

Communicative grammar tasks: Language use and students' preferences

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In this study I investigate the effectiveness of two communicative grammar tasks. I examine the tasks in terms of the language use and I determine the students' preferences regarding them. One of the communicative grammar tasks was designed to elicit the use of prepositions and the other was designed to elicit the use of relative clauses.

Two groups of students participated in this study: native speakers from different various fields of study and non-native speakers (from two proficiency levels) enrolled in an Intensive English Orientation Program. Both groups performed the two tasks and the frequencies of the targeted structures were compared to the results of a corpus-based study of a face to face conversation. A comparison of results was also done among the two groups of participants. These comparisons were done in order to identify if the tasks naturally and to a reasonable extent elicit the use of the structures not only among the native but also the non-native participants. The non-native speakers also performed two traditional structure oriented exercises and completed a questionnaire where they expressed their preferences for the traditional activities or the communicative grammar tasks. This was done in order to determine the motivational appeal of the communicative grammar tasks.

The results obtained suggest that the two communicative grammar tasks used in this study are effective activities. In general, they elicited the targeted structures and the students chose them over the traditional exercises. However, there are differences among the groups

of participants. On the whole the tasks elicited the structures more with the native speakers, followed by the high level non-native speakers and finally by the intermediate level non-native speakers. As for the students' preferences, the communicative grammar tasks were chosen over the structure-oriented exercises, although the preferences were stronger for the high level students than for the intermediate level students.

Further research is necessary, however, in order to confirm the patterns obtained with these participants.

Communicative grammar tasks: Language use and students' preferences

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Teaching English as a Second Language/Applied Linguistics)

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2000

Graduate College
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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of
Felicidade Nogueira Coimbra Van Acker
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Aos meus pais,
Manuel e Angelina Coimbra

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the effectiveness of certain classroom activities regarding language use and motivational appeal. The activities in question are communicative grammar tasks, a current direction in applied linguistics research. These tasks are recommended for classroom use because they allow the integration of communication and focus on form, which according to research, are both instrumental for second language acquisition.

Importance of the study

My interest in the design of communicative grammar tasks derives from my experience as a foreign language learner and as a language teacher. As a student I experienced traditional grammar instruction and communicative activities and I have recognized the benefits of both. I believe that explicit grammar teaching has a role in the acquisition of a foreign language, especially in an EFL context. There is never so much input that the students will be able to acquire a language just by being in contact with it as has been proposed by some scholars. On the other hand, and also because of the small amounts of authentic input, it is necessary that students are presented with situations that are as close to real life communication as possible. Therefore, as a teacher I have always tried to combine both explicit grammar and communication.

Currently, in the field of language teaching, the notion of language knowledge has been superseded by the concept of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (cited in

Tarone & Yule, 1989) developed this concept, which has several components. Acquiring a language equals being proficient in all these different areas:

- Grammatical competence (Knowledge of the grammatical structures).
- Pragmatic competence (Knowing how to convey an appropriate message according to the situation).
- Strategic competence (Knowing what strategies to use when communication problems occur).
- Discourse competence (Knowing how to arrange language in order to successfully convey a message).

Some research shows that communicative competence cannot be fully achieved if the linguistic/grammatical competence is not developed and that proficiency gains can be achieved by having some kind of grammar instruction in the classroom (Dickins and Woods, 1988). Several studies have been conducted in which grammar instruction is considered an essential tool for language acquisition (Doughty, 1991; Long, 1983, 1988; White et al, 1991). Thus, the current challenge for researchers and teachers alike is to find a way to integrate grammar instruction and grammar practice with a communicative approach to teaching. The best solution, therefore, seems to be combining grammar and communication. Several authors suggest that communicative grammar tasks are a very good way to do so.

As I will explain in a more detailed way in chapter 2, there are different types of communicative grammar tasks but all of them share a common characteristic: students have to accomplish a certain goal together, and language is used for that purpose, with special focus on certain grammatical structures. The tasks are classroom activities that are used

either to practice grammatical structures or to help raise students' awareness of those structures. The tasks that I have used for this study are grammar tasks that are designed for the practice of a grammatical structure.

Although communicative grammar tasks are proposed by several authors, few grammar tasks have been actually designed for research or classroom use. Besides that, little research has been done with this kind of tasks. Thus, we do not know to what extent the existing tasks elicit the grammatical structures that the students are supposed to notice or practice. This is exactly what I do in this research project. I use two communicative grammar tasks - Lego Blocks and Picture Board - designed to elicit two grammatical structures of different level of complexity (prepositions and relative clauses), and determine to what extent they do so for learners with different levels of proficiency.

In addition to designing activities that will combine grammar and communication, it is also very important to take the students' interest in the tasks into consideration. My experience as a teacher has shown me that it is very important that the students like the activities done in class, not only for the sake of language acquisition but also for the sake of classroom management. If students have fun in class, it is more likely that they will feel more motivated to learn the language. Communicative grammar tasks seem to be perfect for that. Since they are information gap activities, they have characteristics of a game, although they typically demand collaboration and not competition. Hopefully the students will feel the pleasure of accomplishing something concrete, not just an exercise. Finally, the activities seem to be visually motivating. However, it is necessary to determine if these types of tasks are really motivating, or better, if they are more motivating than traditional exercises. In this

study, I determine that by asking the students about their preferences in a questionnaire designed for that purpose.

Research questions

In order to determine if the communicative tasks (Lego Blocks and the Picture Board) are effective activities for ESL/EFL classrooms, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent do native speakers use prepositions when performing the Lego Blocks task (an information gap activity designed to elicit prepositions), compared to a face to face conversation?
2. To what extent do native speakers use relative clauses when performing the Picture Board task (an information gap activity designed to elicit relative clauses), compared to a face to face conversation?
3. To what extent do the students use prepositions when performing the Lego Blocks task, compared to a face to face conversation between native speakers?
4. To what extent do the students use relative clauses when performing the Picture Board, compared to a face to face conversation between native speakers?
5. How does the complexity of the structures affect the extent to which they are used by the students of the two proficiency levels?
6. Do the students prefer the communicative grammar tasks to the more structure-oriented activities?

7. Are the communicative grammar tasks more motivating than the structure-oriented activities?

By answering the first four questions I will determine how effective the two communicative grammar tasks are. If the native speakers and the non-native speakers use the targeted structures to a greater extent than in a face to face conversation, then the tasks can be considered as effective activities for the language classroom. The answer to the fifth research question will help to further determine the appropriateness of the tasks for different proficiency levels.

As for the answers to the last two research questions, they will help determine how motivating communicative grammar tasks can be in comparison with traditional grammar exercises.

In this chapter, I explained the importance of this study and why it is relevant for my work as a teacher and for the field of ESL/EFL. I gave a brief overview of the characteristics of communicative grammar tasks and presented the research questions of this study. In chapter 2, a review of the literature and research in this area of applied linguistics will be presented. In chapter 3, I will explain how the activities were designed and how the data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 will contain the results obtained in this study and the discussion of those results. Finally, in chapter 5, the summary of results will be presented and the implications of this study for further research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In chapter 1, I explained the reason and importance for a study of communicative grammar tasks and I presented the research questions that guide this study. In this chapter, I start by giving an overview of the role of grammar in language teaching. Then I focus on research done with communicative tasks and with communicative grammar tasks. Finally, I present some of the theory and research done in the domain of motivation in language learning, with special focus on motivation at the level of classroom activities design.

The role of grammar in the history of language teaching

Grammar has been one of the most important topics in the history of language teaching. Its role in instruction has frequently changed throughout history, and classroom practices have gone from learning grammar for its own sake to intensive drilling or to completely putting formal instruction aside. Whether grammar should be taught or not in the classroom has been one of the debated issues in various language teaching methods and approaches. An overview of the main methods and approaches is presented next.

A number of scholars present the history of language teaching and the role that grammar has played throughout it (Celce-Murcia, 1991a; 1991b; Weatherford, 1997; Richards and Rodgers, 1986). For several centuries, teaching a foreign language meant teaching Latin. Since it was a “dead” language and wasn’t used for daily functions, the emphasis of instruction was on the ability to read the classical works. Besides the focus on

the reading and writing skills, it was believed that studying Latin, especially the grammar rules, was excellent for the intellectual development of the students. Latin “was said to develop intellectual abilities, and the study of Latin grammar became an end in itself” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 2). This view on language teaching was still predominant in the middle of the 19th century, as grammatical structures were the points around which classes and textbooks were organized. This approach to language teaching is known as the Grammar-Translation Method.

At that time other methods began to appear and changes were proposed. With the Reform Movement more importance was placed on speech, and grammar was proposed to be taught inductively, i.e. students practiced the grammar structures in a context and only later did they learn the rules. The Direct Method also advocated inductive grammar and intensive exposure to the target language. With this method, “rather than using analytical procedures that focus on the explanation of grammar rules in classroom teaching, teachers must encourage direct and spontaneous use of the foreign language in the classroom. Learners would then be able to induce rules of grammar” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 9).

After the Second World War, in the United States, a new method was implemented, Audiolingualism. In this method, grammar and accuracy were very important, so structures were practiced intensively. They were practiced intensively because this method was influenced by Behaviorism and it was believed that learning a language was mainly habit formation (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). The presentation of rules was done only after the students had practiced them, so again grammar was taught inductively. At the same time, in Britain, the Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching was in use. This was also a structural approach because a structural syllabus was used. Grammar structures were

selected, organized from simple to complex and presented to the students in the context of a situation. Grammar was acquired inductively and “accuracy in both pronunciation and grammar is regarded as crucial” (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 36).

The Cognitive Approach, which appeared as a reaction to Audiolingualism, was influenced by Chomsky’s generative grammar. As Celce-Murcia (1991a) states, in this approach, “language learning is viewed as rule acquisition, not habit formation” (p. 7) The same author presents the characteristics of this approach, one of them being that “grammar must be taught but it can be taught deductively (rules first, practice later) and/or inductively (rules can either be stated after practice or left as implicit information for the learners to process on their own)” (p. 7).

In the 1970s a new and so far lasting approach emerged. In this approach, communication “is viewed as the goal of second language instruction” (Weatherford, 1997, p. 5) and language courses are “not built around grammar but around pragmatic communicative functions” (Weatherford, 1997, p. 5). Because communication assumes such an important role, this is known as the Communicative Approach. With this approach, knowing a language was no longer synonymous with knowing the structures of that language (whether implicitly or explicitly), but being proficient in four different areas that make up communicative competence. Grammatical competence is no longer the only focus in language learning, but it shares its importance with sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences (Tarone and Yule, 1989), i.e., being proficient in a language implies knowing the grammatical structures, knowing how to convey an appropriate message according to the situation, knowing how to arrange language in order to successfully convey a message, and knowing what strategies to use when communication problems occur. In fact, as it gained

popularity, the communicative approach became known for very little focus on grammatical forms.

At the same time that the communicative approach was blossoming, the Natural Approach, whose proponents were Terrell and Krashen, gained some notoriety at the beginning of the 1980s. One of the characteristics of this approach was the exclusion of grammar instruction from the language classroom. According to Krashen's hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), there is language learning and language acquisition. The former happens when there is grammar instruction, and the latter, which should be the goal of a language classroom, occurs through exposure to a large amount of meaningful input.

As one can judge from the historical overview presented above, although every method or language teaching approach has had its own view of the topic, the role of grammar continues to this day to be at the core of language learning methodologies. Whether by being rejected or embraced, grammar instruction occupies a prominent role in the various language teaching methods and approaches.

Current perspective on grammar

As mentioned above, the Communicative Approach is the approach currently followed most widely in language teaching. However, as Celce-Murcia et al. (1997) comment, methods and approaches to language teaching go through different phases. They are "first proposed, then accepted, applied, and eventually criticized" (p. 142). It seems that the Communicative Approach and the Natural Approach proposed by Krashen and Terrell are going through the phase when questions are raised and criticisms are presented. Teachers

and researchers alike are questioning the claim that grammar instruction should be removed from the language classroom and that students can really acquire a language by relying solely on input and classroom activities that focus on meaning only. Grammar instruction is now again regarded as an important tool for language acquisition and for the full development of the communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, 1991b; Celce-Murcia et al, 1997; Dickins and Woods, 1988; Doughty, 1991; Ellis, 1995, 1997; Fotos, 1993, 1994; Long, 1983, 1988; Loschky and Bley-Vroman, 1993; Rutherford, 1987; White et al., 1991)

A good body of research has investigated this claim and evidence has been given that focus-on-form instruction is beneficial for language acquisition. Doughty (1991) conducted a study where the benefits of instruction on relativization were demonstrated. White et al. (1991) found that instruction on the formation of questions was beneficial for students. Long (1983) presents a review of twelve studies that try to determine if language instruction makes a difference in language acquisition. He concludes that the answer to that question “is not a so tentative Yes” (p. 380). In a more recent article Long (1988) confirms the positive influence of instruction on acquisition.

The return to grammar instruction is based on the theory that noticing leads to learning. Providing students with plenty of input is still considered important for language acquisition, but it is as important that the students notice the structures in that input (Celce-Murcia et al, 1997; Ellis, 1998; Fotos, 1993, 1994; Long, 1988b; Schmidt, 1990). When some activities are used to raise students’ awareness of the language forms, these forms will be better noticed in subsequent input and therefore integrated in the students’ interlanguage.

Other factors have to be considered when it comes to the importance of grammar instruction in the classroom. As Celce-Murcia (1991b) points out, the use of formal

instruction in the classroom depends on such factors as the learning style (analytical or holistic), the proficiency level, the educational background, or the objectives of the students. Teachers shouldn't solely rely on the principles of language teaching methods, but should take all the above factors into consideration when deciding whether or not to teach grammar in the classroom.

It has been suggested that language acquisition can happen through exposure to meaningful input and through interaction, as well as through formal instruction, so the challenge is to find a way to combine them. According to several researchers, finding activities that combine both grammar and focus on meaning is one of the current tasks of SLA research (Dickins and Woods, 1988; Ellis, 1998; Fotos, 1994; Loshky and Bley-Vroman, 1993). These authors suggest that the way to do so may be through the use of communicative grammar tasks.

Communicative grammar tasks

In order to see how communicative grammar tasks can be used to integrate both focus on meaning and focus on form, and help language acquisition, an overview of literature about tasks will be presented next. The important points include the definitions of task, its importance for language acquisition, criteria for task development and types of grammar tasks.

Gass (1997) defines task as a "piece of work that must be completed" (p. 152). Pica et al (1993) state that "such activities are structured so that students will talk, not for the sake of producing language as an end in itself, but as a means of sharing ideas and opinions,

collaborating toward a single goal, or competing to achieve individual goals” (p. 10). Nunan (cited in Gass, 1997, p. 153) defines task as a “piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form.” In summary, tasks are classroom activities designed to engage students in meaningful communication, and not mere language drills.

Tasks seem to be the classroom activities that reflect well the theory behind the Communicative Approach - that language is used for communication and is learned through communication. Willis (1998) states that using tasks in the classroom “offers a change from the grammar practice routines through which many learners have previously failed to learn to communicate (p. 18).” The principle behind the use of tasks in the language classroom is that they provide the students with input and promote interaction between them, and it is through interaction and through exposure to input that they will acquire a language. Interaction, as it occurs in the communicative tasks, is important for language acquisition because it allows for negotiation of meaning, metalinguistic awareness, and automaticity and restructuring (Gass, 1997). When students are engaged in interaction in a communicative task and the message doesn’t get through, negotiation of meaning occurs until it does. This allows for metalinguistic awareness, i.e. the students become aware of the gap between what they know and what they need in order to communicate the necessary information. Although attention is focused on meaning while negotiating, restructuring of the students’ interlanguage may occur since a new form is learned.

Pica et al. (1993) present a framework for the design and classification of communicative tasks, which includes the relationship between the interactants, interaction

requirement, goal orientation and outcome options. According to these authors, the best tasks for language acquisition are the ones in which:

- Each student holds some information to be given to the others.
- All the students have to request and give information.
- Goals are convergent.
- There is only one outcome.

Jigsaw and information-gap tasks are the ones that seem to meet these requirements. In these tasks, it is very important that a clear message gets across, so that the students are able to reach the goal of the activity. A lot of interaction and negotiation of meaning is likely to occur in such situation. Therefore, jigsaw and information-gap are likely to be the most effective tasks for language learning.

The two tasks used in this thesis project match the specifications given by Pica et al for the design of information-gap tasks. The students have to exchange information in order to reach one convergent single goal. However, they are not communicative tasks where the goal is simply to convey a meaning, no matter what structures are used. The tasks used in this thesis are communicative grammar tasks because they are designed in such a way that, while communicating a meaning, the students have to use or are led to notice a certain grammatical feature.

Various kinds of grammar tasks have been proposed as a way to integrate form focused instruction in a communicative classroom. Interpretation tasks (Ellis, 1995, 1997) and consciousness-raising tasks (Ellis, 1997; Fotos, 1993, 1994) are two of those.

Ellis (1995, 1997) explains that interpretation tasks “enable learners to identify the meaning(s) realized by a specific grammatical feature” (1995, p. 94), they enhance input and

help gap-noticing. With these tasks, the learners are supposed to interpret the input in a way that they will notice how a certain structure works. Ellis (1997) gives the example of a task where the students are presented with certain sentences containing common and uncommon psychological verbs:

In this activity students are required to assess the truthfulness of a set of sentences in relation to pictures. The input is oral. For example, the students hear a sentence like:

She loved his hairstyle

and evaluate it in relation to a picture which shows a woman looking admiringly at a young man in an exotic hairdo. The sentences are contrived in such a way that there are pronominal clues as to the correct meaning. (p. 154)

Ellis suggests that, in the task described above, by listening to the sentences and by looking at the pictures, the learners will attend to the meaning of the verbs.

A consciousness-raising task, as proposed by Ellis (1997) and Fotos (1993, 1994), is defined as a “pedagogic activity where the learners are provided with L2 data in some form and required to perform some operation on or with it, the purpose of which is to arrive at an explicit understanding of some linguistic property or properties of the target language.” (Ellis, 1997, p. 160). Consciousness-raising tasks can either be inductive or deductive.

An example of such tasks is given by Fotos (1994). In one of the tasks, a group of students is given some data and they have to work together in order to find the general rules of adverb placement in English. In this case, the grammatical feature is learned inductively. In the other task, again a group of students work together. Each one of them is given a card with a rule regarding relative clauses. They read the rule and produce a sentence of their own. At the end all the students should have all the rules written down and should have produced a sentence reflecting each one of them. With this kind of grammar task, the grammar is learned deductively.

Another type of communicative grammar task, which, nevertheless, shares some common characteristics with the tasks described above is proposed by Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993). According to the two authors, the criteria for the development of communicative grammatical tasks are as follows:

- “Structural accuracy in comprehension and production should be made *essential* to meaning in the task;”
- “Communicatively oriented *feedback* on structural accuracy should be incorporated into the design of the task.” (p. 131, 132)

The authors provide a framework for the design of such tasks, which include dimensions like the essentialness of the language for the accomplishment of the task, the goal of the task in the learning process, the control over the language used and whether it is a comprehension or production task.

A communicative grammatical task can be designed in a way so that the grammar structure in question is natural, useful or essential for the completion the task. If it is natural, the structure may occur in the students’ output. If it is useful, the students are more likely to use it, and it will become easier to accomplish the goal of the task. Finally, the structure may be so essential that the task cannot be performed at all without it.

Loschky and Bley-Vroman divide the communicative grammar tasks into comprehension and production tasks and present various dimensions that approximately correspond to each of these types of task. The dimensions are: essentialness of the structure for the completion of the task, control of the language used, use of the task for restructuring (hypothesis testing) or automatization.

The type of task (comprehension or production) influences or can be influenced by how much control can be exerted over the language used. It is easier to control the input to

which the students are exposed (comprehension tasks), than to control the language they produce (production tasks). If we look at the tasks proposed by Loschky and Bley-Vroman as in a continuum, we have tasks where the use of a certain grammatical feature is essential for the completion of the task, so more control of the language is necessary. Therefore, it is easier to design them as comprehension tasks. Comprehension tasks are better used for hypothesis formation and testing. This kind of task may be comparable to the interpretation tasks proposed by Ellis (1995, 1997).

On the other side of the continuum, we find the production tasks in which the use of a certain structure may arise naturally. There is no certainty that a structure will appear in the students' output so there is less control of the language when designing them. Production tasks are more likely to be simply used for automatization of the structures.

The relationship between all these dimensions is not rigid. However, Loschky and Bley-Vroman say that in general the relationship of the various dimensions in the communicative grammar tasks works like mentioned above:

Essential	⇔	Useful	⇔	Natural
Comprehension		⇔		Production
More control		⇔		Less control
Hypothesis formation		⇔		Automatization

Another important factor for the design of communicative grammatical tasks is that they should include provision of feedback. As the two authors comment, this is easily done by transforming them into information gap tasks. In information gap tasks, students have to exchange information in order to achieve a goal. This means that negotiated interaction is likely to happen, providing the students with the necessary feedback.

Some common characteristics can be found between the tasks described above and consciousness-raising tasks. They may be designed to raise students' awareness and may have an information gap format. The difference between them is the fact that, in the consciousness-raising tasks, the grammatical feature *is* the content of the activity.

It must be noticed that the difference between communicative grammar tasks and traditional grammar exercises lies in a different notion of grammar. In communicative language learning, grammar is not something to be learned per se, but is a helpful tool to convey meaning. Therefore, it makes sense for the students to acquire linguistic knowledge in a setting that promotes all the other aspects of communicative competence.

The communicative grammar tasks designed for the present study were created as production tasks. As the designer, I exercised a certain control over the language to be used, in order to make the targeted grammatical structures, if not essential, at least useful. In addition, they were designed as information gap tasks, so that there is place for negotiation and provision of feedback.

Tasks: effectiveness and affective factors

Students' attitudes towards classroom activities are very important because they determine the students' willingness to engage in them, and ultimately they may influence the students' level of motivation to learn a language. However, research done with communicative tasks or communicative grammar tasks has only focused on their effectiveness on language acquisition. Little research has been done in this area, however, to assess the students' attitudes towards them. As Green (1993) says "it is surprising that almost

nobody seems to have actually asked language students to rate the extent to which they enjoy different classroom activities” (p. 1).

Although Green (1993) doesn’t deal specifically with communicative grammar tasks, he conducted a study with Puerto Rican students, in which he tried to determine to what extent the students enjoyed certain classroom activities (both communicative and non-communicative), as well as to what extent the students thought these activities are effective for language learning. The results show that the communicative activities were considered more enjoyable than the non-communicative activities. Both types of activity, however, rated similarly in terms of perceived effectiveness.

In another study of the kind, Schinke-Llano and Vicars (1993) surveyed a group of foreign language students in order to determine to what extent they felt comfortable performing activities that provided for more negotiated interaction (student-centered versus teacher-fronted). They based their study on the theory that language is best acquired when there are opportunities for negotiated interaction (as in information-gap tasks) and when students are in a relaxed atmosphere (Krashen’s lower affective filter hypothesis, 1983). The results suggest that the activities the students feel more comfortable with are the ones that are student-centered.

Just like the studies mentioned above, the present study intends to determine, although not exhaustively, the attitudes of the students towards two communicative grammar tasks (Lego Blocks and Picture Board Tasks) and two traditional grammar exercises (Prepositions of Place and Defining Relative Clauses). The study determines the motivational level of those activities, that is, how much the students enjoy them and how willing they are to do the activities again in future occasions.

A brief overview of the study of motivation in second language acquisition is presented next, with a special focus on intrinsic motivation. Although not exclusively related to second language learning motivation, this area of motivation research is linked to the design of activities and materials that are appealing to the students. Therefore, it is related to the last two research questions of this thesis.

Motivation in second language acquisition

Any researcher in the field of motivation in second language acquisition acknowledges that the Socio-Educational Model developed by Gardner and his colleagues has had an important impact on the field (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994; Oxford, 1996; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Oxford and Shearin, 1996). This model includes two types of motivational orientation in the study of a second language: integrative and instrumental (Gardner and Lambert, 1959). Students show an integrative motivation when students have a positive attitude toward the native speaker community and their goal is to integrate into that community. When, for example, students study a language in order to meet requirements or because of possible future professional advantages, then their motivation is instrumental. In a study done with high school students of French in Canada, Gardner and Lambert (1959) found that “integratively oriented students are generally more successful in acquiring French than those who are instrumentally oriented.” (p. 271)

Even though motivation research has been dominated by Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model, this model does not account for factors such as classroom materials or activities having an impact on students’ motivation for language learning. Several authors

recognize that, indeed, there are many other aspects to take into consideration as far as motivation in second or foreign language acquisition is concerned, and that different perspectives are needed for a better understanding of motivation (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994; Oxford, 1996; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Oxford and Shearin, 1996).

Crookes and Schmidt (1991) are some of the authors who believe that the study of motivation must go beyond Gardner's model. Based on the work of Keller they discuss the four factors that determine motivation: interest, relevance, expectancy and outcomes.

These two authors talk about motivation in second language learning at several different levels: the micro-level, the classroom level, the syllabus level, and long-term learning. I will focus solely on their discussion of motivation at the classroom level since it relates to this thesis project. They suggest that teachers should make a bigger effort to increase students' interest in the activities, that these should be relevant, challenging but not so hard as to create anxiety. They also suggest "less orthodox teaching techniques and/or materials" (p. 488, 489) be used in the classroom. Although they don't provide empirical evidence for the second language context, it is suggested that materials that are fun and interesting help learning. Based on the work of Ames, they suggest that group work that is used to foster collaboration and not competition may be better for students who are not risk-takers. Another important motivating factor suggested by Crookes and Schmidt is the provision of positive feedback.

Dornyei (1994) also believes that "an adequate L2 motivation construct is bound to be eclectic, bringing together factors from different psychological fields" (p. 274). He presents a framework of motivation in second language acquisition that includes three levels: The Language Level, the Learner Level and the Learning Situation Level. Dornyei gives a

list of strategies to motivate language learners at the three levels. It is the last level that is of interest for the present study. Some of the strategies he suggests include:

- Increase the attractiveness of course content by using authentic materials that are within student's grasp; and unusual and exotic supplementary materials, recordings and visual aids.
- Arouse and sustain curiosity and attention by introducing unexpected, novel, unfamiliar, and even paradoxical events.
- Increase students' interest and involvement in the tasks by designing or selecting varied challenging activities; adapting tasks to the students' interests; making sure that something about each activity is new or different; including game-like features (...); and making peer interaction (e.g. pair work and group work) an important component.
- Use cooperative learning techniques. (p. 281, 282)

The communicative grammar tasks used in this project are consistent with the criteria suggested by the above authors.

Oxford and Shearin (1994, 1996) also propose that theories from areas of psychology, such as general, educational, industrial and cognitive psychology be brought into the study of motivation in language acquisition. The two authors discuss several different theories and their implications for language acquisition. Among others, they discuss reinforcement theories, which, according to these authors, are the ones most commonly used at the classroom level by teachers through the utilization of rewards such as praise or prizes. It is known, however, that intrinsic rewards – the satisfaction of accomplishing a task or learning something new- are much more effective. Schmidt et al (1996) provide a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation:

Extrinsic motivation is motivation to do something because of an external reward that may be obtained, while intrinsic motivation is demonstrated when we do something because we get rewards enough from the activity itself. (p. 14)

It is suggested, then, that giving rewards to the students is not as effective in raising students' motivation in the classroom as designing activities that they will enjoy. In this project, I examine if the communicative grammar tasks that the students performed are enjoyable, i.e., intrinsically motivating.

Malone and Lepper (1987), two educational psychologists, present a taxonomy for creating an intrinsically motivating learning environment. It includes individual motivations such as challenge, curiosity, control and fantasy, and interpersonal motivations such as cooperation, competition and recognition. They "define an activity as being intrinsically motivating if people engage in it for *its own sake*, rather than in order to receive some external reward or avoid some external punishment". They "use the words *fun*, *interesting*, *captivating*, *enjoyable*, and *intrinsically motivating* all more or less interchangeably to describe such activities." (p. 229)

Lepper and Hodell (1989) present some studies that were conducted in order to determine whether some embellishments made to some classroom activities would make them more motivating, and conducive to a more effective and long lasting learning. Their conclusion is that students show an increased interest in such activities, and that a positive influence on learning was found. Furthermore, the positive effects of such motivational embellishments of the activities were also found in long-term motivation and learning.

Lepper and Cordova (1992) also present a series of studies designed to investigate the hypothesis that making learning fun can have a positive effect on motivation and learning at short and long-term. The conclusion is that, in general, this hypothesis is confirmed.

In summary, whatever theories one favors or from whatever field of expertise one draws from in order to study motivation in language acquisition, everybody, researchers and

teachers alike, recognizes that motivation plays a very important role in learning. Research has shown that making classes and materials fun can improve students' short and long-term motivation and have lasting effects on learning. The communicative grammar tasks used in this study seem to have the necessary ingredients to make the language classroom fun and thus have a positive impact on language acquisition.

In this chapter, I have presented an overview of the literature in several areas: the role of grammar in the past and in the present, communicative grammar tasks, and motivation. This overview has shown that, although grammar instruction has been generally absent from language classrooms, it is regaining its importance. Research has shown that formal instruction, as well as meaningful communication, is important for language acquisition. Communicative grammar tasks seem to be the best way to combine both. Besides the fact that communicative grammar tasks appear to be an excellent way to integrate communication and formal instruction, they seem to possess as well the necessary criteria to be fun and motivating classroom activities.

In the next chapter, I will present the participants of this study, the activities used and the way they were designed. I will also discuss how the data were collected and analyzed.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

In the previous chapter I gave an overview of research done with grammar and communicative grammar tasks and of the literature available in that area. In this chapter I will present the participants of this study, and describe the way the activities were created. Finally, I will explain how the data were collected and analyzed.

Participants

Two different groups of people volunteered to participate in this study. One group was composed of 12 native speakers of English from diverse fields of study. From this group, 6 graduate students from Engineering and English majors performed the Lego Blocks Task (an information-gap activity designed to elicit prepositions). Since the results from these 6 students showed a large difference in the length of the dialogues, (the two male students from engineering had the shortest dialogues, in contrast with the four females from English), I decided to find two females from engineering, two males from English and a male and female student from another area in case the pattern found in the first group was determined by gender or areas of study. In addition, this second group performed the Picture Board Task (an information-gap activity designed to elicit relative clauses). These 6 students were undergraduates from Engineering, and graduates from English and Plant Pathology. The native speakers consisted of 7 females and 5 males.

The second group consisted of 24 non-native speakers of English. These were students enrolled in the Intensive English Orientation Program at Iowa State University. This group was composed of 12 students from the intermediate level (level 3) and 12 students from the high level (level 5).

Several different nationalities were represented, with the majority being Asian. The students' first languages were the following: Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai, Korean, Mandarin, and Japanese. In the group from level 5, the volunteers were predominantly female, while the participants from level 3 were mostly male. The reason why these students were used for this study is because they represent a good variety of nationalities, first languages and cultures. This allows for the results of the study to be more easily generalized to all the learners of English. Another reason is that, being in the Intensive English and Orientation Program, the students were divided into various proficiency levels, which was necessary for the purpose of this study.

Design of the activities

Four different activities were used in this study. These activities were created in order to elicit two types of grammatical structures: prepositions and relative clauses. These structures were chosen because of their degree of difficulty. My intention was to conduct the study with a structure that is structurally simple (prepositions) and another that is structurally more complex (relative clauses). Although prepositions are one of the last structures to be acquired by the students, they are structurally simple because they mostly consist of one word. In addition to that, spatial prepositions, which had some focus on this study, are

usually simple and rule-governed. The use of relative clauses, on the other hand, involves constructing complex sentences. Therefore, they are structurally more complex. There were two communicative grammar tasks (Lego Blocks task and Picture Board tasks), which were done orally, and two traditional grammar exercises (Prepositions of Place and Defining Relative Clauses), which were done in writing. Some of the activities are originals created by me, while others were adapted from Ur's book *Grammar Practice Activities* (1988). Next, I will describe how each one of these activities were created or adapted.

The Lego Blocks task used in this study is taken from Ur (1988) and is suggested by Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) as a communicative grammar task. This task is created to elicit prepositions, especially prepositions of place.

I took a total of 49 Lego blocks from different sizes, shapes and colors and I built two different objects with them. For object 1, I used 24 blocks and for object 2 I used 25 blocks. Some attention was paid when designing the objects so that the construction patterns would elicit many and different types of prepositions (mostly spatial), such as *on*, *under*, *between*, etc. Then, pictures of the two objects were taken from different perspectives so that the students would be able to clearly understand how the objects were built (see Appendix A).

Again, for the design of task Picture Board (see Appendix C), I used the book by Ur (1988). Her original activity also has a goal to elicit relative clauses, especially defining relative clauses. In the original activity, the students are given a list of words and have to write the definitions of those words. Since the original activity consists only of a list of words that the students must define in writing, I transformed it by making it an oral information gap activity and by adding pictures to the words so that it would be more appealing to the students. With the help of an instructor from the Architecture Department, who did the

graphic design, I created an activity that looks like a board game. There are two boards (one for each student) with 12 words and 12 corresponding pictures, as well as a set of 15 individual cards with pictures. This is how the task was created: I chose 24 words (12 for each board) that needed to be defined by the students and that would likely elicit a defining relative clause. For example, the word “parrot” was chosen because it is likely to elicit the defining relative clause “this is a bird that can talk” The pictures matching the words were scanned and they were put together in two different boards (with a blue and a green background). Each word had a number. Also, two sets of individual cards were made, each with 12 pictures from the board and 3 others. The 3 extra pictures worked as distracters, as I will explain in the Procedure section. Two other boards were created, only with numbers and no pictures. The empty spaces were created so that the individual cards with pictures would be placed on them.

One of the written tasks, Prepositions of Place (see Appendix E) was designed using some pictures from the same book (Ur, 1988). Originally they were designed to elicit “Is/are” and “There is/there are”. I adapted the exercises the same way I would for a high school class, in order to elicit prepositions of place, i.e. I developed a gap-filling exercise. The pictures had several objects and animals positioned in a certain place, so I created sentences that explain how these objects and animals are positioned in relation to each other. These sentences were not complete, however, since a gap was inserted in the place where the preposition should be.

The fourth task is called Defining Relative Clauses (see Appendix F) and is also a written activity. This one was created like any other traditional classroom grammatical

exercise. I invented several sentences that the students would need to join or complete, in order to form relative clauses.

The last material created for this study was a questionnaire (see Appendix G) designed to determine the students' preferences regarding the four classroom activities they performed. Two sets of questions were asked. Questions 1 to 4 ask to what degree the students liked any of the activities they have performed. Their answers are to be expressed in a scale from 1 to 7. Number 1 on the scale means that they didn't like the activity at all and number 7 means that they liked it a lot. In addition, the students are given the opportunity to express what they liked or disliked about the activities by writing it down on a provided space. The second set of questions (from 5 to 8) asks if the students would like to have any of the activities in their future English classes. The willingness or lack of willingness to engage in the activities in the future will help determine their motivational appeal. Again the scale for these questions is from 1 to 7.

Procedure

Data collection was done in two phases. I started recording students in spring semester 1999, when the first 6 native speakers performed the Lego Blocks activity as a pilot study. At the end of the task, I discussed the purpose of the study with them and, therefore, I did not use them for the second communicative grammar task. The recording with the other 6 native speakers was done in the beginning of fall semester 1999.

Collection of the data with the non-native speakers was also done in the beginning of fall semester 1999. The students were recorded in pairs and were asked to perform 4

activities: the Lego Blocks task, the Picture Board task, Prepositions of Place and Defining Relative Clauses. No time limit was set. Each recording session lasted about 1 hour, but for some students from the intermediate level it took longer. The order of the tasks was scrambled, so all the pairs started and ended with different tasks. The two communicative grammar tasks were done in pairs and orally, while the two traditional exercises were done individually and in writing.

Always at the end of each session, the students were given the questionnaire since they had performed all the tasks and were able to give their opinion about them.

The Lego Blocks task went as follows: One of the participants had the set of pictures and the other had the set of Lego blocks, and their goal was to have the object built just like in the picture. The person with the picture had to give instructions to the other one on how to build it using the Lego blocks. The person receiving the instructions was not allowed to see the picture and had to rely solely on the spoken instructions. The instructions and rules for the activity were given to them both in writing and orally (see Appendix B). An important rule was that they were not allowed to point at the blocks. When object 1 was built, the participants changed roles and built object 2. Therefore, for each pair of participants there were two dialogues. Among the native speakers, there were 3 dialogues for object 1 and 3 dialogues for object 2. Among the non-native speakers there were 6 dialogues for object 1 and 6 for object 2 in the high level. In the intermediate level there were 6 dialogues for object 1 and 6 for object 2, but a technical problem resulted in the loss of data for the sixth dialogue.

The Picture Board task worked basically in the same way as the Lego Blocks. Being an information gap activity, one of the students had to give the definition of the words he/she had on the board. The other student had an empty board and some cards with pictures.

His/her task was to listen to the definitions and find the pictures that best matched the words that were defined. The goal was to have the two boards looking exactly the same at the end. The rules of the task were also given to the students in writing and orally (see Appendix D). An important rule was that the students could not describe the pictures but define the words. When they completed one of the boards (either blue or green) they traded roles and began the other board. Again, each one of the students gave and received information. Once again there were two dialogues for each pair of students at the end of the activity. Among the native speakers, there were 3 dialogues for the blue board and 3 dialogues for the green board. Among the non-native speakers there were 6 dialogues for the blue board and 6 for the green board in the high level. In the intermediate level there were 5 dialogues for the blue board and 5 for the green board because the sixth group of dialogues was lost due to a recording problem.

In the activity Prepositions of Place, the students were given a sheet with two pictures and 10 incomplete sentences. They had to look at the pictures and complete the sentences with the appropriate preposition.

The activity Defining Relative Clauses had two parts. The first set of exercises consisted of separate sentences that the students had to join forming a defining relative clause. In the second part of the activity the students had to complete some sentences using the adequate relative pronoun/adverb.

Only the non-native speakers performed the traditional activities since their function is to provide a contrast with the communicative grammar tasks as regards students' interest.

There were 4 dialogues from one pair of students from level 3 that could not be used in this study because of a technical problem with the recording and consequential loss of

data. In total, 12 dialogues from 6 pairs of native speakers and 44 dialogues from 11 pairs of non-native speakers were used.

Analysis

The 56 dialogues were audiotaped and then transcribed orthographically. When all the dialogues from the Lego Blocks task were transcribed, I counted the overall number of prepositions, the number of prepositions of place, and the number of different prepositions. Most of the counting was straightforward, but there were some sentences that needed some interpretation in order to determine if some of the words were truly prepositions. There were some sentences where the preposition could also be an adverb, depending on what followed or what was implicit. The following excerpt is an example of such situation:

NNS 12: “How about green?”

NNS 11: Green is opposite. No. No. Yes, and. Opposite to green, yellow. Ah!”

In this dialogue, the first “opposite” can either be considered a preposition or an adverb depending on the interpretation of the sentence. If the student intended the sentence like it is, then the word is an adverb. If, on the other hand, the student wanted to say that the green is opposite something, but the sentence was interrupted because he/she saw that the other student was doing something wrong (“No. No.”), then the word “opposite” can be considered a preposition. In this, and in similar cases, I considered “opposite” as an adverb because the sentence sounded complete.

Prepositions that were used incorrectly were still included in the counts. This was done because it shows that the students felt the need for the use of a preposition to convey the message. For example, in the following dialogue student 6 uses the word “behind” where he/she should use “beside”:

NNS 6: “ (...) you put a blue one behind yellow.

NNS 5: Uh, put blue one?

NNS 6: Yes.

NNS 5: Behind?

NNS 6: Yellow. Beside.

NNS 5: Beside?

NNS 6: Beside, not behind, sorry.”

Complex prepositions such as “in front of” or “on top of” function as one unit of meaning (Quirk et al., 1972) and were counted as one preposition.

The frequencies of prepositions from the native speakers were then normed to 1,000 words and a comparison with a corpus-based study (Biber, 1988) was done. This comparison was made in order to determine if the task elicited more prepositions than a normal face to face conversation.

In a corpus-based study like the one done by Biber, a large quantity of texts (spoken and written) are analyzed with computer-assisted techniques in order to determine patterns in the language use. Because large corpora of naturally-occurring language are utilized (thousands of spoken and written texts), this kind of language analysis shows how language is typically used by the native speakers in real communication situations.

The frequencies from the non-native speakers were also normed to 1,000 words and a comparison between the performance of the native speakers and the results from the corpus-

based study was done in order to determine to what extent the non-native speakers used the prepositions. On advice of a statistician, no statistical tests were used because of the small amount of data. The results obtained would not be meaningful.

For each transcript from the Picture Board task, I counted the number of relative clauses, and the number of the defining relative clauses, which was the targeted structure. Just like for the use of prepositions, the use of the relative clauses also demanded some interpretation. First, there were cases where no relative pronoun was used (this is different from normal omission), but the sentence would be a relative one if it were there. For example:

NNS 21: “ 11. And number 8. Number 8 is the people live in America and. Yeah.”

In this excerpt the student is trying to form the relative clause “Number 8 is the people that live in America”, in order to define the word “American”. No pronoun is used, but the sentence has the structure of a relative clause. Thus, I counted it as a relative clause.

In other cases, though there was an attempt to do so, the students didn't form a correct relative clause. These incomplete sentences were not counted as relative clauses because the structure of the sentence is not the structure of a relative clause. In the following example the structure of the sentence resembles that of a question:

NNS 15: “ 12. Number 9, who is, who is who, who is make anything.”

In this excerpt the student is trying to define the word “scientist” and is trying to build the relative clause “someone who makes anything”, but is unsuccessful.

The relative clauses that had the incorrect relative pronoun or adverb were also included in the counting. The following sentence is an example of that:

NNS 2: “ So, this is the place that the President works.”

This sentence is a well-formed relative clause and was considered as such; the only problem is the fact the student used the incorrect relative pronoun/adverb. It should have been “where” and not “that”. In summary, whenever there was an embedded relative clause in a sentence even though the relative pronoun was not used or used wrongly, they were included in the counts of relative clauses.

The frequencies of relative clauses obtained in this task were normed to 1,000 just like I did for the Lego Blocks task. The results of the native speakers were then compared to the results obtained by Biber (1988) in order to determine if the task is a good one to elicit defining relative clauses. The results of the non-native speakers were also normed to 1,000 words and a comparison between the performance of the native speakers and the results from the corpus-based study was done in order to determine to what extent the task elicits defining relative clauses from this group. Again no statistical tests were used because of the small number of participants.

For both the Lego Blocks and the Picture Board task, the variety of the structures used was counted in order to determine if the proficiency level of the students accounts for variation.

The answers in the traditional activities (Prepositions of Place and Defining Relative Clauses) were not subjected to any analysis. Their function in this study was solely to function as a contrast to the communicative grammar tasks, as regards the students' preferences. Therefore, analysis of the answers to these activities was unnecessary.

In order to explain the tendencies evidenced in the quantitative results, the transcripts were again read and examined. The gender of the students was checked, as well as the field of studies in order to determine the associations with the patterns found. The size of the dialogues and the amount of negotiation were also examined for the same purposes.

The procedure for the questionnaire was fairly simple. The mean was calculated for scores (from 1 to 7) given by the students of each proficiency level for each one of the 8 questions, and a statistical test was used in order to determine the significance of the results. It was possible to use a statistical test because overall there were 12 students from each level. The statistical test used was the Wilcoxon's matched-pairs signed-ranks test (Howell, 1992). This is a non-parametric test suitable for small samples and non-normal distributions, and it is when it is necessary to compare pairs of results, which was the case with this questionnaire. The mean score for the Lego Blocks task was compared with the mean score for the activity Prepositions of Place, since both were designed to elicit prepositions and represented two different types of activities (communicative task vs. traditional exercise). The mean score for the Picture Board task was compared with the mean score for the activity Defining Relative Clauses, because they were designed to elicit relative clauses and because they represented two different types of activity. The statistical test helped determine whether the choice of one type of activity over the other was due to chance or not.

This chapter presented the participants of this study and explained how the activities were designed. It also explained how the data were collected and how they were analyzed. In the next chapter I will present and discuss the results of the analysis.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will present and discuss the results obtained with the two communicative grammar tasks and the questionnaire. The chapter will be divided into two major parts, which will focus on the use of the language structures and on the questionnaire. I will begin by presenting and discussing the results of the Lego Block task and the Picture Board task for the native speakers and then for the two levels of non-native speakers. Next, a comparison between the two proficiency levels will be made, focussing on the complexity of the structures. Finally, I will present and discuss the results of the questionnaire.

Language use

Use of prepositions by native speakers

The first research question of this study asks to what extent native speakers of English use prepositions when performing the Lego Block Task, compared to a casual face to face conversation. This question is important for this study because my objective is to try to determine if the task, which was created to elicit a satisfactory number of prepositions, (especially prepositions of place) actually fulfills that goal. In order to determine this, the results obtained in this study were compared with the results from a study by Biber (1988) that uses a corpus-based approach to language analysis. All the frequencies (see Appendix H) were converted to a norm of 1,000 words.

The results presented in Figure 1 show that there is a difference between the number of prepositions used by the students in the Lego Block task and the number of prepositions used in a face to face conversation. The results obtained suggest that the Lego Blocks task may elicit a large number of prepositions, depending on the design of the object that students have to build.

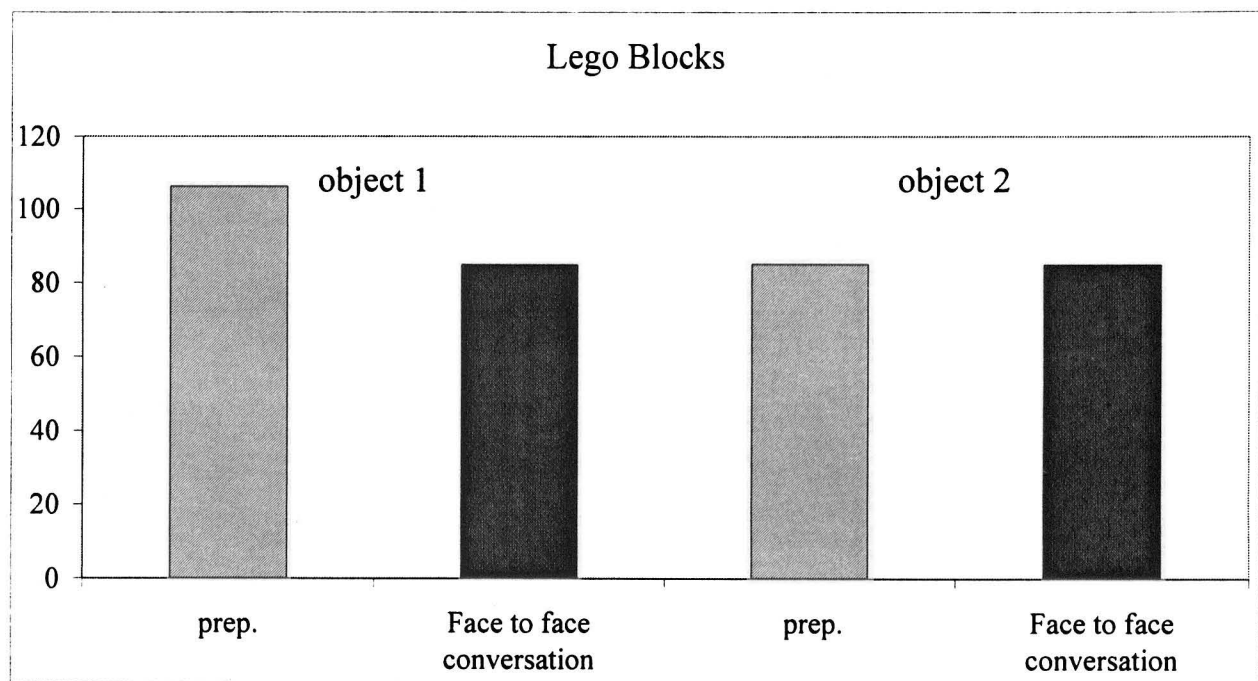


Figure 1. Number of prepositions per 1,000 words used by the native speakers

Object 1 elicits many more prepositions (106.2) than a real life conversation (85). However, for object 2, the results are similar to the ones obtained in the corpus-based study (85.1 for object 2, and 85 for a face to face conversation). The difference of results obtained with the two objects may have several causes. First of all, it may be related to the personal characteristics of the native speakers who had to give the instructions for both objects. Judging from the number of words and the number of prepositions used in object 1 (see

Appendix H), the students who gave the instructions for object 1 were more concise and precise. Their dialogues were shorter than the ones for object 2 and the number of prepositions they used was higher than the number of prepositions used in object 2. Thus, a higher number of prepositions per 1,000 words was obtained. The precision in their language may have been caused by the easiness of the design of object one. Secondly, the data available for the Lego Block task is not extensive; more data from more participants would be helpful.

None of the results were below the numbers of a face to face conversation (the numbers obtained were both at the same level and above the level of a face to face conversation); therefore, this Lego Block task may, in general, be considered a good activity for elicitation of prepositions.

Use of relative clauses by native speakers

The second research question asks to what extent the native speakers use relative clauses (especially defining relative clauses) when performing the Picture Board task, again compared to a face to face conversation.

Figure 2 shows the results obtained with the Picture Board task (normed to 1,000 words) and compares them to the use of relative clauses in a face to face conversation. This comparison is made because, once again, it is my purpose to determine if the task is a good one to elicit the targeted structure. The answer to that is affirmative, since the number of relative clauses used by the native speakers when performing the task is much higher than in a face to face conversation. Therefore, the Picture Board task may be considered an effective activity to elicit relative clauses.

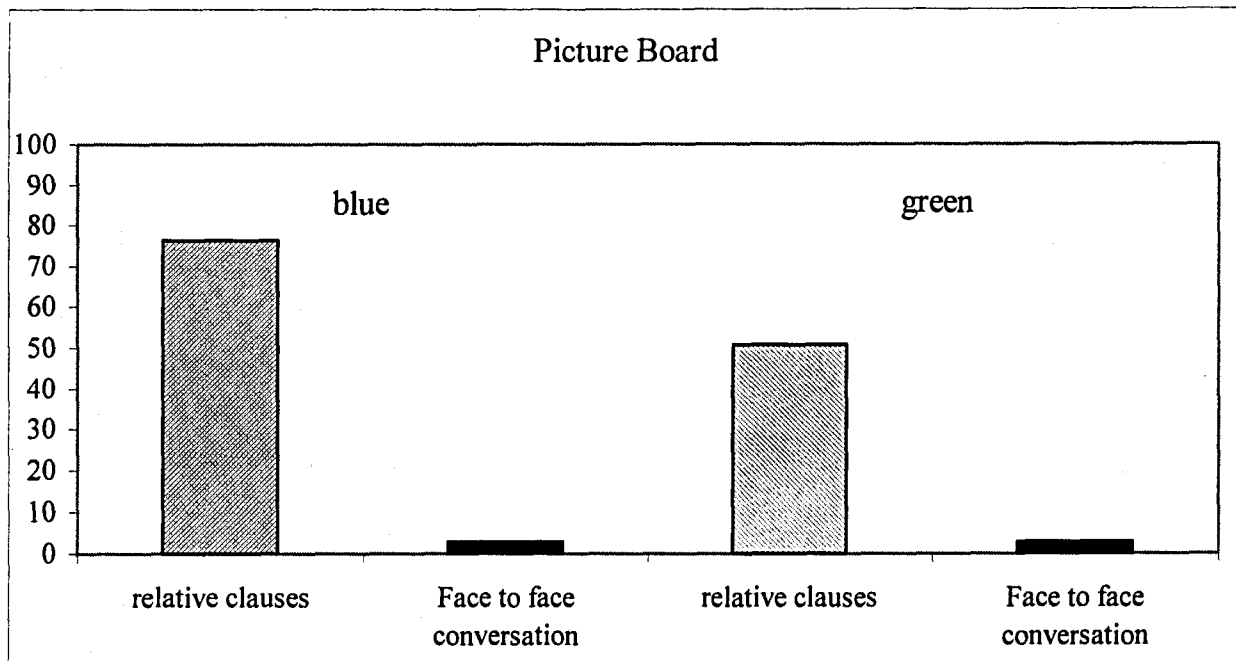


Figure 2. Number of relative clauses per 1,000 words used by the native speakers

The comparison demonstrates that the native speakers used many more relative clauses doing the task than they would use in a conversation. The blue board elicited 76.2 and the green board elicited 50.8 relative clauses. These numbers are much higher than the 3.6 result obtained for the face to face conversation (Biber, 1988). Similar to what happened with the Lego Blocks task, one of the boards (green) elicited fewer relative clauses. However, the green board still elicited a much higher number of relative clauses than a conversation.

The difference between the two boards may be due to the fact that it was the female from Engineering and the female from Plant Pathology who defined the words from the blue board (the one that elicited the higher number of relative clauses). In this task, the female students showed themselves to be more precise in the language used to accomplish the task. In general, not only did they use a shorter sentence to define the word, but they also used a

relative clause within it for the definition. Whether it is actually a gender influence or not can be the subject for another study.

I would like to look at some excerpts from the dialogues that illustrate how the female students managed to be more precise and concise in their definitions. For the word “hairstylist”:

NS 7: someone who cuts and styles your hair”

versus

NS 10: uh, this people, uh, if you, have the stuff that grows on your head, is getting too long, they take care of you, and they comb it nice. And that kind of stuff.

In this example we see that the female student (NS 7) accomplishes her task only by using the relative clause. The male student (NS 10), on the other hand, does not use a relative clause and uses many more words for the same definition.

For the word “astronaut” something similar happens:

NS 7: someone who goes into outer space.

versus

NS 11: Uh. Is, uh, beyond the realms. Somebody who goes beyond the realms of, the atmosphere.

Although, in this example, both students (female and male) use a relative clause, it is the female that uses it immediately and exclusively. The male student tries something else first but in the end he makes use of one. By being more direct, the female students used many

more relative clauses and fewer words, thus affecting positively the scores. Therefore, we may say that the students' individual speech strategies may affect the effectiveness of the task.

Use of prepositions by non-native speakers

Although the results from the experiment with the native speakers are favorable to the use of the two communicative grammar tasks, it is necessary to demonstrate that they elicit the structures from the non-native speakers as well. Therefore, the third research question asks to what extent the non-native speakers use prepositions (with special attention to prepositions of place), in comparison with a normal face to face conversation. The answer to this question involves different perspectives: the level of the students and the objects in question. I will analyze the results of both the high level (level 5) and the intermediate level (level 3). The results from the high level will be presented and discussed first.

The frequencies of prepositions were again normed to 1,000 words, so that a comparison with the corpus-based study and with the performance of the native speakers was possible, and the results are presented in Figure 3. It shows that the results varied in the two objects. With object 1, the students used an average of 72.4 prepositions per 1,000 words, which is lower than the number of prepositions used by the native speakers (106.2) with the same object, and lower than in a face to face conversation (85). It seems that for the high level students, the task that elicited prepositions to a good extent was the one with object 2. It elicited an average of 99.5 prepositions per 1,000 words, which is higher than the number of prepositions used by the native speakers (85.1) and higher than the 85 from the conversation data. The reason for this difference between the two objects may lie in the amount of

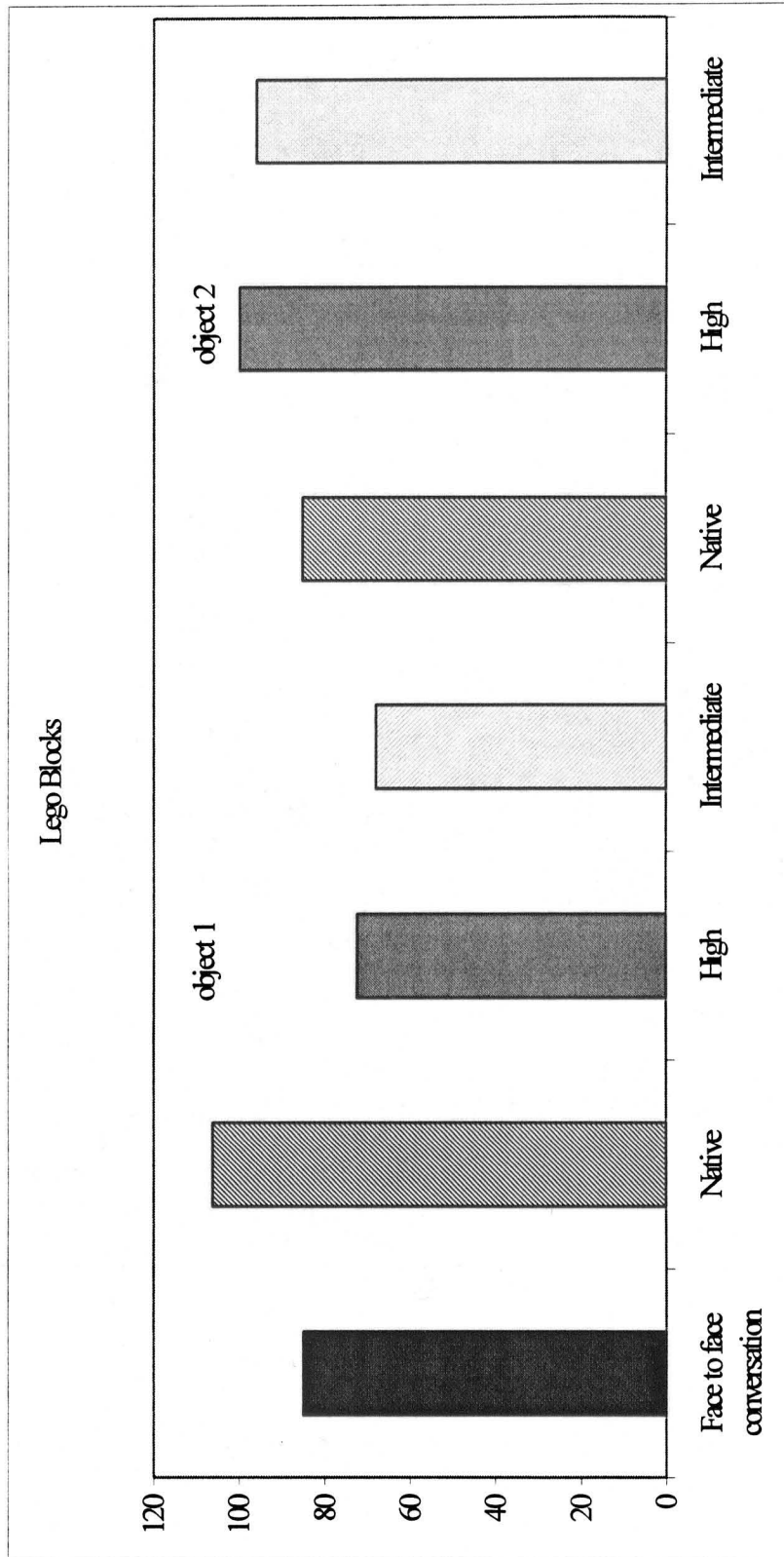


Figure 3. Number of prepositions per 1,000 words used by the three groups of participants.

interaction that they elicited. An analysis of the turns shows that the students interacted more while working on object 2. The number of prepositions may have increased because of the requests for feedback and clarifications. More negotiations may have caused a more intense use of the target structure. The following excerpts illustrate my point:

NNS 1: Like this?

NNS 2: Yeah, you're right. No, behind. Just. All right.

And now put the red one.

NNS 1: Here?

NNS 2: On top. On top.

NNS 1: Here?

NNS 2: No, on top the red. On top the red.

When NNS 1 asks for a clarification ("Like this?" or "Here?") NNS 2 is forced to use more prepositions than he/she normally would without the questions. Besides that, the number of prepositions increases because NNS 1 also uses them (e.g. "like") in his/her intervention.

Here is another example:

NNS 10: Wait a minute. Hmm. You put that green parts
between red and yellow blocks

NNS 9: Red and yellow blocks?

NNS 10: And, uh

NNS 9: Like this?

NNS 10: Beside the taller yellow parts.

NNS 9: Beside?

NNS 10: Beside that taller yellow parts. Between yellow
and red parts. (...)

In this example we see that NNS 10 explains where to put the green block (between red and yellow). However, the explanation is not enough and NNS 9 asks for some feedback,

which makes NNS 10 use the preposition “beside”. Another request for clarification forces the repetition of “beside”. Finally, the word “between” is used once again because NNS 10 wants to return to the initial instruction. This shows that interaction causes an increase in the use of prepositions.

As for the intermediate level, the results showed a similar pattern. The same Figure (Fig. 3) also shows the results for this proficiency level. Object 2 elicited an average of 96 prepositions, which is higher than the score of 85.1 from the native speakers’ performance in the grammar task and higher than the number from a face to face conversation (85). Object 1, on the other hand, elicited an average of 68, which is lower than 106.2 (native speakers) and 85 (face to face conversation).

As happened with the high level, it is object 2 that elicits the use of prepositions to a better extent. The explanation for the difference between the two objects may lie in the degree of difficulty of object 2. It has been my impression that the design of this object made the task more difficult as regards giving instructions. While in object 1 every new step consisted of putting a Lego Block on a higher position (2 blocks excepted), in object 2, several of the building steps involved placing blocks on a lower position after some of the blocks had been placed in a higher position already. This difference in the construction technique may have increased the degree of difficulty of this object and increased the need for a lot more prepositions because the students had to repeat or reformulate the instructions. The native speakers, on the other hand, most likely didn’t feel this level of difficulty because they are perfectly proficient in the language. They were able to give the instructions without so many reformulation or repetitions.

Another factor that surely caused an inflation in the mean obtained for object 2 was the dialogue between NNS 15 and NNS 16. There were some problems of communication between these two students because of pronunciation. A lot of repetition was needed in order to convey the message. The following excerpts illustrate my point:

NNS 15: In front of it has green Lego, green, and has (...) in front of, in front of, middle, in front of

NNS 16: In front of?

NNS 15: In front of the middle, in front of. No, no, in front of you, in front of you, in front of you (...).

NNS 15: green and blue. Green, green is left, blue is right, green, green is left, blue put under, under

NNS 16: Under?

NNS 15: Under here in, in, near, near the yellow, under it, but no space. Under, under it. Under.

In these two excerpts we see that NNS 15 repeats the complex preposition “in front of” and the simple preposition “under” frequently. The repetition occurred because the student was trying to improve the pronunciation of these words and make himself/herself understood. The struggle with pronunciation was present throughout the entire interaction between these two students forcing a lot of repetition and negotiation of meaning, increasing the number of prepositions used. For both levels, thus, the difficulty of object 2 forced an increase in the use of the targeted structure, making this part of the task effective for the purpose for which it was designed.

Use of relative clauses by non-native speakers

Research question number 4 asks to what extent the non-native speakers use relative clauses (especially defining relative clauses) when doing the Picture Board task, in comparison with a normal face to face conversation. The answer to this question also depended on the level of the students and the board that was used. The results for both levels are shown in Figure 4.

To determine if this task is effective for the use of relative clauses, I normed the frequencies (see Appendix H) to 1,000 words and compared the results with a corpus-based study and with the results from the native speakers, as I did for the Lego Block task. The results suggest that, although the numbers are lower for the non-native speakers than for the native speakers, the Picture Board task can still be considered a good one to elicit relative clauses because these results are still higher than in a face to face conversation. As Figure 4 shows, for both levels, this activity elicited fewer relative clauses for non-native speakers than for native speakers, but, the students used many more relative clauses than they would in a face to face conversation, i.e. in a real life situation.

For the high level, the blue board elicited an average of 19.1 relative clauses per 1,000 words and the green board elicited an average of 35.4. These numbers are much higher than the results from a face to face conversation (3.6), but lower than the results from the native speakers (76.2 for the blue board and 50.8 for the green board). Although both boards have much higher results than the face to face conversation, it was the green board that elicited the highest number of relative clauses. A possible explanation for this is presented further below.

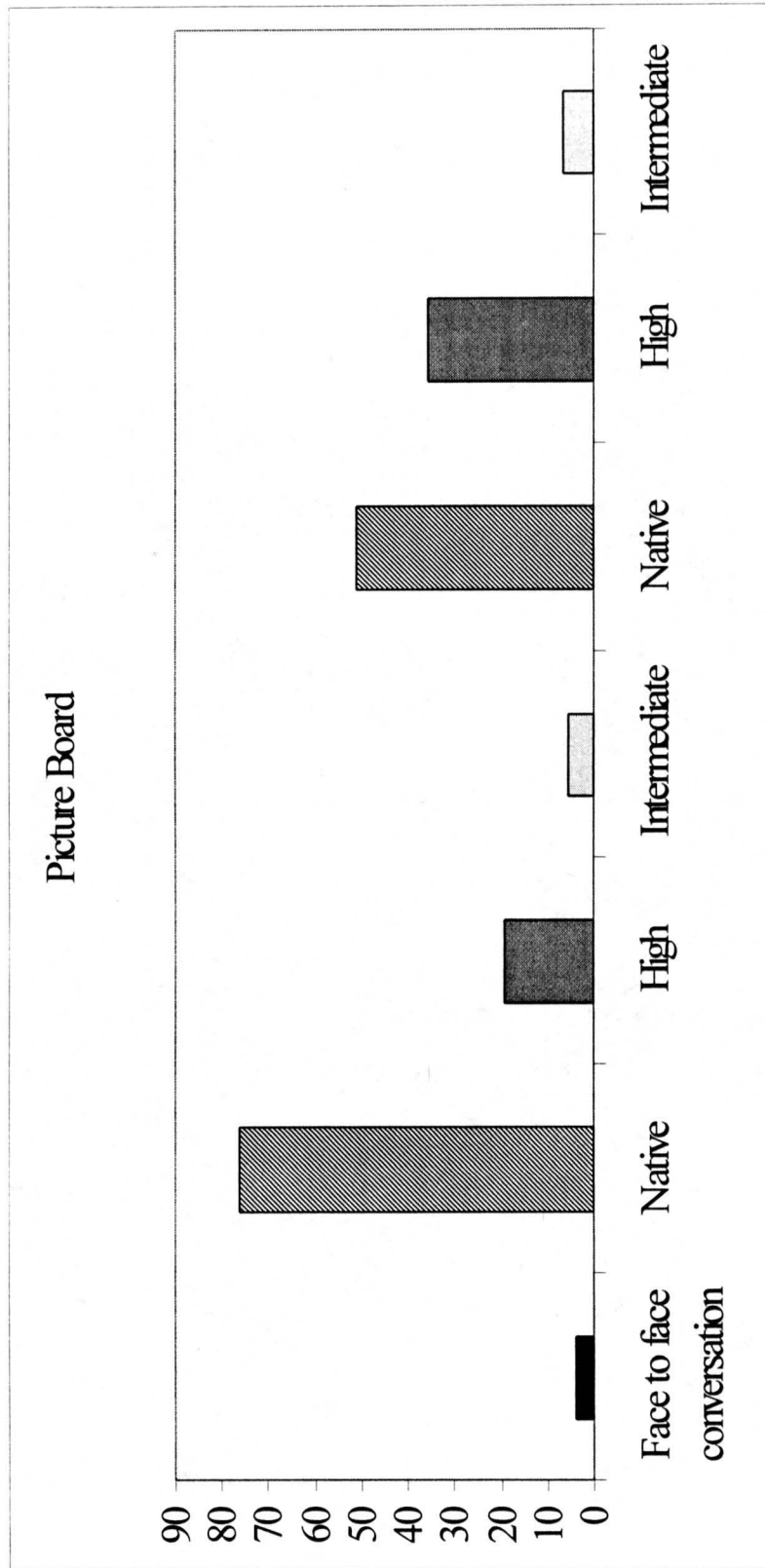


Figure 4. Number of relative clauses per 1,000 words used by the three groups of participants.

In the intermediate level, both boards elicited the structure more than a face to face conversation but less than with the native speakers: The number of relative clauses for the blue board is 5.4 per 1,000 words, which is higher than the 3.6 score in the face to face conversation but lower than the 76.2 result from the native speakers. The number of relative clauses for the green board is 6.5, which is higher than 3.6, but lower than the 50.8 score from the native speakers.

Once again it is the green board that elicited more relative clauses and the reason for this may lie in the words that were used in this board. The words used in the green board were likely more familiar than the words used in the blue board and, therefore, it was more natural for the students to define them using a relative clause. The familiarity of the words may result in a clear definition in the students' mind and in an automaticity in the use of a relative clause. To the mental question "what is this?" the students promptly responded "it is something that" or "it is someone who".

Overall, the results obtained suggest that the Lego Blocks and the Picture Board tasks are valuable activities to elicit the use of prepositions and relative clauses respectively. However, variation seems to occur depending on the students' speech strategies, students' proficiency, design of the objects (Lego Blocks), and choice of words (Picture Board).

Comparison between the two levels of non-native speakers

In the fifth research question I ask how the complexity of the structure affects the way it is used by the two different levels. There was a difference in the performance of the high level students and the intermediate level students that was associated with the complexity of

the two targeted structures. A comparison of the two performances in the Lego Block task is presented in Figure 5.

In this task, the highest results were obtained with the students from level 5 (high level), although the difference with the intermediate level is very small. With object 1, the number of prepositions used by the high level students is 72.4, compared to 68 used by the students in the intermediate level. With object 2, the number of prepositions that the level 5 students use is 99.8, and the number used in the intermediate level dialogues is 96. The difference between the two levels exists but is not at all big, most likely because the structure is simple and is one of the first to be taught in English classes. Although it may take sometime for the students to try to use this structure (therefore the slightly higher results for level 5), they have a great exposure to it.

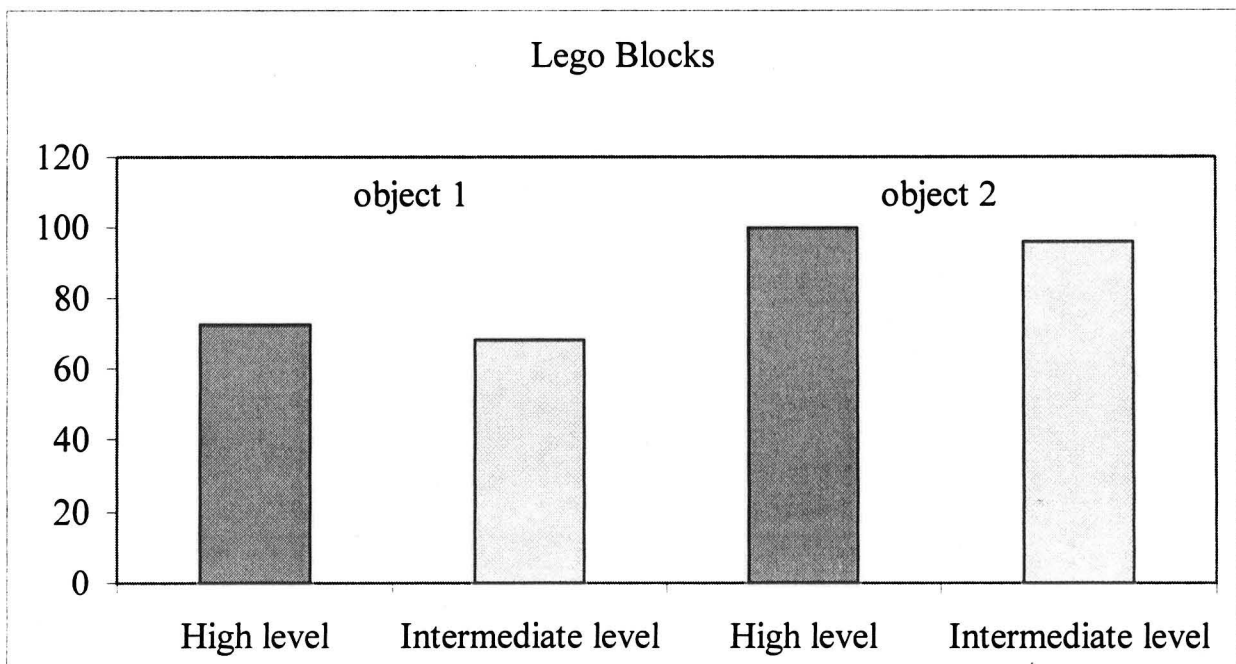


Figure 5. Number of prepositions per 1,000 words used by the non-native speakers

As regards the Picture Board task (Figure 6), the difference between the two levels is bigger. For both boards, the high level students use a considerably higher number of relative clauses. The big difference in the performance of the two proficiency levels is likely explained by the fact that the structure used in this task is a complex one. Unlike prepositions, the relative clauses are not taught in the beginning of a course and it is a structure that doesn't occur so frequently in the input that the students are exposed to.

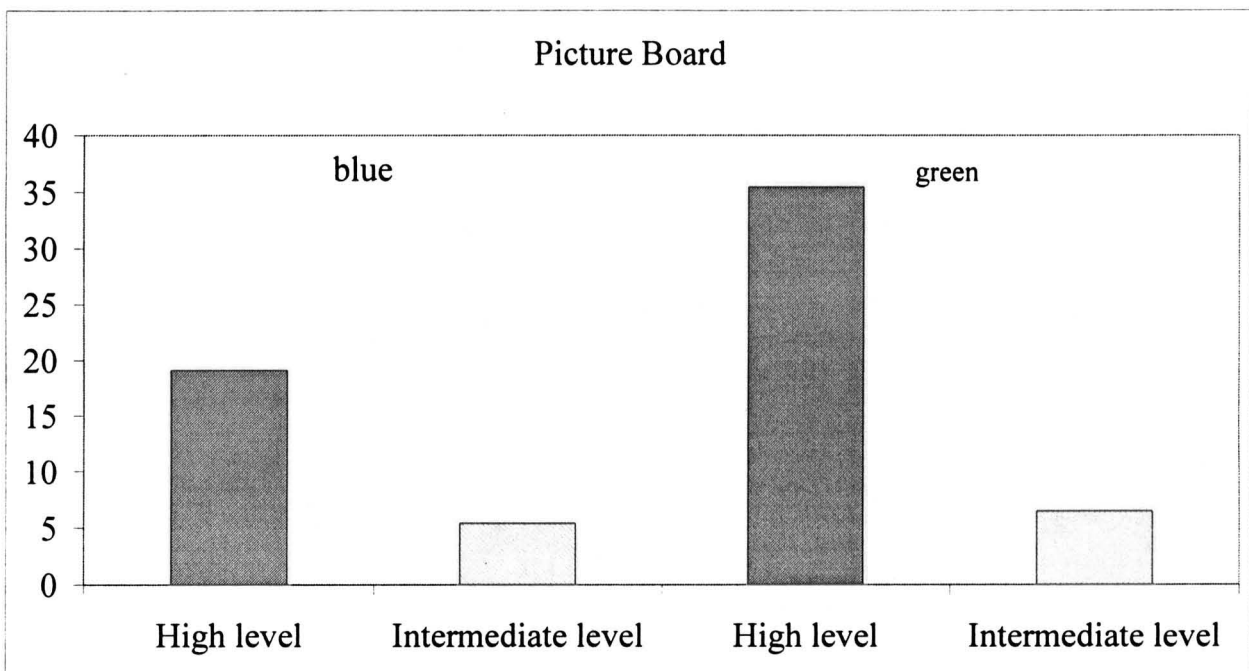


Figure 6. Number of relative clauses per 1,000 words used by the non-native speakers

Thus, even if the students have some instruction on it, it may take longer for them to try to use it.

Many students from the intermediate level didn't use relative clauses in order to complete the task. For example, for the word "doctor", NNS 8 used the following strategy:

NNS 8: “Number 1. Do you know, do you know my father job?”

NNS 7: “yes.”

In addition, several incomplete attempts to construct a relative clause were found in some dialogues. These attempts suggest that these students are in a phase where they are aware of the structure but it is not acquired yet. The following excerpts have examples of such sentences:

NNS 15: who is live in country near England, near England, who live

Or

NNS 22: uh, this, this place, this is live the Clinton, live the president, the president Clinton

In the first example I believe the student is trying to construct the sentence “someone who lives near England” or “a person who lives near England”. In the second example, it seems that the student is trying to say the sentence “this is the place where President Clinton lives”. Although they were not counted as relative clauses for the purpose of this study, it looks like the students are on the way to noticing or acquiring this structure. Both students seem to feel the need to use a relative clause in order to complete the task, but they were unable to construct one successfully.

In summary, the complexity of the structures affects the way they are used by the two proficiency levels. The intermediate and the high level used the simple structure to a

comparable extent. The complex structure, however, was used to a larger extent by the high level students.

Length of the dialogues

A difference in the length of the dialogues in the two tasks was found. The dialogues from the Lego Block task are much longer than the ones from the Picture Board task (see Appendix H) and this raises a question about the design of the tasks. Both tasks are information-gap activities and demand exchange of information in order to have a goal accomplished. Nevertheless, it was in the Lego Blocks activity that more interaction occurred. The reason for this may be the fact that the students needed to have a precise understanding of the instructions to build the object as was in the picture. With the Picture Board activity, this didn't happen. The students were able to find the correct picture even if the definition was not very precise. A few hints about the word were enough for them to accomplish their goal. For example, in the following excerpt from the Lego Blocks task, student 3 needs to know exactly which block to use (long green with 8 holes) and needs to know where exactly to place it (under the green, outside):

NNS 4: Yes, under the green, long, green with 8 holes.
Under that, you know. With 8 holes long. Yes, outside.
No. just put under the. No. put red one and green one
with two holes
NNS 3: put red, this one?
NN 4: No, attach under the green one

In contrast, in the following dialogue from the Picture Board task, the NNS 12 chose the picture with a Christmas tree because NNS 11 used the word "December". It is possible

that NNS 12 didn't understand that the word/phrase the other was trying to define was "Christmas time", but still was able to find the picture:

NNS 11: this is in the house, in December
NNS 12: Ok.

In the next chapter I will talk about the changes in the task that will be necessary in order to avoid such situations where the students do not need to give a definition of the word for the other to find the corresponding picture, and also in order to increase negotiation.

Variety of structures

Another comparison that can be done between the three groups concerns the variety of the structures. Let's first look at prepositions.

The results suggest that the variety of prepositions used, whether simple or complex, may have been determined by the proficiency level of the participants (Fig. 7). There is a tendency for the highest results occur among the native speakers (25 different prepositions in object 1 and 28 in object 2), followed by the high level students (23 in object 1), and finally the intermediate level students (21 in object 1 and 25 in object 2). A strong exception to this happened in object 2, where the non-native speakers from level 5 had the highest score (33).

The reason for this exception may be again the large amount of interaction between the participants. There were a lot of requests for clarification and feedback, which increased the number and most likely the variety of prepositions used. When negotiating and reformulating the sentences, the students likely made use of different prepositions.

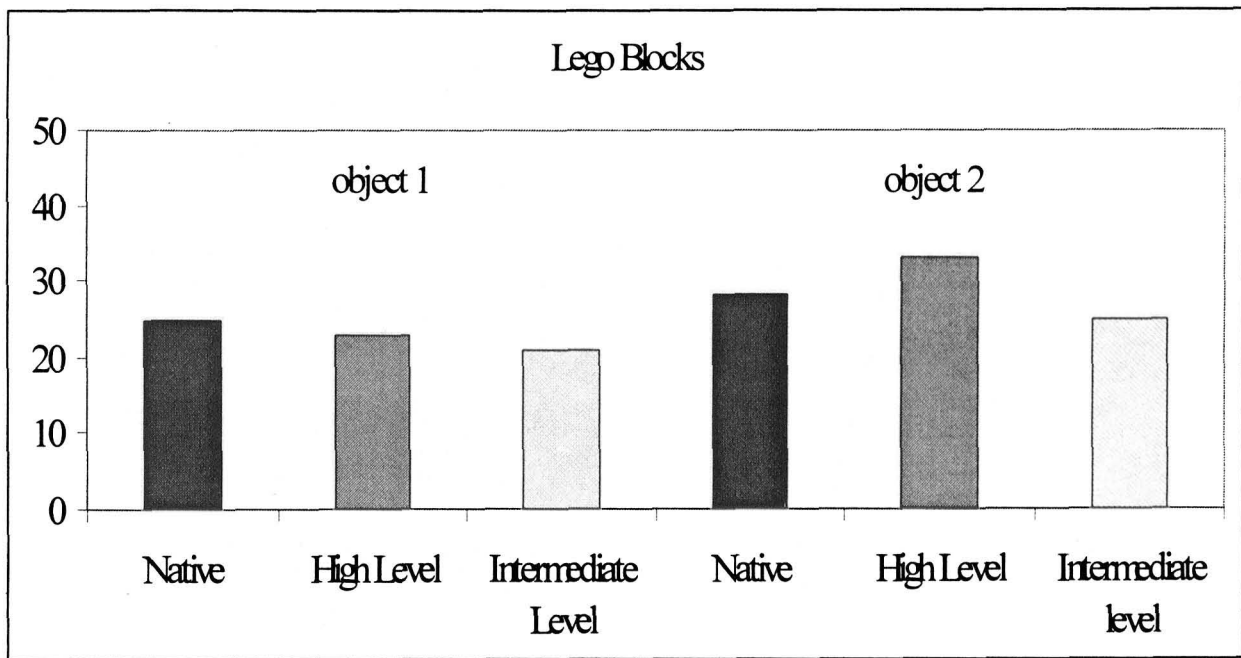


Figure 7. Number of different prepositions used by the three groups

As for the relative clauses, I investigated how many types of relative pronouns/adverbs were used, as well as omissions. As one can see in Figure 8, the pattern emerging from the results also indicates that the variety of the structure used is associated with the proficiency level. For the Blue Board, the native speakers have the highest score for the variety of relative pronouns (5), together with the high level (also 5). At last we have the intermediate level with only 3 different types of relative pronouns/adverbs. For the Green Board, the largest variety of pronouns/adverbs was used by the students in the high level (6), followed by the native speakers and the intermediate level with 5.

The results suggest, then, that the higher the proficiency level, the more varied the structures that are used.

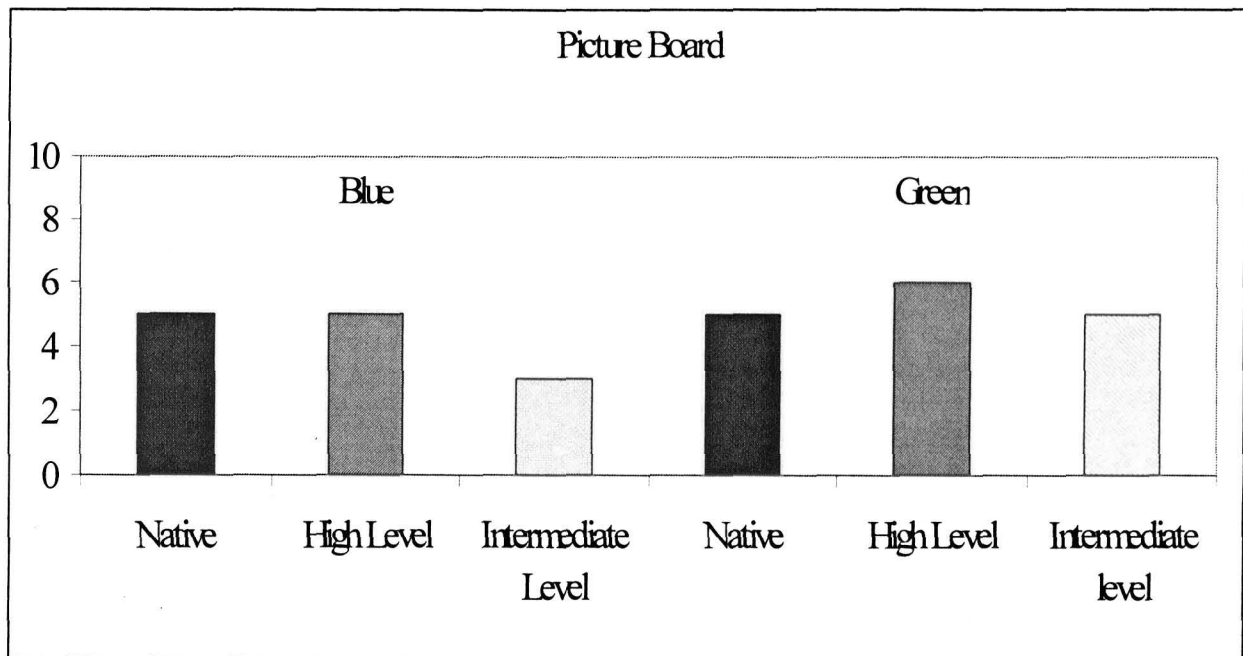


Figure 8. Number of different relative pronouns/adverbs used by the three groups

Questionnaire

In the second part of this study I investigated which of the four classroom activities (Lego Blocks, Picture Board, Prepositions of Place or Defining Relative Clauses) the students liked doing and which ones they would like to have in their English classes. Research question number six asks which activities, the communicative grammar tasks or the traditional exercises, the students liked most. Their liking or disliking of the activities was expressed in a scale from 1 to 7 (see Appendix G). Their opinion about each one of the activities is presented in Table 1.

The results obtained suggest that the students prefer the communicative grammar tasks. For both levels, the average score for the Lego Blocks task is higher than the score for the traditional exercise Prepositions of Place. Similarly, for both levels, the average score for

the Picture Board is higher than for the traditional activity Defining Relative Clauses. The Wilcoxon's matched-pairs signed-ranks test showed statistical significance for most of the results (in bold). Statistical significance was found for the results of the high level comparing both the Lego Blocks Task with the Prepositions of Place and the Picture Board Task with the Defining relative Clauses ($p < .05$). For the intermediate level, statistical significance was obtained for the results comparing the Lego Blocks task with the activity Prepositions of Place ($p < .05$).

Table 1. Mean scores expressing the students' opinion.

Questions	High level	Intermediate level
Lego Blocks	6.0	5.5
Prepositions of Place	3.7	4.5
Picture Board	6.1	5.5
Defining Relative Clauses	4.3	4.5

The general feeling about the communicative tasks is that they are different and fun. We can find such kind of comments in the questionnaires from both levels. Here are a few examples:

NNS 2: "I love it! Again I think that when you plan to teach something using a different material like it, learning will be enjoyable and easier."

NNS 4: "Having fun. It was like a game."

NNS 12: "I enjoyed guessing the questions."

NNS 15: "It's fun and help me describe something."

NNS 18: "It is a different activity."

NNS 19: "I have funny time."

NNS 21: "It was funny."

Judging from these comments it is not surprising to find a preference for the communicative grammar tasks.

The difference between the attitude toward the grammar tasks and the ones of the traditional exercises is more accentuated in the high level. One explanation for this is the fact that some of the students from the intermediate level preferred the traditional activity to the communicative grammar task. This may be because they still feel the need for structure-oriented activities and instruction. Adults commonly feel the need for grammar instruction that is more explicit, and the non-native speakers that participated in this study were all young adults. When performing the activities "Prepositions of Place" and "Defining Relative Clauses" they knew what structures they were supposed to use and practice. When performing the communicative grammar tasks, on the other hand, they were not conscious of the fact that they were using a grammar structure in particular. Therefore, some may have felt that the traditional exercises are more helpful for them. Here are some of the comments they wrote about the traditional activities:

NNS 22: "Grammar is important to me. Also, I need it."

NNS 24: "like because practice for TOEFL."

NNS 24: "like because practice for grammar class."

In these comments about the "Prepositions of Place" and the "Defining Relative Clauses" activities, we see the importance that the students give to the practice of grammar. Their view of grammar, however, is an outdated one, since they seem to equate grammar practice with drills and writing exercises.

Another factor that may have contributed for a more accentuated preference for the communicative tasks in the high level may be the mode of the activities. From what I observed during the recordings, in general the students from level 3 had more difficulty completing the communicative tasks because they were done orally. The traditional activities, on the other hand, were done in written form, which was easier or more comfortable for them. While in the traditional grammar tasks they had to understand the reading and write either a few words or change sentences, in the communicative tasks they were forced to understand and produce spoken language. In addition, in the grammar tasks they had to interact with another student. They had the responsibility to convey a message to the other student and this might interfere with their self-confidence.

Here is a comment by on student explaining what he disliked about the communicative grammar tasks:

NNS 14: "Because it is difficult for me to explain. I need explain exactly my partner. But I don't think that Lego

Block activity improve English.”

In this case, the student not only feels that it is difficult to give the instructions to his partner, but also feels that the activity is not good for language learning, most likely because he wasn't aware of the fact that a grammatical structure was being practiced.

Other students commented:

NNS 19: “I feel that I lack about expressionway.”

NNS 21: “It's so hard to explain.”

In these two comments we find, again, the idea of difficulty in expressing themselves when performing the communicative tasks.

In order to answer the research question number 7, i.e. if the communicative grammar tasks are more motivating than the structure-oriented activities, the students were asked if they would like to have these activities in their future English classes. Again, the range of the possible answers was from 1 to 7.

The same pattern was found as in the previous question (Table 2). The students from both levels would like to have the communicative grammar tasks in their classes more than the traditional activities. For the Lego Blocks task, the means are 6.6 for the high level and 5.2 for the intermediate level. Both contrast with the results for the Prepositions of Place, which are 4.1 and 5.1. Notice, however that the difference in the intermediate level is negligible (5.2 versus 5.1). With the Picture Board task, the results are 6.3 for the high level and 6 for the intermediate, contrasting with the scores of 4.5 and 4.7 of the Defining Relative

Clauses. Statistical significance was obtained for the results (in bold) that show the students' preference for the Picture Board Task versus the activity Defining Relative Clauses regarding future use ($p < .05$).

I would say, then, that these results suggest that the communicative grammar tasks are more motivating than the structure-oriented exercises. Similar to what happened with the previous results (Table 1), the difference between the scores of the grammar tasks and the traditional activities is more accentuated in the high level. Although in this set of questions the students were not given the opportunity to add some explanation to their answers, I believe the reasons mentioned above may also apply to these results.

Table 2. Mean scores expressing the students' preferences for the future

Questions	High Level	Intermediate Level
Lego Blocks	6.6	5.2
Prepositions of Place	4.1	5.1
Picture Board	6.3	6.0
Defining Relative Clauses	4.5	4.7

Overall, then, the results of the questionnaire suggest that the communicative grammar tasks are intrinsically motivating. The students prefer them to the traditional exercises and are more willing to have them in future classes than the other activities. The students' comments show that communicative grammar tasks can make the language classroom fun.

In this chapter, I presented the results of the experiment with the communicative grammar tasks. The two communicative grammar tasks used in this study do elicit the structures they are supposed to elicit and the students prefer them to the traditional activities. An analysis of the results suggest, however, that several factors condition them, such as the design of the activities, the individual characteristics of the students and their proficiency level.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, the results of this study were presented and discussed. In this chapter I will summarize the answers to the research questions, present recommendations for the development of materials and for the use of the tasks in the classroom. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this study for further research.

Summary of findings

The first research question asked to what extent the native speakers use prepositions when performing the Lego Block task compared to a face to face conversation. The answer is that they used prepositions to a satisfactory extent.

The answer to the second research question is more positive than the answer to the first one, since the native speakers used relative clauses to an impressive extent while performing the Picture Board task either with the blue or the green board.

The results from the first two questions seem to suggest then that the two tasks are effective tasks to elicit the grammatical structures in question. But are they so effective when it comes to non-native speakers? The answer to the next two research questions determined that.

Research question 3 asks to what extent the non-native speakers use prepositions when doing the Lego Block task, compared to a face to face conversation. The answer to this question is that the task elicits prepositions to a moderately good extent.

As regards the fourth research question, the answer to it is confidently positive. With the high level students this task elicits relative clauses to a great extent, while with the students from the intermediate level the results are more moderate, but still higher than the results from native speakers in a face to face conversation.

The answers to research questions number 3 and 4 suggest that the Lego Block and the Picture Board tasks are valuable activities to use in order to elicit the two targeted structures from the non-native speakers.

The results from both native and non-native speakers, however, were conditioned by the design of the two tasks. In the Lego Blocks tasks, the language use was affected by the design of the objects. Variation in the performance occurred depending on the object being built. In the Picture Board Tasks, the language use was affected by the words that had to be defined. Other factors, such as the students' speech strategies, gender, and proficiency level also influenced the language use in the two communicative grammar tasks

Although the answers to the two previous research questions were positive, there are differences in the performance of the two proficiency levels. And that is exactly what research question number 5 is trying to determine. The results suggest that the complexity of the structure does affect the extent to which the students from different proficiency levels use them. The results also suggest that the Lego Block task seems to be appropriate for any level, although advanced levels would not generally need to practice such a simple structure. The Picture Board task, on the other hand, may be more effective and more appropriate for a higher proficiency level.

The next two research questions do not concern language use, but the motivational aspect of the communicative grammar tasks and the traditional activities.

The sixth question asks whether the students prefer the communicative grammar tasks to the more structure-oriented activities. The results obtained suggest that the answer is affirmative. There is a difference, nevertheless, in the degree of preference in the two proficiency levels. In the high level, the degree of preference for the grammar tasks is more accentuated than in the intermediate level.

The last question asks whether the communicative grammar tasks are more motivating than the structure-oriented activities. This is determined by the student's willingness to engage in such tasks in the future more than in the traditional activities. Once again the answer is affirmative. It is important to notice that once more, the difference of scores from the high level is more accentuated than the difference of the intermediate level. This suggests that, although overall the tasks seem to be more motivating than the structure-oriented activities, they are more motivating for the high level than for the intermediate level students.

The answers to all the research questions suggest that indeed communicative grammar tasks are a valuable asset for language classrooms. Besides being a valuable way to combine meaningful communication and a focus on form, they seem to be considered as fun and interesting activities. Research shows that all the above factors help promote language acquisition. With communicative grammar tasks they are all combined.

Recommendations for materials development and classroom use

Task design

Although the design of the two objects is mine, the idea of the Lego Block task was taken from Ur (1988). It was used as presented by this author and that is probably why, during the performance of this task, no particular problems were observed. Occasionally, the students had to be reminded not to point at the blocks but everything else worked well.

The design of the objects, however, influenced the number of prepositions used. Among the non-native speakers of both levels the most difficult object instigated more interaction and, consequentially, more use of the structure. Some attention thus must be paid when designing the objects.

The Picture Board task, on the other hand, was an adaptation of another activity recommended by Ur (1988) and thus had a few new elements created by me. Being the first time that this task was tried out, there are several aspects that need to be improved so that it fulfills its goal more precisely. Some changes will be necessary so that the language structure is more consistently used and more negotiated interaction between the students occurs.

One of the first things that I noticed when both native and non-native speakers were doing the activity is the fact that some of them tended to describe the pictures and not to define the words. If this happens, then obviously the task cannot fulfill the goal of eliciting a good number of relative clauses. The solution that I propose involves covering the picture in the board of the student who has to define the word. The word remains visible, though. The student who gives the definition may only look at the picture to confirm whether the other

student has chosen the correct one. The covering of the picture may be easily done with a post-it of the same size. Not only does it cover the picture during the definition phase, but is also easily removed. By doing this, the students are forced to think of a definition for the words and will likely use more defining relative clauses.

Another issue is the fact that often the student is able to quickly find the correct picture but does not necessarily know exactly what word the other student is trying to define. In chapter 3, I presented the example of the student who found the correct picture just by listening to the word “December”. However, this student was not aware of the fact that the exact expression that the other student was trying to define was “Christmas time”. In this situation the amount of interaction was very little. This may be solved by the introduction of a new rule for this task. The students have to find the pictures that match the definitions, but they are also required to say the exact word that was defined. With this modification the interaction and negotiation is likely to increase.

Another way to increase interaction can be by augmenting the number of cards that work as distracters. I observed that more negotiation was necessary when the students came across the pictures that had distracters. Let’s look at the following excerpts:

NS 11: “ Uh, a member of the avian family.”

In this example NS 11 was trying to define the word “parrot”. Because there was no other bird in the cards, the other participant found the picture very easily. However, in the following example, NS 11 had more difficulty in finding the correct card and forced more negotiation with NS 12:

NS 12: “Uh, a member of the avian community. (...)

NS 11: Wait. That last one won’t work.

NS 12: uh, ah, it won’t work? A member of the avian community? You don’t? Uh, something that swims

In this case, the students had changed roles and were working with another board. The word that NS 12 had to define was “duck”. He/she used the expression “avian community” because it had been effective with the previous board. However, NS 11 had the picture of a duck and a picture of a chicken to choose from. Both animals are from the avian family, and therefore NS 12 had to explain better, ending up by using the relative clause “something that swims”. This shows that if one wants to have much more interaction along with a higher number of relative clauses, more distracters have to be used.

Briefly, careful attention must be paid to the design of communicative grammar tasks so that they will effectively elicit the targeted structures. Teachers should pilot the tasks that they design so that they can check how efficient they are and verify what possible problems may occur.

Teachers should take into consideration the fact that communicative grammar tasks like the two used in this study require a good amount of preparation time. Planning in advance is thus very important. Since they require a certain amount of preparation time, it would be ideal if a book with these kind of tasks and materials existed.

Enforcing rules

When using these tasks in a classroom with many students performing them at the same time, I would recommend that teachers pay a lot of attention to and enforce the rules. It

is necessary that students do not point at the objects, when working on the Lego Blocks task. Otherwise the need for the use of prepositions or the need for clarifications and feedback will be reduced or eliminated, limiting the benefits of such classroom activity for language acquisition. Likewise, it is important that the students do not describe the pictures when working on the Picture Board task. If the students use descriptions instead of definitions, it is highly unlikely that they will use relative clauses. Therefore, the task will not fulfill its goal.

Proficiency level considerations

The results from this study suggest that some communicative grammar tasks are more appropriate for certain proficiency levels than others. The appropriateness of the tasks for a certain proficiency level is dependent on the grammatical structure in focus. Tasks focusing on simple structures are likely appropriate for almost any level, while tasks focusing on more complex structures may be more appropriate for higher levels.

The mode of the task also influences how the students perform them. Communicative grammar tasks like the ones used in this thesis project require students to make use of their listening and speaking skills. This is usually more difficult for students at a lower proficiency level than for the students who are more proficient.

Teachers should take the above factors into consideration when determining which tasks to design or use in class.

Need for more and diversified grammar tasks

Following the criteria suggested by Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) the two communicative grammar tasks used for this study were designed as production tasks. I

recommend thus that they be used in the classroom for the practice of the two targeted grammar structures. However, they should be considered only as one of the phases of a class that integrates grammar with communication. The other tasks that I recommend to be used are the consciousness-raising (recommended by Ellis and Fotos) or the interpretation tasks (recommended by Ellis). These are classroom activities designed to make students aware of grammatical forms. Their goal is not to have students produce anything but to notice how certain forms convey meanings. In a language classroom, the initial part of a class is usually dedicated to the presentation of grammatical forms to the students. Consciousness-raising or interpretation tasks are thus appropriate for that phase of the class. Production usually comes at the end of a class, so the communicative grammar tasks used in this study are appropriate for that. They are production tasks and allow for practice of structures, and, ultimately, automaticity.

The ideal classroom, then, would include consciousness-raising tasks, in order to first promote noticing and hypothesis formation, and production tasks (such as the Lego Blocks and the Picture Board) in order to promote automaticity.

Implications and suggestions for further research

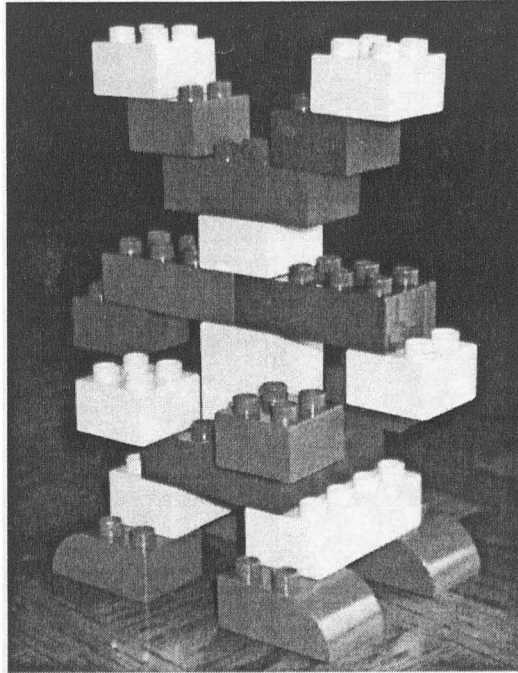
First, it is important to remember that the conclusions reached in this study are not definitive due to the limited amount of data available. The tendencies shown need to be further explored in other studies of this kind. More students from various proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds are needed so that the results are more generalizable.

Secondly, more research is necessary with other grammatical structures. The goal of this exploratory study was to determine if communicative grammar tasks are effective activities to use in the ESL/EFL classrooms in order to integrate grammar and communication. Since the two tasks used in this study focused only on prepositions and relative clauses, and it is known that learning a language involves (among other equally important things) acquiring many different grammar structures, it is necessary to develop and research new tasks that will focus on other grammatical structures.

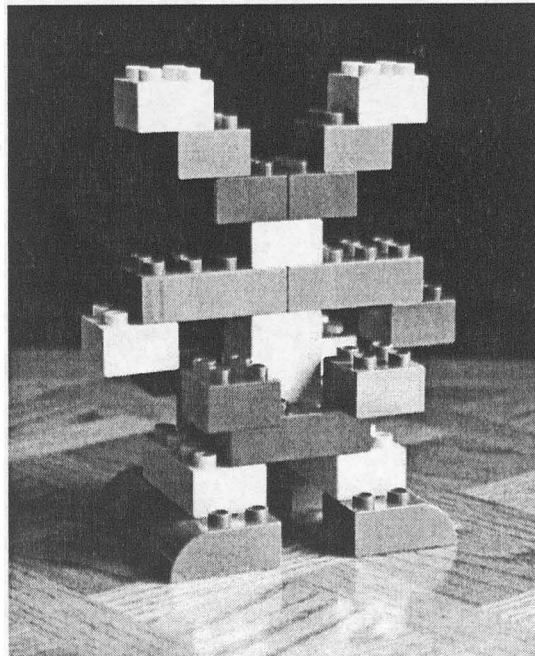
Finally, more research is necessary with the various types of grammar tasks. It is important to design and experiment with both consciousness-raising and production tasks, so that both can be used and complement each other in EFL/ESL classes. It is necessary to design both consciousness-raising tasks and production tasks focusing on the many existing grammar structures so that the students can notice and practice grammatical forms integrated in communicative tasks throughout different proficiency levels. Research is necessary in order to determine if the designed tasks really help develop students' awareness and automaticity.

The results obtained in this study suggest that this kind of classroom activity is a valuable means of integrating grammar with the communicative approach to language teaching. Communicative grammar tasks show that teachers don't necessarily have to be on one side or the other of the "grammar vs. communication" controversy. Grammar and communication are possible together. This study also suggests that communicative grammar tasks are perceived as fun by the students and thus are likely to be conducive to a higher degree of motivation for learning a second language. With further research we can expand

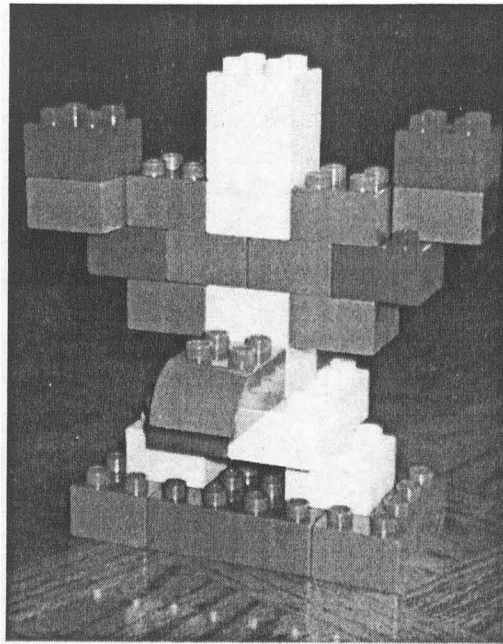
our understanding of the value of communicative grammar tasks, so that teachers can truly and extensively integrate grammar with communication in ESL/EFL classrooms.

APPENDIX A. LEGO BLOCKS TASK

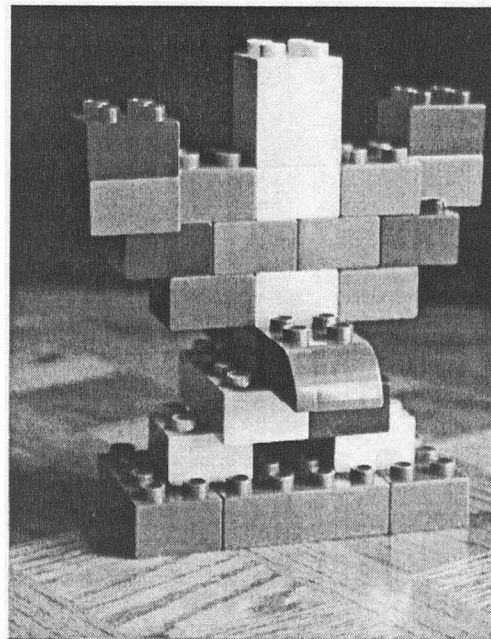
Object 1



Object 1



Object 2



Object 2

APPENDIX B. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LEGO BLOCKS TASK

Lego Blocks (Student A)

Read the following instructions:

- Study the object in the picture.
- Give instructions to your partner on how to build exactly the same object with the Lego blocks that he/she has.
- He/she may ask questions
- **DO NOT** point or use the blocks yourself to help your partner.

Lego Blocks (Student B)

Read the following instructions:

- Look at the Lego blocks at your disposal.
- Follow the instructions your partner will give you on how to build a certain object with the blocks.
- You may ask questions.

APPENDIX C. PICTURE BOARD TASK

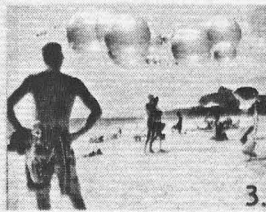
Blue Board



1. a Doctor



2. an Airport



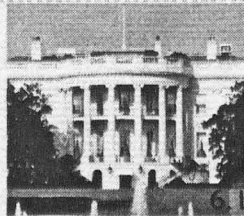
3. the Summer



4. a ticket



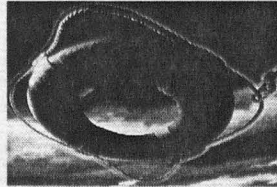
5. a newspaper



6. the Whitehouse



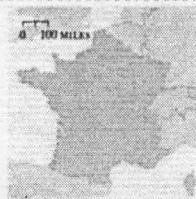
7. a Duck



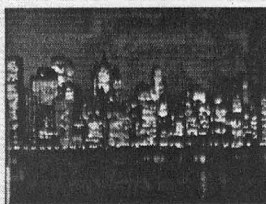
8. a Buoy



9. a Scientist



10. a Map



11. the Night

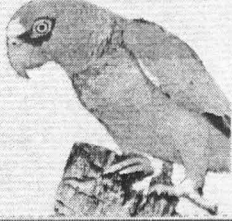


12. a Scotsman

Blue Board

[illegible]

Green Board



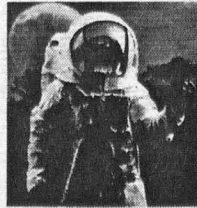
1. a Parrot



2. a Mailbox



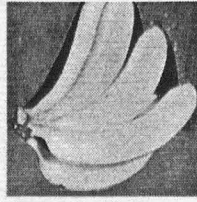
3. a Hairdresser



4. an Astronaut



5. a Florist



6. a Banana



7. Christmas Time



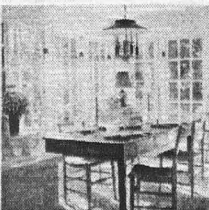
8. an American



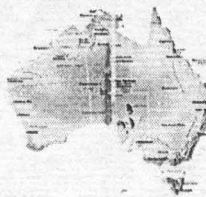
9. a Cell Phone



10. a Clown



11. the Morning



12. Australia

Green Board

[illegible]

APPENDIX D. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PICTURE BOARD TASK

Picture Board (Student A)

Read the following instructions:

- Look at the words in your board.
- Give a **DEFINITION** of each word so that your partner can choose a picture to complete his board. **DO NOT** describe the pictures.
- Follow the numerical order.
- Make sure the board from your partner looks like yours.
- Your partner may ask questions.

Picture Board (Student B)

Read the following instructions:

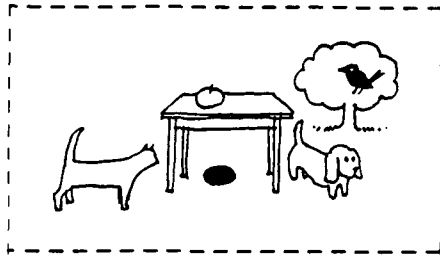
- - Your partner will give a definition of a word.
- - Listen to the definition of the word and try to find a picture that corresponds to it.
- - Place the picture on the board on the appropriate number.
- - You may ask questions

APPENDIX. E. ACTIVITY PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

PREPOSITIONS OF PLACE

Name initials _____ First language _____

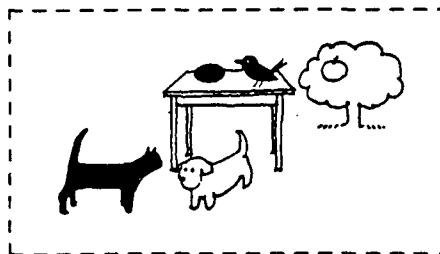
Look at the following pictures and complete the sentences below with the appropriate preposition of place:



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Example: The bird is _____ in _____ the tree.

1. The dog is _____ the table.
2. The apple is _____ the table.
3. The ball is _____ the table.
4. The cat is _____ the table.
5. The dog is _____ the tree.
6. The table is _____ the cat and the dog.



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7. The black cat is _____ the dog.
8. The bird is _____ the ball.
9. The table is _____ the dog.
10. The apple is _____ the tree.

APPENDIX F. ACTIVITY DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

DEFINING RELATIVE CLAUSES

Name initials _____ First language _____

Join the following sentences using a relative pronoun:

Example: This is the car. John bought it last week.

This is the car **that** John bought last week.

1. The dress is torn. My mother bought it for my birthday.

2. Corruption is an issue. It raises strong emotions.

3. The man robbed you. He was arrested yesterday.

4. The hotel is quite expensive. We are staying in the hotel.

5. Kevin entered the room. Melissa was singing at that moment.

6. There is the woman. She was very kind to me.

Complete the following sentences with the appropriate relative pronoun:

Example: The fireman **who** saved the little girl received a medal.

7. Once I met a man _____ could imitate lots of famous public figures.

8. The neighborhood _____ they live is wonderful. I think we should move there.

9. She was never able to keep a job _____ demanded a lot of concentration.

10. Brad was leaving the shop _____ I bumped into him.

11. They were the first students _____ managed to get good results from the experiment.

12. This is the umbrella _____ Caroline bought in London, last year.

APPENDIX G. QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name initials _____ First language _____

Read the following questions and circle the number that best describes your opinion.
Answer the questions written in *italics*.

1. Did you like doing the activity with the Lego Blocks?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What did you like about it? _____

OR

What didn't you like about it? _____

2. Did you like doing the activity with the Prepositions of Place?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What did you like about it? _____

OR

What didn't you like about it? _____

3. Did you like doing the activity with the Picture Board?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What did you like about it? _____

OR

What didn't you like about it? _____

4. Did you like doing the activity with the Defining Relative Clauses?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

What did you like about it? _____

OR

What didn't you like about it? _____

5. Would you like to have activities like the one with the Lego Blocks in your future English classes?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Would you like to have activities like the one with the Prepositions of Place in your future English classes?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

7. Would you like to have activities like the one with the Picture Board in your future English classes?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

8. Would you like to have activities like the one with the Defining Relative Clauses in your future English classes?

NO						YES
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX H. FREQUENCIES AND NORMED COUNTS OF PREPOSITIONS AND RELATIVE CLAUSES

Table 3. Frequency of prepositions used by the native speakers

NS #	Lego Blocks					
	Object 1			Object 2		
	# words	# prep.	# prep. of place	# words	# prep.	# prep. of place
1 and 2	354	39	22	365	29	26
3 and 4	794	83	38	1008	76	53
5 and 6	588	61	43	749	75	55
<i>mean</i>	<i>578.7</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>34.4</i>	<i>707.4</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>44.7</i>

Table 4. Number of prepositions used by the native speakers vs. corpus based studies (per 1,000 words)

NS #	Lego Blocks			
	Object 1		Object 2	
	# prep./1,000	Face to face conversation	# prep./1,000	Face to face conversation
1 and 2	110.2	85	79.5	85
3 and 4	104.6	85	75.4	85
5 and 6	103.8	85	100.2	85
<i>mean</i>	<i>106.2</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>85.1</i>	<i>85</i>

Table 5. Frequency of relative clauses by the native speakers

NS #	Picture Board					
	Blue Board			Green Board		
	# words	# relative clauses	# defining rel. clauses	# words	# relative clauses	# defining rel. clauses
7 and 8	152	15	15	131	12	12
9 and 10	195	7	7	248	4	4
11 and 12	96	9	9	135	6	6
<i>mean</i>	<i>147.7</i>	<i>10.4</i>	<i>10.4</i>	<i>171.4</i>	<i>7.4</i>	<i>7.4</i>

Table 6. Number of relative clauses used by the native speakers vs. corpus based studies (per 1,000 words)

NS #	Picture Board			
	Blue Board		Green Board	
	# relative clauses/1,000	Face to face conversation	# relative clauses/1,000	Face to face conversation
1 and 2	98.7	2.9	91.7	2.9
3 and 4	35.9	2.9	16.2	2.9
5 and 6	93.8	2.9	44.5	2.9
<i>mean</i>	<i>76.2</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>50.8</i>	<i>2.9</i>

Table 7. Frequency of prepositions used by the non-native speakers (high level)

NNS #	Lego Blocks					
	Object 1			Object 2		
	# words	# prep.	# prep. of place	# words	# prep.	# prep. of place
1 and 2	728	58	27	743	54	38
3 and 4	917	78	31	710	80	53
5 and 6	530	42	26	587	78	75
7 and 8	528	26	23	346	35	33
9 and 10	554	38	21	771	70	48
11 and 12	430	31	17	261	23	18
<i>mean</i>	<i>614.5</i>	<i>45.5</i>	<i>24.2</i>	<i>569.7</i>	<i>56.7</i>	<i>44.2</i>

Table 8. Number of prepositions used by the non-native speakers (high level) vs. corpus based studies (per 1,000 words)

NNS #	Lego Blocks			
	Object 1		Object 2	
	# prep/1,000	Face to face conversation	# prep/1,000	Face to face conversation
1 and 2	79.7	85	72.7	85
3 and 4	85.1	85	112.7	85
5 and 6	79.3	85	132.9	85
7 and 8	49.3	85	101.2	85
9 and 10	68.6	85	90.8	85
11 and 12	72.1	85	88.2	85
<i>mean</i>	<i>72.4</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>99.8</i>	<i>85</i>

Table 9. Frequency of prepositions used by the non-native speakers (intermediate level)

NNS #	Lego Blocks					
	Object 1			Object 2		
	# words	# prep.	# prep. of place	# words	# prep.	# prep. of place
13 and 14	-	-	-	-	-	-
15 and 16	498	27	25	1186	155	136
17 and 18	330	36	18	875	92	68
19 and 20	404	25	23	408	31	31
21 and 22	580	18	9	756	50	20
23 and 24	372	31	22	503	51	48
<i>mean</i>	<i>436.8</i>	<i>27.4</i>	<i>19.4</i>	<i>745.6</i>	<i>75.8</i>	<i>60.6</i>

Table 10. Number of prepositions used by the non-native speakers (intermediate level) vs. corpus based studies (per 1,000 words)

NNS #	Lego Blocks			
	Object 1		Object 2	
	# prep/1,000	Face to face conversation	# prep/1,000	Face to face conversation
13 and 14	-	-	-	-
17 and 18	54.3	85	130.7	85
19 and 20	109.1	85	105.2	85
21 and 22	61.9	85	76	85
23 and 24	31.1	85	66.2	85
15 and 16	83.4	85	101.4	85
<i>mean</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>85</i>

Table 11. Frequency of relative clauses used by the non-native speakers (high level)

NNS #	Picture Board					
	Blue Board			Green Board		
	# words	# relative clauses	# defining rel. clauses	# words	# relative clauses	# defining rel. clauses
1 and 2	442	7	7	475	18	18
3 and 4	322	9	9	241	11	11
5 and 6	375	3	3	398	6	6
7 and 8	389	0	0	301	10	10
9 and 10	193	12	12	285	14	14
11 and 12	258	0	0	193	6	6
<i>mean</i>	<i>329.9</i>	<i>5.2</i>	<i>5.2</i>	<i>315.5</i>	<i>10.9</i>	<i>10.9</i>

Table 12. Number of relative clauses used by the non-native speakers (high level) vs. corpus based studies (per 1,000 words)

NNS #	Picture Board			
	Blue Board		Green Board	
	# relative clauses/1,000	Face to face conversation	# relative clauses/1,000	Face to face conversation
1 and 2	15.9	2.9	37.9	2.9
3 and 4	28	2.9	45.7	2.9
5 and 6	8	2.9	15.1	2.9
7 and 8	0	2.9	33.3	2.9
9 and 10	62.2	2.9	49.2	2.9
11 and 12	0	2.9	31.1	2.9
<i>mean</i>	<i>19.1</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>35.4</i>	<i>2.9</i>

Table 13. Frequency of relative clauses used by the non-native speakers (intermediate level)

NNS #	Picture Board					
	Blue Board			Green Board		
	# words	# relative clauses	# defining rel. clauses	# words	# relative clauses	# defining rel. clauses
13 and 14	-	-	-	-	-	-
15 and 16	727	0	0	514	0	0
17 and 18	300	4	4	202	6	6
19 and 20	260	1	1	186	0	0
21 and 22	384	2	2	407	1	1
23 and 24	235	1	1	246	0	0
<i>mean</i>	<i>384.8</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>311</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>1.4</i>

Table 14. Number of relative clauses used by the non-native speakers (intermediate level) vs. corpus based studies (per 1,000 words)

NNS #	Picture Board			
	Blue Board		Green Board	
	# relative clauses/1,000	Face to face conversation	# relative clauses/1,000	Face to face conversation
13 and 14	-	-	-	-
15 and 16	0	2.9	0	2.9
17 and 18	13.4	2.9	29.8	2.9
19 and 20	3.9	2.9	0	2.9
21 and 22	5.3	2.9	2.5	2.9
23 and 24	4.3	2.9	0	2.9
<i>mean</i>	<i>5.4</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>6.5</i>	<i>2.9</i>

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people, without whose contribution this work wouldn't have been possible:

- The members of my committee, Dr. Susan Conrad, Dr. Carol Chapelle, and Dr. David Edwards, for their guidance, support and patience. A very special thanks to my major professor, Dr. Susan Conrad.
- Vincent Van Acker, for his precious help and unconditional support.
- Russell Anderson, for doing the graphic design of the Picture Board Task.
- The students from IEOP and the native speakers who volunteered to participate in this study.
- Dr. Alipio Barra, Dr. Nicolas Hurst and Dr. Antonio Souza, for recommending me for the master's degree program in TESL/Applied Linguistics at Iowa State University.
- All the professors in the TESL/Applied Linguistics area, for everything they have taught me.
- All the people I met and all the friends I made during my stay at ISU, for making my life so much richer.

To all

Obrigada!