game-like activity, the task itself provides interest. In addition, Ur, Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1988) provide a good range of subject matters on which to base effective grammar practice: factual information on topics of general interest such as history, geography, physics, sociology, psychology, politics, ethics, civilisation etc.; controversial subjects of local or general interest; personal viewpoints, feelings, experience, tastes; fiction, amusing or pleasant ideas expressed in poetry, proverbs and quotations; entertainment; personalities etc.

Furthermore, to facilitate learning grammar, Harmer (2005) advises the teacher to exploit sight as an extremely powerful and demanding sense. Obviously, it is easier to concentrate attention if something is, at least, depicted or reproduced graphically. To avoid the distraction of the students' attention, Ur (2001) recommends combining oral and *visual* aspects of language practice exercises to make them more interesting. Besides, the teachers should not underestimate themselves as excellent visual aids to create a completely stimulating learning environment in the classroom.

It is well-proved by experience that *open-ended* grammar tasks stimulate the production of lots of various learner responses. Although, not all close-ended tasks (artificial patterns

based on very controlled responses) are boring. Thus, they can be varied regarding intonation, facial expression and gesture, the use of visual aids, the introducing of game-like features such as competition, time limits, role plays etc.

It seems significant to acknowledge the assumption of such researchers as Doff (1997), Scrivener (2003), Ur (2001), Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1994) that *information gaps* can improve the learners' interest in language transactions by adding a feeling of a purpose, challenge and authenticity.

According to Ur (2001) and Harmer (1991), the application of the principle of *personalization* in grammar practice activities allows seeing the language learner as an individual, not merely as a container of knowledge. Thereby, the teacher-student relationship should be based on the entire personalities of both teacher and student, not just on their language-teaching or language-learning faculties. Even more, "to fail to relate to the students' individual backgrounds, thoughts and feelings is to deprive ourselves of an excellent source of interesting activities". (Ur, 2001: 22) However, the teachers should be sensitive to their students' personalities and relationships. Sometimes being very intimate and frank can cause embarrassment, even distress (ibid.: 21-22).

As Ur (2001) and Scrivener (2003) point out, enjoyable *pleasurable tension* contributes to effective grammar practice. The drive to achieve some stimulating and clearly-defined, but not very easy attainable objectives without any threatening real-life consequences fosters students' motivation. In addition, the challenge can be caused by the introduction of extra constraints and rules such as a time limit, the drive to compete with others or with oneself, unpredictable answers etc.

All the above-mentioned researchers regard *entertainment* as another source that can evoke students' interest. For example, amusing tasks can be based on combining or comparing ideas not usually juxtaposed, apparently straightforward brainstorming procedures etc. More effective for grammar practice purposes are those activities in which the entertainment is supplied by the students' own contributions.

It's observed that people often enjoy being someone else or being themselves in an imaginary situation. Harmer (2005) and Ur (2001) consider that a temporary departure from reality is a means of motivating learners to participate as well as a way of widening the range of language available for use. Ur points out that there is a difference between *role-play* and *play-acting* or *simulation*. Respectively, in role-play each student takes on a particular personality for an individual purpose. Play-acting, on the other hand, involves the entire group where the students are talking through an imaginary situation as a social unit (ibid.: 24).

To be effective, a well-designed grammar practice activity should involve most students. Harmer (1991), Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1988), Scrivener (2003) and Ur (2001) describe the main techniques of LEARNER ACTIVATION to ensure maximum participation of the students in oral work.

To begin with, the instances of grammar being learnt should be presented through showing the structures within a written or spoken context. **Reception with no overt response** is acknowledged as being far from a passive process and one of the best ways of familiarizing the students with acceptable forms. The teacher does most, if not all, of the language production. The above-mentioned technique of learner activation is regarded as most effective in situations when the learners are young or learn better through intuition than through intellect, and when there is plenty of time available. (Ur, 2001)

Furthermore, in *minimal-response* activations the students are asked to concentrate on the task as a whole and focus their attention on the particular language points being taught to make responses. Thus, the learners are given a written or spoken text which may be an isolated sentence or a longer passage of discourse. The students are asked to react to some aspect of the given text by physical gesture, brief answers or a written symbol. The teacher has an opportunity to monitor the students' learning but there is still no production by the learners of the grammatical structure in full-sentence contexts (ibid.).

Teacher-student exchange is the most common verbal interaction in language classrooms. The teacher elicits the answers; the students perform them either individually or chorally. The teacher is the focus of attention: he/she controls the process of language acquisition and is largely able to determine what the students' answers will be. The technique referred to should be used at an early stage in practice to make sure that the learners hear and produce acceptable forms of grammatical structures. To conclude, the teacher-student exchange involves a high proportion of teacher talk and rather little language production by the learners. The given cues demand only one response therefore they tend to be geared to a single level and are not appropriate for very slow or very advanced learners. Each language exchange is closed to participate by other members of the classroom thereby they are not motivated to engage in learning (ibid.).

According to Ur, **student-teacher** language exchange is used rarely because teachers are reluctant to lose their initiative. The positive aspect of the technique referred to is that the students can decide on the context and ideas of the task therefore they listen to each other more attentively (ibid.).

The researcher's teaching experience has proved that **brainstorm** ensures a great amount of productive language practice. In general, a single stimulus can provide various possible

answers. Moreover, the learners produce the responses at levels of language competence convenient to them. Actually, the students' performance frequently tends to be humorous and entertaining. According to Ur, the brainstorm technique provides a larger volume of productive language practice on the part of the learners relative to the contribution of the teacher. Nevertheless, some students may feel confused by the open-endedness of the assignment because they are not used to taking the initiative (ibid.).

In a learner-centred *chain* technique the teacher gives an initial cue. The students, on their part, perform various answers that are made in response to the cue before. Besides, the technique referred to can comprise a variation – the 'cumulative chain'. It asks the students to repeat all the previous contributions, in order, before making his/her own addition. The author of the present paper has experienced in practice that the chain technique "produces a high proportion of learner talk while allowing the teacher to monitor." (Ur, 2001: 28)

Ur summarizes that in all the above-mentioned types of interaction only one learner has been talking at a time allowing the teacher to monitor all the students' utterances.

The following language transactions are useful when the teacher is fairly confident that the learners can produce acceptable instances of the grammar structure without prompting. Actually, in many forms of pair or group work nearly all the actual language production is done by the learners, while the teacher merely providing instructions and materials and acting as a helper.

Fluid pair technique involves a transaction-based language exchange between two students. The basic idea is given by the teacher. Each learner has to perform one language transaction with any one partner; afterwards it is necessary to do the same with another student. Hence, the technique referred to is very useful as a framework for repetition with a communicative purpose. It should be remarked that the fluid pair technique is used rarely because the students can be rather noisy and it is difficult to control them (ibid.).

In *semi-controlled small group transactions* pairs or groups of students are asked to perform a dialogue or a conversation. The teacher provides a framework or an idea for the task. The language produced by the students is semi-controlled: the teacher tells the learners to use certain patterns or kinds of sentences but the students create the exact content of the activity. Thereby, such language transactions are often based on an information gap task (ibid.: 30). Scrivener (2003: 63) assumes that small group work greatly increases the amount of learner talking time and allows each learner to hear a range of other opinions. The author of the present research regards the language transaction referred to very involving for effective grammar practice.

Ur (2001), Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1988), and Scrivener (2003) admit that *free group discussion* is the most advanced and the least controlled type of learner activation. The teacher assigns a task whose performance is likely to involve the use of the grammar structure being practised. The teacher may or may not wish to encourage the students to use the structure in question. In any case, the structure occurs less frequently than in more controlled tasks, but more purposefully and naturally. Typically, the size of the group of students is usually bigger than that of semi-controlled small group transactions; it may be even the whole class. As to the author of the present study, she cautiously uses this technique with pre-intermediate students because they find it difficult to produce acceptable grammatical structures without teacher's guidance.

To sum up, a well-designed grammar practice activity is based on a task that has clear objectives and requires an active use of the structure being practised. It should support learners' interest and motivation through a careful selection of a topic, the involvement of such factors as the use of visual aids, the principles of open-endedness, success orientation, personalization, pleasurable tension, entertainment etc. The task of the teacher is to activate his/her learners by selecting the most appropriate and effective teaching techniques for each level students starting from extremely teacher-controlled tasks at an early stage of language acquisition and later moving on to more advanced types of communicative grammar practice.

1.8 Usage of Tests for Purposeful Language Assessment

Language teachers often have to assume the responsibility for selecting and/or developing tests for their classroom and program. The researcher has experienced that it is a burdensome problem to decide which testing alternatives are most suitable ones for the particular language and educational context. It is observed that nowadays the majority of classrooms base their teaching/learning of English on communicative textbooks that sometimes provide neither accompanying tests nor any instructions for test construction. To measure students' performance and progress, teachers are left on their own without any guidance. The author of the present study regards well-grounded Basanta's (1995: 55) statement that the teachers have fairly often been reluctant to administer regular tests. Basanta refers to Stevenson and Rieve who give the reasons for this:

1. Teachers consider testing too time-consuming, taking away valuable class time.
2. They identify testing with mathematics and statistics.
3. They may think testing goes against humanistic approaches to teaching.

4. They have gotten little guidance in constructing tests in either pre-service or in-service training.”

Basanta personally adds that:

- “5. Teachers feel that the time and effort they put into writing and correcting tests is not acknowledged with additional pay or personal praise.
6. There is the personal implication that I would call `the image in the mirror`: Testing puts you face-to-face with your own effectiveness as a teacher. In this sense, testing can be as frightening and frustrating to the teacher as it is for the students” (ibid.).

According to Hughes (2004: 1), the mistrust in tests and of testers of many language teachers is well-founded. It should be admitted that a great amount of language testing is of very poor quality. Moreover, language tests have a harmful effect on teaching and learning too often and they fail to measure accurately what they have to measure.

As Norris (2000: 19) points out, language tests are tools for gathering information having to do with student language abilities. Actually, a variety of *instruments*, *procedures* and *practices* are available today. Language test types differ according to such characteristics as a variety of formats, lengths, item types, scoring criteria, the information provided by each etc. Furthermore, language teachers may select diverse kinds of tests with long traditions of use such as multiple choice, matching, true-false, fill-in-the-blank tests; cloze and dictation procedures; essay exams; oral interviews; the tests differing in scope and structure from these well-known options to, for example, computer-based and computer adaptive tests, audiotape-based oral proficiency interviews, web-based testing. Even more, a variety of innovative testing procedures have been practised on a wide scale: portfolios, self- and peer-assessment, conferencing, diaries, learning logs, teacher checklists and observations, as well as performance-based and task-based testing, the so-called alternative testing etc. (ibid.). Besides, Hughes (2004: 9) contrasts different kinds of tests and testing techniques: direct versus indirect testing; discrete-point as opposed to integrative testing; criterion referenced against norm-referenced testing; objective and subjective testing. Also communicative language testing is touched upon. In addition, Basanta (1995: 57) refers to Carroll and Hall who classify the test format into three categories: 1) close-ended testing assumed as analytical and objective; 2) open-ended testing admitted as subjective, impressionistic, and global; 3) restricted response testing manifested as content-controlled but allowing for more than one answer.

According to the researcher's teaching experience, language teachers often weigh the pros and cons of the most suitable test types for the particular needs. Hughes (2004: 6) assumes that each testing situation is unique and the tester's job is to provide the best solution to that. Norris (2000: 19) complements: "To select the appropriate tool we first need to have an idea about the job to be accomplished". Both Hughes and Norris recognize that there is no best test or best technique: "a technique which may work very well in one situation can be entirely inappropriate in another". (Norris, 2000:19) On the other hand, a unique format can ensure different kinds of information. To sum up, with the help of language testing tools teachers gather information in a systematic way and then make interpretations based on that information. Finally, basing on these interpretations, they make a decision or take an action within the classroom: admit and place students into appropriate course, diagnose areas of learners' need or sources of learning difficulties, encourage student involvement in the learning process, provide learners with feedback about their language learning progress, evaluate teacher performance, reflect on the effectiveness of materials, activities, syllabus design and pedagogy, determine the extent to which course objectives are being achieved, as well as make selective decisions for entrance into universities, certify that students have achieved a particular standard of language ability. "Language assessment, then, is much more than simply giving a language test; it is the entire process of test use" (ibid.). To select the most appropriate testing tools for the implementation of the above-mentioned decisions and actions, Norris recommends weighing up the interrelationship between four components of the language assessment process: who are the test users, what information the test should provide, why, or for what purpose, the test is being used, what consequences the test should have. It's important to note that each of the components interacts with all the others. Obviously, different people need different information from tests for different aims and with different consequences (ibid.: 20). Teachers should bear in mind that interpretations are always made about someone or something. It's essential that the selected testing instruments and procedures have to maximize the positive consequences and minimize the negative effects of using the test.

The assumption of Ur (2001) that tests are important for providing *feedback* without which neither teachers nor learners would be able to progress very well is very significant: "We have to know where we are in order to know where to go next" (ibid.: 10). Actually, most testing in language classrooms takes place automatically and almost unconsciously as the course proceeds. Hughes (2004: 1), in his turn, analyzes the effect of testing on teaching and learning, known as *'backwash'*. He emphasizes that backwash can be beneficial or harmful therefore the preparation for a test regarded as important should dominate all teaching and

learning activities. Both Hughes and Basanta (1995: 56) agree that teachers should avoid a discrepancy between teaching and testing. Basanta supports Davies's view that a good test is an obedient servant since it follows and apes teaching. That is, the more our tests resemble the classroom, the more valid they are (ibid.). Hughes (2004: 2) expresses a slightly different opinion by defining that the proper relationship between teaching and testing is that of partnership: testing should support good teaching and, if necessary, have a corrective influence on bad teaching.

Joyce and Burns (2001) sum up that the judgements about students' language proficiency and development in each particular testing situation at all stages of teaching relate to the following types of assessment:

- *Assessment related to future performance* involving *proficiency assessment* and *placement assessment*;
- *Assessment related to ongoing performance* involving *diagnostic assessment*, *formative assessment*, *achievement assessment* and *summative assessment*;

According to Basanta (1995), a generally accepted opinion of the linguists is that a test must achieve such theoretical requisites as *validity*, *reliability* and *practicality*.

"A test is valid if it measures what you want it to measure" (ibid.: 56). Basanta explains various aspects of test *validity*. Thus, *construct validity* is referred to as the concomitance between the test and the underlying teaching principles. Furthermore, a test possesses *content validity* if its content constitutes a representative sample of relevant structures. Moreover, if a test looks as if it measures what is supposed to measure, it has *face validity* (ibid.: 27). It's significant to agree with Hughes's (2004: 25) assumption that sometimes it is necessary to reflect on *criterion-related validity* which shows how far the results of the test agree with those provided by some independent assessment of the candidate's ability, that is, the criterion measure against which the test is validated. Furthermore, Hughes specifies that the criterion-related validity involves the *concurrent* and *predictive validity*. The concurrent validity occurs when a test is validated against a proven longer test or objective teachers' assessments of their students. On the other hand, predictive validity reflects the degree to which a test anticipates students' future performance (ibid.: 24).

According to Hughes, tests are supposed to be *reliable* if the scores obtained on a test on a particular occasion are likely to be very similar to those which the same student could obtain at a different time (ibid.: 29). As Basanta (1995) puts it, the results should be consistent. There are two main sources of reliability: the consistency of performance from candidates and scoring (ibid.: 56). In addition, Hughes (2004) analyzes the notions 'the reliability coefficient'

and *the standard error of measurement*. The reliability coefficient allows comparing the reliability of different tests: the more important decisions that are to be taken, the greater reliability is demanded (ibid.: 31-35). To estimate how close a person's actual score is to what is called their *true score* calculations are made to define the standard error of measurement which is regarded as useful for decisions that are taken on the basis of test scores (ibid.). Basing on the personal teaching experience, the author of the present research adheres to the view that the more mutually independent items a test has, the more reliable it will be. Moreover, Hughes claims that tests should be long enough: "the more important the decisions based on a test, the longer the test should be" (ibid.: 37). Reasonable planning in relation to the length of the test is very helpful: to restrict the range of possible answers, not to present the items whose meaning is not clear or to which the answer can be acceptable but not anticipated, to provide clear and explicit instructions, to ensure that tests are well laid out and perfectly legible. It's important that the students should be familiar with the format and testing techniques. In addition, the conditions of test administration have to be uniform and non-distracting. Finally, to obtain the scorer reliability which is essential to the test reliability, Hughes recommends using items that permit objective scoring, making comparisons between students as direct as possible, providing a detailed scoring key, training scorers. Students should be identified by number, not name as well (ibid.: 37-42).

Basanta (1995: 56) concludes that a test has *practicality* if it does not involve much time and money in its construction, implementation and scoring.

It's significant to acknowledge Hughes's (2004: 141-142) view that *grammar component* should be involved in the achievement, placement and diagnostic tests. The lack of grammatical knowledge may set limits to achieve the primary objective of a language course: skills performance which has been well proved by the researcher's experience. According to Joyce and Burns (2001), assessing students' grammatical knowledge is a significant element of a broader overall judgement about their written and spoken skills and may focus on learners' ability to:

- produce structures appropriate to the context or to the purpose of the text;
- use the correct word order;
- use the verb tenses correctly;
- use the adverbial phrases correctly and appropriately;
- use the definite and indefinite article appropriately;
- produce complex rather than simple grammatical structures;
- use a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic etc. (ibid.: 159).

In relation to scoring grammar items, it seems essential to admit Hughes's (2004) opinion: "The important thing is to be clear about what each item is testing, and award points for that only" (ibid.: 145). Thus, nothing should be deducted for non-grammatical errors, or for errors in grammar which is not being tested by the item. Actually, for two elements being tested in an item points may be assigned to each of them. Obviously, to have the full control of the structure, learners need to get both elements correct. Besides, to get valid and reliable scoring of grammar items, careful preparation of the scoring key is needed (ibid.).

To conclude, language teachers should select, use and evaluate language testing alternatives that are appropriate for their language education contexts in a purposeful way by focusing on assessment, not testing, clarifying the intended use of the tests and evaluating the outcomes of assessment. Testing should be supportive to teaching and, if necessary, have a corrective effect on improving it. Every effort should be made to ensure such essential qualities as validity, reliability and practicality in test construction, administration and scoring. A grammar component should be included in various test types to reach the primary objective of the language courses: skills performance.

1.9 Recent Approach to Errors and Corrective Feedback

According to Ancker, error correction remains one of the most contentious and misunderstood issues in the second and foreign language teaching profession. (2000: 20) Error correction and teacher feedback are usually considered as the final steps of the lesson. Nevertheless, nowadays the majority of all foreign language teachers agree that error correction must take place throughout the lesson and affect learning positively. As Joyce and Burns (2001: 154) point out, since the early 1970s errors have been seen as reflecting the natural order of acquiring new language therefore adopted as a necessary aspect of the process of forming hypotheses while learning. However, Ancker (2000) emphasizes that a shift has taken place from an immediate correction of every error in older methods based on behaviour theories of learning to a more tolerant approach supported by recent theories of Krashen, Doff, Lewis, Ur, Nunan and Lamb. The researcher shares Ancker's point of view that the main reasons for occurring errors are: interference from the native language, incomplete knowledge of the target language, the complexity of the new structure, problematic spelling, fossilisation etc. (ibid.). The definitions regarding `a slip` and `an error` are very significant and helpful in deciding whether to correct the students` responses immediately after their performance. Thus, Ancker refers to Edge's conclusion that a learner can self-correct a slip but he/she cannot self-

correct an error. A brief pause or a non-verbal cue is often sufficient for students to recognize and correct the mistakes they make while speaking. (Ancker, 2000: 21) The author of the article remarks that many of his colleagues throughout the world no longer automatically correct their students but encourage self-correction and peer-correction.

However, Joyce and Burns (2001) note that a more recent research suggests that grammatical awareness and corrective feedback through direct instruction does contribute positively to language development. The question arises of when and how the errors should be corrected. It seems clear that the teacher's decision regarding error correction can be influenced by various contextual factors such as learner characteristics, duration of the course, goals for learning, learners' expectations about error correction etc. Moreover, other teacher's decisions relate to the purpose of the task and the extent to which errors will impede students' progress, that is, it is necessary for the teacher to set the teaching priorities. Therefore, Joyce and Burns advise that error correction and corrective feedback are appropriate when the new structures are being provided for the first time, specific structures and language patterns are practised, learners have common problems in the production of the new language, the errors are global etc. On the other hand, less attention to error correction and corrective feedback is appropriate, if the students focus on fluency and communicating the meaning. In the previously-named cases the students should be encouraged to self-monitor (ibid.).

Error correction strategy set up by Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988: 28) completely corresponds to the researcher's teaching experience: error correction and teacher feedback must take place throughout the lesson changing according to the phase of it. Sometimes error correction and teacher feedback can be predominantly straightforward and immediate, sometimes even interrupted. To conclude, "regardless of when correction is made, teacher feedback should always attempt to engage the student cognitively rather than to simply point out the error and provide the appropriate target form" (ibid.).

It seems important for the author of the present paper to accent Ancker's (2000: 23) statement that some educators and many students consider not correcting errors scandalous, even irresponsible. Actually, not correcting errors is not the same as teaching incorrect forms. Ancker advises the teachers to explain that learning to speak another language requires intellectual effort, physical skills and a tremendous amount of practice that cannot happen without making mistakes in the process. It is significant to shift the students' focus to the positive aspects of errors and to emphasize what they can do in the target language. In other words, it is "intellectually dishonest and counterproductive to ignore our students' success and exaggerate the seriousness of errors and mistakes" (ibid.).

To sum up, error correction and corrective feedback are regarded as contentious and misunderstood issues in foreign language teaching. Nowadays many language educators consider that error correction and teacher feedback should take place throughout the classes and improve the learning process. The distinction between a slip or a mistake and an error as well as various contextual factors and teaching priorities can influence the teacher's decision regarding error correction and corrective feedback.

2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SYNTAX IN KNOWING GRAMMAR

Huddleston (2000: 17) views syntax as one of the narrower senses of the grammar of a language and, simultaneously, admits that the sentence is the largest stretch of the language forming a syntactic construction. He explains that syntax is concerned with the way words combine to make sentences. Similarly, Blokh (1983: 268) expresses the same view that the sentence is the main object of syntax which is built up of words according to a definite syntactic pattern. Mathew (1981: 26) agrees that, in defining syntax, a dictionary will usually refer to the sentence. Furthermore, the author of the book offers to view syntax as the study of constructions: “the sentence in turn can be defined as the maximal unit of syntax or the largest unit over which constructional relations hold” (ibid. 29). Also Thornbury (2004: 2) defines syntax as the system of rules that cover the order of words in a sentence. Finally, Huddleston (2000: 17) explains it closer that within the sentence there is a sharp distinction between permissible and impermissible combinations, which enables to formulate the rules distinguishing what is grammatical from what is not.

Thus, it is obvious that the views concerning the definition of syntax are not very diverse in their essence and view syntax, in its general sense, as a study of the sentence structure in a natural language.

Traditional assumptions in relation to syntax clarify that sentences are structured out of words and phrases, each of which belongs to a specific grammatical category (nouns or noun phrases etc.) and serves a specific grammatical function within a sentence (subject, complement etc.). (Radford, 1998) The author of the book specifies that phrases and sentences are formed by a **binary merger operation** which combines pairs of categories to form larger and larger structures.

Moreover, Mathew (1981) explains that grammatical sentences can be the basis of a **generative grammar**. It is interesting to note that the notion of it was explained by Chomsky in the 50s. Chomsky’s most important achievement was “to clarify this notion, and to show that such a system could be formalised” (ibid.: 45). The rules of grammar can generate all sequences of units which are established as grammatical sentences, and none of those established as ungrammatical (ibid.).

Two different types characterize the linguistic relations between forms: **syntagmatic** and **paradigmatic** or `and relations` and `or relations`. (Huddleston, 2000: 9) Syntactic functions such as subject, predicator and object handle syntagmatic relations. The set of forms in paradigmatic relations can involve a number of distinct variables (ibid.).

In short, syntax is the study of how words and phrases combine together according to definite patterns to make larger units: sentences. Linguistic relations between forms in a sentence can be syntagmatic or paradigmatic.

2.1 Significance of a Sentence as an Essential Syntactic Structure

People communicate their ideas in sentences in which the words are used in meaningful relation to one another. Word order has the major effect on the meaning. “Communication involves the exchange of information and knowledge. It requires language and language consists not only of words but also of a system of combining words that is used and understood by people. That system is the two-part invention for communication – sentence”. (Bates, Freedman Stern, 1983: 3) Brown, Nilson, Shaw and Weldon (1984: 4) complement that sentence as the basic unit of communication is the central element of syntax that allows people to communicate for it is in syntactically structured forms – sentences that people express their thoughts. According to Palmer (1973: 73) and O`Dwyer (2000: 227), sentence is not a constituent of a larger syntactic structure. Palmer accents that traditional grammars view sentence as the expression of a complete thought (ibid.:71). Burl Hogins (1985: 7) emphasizes the significant role of well-considered sentences in communication: “A good sentence centers a writer’s thought; a good sentence commands the reader’s attention”.

Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1986: 27) state that sentence is the largest unit of language that is composed of smaller parts. Furthermore, Morenberg (1997: 24) offers the definition `CONSTITUENTS` regarding the words that work together as single units. Sentence constituents are always nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs which appear as single *words*, *phrases* or *clauses*. In its simplest sense, grammar “consists only of noun, verb, adjective, and adverb constituents, and some “little” words like articles and conjunctions that essentially hold the noun, verb, adjective, and adverb constituents together and relate them to one another” (ibid.: 27). The teachers need to determine constituency when sentences are analyzed.

According to sentence **STRUCTURES**, O`Dwyer (2000) accents that the traditional approach is to identify sentences as *simple*, *compound*, *complex* and *compound-complex*. It “tells us something about the structure as a whole” (ibid.: 227).

It seems interesting to deal with a more detailed analysis of sentence structures offered by O`Dwyer (ibid.: 232). The author referred to points out that sentence structures can also be treated according to their particular PATTERNS, noting the roles and the grammatical

meanings for each pattern. Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1986: 114) explain it closer that English has a fairly fixed word order. The basic order of elements of the normal declarative clause is: subject, predicator, object, complement and adverb. According to Morenberg (1997), there are six *core* sentence patterns in English. Nevertheless, Leech, Deuchar and Hoogenraad (1986: 114-116) state that also exceptional word orders are allowed. Therefore, some sentence types such as questions can be considered as systematic *deviations* from the expected word order. One sentence structure can be changed into another with the help of the rules called *transformations*. Furthermore, transformations are divided into *optional* and *obligatory*. In optional (unmarked) transformations either word order is grammatical. On the other hand, in obligatory (marked) - only the inverted word order is possible. As Morenberg (1997: 90) points out, the core sentence patterns can be changed by rearranging and compounding. Thus, “you can make positive sentences negative, turn statements into questions, convert active sentences into passives, change certain kinds of sentences which have BE as the main verb into existential-there sentences, and render conditional remarks into commands”. Moreover, it is possible to compound structures within sentences to make them longer (ibid.: 90).

It should be added that sentence patterns can be reordered or reduced due to communicational situation and the context. As to Giering, Graustein, Hoffmann, Kirsten, Neubert and Thiele (1980: 233), the speaker’s/writer’s perspective of communication can affect the order of constituents in the sentence types. The same group of words can have different meanings depending on the PURPOSE of the sentence. There are sentences that make statements, ask questions, give commands and express strong or sudden feeling. Therefore, according to the purpose, all sentences are identified as *declarative*, *interrogative*, *imperative*, or *exclamatory*. It should be noted that O’Dwyer (2000: 230) views the same division of English sentences as relating merely to their form without dealing with the purpose of a sentence.

Giering et al. (1980: 209) express another consideration regarding the *communication* type of sentences. It’s essential that in the communicational framework the speaker’s intent is very important. Thus, the speaker expresses an assertion, an inquiry, or makes a request syntactically in the form of a certain communication type of sentence (CT). The authors of the book warn that there is no one-to-one relationship between the type of intent and CT because one CT can express different types of communicative intent, and one type of intent can be expressed by more than one CT. That is, a request can be expressed syntactically by a declarative sentence, a question, by an imperative sentence, or by a combination of two sentence types. To conclude, a communicative classification of sentences cannot be made on

the basis of a syntactic form only, however there exists a standard CT for assertions, inquiries and requests: correspondingly declarative sentences, questions and imperative sentences (ibid.).

To sum up, the sentence is the basic unit of syntax that allows people to communicate. It consists of the following constituents: words, phrases and clauses. Sentences are classified in different ways according to their structure as well as purpose. Communicational framework plays a significant role in determining the types of sentences that can express different intents chosen by the speaker.

2.2 Features and Use of Interrogative Sentences

The question is a sentence type that plays an important role in communication. Questions are used for many purposes. They can aim at seeking information, giving an order or command, making a request, beginning a conversation, making a comment on a situation and checking knowledge to find out if someone knows something accurately. (http://www.2gsu.edu/~eslhp/grammar/lecture_10/quest_context.html)

It is important to note that there are different concepts in relation to the question types. As O'Dwyer (2000: 231) indicates, questions can be affirmative and negative. The author of the book distinguishes two kinds of interrogatives: interrogative *yes/no* questions and *wh*-questions.

Interrogative *yes/no questions/general questions* expect a simple `yes` or `no` answer (ibid.). They are seldom asked with the expectation of getting just a `yes` or `no` answer. Moreover, *yes/no* questions are often used as commands and conversation starters. (http://www.2gsu.edu/~eslhb/grammar/lecture_10/quest_context.html) The researcher regards well-grounded the proposal to call *yes/no* questions *total* questions as the state-of-affairs as such is questioned. (Giering et al., 1980) The above-mentioned questions are used:

- when the speaker/writer is uncertain about the realization of some state-of-affairs
- when he wants to doubt something
- when some state-of-affairs is unknown to him and he wants to get some information about it

It should be noted that there is a special case of *yes/no* questions – *declarative* questions which are identical in form to declarative sentences but have the final rising intonation or a question mark. Actually, these sentences are confined to spoken English, and their use is determined by the context or situation where the speaker wants to have something confirmed

and expects a positive answer. Although, sometimes *yes/no* questions can be negated by `not` but “while positive questions are neutral as to the answer that is expected - it may be `yes` or `no` with equal probability - the starting point in the mind of the speaker with negative questions is positive and he simply asks for the hearer’s confirmation or expresses surprise at this positive assumption not coming true” (ibid.: 223).

Wh- questions/special questions query a content phrase, generally a noun phrase or an adjective phrase. (Morenberg, 1997: 98) Furthermore, the author of the book adds that these are partial questions because the speaker/writer wants to have his information completed in one respect (person, thing, time, place, reason, etc.). Falling intonation characterizes *wh-* questions. Some linguists such as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman specify that *wh-* questions are used to request specific information, for instance, in social interaction, for getting directions, in seeking explanations, for eliciting vocabulary etc. (http://www.2gsu.edu/~eslhpb/grammar/lecture_10/quest_context.html) The correspondence between *wh-* questions and positive declarative sentences can be described in terms of *transformation* (except the *wh-* questions where the question element is a subject or a part of it because they do not need a change of position or the introduction of a special auxiliary element. (Giering et al., 1980: 213) Negative *wh-* questions are regarded to occur only in connection with an interrogative pro-adverb `why`. It should be remarked that such questions do not merely ask about facts and opinions. Moreover, there is also some imperative or rhetorical element in them (ibid.: 223).

O`Dwyer (2000: 231) presents ***tag questions*** as special question structures in English. For Giering et al. (1980), *tag* questions are confined to spoken language and play an important part in everyday conversation. It is interesting to note that Giering et al. assume that the *tag* question is a further type of *yes/no* question. In short, the above-mentioned questions ask for confirmation of the truth of the statement. *Tag* questions usually imply some kind of emotionality in relation to the speaker. Furthermore, *tag* questions can be oriented positively or negatively. The tag is negative after a positive statement, and vice versa. The intonation of the question tag is rising. The question tag is separated from the statement by a comma thus making the tag to appear as an afterthought on the part of the speaker. However, the authors of the book add that in spoken English *tag* questions can also express the speaker’s affirmation. In this case the tag should have a falling intonation (ibid.).

According to Giering et al. (1980), ***alternative questions/choice questions*** expect one of two or more alternatives mentioned in the question in the answer. This type of questions is regarded to be of lesser importance than *wh-* questions or *yes/no* questions (ibid.: 218). Giering et al. consider that the alternative questions and *yes/no* questions are related to each other in

some respects: they do not contain *wh*- element; they are total questions; they present alternatives. Moreover, the researchers referred to remark that both types of questions are sometimes grouped together as alternative questions, or *yes/no* questions are treated as a special case of alternative question. On the contrary, the reason for classifying *yes/no* and alternative questions as two different types is that they differ as to the type of answer expected. “With *yes/no*-questions there is only a choice of positive or negative with regard to one statement, while with alternative questions two or more statements are given as alternatives” (ibid.: 213).

Considering the assumptions of the researchers on the field such as Giering et al., it is possible to conclude that a spoken language often implies its corrections on interrogative sentences such as the usage of short question forms instead of full equivalents and a lot of declarative and rhetorical question structures. Full forms with complete subjects and predicates are the norm in written questions: in textbooks and on examinations and quizzes. “So, full questions are occurring in one kind of context, and the short forms occur in another kind of context”. (http://www.2gsu.edu/~eslhp/grammar/lecture_10/quest_context.html)

To sum up, interrogative sentences form questions. They are used to get new information as well as for other purposes. Interrogative sentences vary in relation to their structure. There are various divisions of question types. Conversational English imposes significant features on the use of interrogative sentences such as declarative questions, short forms etc.

3 THE PRACTICAL PART OF THE STUDY

The practical part of the present paper describes the target group, the research method, topic and techniques, the approach to the data collected as well as provides the results of the students' preliminary testing and the summaries of the questionnaires for the learners and the teachers of English at elementary school. The practice of question formation in the teaching aid used in the classroom is analyzed. Various and absorbing types of activities are selected to improve the students' skills in asking questions. Learning outcomes are examined and presented graphically.

3.1 Description of the Target Group

In order to accomplish the goal of the study, the author of the present diploma paper chose a group of 16 learners at pre-intermediate level of English, Form 8.

The experiment took place at the biggest school in the region: Cesis Primary School.

The target group consisted of 8 girls and 8 boys between the ages of 13 to 16. Their first language is Latvian. All of them come from the same town. The participants have been studying English for 6 years. Most of the learners have had the same teachers. One pupil has repeated the course. 3 students out of 16 have come to study at Cesis Primary School from other schools of the town. The small number of the learners in a group is a favourable factor for the teaching/learning process.

As concerns the learning background of the target group: they have not had any interruptions in learning English. The researcher should admit that the students of the group referred to are eager to acquire the language better; they appreciate the importance of knowing English nowadays. Therefore they are motivated learners. The students of the target group have discussed abstract issues, they are aware of such cognitive skills as making similarities, contrasting ideas and concepts, solving problems following the guidance of their teacher.

Nevertheless, the author of the present study has observed that a few pupils are disruptive in the class. They cannot devote themselves to the process of learning completely. Various factors distract their attention, tasks seem difficult to do therefore their ability to concentrate suffers. The lack of knowledge makes some students feel embarrassed and confused at times. Sometimes they also present discipline problems. If the teacher manages to control them in a supportive and constructive way, the learners have a greater commitment to doing the tasks.

All the described factors show that the target group of the present research is fairly homogenous with common features for the most part of the participants.

3.2 Research Method, Topic and Techniques

To fulfil the tasks of the diploma paper and prove the hypothesis that the students' understanding of question formation and use is improved, if the teacher applies diverse and absorbing practice types, the author of the present study decided to do **action research** which included the process of data collection, the setting up of a database and subsequent analysis of the collected data.

The researcher explored the *topic* in relation to practising question formation skills at elementary school. The subject of the study mattered to the author of the present research both in terms of extrinsic (it was necessary for the diploma paper) and intrinsic (it seemed interesting to find out the ways for overcoming the problems that were very often touched upon in the working practice) motivation. The researcher decided to clarify the main groups of the students' mistakes in asking questions and to investigate the ways of practising the problematic areas by using effective, absorbing exercises. The attention was focused on the practice stage of teaching grammar at which certain specific grammar items should be absorbed from short-term to long-term memory by means of various techniques and activities.

To present the factual data of the action research, the author of the current study chose the *practical* research tools that allowed gathering information regarding the investigated problem of improving the skills in question formation. With the help of the *questionnaires* the topic was explored in breadth. The questionnaires were designed for the purpose of finding out how the students of the target group as well as their teachers assessed the learners' skills in asking questions. The researcher was interested in clarifying the most problematic issues on the field as well as in defining the preferences in the ways of acquiring questioning skills better. The information about their teaching/learning situation was elicited from a comparably large number of people (16 students and 12 teachers) and the obtained data was used in planning the research activities. To make the questionnaires easier and quicker for the respondents to fill in, merely closed questions were included for faster and more reliable scoring of the responses.

To confirm the results of the research, the author of the present paper used classroom *observation* to reveal how the teaching/learning process took place in various forms.

Observing was not concerned with assessment but with exploring the students' response to the teaching.

The researcher took *field notes* while actually being engaged in the experiment. They provided raw material of reflection on action, for example, self-evaluation, group functioning, performance of individual students, interaction, common errors, problematic issues, ideas, inspirations, things that worked well, remarks etc. The field notes were helpful for increasing the efficiency of the teaching/learning process and prevented losing the hard-won experience.

Two *tests* were designed: the preliminary test was aimed at diagnosing the most common mistakes in asking questions; after the teaching stage the achievement test measured the students' obtained knowledge.

The *experiment* covered a range of different activating and absorbing practice tasks for improving the skills in question formation. It also involved matching the results of the diagnostic and achievement tests designed for the students of the target group.

Regarding the process of selecting appropriate tasks for question formation practice, the researcher shared Ur's (2001) experience that it was hard to make a strict division in grouping activities accordingly to the traditional labels of 'presentation', 'practice', 'production'; in one context the 'presentation' activity could work equally as 'practice' one in another and vice versa. It was seldom predictable what was new for students. Therefore the term 'presentation' was also problematic. The researcher decided to specify the descriptions regarding the purpose of the activities. The author of the present study considered the extent to which each type of exercises could be adapted for different purposes and for use in various contexts. The chosen practice tasks had to be generic, that is, adapted to suit a range of objectives and circumstances.

3.3 Approach to the Data Collected

To make the research **reliable**, the author of the study should be sure that the obtained results/findings will be the same if the applied research procedures are used by another researcher. It was necessary to answer the question: Is the research replicable? For example, is the marking scheme of the designed questionnaires such that any marker will get the same results? To achieve a high degree of reliability means that the researcher should control nearly all the aspects of the situation that can change or vary. The author of the present paper had to make the findings explicit for credibility. It was necessary to have more than one source of data. Providing more than one perspective on the topic being researched is called

triangulation. The researcher decided to carry out observation, to design and administrate the questionnaires, the diagnostic and the achievement tests for students and to do the pilot teaching.

Wallace (1999) states that the data gathered by different methods can be looked at from various approaches. Thus, questionnaires being *introspective* by eliciting the information from respondents can supply both *qualitative* and *quantitative* data, they are *intrusive*: disrupt people's lives. Therefore, the questionnaires should be handled sensitively. They involve *collaboration* and generate *conclusive* findings by proving that some facts are true.

Observation techniques provide both *qualitative* and *quantitative* data. They could be done either on a *collaborative* or an *individual* basis. We can call them *complementary* if they are put into effect as elaborations of normal teaching activities. The findings of the observation studies may be *conclusive*, also *illuminative* (throwing some light on a problem) or *heuristic* (discovering something about the topic).

Experiments are usually *quantitative*, *intrusive*. They intend to be *conclusive* and may be conducted on either an *individual* or a *collaborative* basis.

To make the research **valid**, the students were asked to fill in anonymous questionnaires to get open and candid answers. The data acquired through the experiment should not be misleading or irrelevant. It should test what it needs to test.

3.4 Results of Students` Pre-testing

Before carrying out the practical part of the study the researcher had designed and administered a diagnostic test (*see Appendix 1*). Its *aim* was to find out how the students of the target group had acquired question formation structures and to state the most typical mistakes. The preliminary testing was necessary for selecting the most appropriate meaningful practice activities for the experiment. The learners had to ask *yes/no*, *wh-*, and *tag* questions as well as to translate from Latvian into English. According to the syllabus, the students had to cover the Present Simple, the Present Continuous, the Present Perfect, the Past simple, the Future Simple and the Planned Future `to be going to` tenses as well as the usage of countable and uncountable nouns, the structures `there is /there are`, `have to` and the modal `can`. There were 15 students in the group. The learners had to perform four tasks in 40 minutes. The students were not allowed to use any additional materials.

The results of the diagnostic test showed that the *average* indicator of the learners' performance was **36%** out of **100%**. Each student could get maximum **80** points for the test. The average indicator of the group was **29** points.

The easiest exercise for most learners was asking *yes/no questions*. The average result of the students was 9 points out of 20 or **45%** out of **100%**. The learners had a tendency to use `some` instead of `any` (9.3% out of 100%). Some students did not form questions with the help of `do`, `does` or `did` regarding the sentences which expressed necessity by means of the structure `have to` (9.3% out of 100%). As to the Past Simple, many mistakes were made in an incorrect usage of the auxiliary element in the question and the non-observance of the verb change to the infinitive (8.7% out of 100%).

The results of the diagnostic test discovered also the most *difficult* question formation structures for the learners of the target group.

With regard to *wh- questions*, the average performance of the students was 7 points out of 20 or **35%** out of **100%**. The students sometimes could not distinguish the questions to the subject in which inversion is not used and the questions to the object (25% mistakes out of 100%). Many mistakes referred to the usage of `do`, `does` or `did` as the auxiliary element in the questions expressing necessity with the help of the structure `have to` (17% mistakes out of 100%). A typical mistake was the omission of `there` in the subject position (5.7% mistakes out of 100%).

As regards the *wh- questions* and the *translation* task (the average indicator of the learners' performance in the translation task was 5 points or **25%** out of **100%**) together, the students made many mistakes regarding word inversion and the use of auxiliaries. Problems appeared in relation to the sentences which involved the usage of `do`. The learners did not notice that `do` should take on the tense form and the verb should change to the infinitive (4.6% mistakes out of 100%). In some cases the auxiliary element `do` was omitted (8% mistakes out of 100%). When the learners questioned a genitive noun in a noun phrase, they did not move the whole noun phrase to the beginning of the sentence. They moved simply the genitive noun (8% mistakes out of 100%). The students did not pay due attention to the choice of the right interrogative words either. They had a tendency to use `who` or `whom` instead of `whose`, `when` instead of `how often` or `what time`, `what` instead of `which` or `how`. There were a few mistakes regarding the usage of the Future Simple and the Planned Future `to be going to` tenses (3% and 1% out of 100% accordingly).

The average indicator of the students' performance in asking **tag questions** was 9 points out of 20 or **45%** out of **100%**. Most mistakes were related to the absence of the auxiliary elements 'do', 'does' or 'did' in question tags regarding the sentences which expressed necessity with the help of the structure 'have to' (4.3% out of 100%).

The following table presents the results of the learners' performance at the diagnostic test. The percentage of the students' achievement is calculated concerning the possible answers of all the learners in relation to the particular question type.

The Learners' Performance at the Diagnostic Test

Table 3.4.1

	<u>Exercise 1</u> (yes/no questions) Percents/Points	<u>Exercise 2</u> (wh-questions) Percents/Points	<u>Exercise 3</u> (tag questions) Percents/Points	<u>Exercise 4</u> (translation) Percents/points
Present Simple	11.3% (34)	17.3% (52)	13.3% (40)	9% (27)
Present Continuous	7.3% (22)	3.3% (10)	0% (0)	1.3% (4)
Present Perfect	4% (12)	0.3% (1)	7% (21)	0.3% (1)
Past Simple	6% (18)	3% (9)	5.7% (17)	8.3% (25)
Future Simple	3% (9)	2.7% (8)	2.3% (7)	0.3% (1)
Planned Future 'be going to'	3.7% (11)	0% (0)	2.3% (7)	1% (3)
Countable/Uncountable Nouns	0.7% (2)	0.7% (2)	0% (0)	0.3% (1)
'there is/there are'	0% (0)	0.7% (2)	6% (18)	0.3% (1)
'have to'	0.7% (2)	0.3% (1)	3.7% (11)	0.3% (1)
'can'	3.3% (10)	1% (3)	4.7% (14)	1.3% (4)
Maximum Percents/Points	40% (120)	29.3% (88)	45% (135)	22.7% (68)

To sum up, the results of the diagnostic test showed a comparatively mediocre students' performance. The learners' attention should be focused on all kinds of questions including all the above-mentioned grammatical items. The usage of the Present Perfect tense as well as

countable/uncountable nouns, the structures `have to` and `there is /there are` were the most problematic issues in relation to question formation. The author of the present diploma paper concluded that appropriate additional practice was necessary to overcome the obstacles regarding the acquisition of question formation according to the requirements of the syllabus and the learners` communicative needs.

3.5 The Analysis of the Learners` Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the students (*see Appendix 2*) was used with regard to a specific learning setting: sixteen learners of English from Form 8 at Cesis Primary School. Its aim was to get a practical outcome by gathering information from a number of students of the target group. The researcher was interested in finding out how much help the class members needed to adjust her teaching accordingly. The author of the present study tried to find out the students` attitude towards learning grammar and its explanation in the course book. It seemed necessary to discover how comfortable the students felt when asking questions, making mistakes. The researcher wanted to define the preferences as to different ways of learning grammar. The learners had to answer whether they thought that their 1st language had influenced the process of learning English. The author of the current study tried to reveal the level of the respondents` motivation.

The questionnaire contained *nine* items.

To ease the process of analysing the data, the researcher chose closed questions. The students were asked to give their opinion by circling the most appropriate answer for them. The learners did not have to sign their names since honest answers were expected.

To make the questionnaire reliable, the author of the study tried to work out a fair marking scheme useful for different teachers. The questionnaire presented the content it was supposed to measure: the students` experience in learning English grammar. The validity of the questionnaire could suffer if the respondents were not candid enough.

Scores were calculated by averaging the individual item scores.

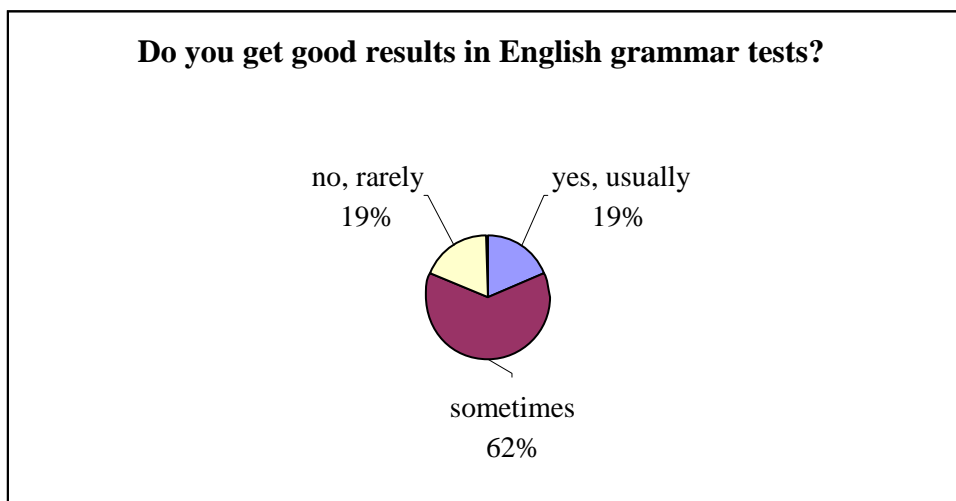


Figure 3.5.1 **Do you get good results in English grammar tests?**

The first question to which the students had to give their self-evaluation was related to their results in English grammar tests. Three respondents out of sixteen or **19%** held the view that their performance in tests was good. **62 %** of the learners said that they sometimes did the tests well and three respondents (**19%**) gave a negative answer.

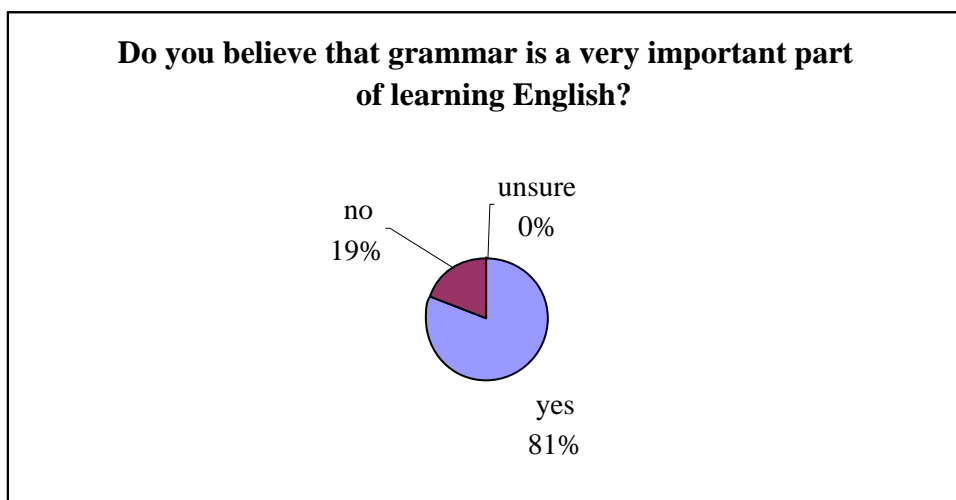


Figure 3.5.2 **Do you believe that grammar is a very important part of learning English?**

The researcher also discovered that the students appreciated the importance of grammar as a part of learning English. The results were as follows: most of the learners, (**81%**), expressed the view that grammar was very significant in acquiring a foreign language; only **19%** denied it. Nobody gave the answer `unsure`.

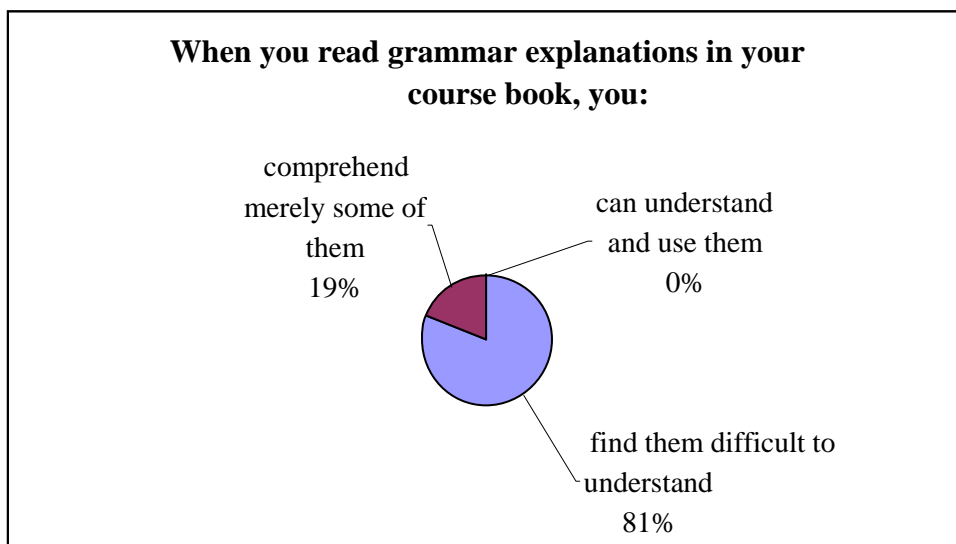


Figure 3.5.3 **When you read grammar explanations in your course book:**

The third question was meant to define the learners' attitude towards grammar explanation in their course book. **81%** of the pupils recognized that it was difficult to tackle grammar rules, **19%** admitted that they could follow merely some grammar explanations. Nobody found the rules understandable and easy to use.

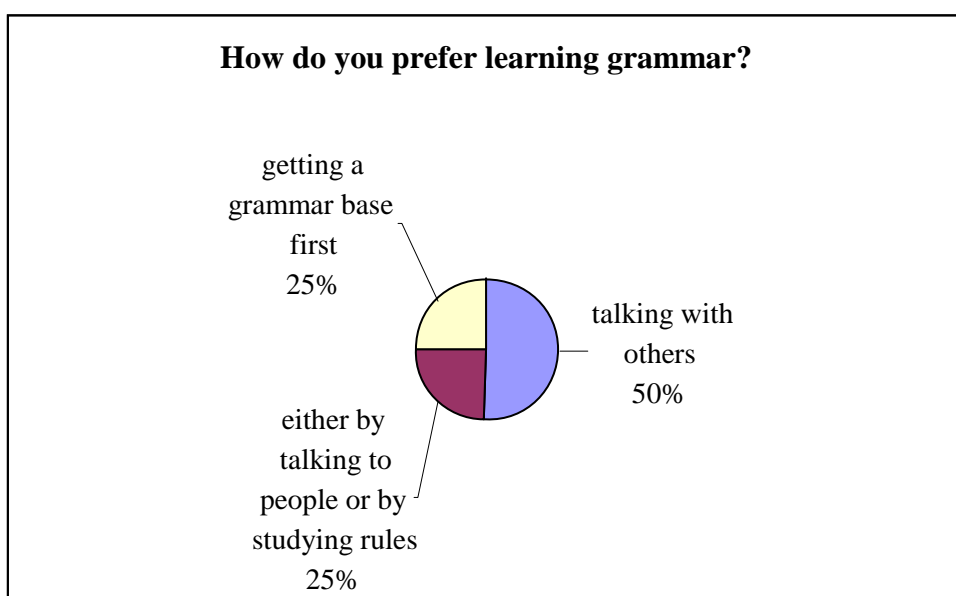


Figure 3.5.4 **How do you prefer learning grammar?**

As to the question of the learning styles, most of the respondents, **50%**, found themselves more interested in learning through the process of interaction (it seems obvious because elementary school learners enjoy acting in real life situations). There were four students (**25%**) who stated that they could learn either by talking to people or by studying

grammar rules. Four learners (25%) said that they preferred getting the grammar base first, then using the language.

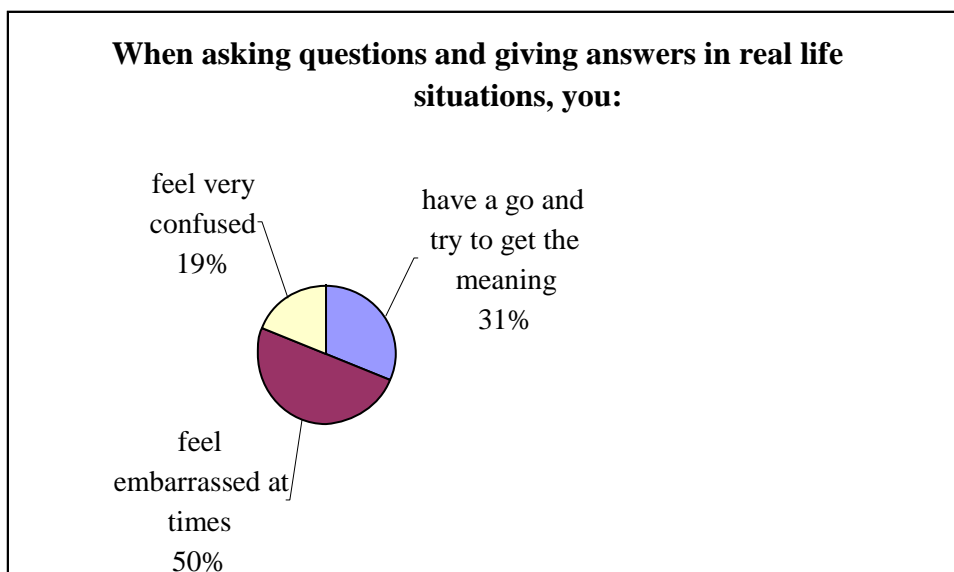


Figure 3.5.5 When asking questions and giving answers in real life situations:

The researcher was surprised to find out that for five students (31%) asking questions in real life situations did not create any difficulty. Most students (50%) admitted that communicating seemed a little embarrassing at times. Three learners (19%) found their lack of knowledge very confusing.

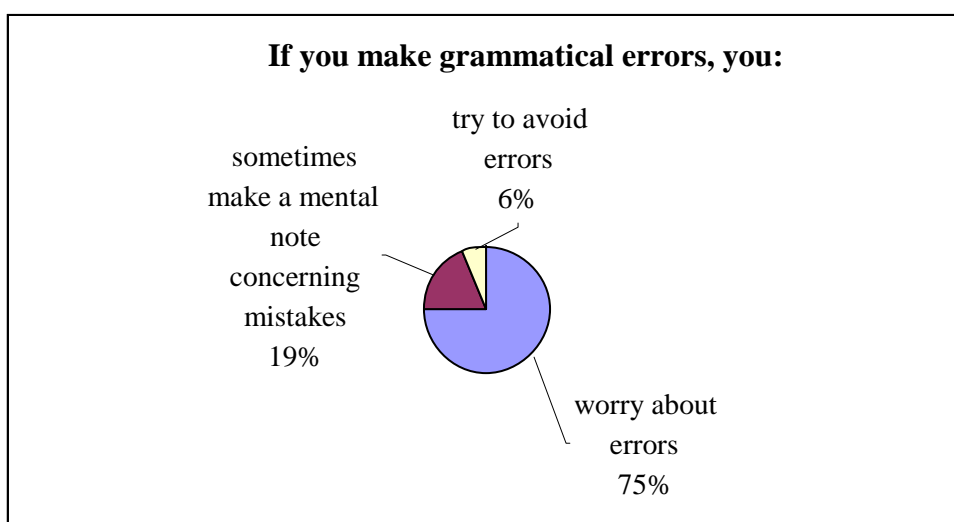


Figure 3.5.6 If you make grammatical errors:

The majority of the students (75%) felt worried about their grammar errors. Three learners (19%) sometimes made a mental note not to perform the mistake again. One student (6%) avoided making the same errors again whenever possible.

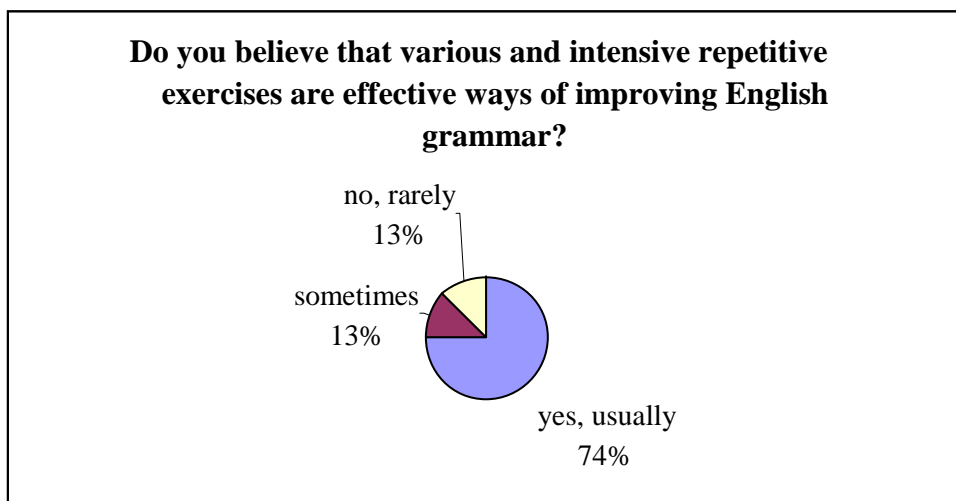


Figure 3.5.7 Do you believe that various and intensive repetitive exercises are effective ways of improving English grammar?

The question about effective ways of improving English grammar was particularly important for the present research. The results were as follows: twelve of the learners (74%) considered that they were interested in practising English grammar through various intensive and activating exercises, 12.5% of the respondents stated that different activities sometimes helped them to improve their knowledge. 12.5% of the students gave a negative answer.

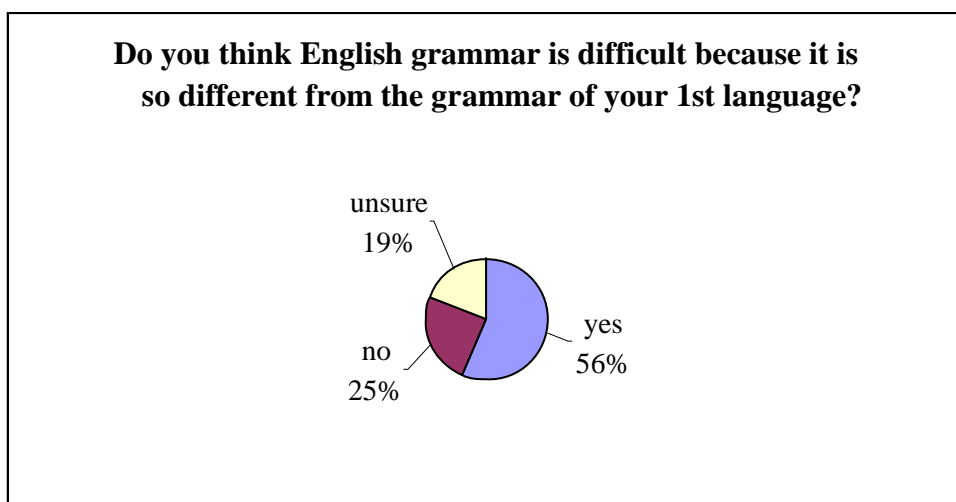


Figure 3.5.8 Do you think English grammar is difficult because it is so different from the grammar of your 1st language?

Another significant question was about the influence of the learners` first language on the process of acquiring English grammar. Nine learners out of sixteen (56%) revealed that the above-mentioned factor caused misunderstanding and hindered the acquisition of the foreign language. Four respondents (25%) denied it. Three students (19%) were not sure about the answer.



Figure 3.5.9 Your need to improve your skills of asking and answering questions is:

The author of the diploma paper should admit that the students` need to improve their skills of asking questions was very high therefore they were extrinsically motivated learners. Fifteen students out of sixteen (**94%**) held the view that the development of question formation skills seemed very valuable for them. 1 respondent (**6%**) revealed that he tried to avoid using the above-mentioned skills.

To sum up, the analysis of the obtained data as a result of questioning the students proved that most learners spoke in favour of grammar in the English language classroom. Many students pointed out that they found grammar explanations in their course book not easy to understand. It could be easily explained: the learners of the elementary language level had insufficient competence in grammar terminology. They were not exposed to theoretical explanations of grammar very much. Teachers usually supplied their guidance. Elementary school language students needed more practice in employing their cognitive skills. A lot of the learners mentioned that they were interested to develop the skills of asking questions to achieve the communicative goals. They admitted that they liked interacting through group work during the lessons. Many pupils agreed that various absorbing activities could be helpful for practising their question formation skills. The learners emphasized the fact that they often felt scared and embarrassed when asking questions in different contexts and found their lack of knowledge very confusing. The author of the current study holds a view that the above-mentioned factor has fostered the loss of learners` motivation.

Taking the obtained results into consideration, the researcher finds it possible to assume that both the teacher and the students can improve the situation and reduce the difficulties. The task of the teacher is to make the learners aware of the possibilities of different teaching

techniques to improve their language development. A high degree of students' motivation is a favouring factor for a successful teaching/learning process.

3.6 Summary of the Questionnaire for Teachers

In order to clarify the viewpoint of the teachers of English on the teaching/learning of grammar and the importance of question formation skills, the author of the present research offered a questionnaire (*see Appendix 3*) to twelve teachers of English from Cesis Primary School and Cesis Grammar School. It should be noted that the fact that some teachers work also with secondary school students may have influenced the given answers.

The researcher shares the joint view of all the respondents that the students do not have a good knowledge of English grammar. Surprisingly, that **100%** of the teachers admitted that their students merely sometimes had good results in their grammar tests.

Therefore, the author of the present research considered the answer to the second question to be very logical and understandable: **100%** of the teachers acknowledged grammar to be a very important part of learning English.

In relation to grammar explanation with the help of rules provided by the course book used in the classroom, most teachers (**75%**) assumed that their students were sometimes able to grasp them. The author of the current study should remark that the rules in the course book are explained in a simple language by means of interesting model sentences. **17%** of the teachers mentioned that the rules were too difficult for the learners. **8%** of the educators regarded that their students understood and used the rules successfully.

Most teachers (**67%**) pointed out that their students preferred getting a grammar base first, then using the language. Considering the study of the theories, it is a natural way of language acquisition. Nevertheless, **25%** of the respondents mentioned that their students preferred learning grammar while talking to people rather than studying rules. **8%** of the teachers regarded that the learners did not care about the way they acquired grammar.

The next question referred to identifying the teachers' point of view concerning their students' everyday communication. The author of the current research shares the view of a considerable part of the educators (**58%**) that students do not often care about their grammar mistakes: they just have a go and speak. **25%** of the respondents characterized their students as being a little embarrassed while communicating. **17%** of the teachers admitted that the learners felt even very confused when asking questions.

It was surprising for the author of the present study to learn, on the other hand, that most respondents (**58%**) affirmed that the students were anxious about their grammar mistakes and tried to avoid them after being corrected. **25%** of the respondents acknowledged that the learners sometimes made a mental note not to make the mistake again. **17%** of the teachers characterized their students` attitude towards grammatical mistakes as indifferent.

The next question was very significant for the present research therefore the author of the current study felt supported by **100%** of the colleagues that various effective exercises could improve the process of English grammar acquisition.

The researcher was interested in clarifying the reasons for difficulties in learning English grammar. It was suggested that attention should be paid to the influence of the students` native language in the process of language acquisition. The results of the questionnaire showed that most teachers (**50%**) denied the negative influence of the native language in the process of learning English grammar. **25%** of the respondents pointed out that the native language was a hindrance in the foreign language acquisition. **25%** of the teachers could not supply a definite answer.

It was very important for the present research to find out that all the teachers accented the high need of their students for acquiring the skills of asking questions and giving answers.

As it was seen from the results of the questionnaire for the teachers who work with elementary school students, learning grammar and its use in everyday communication was considered to be very important. The teachers regarded that additional practice was necessary to improve the learners` knowledge of grammar, including the skills of asking and answering questions to satisfy the diverse needs in relation to language acquisition.

It should be noted that the teachers had to answer the same questions that were offered to the students of the target group. The following figure shows the comparison of the key answers to the questions provided in the questionnaires for the students and the teachers of English that accented the necessity to study grammar, involving also the practice of question formation skills. The subpoint of each question that most reflected the above-mentioned affirmation was given in brackets under each question number. It could be seen that an impressive amount of the teachers and learners viewed grammar as a very important part of language acquisition, **100%** and **81%** accordingly (*see question 2A*). Both teachers and students regarded the learners` knowledge of grammar not to be good enough, **100%** and **62%** accordingly (*see question 1B*). Both groups of respondents admitted that the students felt scared when talking to people, **25%** and **50%** accordingly (*see question 5B*), they were afraid of making mistakes, **58%** and **75%** accordingly (*see question 6A*) and needed more additional practice, **100%** and **75%** accordingly (*see question 7A*) because the need of improving the

skills of asking questions seemed very important to them, **100%** and **94%** accordingly (*see question 9A*).

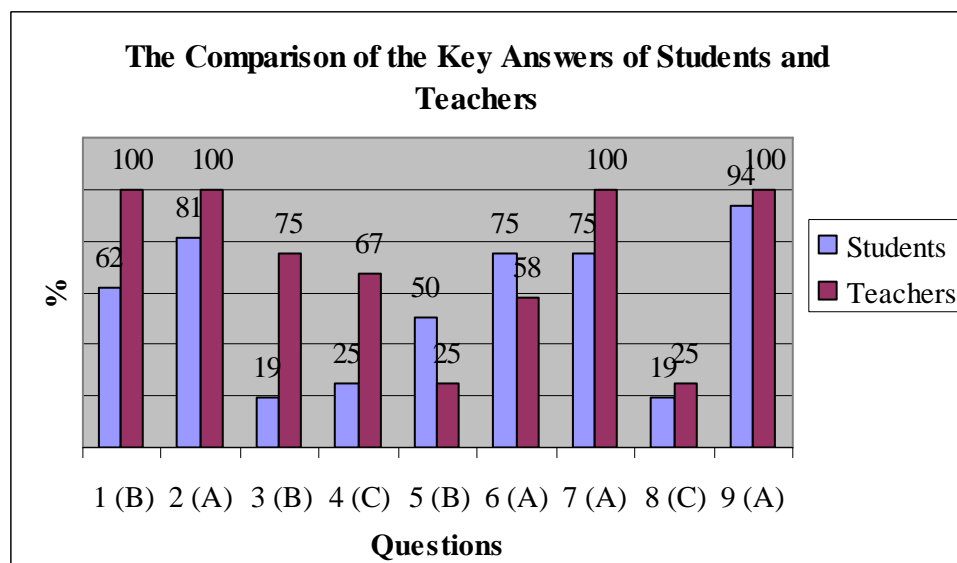


Figure 3.6.1 The Comparison of the Key Answers of Students and Teachers

3.7 The Practice of Question Formation in the Course Book

The analysis of the topic of question formation in the course book is mainly based on the principles of effective grammar practice presented by P. Ur (2001), taking into consideration the aim to provide a thorough coverage of the material and its transition from the short-term to long-term memory.

Concerning the factors that contribute to a successful language practice, the researcher admits that sufficient *PRESENTATION* and *EXPLANATION* allows using the time effectively for consolidating the material at the following – language practice stage. As to the subject matter of the diploma paper, i. e., question formation, eight units out of sixteen in the course book **OPPORTUNITIES ELEMENTARY** offer the presentation of the grammar structures based on discovery approach: the students have to work out the rules of form and usage working in groups or pairs under the teacher’s supervision. Firstly, the learners should concentrate on the meaning of the given listening and reading activities, afterwards they are asked to direct their attention to the form of the target grammar items with the help of such tasks as slot-filling, looking for more examples of the structure in the text, grouping them etc. The rules of application are mostly deducted by completing sentences. In separate cases students have to discriminate the odd explanation, perform matching, grouping and multiple choice tasks. To consolidate the presented language material and clarify the problem areas (for

example, short forms), the learners are asked to listen to the text and to repeat or write it down, to translate the questions, to read the indicated material. In one case the presentation of the two previously-taught structures of grammar should be performed without completing the rules. The students are asked to do grouping and matching tasks to ascertain the distinction between them. Basing on the personal teaching experience, the author of the present diploma paper recognizes that the presentation and explanation of question formation in the course book is well-considered and effective enough to foster perceiving the language material.

After the pre-learning stage the course book offers question formation practice through various *TYPES of ACTIVITIES* regarding the form and meaning of the structures of grammar, their oral and written production. Purely form-based exercises are not typical of the course book referred to. From the teacher's viewpoint, it seems that the authors of the teaching aid expect the learners to grasp the rules of form as a result of the presentation and explanation stage. There are just two cases of practising structures without their relation to meaning because their formal rules are difficult to grasp. Other discrete-item exercises in the course book demand students' comprehension. The tasks are integrative though unlinked to any general communicative framework. Most discrete item activities consist of various slot-fillers, asking oral or written questions based on the given cues, pictures, visuals and situations. There are some examples of reordering and multiple choice tasks, also instances of pair work based on the cues to ensure that the structures are being used in the right way. The researcher recognizes that the large amount of communicative activities form the best part of question formation practice in the course book. They provide comprehension and production of meanings for non-linguistic purposes. At the beginning of the book they are based on pair work activities supplied by cues or personal written notes. Further on, there is a transition to pair work or group work based on the given cues, visuals or written notes and, additionally, dealing with a lot of personal information. The author of the present paper admits that the course book involves a great deal of information-gap activities but it contains an insignificant number of opinion-gap exercises and the tasks which stimulate the students to produce entertaining ideas. Sometimes additional grammar items are integrated in question formation activities (for example, adverbs of frequency, possessives). The balance between form-based though comprehension needed and personalized communicative tasks in the **Grammar Focus** section of the course book is in favour of the first type (17:13 out of 30) thus devoting more attention to building up the learners' confidence in grasping the rules of form. There are more oral than written activities (15:10) to foster communication through real-life language-based transactions. Five tasks combine both kinds of practice. Thirteen units out of sixteen of the **Skills Focus** in the course book consolidate question formation practice in such oral

communicative activities as role-playing, simulations and information-gap tasks. They are always based on the Function File presenting everyday spoken language and also on the given cues, visuals and students' written notes. The **Communication Workshop** offers a range of communicative tasks involving question formation practice through information-gap activities, role-plays and group work that is mostly based on students' written work performed in advance (10 cases out of 13), as well as the Function Files, the given cues and pictures. Some activities or parts of them in the **Review** section (7 units out of 8) ensure practice on checking and consolidating question formation by offering slot-filling, sentence-completion, true/false, matching tasks, and also two information-gap activities. Separate tasks in the **Language Problem Solving** spots (four out of eight) deal with the problem areas in question formation providing mostly sentence-completion. There are also four information-gap tasks focused on the use of specific types of questions.

The author of the present study considers that the objectives of the linguistic and non-linguistic *TASKS* in the course book are defined clearly, in simple words to get the students involved in perceiving, discriminating, understanding, interpreting and producing the material to be practised. Equal parts of the language-based and non-linguistic tasks (15:15) in the course book ensure a good balance between exposure to repeated grammar practice and more motivating communicative usage of the target language. The **Skills Focus** and the **Communication Workshop** strengthen the learning value of the teaching aid by focusing on non-linguistic objectives of the tasks. Most of all students are asked to deal with communicative activities in terms of the process, not the end product: only four examples in the **Communication Workshop** are oriented towards reaching a tangible result (a story, surveys and instructions). The researcher regards that more outcome-oriented tasks might be preferable for activating students additionally.

A very good feature of the course book from the teacher's point of view is fostering the students' *INTEREST and MOTIVATION* by a large amount of *information-gap* activities. Most of them are *personalized*. The goal-oriented question formation practice tasks are made enjoyable by introducing game-like elements. *Role plays* (2 out of 30 in the **Grammar Focus** section of the course book, 7 out of 13 in the **Skills Focus** and 5 out of 12 in the **Communication Workshop**) motivate the learners to participate and provide a framework for an effective widening of the range of language used. The researcher believes that it is a great asset that the course book offers purposeful activities to provide task *volume and repetition*. Eleven exercises (out of 30) in the **Grammar Focus** section, also the tasks supplied by the **Skills Focus** and the **Communication Workshop** ensure maximum language use due to repeated production of a structure of grammar while exchanging information with different

partners. *Success-orientation* makes practice effective and contributes to positive learning environment in the classroom. The tasks referred to can be performed at different levels of learner proficiency in terms of both quantity and quality, that is, they are *heterogeneous*. The exercises provided by the course book are also *open-ended* because lots of various learner responses are based on the prescribed structural framework. The teaching aid includes a good range of *topics* to maintain students' interest such as factual material of general information: history, geography, science; personalities, fiction, entertainment, personal viewpoints, subjects of general interest etc. They are displayed in newspaper articles, stories, fairy tales, legends, biographies, text fragments, fact files, letters, web pages, interviews, quizzes, menus etc. Efficient *visual material* such as pictures, photos, diagrams, tables, brief notes help to focus the students' attention on the topic.

Considering various ways of *LEARNER ACTIVATION* to ensure the amount of participation and involvement, during the presentation stage the learners should perceive natural context under the teacher's control. The majority of practice tasks in the **Grammar Focus** section of the course book focus on teacher-student exchanges in which the teacher is the dominant and the learners increasingly active participants of language production (17 cases out of 30). The other question formation tasks in the **Grammar Focus**, **Skills Focus** and the **Communication Workshop** spots provide opportunities for active students' participation through an impressive amount of pair work activities. Most pair work consists of semi-controlled language production. The teacher merely provides instructions and materials for language transactions. The students use certain patterns to express their particular content. The kinds of responses needed are clearly defined. The researcher recognizes that fluid-pairs technique is presented by an insignificant number of activities. There is no evidence of student-teacher exchange, chain technique and free group discussions.

Regarding the question formation practice tasks displayed on the **Review** pages and the **Language Powerbook**, the author of the present paper can assess them more as informal tests than grammar practice. A relatively insignificant amount of the tasks with insufficient volume and repetition may provide the teacher merely with some feedback on the student contribution and let the learners check their learning and identify problem areas.

To sum up, the researcher admits the following *assets* of the teaching aid:

- Well-considered and effective grammar presentation;
- Carefully graded question formation practice tasks that keep a reasonable balance between form and meaning; written and oral aspects ;

- Convincingly combined linguistic and non-linguistic aims in communicative activities in the largest part of proposed grammar practice;
- Clear task objectives providing sufficient volume and repetition of the structure being taught;
- A great deal of semi-controlled practice activities suitable for efficient learner activation;
- Purposeful fluency practice transactions based on personalization, absorbing game-like activities, a variety of topics and their layout, an impressive visual material used to maintain learner interest and motivation;

The author of the present diploma paper puts forward some *drawbacks* of the course book:

- Insufficient number of form-based and meaning-based however non-communicative activities for practising particularly difficult question formation structures;
- Underestimated useful techniques for learner activation such as student-teacher exchange, chain and fluid pairs transactions and free group discussion;
- There is too little group work to produce the language material purposefully and naturally;
- Insignificant number of practice tasks with non-linguistic objective in terms of the end product to get the students involved;
- Few activities involving brainstorming known as an effective technique to encourage frequent production of a targeted grammar item in context;
- Little use of entertaining contributions as an advisable source of interest;

To conclude, the author of the current study recognizes that the course book ensures opportunities for maximum language use on the students` part. Various pair work activities involve volume, repetition, they are heterogeneous and open-ended thus providing sufficient amount of possibilities to perform successfully after mistakes have been eliminated. From the teacher`s viewpoint, the course book contains an insufficient number of activities fostering the building up of learners` confidence that is necessary for fluency practice as well as for a positive self-image. The researcher has experienced that rather often mixed-ability students at elementary school find it difficult to grasp the rules of question formation and their comprehensive application. Therefore, more diverse and useful practice is needed that helps

the students to recognize and use grammar structures in language acceptably to eliminate mistakes and strengthen the sense of constant progress towards a successful performance.

3.8 Principal Considerations of Practice Organisation

To cover the specifications of the syllabus, the students having completed the elementary level of English studies have to know how to deal with definite types of questions – *yes/no*, *wh-* and *tag* relating to the following grammar items – the Present Simple, the Present Continuous, the Past Simple, the Present Perfect, the Simple Future and the Planned Future `to be going to` as well as the structures concerning the usage of `there is/there are`, countable/uncountable nouns and expressing needs and abilities. The course book for pre-intermediate students offers merely incidental possibilities to practice the question formation structures mentioned above. More attention is paid to some new grammar items. There are also many distinction tasks focusing on comparing or contrasting the structures studied at the previous stages of language learning. The students are asked a lot of questions without providing sufficient practice in question formation.

To meet the performance objectives of the final Year 9 test requiring the students to handle communication through various pair work based language transactions, much effort should be devoted to the consolidation of question formation skills at the pre-intermediate level of studies to ensure the entire coverage of different aspects of the structures through a variety of topics, task types and ways of student activation. The results of the diagnostic test and the questionnaires for the students and the teachers acknowledge that there are frequent difficulties in forming questions.

The course book provides diverse possibilities for question formation practice, nevertheless it should be admitted that the amount of activities is insufficient to acquire the structures completely. Scrivener (2003: 2) states that humans learn by having a lot of opportunities to practice new language. Learners get things wrong quite a few times before they get them right. It may take a long time for a newly studied language to become part of a learner's own repertoire. The researcher feels the need to use the course book material more creatively as well as to supplement it to suit the needs of the syllabus requirements and a particular teaching context. The acquisition of the most essential and tricky question formation structures should be enhanced in terms of their relevance to the level, needs, interests, expectations and learning styles of the students involved in the research. In the course of teaching particular activities can be omitted, replaced or added according to the appropriate learning environment.

3.9 Practical Application of Selected Question Formation Activities

In the process of carrying out the experimental part of the research the selected question formation tasks were arranged according to the following *stages* of grammar practice – controlled meaningful activities were followed by guided meaningful exercises, after moving on to free oral production. The guided tasks between firmly teacher-controlled and free oral activities provided a slight transition stage for performing question formation practice which was controlled in general but at the same time involved some features of real communication. The controlled tasks were teacher-centred; the guided activities included language interactions that were performed by pairs or small groups of students on their own involving some help provided on the part of the teacher. The learners provided all the language in the free oral tasks. The author of the present study acknowledges that the chosen principle logically reflected the way other skills were learned - through graded stages of practice.

The provided *samples* of diverse and graded exercises dealt with the most problematic and confusing question structures for the students of the target group, identified in the diagnostic test. Special attention was devoted to those types of activities and forms of student activation that were less employed in the teaching aid: purposeful and effective examples of restricted question formation practice – drilling; games, quizzes, questionnaires and communicative tasks, involving personalization as a useful source for teacher-guided meaningful and free language practice. Comments on the area of use were supplied and the most problematic issues were outlined.

The author of the present paper based the selected question formation activities mostly on *pair work* as well as *group work* as very useful forms of learner activation to meet the needs of the Year 9 final test as well as to satisfy the students` communicative goals. It should be pointed out that purposefully organized pair or group work generated a feeling of mutual supportiveness. Moreover, it vastly increased the student talking time, provided a chance to experiment privately with language and released shy learners as well as the teacher from being the central person. (Morgan, Rinvoluceri, 1988: 13)

The selected question formation activities were intended to be used before, during or after the performance of receptive or productive tasks. Concerning the teaching of pre-intermediate level students, the author of the present research logically included dealing with the grammar structures in question during or after the completion of various language tasks to solve anticipated and also unforeseen problems. As Byrne puts it: during `boomerang` or

`patchwork` lessons. (Harmer, 2005: 83) The practical experience of teaching permitted the researcher to remark that focusing on particular language items during or after performing the task significantly raised the level of learners` awareness and, in most cases, benefited the students.

The practical part of the present diploma paper was based on the study of the methodical literature written by such authors as Doff (1997), Gerngross and Puchta (1995), Harmer (1991, 2004, 2005), Scrivener (2003), Sela (2000), Steer and Carlisi (1998), Thornbury (1999, 2004, 2005), Ur (2001), Wood (1994) and Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1994). Their conclusions were compiled and adapted to the particular teaching situation: a mixed-ability group of students whose knowledge was rather shaky and unreliable, about the average level of independence and language competence; the contribution of the course book and the results of the diagnostic test and the questionnaires for the learners and the teachers.

3.9.1 Controlled Meaningful Practice

To achieve the accuracy of language production, it is necessary to pay attention to the form-focused practice. Learners find it difficult to focus on the form and meaning of the grammar structure at the same time therefore some researchers such as Thornbury (1999: 92) propose that the form-focused practice should come after the students have been familiarised with the new structure through, for example, reading and listening tasks. The learners need sufficient time available while performing accuracy practice activities. Certain structures are acquired through exercises that concentrate on virtually meaningless manipulations of form. This type of practice is well-considered and purposefully organised in the teaching aid used in the classroom therefore the researcher pays more attention to controlled meaning-based activities asking the students to produce acceptable forms of language. The learners are fostered to concentrate on form if the teacher supplies unambiguous feedback by correcting. It should be recognized that various effective *drills* help to perceive and recognize language items better before moving on to more integrative tasks which deal with grammar knowledge as well as involve the meaning. The researcher often uses drills for fine-tuning the students` performance at the end of the teaching cycle. Drills are appropriate for practising almost any grammar structure. Drilling involves little effort on the part of the teacher as choosing prompts or pictures does not take much time. Drills require a lot of practice on the part of the students. The teacher controls the accuracy of the learners` responses. Drilling fosters reaching automatisations as a form of fluency practice. All the selected form-focused activities follow a

similar sequence of drills concerning language and learner activation. To start with, the students perform an *imitation drill* during which they repeat the given model first in chorus, then individually. The next step involves *a simple substitution drill* in which it is necessary to replace one element by an item to fill the same slot. Different kinds of substitution drills keep the class more active and give the students practice to form the structure therefore substitution practice is more useful. The next stage of drilling requires more meaning-directed attention. The teacher introduces visual prompts, the students have to think and express meanings. All the above-mentioned process is repeated with a contrasting question pattern. The next step is *a variable substitution drill* in which the two patterns are brought together and require the students to make distinction by realizing the necessary adjustments to the structures. The response varies according to the prompt. To devote more attention to the meaning, words are substituted by pictures after the students have a measure of control over the provided grammar structures. To increase the quantity of practice, the students are allowed to perform in pairs. Some selected tasks also involve a free substitution element asking to invent a sentence. A very common type of verbal interaction in controlled meaningful practice activities is between the students and the teacher. It works successfully at an early stage of practice when the learners' answers need to be thoroughly checked in form.

A Sample of Controlled Meaningful Practice –Drilling (see Appendix 4)

The aim of the exercise that was performed in the target group was to teach the students simple interrogative forms within dialogues. On the whole, the activity involved little preparation. Some planning had to be given to the choice of short dialogues between two speakers consisting of four to six utterances, representing some kind of a communicative event.

Example:

A: *What are you doing?*

B: *I'm going outside.*

A: *Why? (pause) Why are you going outside?*

B: *None of your business.*

The dialogue was presented orally and learnt by heart by the students through various kinds of repetition (choral, pair and individual), reiterating or answering utterances said by the teacher. It was performed either by a single pair of students in front of the class, or by all the students, in pairs, simultaneously. The dialogue should be reviewed in later lessons in order to consolidate learning. The dialogue was varied by changing its speed, tone, volume, also mood

and the situational context. In such a way the dialogue was repeated many times, familiarizing the students more effectively with its forms, while maintaining interest. Later, the actual content of the dialogue was varied: the students suggested alternatives to certain key words. Typical form-focused practice was provided through a sequence of *imitation* and *simple substitution drills*. The above-mentioned sequence represented the classic progression from controlled to less controlled grammar practice. By means of the dialogue the students' attention was directed towards the meaning. The amount of practice was increased by allowing the students to do pair work after they had acquired the grammar structure sufficiently.

(Source: Ur, P. (2001) *Grammar Practice Activities*. Cambridge University Press, 148-149)

To avoid boredom while performing predominantly mechanical practice, more learning value is provided through involving the students to perceive and perform correct forms and the meaning by doing the tasks which ask the learners think and understand what they are saying and express the meaning. The researcher selected various examples of the previously-named type of practice to fine-tune the most problematic question formation structures for the students of the target group. They range from firmly teacher-controlled to more learner-centred yet teacher-guided tasks. In the teaching aid used in the classroom close-ended activities (various kinds of *slot-filling*, *true/false*, *multiple choice*, *cloze*, as well as *matching* and *translation* exercises) asking for very controlled responses are widely represented. During the selection of additional activities concerning question formation a central challenge for the researcher was to combine the principle of repetition with an interest to make practice techniques effective. *Interesting stimuli* to respond to (for example, see Appendix 5 - 'Input Flood'), involving *amusing subject matter* (see Appendix 6 - 'Alibis'), the use of *visual aids* (see Appendix 7 - 'Using Realia'), or introducing *game-like* features such as competition or time limits (see Appendix 8 - 'Sentence Race') were proposed as the sources of active learner participation.

A Sample of Controlled Meaningful Practice - Reordering (see Appendix 9)

The activity was aimed at drawing attention to the word order and the use of auxiliaries in questions. The teacher used *interesting stimuli* to respond to – cut-up questions. Short questions were written on the word cards of the same size, one word or phrase per card. The questions had to consist of an equal number of words and phrases and be notionally or thematically related. Capital letters were to be used, so that there were no punctuation clues as to the word order. For the same reason, it was necessary to prepare on separate, smaller cards

as many question marks as there were questions. There had to be enough packs of these cards for each group of three to four learners. The sets of cards were distributed to the learners, working in groups of three or four. They had to spread them out, face up, on a flat surface. The students were told to sort cards into questions, indicating the number of questions that there were and the number of cards that comprised each question, if the questions were of equal length. It was necessary to point out that there should be no cards left unused. The groups were monitored indicating any ill-formed combinations. When most of the groups seemed to have finished, the correct combinations were elicited on to the board. The class was asked to tell the teacher the rules of formation of each case. This meant asking them to group the sentences into categories. It should be noted that questions are particularly suitable for an ordering exercise because of the changes in word order. The task was harder than it looked. Depending on the selection of the question, there were some correct questions that had to be rejected because otherwise there would be cards left unused. It was important that the learners knew which questions were acceptable and which were not.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 56-58)

Controlled meaningful activities are aimed at perceiving and recognizing language items better before more integrative tasks. They can also be used for fine-tuning the students' performance at the end of the teaching cycle to promote achieving the accuracy of language production and foster reaching automatisations as a form of fluency practice.

3.9.2 Guided Meaningful Practice

Steadily teacher-controlled tasks involve a high proportion of the teacher talk in relation to the language production performed by the students: only one learner talks at a time. There are not many opportunities for slow or advanced students because the given cues are geared to a single level. To raise the amount of language production necessary for developing fluency, several interactions can be carried out through various pair work or small group activities. It is possible to implement when the teacher is confident that the learners are able to produce acceptable instances of question formation structures without prompting because student utterances will be out of the teacher's direct control.

To divert the students' attention away from form and complement firmly structure-based practice, the students should be involved in real communication by including more than single sentences in provided tasks so that the learners can use combinations of different functions and structures. They can give a variety of responses through performing practice

under real-life constraints which leads to unpredictable language. The given communicative purpose allows the students to express their personal experience or ideas concerning real life or imaginary situations. The provided activities should include a communicative need (to find something out, to get somebody to do something, to offer to do something etc.) – something that makes the learners to listen and to perform. Diverse tasks based on *information gaps*, *game-like* procedures, *quizzes*, *questionnaires* and *role plays* help to reach the above-mentioned communicative aim. More attention on the teacher's part should be paid to the content of information, not only to correctness of the grammar structures. The students need the opportunity to perform in private, face-to-face interactions.

The easiest and most motivating type of teacher-guided meaningful language interaction activities involved in the practical part of the present diploma paper was based on *information gap* procedures (for example, `Spot the Difference` – *see Appendix 10*) that were intrinsic to many language learners. During the performance of the above-mentioned activities the students' need to speak was similar to the need to listen: the exchange was reciprocal. The necessity to bridge the gaps by passing the information from one to the other as well as conveying an opinion which the receiver was interested in involved the students in real communication that was necessary for successful language automatization. A natural information gap occurred when the learners talked about their own lives, interests, experiences. Information gap tasks provided intensive and interesting practice although the exercises were controlled and simple language was used. They were very useful for practising question formation. This type of activities could easily be performed by a small number of the learners. In large classes it could be problematic for the teacher to make many copies of each half of the text.

A Sample of Guided Meaningful Practice – Information Gap Activity

(see Appendix 10)

The aim of the information gap activity `Spot the Difference` was to provide interactive conditions for reinforcing the grammar item. Copies of the two versions of the same picture were distributed to pairs of students so that each member of a pair had a different version of the same picture. The learners had to hold the pictures and sit in such a way that they could not see each other's picture. The teacher pointed that the pictures were different in a number of details and demonstrated the kind of exchange necessary for discovering the differences. For lower level students it helped to write some question patterns on the board.

Examples:

Is there a man/woman, etc. standing/sitting next to/behind/in front of...?

What is he/she doing?

Has he/she got...?

The learners took turns to ask each other questions until they had discovered all the differences. This activity resulted in a lot of interaction, nevertheless it was limited in terms of the grammar points that were practised – they comprised the usage of the Present Continuous tense for describing ongoing activities, the structures *‘there is/there are’*, *‘have/has got’* and prepositions.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 85-86)

Games (for example, *‘One Idea at a Time’* – see *Appendix 11*) maintain the effort necessary for language learning. They provide a meaningful and useful context that encourages learners to participate. Many of the games include challenge: students need to cooperate while accepting problems and solving them. To take part in games, it is necessary to understand and produce language. The learners often respond to the meaning of the context in a definite way, expressing emotions thus fostering the acquisition of grammar structures better. Games provide density of meaningful practice as well. A language form can be used frequently during a limited period of time to convey information and opinions. In that way the elements of drilling are combined with the sense of real communication. It should be admitted that games can satisfy the needs of the students relating to various age groups and levels of ability and achievement if they are used appropriately.

A Sample of Guided Meaningful Practice in a Game-type Activity

To meet the students’ needs not only to answer the questions, but also to ask them, thus achieving the *density* of practice, the learners of the target group had to do a *game-like* activity (see *Appendix 12*) concerning forming *yes/no* questions. The students were asked to form a circle. The teacher had 10 cards which provided a general category and the name of a person, place or thing. A student chose a card and read out the sentence (e.g., “It’s a country.”). the teacher had to answer only *‘yes’* or *‘no’* to the students’ questions, so the learners asked only *yes/no* questions. To keep the game going longer, they had to ask general questions for one round before asking more specific questions (e.g., “Is it in Finland?”). Here are some cards that worked very well:

A Famous Woman (Princess Diana)

A Famous Man (Leonardo da Vinci)

An Animal (giraffe)

A Bird (penguin)

A Plant (carrot)

An Occupation (dentist)

An Island (Greenland)

A Country (India)

A Cold Place (refrigerator)

A Sport (rowing)

Something to Read (letter)

Transportation (canoe)

Food (rice)

No student was allowed to ask specific questions or to make a guess until one round was over. The person who had correctly figured out the answer drew a card and answered the students' questions in the next round. It should be admitted that the learners asked more questions if the chosen grammatical category was uncommon. The task provided useful question formation practice, as well as fostered listening comprehension.

(Source: Wood, N. M. (1994) 'Some 'questionable' activities'. *English Teaching Forum*, 32 (3): 46)

Questionnaires (for example, 'Making Questionnaires' – see *Appendix 13*) are used to provide a simple and effective framework for focused question formation tasks with clear outcomes. At the same time students are allowed to work at their own pace. If the teacher proposes activities that involve the students in thinking or feeling in new areas, as well clarify the hidden moral, social or material values, the learners discover something new about themselves and others. Questionnaires can be used with different types of questions. The learners can also design questionnaires themselves. In this way the process of learning the language becomes part of the learners' personal development thus reducing their inner resistance towards the foreign tongue.

Quizzes (for example, 'General Knowledge Quiz' – see *Appendix 14*) are recognized as motivating students to understand the questions without worrying about any language problems. They tempt the learners in many ways: as competitions (against others or oneself), as indicators of knowledge, as entertainment, as a painless way of absorbing new knowledge,

as a means of questioning one's assumptions. The learners are exposed to a lot of the target structures.

A Sample of Guided Meaningful Practice – a Quiz (see Appendix 15)

The activity “Making Quizzes” ensured practice in listening to and making question forms in the Past Simple tense. The task might be organized in different ways, for example, as a popular programme on television. The teacher provided a quiz with 20 questions. Enough answer sheets were prepared for the students. The class was organized into teams with about 5-6 people in each. The teacher let the learners choose their own teams, or mixed stronger and weaker students together. Every team got the ‘Answer Sheet’. The teacher asked the learners to write numbers from 1-20 down the left side of the page. The teacher read out the first question. Some time was allowed for the team to discuss it. The students were not allowed to write an answer until everyone had agreed. The answer had to be written down next to number 1. Afterwards, in the same way, the teacher went to questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 - there were five questions in a round. After the five questions, the teams were asked to swap their answer sheets with another team who marked them. The first five questions were checked. The teacher did not tell them the right answers, but got the students to think and explain them. If necessary, the learners were asked to examine the questions more attentively. The teams were awarded one mark for each correct answer. Then the marked papers were handed back to their teams. The winning team was checked. The next five questions were checked, and the next five, etc., up to question 20. Next, the teams were asked to write five new questions with answers. If the learners needed to revise the Past Simple questions, some time was devoted to going over them. When the students were writing the questions, the teacher went round and checked that the questions and answers made sense and were true. When everyone was ready, one team asked their five questions first, and other students wrote answers. In the course of the activity each team had to ask their questions. The winning team was the one with most points at the end of the activity.

The topic could be of general or specific interest to the particular class. The difficulty of questions could vary.

(Source: Scrivener, J. (2003) *Teaching Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 36-37)

Guided meaning-based activities should involve built-in repetition to produce a high volume of the target structure to foster the automatising of the language. It is absolutely

necessary to explain the character, rules and aims of the tasks before the students start working on their own.

3.9.3 Free Oral Practice

Free oral practice is the least controlled stage of language performance. It involves minimal teacher interaction. For oral practice such discussion task is designed that is likely to include the grammar points to be practised. The students have to use particular grammar structures naturally and spontaneously in their self-initiated speech. Through games, various forms of role plays and other communicative activities the students get used to listening to what other learners say, to being the centre of class attention, to being prepared to express and enjoy their own imagination and to value imaginative as well as factual expression, to accepting and profiting from situations when the teacher is not overtly in control. The aforementioned most advanced type of grammar practice is appropriate for the learners who are able to produce acceptable forms of the target structure in controlled meaningful activities and need some additional experience in using it freely. To perform free grammar practice tasks, the students are organised as bigger groups, even as a full class. Group work involves a great amount of learner talking time and ensures the opportunity to hear a range of other opinions. In the case of a challenge among the groups they should be made of mixed-ability students. It is also possible to organise the learners according to their level of language ability, achievement etc. Sometimes the students can do mingling – they move from one grouping to another, talk with different people to get information which is performed during full class discussion later.

Role plays are a way of bringing situations from real or imaginary life into the classroom. The chance to become embodied in a role and a situation expands the possibilities for practice and increases the students' motivation. Controlled role plays are based on the dialogues and texts in the course book. Free role plays involve situations beyond the text book but on the same topics. The situations can be within the experience of the students: real everyday life as well as imaginary happenings. The learners can imitate the roles of people familiar to them from everyday life, as well as the characters from the textbook or other books, programmes on television etc. and thus appreciate another point of view. The 'doubling' technique is a form of the role play in which one student gives voice to the thoughts, feelings etc. of another (present or absent). Asking to speak for a real, individual person rather than construct an ideal or stereotype " is an effective way of going beyond one's own narrow point of view on a person or situation; speaking *as* rather than *about* a third person sharpens

perceptions and increases empathy. For the listener, the double acts as a clear, concrete focus of attention". (Morgan, Rinvoluceri, 1988: 81)

A Sample of Free Oral Practice – ‘The Worm’ (see Appendix 16)

The *doubling* technique was applied to a non-human subject. The teacher put an earthworm in a pot of damp soil where the class could see it. The students were told to interview the worm. The teacher asked the learners to write down eight direct, second person questions they would like to ask the worm. The class was told that the worm would be happy to answer their questions, but had lost its voice. One member of the class was invited to come and speak for the worm. The rest of the class then put their questions to the worm, and the ‘double’ answered. It should be remarked that there were plenty of questions about the worm’s life that no one in the group was able to answer. The teacher gave out the text “Letter from a Worm” (see Appendix 17). The direct questioning involved in the activity ensured effective fluency practice of mixed questions.

(Source: Morgan, J., Rinvoluceri, M., (1988) *The Q Book* .Longman Group UK Limited, 86)

Free grammar practice provides the opportunity to consolidate the students’ language competence with the help of their self-initiated speech with minimal teacher interaction.

To summarize, the author of the research on the theme selected the meaning-based tasks for additional practice of question formation skills at the pre-intermediate level of studies and offered a number of different activities which followed graded stages of grammar practice starting from firmly teacher-controlled tasks, moving on to teacher-guided exercises that involved a lot of language production on the part of the students and reaching the most advanced – free oral practice stage without teacher interference in the process of exchange of information. Various interest-raising factors were considered and realised through diverse pair or group work activities. To contribute to the real communication atmosphere in the classroom, a number of chosen language transactions were based on genuine need to exchange information. The selected tasks were tested and discussed also by the colleagues of the author of the research to agree on their suitability and appropriacy for the student level of language competence and a successful development of question formation skills. The above-described approach to choosing and realizing additional question formation practice produced the following results:

1. The students developed their skills of asking questions correctly to a certain extent. The learners eliminated the mistakes because they were less dependent on their native language as well as their production involved fewer instances of overgeneralizing the rules – the so called developmental mistakes.

2. Through the provided exposure to diverse question formation practice the students moved towards the improvement of their grammatical knowledge in terms of accuracy and fluency.

3. It should be recognized that most learners demonstrated a certain ability to structure what they knew and integrate the new information in their current knowledge. They had widened the complexity of their command of the language thus making themselves more prepared for dealing with various communicative situations, as well as meeting the requirements of the Year 9 final test.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

To sum up the results of the experiment and clarify the improvement of the students` questioning skills, the author of the present study developed and administered an achievement test (*see Appendix 18*).

The achievement test involved the same grammar items and question formation structures as the diagnostic test. The only difference was in relation to the content of the sentences. The sequence of the grammar items and question types as well as the scoring system followed the same pattern to facilitate the comparison of the students` performance. The achievement test was done by fifteen learners of the target group. The students were asked to do four tasks in 40 minutes. The achievement test could be less difficult for the students of group referred to because they had dealt with the same grammar items and types of questions in the diagnostic test. Nevertheless, a rather large amount of the tested items could create some confusion and hinder grasping of the structures.

On the whole, the obtained results demonstrated that the students of the target group had performed significantly better. The average indicator of the learners` performance was **54%** out of **100%** (i.e., **19%** more than in the diagnostic test).

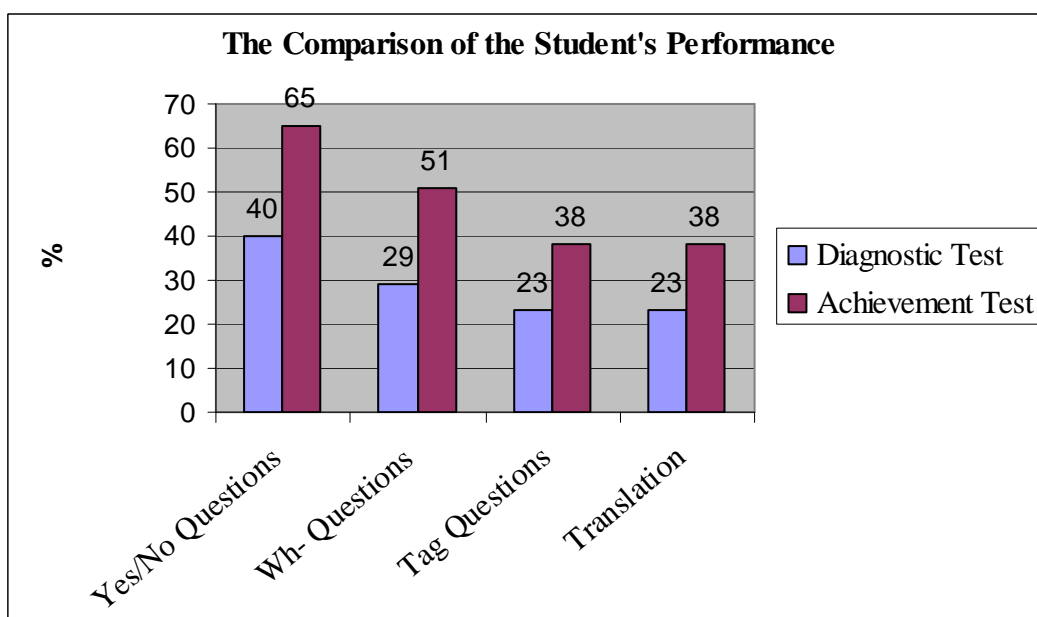


Figure 3.10.1 The Comparison of the Student's Performance

The learners' progress in relation to *yes/no* questions had increased from **40%** out of **100%** in the diagnostic test to **65%** out of **100%** in the achievement test (see Figure 3.10.2). It was not surprising because the above-mentioned grammar structures were familiar to the students of the target group for a long time. *Yes/no* questions were frequently used in classroom interactions as well as a lot of additional activities were performed during the experiment that involved practicing them. Most mistakes in the task were caused by the learners' carelessness. The use of countable and uncountable nouns as well as the structures 'there is/there are' and 'have to' seemed to be the most problematic tasks for the students. Probably, it could be explained by the influence of the learners' native language involving only a conceptual distinction between countable and uncountable nouns without the following consequences in grammar therefore the students pursued the pattern of their mother tongue. As to the use of the structures 'there is /there are', the students often used the verb 'be' alone without 'there' in a subject position. The reason for such a kind of mistakes could also be the influence of the learners' native language missing a similar sentence construction. With regard to the use of the structure 'have to' in asking *yes/no* questions, the students had a tendency to use 'have' or 'has' instead of the auxiliary elements 'do' or 'does'. It might be the result of an insufficient amount of appropriate practice activities offered by the course book. The situation could also be helped, if the teacher devoted more teaching time to better acquisition concerning the use of the structure 'have to' in question formation.

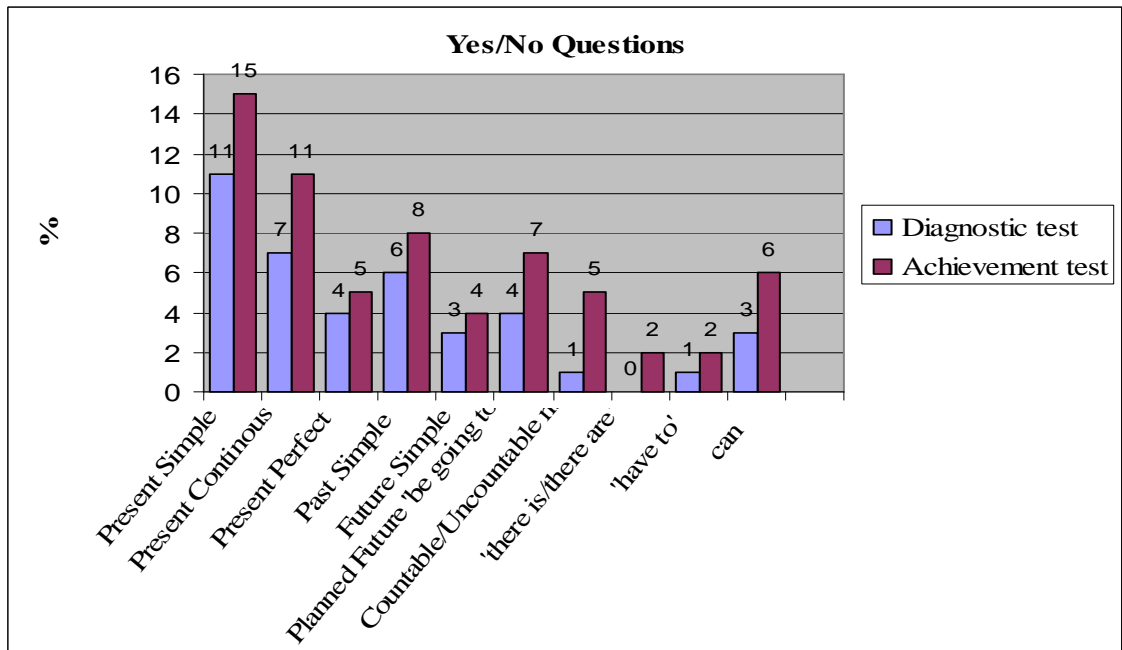


Figure 3.10.2 Yes/No Questions

As regards the *wh-* questions, the improvement was evident: from **29%** to **51%** out of **100%** (see Figure 3. 10. 3). The most prevalent mistakes concerned the same grammar items as in asking *yes/no* questions. The less proficient English learners found it difficult to use the Present Perfect form, the Planned Future `to be going to` as well as the correct word order and appropriate auxiliaries. Some drilling and other awareness-raising activities as well as meaningful practice in which the choice of the form depended on the context could foster the improvement of the students` progress.

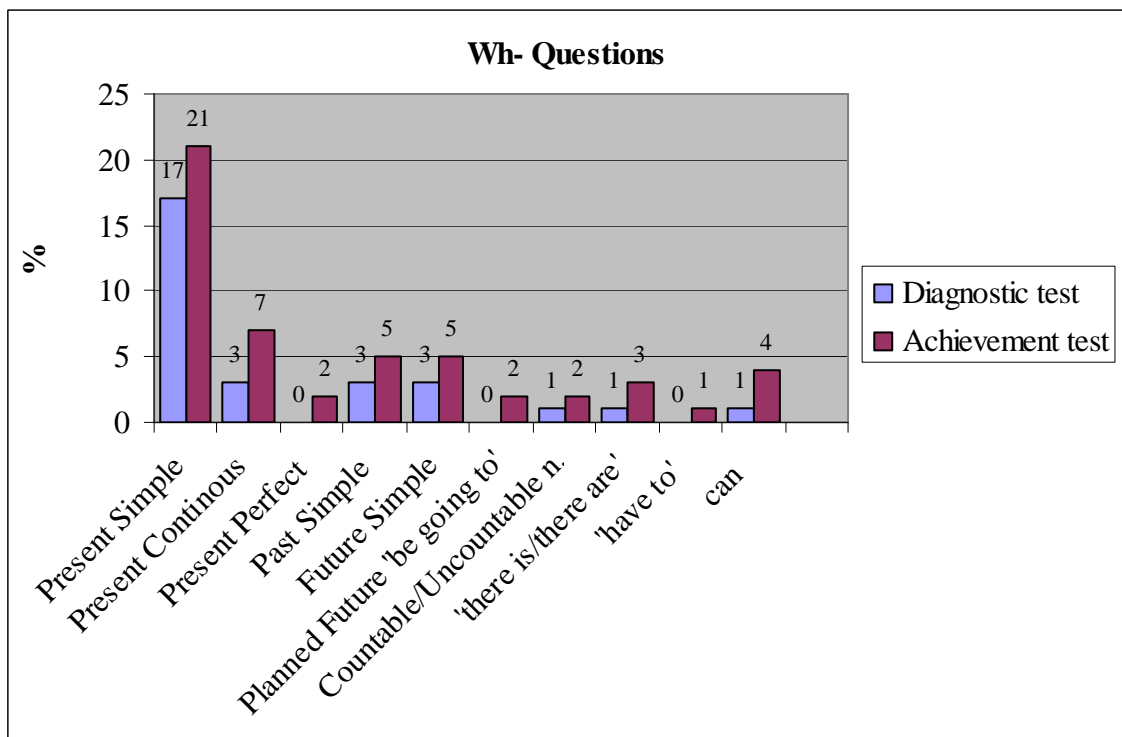


Figure 3.10.3 Wh-Questions

With regard to the students' performance in asking **tag questions**, the average indicator of the students' progress had increased significantly from **45%** to **61%** out of **100%** (see *Figure 3.10.4*).

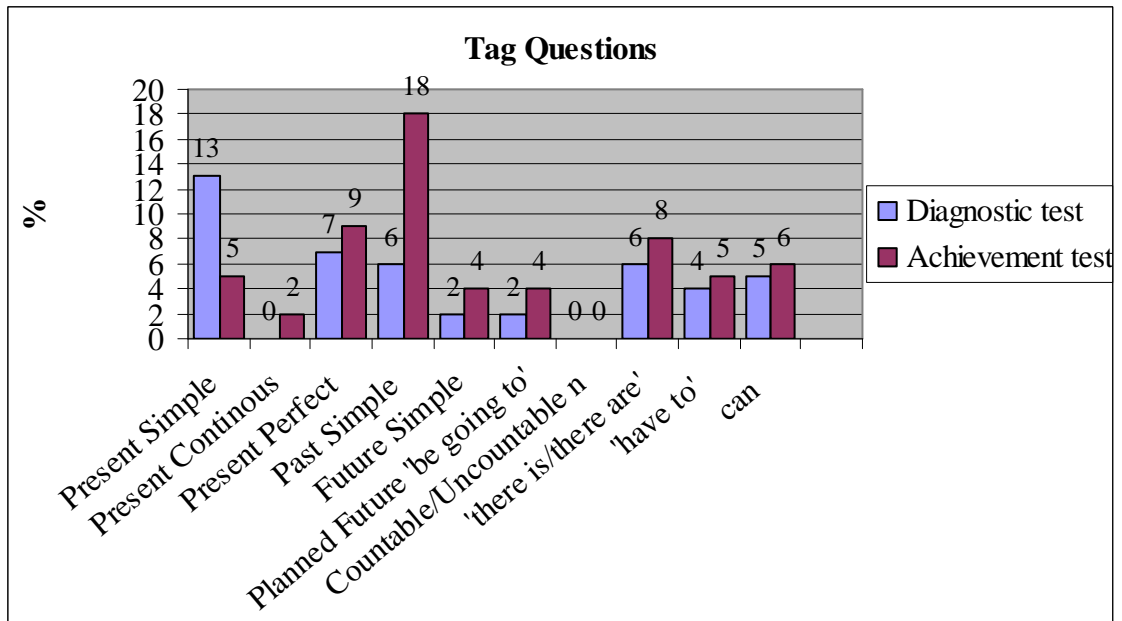


Figure 3.10.4 Tag Questions

As to the **translation** task, the improvement of the learners' questioning skills had reached **37.7%** out of **100%** (see *Figure 3.10.5*). Both *tag* questions and the translation task involved the same mistakes as in the diagnostic test.

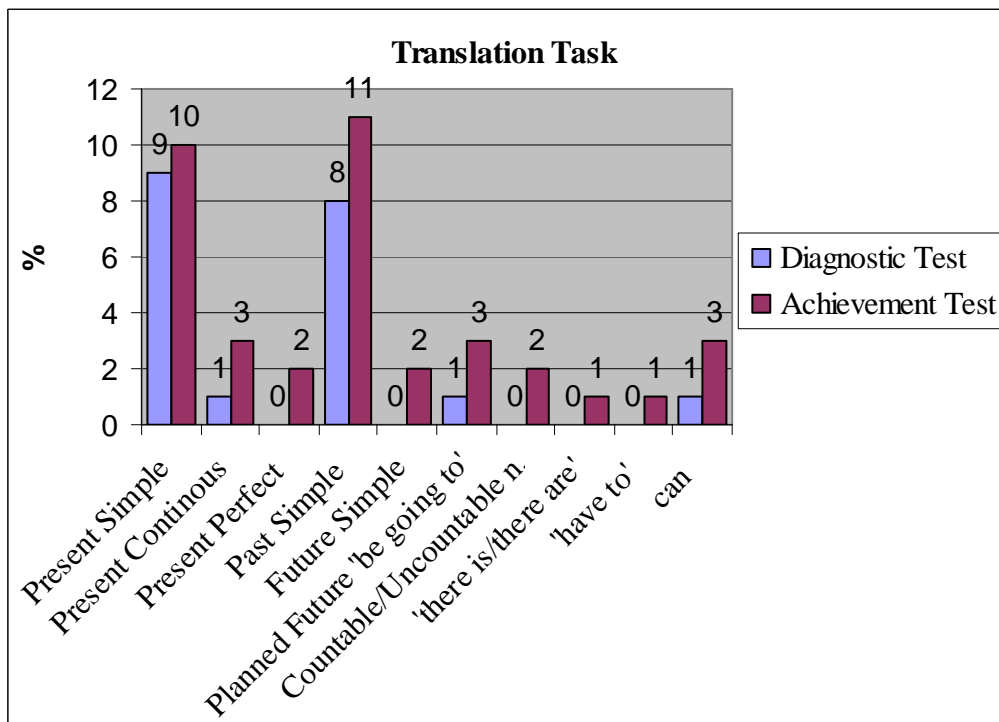


Figure 3.10.5 Translation Task

The results of the achievement test showed that the realisation of the practical part of the study had contributed to the development of the students' question formation skills. Doing diverse awareness-raising activities and meaningful practice based on pair or group work had improved the teaching/learning process oriented towards the correct performance of grammar items in the communication of full value. The author of the present paper considered that one reason for the students' inability to perform the correct questions was that the general level of English of some learners' had been far from pre-intermediate. The situation could be improved if the teacher devoted more attention to the appropriate amount and type of the selected grammar practice activities depending on the teaching context to eliminate the learners' mistakes and contribute to the development of the students' question formation skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Grammar is an essential and constructive mechanism according to which language works when it is used to communicate. The status of grammar in general education is significant. Therefore, educators should choose an appropriate approach to teaching it for every specific learning environment. Language users should be aware of the variety of the language and adapt it to suit their communicative needs. The teacher's role in planning, monitoring and supporting the students' performance means acting both as an authority and a facilitator. The ways of teaching grammar involve various kinds of techniques and procedures that can be arranged in different order. Testing supports teaching and, if necessary, improves it. A grammar component in various test types helps to reach the main objective of the language courses - skills performance. The recent approach to errors recognizes them as a necessary aspect of the process of learning. Error correction should engage the learners cognitively and affect positively.

Syntax is a study of the sentence structure in a natural language. The sentence is the largest unit of the syntax that allows people to express their thoughts. Questions as a sentence type are used for seeking information, giving an order or command, making a request, beginning a conversation, making a comment on a situation and checking knowledge.

The learners often feel scared and embarrassed when questioning in different contexts. They make various kinds of mistakes and find their lack of knowledge very confusing. The teachers consider that additional practice could improve the learners' skills in asking questions. The results of the diagnostic test show a comparatively mediocre students' performance. The course book used for teaching in the classroom contains an insufficient number of activities to ensure acceptable recognition and use of grammar structures necessary for fluency practice as well as for a positive self-image. The teachers and the students by common effort can reduce the difficulties. The teachers' task is to make the students aware of the possibilities of different teaching/learning techniques to foster the language development. A high degree of students' motivation is a favouring factor for successful teaching/learning. Appropriate additional practice can reshape the process of teaching and overcome the obstacles regarding the acquisition of question formation according to the requirements of the syllabus. It engages the learners and helps them both to get the grammar right and reach the communicative goals.

To consolidate question formation skills and provide a thorough coverage of different aspects of the grammar structure, the teaching of the most essential and tricky question structures can be enhanced in terms of their relevance to the level, needs, interests, expectations and learning styles of the target group students as well as involve the learners by means of a variety of task types, topics and ways of student activation. Effective grammar practice activities are based on a task that has clear objectives and asks an active performance of the structure being practised. Students` interest and motivation is supported by a careful selection of the topic, the use of visual aids, the principles of open-endedness, success orientation, personalization, pleasurable tension and entertainment. Learners are activated with the help of appropriate and effective teaching techniques for students of each level starting from firmly teacher-controlled tasks at an early stage of language learning and later moving forward to more advanced types of communicative grammar practice.

Doing a lot of awareness-raising and meaningful activities fosters the language acquisition oriented towards a correct performance of grammar items in the communication of full value. The hypothesis concerning the role of well-considered diverse and absorbing grammar practice types in improving the learners` understanding of question formation and use is proved.

Including a wide range of meaningful grammar practice activities enriches the material of the particular teaching aid in the process of teaching/learning question formation skills at elementary school. Teachers should apply the above-mentioned additional practice tasks before, during or after the performance of receptive or productive grammar exercises to improve their students` skills in question formation and use in everyday communication.

THESES

1. Grammar is a substantial universal and generative tool that empowers learners to put words together to make meanings. Grammar is a resource that is utilized to represent experiences of the world, to establish and maintain social relationship, to express values, attitudes, opinions and to create texts.
2. The approaches to teaching grammar have experienced major shifts at different times. Enormous changes in society and culture have caused alterations concerning the status of grammar in a language study nowadays. Language users should be conscious of the diversity of the language and adjust it to suit their social goals. It's a challenge for a language teacher to encourage the learners to develop both their unconscious and theoretical knowledge in relation to grammar.
3. The changing role of the teacher in the classroom should be aimed at promoting the learners progress towards language acquisition. The teacher can act as both authority and facilitator in the English language classroom. Each separate grammar lesson requires a precise and appropriate decision of the teacher on the ways of drawing in the learners.
4. The organization of grammar teaching should follow the graded stages of acquisition. A well designed grammar activity is based on a task that has clear objectives, involves volume and repetition as well as includes diverse factors to raise the learners` interest and motivation. Tests should be supportive to teaching and, if necessary, have a corrective effect on improving it. Error correction and corrective feedback should take place throughout the classes and improve the teaching/learning process.
5. Syntax clarifies how words and phrases combine together according to definite patterns to make larger units – sentences. The sentence is the basic unit of syntax that allows people to communicate. Interrogative sentences are used for many purposes such as getting new information, giving an order or command etc.
6. Asking questions is an essential skill for a foreign language learner. It expresses power over the language both in form and function. The classroom could be a safe and encouraging environment for students to have an opportunity to create and recreate

meanings through asking and answering questions with the help of their advisers, i. e. teachers.

7. The selected meaning-based tasks for additional practice of question formation skills follow graded stages of complexity. They involve various interest raising factors and are realized through diverse pair or group work activities. The chosen language transactions are based on genuine need to exchange information to contribute to the real communication atmosphere in the classroom.
8. The provided exposure to well-considered grammar practice activities significantly contributes to the development of the students` question formation skills. Most of the mistakes are eliminated, the learners move towards the improvement of their grammatical knowledge in terms of accuracy and fluency.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Diagnostic Test

Write Yes/No Questions

1. Your father is a dentist.
2. Tourists left for Milan.
3. Joyce has enrolled in a college.
4. That film was terrible.
5. My aunt works in a school.
6. My parents have been to France.
7. Dad will take me to the airport.
8. My cousins live in London.
9. Alice is going out tonight.
10. Simon can help you probably.
11. Children are coming soon.
12. Three men were charged for manslaughter.
13. Pete and Sue are married.
14. There is nothing to do there.
15. I am going to be a vet.
16. A flight attendant has to wear a uniform.
17. There are some sandwiches on the table.
18. My friends had a great time at the party.
19. In this sport club you have to show your card at the desk.
20. I am your eldest nephew.

Write Tag Questions

1. Vegans do not eat meat.
2. Jim has bought a new boat.
3. It is going to rain.
4. Shirley will not mind our proposal.
5. Leo does not know Martin.
6. Cats can not swim.
7. My mum brought some milk.
8. The meal last night was delicious.
9. I am wrong.
10. We were all shocked to hear about the accident.
11. I look silly in this jacket.
12. My sister does not have to be at work until ten o'clock today.
13. There is cooperation between the manager and his workers.
14. I have not forgotten anything.
15. You can not use spreadsheets.
16. There are not any boys in the hall.
17. Greg takes down the flag before sundown.
18. Ice hockey players have to wear helmets.
19. The athletes are not on the track.
20. I have forgotten my keys.

Write Wh- Questions

1. Rachel is writing.
2. Keith knows Pamela.
3. David has taken Frank's new CD.
4. Claudette is thirty two.
5. Students can go into the museum at four.
6. I need little sugar.
7. Peter went home by bus.
8. Mother will make a birthday cake.
9. Her eyes are blue.
10. Ann is not at work today because she is ill.
11. There is some milk in the fridge.
12. My jacket is the red one.
13. Tigers live for an average of eleven years.
14. Loud music makes gives my grandfather a headache.
15. Jack stayed at Susan's house.
16. Teachers have to go to a meeting every week.
17. There are eleven players in a hockey team.
18. Wasting food makes my grandmother angry.
19. Her house is two kilometres from here.
20. My sister has to be at work.

Translate

1. Vai viņš ir students?
2. Kur Tavi vecāki satikās?
3. Vai Tev patīk sports?
4. Kas Tev iedeva tos ābolus?
5. Vai Tavā videokamerā ir filma?
6. Cikos Tavi draugi devās projām no sarīkojuma?
7. Vai Jūlija bieži iet peldēties?
8. Kāpēc Tavi vecāki bija dusmīgi?
9. Vai Tavas atbildes bija pareizas?
10. Cik daudz naudas Tu iztērēji pagājušajā nedēļā?
11. Vai Tu labi pavadīji laiku Skotijā?
12. Cik ilgi Tu gatavojies dzīvot Spānijā?
13. Vai mūzika bija laba?
14. Uz ko Tu pašlaik skaties?
15. Vai šovakar pa televīziju rāda kādas labas filmas?
16. Kurā pilsētā būs vissiltākais laiks?
17. Vai es varu nopirkt biļetes tūlīt?
18. Kāds ir Tavs izmērs?
19. Vai Tev sestdienās agri jāceļas?
20. Vai Tu esi kādreiz spēlējis šahu?

Appendix 2

A Grammar Questionnaire

For Students

Please, answer the following questions by circling the answer that is nearest to your own experience in learning English grammar.

1. Do you get good results in English grammar tests?
 - A Yes/Usually
 - B Sometimes
 - C No/Rarely

2. Do you believe that grammar is a very important part of learning English?
 - A Yes
 - B No
 - C Unsure

3. When you read grammar explanations in your course book:
 - A You usually find them difficult to understand
 - B You are able to comprehend merely some of them
 - C You can usually understand and use them quite successfully

4. How do you prefer learning grammar:
 - A Talking with others rather than exclusively with the help of rules
 - B You can learn either by talking to people or by studying grammar rules
 - C Getting a grammar base, then using the language

1. When asking questions and giving answers in real life situations:
 - A You usually just have a go and try to get the meaning somehow
 - B You try to communicate though it can be a bit scary and embarrassing at times
 - C You find your lack of knowledge very confusing

6. If you make grammatical errors:
 - A You don't worry about it
 - B You sometimes make a mental note not to make the mistake again
 - C Whenever possible you try not to make the mistake again

7. Do you believe that various and intensive repetitive exercises are effective ways of improving English grammar?
- A Yes/Usually
 - B Sometimes
 - C No/Rarely
8. Do you think English grammar is difficult because it is so different from the grammar of your 1st language?
- A Yes
 - B No
 - C Unsure
9. Your need to improve your skills of asking and answering questions is:
- A High – it seems very important for me
 - B Moderate – not particularly necessary for me
 - C Low – I try to avoid it

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix 3

A Grammar Questionnaire

For Teachers

This questionnaire is a part of the research into teaching questions to elementary students. Please, answer the following questions by circling the answer that is nearest to your own experience in teaching English grammar.

1. Do your students get good results in English grammar tests?
 - A Yes/Usually
 - B Sometimes
 - C No/Rarely

2. Do you believe that grammar is a very important part of learning English?
 - A Yes
 - B No
 - C Unsure

3. When your students read grammar explanations in their course book:
 - A They usually find them difficult to understand
 - B They are able to comprehend merely some of them
 - C They can usually understand and use them quite successfully

4. How do your students prefer learning grammar:
 - A Talking with others rather than exclusively with the help of rules
 - B They can learn either by talking to people or by studying grammar rules
 - C Getting a grammar base, then using the language

5. When asking questions and giving answers in real life situations:
 - A Your students usually just have a go and try to get the meaning somehow
 - B Learners try to communicate though it can be a bit scary and embarrassing at times
 - C Your students find their lack of knowledge very confusing

6. If your students make grammatical errors:
 - A They don't worry about them
 - B They sometimes make a mental note not to make the mistake again
 - C Whenever possible they try not to make the mistake again

7. Do you believe that various and intensive repetitive exercises are effective ways of improving English grammar?
- A Yes/Usually
 - B Sometimes
 - C No/Rarely
8. Do you think English grammar is difficult to teach because it is so different from the grammar of your students` 1st language?
- A Yes
 - B No
 - C Unsure
9. Your students` need to improve their skills of asking and answering questions is:
- A High – it seems very important for them
 - B Moderate – not particularly necessary for them
 - C Low – they try to avoid it

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix 4

Dialogues

Simple interrogative, affirmative and negative forms, within dialogues; oral repetition of forms learnt by heart.

Materials: Short conversations between two speakers consisting of four to six utterances, representing some kind of communicative event. For example:

A: What are you doing? B: I'm going outside.

A: Why? (pause) Why are you going outside?

B: None of your business.

Your coursebook will probably supply further examples; or see BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Procedure: The dialogue is presented orally - with or without written reinforcement - and learnt by heart by the students, preferably during the lesson through various kinds of repetition (individual, pair, re-iterating or answering utterances said to the Teacher. It is then performed either by single students in front of the class, or all the students simultaneously. The dialogue should be reviewed in later lessons in order to consolidate learning.

Variations: Just repeating dialogues as they stand can be boring. It is a good idea to vary them by introducing different stage directions. These can apply only to speed, tone or volume ('Do the dialogue fast/slowly: ... in a high/low voice ... loudly/softly...') or they can apply to *modality* or personality ('Do the dialogue angrily ... sadly ... laughingly, ~ dramatically ... fearfully...'). You can even prescribe an *environmental* situational context ('The dialogue is an exchange between secret agents in hostile territory ... or a conversation between a teacher and student in a lesson ... or part of a marital quarrel...'). Such variations may be issued to the performers privately, and the rest of the class asked to guess what the situation is. In such ways the dialogue can be repeated many more times, familiarizing the learners more effectively with its forms, while maintaining interest.

Later, of course, the actual content can be varied: you can ask students to suggest alternatives to certain key words (for example 'going outside' in the dialogue given as an example here can be replaced with 'reading a book', 'walking around', etc.), or further exchanges can be added to develop the situation in different ways.

A technique called *written drama* can be used with two-utterance exchanges that express or imply some kind of conflict. For example:

A: Will you marry me?

B: Why should I?

Students work in pairs, each taking one of the 'parts' and argue with each other using only the exact words of their line. They try to wear each other down by repeating their utterances in turn, using as many varied kinds of emphasis as they can. The first to give up is the loser.

(Source: Ur, P. (2001) *Grammar Practice Activities*. Cambridge University Press, 148-

Appendix 5

Input flood

Level Any

Time 15-25 minutes

Aims To raise awareness about a grammar item, by means of repeated exposure of the item.

Preparation

Find or prepare a short text which has a significantly high frequency of a particular grammar item.

Example The following text comes from the Sunday supplement of a British newspaper:

I like it when I'm listening to my Walkman and the song ends as I arrive at my destination.

I like finding out new words. Here's one for you: crinkumcrankum (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

I like seeing a famous sight, buying a postcard and circling the exact location from which I am writing the card.

I like it when the cinema in which I'm seeing a film is actually featured in the film. This occurred when I saw *Breathless* in the Cinema Mac-Mahon in Paris. Everyone laughed.

I like wearing ties worn by my grandfather who died before I was born.

I like any film in which human beings are reduced in size.

I like paying with the exact money.

I like chewing the stopper on the end of a Bic biro. I like it when people clap at the end of films.

I like red tulips; I like easy-spread butter; I like the first kiss ...

(Abridged from the Patrick Marber column. *The Observer Magazine*, 13 February 1999)

Procedure

- 1 Distribute the text. Set a general reading task, such as Who is writing about what? Who to? Why? in order to establish the context of the text, the kind of text that it is, and its purpose. Check this task.
- 2 Then, draw attention to the significantly frequent feature. One way of doing this is to ask learners simply to count the number of instances of (in this case) like. Then they should categorize these. In this case, the uses of like are distributed between like + -ing, like + **noun** phrase, and like + it + when-clause.
- 3 Learners then write their own sentences using the three patterns. **Comments**

'Input flood' is the name that some researchers have given to tasks that are designed to cause learners to notice grammar items by virtue of their artificially high frequency in a text. Few authentic texts have a natural 'input flood' of a specific grammar item, but one kind of text that often does is the pop song. Some poetry, too, exploits repetition for its effects.

Example The following poem repeats the structure verb + *object* + (*object*) complement:

Call alligator long-mouth

call alligator saw-mouth call alligator
pushy-mouth call alligator scissors
mouth call alligator raggedy mouth call
alligator bumpy-bum
call alligator all dem rude word but better
wait

till you cross river.

(John Agard. 'Don't call alligator long-mouth till you cross river' from *Say It Again Granny*. Bodley Head, 1986. Reprinted in *Poems on the Underground* (tenth edition) Cassell, 2001)

ELT coursebooks used to include texts based on the principle of 'input flood', but this practice has gone out of fashion, on the grounds that such texts lacked authenticity. But authenticity is not 'sacred', and it may need to be sacrificed in the interests of clarity.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 78-80)

Appendix 6

Alibis

Level Intermediate and above

Time 20-30 minutes

Aims To review past tense verb forms.

Procedure

- 1 Two students are 'accused' of having committed some crime, such as a robbery in the institution where the class takes place, in a fixed period, say, between the hours of to and it in the morning on the preceding day. The two 'accused' then have to establish an alibi, and they go out of the room to do this. The alibi needs to account for their actions only during the time period in question (anything before or after is irrelevant), and it is important to establish that they were together for all that time.
- 2 While the accused are working out their alibi, the rest of the class (with the teacher prompting, if necessary) can prepare generic questions of the type: *What were you doing ... ? What did you do next? Did you meet anyone? What did you say? How much did it cost? Who paid?* etc. The accused are then led in, one at a time, and have to answer the questions put to them. (It helps to establish the rule that they are not allowed to say 'I don't remember'.) Any significant discrepancy in their answers means that they are, of course, guilty.

With large classes, Alibis can be played in groups, each group playing their own version of the game. Alternatively, (and so long as they are out of earshot) the two accused can be interviewed simultaneously by two different groups, and then exchange places.

Variation 1

Green Card. 'Immigration officers' interview, separately, two candidates who claim to be members of the same family (in which case, they have to answer questions about the other members of their immediate family-their names, age, and appearance), or who claim to be partners (in which case, they have to answer questions about their daily routine). This is good for practising present tense forms and the language of description.

Variation 2

UFO. Two people are interviewed separately by The Institute of Paranormal Research about an encounter with aliens that they claim to have experienced. They are questioned separately about the exact details of the encounter, in order to check that it is authentic. This is good for practising past tense forms and the language of description.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 90-91)

Appendix 7

Using realia

Level Any

Time 20-30 minutes

Aims To introduce a grammar item by means of real objects (*realia*).

Materials A collection of real objects, depending on the grammar area you are planning to focus on. For example, the contents of a 'mystery person's' handbag can be used to create sentences in the present simple (*She takes the bus; she shops at X supermarket ...*). Or a variety of personal items gathered from the learners, such as keys, mobile phones, wrist watches, etc., can be used to teach *Whose is this?/Whose are these?* and *It's Dani's. They're hers. It's mine.* etc.

Procedure

- 1 Assemble the real objects and check that learners know what each one is called. If the class size allows, the objects can be passed around
- 2 Use the objects to elicit sentences, for example:
TEACHER (holding up pen) Whose is this pen? STUDENT 1
Vuong.
TEACHER Listen. It's Vuong's. It's Vuong's. Whose is it? STUDENT 1 It's
Vuong's.
TEACHER Vuong, is this your pen? STUDENT 2 Yes.
TEACHER Listen: Yes, it's mine. Vuong, is this your pen? STUDENT 2 Yes,
it's mine. etc.
- 3 Write the sentences that you have elicited on to the board, and draw attention to their grammatical form.

Variation

Use family photographs as realia to teach **possessive determiners** (That's my father...) and possessive 's: That's Lin's brother. They are also useful for practising **prepositions** and present tense verb forms: Lin is standing next to *her son*. *The person sitting on the sofa* is my sister, as well as the verb forms that incorporate these items: Who is *the person* holding the baby?

Ask learners, in advance, to bring their family photographs to class. They can be asked to prepare a short description of their photos beforehand, and to ask and answer questions about each other's photos in pairs or small groups.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 83-85)

Appendix 8

Sentence race

Level Pre-intermediate and above Time 5-10 minutes

Aims To play with the constraints imposed by word order.

Procedure

- 1 Divide the class into two teams, and divide the board into two halves by drawing a vertical line down the middle. In the top left-hand corner of each half of the board write the same word. It should be a word that typically begins a sentence, for example, for lower levels *The, A, Yesterday ...* or, for higher levels *If, Although, Having, Before ...* etc. Hand a board pen (or piece of chalk) to one member of each team. They are now ready to begin the 'race'.
- 2 The object of the game is to produce, in a time limit (say, two minutes), the longest correct sentence that begins with the preselected word. A member of each team adds one word at a time to the developing sentence, and then hands the board pen to another team member. If a word is incorrect (for example, because it doesn't agree with the word that precedes it, or if it is the wrong part of speech) the teacher simply erases it, without explanation. For example, if the sentence on the board reads *Although I had not ...* and the next student adds *went you* erase this word without comment. If the next student adds *been*, this is acceptable. The only rule is that the sentences must be grammatically correct, and that 'lists' of more than two similar items are not permitted (in order to avoid the strategy of extending the sentence indefinitely by using a string of **adjectives**, for example.)
- 3 On expiry of the time limit, the last player is allowed to add a maximum of three words in order to complete the sentence. Then the number of words in each sentence is totalled, and the team with the most words wins.

Variation

To add an extra degree of challenge, teams are not allowed to repeat a word.

Example Here is a text from a coursebook published in 1978:

Look at this man.

His name's Terry Archer. He isn't from London. He's from Oxford.

He's a factory worker. He's got a good job. He's got a car.

He hasn't got a big house, he's got a flat.

He's got a wife, but he hasn't got any children. Life's all right.

(B. Hartley and P. Viney. *Streamline English Departures*, Unit 16. Oxford University Press, 1978)

Short of finding naturally occurring examples of such texts, teachers may need to write their own.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 62-63)

Appendix 9

2.8 Cut-up questions

Level Any

Time 20-30 minutes

Aims To draw attention to the word order, and use of auxiliaries, in questions.

Preparation

Use a set of word cards, each card about half the size of a normal visiting card. Write a selection of short questions on the cards, one word or phrase per card. Ideally the questions should consist of an equal number of words or phrases, and be notionally or thematically related. It helps, too, if the cards are all the same size. Use capital letters, so that there are no punctuation clues as to the word order. For the same reason, on separate, smaller cards, prepare as many question marks as there are questions.

Example Here is a set of four four-word questions, suitable for an elementary group:

WHEN	WERE	YOU	BORN
WHAT	IS	YOUR	JOB
WERE	DID	YOU	STUDY
WHO	WAS	YOUR	TEACHER
			7

Here is a set of cards that mix passive and active sentences, more suitable for an intermediate group:

WAS	YOR	CAR	STOLEN
DID	YOU	LOCK	IT
HAVE	YOU	REPORTED	THE THEFT
HAS	ANYONE	BEEN	ARRESTED

There should be enough packs of these cards for each group of three to four learners. Shuffle the cards in each pack so that the questions are no longer in order.

Procedure

- 1 Distribute the sets of cards to the learners, working in groups of three or four. Ideally, they should be able to spread them out, face up, on a flat surface. Tell them to sort the cards into questions, indicating the number of questions that there are (for example, four) and the

- number of cards that comprise each question, if the questions are of equal length. Point out, too, that there should be no cards left unused.
- 2 Monitor the groups as they work, indicating-if appropriate-any illformed combinations.
 - 3 When most of the groups seem to have finished, elicit the correct combinations on to the board.
 - 4 Ask the class to tell you the rules of formation in each case. This may mean first asking them to group the sentences into categories, for example, active and passive. Elicit the rules of formation for each category.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 85)

Appendix 10

2.25 Information gap-spot'the difference

Level Any

Time 10-20 minutes

Aims To provide interactive conditions for reinforcing a grammar item.

Materials Sufficient copies of the two versions of the same picture to be distributed to pairs.



Photocopiable © Oxford University Press

Procedure

- 1 Distribute the pictures so that each member of a pair has a different version of the same picture. They should hold the pictures and be seated in such a way that they cannot see each other's picture.
- 2 Point out that the pictures are different in a number of details, and demonstrate the kind of exchange necessary in order to discover the differences. For lower levels it will help to write some question 'frames' on the board, such as:
Is there a man/woman, etc. standing/sitting next to / behind / in front of ... ? What is he/she doing?
Has he/she got, .. ?
- 3 Learners take turns to ask each other questions until they have discovered all the differences.
- 4 They then write up the differences, using a rubric such as: In picture A *there* is ..., but in picture B ...

Comments

While this activity can result in a lot of interaction, it is relatively limited in terms of the structures that can be practised. These comprise mostly those structures used for describing ongoing activities, such as the present continuous, *there is/are ...* ; has/have got; and **prepositions**.

(Source: Thornbury, S. (2005) *Grammar*. Oxford University Press, 56)

Appendix 11

Guessing and speculating games

92 One idea at a time

Language Describing things using adjectives.

Variation 2: adverbs (e.g. *noisily*) and imperatives (e.g. *open, close*).

Variation 3: names of jobs, and questions.

Variation 3: present continuous (e.g. *You're carrying something*).

Variation 4: present perfect (e.g. *Have you hurt ...?*).

Skills Listening and speaking.

Control Guided.

Level Beginners/intermediate.

Time 10-15 minutes.

Materials None.

Preparation

None.

Procedure

Class work.

One learner mimes an adjective and the others try to guess what he/she is miming, e.g.

Learner 2 : Are you tired?

Mimer: (*Shakes head.*) Learner

2: Are you lazy?

Mimer: (*Shakes head.*)

Learner 3: Are you bored?

Mimer: (*Nods head.*)

You should then encourage the other learners to find the reason for his/her boredom, e.g. ,

Learner 4: Are you bored because you have nothing to do?

Other examples: miserable, busy, thirsty, frightened, surprised, angry.

(Source: Wright, A., Betteridge, D., and Buckby, M. (1994) *Games for Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, 173)

Appendix 12

Some "questionable" activities

20 Questions. For beginning and intermediate students, the simple game of "20 Questions" is very popular. It provides practice in forming Yes/No questions and proves to be a great exercise in listening comprehension. Students form a circle. The teacher has 10 cards which have a general category and the name of a person, place, or thing. A student chooses a card and reads out the general category (e.g., "It's a country."). He/she can only answer "yes" or "no" to the students' questions, so students ask only Yes/No questions. To keep the game going longer, they are to ask general questions for one round before asking more specific questions (e.g., "Is it Finland?"). Here are some cards that have worked well in my classes in the United States and Hungary:

A FAMOUS WOMAN (Margaret Thatcher)

A FAMOUS MAN (Albert Einstein)

AN ANIMAL (giraffe)

A BIRD (penguin)

A PLANT (carrot)

AN OCCUPATION (dentist)

AN ISLAND (Greenland)

A COUNTRY (India)

A COLD PLACE (refrigerator)

A SPORT (rowing)

SOMETHING TO READ (letter)

TRANSPORTATION (canoe)

FOOD (rice)

There are all kinds of possibilities. I've found that by choosing some items that are not too commonplace, students are forced to ask more questions. This game can be adapted to all cultures. The items in my example work well in Europe and North America. Students have to listen very carefully to clues. No one is allowed to ask specific questions or to make a guess until we've gone through one round. The person who has correctly figured out an item gets to draw a card and answer the students' questions in the next round. Students- enjoy up- tcr-20 minutes of 20 Questions. I keep a few of these cards with my lesson plans to use when I have five minutes to spare at the end of a class.

(Source: WTMd, N. M. (.994) *EngUsH Teaching Forum*, 32 (3): 46)

Appendix 13

Making questionnaires

TECHNIQUE You help your class create questionnaires which they use to interview each other.

LANGUAGE FOCUS Present perfect for experiences, for example, 'Have you ever ...?'; 'I've never ...'

LEVEL Lower intermediate

RESOURCES Two questionnaires - the second questionnaire should use the same verbs as the first, but with different nouns. These examples focus on present perfect questions:

Questionnaire 1 - 'Have you ever ...?' - 'Yes, I have.' I 'No, I haven't.'

Names	1	2	3
<i>played basketball?</i>			
<i>caught a fish? been to the capital of your country?</i>			
<i>tasted a fresh pineapple? seen a parrot? walked 10 kilometres? done a jigsaw?</i>			

Questionnaire 2

Names	1	2	3
<i>played chess?</i>			
<i>caught a mouse? been to the seaside? tasted a fresh mango? Seen a helicopter? walked in a forest? done a crossword?</i>			

PREPARATION Design your questionnaires. Write the first questionnaire on the board before the lesson. You can adapt the questions to fit the location and the class.

TIME GUIDE 40 minutes

Lesson

1 Check the class understand the phrase 'played basketball' by miming the action, drawing a little picture, showing a prepared flashcard, or translating. Draw the time line on the board. Ask one of the learners the first question, for example, 'Viktoria. Have you ever played basketball?' If her answer is 'Yes'; use the diagram to point out that we don't know when she played - just that it was something in the past.

Appendix 14

Question and answer games

82 General knowledge quiz

Language Wh- questions, agreeing, disagreeing; speculating, expressing doubt, ignorance, e.g. *Yes, I think you're right ...*, *Would I be right in thinking ...*'

Skills Listening and speaking.

Control Free.

Level Intermediate/advanced.

Time 10-15 minutes.

Materials Reference books (optional).

Preparation

The quiz can cover a range of topics, or can concentrate on one area. It is important that none of the learners should know the answers to all the questions, so that the speculation and argument are real and so that the learners acquire some new information through the foreign language. An excellent source for such quizzes is *The Guinness Book of Records*. This may suggest, in particular, quizzes using superlatives and comparatives. The following quiz examples would give practice in the use of past tenses.

- i Who first sailed alone around the world? a) Sir Francis Drake b) Sir Francis Chichester
c) *Joshua Slocum*
d) Christopher Columbus
- i Who first flew alone across the Atlantic? a) *Charles Lindberg* b) The Wright brothers
c) Alexander Fleming d) Louis Pasteur
- 3 Who produced the first television picture? a) *The Scotsman, John Baird* b) The American, Neil Armstrong
c) The Russian, Yuri Gagarin d) The Englishman, George Stephenson

Appendix 15

Making quizzes

TECHNIQUE You give your class practice in listening to and making questions in the form of a quiz.

LANGUAGE FOCUS Question forms in the past.

Pattern 1: The question word refers to the subject of the answer. In this case we do not use 'did' in the question, for example:

Who directed 'Star Wars'? - George Lucas.

Pattern 2: The question word doesn't refer to the subject of the answer, it refers to the object. In this case we use 'did' in the question, for example:

What did Shakespeare write? - He wrote plays.

LEVEL Lower intermediate

RESOURCES A quiz with 20 questions. You can use general topics or a specific topic that your class is interested in. You can also vary the difficulty of the questions. Here are two examples:

Pattern

Who wrote (book/play)?

When did (something happen)?

'Guernica'?- 1937 or 1967?

Example question

Who wrote 'Hamlet'?

When did Picasso paint

Prepare enough answer sheets for all the teams.

PREPARATION Write your quiz. There are many different ways to organize a quiz. If there is a popular quiz programme on television, you may prefer to use that format.

TIME GUIDE 40 minutes

Lesson

1 Ask the class if they watch quizzes on TV or have done quizzes themselves. Ask what kind of questions are asked. Write your examples on the board and ask the class if they know the answers. Give them the answers if they can't guess them. Ask the class what topics are used in quizzes and write a list on the board, for example, History, Sport, Famous people, Film, Art, Geography, Science, Books, etc.

2 Organize the class into teams with about 5-6 people in. You can let learners choose their own teams, or in order to mix stronger and weaker students together, do it yourself. Here is one team-making idea:

Appendix 16

FREE ORAL PRACTICE

TOPIC

The natural world

LANGUAGE

Fluency; mixed questions

LEVEL

Elementary to intermediate (if you use the letter text)

Or

Intermediate to advanced (if you use the scientific text)

TIME

20-30 minutes

MATERIALS

An earthworm in a pot of damp soil (you will easily find a worm by digging over a small piece of garden)

- One copy of 'The Earthworm' and/or 'Letter from a Worm' for each student

4.5 The worm

BACKGROUND

Here, the doubling technique of the previous activities is applied to non-human subjects. We have successfully used it with possessions (a person's shoes, spectacles, notebook, etc.), furniture, indoor plants, and the classroom itself. If the students and the teacher are willing to enter the (academically odd) frame of the exercise, the direct questioning can be far more powerful than just 'taking about' the theme.

The texts that follow the questioning stage of the activity are included in response to requests by classes for more information about the subject.

As with the previous exercises in this section, there should be no insistence that *all* or *only* the written questions may be put.

IN CLASS

- 1 Put the worm where the class can see it clearly. Tell the students that they are going to interview the worm
- 2 Ask the students to write down eight to ten questions they would like to ask the worm. Make sure they write direct, second person questions, e.g. 'Worm, do you like the rain?'
- 3 Tell the class that the worm would be happy to answer their questions, but has lost its voice. Invite one member of the class to come and speak for the worm. The rest of the class then put their questions to the worm, and the 'double' answers.
- 4 There are usually plenty of questions about the worm's life that no one in the group has an answer to. If this is so, give out one or other of the texts ('Letter from a Worm', and 'The Earthworm') or supply your own text.

VARIATION

As the students are writing their questions find a person to speak for the worm and supply him/her with one or other of the texts. She/he then has the information to answer some of the questions that will be asked. The only snag with this variation is that the rest of the students will come on to the reading assignment with less thirst for knowledge than in the sequence outlined above, since the student speaking for the worm will have already given them most of the information.

(Source: Morgan, J., Rinvoluceri, M., (1988) *The Q Book*. Longman Group UK Limited, 86)

Appendix 17

Letter from a worm

Dear Student,

You are very odd with your eyes and ears. I don't have any of these but I have a sense of touch all over my body. *I feel* chemicals and light all over me and react to these.

I burrow through the earth and a lot of it passes through my body. I break the earth up and the gardeners like me because this improves the soil. I drag leaves down into my burrow, too.

You may wonder which **sex** I am. I'm both male and female. I produce young worms by coming up to the surface of the soil at night -: 1 : 3 lying against another worm. We exchange sperm. I give sperm from my male organ and receive it in my female one. I then produce eggs in a cocoon. The young worms come out of the cocoon.

My heart is not at all like yours. It's in rings round my stomach in the front half of my body.

The thing I really hate is' great heat. I must stay moist. If it gets too hot or too cold, I burrow deep down into the soil. I cover myself with mucus that hardens and keeps me moist. I can stay quiet like this for a very long time.

I quite like rain; but not too much. If it rains too hard, my burrow gets flooded and I might drown. I hate thrushes, moles and hedgehogs.

Yours sincerely,

The earthworm

Appendix 18

Achievement Test

Write Yes/No Questions

1. She is a very good doctor.
2. The driver locked the car.
3. We have produced a new minicomputer.
4. Christine is drinking green tea.
5. The piano costs a lot.
6. I will take Grandpa to the dental clinic.
7. Cats like fish.
8. The boat trip was exciting.
9. I have seen some interesting advertisements.
10. The kittens are chasing a ball of wool now.
11. They were lucky.
12. I had a bad headache this morning.
13. Sheila can speak Japanese.
14. Writing and journalism are challenging.
15. There is a cinema in my street.
16. I am going to study very hard.
17. Every morning my mother has to leave the house at seven o'clock.
18. There are some buns on the table.
19. You have to come now.
20. I am from Britain.

Write Wh- Questions

1. The hotel guest is waiting for a taxi.
2. Steve likes Shane.
3. He closed the window because it was raining.
4. Her photograph has featured in all the newspapers.
5. A tennis player has to serve over the net.
6. Jamie is two months younger than me.
7. He has got brown eyes.
8. I can take you home at six.
9. Some plants need a little water.
10. The slide presentation was extremely effective.
11. We will serve the food later.
12. Last Sunday I had breakfast in bed.
13. We have to clean our class once a month.
14. There is some hot food in the kitchen.
15. They want to demolish the Lido theatre.
16. You are going to do voluntary work.
17. The programme is three hours long.
18. My parents live in Holland.
19. A bad investment causes Mr Adams a lot of anxiety.
20. That restaurant serves several varieties of coffee.

Write Tag Questions

1. The sheep do not look adorable.
2. The manager has approved our project.
3. It is a sunny day.
4. They will not telecast the match live.
5. I do not have to be late for work tomorrow.
1. Josephine does not wear high-heeled shoes.
2. They solved the answer to the maths problem a while ago.
3. The author was known only by his surname.
4. You are not late for your appointment.
5. I am late already.
6. The motorist did not notice the warning signs.
7. You were frightened.
8. Our arguments make life interesting.
9. Julia swims twice a week.
10. Jack has to wear a suit and a tie at work.
11. I will go out for dinner this evening.
12. Our hostess wants you to play the piano for the dance.
13. There is a unity among the people in this neighbourhood.
14. You can not use your mobile phone on the plane.
15. There are not eight days in a week.

Translate

1. Vai viņš ir students?
2. Kur Tavi vecāki satikās?
3. Vai Tev patīk sports?
4. Vai Tu labi pavadīji laiku Skotijā?
5. Vai Tavā videokamerā ir kasete?
6. Cikos viņi atstāja sarīkojumu?
7. Vai Jūlija bieži iet peldēties?
8. Ko Tu pašlaik dari?
9. Vai šovakar pa televīziju rāda kādas labas filmas?
10. Cik ilgi Tu gatavojies dzīvot Spānijā?
11. Vai mūzika bija laba?
12. Kurā mēnesī ir visaukstākās nakts?
13. Vai Tavas atbildes bija pareizas?
14. Kāda ir Tava tautība?
15. Kas Tev iedeva tos ābolus?
16. Vai sestdienās Tev agri jāceļas?
17. Cik daudz naudas Tu iztērēji pagājušajā nedēļā?
18. Vai es varu nopirkt biļetes internetā?
19. Kāpēc viņi bija dusmīgi?
20. Vai Tu kādreiz esi spēlējis šahu?