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APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE TASKS TO TEACHING MODAL VERBS AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

KOMUNIKATĪVO UZDEVUMU IZMANTOŠANA MODĀLO DARBĪBAS VĀRDU MĀCĪŠANĀ AUGSTSKOLĀ

MASTER THESIS

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ANOTĀCIJA

Angļu valodas modālie darbības vārdi studentiem rada ievērojamas grūtības to gramatiskās un funkcionālās dažādības dēļ. Pētnieki un metodiķi uzsver uz konteksta bāzes veidotu komunikatīvo uzdevumu pielietojuma nozīmīgumu efektīvākai gramatisko formu, īpaši modālo darbības vārdu, apguvei un nostiprināšanai. Maģistra darba mērķis bija izpētīt komunikatīvo uzdevumu ietekmi modālo darbības vārdu apguvē un to pielietojumā reālās situācijās. Tika veikts kvazi eksperiments, kurš ietvēra divas aptaujas, pilot-nodarbības, kā arī studentu zināšanu pārbaudi testa veidā pirms eksperimenta un tā beigās. Pētījuma rezultāti liecina, ka komunikatīvajiem uzdevumiem ir pozitīva ietekme uz modālo darbības vārdu apguvi, un tie veicina precīzāku modālo darbības vārdu pielietojumu reālās situācijās.

Atslēgvārdi: gramatikas mācīšana, modālie darbības vārdi, komunikatīvā pieeja, komunikatīvie uzdevumi

ABSTRACT

English modal verbs represent a great difficulty for learners due to their grammatical and functional diversity. Researchers and methodologists emphasize the importance of context-based communicative practice for more effective acquisition and consolidation of grammatical forms in general and modal verbs in particular. The goal of the Master Thesis was to investigate the effect of communicative tasks on students' ability to acquire modal verbs and apply them effectively in real-life situations. The quasi-experiment was carried out, which included the distribution of two questionnaires, the pilot-teaching sessions and pre- and post-tests administration. The results of the research show that communicative tasks created a positive impact on students' knowledge of modal verbs and helped to apply them in real-life situations more accurately.

Key words: grammar teaching, modal verbs, communicative approach, communicative tasks

Contents

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AF – Affective Filter

ALL – Australian Language Levels

CA – Communicative Approach

CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference

CIH – Comprehensible Input Hypothesis

CLT – Communicative Language Teaching

COH – Comprehensible Output Hypothesis

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ESL – English as a Second Language

FFI – Form-Focused Instruction

FonF – Focus on Form

FonFs – Focus on Forms

MFI – Meaning-Focused Instruction

PPP – Presentation, Practice, Production

SLA – Second Language Acquisition

SLT – Situational Language Teaching

TBLT – Task-based Language Learning

Introduction

The modal system consists of a variety of verb forms, which impose a learning burden on both English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and learners due to the intricacy of inter-related meanings and functions they represent. Teachers often struggle with establishing the precise difference between modal auxiliaries, since a number of different modal verb forms express similar meanings or the same function (e.g. *must* and *should*) (Bowen and McCreary, 1977: 283; Tyler, 2012: 94). Furthermore, complexity of modal verbs lies in their duality of meanings. Each modal verb has a meaning connected to the social world ('the root sense') and the one representing 'the world of reasoning and logical prediction' ('the epistemic sense') (Tyler, 2012: 94). Therefore, teachers may have difficulties with differentiating and conveying precise meanings and functions of modal verbs to their students because of the complexity mentioned above.

Regarding learners, they face enormous difficulties with the English modal system too. The previous studies in the grammar instruction (Ellis, 2006; Howard, 2010: 1; Mukundan, Saadullah, Razalina, Zasenawi, 2013; Richards and Reppen, 2014) have proven that despite having a good command of modal syntactical forms, ESL learners still struggle to distinguish their shades of meaning and identify their functions as well as use them appropriately in real-life setting. The gap between the form, meaning and function divide is attributable to the insufficiency or, at times, lack of context-based communicative practice in grammar classes that result in learners' failure to demonstrate efficient use of modal verbs in an appropriate context of real-life spoken communication (Ellis, 2006; Howard, 2010: 1; Mukundan et al., 2013; Richards and Reppen, 2014).

In an attempt to solve the existing problem described above, the **goal** of the present paper is to investigate the effect of communicative tasks on the acquisition of modal verbs and on the ability to use them in real-life situations. The **hypothesis** of the paper is as follows: if students are engaged in context-based communicative practice in the classroom ensured by the application of communicative tasks, the students' usage of a grammatical form in question in real-life spoken communication will become more accurate and automatic. In order to achieve the goal, it is necessary to establish the following **objectives**:

1. to define the concept of Communicative Approach (CA) and place it in the wider context of traditional approaches to grammar instruction;
2. to explore the concept of *communicative task*;
3. to design the communicative tasks;

4. to do a pilot-teaching with the application of the communicative tasks in the classroom;
5. to draw relevant conclusions.

The research methods applied in the paper are the secondary analysis of theoretical works and the quasi-experiment. The secondary analysis of theoretical works is mainly based on the writings of Batstone (1994); Thornbury (2005), Szescy (2008); Shrum and Glisan (2009); Hall (2011); Larsen-Freeman and Andersen (2011); Nasaji and Fotos (2011); Richards (2014); Ellis (2015), who provide a comprehensive account of major changes and transformations in grammar teaching methodology and describe principal teaching methods. Further, the works of Ellis, (2000; 2003; 2006; 2012); Littlewood, (2004); Nunan (2004); van den Branden, (2006); Samuda and Bygate, (2008); Bygate et al., (2013) are discussed, who give a considerable insight into the concept of *task*, specifying different approaches to defining its notion. Moreover, theoretical accounts of Shavelson and Stern (1981); Candlin (1987); Wright (1987); Nunan (2004), (and) Samuda and Bygate (2008) are analysed, which provide a comprehensive overview of task components that are dealt with separately further in the paper. In addition, the quasi-experiment has been chosen as the principle research method. Research participants were thirty five first year students of a Bachelor programme majoring in languages and business studies at a university in Latvia.

The research method in question enabled to apply such **data collection tools** as a pre-experimental questionnaire, a pre-test of students' knowledge of modal verbs, a post-test, a final feedback questionnaire and a participant observation.

To ensure **validity and reliability** of the research, methodological triangulation was achieved through the usage of the same teaching method on different occasions as well as through the application of the quasi-experimental design as the principle one and survey in the forms of questionnaires.

The **first chapter** of the current paper provides an overview of grammar teaching approaches evolved over the last fifty years starting with traditional approaches to teaching grammar, continuing with types of exposure to meaningful communication and finishing with recent developments. Further, the CA and its role in teaching grammar are discussed.

The **second chapter** explores the concept of *task* and analyses different approaches to its definition with particular emphasis on Littlewood's (2004) approach. Further, six classifications of task components appeared in chronological order are examined among which five components are selected for closer analysis. Finally, possible implications and limitations of using communicative tasks in grammar classes are discussed.

The **third chapter** presents the quasi-experiment carried out during the research, which includes the analysis of the results of the pre-experimental questionnaire, the explanation of the research methodology, the description of the communicative tasks designed and applied in the classroom during the pilot-teaching sessions, the analysis of the pre-test and post-test as well as the results of the final feedback questionnaire. Further, the results of the research are discussed in the third chapter.

1. Overview of Grammar Teaching Approaches

Learning English grammar has always been the primary concern for learners of the target language due to its complex organization, which contains an intricate system of tenses, a complicated classification of mood, even more confusing concept of modality, not to mention an enormous variety of exceptions in the usage of articles, and many other grammatical features, which learners may find challenging and even off-putting. Nonetheless, the knowledge of grammar as well as the ability to use it are by all means essential to master, for grammar is what makes an utterance or a message understandable and transmissible among the speakers. Learners may argue that the knowledge of grammar is superfluous, and they can easily express themselves mainly with the help of vocabulary by, for instance, naming objects and pointing at them. Although, in some situations, it is indeed possible to engage in communicative acts relying exclusively on the knowledge of vocabulary units, in more demanding contexts, however, such as academic or working environment, grammar is an indispensiable tool for arranging an utterance in a coherent and cohesive structure. That is undoubtedly one of the reasons why scholars have been searching for an optimal method to present grammar in a more engaging and systematic way so that learners could not only enjoy the process of language learning, but also find it effective, practical and beneficial for their language development and could, in the long run, become competent language users.

In this chapter a vast variety of grammar teaching approaches evolved over the last fifty years will be analysed starting with those that exclusively focused on grammar, later continued as types of exposure to meaningful communication, and recently emerged as a set of instructional options with a focus on both form and meaning – the framework proposed by Nasaji and Fotos (2011). Further, the main postulates, accepted methodology and hands-on classroom activities of the approaches under consideration will be explored in greater detail. Finally, the role of the CA in the context of traditionally accepted grammar teaching approaches will be discussed in terms of its potential to be applied to teaching modal verbs. It should also be mentioned that the grammar teaching approaches discussed in the first chapter were taken as a theoretical basis for pre-experimental questionnaire design.

1.1.Presentation – practice – production model

The multifaceted concept of grammar instruction is comprised of grammar-based and communication-based approaches (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 1). In grammar-based approaches, grammar is considered to play a central role in language pedagogy and be a fundamental

principle for designing curricula and learning materials (Kelce-Murcia, 2001, discussed in Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 2). Within grammar-based approaches, it is further assumed that the knowledge of grammar rules is sufficient for learners to know the language (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 2). Another assumption underpinning grammar-based approaches is that learning language structure is by far the most challenging undertaking that requires teachers' undivided attention (ibid.). One of the most popular forms of grammar-based approaches is the *Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model* alongside with product teaching and inductive approach dealt with in subsequent sections of the chapter.

The PPP model follows a strict three-stage sequence: a new grammatical structure is first presented by the teacher (Presentation), then put into practice through focus exercises (Practice) until it is automatically used in written or spoken output (Production) (Ellis, 2015: 196). Ellis further stresses that in the PPP 'the role of the instruction is to provide learners with explicit knowledge of a target feature and facilitate the cognitive features needed for automatic processing' (ibid.). During the *presentation stage* learners are introduced to a target structure through a text, a dialogue, or a story that contains a structure in question (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 4). The following *practice stage*, beginning with controlled practice, intends to provide learners with a number of written or spoken exercises in order to repeat and reproduce the structure until it is accurately used in less controlled and more open-ended activities (ibid.). In the *production stage*, learners are expected to internalise and master the structure by engaging in free communicative activities until it is spontaneously used (ibid.).

Therefore, in the PPP model the acquisition of a certain grammatical structure advances 'from controlled to automatic processing' as well as 'from declarative to procedural knowledge', meaning that learners consciously study the rules and put them into practice until they are fully internalised (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 4; Ellis, 2015: 196). The effectiveness of the PPP can be measured in terms of whether learners have improved their ability to use the structure in both controlled and spontaneous communicative practice (ibid.).

1.2.The product and process teaching

Another form of grammar-based approaches is *product teaching*, which cannot be discussed without its counterpart – *process teaching* – the type of grammar teaching that provides exposure to meaningful communication. The product/process division to analysing and teaching grammar was proposed by Rob Batstone (1994), who posits that 'language is not random but orderly' and 'grammar is not a single, homogeneous "object" but an immensely

broad and diverse phenomenon', suggesting that both language and grammar should be viewed from a structured and systematic perspective (Batstone, 1994: 5).

The product view on grammar postulates that component parts of the language system are divided into seperate forms that ought to be presented and dealt with separately in the classroom, which makes form be the primary focus of the product teaching (Batstone, 1994: 5). The advantage of the product teaching is that focusing learners' attention on forms and their respective meanings helps them to get insights into the way grammar is organized as well as comprehend the grammatical system, and the meanings which it helps to convey (ibid.). The process view on grammar, on the other hand, places it in the communuicative perspective and views as a means of interaction in real-time communication (ibid.). The advantage of the process teaching is that putting learners' knowledge of form into practice in meaning-focused context helps them to consolidate and internalise grammatical structures in question (ibid.)

In the product teaching learners are expected to 'sort out grammatical forms and their associated meanings', which is a rather complex process requiring to be initially exposed to *input* – the amount of language learners hear or read – with its further convertion into *intake* – the amount of language learners process, internalise and acquire (ibid.: 38). In order to assist learners in converting input into intake, teachers should provide them with possibilities to *notice* and *structure* grammar (ibid.: 39-40). In noticing grammar, learners are asked to look at and pay acute attention to grammatical forms, which, to become more detectable, need to carry meaning significant to the learner (ibid.). In structuring grammar, learners should take an individual journey into the complexities of grammatical forms by revisiting or renoticing the forms already studied and formulating their own hypotheses about them. It deepens the understanding of how the form functions and contributes to its effective usage (ibid.).

In the process teaching, learners are expected to practice language use in the classroom, since 'the process of using a language actually creates the best conditions for learning more about it, and about how to use it effectively in communication' (ibid.: 38). As in the product teaching, the process teaching also adheres to several steps, namely to *proceduralization* and *synthesis* (ibid.: 42-44). Although the steps of *noticing* and *structuring* grammar in the product teaching may prove extremely beneficial for acquiring and expanding knowledge about grammar, it is still not sufficient to become a competent language user (ibid.: 42). The knowledge in question needs to be further exploited and put into practice so that learners could be able to 'access knowledge efficiently under the considerable pressure of real time communication' (ibid.). Such process of an instant accessing and retrieving of information from the mental store is termed 'automatic processing' of ready-to-use chunks and

expressions known as ‘procedural knowledge’ – the type of knowledge not only about or of grammar, but also of language routines used now and then in everyday communication (ibid). It is important to mention that ‘procedural knowledge is something which is developed through very considerable practice of language use’ (Batstone, 1994: 44). Finally, as soon as the steps of noticing, structuring and proceduralizing knowledge has been successfully completed, one should be able to synthesize them all, since speaking languages is a complex skill (ibid.).

Another scholar who researched into the process teaching of grammar is Scott Thornbury (2005). His view on the process teaching already includes initial steps of *noticing* and *structuring* grammar of Batstone’s classification. However, unlike Batstone, who provides primarily the overview and main postulates of the product and process teaching, Thornbury explores them in terms of lesson shape, material choice, syllabus design and teaching style (Thornbury, 2005: 58).

According to Thornbury, the teaching techniques used in the process teaching fall into *providing input*, *facilitating interaction*, *facilitating item learning*, *facilitating pattern detection* and *providing output opportunities* (ibid.: 53-73).

The importance of *providing input* has already been established earlier in the paper as an indispensable starting point for noticing grammar as well as for its further convertion into intake. In addition to that, Thornbury specifies particular types of input, which, in his view, are the most beneficial ones for exploring grammar. He suggests maximizing the exposure to the target language by involving learners in home reading activities and classroom listening activities, the latter including not only pre-recorded audio or video materials as a source of input, but also the teacher’s talk (ibid.: 59). In order to facilitate understanding of what is being read or heard, he recommends choosing materials within learners’ linguistic competence or the ones already familiar in their native language; preteaching unfamiliar grammatical forms and lexis or explaining them along the way; providing context for reading/listening activity or pre-setting a task to draw learners’ attention (ibid.). All of the above mentioned tricks may be useful not only for the development of grammatical ability, but also for the enhancement of overall language competence.

Another teaching technique in the process teaching of grammar is *facilitating interaction*, which, according to Thornbury, lies in creating opportunities for small talk between the teacher and learners in the classroom as well as before or after the lesson (Thornbury, 2005: 61). The main idea of this technique is that engaging in small talk and chatting with the teacher about general topics provide ample opportunities for correction, prompting a self-correction, recast, language supply and teachers’ comments (Thonbury,

2005: 63). Thus, learners have a chance to practice grammatical features covered during the class outside the classroom and will be given immediate, covert correction, which will improve and further consolidate their knowledge of grammar as well as speaking skills.

Facilitating item learning deals with remembering new words or chunks, since 'word acquisition is a prerequisite for the development of grammar' (ibid.: 64). In order to enhance memorization of new vocabulary, Thornbury recommends applying 'keyword technique' – a mnemonic device based on forming associations between a word in the target language and a similar-sounding word in the moher tongue – and using word cards with a foreign word on one side and its translation or explanation on the other (ibid.). As far as memory techniques in learning a foreign language concern, Thornbury stresses that learners should find and apply their own effective and appropriate ways of memorizing language items, since memory work is unique and individual process (ibid.).

Facilitating pattern detection has already been discussed earlier in the paper as *noticing* grammar – observing and paying attention to grammatical forms found in listening or reading texts. In addition to that, Thornbury proposes to pull out the target pattern by commenting on it, underlining or highlighting it (ibid.: 65). Moreover, Thornbury emphasizes that one of the crucial features of patterning is that words sharing patterns also tend to share meanings (ibid.: 66). It suggests that a number of patterns similar in form and meaning may be built upon a detected pattern, which may expand learners' knowledge of the pattern in question and consolidate its understanding (ibid.).

Providing output opportunities is another process teaching technique, which lies in engaging learners into communicative practice in order to extract and use their language utterances as a basis for grammar instruction in general and for item learning and pattern detection in particular (Thornbury, 2005: 70). In other words, learners' talk should always be subjected to detailed scrutiny as it is rich in lexical and grammatical resource that may be used for teaching purposes.

Thus, it is seen from the above analysis that the product and process teaching follow a systematic and comprehensive scenario of teaching grammar, which includes both attention to form and its gradual insertion into communicative utterances. Moreover, the product and process teaching, along with other approaches discussed further in the paper, are regarded as one of the most effective ways to familiarize learners with the vast and complicated system of English grammar.

1.3.Deductive and inductive grammar teaching

Like the aforementioned division of the product/process teaching, *deductive* and *inductive* approaches are instances of traditional grammar-based approach (deductive) and the one implying exposure to meaningful communication (inductive).

Nowadays, the deductive and inductive approaches are seen as the principal and widely implemented approaches to teaching grammar (Shrum and Glisan, 2009: 218). The *deductive approach* or rule-driven learning is characterized by explicit grammar instruction, in which the teacher's explanations of the rules are followed by the exercises aimed to facilitate the retention of a target structure (ibid.). Conversely, the *inductive approach* or example-driven learning is characterized by implicit grammar instruction, in which learners naturally acquire language from sufficient and comprehensible input provided by the teacher (ibid.).

Both deductive and inductive approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. One of the numerous advantages of teaching grammar deductively is that it is time-saving (Thornbury, 1999: 30). As Thornbury puts it, 'many rules – especially rules of form – can be more simply and quickly explained than elicited from examples' (ibid.). Further, the deductive approach allows the teacher to handle language problems straightforwardly as soon as they come up, instead of having to anticipate them and prepare for them in advance (ibid.). Moreover, adult learners could feel recognized as cognitively prepared and able to process mentally challenging pieces of information (ibid.). Finally, the deductive approach to grammar teaching fulfills learners' expectations as to how the classroom environment should be organized (ibid.).

In addition to the abovementioned advantages, there are numerous disadvantages of employing the deductive approach in the classroom. Firstly, explicit presentation of grammar rules may be intimidating for some learners, who do not possess sufficient knowledge of the metalanguage to grasp the gist of the rules (Thornbury, 1999: 30). Secondly, the deductive approach implies the prevalence of the teacher talk, assigning a rather passive role to the learner (Thornbury, 1999: 30; Shrum and Glisan, 2009: 218). Furthermore, explanation of rules may not be as memorable as other existing techniques such as demonstration and, as a result, can be easily forgotten (ibid.). Finally, pure focusing on grammatical structure detached from its contextual meaning may lead to a failure in immediate communicative situation (Shrum and Glisan, 2009: 218). It could be concluded that the deductive approach could be used in the classroom with adult learners who are cognitively ready to process such amount of information, and as a means of making immediate error correction on condition that learners have the knowledge of the metalanguage.

Regarding the inductive approach, it also has some advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of the inductive approach include better retention and greater memorization of rules explored independently from the teacher's explanations (Thornbury, 1999: 54). Also, the inductive approach promotes learners' higher involvement and in-class participation that keeps them attentive and motivated during the lesson (ibid.). Further, attempting to grasp the rules themselves, learners are preparing for higher autonomy (ibid.).

One of the respective disadvantages of the approach in question is that it may take more time for learners to induce the rules at the expense of time spent putting the rule into practice (Thornbury, 1999: 54). Moreover, learners may easily fail to induce a rule or work out its wrong version, making it more difficult for the teacher to correct misunderstanding (Thornbury, 1999: 54; Shrum and Glisan, 2009: 218). Finally, there are learners who, due to their individual learning styles, would prefer to be told the rule (Thornbury, 1999: 54).

Despite numerous disadvantages and due to obvious advantages of both the deductive and inductive approaches to teaching grammar, they are currently used in teaching practice and surely deserve attention. However, depending on learners' prior knowledge and educational background, the two approaches ought to be alternated and complemented, since one focuses mainly on form, whereas the other exposes learners to meaning.

1.4.Communicative approach

In the previous sections, grammar-based approaches were analysed, the inadequacies of which led to the emergence of communication-based approaches, which hold that 'knowing a language is more than knowing its grammar' (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 6).

In 1960s, the British language teaching tradition had been undergoing considerable changes, which resulted in the emergence of the new approach known as the CA or simply Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards, 2014: 153). Until then, Situational Language Teaching (SLT) was a leading approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Based on a repetition of structures in the context of situational events, it was continuously dying down while rapidly developing linguistic tradition of the time was searching for an approach to teaching that would exploit the functional and communicative potential of language and shift the focus from mastery of structures to the development of communicative proficiency (ibid.). As a result, teaching syllabus was reorganized from the one based on structure to the one based on communicative meaning, which was the first phase of the CA development (Szescy, 2008: 155). In the second phase of the CA development the learner's needs analysis was introduced as an essential component of the approach, whereas

the third phase witnessed the application of interactive, group-oriented learning activities (ibid.). Thus, the CA emerged as a leading approach of the time, which is still used and appreciated by a vast majority of language practitioners from all over the world.

The CA developed in two ways: through the notional-functional approach that added the teaching of interactional notions to grammar instruction; and the learner-centred approach that regarded the teaching of how to express meanings learners want to communicate as its primary concern (Bygate, 2001: 15). Thus, the view on grammar within the CA was reconceptualised to 'treating grammatical form as more closely related to meaning and its functions of use' (Tyler, 2012: 16).

The CA is considered to be an approach, not a method, since there is no accepted linguistic or learning theory, or even instructional model, which teachers and learners follow (Szescy, 2008: 155). Despite that, the newly-emerged CA still gained considerable theoretical support owing to immense contribution of such linguists as Hymes (1972); Savignon (1972), whose applied research into the CA lies at the heart of communicatively-oriented pedagogy; Wilkins (1976), who introduced the CA's major document known as *Notional Syllabuses*, and Canale and Swain (1980), who enumerated the guiding principles of the CA.

The principal target of language teaching within the CA is the development of *communicative competence*. The term *communicative competence* was first introduced by Dell Hymes (1972), who argued that well-developed communicative competence includes not only the ability to form grammatically correct sentences, but also make appropriate linguistic choices in a variety of settings and situations, and with a variety of speakers (Hymes, 1972: 282-283). According to Hymes, the communicative competence is the ability to discern whether (and to what degree) an utterance is:

- Formally, grammatically *possible*.
- cognitively *feasible*.
- socially *appropriate* in a given situation.
- regularly *performed* by the speakers of the target language (Hymes, 1972: 284-287).

In other words, all the aforementioned components of the communicative competence could be summarized, as Larsen-Freeman and Andersen put it, as 'knowing when and how to say what to whom' (Larsen-Freeman and Andersen, 2011: 115). They further state that the shift towards 'the real world use of language' called for a great deal of reconsideration of the ways a language may be learned and taught, which required taking into account 'the dimensions of context, topic, and roles of the people involved' as well as introducing 'techniques that make the students communicate with each other', or communicative tasks, which will be dealt with in the second chapter (Larsen-Freeman and Andersen, 2011: 115).

Drawing on Hymes' conception of the communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that it includes three major components: *grammatical competence*, *sociolinguistic competence* and *strategic competence* (Canale and Swain, 1980, discussed in Richards, 2014: 160; Keck and Kim, 2014: 16). A well-developed grammatical competence is characterized by a sound knowledge of grammatical and lexical units; *sociolinguistic competence* refers to the relationship between the social context and the communicative purpose of the interaction, whereas *strategic competence* refers to strategies to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair or redirect communication (ibid.).

Continuing with the theoretical accounts of the CA, it is further important to mention its first and major document that significantly influenced the development of the CA. It is Wilkins' *Grammatical, Situational and Notional Syllabuses* (1972) that was further expanded into *Notional Syllabuses* (1976) (Richards, 2014: 154). According to Wilkins, 'this notional framework is intended to provide the means by which a certain minimum level of communicative ability in European languages can be set up' (Wilkins, 1972: 253). The document under consideration needs to be mentioned in the context of the present paper, since it describes two types of meanings – *notional categories* and *categories of communicative function*, with the latter serving as a basis for syllabus design aimed to develop not only learners' communicative competence, but also to teach grammar, most specifically, modal verbs (ibid.). Since the paper deals primarily with teaching modal verbs, *categories of communicative function* ought to be closely examined, for they comprise *modality* as the major sub-function along with the sub-functions of *moral evaluation and discipline, suasion, argument, rational enquiry and exposition, personal emotions, emotional relations* and *interpersonal relations* (ibid.).

Further, Wilkins dwells upon the communicative function of *modality*, which is represented by such sub-functions as *certainty*, *necessity*, *conviction*, *volition*, *obligation incurred*, *obligation imposed* and *tolerance* (ibid.: 262). All of the abovementioned sub-functions may be expressed through a whole range of unmodalised statements as well as modal auxiliary verbs (ibid.).

The inclusion of *modality* in the list of communicative functions of the very first CA document proves that modal verbs represent a distinct class of grammatical structures that has to be taught with greater focus on meaning and function in a given communicative context rather than on a sentential level. Moreover, as Wilkins discusses it in the document, the aforementioned functions, modality included, form the very purpose the language is used for and should be primarily taught through communication, since 'the aim of language teaching is to teach learners to exploit their grammatical (and lexical) knowledge in creative acts of

communication' (Wilkins, 1972: 264), which makes it one of the reasons why the CA, to be more precise, its main instrument – communicative tasks, which will be discussed in the following chapter, could be applied to teaching modal verbs in addition to more traditional approaches to teaching grammar.

In addition to Hymes' *Theory of Communicative Competence* and Wilkins' *Notional Syllabuses* discussed above, the main principles underpinning the CA should be mentioned, which regard the position of learners, language and in-class communication. As far as learners are concerned, the CA postulates that its syllabus, materials and techniques are based on the result of a needs analysis (Little, Devitt and Singleton, 2003: 44; Richards, 2014: 158). As far as the language is concerned, it is seen not as an objective of language teaching, but as a medium of communication (Little et al., 2003: 43; Szescy, 2008: 155). As regards in-class communication, it is given a social purpose and is studied in a broader socio-cultural use (Little et al., 2003: 43).

More detailed principles of the CA to the second language teaching, however, were outlined by Canale and Swain (1980) as follows:

- CA aims to develop all major areas of communicative competence.
- CA directly addresses learners' needs and goals, which may vary from classroom to classroom.
- CA draws upon linguistic descriptions of the target language as it is used by native speakers.
- curricula include speech events that learners are most likely to participate in outside of the classroom.
- CA creates opportunities for authentic communication with speakers of the target language (Canale and Swain, 1980: 27-28, quoted in Keck and Kim, 2014: 17).

Another set of principles underlying the CA is proposed by Larsen-Freeman, who in her prominent book devoted to the overview of language teaching methods, formulated them based on the classroom observation of a lesson taught by the CA. The principles regard mainly the students and classroom techniques, and are stated as follows:

- Students should engage in situations likely to promote communication.
- students should be given opportunity to express their ideas and opinions.
- students should work with language at the suprasentential (above the sentence) level.
- students should be introduced to language used in the real context.
- a variety of linguistic forms should be presented together.
- the appropriate usage of language forms should be promoted.

- Games should be used in the classroom, since they have a purpose of the exchange.
- Learning to use language forms appropriately is an important part of communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman, 2001: 125-128).

The last principle should be given a little more attention, since it suggests that if language forms play an important part in the development of communicative competence, then communication should not be neglected and underestimated during grammar classes either.

Indeed, the belief that the CA disregards grammar has been a widely spread misconception. Little et al. discuss that the apparent indifference to grammar is grounded on the misbelieves that the CA is 'hostile to the explicit treatment of grammar' and 'fails to give grammatical form its due' (Little et al., 2003: 44). Little (2003) proves that such arguments are truly misleading by explaining that, with regard to the first statement, the earliest communicative documents emphasized the need for incorporating grammar into the process of learning meaningful expressions; and, as far as the second argument is concerned, grammatical form cannot be neglected, since absence of form may lead to the breakdown of communication (ibid.). Moreover, as Little (2003) puts it, the fact that much priority is given to meaning stresses the importance of 'exploring formal issues within a meaningful context', which suggests that not only the CA could be used as an alternative approach to teaching grammar, but also that the application of communicative tasks would be an optimal solution to 'explore formal issues within a meaningful context' (ibid.). The idea is further supported by Sandra Savignon, who posits that 'involvement of communicative events necessarily requires attention to form', since grammar is the backbone of communication (Savignon, 2002: 7). What is more, in order to develop communicative competence with no loss of morphosyntactical accuracy, she advocates that form-focused sentence-level grammatical drills be constituted with meaningful self-expressions (ibid.). However, the optimal solution for developing the ability to communicate clearly and effectively, as she puts it, would be 'the integration of form-focused exercises and meaning-focused experience' (ibid.). By integrating form-focused exercises with meaning-focused experience during grammar classes, teachers would assist their learners to cope with structural multiplicity and functional variety of modal verbs simultaneously developing their ability to communicate (ibid.). Such level of integration could be achieved through the application of communicative tasks, which will be explored in depth in the next chapter.

Finally, the most recent set of principles is proposed by Brandl (2008), who further develops Savignon's idea and suggests using tasks as an organizational principle within the CA (Brandl, 2008: 7). He argues that it is the tasks that 'provide learners a purpose to use the

grammar in a meaningful context', which renders them a starting point for the development of both grammatical and communicative competence (ibid.).

In conclusion, the current paragraph dwelled upon the development of the CA, its main theoretical works and documents as well as the main principles and postulates underpinning the approach. Moreover, the interrelationship between the CA and teaching grammar was commented upon refuting widespread opinion that the CA disregards the proper grammar instruction.

1.5.Form-focused and meaning-focused instruction

Having examined the traditional grammar-based and communication-based approaches, it is possible to look at the recently-emerged approach known as *Focus on Form* (FonF), which attempts to combine the features and characteristics of the two approaches already discussed. However, in order to avoid confusion in similar approaches within form-focused and meaning-focused instruction, they will be presented separately.

Form-focused instruction (FFI), similar to the communication-based approaches, emerged as a response to inadequacies of grammar-based approaches that viewed a language as a set of structures and rules requiring a constant drilling (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 10). Investigation of FFI has attracted careful attention of the language practitioners and theoreticians, since it may help to determine the most effective ways to teaching grammar to EFL learners, enhance the quality of pedagogic practice and establish the role of formal instruction in the classroom (Trendak, 2015: 5).

When analysing the notion of FFI, one may frequently come across its counterpart – *meaning-focused instruction* (MFI) (ibid.: 6.). In FFI, learners are required to notice the target grammatical structure through formal instruction they are provided with, whereas in MFI they are asked to focus on the content of the message they convey (ibid.). In the former type of instruction learners employ the *analytic strategy*, while in the latter one they resort to the *experiential strategy* (Stern, 1990, discussed in Trendak, 2015: 6). The difference between the two types of instruction may further be stated as follows:

> while the former relies on the techniques of study and practice and invites the learner to pay attention to formal and functional features of languages which are to greater or lesser extent abstracted from the context of actual use, the latter encourages the student to accomplish specific communicative goals, focus on communication and participate in social interaction and practical transactions (Pawlak, 2006: 18).

The above definition suggests that FFI and MFI are similar to the principles of deductive and inductive learning discussed in the previous paragraph.

Regarding the difference between FFI and MFI, it should be mentioned that FFI provides learners with *negative evidence*, or, in other words, with what is incorrect and impossible in language, whereas in MFI, learners are provided with *positive evidence*, i.e. what is possible in the target language (Long and Robinson, 1998: 19). The negative evidence in FFI is divided into the *preemptive* and the *reactive* forms (ibid.). In the preemptive form the teacher's aim is to explain grammatical rules before learners make a mistake in using a grammatical form, whereas in the reactive form learners are given *explicit* or *implicit feedback* after they utter incorrect forms (ibid.). Explicit feedback is provided in an overt manner in response to learners' immediate mistakes, whereas implicit feedback involves a breakdown in communication and a necessity to rephrase an utterance and negotiate the form under consideration (ibid.). Providing learners with explicit or implicit feedback as a response to an incorrect utterance offer them an advantage of noticing and comparing the difference between the input and output, thus forcing them to focus on form (ibid.).

FFI instruction is a rather broad term that embraces the notions of *focus on forms* (FonFs), which in their turn is subdivided into *explicit focus on forms* and *implicit focus on forms*, and *focus on form* (FonF) subdivided into *planned focus on form* and *incidental focus on form*, the dimensions that provoke a deal of bafflement and need further explanation (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 10; Trendak, 2015: 16).

Being a traditional approach, FonFs represents an analytic syllabus based on the assumption that language consists of a series of structures, which should be acquired gradually and sequentially (Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 10). FonFs has a number of characteristic features that could be summarized as follows:

- Form is of greater importance than meaning.
- the principle aim is to learn a specific structure or form isolated from context.
- the elements to be taught are preselected by the teacher in accordance with their degree of difficulty, the frequency of occurrence and utility.
- learners treat the target language as an object rather than a tool.
- FonFs aligns with the PPP procedure discussed earlier in the chapter (Trendak, 2015: 16).

Earlier the distinction has been made between *explicit FonFs* and *implicit FonFs*, the difference of which lies in whether learners approach a grammatical structure consciously (explicit) or unconsciously (implicit) (Trendak, 2015: 17).

Long argues that FonFs is a rather problematic approach, since it completely disregards communicative context and leads to monotonous lessons where learners do nothing but learn rules and drill grammatical structures (Long, 2000, discussed in Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 10).

In contrast, FonF, according to Long, 'overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication' (Long, 2000, discussed in Nasaji and Fotos, 2011: 10). In other words, contrary to FonFs, FonF represents an instruction that draws learners' attention to forms in the context of meaningful communication (ibid.).

Similar to FonFs, FonF also has its characteristic features, which could be presented as follows:

- The main focus is on meaning rather than on form.
- the approach is learner-centered.
- the elements to be taught are selected on the basis of learners' difficulty rather than in accordance with syllabus.
- learners treat the target language as a tool, which make them function as real language users (Trendak, 2015: 20).

FonF instruction may be approached in three stages:

- Engaging learners in problem-solving tasks while seeding the input with target structures.
- drawing learners' attention to a certain problem arisen during pair work or group work.
- providing learners with implicit negative feedback to promote their noticing of a target structure (Long and Robinson, 1998: 25).

Earlier the distinction has been drawn between *planned FonF* and *incidental FonF*. Planned FonF entails an intensive and extensive treatment of a language feature over a certain period of time until the feature in question is fully internalised, whereas incidental FonF is not provided in an intensive and extensive manner, but only if need be, especially when learners encounter grammatical obstacles they cannot overcome and are in need of the teacher's immediate clarification (Trendak, 2015: 22). Incidental FonF may further be divided into *preemptive* and *reactive* FonF. In preemptive FonF it is either the teacher or the learner who 'takes time out' from a communicative activity in order to ascertain deep understanding of a target grammatical structure or a meaning of a word by providing clear explanations or definitions before the activity begins (ibid.). Such an approach helps to prevent learners' confusion or misunderstanding of a language feature and promotes careful and conscious selection of language utterances. Moreover, the focus on form is pertained throughout the activity even though no apparent mistakes have been made (ibid.). Reactive FonF is similar to preemptive one in that attention to form may be drawn either by the teacher or by the learner

and in the possibility to arise due to communication errors (Trendak, 2015: 22). It may take form of a short recast, a long discussion, requests for clarification and repetition in the course of the communicative activity in order to provide additional information and clarifications (ibid.).

As far as the teaching of grammar is concerned, one may come to a conclusion that MFI and FonF approach could be integrated in language classroom with the focus on both meaning and form (ibid.: 23). However, as Trendak puts it, 'teachers should not forget about the values of explicit instruction', meaning that drilling of rules and doing form-focused exercises ought not to be discarded from language learning experience (ibid.).

The current chapter investigated the approaches to teaching grammar ranging from traditional grammar-based approaches to recently developed forms of instruction emerged over the last fifty years, which include the PPP modal, the product and process teaching, the deductive and inductive approaches, the CA and the form-focused and meaning-focused approaches. It was crucial to start with the overview of theoretical accounts on grammar teaching methods, since not only were they used as a basis for the pre-experimental questionnaire design, but also allowed comparing and selecting the most suitable techniques for delivering grammar classes during the pilot-teaching sessions.

Having examined the abovementioned grammar teaching approaches, the conclusion could be reached that the CA and the application of communicative tasks are indispensable tools for expanding and perfecting students' knowledge of modal verbs. It has been discussed in the chapter that historically the CA was mistakenly supposed to disregard and neglect grammar instruction as well as the attention to structural accuracy, since its major goal is to develop communicative competence. However, as seen from the analysis, the concept of communicative competence includes a high level of grammatical competence as well, which ought to be worked towards in parallel with the overall language development. What is more, since in the CA the focus shifts from grammar to meaningful communication, grammar begins to play not subsidiary, as was mistakenly argued, but a supportive role, ensuring a solid structural framework for creating meaningful communicative utterances, which requires grammar instruction be integrated with communication. Such integration could be achieved through the application of communicative tasks to grammar instruction in general, and to modal verbs in particular, since their functional diversity ought to be explored in a meaningful context rather than of a sentential level.

2. Concept of Task

The aim of the present chapter is to get insights into the concept of task by carrying out close analysis of its main theories. Works of such destinguished scholars as Ellis (2000; 2003; 2006; 2012) Littlewood (2004); Nunan (2004), Samuda and Bygate (2008); Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2013) have been selected for closer examination on the ground of the researchers' immense theoretical contribution to the field of the task-based research. The chapter will conclude with the theoretical investigation of communicative tasks and discuss the problems that may arise from the application of communicative tasks to teaching grammar.

2.1.Difference between task, exercise and activity

Prior to proceeding with the analysis of the concept of *task*, a crucial distinction must be drawn between such analogous terms as a *task*, an *exercise* and an *activity*.

Ellis defines a *task* as 'the actual task materials that are given to learners', whereas *activity* is viewed as 'the actual performance of the task', that is, procedures in which learners are engaged in the classroom (Ellis, 2012: 15). However, he further comments that the term *task* preserves the same generic meaning as *activity*, thus accounting for their frequent interchangeable use in the theoretical works.

As regards the difference between a *task* and an *exercise*, Skehan proposes four objective criteria that distinguish one from another:

- Meaning is primary.
- there is a goal which needs to be worked towards.
- the activity is outcome-evaluated.
- there is a real-world relationship (Skehan, 1998: 268).

Similar and more recent criteria are proposed by Ellis, who enumerates the following:

- Semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances is primary focus.
- there is an information or opinion 'gap' to fill in.
- learners are required to rely on their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources.
- there is a clearly-defined outcome other than the use of language (Ellis, 2012: 198).

Based on the criteria above, one may conclude that in a *task* learners' key concern is to communicate meaning in the process of reaching a goal or an outcome, relying on their linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. The completion of the task is evaluated in terms of whether the goal is achieved or missed. Moreover, the goal of the task should bear a real-world relationship and represent the one other than the use of language. Willis refers to such

tasks as *goal-oriented tasks*, in which the learner 'would be focusing first on meaning, and then on the best ways to express that meaning linguistically (Willis, 1996: 24).

In contrast, in an *exercise* a written grammatical activity must be accomplished individually and aims to deepen the knowledge of grammatical form in question. It does not pursue neither linguistic nor non-linguistic goals resembling those that naturally occur in real-life communication.

Once the difference between the confusing terms of a *task*, an *activity* and an *exercise has been* clarified, one should focus particularly on the ways to define such a complex and multifaceted concept as *task*, which is discussed in the next section.

2.2.Defining task as a communicative activity

Many researchers in the field of language acquisition (Breen, 1987; Stern, 1992; Estaire and Zanon, 1994; Willis, 1996; Williams and Burden, 1997; Nunan, 2004; Edwards and Willis, 2005; van den Branden, 2006; Samuda and Bygate, 2008; Bygate et al., 2013) have attempted to provide definitions of what a *task* is, which resulted in the emergence of contradictory viewpoints and inconsistency in terminology. In order to tackle numerous definitions offered by distinguished scholars, a Littlewood's approach is applied in the paper. It lies in arranging the existing definitions in accordance with 'the extent to which they insist on communicative purpose as an essential criterion' (Littlewood, 2004: 320). It seems logical to apply this approach, since it allows tracing the transformations that definitions of a *task* have been undergoing to establish themselves within the communicative perspective as classroom activities that require communication.

Littlewood groups *task* definitions into three main categories:

1. Definitions that disregard communicative purpose of a task;
2. Ones that imply the importance of communication in the classroom;
3. Ones that view communication as a principal purpose of the task (Littlewood, 2004: 320-321).

As mentioned above, definitions of the first category do not consider communicative purpose to be an essential criterion of the task, focusing purely on facilitation of a learning process in general. For instance, for Breen a *task* 'is assumed to refer to a range of workplans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning' (Breen, 1987: 23, quoted in Nunan, 2004: 3). Likewise, Williams and Burden view a *task* as 'any activity that learners engage in to further the process of learning a language' (William and Burden, 1997: 168, quoted in Littlewood, 2004: 320). The evident limitation of these definitions is that they are

rather general, implying that anything the learner performs in the classroom may be counted as tasks.

The second category contains more precise definitions that recognize the necessity for the learner to be involved in communication in the classroom. Ur lists the main features of a *task* as follows: it has a clear objective and it is supplemented with 'active language use' (Ur, 1988: 17). It is necessary to clarify that by 'active language use' she means not only linguistic utterances produced by learners themselves, but also such instances of mental activity as 'perceiving, discriminating, understanding and interpreting'(ibid.), thereby viewing a *task* as both communicative and cognitive undertaking. In contrast to Ur's interpretation, the following definitions are inclined to view a *task* as more practical and goal-oriented engagement. For instance, Stern argues that a *task* is 'communicative exercise that provides opportunities for relatively realistic language use, focusing the learner's attention on a task, problem, activity, or topic, and not on a particular language point' (Stern, 1992: 195-196). Similarly, Edwards and Willis state that 'a language learning task is an activity that has a non-linguistic purpose or goal with a clear outcome and that uses any or all of the four language skills in its accomplishment by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use'(Edwards and Willis, 2005: 18-19). These interpretations correspond with that of Kris van den Branden who also suggests that a *task* is 'an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language' (Branden, 2006: 4). The aforementioned definitions introduce the main characteristics of a *task* as viewed from the communicative perspective such as achievement of linguistic or non-linguistic goal and involvement in true-to-life language use.

Finally, there is a range of definitions which strongly emphasize that tasks comprise only activities that require communication. The representative example of such a definition is the one by Willis, who claims that 'tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome' (Willis, 1996: 23). Within the applied classification, it is also worth mentioning Bygate et al.'s definition, which along with task characteristics mentioned before, also adds a more pedagogical and research-oriented perspective. They state that a *task* is 'a contextualised, standardized activity which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning, and with a connection to the real world, to attain an objective, and which will elicit data which can be used for purposes of measurement'(Bygate et al., 2013: 12). Another definition is provided by Nunan, who asserts that a *task* is

> a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on

> mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end. (Nunan, 2004: 4).

Nunan's definition is so multifaceted that requires further consideration. Firstly, it does determine the priority of communication over other targets by saying that a *task* is a communicative act. What is more, in Nunan's viewpoint communication encompasses not only interaction, which is its integral part at the outset, but also 'comprehension and manipulation'– the constituents that make communication much closer to realistic, and which, however, have not been mentioned so far in the previously illustrated examples. Indeed, with learners attempting to come to understanding with each other and try to influence one another in the classroom setting, their language performance will not be limited to a set of persistently drilled language forms, but will be colored with functional undertones, which need developing in order to operate successfully in the society. Secondly, in his definition, Nunan manages to bridge the gap between 'focus on form' and 'focus on meaning' divide, by remarking that while engaging in tasks learners should 'mobilise their grammatical knowledge' (ibid.). 'Mobilising grammatical knowledge' is essentially different from being concerned only with grammatical forms in a way that it acknowledges the indispensable role grammar plays in constructing comprehensible utterances while pursuing a principal objective of expressing and conveying meaning instead of drilling and training a grammatical structure for its own sake. Nunan's idea of 'mobilizing grammatical knowledge' while carrying out a task is similar to Samuda and Bygate's (2008) understanding of the notion of a *task*. They propose a holistic approach, within which a *task* is viewed as a part of *holistic activity.* In order to produce an utterance, learners make a determined choice of the meaning and the form, the latter consisting of words, grammar and pronunciation (Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 8). Through engaging with a task, learners accomplish a larger purpose, while activating and consolidating different aspects of language such as lexis, grammar and pronunciation (ibid.).

Having adopted Littlewood's approach to defining a task from communicative perspective, it is possible to summarize its main characteristics that will be implied each time the term *task* is mentioned in the paper:

- A task aims to achieve a goal, be it a linguistic or non-linguistic one.
- a task involves certain procedures that help mobilise grammatical knowledge as a means of achieving the goal.
- a task aims to help learners understand, convey and exchange meanings necessary to reach the goal.

- a task provides an opportunity for extensive collaborative context-based engagement in language use in class similar to that of out-of-class real-life communication.

Having defined a *task*, it is of crucial importance to consider task components – main constituents of a task, which is explored in detail in the following paragraph.

2.3.Task components

Prior to designing a task or implementing already existed tasks in the classroom, one should take into consideration *task components* – the key elements that comprise a task (Nunan, 2004: 40). Six conceptualizations of *task components* are discussed in the paper proposed by Shavelson and Stern (1981), Candlin (1987), Wright (1987), Ellis (2003) and Nunan (2004), Samuda and Bygate (2008), which differ in number, but concur in main elements constituting a task.

It seems logical to start with the conceptualization that chronologically occurred first – the one by Shavelson and Stern, who propose six main components of a task:

- content – refers to the subject matter to be taught;
- materials – the things that learners can observe and manipulate;
- activities – the things that learners and teachers are doing in class;
- goals – teachers' general aims for the task;
- students – their abilities, needs, interests;
- social community – the class as a whole (Shavelson and Stern, 1981: 478).

In their thorough examination of *task components*, Shavelson and Stern show that students' abilities, needs and interests are crucial to consider prior to designing a task, which makes their classification stand out among the others. What is more, it also recognizes a group of students in class as a social community, which can be either contributing or complicating factor in task implementation.

Candlin proposes a similar list of task components:

- input – refers to the data given to learners to work on;
- roles – establish the relationships between participants in a task;
- settings – refers to a place where the task is performed;
- actions – refer to procedures and sub-tasks performed by learners;
- monitoring – refers to the supervision of the task on the part of the teacher;
- outcomes – goals of the task;
- feedback – evaluation of the task (Candlin, 1987, quoted in Nunan, 2004: 40).

Comparing Candlin's classification with Shavelson and Stern's conceptualization, one may notice that such components as *monitoring* and *feedback* appear in the list, which implicitly introduce *role of the teacher* as a distinct task component.

Another conceptualization is proposed by Wright (1987) who describes two basic components of a task: *input data* and *instructional questions* (Wright, 1987, discussed in Ellis, 2003: 18). According to Wright, the aim of instructional questions is to guide learners through a task and assist them in working on input data (ibid.). In comparison with Candlin's classification, he refutes the notion that *outcomes* should be considered a task component on the ground that an unpredictable number of outcomes may occur at the end of a task performance, including ones not anticipated by the teacher (ibid.).

Ellis's conceptualization of *task components* is also worth mentioning in the paper, since it provides a deeper insight into methodological aspects of approaching a task. According to Ellis, *task components* include:

- goals – specify the aspects of communicative competence to be developed;
- input – the type of input data, e.g. oral or written;
- conditions – the way the data is presented;
- procedures – methodological options available for researchers and teachers for implementing a task;
- predicted outcomes – expectations that certain results will be achieved (Ellis, 2003: 19).

Nunan suggests that a set of minimum task specifications should include *goals*, *input*, *procedures*, which are supported by *teacher*/*learner roles* and *settings* (Nunan, 2004: 41). His conceptualization resembles Ellis's and contains developed notion of *teachers and learners roles*, earlier proposed by Candlin (1987).

The relatively recent conceptualization of task components is suggested by Samuda and Bygate, who propose the following features:

- holistic nature – the knowledge of phonology, grammar, vocabulary and discourse structures are required to complete a task;
- one or more meaningful outcomes – both production of accurate language and a pragmatically credible response are expected from learners upon completion of a task;
- input material – the objects and the instructions;
- task process – any language process targeted by the teacher necessary to work towards an outcome;

- task phases – a series of manageable steps envisaged by a task developer or the teacher, which guide learners through a task;
- conditions – the use and manipulation of external pressures, which can be of two types. The first type refers to the allocation of time frame for a task and the provision of pre-, while- and post-task support. The second type is associated with the atmosphere in and ethos of the class, the rapport between the class members, their level of language proficiency and the way learners deal with the task processes and outcomes (Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 13-16).

Therefore, having looked at six different conceptualizations of task components, it is possible to isolate the ones that occur more frequently, such as *goals* (Shavelson and Stern, 1981; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004); *input* (Candlin, 1987; Wright, 1987; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Samuda and Bygate, 2008); *procedures* (Ellis, 2003; Nunan; 2004), also referred to as activities in Shavelson and Stern (1981), and as actions in Candlin (1987), as task phases in Samuda and Bygate (2008); *roles of teachers and learners* (Candlin, 1987; Nunan, 2004) and *setting* (Candlin, 1987; Nunan. 2004). These variables will be dwelt on in greater detail in subsequent sub-chapters.

2.3.1. Goals

Stating goals plays an important part in curriculum development in general and in task design in particular. Richards assumes that setting sound goals has a positive impact on the level of students' motivation and enhances the effectiveness of teaching and learning process as well as of a learning programme (Richards, 2001: 112).

Goals are broadly defined as 'the vague, general intentions behind any learning task' (Nunan, 2004: 41) or 'the overall purpose of an interaction' (Ellis, 2012: 95). Nunan (2004) mentions several points to characterize goals of a task. According to him, goals:

- May relate to a range of general outcomes;
- May not be explicitly stated, but inferred from a task itself;
- May directly describe teacher or learner behaviour (Nunan, 2004: 42).

Moreover, a complex communicative task with numerous steps and sub-tasks may have more than one underlying goals (ibid.).

Depending on a type of task, one may observe several types of goals. Nunan, referring to the Australian Language Levels (ALL) project, distinguishes communicative, sociocultural, learning-how-to-learn along with language and cultural awareness goals (Clark, 1987: 227-32,

discussed in Nunan, 2004: 43). However, in the context of the present paper, only communicative goals will be explored in greater detail.

Communicative goals seek to promote an exchange of information, ideas, opinions, attitudes and feelings through establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships in order to get things done (ibid.). Communicative goals are set by communicative tasks, which, in their turn, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), have their own subset of goals – *convergent,* requiring learners to reach a 'single, agreed outcome', and *divergent* goals, having no 'single, intended outcome' and demanding learners to engage in information exchange (CEFR, 2001: 162). From the perspective of task complexity, *convergent* goals are more challenging for learners, since they involve a greater amount of negotiation of meaning, in which more complex language output can occur (ibid.).

Another more recent classification of task goals is proposed by Ellis (2012), who divides them into the following:

- Core goals – focus on the language as a medium of communication and on the content as a message; they may also be a part of an activity;
- Framework goals – deal with the organization and classroom management;
- Social goals – promote true-to-life interaction in the classroom (Ellis, 2012: 95).

Further, Ellis clarifies that while core goals are prone to confine learners to responding roles, framework and social goals stimulate interaction and trigger a wider range of language functions and output (ibid.). Ellis's goals address the teacher, who is responsible for providing certain conditions, such as language input and content, and for creating a stimulating learning environment through efficient classroom management techniques and promotion of classroom interaction.

In the present paper, apart from grammar-related goals of mastering the usage of modal verbs forms, communicative convergent goals are given priority in order to ensure meaningful interaction among students, which is expected to promote deeper understanding of how modal verbs function in real-life communication.

2.3.2. Input

In the previous sub-chapter the task component of goals has been discussed, which is further followed by another element of input. In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), second language (L2) *input* is perceived as one of the most crucial components of language learning (Nizegorodcew, 2007: 1). Within the SLA models, there is a generally accepted view on *input* as 'raw L2 data that reaches the non-native audience's perceptual system' or,

speaking in methodological terms in the context of EFL teaching, 'the target language spoken by the teacher which is heard by learners' (ibid.).

In the context of the present paper that deals with introduction of communicative tasks to teaching grammar, to be more precise, to teaching modal verbs, it seems appropriate to touch upon several SLA models, which recognize not only the importance of *input*, but also the role of *output* in producing accurate and meaningful language utterances.

The first SLA model of interest is Stephen Krashen's *Comprehensible Input Hypothesis* (CIH), which first appeared in 1981 and was elaborated in his recent publication of 2009. The scholar posits that one of the necessary conditions for successful acquisition of input lies in its comprehensibility, which corresponds to the level of difficulty slightly higher than learners' present level of proficiency (Krashen, 2009: 81). In other words, according to Krashen, learners are able to acquire language only if they understand a comprehensible input of what is being heard or read, which is still challenging for them (ibid.). Another condition to acquire comprehensible input, according to Krashen, lies in keeping *Affective Filter* (AF) low or down (ibid.). AF refers to several affective variables such as anxiety, self-esteem, integrative and instrumental motivation (ibid.). In order to achieve desired results in language learning, learners should, according to Krashen, reduce the level of anxiety arisen out of learning a new language; become more self-assured and confident in positive outcomes; establish a good rapport with classmates to develop a feeling of belonging to the group and be motivated to accomplish a task set by the teacher (ibid.). Therefore, the model in question states that it is not only the comprehensibility of input that influences learners' performance, but also affective variables that depend on both learners' positive attitude towards language learning and teachers' role as an mediator, facilitator and manager of a learning environment in the classroom. However, roles of learners and teachers as separate task components will be discussed further in the paper.

Swain proposed a modification to Krashen's CIH, putting forward *Comprehensible Output Hypothesis* (COH), which postulates that *comprehensible output*, or learners' spoken language, resulted from an attempt to produce a meaningful utterance, is a necessary condition to achieve a native-like competence in the target language (Swain, 1985: 252). She further elaborated her hypothesis, distinguishing three functions of *output*, such as *noticing*, *hypothesis testing* and *metalinguistic function* (Swain, 1995: 125-126). The act of *noticing* develops learners' awareness of their knowledge or the gap in knowledge when producing the target language, which means that they become more able to reflect on their problems as well as generate new knowledge or consolidate existing one. *Hypothesis testing* suggests that 'output, particularly erroneous output, can often be an indication that the learner has

formulated a hypothesis about how the language works, and is testing it out' (Swain, 1995: 126). *Metalinguistic function* of output enables learners to control and internalise their linguistic knowledge (ibid.). Therefore, as seen from Swain's hypothesis, both *input* and *output* serve as a starting point towards and basis for L2 development.

As to *input*, it is important to make a clear-cut distinction between the terms *input* and *intake*, since the two are often confused. Chronologically, the first mentioning of the difference between *input* and *intake* dates back to 1967, when Corder provided the following definition:

> The simple fact of presenting a certain linguistic form to a learner in the classroom does not necessarily qualify it for the status of input, for the reason that input is 'what goes in' not what is *available* for going in, and we may reasonably suppose that it is the learner who controls this input, or more properly his intake. (Corder, 1967: 165).

From the definition mentioned above, one may deduce that *input* refers to language in general that learners come across not only in classroom environment, but also outside of it, whereas *intake* is a conscious process of taking in a linguistic form available for learners. A few decades later, Hatch elaborated Corder's definition, stating that information that is 'completely and successfully' processed may be regarded as *intake*, whereas the one that is only 'partially' processed remains *input* (Hatch, 1983, discussed in Rast, 2008: 3). Although this distinction is now widely-accepted, there is still confusion surrounding any attempt to articulate the difference between *input* and *intake* more clearly, compounded by the fact that no measuring criterion is available for researchers to determine 'what elements of the linguistic environment are processed completely, partially or not at all'(ibid.). Therefore, it can be concluded that *input* stands for any linguistic phenomena learners are surrounded by and are exposed to on everyday basis through hearing or reading, whereas it is still unclear how this information is processed and when *intake* comes into play (Rast, 2008: 4).

In the context of task performance in the classroom, *input* refers to 'the spoken, written and visual data that learners work with in the course of completing a task' and can be taken from a variety of sources available for teachers (Nunan, 2004: 47). Nunan provides a list of possible sources of input, which, in his view, may be adapted for communicative tasks, among which he lists articles from newspapers, magazines and journals, radio and television scripts and documentaries, news stories and reports, short stories, poems and plays, recipes, instructions and handbooks, and the like (Nunan, 2004: 48).

2.3.3. Procedures

In task implementation, *procedures* refer to certain actions learners take to handle the language input, and are based on the criteria of *authenticity*, *focus* or *goal* and *development of accuracy* and *fluency* (Nunan, 2004: 53-56). Procedural authenticity requires in-class rehearsal of communicative behaviour, which is expected from learners in out-of-class environment (Nunan, 2004: 56). Regarding procedural focus or goal, in the context of grammar teaching task procedures must be sequenced in a way ensuring learners' encounter with a grammatical form, its memorization and manipulation (skill-getting) followed by its further application in the course of communicative interaction (skill-using) (ibid.). Finally, since in-class teaching is considered to be a preparatory stage for out-of-class communication, equal attention must be paid to the *development of accuracy* and *fluency* in producing a language, which should not counteract, but, conversely, complement each other in task implementation (ibid.).

2.3.4. Roles of teachers and learners

In the literature devoted to language teaching, several attempts have been made to define the role that teachers and learners play in the classroom. Within a standard pedagogic approach to teach English through the PPP sequence, teachers were perceived as no more than providers of carefully-selected input and feedback, as well as attentive classroom managers, dubbed as 'controller', 'organizer', 'assessor', 'prompter' and 'tutor' (Harmer, 2001: 58-63). Within the TBLT framework, the view on teachers' roles has changed towards 'adviser', 'chairperson', 'monitor', 'language guide', 'facilitator', which suggest that teachers display more cooperative and stimulating behaviour in the classroom (Willis, 1996, discussed in Bygate et al., 2013: 120) According to Nunan, teachers should play a less prominent role than learners and try to become non-intrusive and attentive listeners whose principle concern is to provide ample opportunities for learners to interact (Nunan, 2004: 69). However, in the context of grammar teaching, the teacher's role as a 'controller' should not be completely discarded, otherwise grammatical accuracy of learners' utterances may be put at great risk. Therefore, at the stage of skill-getting, discussed in the previous sub-chapter, teachers are expected to play a role of a 'controller' and 'assessor', while at the stage of skill-using, they are allowed to step back and let the conversation take its course.

As regards learners, Nunan provides a list of roles that evolve simultaneously with the changing classroom procedures from passive recipient, through active participator and

contributor to independent, autonomous and self-reliant person responsible for their own improvement (Nunan, 2004: 65). Moreover, in the context of communicative language teaching, learners are expected to have 'an active, negotiable role; contribute as well as receive' (ibid.).

Therefore, a certain level of correlation between teachers and learners should be achieved in the classroom, where teachers predominate when present new material and students prevail when they first start memorizing, manipulating and practicing language input provided by teachers.

2.3.5. Settings

Settings are a crucial task component to take into consideration on a preparatory stage of task design and implementation, which is likely to influence task performance. Nunan defines *settings* as 'the classroom arrangements specified or implied in the task' (Nunan, 2004: 70). He further expands on what is implied by settings and distinguishes between *environment* and *mode*. *Environment* is where the learning is carried out, whereas *mode* is the way learners operate in the classroom, which can be either on an individual or on a group basis (ibid.). Nunan further mentions that group mode has more benefits than individual mode, since it contributes to effective language skills development by providing opportunities for extensive interaction, negotiation of meaning and group decision-making (ibid.).

2.4.Communicative tasks

The concept of a *communicative task* can best be illustrated in contrast with a *guided-practice task*. Both of them are examples of oral activity and are often confused by language teachers (Blyth, 2010: Online). To distinguish the two of them, one should bear in mind the goals that the aforementioned tasks pursue. A guided-practice task, as its name suggests, is aimed to improve accurate usage of a language form, whereas a communicative task is aimed at acquiring fluency in language use (ibid.).

Apart from different goals these oral activities pursue, they can also be distinguished on a number of the following criteria:

The control criterion – in a genuine communicative task, learners are given a freedom in 'making their own choices as communication unfolds', whereas in a guided-practice task it is the teacher who decides on the topic and linguistic forms to be dealt with (ibid.).

The authenticity criterion – a communicative task requires asking questions, raising problems or introducing topics which could be relevant and topical in out-of-class communication, while a guided-practice task requires questions that may not necessarily make sense, but can be asked to prompt the usage of a linguistic or grammatical point in question.

The analytic-synthetic criterion, in which analytic means dealing with a particular grammar point one at a time, where only one answer to a question is possible. In contrast, in real-life communication it is necessary 'to synthesize many parts into one whole', making it possible to answer a question in a variety of ways (ibid.).

The focus criterion suggests that the focus of a guided-centered task is on accurate usage of a grammatical form, whereas the focus of a communicative task is on conveying of meaning with a subsidiary purpose of helping to automatize a grammatical form in question (ibid.).

Having looked at principle differences between communicative and guided-practice tasks, it is logical to determine task types that could be counted as communicative. Yule suggests six types of task formats based on the criterion of information flow (Yule, 1997: 32).

1. One-way format enables an information transfer from one speaker to the other;
2. Two-way format ensures information exchange between the speakers;
3. Tasks fostering collaboration in which speakers are required to reach a common goal;
4. Tasks fostering independence in goal orientation in which different or conflicting goals are set;
5. Open tasks that excludes exchange of information or reaching a solution;
6. Closed tasks in which it is necessary to exchange information and achieve a common goal (Yule, 1997: 32-33).

In the context of grammar teaching it is important to mention task types focusing on language forms and the ones focusing on meanings. Littlewood proposes five task categories, based on how they relate to communication:

- non communicative learning tasks;
- pre-communicative language practice tasks;
- communicative language practice tasks;
- structured communication tasks;
- authentic communication tasks (Littlewood, 2004: 321-322).

Non communicative learning tasks aim to train the usage of a particular grammatical form. They include substitution exercises and awareness-raising activities. In substitution exercises the learner is asked to fill in the gaps in a sentence with a correct grammatical form, whereas

in awareness-raising exercises aim to deepen learners' knowledge of a certain form by underlining or highlighting it in the written text. Pre-communicative language practice tasks allow the learner to practice language with some attention to meaning when they are not ready yet to communicate their own messages to others. Such tasks include 'question and answer practice'. Communicative language practice tasks comprise of information-gap activities or personalised questions. Structured communication tasks contain structured role-play and simple problem-solving, whereas authentic communication tasks include creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion (Littlewood, 2004: 322).

Another classification of communicative tasks is provided by Ribe and Vidal (1993) who differentiate them 'in terms of duration, degree of elaboration and the different kinds of pedagogic purpose that teachers might want to use them for' (Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 225-226). The tasks are categorized into *first generation tasks*, *second generation tasks* and *third generation tasks* (ibid.). First generation tasks are referred to as basic tasks aimed to 'target specific structures/functions and to develop communicative ability in a specific area being taught' (Ribe and Vidal, 1993, discussed in Samuda and Bygate, 2008: 226). First generation tasks include information gap activities such as Spot the Difference tasks; Map tasks; Describe and Draw tasks and controlled role plays (ibid.). The main focus second generation tasks is on content, procedure and language, where the teacher and learners decide on the type of information needed, procedures for collecting, synthesizing and analysing it as well as on ways of reporting findings and results (ibid.). The examples of second generation tasks are survey tasks aimed at collecting information outside the classroom (ibid.). Third generation tasks are similar to second generation tasks, but are concerned with wider educational objectives such as attitudinal change, learner awareness and motivation. The example of such type of tasks is full-scale projects on the chosen topic (ibid.). It could be noticed that the abovementioned types of tasks are classified in order of difficulty, where first generation tasks serve as a preparative stage or an introduction to more challenging second and third generation tasks. Further, first generation tasks could be used in grammar classes, since they aim at practicing a particular structure or function in the meaningful context.

Finally, communicative tasks could be differentiated based on four features: interactant relationship, interaction requirement, goal orientation and outcome option (Garcia, 2007: 71). The combination of these four features create the continuum of task types ranging from the ones that provide the most opportunities for interaction to those that provide the least, the examples of which are *jigsaw*, *information-gap, problem-solving* and *opinion exchange* (ibid.). At one end of the continuum jigsaw tasks generate the most opportunities for interaction, since each learner possesses different pieces of information, and therefore he/she

should give and request information to achieve a single goal; whereas in opinion exchange tasks each learner has access to the same type of information, which limits the opportunities of interaction (ibid.).

2.5.Limitations of applying communicative tasks in grammar classes

It has already been discussed in the first chapter that later conceptualizations of the CA do not neglect grammar instruction and emphasize attention to grammatical form. Furthermore, as seen from the previous paragraph, communicative tasks have various forms and are appealing to use in the classroom to engage learners and give them ample opportunities for language practice. However, the application of communicative tasks in grammar classes, despite the evident appeal, may have limitations and still lead to ineffective grammar acquisition.

Burton mentions several disadvantages of communicative tasks. In the first place, students may get carried away by the topic of discussion and attempt to express their ideas faster and more fluently, thus forgetting to use correctly required language forms (Burton, 2002: 285). In the second place, in the course of conversation students are prone to acquire erroneous language forms from each other, which may lead to ineffective grammar acquisition (ibid.) Finally, some students can be reluctant to contribute to pair work and group work discussions due to individual characteristics, such as shyness, reservedness or simply fatigue, which render communicative tasks not only less efficient, but also superfluous (ibid.).

Apart from the limitations mentioned above, there are other constraints, which come from the very nature of communicative tasks. The analysis of communicative tasks carried out in the previous paragraph shows that not all types of communicative tasks may be applied in grammar classroom, since only a limited number of them are beneficial for further development of grammatical competence, such as, first generation tasks, whereas most of the tasks aim at practicing fluency and overall proficiency.

Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that in grammar teaching, communicative tasks should play a role of supportive element to written grammatical exercises. Moreover, they should be introduced at the final stage of the acquisition of a grammatical form, and sequenced accordingly at the end of a class or a textbook unit. Finally, providing the teacher maintains a proper control over learners' communication flow, gives corrective feedback and, in case of mistakes, constantly draws learners' attention to form, communicative tasks may serve as a challenging, but rewarding undertaking both for the teacher and learners on the way of developing communicative competence.

3. Application of Communicative Tasks to Teaching Modal Verbs

The research was carried out at a university in Latvia in October-November 2015 with thirty five first year students of Bachelor programme majoring in Business and Modern Language studies.

The research methodology was chosen according to the goal and objectives of the current MA thesis. Hense, the research methodology is discussed in the next sub-chapter.

3.1.Research methodology

The current research was designed to investigate the effect of communicative tasks on the acquisition of modal verbs and on the ability to use them in real-life spoken communication. In order to carry out the research, it was necessary to select appropriate research methodology, data collection tools and perform analysis of the data collected during the research. The research method selected for the empirical part is the quasi-experiment, whereas data collection tools include the pre-experimental questionnaire, the pre-test and post-test, and the final feedback questionnaire.

The research procedure was the following:

Firstly, the pre-experimental questionnaire was given to the participants in order to ask for their self-assessment of English proficiency in general, awareness of modal verbs in particular as well as to determine the extent of the exposure to communicative tasks during grammar classes at school. Further, the results of the questionnaire were used as a basis for designing lesson plans and communicative tasks.

Secondly, the pilot-teaching was conducted to the control and experimental groups, whereby the latter was taught with the application of communicative tasks.

Thirdly, the post-test was carried out and compared with the results of the pre-test administered at the beginning of the research.

Finally, the feedback questionnaire was distributed to the participants to ask for their feedback concerning the organization and content of the classes as well as on the usefulness of communicative tasks.

To ensure validity of the research, the appropriate sample of thirty five students was selected, among which there were eleven students of the control group, and twenty four students of both experimental groups.

Moreover, appropriate instruments were devised and used such as questionnaires, in which the leading questions were avoided, the pre-test and post-test corresponding to the level

of the students' proficiency as well as carefully-planned communicative tasks applied in the classroom. The possible threat to validity lies in the students' inconsistent attendance at grammar classes.

The reliability was ensured through establishing and following different teaching procedures for the control and experimental groups as well as through checking that the students from the control group did not attend the experimental groups' classes and vice versa.

Each step of the research procedure as well as the results and their discussion are provided in the following sub-sections. The results and discussion of the whole research are provided in the Conclusions.

3.2.Questionnaire

The principle aim of the pre-experimental questionnaire (see Appendix 1) administered prior to the pilot-teaching sessions was to find out the participants' level of overall English proficiency and educational background. Moreover, the questionnaire aimed at discovering teaching methods, techniques and tasks the students had been exposed to at school. Theoretical works by Batstone (1994); Thornbury (2005); Szescy (2008); Hall (2011); Larsen-Freeman and Andersen (2011); Richards (2014) and Ellis (2015) discussed in the first chapter of the paper dealing with the overview of grammar-teaching methods were used as a basis for the questionnaire.

The first three questions were designed to discover the students' experience in learning English, their educational background and self-evaluation of English proficiency. It was discovered that the majority of the students have been studying English since kindergarten (45%) and the first grade (33%), whereas some of them started learning English since the third grade (18%) and the fifth grade (4%). It was further discovered that most of the students received secondary education at ordinary school (58%) with the backup of private tutoring (24%), whereas some of them claim that they left schools majoring in English (5%), language centres (5%), language schools abroad (4%) and language centers abroad (4%). In addition to the secondary education, a few of the students mentioned participation in Latvian language camps, internship in British universities and summer work experience abroad. The abovementioned findings suggest that by the time of the research the participants had already gained an ample experience in learning English as well as in real-life communication in the target language. However, despite their considerable English-speaking experience, the majority of the students assessed their level of English as upper-intermediate (53%), whereas

some of them considered themselves advanced speakers of English (30%), intermediate (14%) and proficient ones (3%).

The fourth question was designed to find out the students' knowledge and awareness of modal verbs. The majority of the students claimed that they had already been familiar with forms, meanings and functions of modal verbs (64%), but they felt the need to explore them in greater depth. The students' answer formed the basis for the lesson plans with greater focus on communicative tasks rather than on sentence-level drills and written exercises. The need for communicative tasks was also supported by the fact that 28 percent of the students indicated their confusion about the functions of modal verbs, claiming, however, that the forms and meanings were clear to them. Further, only 3 percent of the respondents claimed that they had a deep knowledge of forms, meanings and functions, whereas 5 percent indicated that they were familiar with forms, but mixed up their meanings (see Figure 3.1).

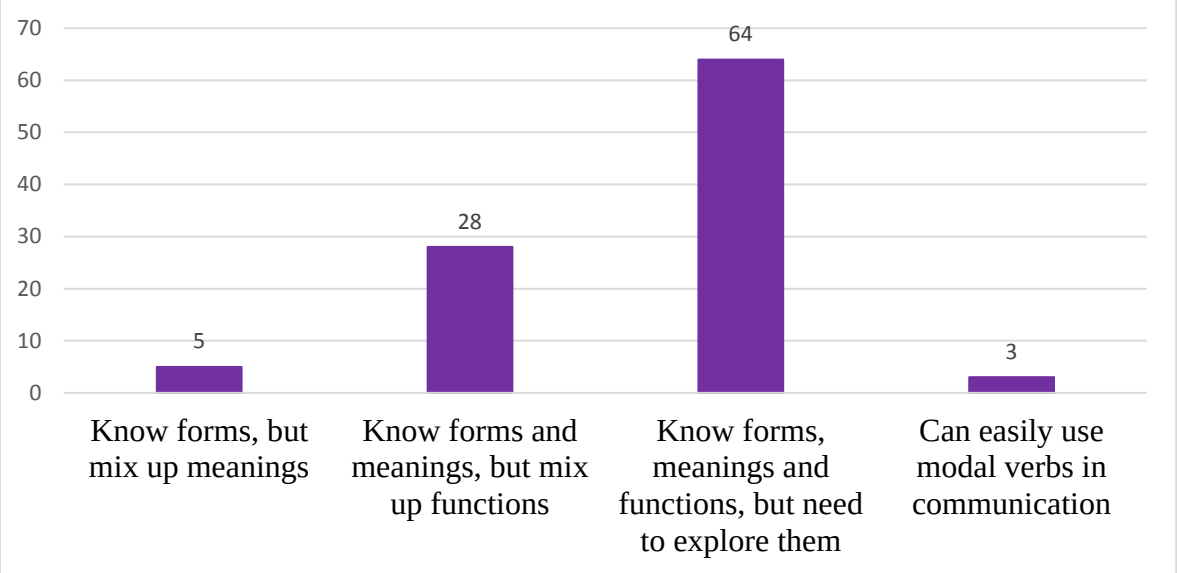

Figure 3.1. **The students' self-evaluation of the knowledge of modal verbs**

In the fifth question the students were asked to choose the statement, which best described their previous classroom experience. Most of the participants (42%) responded that they regularly did written grammatical exercises, 31percent of them claimed that the teacher gave explicit explanations of the rules, whereas only 17 percent indicated the participation in communicative tasks and 10 percent claimed to have been guessing the rules from the context (see Figure 3.2). These findings suggest that explicit written grammatical exercises and deductive approach discussed in the first chapter prevailed over communicative tasks and inductive approach in the students' experience, which will have future implications during the pilot-teaching sessions.

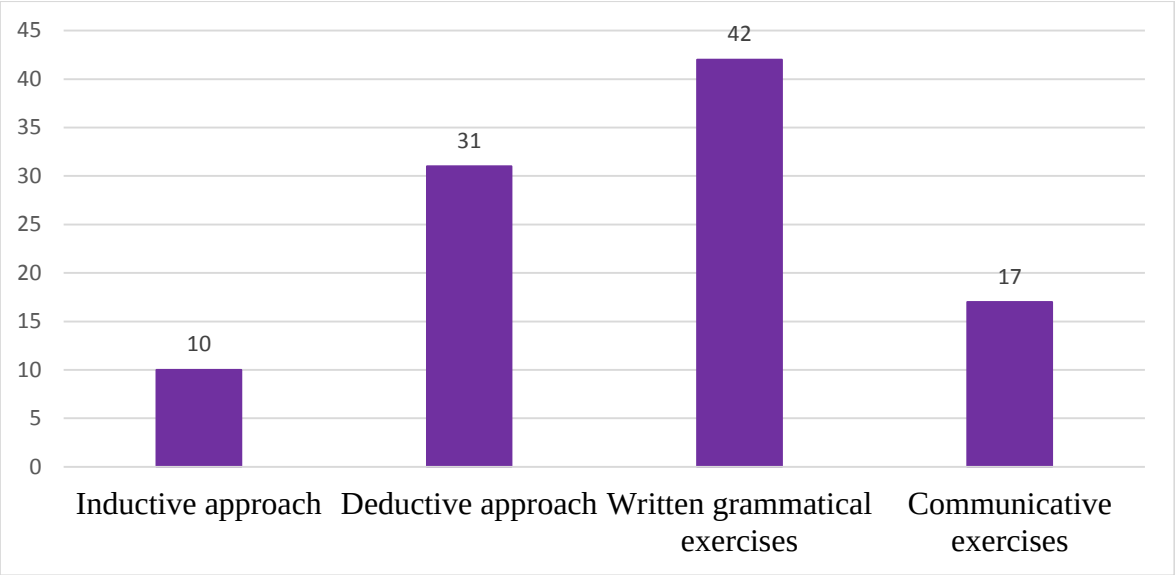

Figure 3.2. **The students' previous classroom experience**

The sixth question aimed at inferring types of activities the students engaged in at school. It was found out that most of them (60%) were completing fill-in-the-gaps exercises on a sentence-level, 23 percent of respondents experienced the completion of fill-in-the-gaps exercises on a text level, whereas only 9 percent did writing in context and 8 percent remembered participating in communicative tasks (see Figure 3.3). It could be concluded from the fifth and the sixth questions that the students mostly endured grammar-based approaches with the prevalence of written fill-in-the-gaps exercises on a sentence level – the reason why most of them admitted the need for deepening the knowledge of forms, meanings and functions of modal verbs and overall confusion about their functions.

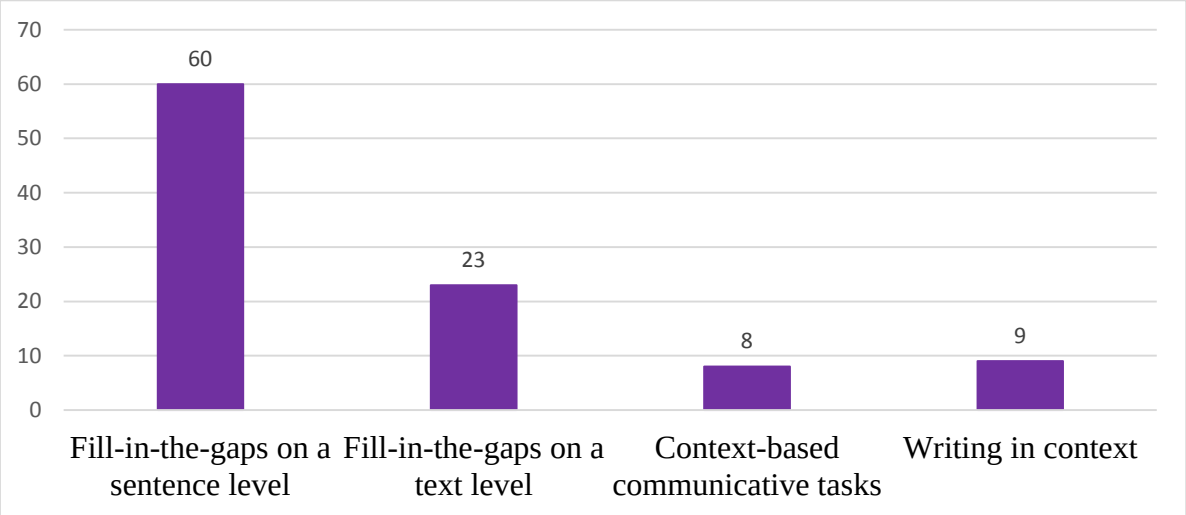

Figure 3.3. **Task types**

The seventh question dealt with the way the students worked in the classroom. The results show that the majority of the students completed tasks given by the teacher individually (63%), 25 percent mentioned teacher-class mode of instruction, whereas only 9

percent indicated pair work and 3 percent mentioned group work (see Figure 3.4). It could be noticed that the percentage of the students who claimed to have been completing fill-in-the-gaps exercises (60%) almost concur with the percentage of those who mentioned individual work (63%), which implies a vivid picture of the classroom situation the majority of the students experienced – explicit grammar instruction lacking in-class interaction with the peers.

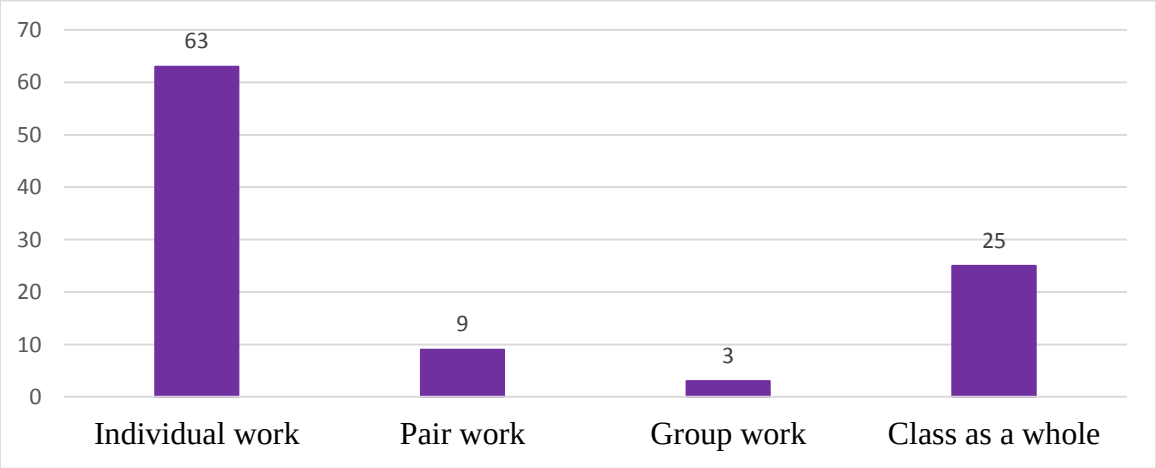

Figure 3.4. **Types of classroom procedures**

The eighth question gives insights into the way the students' knowledge had been tested. Most of the students (71%) indicated fill-in-the-gaps written exercises, equal number of the students (11%) mentioned both acting out of dialogues and retelling of grammar rules, whereas 7 percent of the respondents remembered speaking activities without preparation (see Figure 3.5) The conclusion could be drawn that the students did not have a chance to put their knowledge into practice, or in Savignon's words, form-focused exercises had not been integrated with meaning-focused experience – the essential feature of the CA discussed in the first chapter (Savignon, 2002: 7).

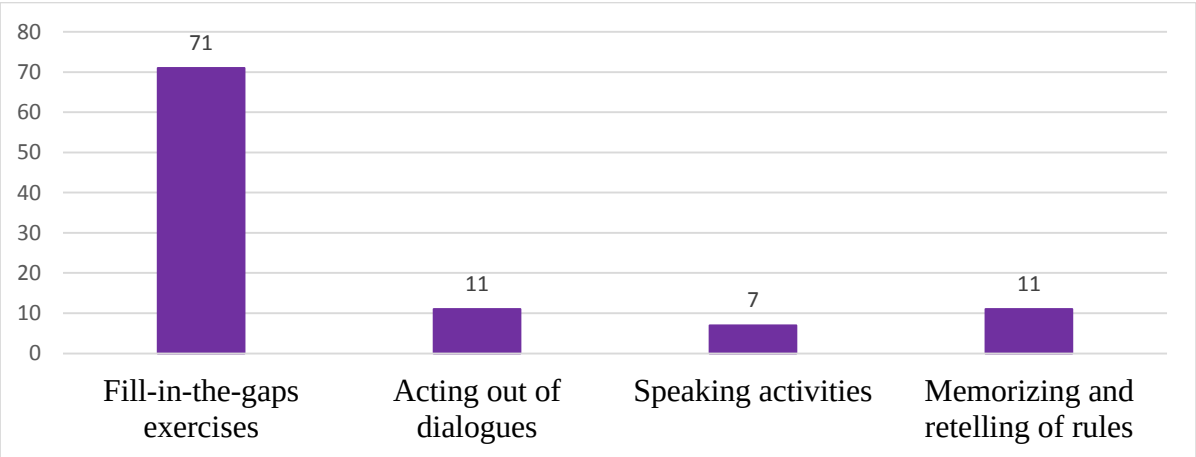

Figure 3.5. **Testing of modal verbs**

The last question was connected with the sources of input the students had been exposed to. Mostly, handouts with written grammatical exercises (42%) and grammar textbooks (29%) were mentioned by the students (see Figure 3.6), which makes one doubt that the source of input was sufficient to operate in the society.

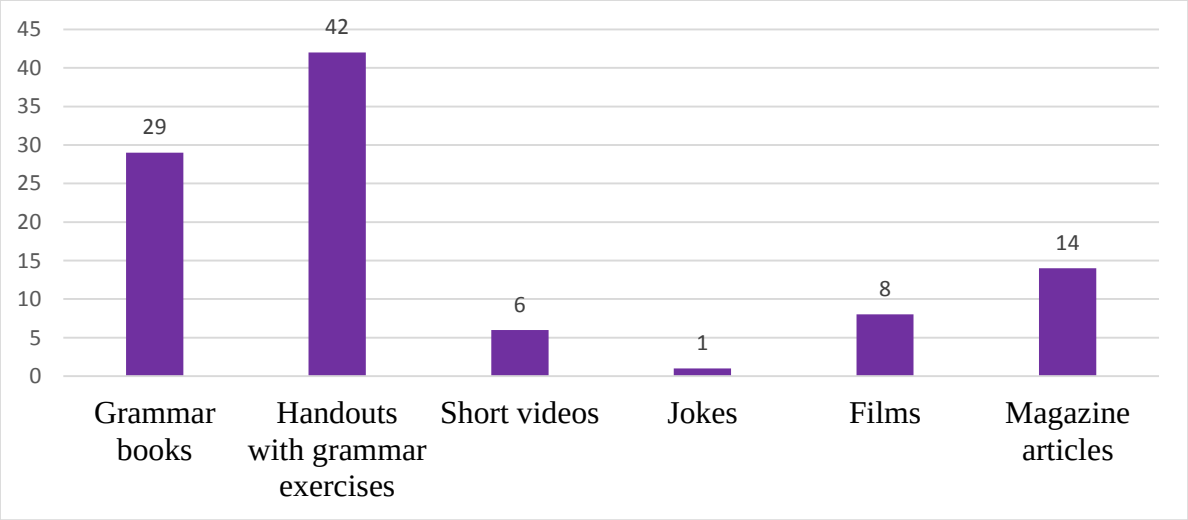

Figure 3.6. **Types of materials**

As seen from the findings of the questionnaire, the participants' previous learning experience lacked its essential feature – context-based instruction and in-class communication. The results of the pre-experimental questionnaire provided the basis for the pilot-teaching sessions, the aim of which was to compensate the lack of in-class interaction by applying context-based communicative tasks. The description of the pilot-teaching sessions is provided in the next section.

3.3.Quasi-experiment

The quasi-experiment was chosen as a research method for the pilot-teaching sessions. According to Cohen, the essential feature of experimental research is that 'investigators deliberately control and manipulate the conditions which determine the events in which they are interested, introduce the intervention and measure the difference that it makes' (Cohen, 2007: 272). Experimental research has the following experimental designs: 'true' experiment and quasi-experiment (ibid.). The characteristics of 'true' experiment include the following:

- one or more control groups;
- one or more experimental groups;
- random allocation to control and experimental groups;
- pre-test and post-test of the groups;
- one or more interventions to the experimental groups;

- isolation, control and manipulation of independent variables;
- non-communication between the control and experimental groups (ibid.).

However, if an experiment does not preserve all of the abovementioned features, then it is a quasi-experiment (ibid.).

As far as the present research is concerned, all the characteristics of 'true' experimental design were maintained, except for random allocation to control and experimental groups, which accounts for the chosen pre-test-post-test non-equivalent group design. By the time the research was undertaken, thirty five participants of the study had already been allocated to the three groups based on the results of school examination, whereby the first group – the strongest group – was a control one, whereas the second and the third groups – who scored less on the school examination – were experimental groups. The control group was taught modal verbs through explicit instruction of grammar rules and their further practice with written grammatical exercises, whereas the experimental groups received the same instruction, but with the additional application of communicative tasks. Thus, communicative tasks were the independent variable introduced to test the dependent variable, which is the effect of communicative tasks on the students' acquisition of modal verbs. It is important to mention that at the end of each class both control and experimental groups received follow-up homework that differed in content as well. The control group was asked to write out-of-context sentence-level utterances using modal verbs, whereas the experimental groups had to complete context-based written assignments connected with the topic of communicative tasks carried out in class to ensure consolidation of modal verbs.

During the research period one seminar of 25 minutes and 2 classes of 90 minutes were delivered to both control and each of the two experimental groups, in which there were 11 students of the control group, and 24 students of both experimental groups. The classes covered modal verbs of asking for permission, making polite requests, expressing ability, possibility, advisability, obligation, necessity, absence of obligation and necessity, deduction as well as specific use of will and would expressing habitual events, characteristics, certainty, willingness and refusal. It has already been mentioned that explicit grammar instruction and form-focused written exercises were applied to both control and experimental groups, since, as it was discussed in the first chapter, the development of communicative and grammatical competence within the CA does not disregard explicit grammar instruction, instead, it finds it effective providing that it is supported by meaning-focused expressions.

3.3.1. Communicative tasks applied in the pilot-teaching

In the pilot-teaching sessions, a number of communicative tasks were carried out with the experimental groups, the purpose of which was to foster the acquisition of modal verbs through in-class communication. Five communicative tasks were applied for this purpose, each of them will be described in terms of its type, advantages and disadvantages as well as the effect it cast on the students.

During the first 25-minute period of a class, the students were engaged in asking for permission and making polite requests task, imagining they had left a piece of stationery at home, and to ask their peers to lend them one (see Appendix 2). Asking for permission and making polite requests task is a two-way format task in Yule (1987) classification, communicative language practice task in Littlewood's (2004) one and first generation task according to Ribe and Vidal (1993)– all the classifications described in the second chapter. The advantage of this task was that the students were practicing ready-to-use chunks in the academic context. Moreover, they were able to differentiate formal and informal register of modal verbs – the ones used to address a peer, and the others to address the teacher. Some students benefited from the task in question, since they had not been aware of the difference in register of the modal verbs asking for permission and making polite requests. However, for the majority of the students the task was quite simple to complete, and they demonstrated a good knowledge of the modal verbs.

During the second 90-minutes class (see Appendix 3), two tasks were performed to train the usage of modal verbs of obligation, absence of obligation and prohibition.

In the first task (see Appendix 4), the students were divided into groups, and told that they represented an international company. To provide a clearer context and motivate the students, they were given a slip of paper with the company's logo printed on it. Then, they had to discuss in groups and establish rules of the company as well as describe employees' responsibilities. The business theme was chosen for the task in order to provide the context appropriate for the students majoring in Modern Languages and Business studies. At the end of the discussion, they were asked to make a brief presentation of the company they represented – state its name, rules and responsibilities to other groups. In Yule's (1987) classification, it is a two-way format task and the one that fosters collaboration to reach a common goal. In Littlewood's (2004) classification it is a pre-communicative language practice tasks, since the students were given pieces of paper with grammar tips on it. According to Ribe and Vidal (1993), it is a first generation task. While completing the task and discussing rules and responsibilities, the students got interested in the task, and generated

a great deal of vocabulary during the discussion. On the presentation stage, they were attentive to other groups' reports and had a chance to notice the usage of modal verbs. All in all, the task helped them to grasp the slight difference between such modal verbs of obligation as must, have, should and ought to. One of the disadvantages of the task was that, during the group discussion, the students tended to shift from English to their mother tongue, which was difficult to control. The shift to the mother tongue could threaten the effectiveness of the task in question.

In the second task (see Appendix 5), the students continued working in groups, and each group was given a text offering travel advice on rules of behaviour in a foreign country. After reading the text, they were supposed to report to other groups what was allowed or prohibited to do in the country they were reading about. At first, the students were asked to read the text and underline the modal verbs used in it. Then, they had to classify the information on a piece of paper into respective columns of what is allowed and prohibited. Finally, they were asked to present their findings and compare with other groups. The task in question resembles jigsaw reading task, since it asks different groups to read different texts on the same topic. However, unlike genuine jigsaw-reading task, the students do not read pieces of the same task. The reading part of the task represents non-communicative learning task in Littlewood's classification, for it allows to notice the grammatical forms prior to putting them into oral practice. Further, having received an amount of grammatical and lexical input, the students had an opportunity to transform it into intake, the process discussed in the first chapter, by communicating to the peers, comparing and discussing the information they had discovered, which makes it a two-way format information exchange task in Littlewood's classification. Like in the first task, the students got easily engaged and took interest in finding out information about the given country and sharing it with the others.

During the third 90-minutes class (see Appendix 6), two tasks were performed in order to practice modal verbs of deduction. In the first task (see Appendix 7) the students were shown pictures from which they had to guess what the people were doing or what was happening using modal verbs of deduction and corresponding infinitive forms. This task is a one-format task in Yule's classification and pre-communicative task in Littlewood's one, since pictorial hints were provided to support the students' utterances. In the second task (see Appendix 8) the students were told that the house was burgled, and they had to find the person who committed the crime. They were given strips of paper with clues from which they had to deduct the appearance of the burglar and the chain of events on the crime scene. This task is a closed-task in Yule's classification, and a genuine information-gap activity, which requires all the participants to reach a common goal. At the end of the task the two

experimental groups successfully completed the task indicating the burglar. However, the first experimental group experienced difficulties during the task connected with misunderstanding of the clues written on strips of paper, whereas the second experimental group became actively involved in the task and suggested witty and, at times, funny ideas on how the events unfolded on the crime scene.

3.4.Pre-test and post-test

Prior to the pilot-teaching sessions, the students' awareness of modal verbs was tested. In the pre-test the students were asked to respond to six different communicative situations adapted from Woodward's (1997) *Fun with Grammar. Communicative Activities for Azar Grammar Series*, the way they would respond to them in real-life oral context (see Appendix 9). Although the pre-test was held in written form, the very nature of the students' responses had also an 'oral' element in them. The students' answers were assessed and counted according to the following criteria:

- modal verbs were used correctly in the utterance;
- modal verbs were used incorrectly (functions of the modal verbs did not concur with the given situation or modal verbs were not used).

It is important to mention that in each of the given situations different wording and a variety of grammatical structures could be used and counted as correct ones as long as the response conveyed a clear meaning. However, in each of the situations the usage of a modal verb made the utterance more precise, natural and understandable, which is why, in the context of the present research, the responses lacking modal verbs were counted as incorrect.

The total amount of the students taking the pre-test was 35 – 11 students of the control group, and 24 students of both experimental groups.

As regards the control group, each utterance was assessed and counted according to the criteria provided above. The total amount of correct utterances would be 66 – the number that stands for 11 students, who used the modal verbs correctly in each of the 6 situations. However, the results show 27 instances of correct usage of modal verbs and 39 incorrect instances of using modal verbs (see Figure 3.7).

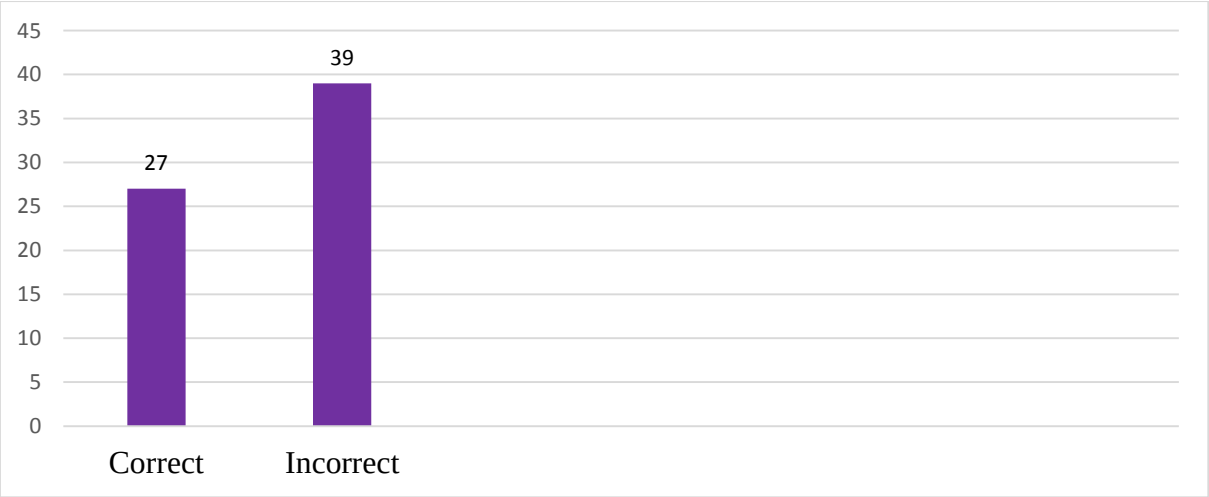

Figure 3.7. **Results of the control group's pre-test**

As to the experimental groups, the total amount of correct utterances would be 144. However, the results demonstrate 51 instances of correct usage and 93 instances of incorrect one (see Figure 3.8).

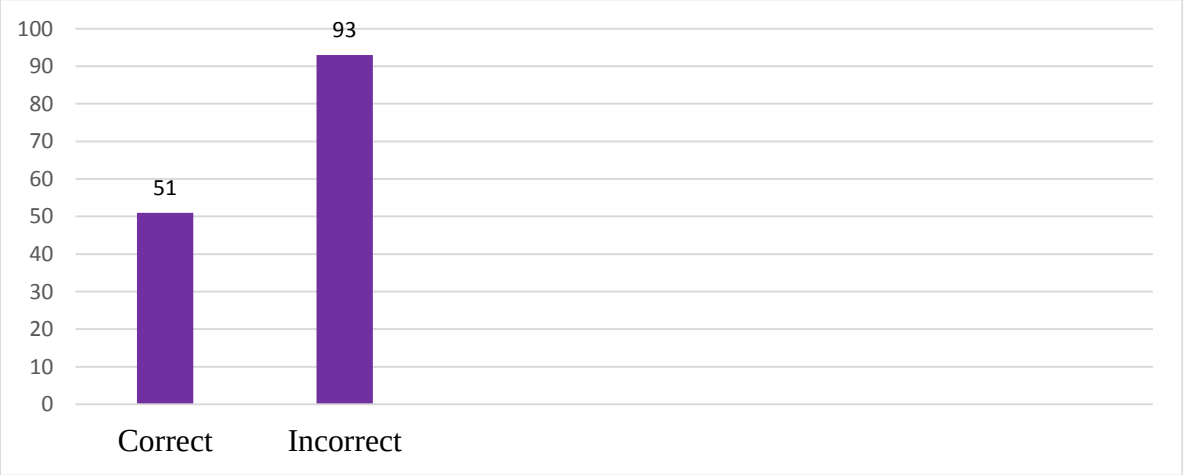

Figure 3.8. **Results of the experimental group's pre-test**

The results reveal that the number of incorrect instances of using modal verbs is higher than correct ones both in the control and experimental groups, which suggested that there was room for perfecting the students' knowledge and usage of modal verbs.

The post-test's content was similar to the one of the pre-test – the students had to respond to six communicative situations similar to those in the pre-test, whereas the criteria for assessment were the same (see Appendix 10). The number of the students taking the post-test was lower in comparison with the pre-test due to the students' natural inclination to skip classes. 10 students took the test in the control group (out of 11 in the pre-test) and 20 students of both experimental groups (out of 24 in the pre-test). This factor is significant, since it causes threat to the reliability of the results.

The results of the post-test show 46 instances of correct usage of modal verbs in the control group, whereas in 14 instances modal verbs were used inappropriately in their meaning and function out of 60 possible correct answers (see Figure 3.9).

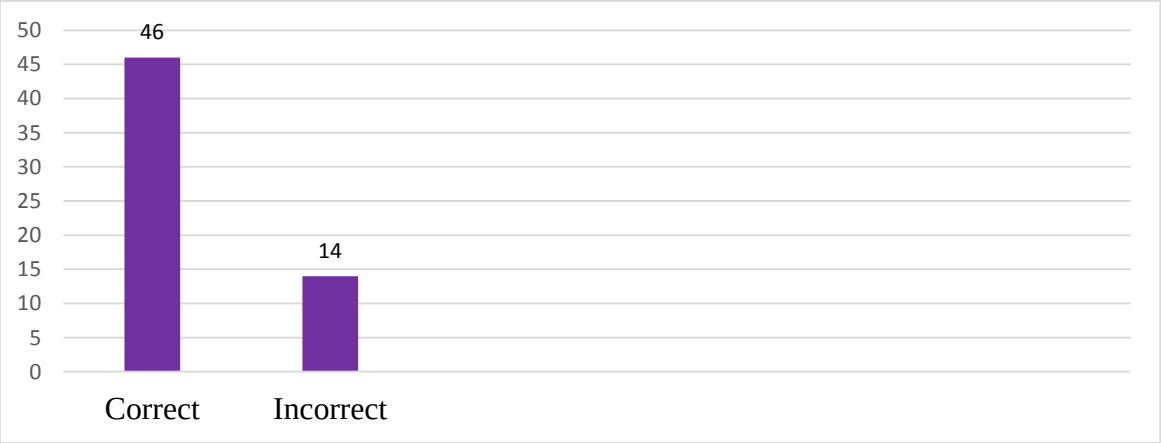

Figure 3.9. **Results of the control group's post-test**

In the experimental groups there were 86 instances of correct usage of modal verbs and 34 instances of incorrect one out of 120 possible correct utterances (see Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10. **Results of the experimental group's post-test**

Due to the fact that the number of participants in both control and experimental groups was uneven at the outset and significantly varied in pre-and post-tests (control group – 11 for the pre-test and 10 for post-test; experimental group – 24 for the pre-test and 20 for the post-test) the percentage of correct and incorrect answers for both the pre-test and post-test was calculated, which enabled to measure the performance of the whole group rather than of individual students, thereby ensuring higher reliability of the results. Thus, transferring the results of the pre- and post-tests to the percentage, the control group had 41percent of correct answers and 59 percent of incorrect instances of using modal verbs in the pre-test as opposed to 77percent of correct and 23percent of incorrect utterances in the post-test (see Figure 3.11).

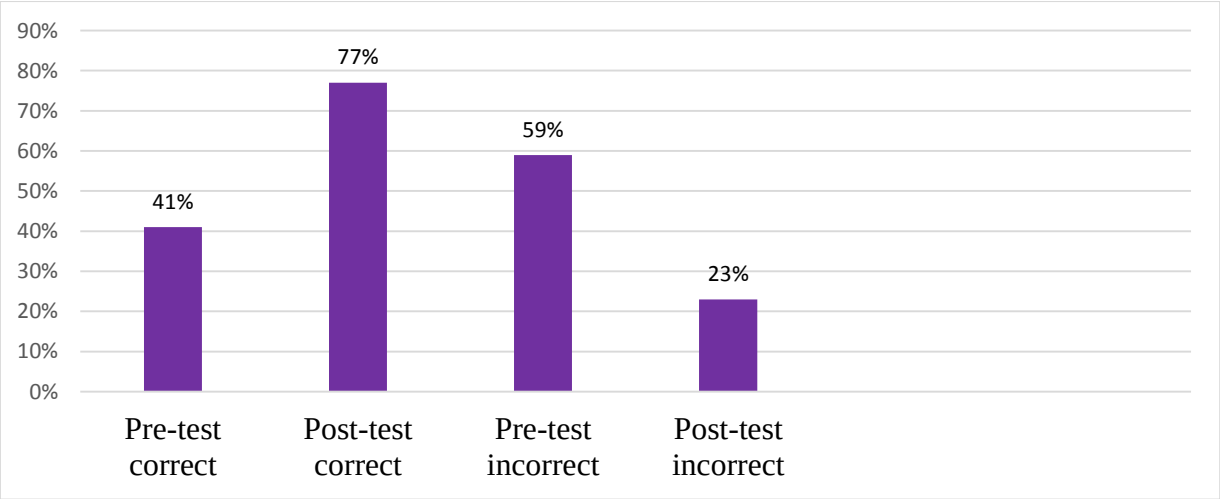

Figure 3.11. **Results of the control group's pre-test and post-test in percentage**

The experimental groups, on the contrary, demonstrated 35 percent of correct utterances and 65 percent of incorrect ones in the pre-test as opposed to 72 percent of correct and 28 percent incorrect utterances in the post-test (see Figure 3.12).

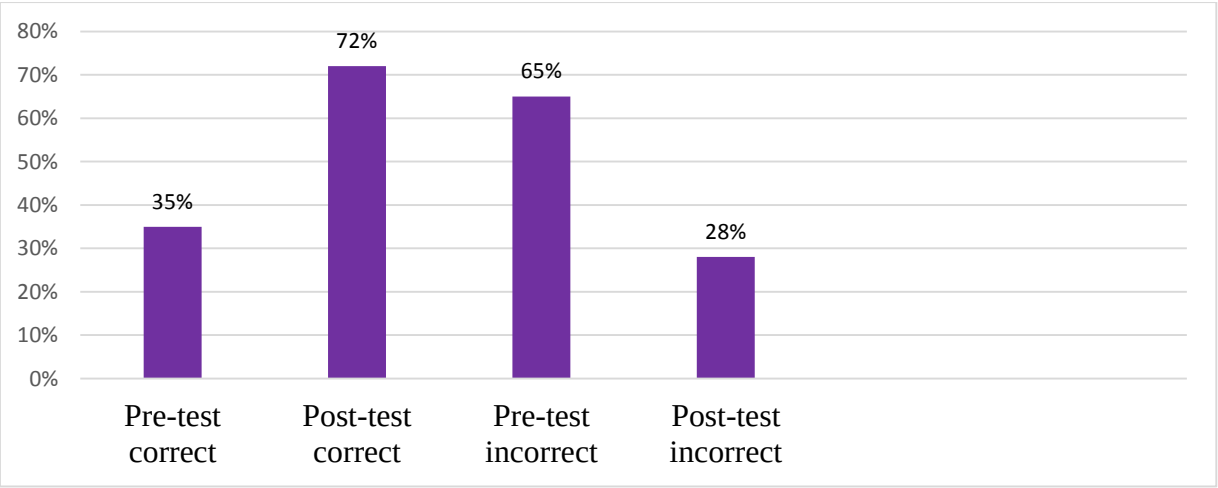

Figure 3.12. **Results of the experimental group's pre-test and post-test in percentage**

Further, to assess the effect of communicative tasks on the students' acquisition of modal verbs, the percentage increase of correct answers within each group was calculated and then compared with the other group. The percentage increase was calculated with the following formula:

$$T_{n(E)} = \frac{y_i - y_0}{y_0} \cdot 100\% .$$, where:

Y0 – the percentage of correct answers in the pre-test;

Yi – the percentage of correct answers in the post-test.

The calculations show that the percentage of correct answers of the experimental groups' post-test is 102.4 percent higher than the one of the pre-test, whereas the percentage of correct answers of the control group's post-test is 87.4 percent higher than the one of the

pre-test, which is 15 percent lower than the experimental groups. It has already been mentioned earlier in the chapter that the students of the control group, according to school examination, were more proficient in English than the students of the experimental groups. Moreover, taking into account that the results of the control group's pre-test were higher than the results of the experimental groups, it is crucial to point out that not only did the experimental groups catch up with the control group, but also demonstrated the percentage increase 15 percent higher than the control group (see Figure 3.13).

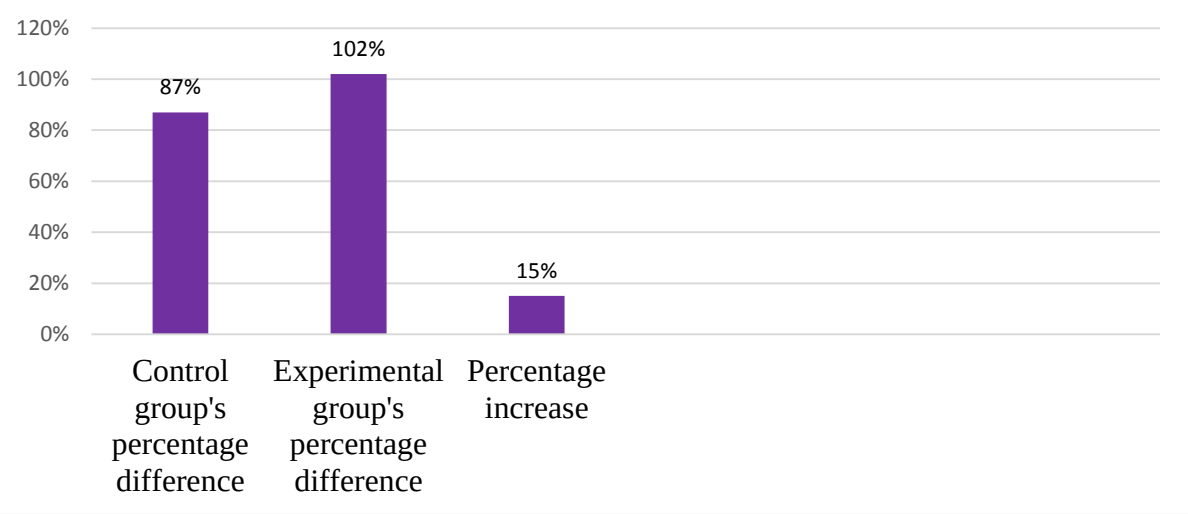

Figure 3.13. **Control and experimental groups' percentage difference and percentage increase**

Therefore, it could be concluded that the application of communicative tasks to teaching modal verbs had a positive impact on the students' acquisition and performance of modal verbs. At the end of the pilot-teaching sessions, the students demonstrate higher grammatical and functional accuracy in the post-test as compared with the results of the pre-test. Even though 15 percent is not so sharp a difference, it still proves the hypothesis that if students are engaged in context-based communicative practice in the classroom ensured by the application of communicative tasks, their usage of a grammatical form in question will become more accurate and automatic.

3.5.Final feedback questionnaire

At the end of the pilot-teaching sessions the final feedback questionnaire was distributed to both control and experimental groups, which aimed at asking the students' opinion on the effectiveness of communicative tasks (see Appendix 11, 12). Since the control and experimental groups received a different treatment, the control group was not asked to rate the effectiveness of communicative tasks on their performance, instead they were asked to share what types of activities could be added to the explicit teaching they received to make the

classes more productive and engaging. As to the experimental group, they were asked to indicate on a Likert scale the extent to which they agree or disagree that learning rules, doing written grammatical exercises and being engaged in communicative tasks had a positive impact on their performance. Further, they were asked to report which types of communicative tasks they found more useful.

The results of the control group's final questionnaire show that the tasks asking to describe pictures (5), read, analyse and report the information from a short text (5), role plays (6) and group discussion (4) could be added to the explicit teaching to deepen the understanding and practice the usage of modal verbs, which are the exact tasks implemented with the experimental groups (see Figure 3. 14).

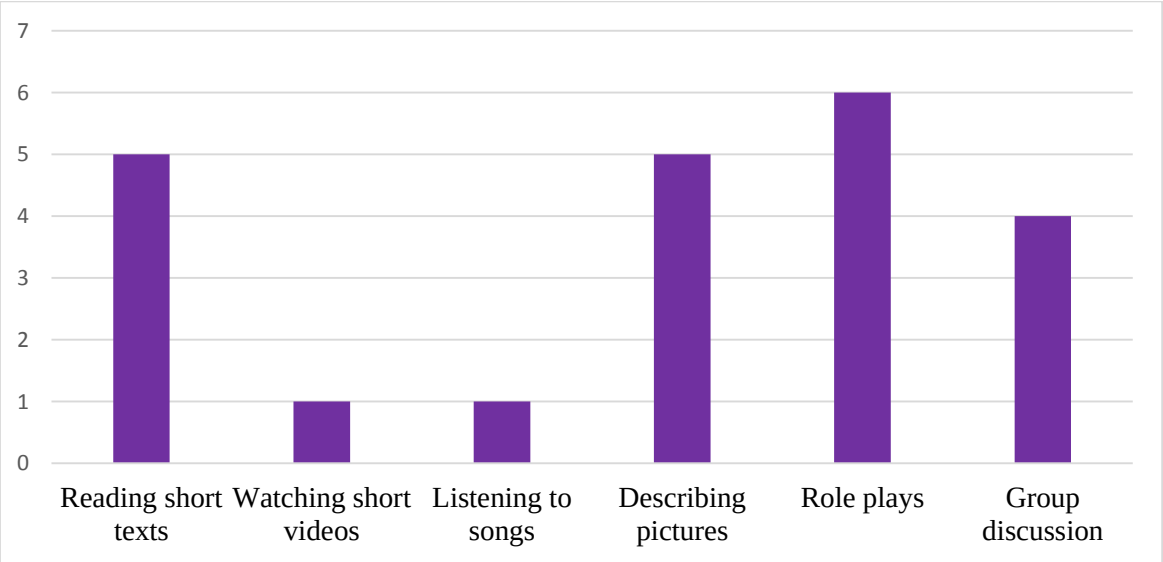

Figure 3.14. **Results of the control group's final questionnaire**

As far as the experimental groups are concerned, in the questionnaire they had to indicate the rate of agreement on a Likert scale, where strongly disagree was 0, strongly disagree – 1, agree – 2, unsure – 3, agree – 4 and strongly agree – 5. Further, the average amount of the results was calculated. The results show that the students demonstrated a unanimous agreement on the effectiveness of communicative tasks. However, they also indicated that learning rules and doing written grammatical exercises played an important part in acquiring and practicing the usage of modal verbs (see Figure 3.15).

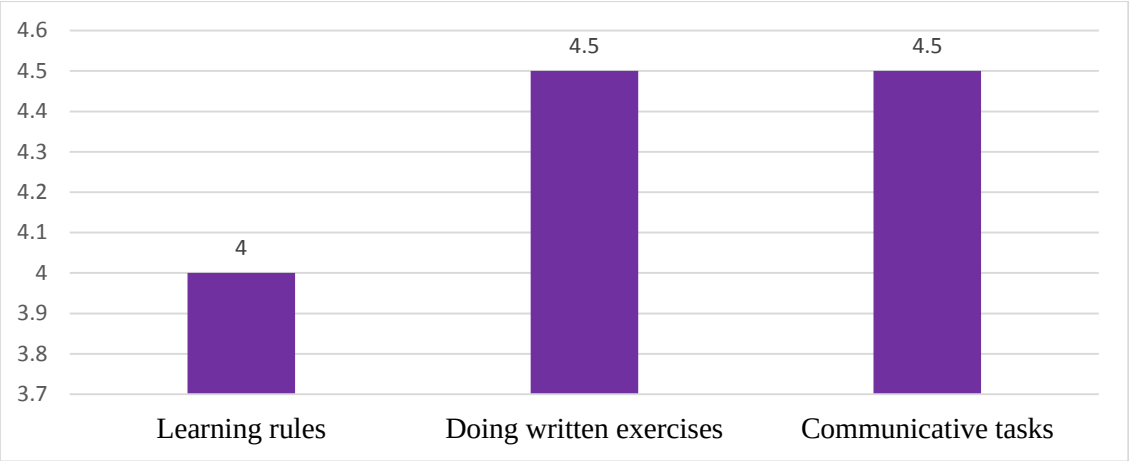

Figure 3.15. **Results of the experimental group's final questionnaire**

Therefore, the conclusion could be achieved that communicative tasks applied in the classroom were positively received by the students, who took real pleasure in them and provided a positive feedback on their application.

3.6.Limitations of the research

In the previous chapter the limitations of applying communicative tasks to teaching grammar have been discussed, which include the students' tendency to get carried away by the topic of discussion and relax their control over the usage of correct grammatical forms, tendency to acquire erroneous grammatical forms from each other and their reluctance to participate in communicative tasks. In the course of the research, only one of the abovementioned limitations discussed in the previous chapter was observed. Even though the topics for communicative tasks had been selected very carefully in accordance with the students' field of studies and age group, some students were reluctant to contribute to discussions and preferred to keep silent, which could lead to invalid and inappropriate results of the research. The students' reluctance to participate in the communicative tasks may partly be explained by the fact that, according to the results of the pre-experimental questionnaire, they lacked communicative experience at grammar classes at school. In order to avoid this limitation, the additional questionnaire aiming at discovering the students' interests ought to have been distributed prior to the pilot-teaching sessions, which would guarantee higher engagement in the tasks.

Further, other limitations were observed during the research. Firstly, as it has already been discussed earlier in the paper, the students' attendance at grammar classes was not stable, and the number of the students taking the pre-test and post-test significantly varied, which is a considerable threat to the reliability of the research. Secondly, it was also noticed

that while engaging in communicative tasks, the students tended to switch to their mother tongues, which could affect proper acquisition of modal verbs and undermine the effectiveness of communicative tasks. Finally, one of the significant limitations is the researcher's lack of previous teaching experience with adults, whereby not all the communicative tasks were carried out as successfully as it was expected.

Another significiat limitation concerns the time allocated for the pilot-teaching sessions, which was not enough to cover all the structural and functional variety of modal verbs, and carry out more challenging types of communicative tasks, such as, role plays. The limitiation in question could be taken into account for replicating the current research over longer period of time.

Conclusions

Learning English grammar is a serious undertaking requiring conscious effort and complete dedication from both teachers and learners. Moreover, in addition to determination and decisiveness to acquire solid knowledge of grammar, useful approaches, methods and tasks ought to be selected or developed depending on the grammatical structure to be taught and in accordance with learners' needs, age, level of proficiency, individual characteristics and educational background. Keeping in mind all these constituents of a learning process and introducing them in the classroom is a challenging and, at the same time, rewarding job, which eventually brings desired results providing that the learning process is productive, engaging and aims at teaching communication through communication.

Thus, the current Master Thesis dealt with the problem of learners' failure to demonstrate accurate and effective usage of modal verbs in real-life spoken communication due to inadequacy or, at times, lack of communicative practice at grammar classes and the prevalence of explicit sentence-level instruction. Furthermore, the goal of the Master Thesis was to explore whether the application of communicative tasks to teaching modal verbs could foster the acquisition of modal verbs and contribute to their accurate usage in the context of real-life spoken communication. The objectives stated at the beginning of the research involved exploring the Communicative Approach as the one from which communicative tasks came into being, and placing it in the wider context of traditional approaches to grammar instruction; researching into the concept of *task*; defining *communicative task;* carrying out the pilot-teaching with the application of communicative tasks in the classroom and comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test to measure learners' achievement at the end of the research.

At the initial step of the research, the participants reported in the pre-experimental questionnaire that they felt unsure about their ability to use modal verbs correctly in real-life spoken communication, which could be explained by the explicit grammar instruction they experienced at school and lack of communicative practice accounted for by the prevalence of individual work over pair work or group work, and of sentence-level instruction over studying grammar in context. The results of the questionnaire were then taken as a starting point to design communicative tasks and bring communicative practice to traditional methods of grammar instruction. Five communicative tasks of different types were designed keeping in mind learners' level of proficiency, the importance of language input as well as the crucial step of noticing a grammatical feature in context prior to its usage in speech.

During the pilot-teaching sessions the communicative tasks were implemented with the experimental group. The students' increasing interest and motivation in studying modal verbs were observed in class, which further resulted in their successful performance on the post-test. It was observed that the students from the experimental group, who, based on school examination results, had lower level of English, demonstrated the most noticeable difference in test results before and after experiencing the communicative tasks – the achievement by 15 percent higher than the one of the control group.

Further, in the final feedback questionnaire the students unanimously agreed on the effect the communicative tasks produced on their mastery of modal verbs. However, the students also indicated that the explicit teaching of modal verbs provided by the teacher as well as learning rules and doing written grammatical exercises were also of paramount importance on their way to acquiring modal verbs. Therefore, in the course of the research, the hypothesis of the current Master Thesis, which claimed that if students are engaged in context-based communicative practice in the classroom ensured by the application of communicative tasks, the students' usage of a grammatical form in question in real-life spoken communication will become more accurate and automatic, was confirmed. The conclusion is reached that the application of communicative tasks at grammar classes foster the acquisition of modal verbs by bringing the context, in which modal verbs' meanings and functions may be consolidated more effectively. In addition, it is important to mention that communicative tasks had better be applied at the final steps of acquiring a grammatical structure, preceded by explicit teaching of modal verbs and meticulous analysis of their shades of meaning and register.

As far as the further research is concerned, teaching modal verbs with corpus could be explored, since corpora record authentic instances of written and spoken communication and represent a powerful resource in analysing how, when and under what circumstances modal verbs are used in real-life setting. In addition, in the current research, the students' performance, due to time limits, was measured with written tasks, which, although having an 'oral' element in them, could not possibly reflect spontaneous responses. Therefore, measuring the effectiveness of communicative tasks by audio- or video-recording of the students' participation in role-plays before and after the intervention may also be undertaken by the researchers.

Theses

1. The inadequacies of grammar-based approaches led to the emergence of the communication-based approaches, which hold that 'knowing a language is more than knowing its grammar'.
2. The inclusion of *modality* in the list of communicative functions of the very first CA document proves that modal verbs represent a distinct class of grammatical structures that has to be taught with greater focus on meaning and function in a given communicative context rather than on a sentence level.
3. Functions which modal verbs express form the very purpose the language is used for, which is why they should be primarily taught through communication.
4. By integrating form-focused exercises with meaning-focused experience during grammar classes, teachers would assist their learners to cope with structural multiplicity and functional variety of modal verbs simultaneously developing their ability to communicate.
5. Grammar plays not subsidiary, as was mistakenly argued, but supportive role, ensuring a solid structural framework for creating meaningful communicative utterances, which requires grammar instruction be integrated with communication.
6. Not all types of communicative tasks may be applied in grammar classroom, since only a limited number of them are beneficial for further development of grammatical competence, whereas most of the tasks aim at developing fluency and overall proficiency.
7. Communicative tasks should play a role of supportive element to written grammatical exercises and be introduced at the final stage of the acquisition of a grammatical form, and sequenced accordingly at the end of a class or a textbook unit.
8. The participants' previous learning experience lacked its essential feature – context-based instruction and in-class communication.
9. The application of communicative tasks to teaching modal verbs had a positive impact on the students' acquisition and performance of modal verbs, and contributed to more accurate usage of forms, meanings and functions of modal verbs in the context of real-life spoken communication.
10. The students unanimously agreed on the effectiveness of communicative tasks on their mastery of modal verbs.

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Appendix 1

Pre- Experimental Questionnaire

Dear students,

Would you be so kind as to fill in the following questionnaire?

The aim of the questionnaire is to find out the way you were taught English modal verbs.

The results of the questionnaire are guaranteed to be strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of Master's thesis research.

The questionnaire is completely anonymous.

For each question, please highlight the relevant answer.

1. **How long have you been studying English?**

a) Since kindergarten
b) Since the first grade of school
c) Since the fifth grade of school
d) Since high school
e) Other (*please, specify*)

_____

2. **Where had you studied English before you entered the university?** (*More than one answer is possible*)

a) At ordinary school
b) At school majoring in English
c) At language centers
d) Private tutoring
e) Language schools abroad
f) Language camps abroad
g) Other (*please, specify*)

_____

3. **How would you assess your level of English on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) scale?** (*only one answer is possible*)

a) B1 (intermediate)
b) B2 (upper-intermediate)
c) C1 (advanced)
d) C2 (proficiency)
e)

4. **Choose the sentence which is most applicable to you**
    a) I know forms of modal verbs, but I mix up their meanings
    b) I know forms of modal verbs and I can differentiate their meanings, but I am confused about their functions
    c) I know basic forms, meanings and functions of modal verbs, but I still need to explore them in greater depth
    d) Forms, meanings and functions of modal verbs are crystal clear to me and I can easily use them in real-life communication

5. **Choose the sentence which best describes your previous classroom experience** *(more than one answer is possible)*

a) The teacher clearly explained the rule about modals
b) We had to guess the rule ourselves from the written texts or videos provided by the teacher
c) We did a lot of written grammatical exercises
d) We often had to talk with each other to practice modal verbs

6. **What types of activities do you remember doing most of the time in the English classes?** (*choose only one activity that you remember most*)

a) I had to put the correct modal form in a sentence
b) I had to choose the correct modal verb from a number of similar modals and complete a text with them
c) I had to engage in a number of situations with my classmates (e.g. predicting the weather for today, asking for parents' permission to go on a tour, etc.)
d) I had to write different kinds of letters – to a friend, to a head teacher, to an exchange program coordinator, etc.)
e) Other (please specify)

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. **Choose the sentence which best describes your previous classroom experience**

Mostly, …

a) I completed tasks given by the teacher on my own
b) I completed tasks given by the teacher with my peer
c) The teacher would put us in a group of three to five people to complete tasks
d) The whole class actively participated in the completion of tasks

8. **How was your knowledge of modal verbs tested?** *(More than one answer is possible)*

a) We took written tests, in which we inserted the correct form or chose one from a number of forms
b) We made up dialogues and then read them out/acted them out
c) We talked to each other without prior preparation
d) We had to memorize the rule and retell it to the teacher

9. **Indicate the materials you used to study modal verbs** *(more than one answer is possible)*

a) Grammar books
b) Handouts with grammar exercises
c) Short videos
d) Jokes
e) Films
f) Magazine articles
g) BBC podcasts
h) Weather forecasts
i) Video advertisements

Other (*please, specify*)_____

Many thanks for your answers and cooperation!

Appendix 2

Lesson Plan of Class 1

Level: Advanced

Form/Year of the students: 1st year Modern Languages and Business Studies BSP students;

Course: English Communicative Grammar I Valo1510.

Length of the lesson: 25 min

Aim of the lesson:

1. To introduce the students to the concept of modality and modal verbs.

Prior knowledge:

1. students have studied all the tenses (present, past and future);
2. students are familiar with the passive form;
3. students have studied causative structure have something done.

Objectives of the lesson:

1. to deepen the students' knowledge of a variety of modal forms and expressions;
2. to clarify the usage of infinitive types with modal verbs;
3. to introduce the functions of *asking for permission* and *making polite requests*;
4. to differentiate formal and informal register of modal verbs *can, could, may, might* in asking for permission and making polite requests.
5. to carry out communicative tasks.

Activities: teacher-students interaction; group work; communicative tasks.

Preparation: overhead projector, ppt presentation

Procedure

Task/Theme	**Time**
1) Greeting; the goal of the lesson	1 min.
2) Introducing the concept of modality; introducing modal verbs and expressions (Appendix 1, slides 2, 3, 4).	10 min
3) Explaining the function *asking for permission* and *making polite requests*	5 min
4) Practice. Communicative task 1 Students are told that they had forgotten a piece of stationary at home. They are asked to make a polite request or ask a person next to them for permission to borrow a piece of stationery.	5 min

Brief comments (in 1-2 sentences): students can be reluctant to work in pairs and contribute to the discussion.

Next lesson: Modal verbs of ability, possibility, advisability, obligation, necessity, absence of obligation, lack of necessity.

Appendix 3

Lesson Plan of Class 2

Level: Advanced

Form/Year of the students: 1st year Modern Languages and Business Studies BSP students;

Course: English Communicative Grammar I Valo1510.

Length of the lesson: 90 min

Aim of the lesson:

1. to deepen students' knowledge of modal verbs expressing ability, possibility, advisability, obligation, necessity, absence of obligation and necessity as well as particular uses of the verb *dare*;

Prior knowledge:

1. students are expected to be familiar with basic functions of modal verbs;
2. students were given a brief theoretical introduction to modal verbs;
3. students revised the usage of modal verbs in *asking for permission*.

Objectives of the lesson:

1. to check homework exercises asking students to support their answers;
2. to deepen students' knowledge of different ways of expressing ability, possibility, advisability, obligation, necessity, absence of obligation and necessity through engagement in context-based communicative tasks;
3. to deepen students' knowledge of formal and informal usage of the verbs expressing the aforementioned functions.

Activities: group work, reading

Preparation: overhead projector, ppt presentation, handouts.

Procedure

Task/Theme	**Time**
1) Greeting; the goal of the lesson	1 min.
2) Checking in short exercise 1 from homework.	5 min
3) Theory 1. Summarizing the rules from the theory on the different meanings of the verb *can*. T provides a comparative analysis of *can* expressing ability, possibility and stating the fact.	1 min
4) Practice. Task 1. T asks Ss to work in groups (depends on the number of Ss), gives handouts with written advertisements with different meanings of *can* and asks Ss to	10 min

put the advertisement slogans into three groups, where can expresses *ability, possibility, factual information.*	
5) Theory 2. Different ways to express ability, possibility, ability and possibility in the past, criticism. Checking exercises 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.	20 min
6) Theory 3. Revising modal verbs of obligation. T asks Ss to work in groups. Each group is a famous international company, in which one is a CEO, the others are employees. The CEO has to establish at least 5 rules for his/her employees, whereas the employees are asked to describe their everyday job responsibilities using *must, should/ought to, have to, need to, will need to*. When they finish discussing, each group is asked to announce the company's rules and responsibilities. The others are given check-lists so that they could fill it in while the group in question is speaking. In case students can't think of rules and responsibilities in the company, they are given lexical prompts.	20 min
7) Theory 4. Other ways to express obligation, modal verbs of prohibition, absence of obligation Ss continue working in groups to do task 3. Each group is given a text with instructions for travelers. They have to read the text, underline expressions of obligation, modal verbs of prohibition and absence of obligation, and report what they have found to the others.	20 min

Brief comments (in 1-2 sentences): students can be reluctant to work in pairs and contribute to the discussion.

Next lesson: Modal verbs of deduction, degree of certainty

Appendix 4

Class 2, Task 1

You represent an international company. Fill in the 1st column of the table – write the name of a company. CEO has to write at least 5 rules. Employees have to describe their job responsibilities.

Then, tell the group your company's rules and responsibilities.

Fill in the 2nd and the 3rd columns with the information presented by the other groups.

Name of a company	**Name of a company**	**Name of a company**
CEO's rules	**CEO's rules**	**CEO's rules**
Must … Should … Ought to …	Must … Should … Ought to …	Must … Should … Ought to …
Responsibilities	**Responsibilities**	**Responsibilities**
Have to… Need to… Will need to…	Have to… Need to… Will need to…	Have to… Need to… Will need to…

(Online 1)

Appendix 5

Class 2, Task 2

Italy – travel advice

Road travel

Private and hire cars are not allowed to enter the historic centre of many Italian cities without an official pass. To reduce pollution, the city authorities in Rome sometimes introduce traffic restrictions whereby vehicles with odd or even number plates are not allowed into a 'green area'.

Local laws

In the cities of Venice and Florence, you mustn't drop litter, otherwise you may be fined. In Florence it is not allowed to sit on steps/courtyards or to eat and drink in the immediate vicinity of the main churches and public buildings.

Entry requirements

European citizens don't need a visa to enter Italy. For more information about entry requirements, contact the Italian Embassy. Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay; you do not need any additional period of validity on your passport beyond this.

Portugal – travel advice

Road travel

As a tourist, you may not bring your own vehicle to Portugal for longer than a maximum of 183 days in any 12-month period. You must not use your vehicle for any other purpose than tourism or loan it to anyone else during that time. If you intend to stay longer, you must apply to the Portuguese Customs authority to have the car legally imported.

Terrorism

There is considered to be a heightened threat of terrorist attack globally from groups or individuals motivated by the conflict in Iraq and Syria. You should be vigilant at this time.

Local laws and customs

Gambling is only legal in establishments properly licensed by the government, like official casinos. If in doubt, you should ask whether the establishment you're entering is legally licensed.

Spain – travel advice

Safety and security

Most visits to Spain are trouble-free, but you should be alert to the existence of street crime, especially thieves using distraction techniques. If you have had belongings stolen, you will need to keep the report for insurance purposes.

Outdoor activities

You can't swim in the sea unless you there is a flag system on the beach. Before swimming, make sure you understand the system and follow any warnings (a red flag means you mustn't enter the water). You shouldn't swim in the sea if there are no life-guards, flags or signs.

Road travel

You are not allowed to drive unless you carry two red warning triangles in front of and behind the vehicle. Seat belts are required for all passengers in the front and back seats. Using an earpiece is prohibited but you're allowed to use a mobile phone with a completely hands-free unit.

Passport validity

Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay; you don't need any additional period of validity on your passport beyond this.

(Online 1)

Appendix 6

Lesson Plan of Class 3

Level: Advanced

Form/Year of the students: 1st year Modern Languages and Business Studies BSP students; (Experimental group)

Length of the lesson: 90 min

Aim of the lesson: to deepen the students' knowledge of modal verbs of deduction as well as of specific use of *will* and *would* expressing habitual events, characteristics, certainty, willingness and refusal.

Prior knowledge:

1. Students have read theory of modal verbs expressing deduction, habitual events, characteristics, certainty, willingness and refusal;
2. Students are expected to have a basic knowledge of modal verbs of deduction;
3. Students are familiar with present simple tense to talk about habitual events;
4. Students have learnt modal verbs expressing ability, possibility, advisability, obligation, absence of obligation and necessity, prohibition, requests.

Objectives of the lesson:

1. To deepen the knowledge of modal verbs of deduction with simple, continuous, perfect and perfect continuous infinitives;
2. To practice the use of modal verbs of deduction with simple, continuous and perfect infinitives with the help of communicative tasks;
3. To train the usage of the verbs *will* and *would* expressing certainty and expectations about present, past and future events as well as habitual events and criticism;
4. To check homework exercises 1, 2, 3, 4, 6;

Activities: grammatical exercises, discussion, group work

Preparation: overhead projector, ppt presentation, handouts in the form of cards with clues (20).

Procedure

Task/Theme	**Time**
1) Greeting; the goal of the lesson	1 min.
2) Eliciting what has been studied last time. Quiz.	6 min.
3) Theory: modal verbs of deduction + simple infinitive. The teacher (T) explains what a deduction is and elicits which modal verbs are used to express it.	3 min

4) Practice: exercise 1. The Ss read the sentences, indicate modal verbs of deduction and determine the degree of certainty. Discuss the answers.	3 min
5) Practice: exercise 2. The Ss are shown the sentences taken from their homework exercises. They are asked to fill in the gaps with the correct form of modal verb of deduction + simple infinitive and account for their choice.	5 min
6) Theory: modal verbs of deduction + continuous infinitive. The T explains the difference between the usage of modal verbs + simple infinitive and the one + continuous infinitive. She stresses that the degree of certainty is exactly the same; however the emphasis is on the duration of an action.	3 min
7) Practice: exercise 3. The Ss are shown the sentences taken from their homework exercises. They are asked to fill in the gaps with the correct form of modal verb of deduction + continuous infinitive and account for their choice.	5 min
8) Practice: task 1. The Ss are shown the pictures on the screen. They are asked to deduct who is in the picture and what he/she is doing using modal verbs of deduction + simple or continuous infinitive	8 min
9) Theory: modal verbs of deduction + perfect and perfect continuous infinitives. The T continues explaining modal verbs of deduction, specifying their use with perfect infinitive.	3 min
10) Practice: exercise 4. The Ss are shown the sentences taken from their homework exercises. They are asked to fill in the gaps with the correct form of modal verb of deduction + perfect infinitive and account for their choice.	5 min
11) Practice: a group information gap activity “Solving a crime” to practice modals of deduction with perfect and perfect continuous infinitives Students are given a set of clue cards to determine who burgled a house.	20 min
12) Theory: Logical deduction for future time, expressing expectation The T elicits the rules as to how to express logical deduction for future	3 min

time and expectation.	
13) Practice: exercise 5.	3 min
14) Checking the rest of homework exercises.	25 min
15) Finishing the lesson, giving homework	3 min

Brief comments (in 1-2 sentences): Students might get shy and won't be able to contribute to discussions. It can also be difficult to elicit rules or explanations to the rules from them.

Next lesson: next time they will be doing a self-test on all the functions of modal verbs.

Appendix 7

Class 3, Task 1

Task 1

How many deductions can you make about this photo?
(use modal verbs + simple and continuous infinitives)

He must be a chef – 95% certain

He can't be/couldn't be a teacher – 99% certain

He could be writing a cook book – 50% certain or less

Task 1 (cont.)

They must be in love
They can't be fighting
They could be brother and sister

Must be – 95%
Can't be – 99%
May/might/could – 50% or less
May not/might not – 50% or less

Task 1 (cont.)

It must be a film
They might be sisters
They could be gossiping

Task 1 (cont.)

They must be shooting a film
They can't be ordinary people
They could be famous

Appendix 8

Class 3, Task 2
Evidence Cards for Information Gap Activity 'Solving a Crime'

The window was broken, but the door was locked.	A small piece of blue material was found by the window.	There was blood on the broken window.	There were large muddy footprints on the floor.
There was a large vase on the mantelpiece. It is not there any more.	There was a large painting on the wall. It is not there any more.	Painting was the only item missing.	There were pieces of broken china on the floor.
There was a Paris metro ticket on the floor.	There was a handkerchief on the floor.	There were no fingerprints.	There were tyre marks on the ground outside.
There was a magnifying glass on the mantelpiece.	There was a mobile phone with lots of Paris numbers.	There was a text message on the phone saying, 'How was the football? When will you be home?'	The text message was sent at 7.00pm.
Some red paint was found on the gate to the driveway.	A red Citroën car was seen driving very fast towards Dover at about 8pm.	You can catch a car ferry from Dover to France.	The police checked the ferries to France between 10pm and midnight. They did not find a red Citroën car.

(Online 2)

Appendix 9

Pre-test

Read the situations below and provide only one response to each of them.

1. You are at a business meeting. It is boiling hot in the room. Make a polite request to open the window.
2. Write down in full sentence one thing that is necessary for you to do this week.
3. One of your friends is homesick. Make a possible suggestion to help him/her.
4. One of your friends went jogging on the beach and lost his/her car keys. Tell him/her it was a mistake to have the keys in his/her pocket.
5. Your favorite group mate isn't in class today. You are 50 percent sure you know the reason. Tell your teacher why she/he is absent.
6. You are 90 percent sure your friend will do well on the midterm exam. Tell him/her.

Adapted from Woodward, 1997.

Appendix 10

Post-test

Read the situations below and provide only one response to each of them.

1. You have failed a grammar test. Ask your professor for permission to retake it.

2. You have a friend who is complaining about strict deadlines at university. Give her a piece of advice on how to manage study time.

3. Your friend would like to study at the University of Latvia. Tell him/her about the university rules.
4. Your friend would like to study at the University of Latvia. Tell him/her about students' responsibilities.

5. You work for the Tourist Information Centre in Riga. Your boss asked you to write down a list of rules of behaviour in Latvia for a travel brochure.

6. You work for the Tourist Information Centre in Riga. Your boss asked you to write down a list of possible leisure time activities in Riga for a travel brochure.

Adapted from Woodward, S. (1997) *Fun with Grammar. Communicative Activities for Azar Grammar Series*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents

Appendix 11

Final Questionnaire for the Control Group

Dear students,

Would you be so kind as to fill in the following questionnaire?

The aim of the questionnaire is to ask for your opinion on the delivery of classes in modal verbs.

The results of the questionnaire are guaranteed to be strictly confidential and will only be used for the purpose of research.

The questionnaire is anonymous.

Part 1. Please, highlight a corresponding box for each statement.

1. Reading the theory provided by the teacher was sufficient for me to complete written exercises.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

2. The amount of written exercises was sufficient for me to master the usage of modal verbs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

3. Learning rules of modal verbs was sufficient for me to understand the topic.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

4. Doing written exercises helped me understand how to use modal verbs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

Part 2. Please, highlight an appropriate answer.

1. In your opinion, which activities could be added to make a class more productive and engaging? (*more than one answer is possible*)
    a) Reading short texts in groups and analysing the usage of modal verbs found in the text;
    b) Watching short excerpts from films and analysing situations in which characters use modal verbs;
    c) Listening to songs and analysing the usage of modals in the lyrics;
    d) Describing pictures using modal verbs;
    e) Engaging in role plays (e.g. students in groups are investigators who are solving a crime; students in groups are employers and employees who think up rules and responsibilities, etc.);
    f) Group discussions to practice the usage of modal verbs;
    g) Other(please,specify)_____

2. Did you use additional materials to study modal verbs?
    a) Yes
    b) No, I only used the theory provided by the teacher

3. (*only if the answer to the previous question is yes*) Which additional materials did you use to deepen your understanding of modal verbs?
    a) Internet articles explaining the rules of modal verbs;
    b) Video lessons found on the internet;
    c) Grammar books I studied at school;
    d) Notes from school;
    e) Grammar books found at university library;
    f) Other (please, specify)_____

Thank you for your cooperation!

Wish you all the best in life☺

Appendix 12

Final Questionnaire for the Experimental Group

Dear students,

Would you be so kind as to fill in the following questionnaire?

The aim of the questionnaire is to ask for your opinion on the delivery of classes in modal verbs.

The results of the questionnaire are guaranteed to be strictly confidential and will only be used for the purpose of research.

The questionnaire is anonymous.

Part 1. Please, highlight a corresponding box for each statement.

1. Reading the theory provided by the teacher was sufficient for me to complete written exercises.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

2. The amount of written exercises was sufficient for me to master the usage of modal verbs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

3. Learning rules of modal verbs was sufficient for me to understand the topic.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

4. Doing written exercises helped me understand how to use modal verbs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

5. Engaging in speaking tasks in class (e.g. solving a crime, describing pictures, talking about company's rules and regulations) helped me understand how to use modal verbs.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree

Part 2. Please, highlight an appropriate answer.

6. Which of the following tasks were the most useful for practicing the usage of modal verbs? (*more than one answer is possible*)

a) Written grammatical exercises given for homework;
b) Writing a letter to a friend and making a list of rules for air travelers;
c) Reading advertisements in groups and analysing different functions of modal verb *can*;
d) Making a list of company's rules and employees' responsibilities;
e) Reading texts about countries' rules and regulations and analysing modal verbs found in the text;
f) Describing pictures using modal verbs of deduction;
g) Solving a crime.

7. Which of the following tasks did you like most? (*more than one answer is possible*)

a) Written grammatical exercises given for homework;
b) Writing a letter to a friend and making a list of rules for air travelers;
c) Reading advertisements in groups and analysing different functions of modal verb *can*;
d) Making a list of company's rules and employees' responsibilities;
e) Reading texts about countries' rules and regulations and analysing modal verbs found in the text;
f) Describing pictures using modal verbs of deduction;
g) Solving a crime.

8. Did you use additional materials to study modal verbs?

c) Yes
d) No, I only used the theory provided by the teacher

9. (*only if the answer to the previous question is yes*) Which additional materials did you use to deepen your understanding of modal verbs?

a) Articles found on the Internet explaining the rules of modal verbs;
b) Video lessons found on the internet;
c) Grammar books I studied at school;
d) Notes from school;
e) Grammar books found at university library;
f) Other (please, specify)_____

Thank you for your cooperation!

Wish you all the best in life☺