

# Students' Attitudes Regarding the Acquisition of English and Croatian Grammars

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

**ANJA RADOČAJ**

**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**STUDENTS' ATTITUDES REGARDING THE  
ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AND  
CROATIAN GRAMMARS**

**Zagreb, rujan 2018.**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

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Acquisition of English and Croatian Grammars

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## ABSTRACT

Learning and acquiring a *second language* (L2), as well as the *first language* (L1), does not only imply the four most important skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. An important role in acquiring any language belongs to the knowledge and understanding of “the language rules” - grammar. Many people see grammar as a problem, and for some personal reason, they do not like to learn it. It seems that grammar inspires fear and is the most difficult part of language learning, and that is why the primary goal in this research was to find out about students' attitudes concerning the acquisition of English grammar (English as a *second language*) and Croatian grammar (Croatian as a *first language*), regardless of their love of grammar. The research was conducted using a qualitative method with a questionnaire consisting of two open-ended questions, and it involved 80 future elementary school generalist teachers, who are also studying to be teachers of English. The participants were first-year and third-year university students. The main reason for choosing these two groups is that they have the same major, but at the same time, they have a different level of language acquisition, and different experience with teaching practice in classrooms. The analysis showed that students considered grammar important, with a smaller emphasis on the *first language* grammar. They see the *second language* grammar important for teaching others, but also for enabling easier communication and better fluency. As for the grammar of the *first language*, the students think there should not be much stress on it since the *first language* surrounds us on a daily basis and we adopt the grammar naturally. However, they still consider grammar important in order to understand the language better and to acquire new (foreign) languages easier. As far as students' attitudes based on their year of study are concerned, no significant differences were noticed.

*Keywords:* grammar, teaching and learning, the first language, the second language, future teachers

## SAŽETAK

Učenje i usvajanje *drugog* (L2), ali i *prvog jezika* (L1), ne uključuje samo četiri najvažnije vještine: čitanje, pisanje, govorenje i slušanje. Važnu ulogu u usvajanju jezika također zauzima poznavanje i razumijevanje svih “jezičnih pravila” - gramatike. Velik broj ljudi smatra gramatiku problemom i iz nekog osobnog razloga ne voli ju učiti. Čini se kako gramatika stvara strah i kako je ljudi smatraju najtežim dijelom prilikom učenja jezika, stoga je glavni cilj ovog istraživanja bio otkriti stavove studenata vezane uz usvajanje gramatike engleskog (kao *drugog jezika*) i gramatike hrvatskog (kao *prvog jezika*), bez obzira na to vole li studenti gramatiku ili ne. Istraživanje je provedeno kvalitativnom metodom uz pomoć upitnika s dva pitanja otvorenog tipa, a u njemu je sudjelovalo 80 budućih učitelja engleskog jezika. Ispitanici su bili studenti prve i treće godine. Glavni razlog zbog kojeg su odabrane ove dvije grupe jest taj što ispitanici studiraju na istome smjeru, ali istovremeno imaju različitu razinu poznavanja jezika i praktičnog iskustva poučavanja u razredu. Analiza je pokazala kako studenti smatraju poznavanje gramatike važnim, s manjim naglaskom na veću važnost ako se radi o *prvom jeziku*. Najveću važnost kod gramatike *drugog jezika* pridodaju upravo zbog podučavanja drugih, ali i lakše komunikacije te poboljšanju tečnosti govora. Što se tiče gramatike *prvog jezika* studenti misle kako ne treba postojati toliki naglasak na učenje gramatike budući da smo *prvim jezikom* svakodnevno okruženi te gramatiku usvajamo prirodnim putem. Bez obzira na to, studenti i dalje gramatiku smatraju važnom zbog boljeg razumijevanja jezika, ali i lakšeg usvajanja novih (stranih) jezika. Što se tiče stavova među studentima ovisno o godini studiranja, nisu uočene nikakve značajne razlike.

*Ključne riječi:* gramatika, učenje i poučavanje, prvi jezik, drugi jezik, budući učitelji



## 1 INTRODUCTION

There are several different definitions of grammar, but perhaps the easiest one to understand is the one that says grammar is a group of forms by which words are organized in order to gain larger meanings (Hartwell, 1985). Some people like grammar and some do not. Some consider it important, and they want to learn it, while others learn it because they have to (for example, in schools). Quite often, when English is not students' *first language*, teachers use translation techniques to facilitate to the students the understanding of the grammar rules. Some consider this as a good way of teaching, while others would rather give explanations in English. Regardless of the love for grammar or the way people consider it should be taught, grammar should be looked at as an extremely important and indispensable component of a language. When I was younger, I did not like grammar, but I always had huge respect for its importance. Just like the participants in this study, I am a future English and elementary school teacher, and today, as a future teacher, I consider grammar even more important. One day I will be teaching children, and in accordance with my profession I should not and do not want to teach them something wrong. Of course, every person is different and therefore has their own opinion and attitude about the importance of grammar, which was one of the reasons for writing this thesis.

Since this thesis is based on the importance of teaching and learning grammar in the acquisition of the *first language* and the *second language*, it is important to explain the difference between the two. Quite often people relate them, respectively, to the terms *mother tongue* and *foreign language*. Medved Krajnović (2010) described the concepts in her book *Od jednojezičnosti do višejezičnosti*. The term *first language* is often replaced by the term *mother tongue*, *native language*, and *primary language*. The author's advice is to use the term *first language* since it is the language that people learn first. *Primary language*, according to the author, does not necessarily have to be the first acquired language (for example, a person who moved to another country lived there long enough for the official language of that country become "stronger" than their *first language*). Additionally, she states that there are different debates associated with the terms *native* and *primary language*, but unfortunately, she does not mention or describe any of them. In this thesis, we will use the term *the first language of the participants*. As far as the *second language* is concerned, Medved Krajnović differentiates the *second language* and the term *foreign language* because the term

*foreign language* can imply a *third language*, *fourth language*, and so forth. In this thesis, the English language will be referred to as the *second language of the participants*, since it was acquired after the participants acquired their *first language*. Prior to the study, it was established that Croatian was the *first language* of all the participants, while English was their *second language*.

Regarding the structure of this thesis, the first part gives some theoretical views on grammar such as the definition of grammar, the necessity of teaching grammar, and various ways of teaching grammar. Moreover, we will focus on the place of grammar in the second language acquisition and the connection of grammar with the phenomenon known as *language anxiety*. Furthermore, this thesis describes teaching English grammar within the Croatian school system. More specifically, it explains what parts of grammar and when exactly are being taught. The last chapter of the theoretical part will discuss the influence on attitudes towards grammar.

The second part of the thesis deals with the study conducted. The primary purpose of the study was to find out students' attitudes about the importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2 (the *second language*) and their *first language*. The research included 80 students of the Faculty of Teacher Education. Although most students, as expected, considered grammar important, the final results were quite surprising, including some interesting and creative answers.

## 2 GRAMMAR IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

There is no language without grammar, and there is no grammar without a language. These two concepts have always been linked together and cannot function separately. It cannot be said that a person knows a language if they do not use the correct grammar. Therefore, each process of language acquisition or language learning also means learning and acquiring grammar.

Lightbown and Spada (2000) say “language learning is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development.” It often happens that people mix the term *language learning* and *language acquisition*, thinking they have the same meaning. In fact, they are two different terms. The term *second language acquisition* (abbreviated SLA) usually means acquiring language with minimal or no formal learning. For example, a person, whose *first language* is Croatian, spends some time in the United States. In that case, he or she can adopt the language by listening to the people in his/her surroundings. The same thing happens with the grammar. By interacting with people, they can pick up certain phrases and sentences, but it will be harder for them to make new grammatically correct phrases and sentences because they are not familiar with the rules that are usually taught in formal language learning. When speaking of formal language learning, it is good to point out how it relates to the language (and grammar) learning in the classroom, mostly in schools through curriculum, or in private language schools. The research of Batstone and Ellis (2009), but also Nassaji and Fotos (2004), mentions that in recent years grammar learning has again found an important place in the foreign language learning. There are also different beliefs about the significant importance of grammar and how ignoring or not knowing grammar constraints and hinders a possible development in language learning. On the other hand, Krashen (1981), when distinguishing conscious and unconscious language learning, argues that learning should be adopted naturally, surrounded by a native environment, rather than through formal learning. As a reason, he states that formal grammar lessons develop only general knowledge of grammatical structures or forms, but not the ability to properly use them.

Various research has proven that the *first language* influences *second language* learning. Thus, for example, Ellis (1999) states that SLA is influenced by the speaker's knowledge of the *first language* in terms of foreign accents. He gives the example of

a Frenchman who is in the process of learning English and whose English, in the end, sounds French while speaking. He also states that L1 (the *first language*) does not only affect accents but also affects other components such as grammar and vocabulary. For example, we can mention the fact that most people translate the rules into their *first language* in order to better understand them and then apply them to the *second language*. Also, if they are not sure what rule to use, they use the knowledge of the *first language* and try to transfer it into the *second language*.

### 3 GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE ANXIETY

People can often feel uncomfortable when learning something new, whether it is a language or something else. If we talk about a language, people are usually afraid that they will not remember some words or that they will embarrass themselves if they say a wrong one. This insecurity mostly comes from not being certain about their knowledge of the language and its grammar. Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) in her book - *Strah od stranog jezika* - deals with the fear of a foreign language and defines it as a manifestation of more general types of fears. The author looks at language anxiety as a reaction to what we perceive as a threat to our security or self-esteem. The example she gave was a direct threat which a learner can feel while learning a language, e.g., getting a bad grade, or an indirect threat, e.g., dealing with the fact that he/she is not as successful in learning a language as in mastering other areas of their lives. She also gives an example of the moment when a person becomes shy if asked to speak publicly because, in some way, their knowledge and skills of the language are constantly being evaluated.

#### 3.1 Dealing with anxiety and overcoming it

Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) considers that if a person suffers from language anxiety and fear of grammar, the first step is to discover it so that they can make it disappear later. Only when a person becomes aware of his/her fear, can they do something about it. When talking about grammar, we are all aware of the fact that many learners are afraid of it and therefore do not like learning it. The fear usually occurs at the very beginning of language learning when a person is experiencing some form of fear in a particular situation. For example, somebody did not acquire and understand well enough the tense that was taught during the lesson, and the teacher already moved on to another. It makes the student feel insecure because he/she is aware of falling behind and that makes him/her afraid that they will not be able to catch up. Another example would be a student who is not sure which tense (or word) should be used and does not even want to try to guess it out of fear of being embarrassed or corrected in front of the others. However, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) points out that when it comes to language competence, when people start working on it, it begins to increase. That also brings an increase in a number of positive experiences, which in the end reduces language anxiety itself.

There are no right and prescribed methods on how to get rid of the fear of grammars and languages. Each person is an individual who learns and adopts grammar in their own way and therefore should find their best method. An important step, according to Mihaljević Djigunović (2002), is raising awareness of the different aspects and ways of learning and acquiring a language or grammar, together with the formation of a positive attitude. We already know from psychology that positive thinking can contribute to better and faster learning and improving memory, which in the end makes people more confident when learning new grammatical structures. It is important not to be afraid of making a mistake because mistakes can be corrected, and it is important to spend a lot of time practicing by repeating and exercising. After all, it would be a shame if the fear of learning would distance people from grammar and had a negative influence on their attitude about its importance.

#### 4 GRAMMAR BACKGROUND

Today we can find many different definitions of grammar. There is no universal definition because linguists define grammar in different ways. The most common place where non-expert people first look up the definition of grammar is a dictionary. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) defines grammar as "the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences." In another well-known dictionary, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, there are several different definitions. The main definition describes grammar as "the study of the classes of words, their inflections and their functions and relations in the sentence." There are two more definitions linked to the previous one. One of them defines grammar as "the characteristic system of inflections and syntax of a language," while the other looks at grammar as "a system of rules that defines the grammatical structure of a language." Hartwell (1985) might have given the most straightforward definition of grammar. For him, grammar is a group of forms by which words are organized in order to gain greater meanings. Of course, we should also have in mind that the word *grammar* in English does not only have the meaning of grammar as structure or form. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) mentions the term *grammar* as a book or a school textbook with the description of the rules for learning a language or a person's knowledge and use of a language. In this thesis, the word *grammar* will be used solely in terms of grammar as one of the main components of the language. Two other examples of a definition of grammar, originally by Ur, can be found cited in Askeland (2013). In the first one, Ur roughly describes grammar "as the way a language manipulates and combines words to form longer units of meaning. There is a set of rules which govern how units of meaning may be constructed in any language" (Ur, 1988). A few years later, in her book from 2009, she describes grammar "as the way a language manipulates and combines so as to express certain kinds of meaning, some of which cannot be conveyed adequately by vocabulary alone. These include the way ideas are grouped and related, and the purposes of utterances (statement, question, request, and so on)".

One of the major roles of grammar is to help a learner to perceive and understand different patterns a language is composed of and make all that we say, write, hear, or read comprehensible. In fact, without grammar, one would only use individual words and sounds or images and body language to make communication meaningful.

Additionally, grammar helps learners to express themselves fluently using nouns and adjectives, sentences and phrases, and express themselves correctly in the time frame using the right verb form (Azar, 2007).

Ur (2009) writes how grammar also affects the meaning and not just the way parts of a language are combined in order to look and sound correct. Often in school textbooks and curricula, the emphasis is given to the accuracy and form rather than the meaning. According to the author, the lack of understanding of the meaning creates difficulties for learners. As an example, she points out that it makes no sense to know how to construct and use for instance a verb tense in a sentence, if the learner does not know what difference in meaning it can make.

Grammar is not only important because it makes the rules for the language or because it forms structures and phrases, but also because being a part of a cultural and socio-economic group requires grammar and language knowledge for easier and meaningful communication (Garret, 2003). The author adds that there should be a shared understanding of any important parts of a language and that includes the knowledge of grammatical rules of the language spoken by members of a particular cultural group. Talking about cultural differences, there are sometimes changes which occur in the language (and sometimes in grammar), precisely because of the surrounding environment. Today there are many new and different trends in language, depending on the cultural group, education level, age, region, ethnicity and so on. For example, there are different slang words, word combinations, new words and abbreviations in texting which sometimes ignore grammar rules (e.g., *U okay?* instead of *Are you okay?*). Therefore, a language learner/user should be aware of those changes and know when to apply them in order to ensure the best language production possible. Once a learner understands the language learned, including its grammar, they can gain new insight and a deeper understanding of the importance of teaching and learning grammar.



## 5 TEACHING GRAMMAR

The most common misconception about grammar seems to be associated with the idea that grammar is just a group of rules that have to be learned by heart. Some argue that it is possible to learn grammar naturally, while others claim it impossible and consider that it requires formal learning. But what is the current situation with learning and teaching grammar? Some answers to the questions about whether grammar teaching is needed or not, and how and when it is best to learn grammar can be found in the upcoming two subchapters.

### 5.1 The necessity of teaching grammar

Ellis (2006) sees grammar teaching as “any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it”. In other words, any teaching technique which can help learners understand the language better. According to Zhang (2009), grammar rules can be looked at as the main parts of a machine without which workers cannot work. That means, since grammar is an important part of a language, the core of a language, that speakers cannot use a language completely and accurately without proper grammar. The author also emphasizes communication competence, which also includes grammar knowledge. Since communicative goals are the learner's primary goals in learning a language, learning grammar is of utmost importance in achieving them. Eastwood (2005) explains how an imperfect knowledge of grammar can seriously affect communication in terms of misunderstanding and adds the example of a student who does not know the difference between *I have time*, and *I had time*. There is a common belief that grammar does not bring much meaning into a language and is not needed for language use. However, the truth is very different. For Zhang (2009), grammar embraces three dimensions: *meaning*, *form*, and *usage*. All three dimensions are interdependent, and the smallest change in any of them affects and changes the other two.

To sum up, grammar is an extremely important part of a language and its learning. Although it is possible to adopt some parts of grammar naturally (by merely being exposed to a language), formal learning is still needed in order to fully understand and

use grammar. If anyone wants to use a language correctly and fluently, it is important to master the grammar of that language.

### 5.2 What grammar to teach?

When teachers think about teaching grammar, they have different opinions about grammar structures that should be taught. Krashen (1981) thinks that teaching grammar should be limited to the most basic and most simple grammar rules; for example, the *third person singular* and the *past tense*. The reason for this is his theory that most students are only capable of learning simple rules because more complex rules, depending on the learner's age, are beyond their capabilities. Ellis (2006), however, presented some instances of research where the students were sufficiently capable of adopting a wide range of grammatical structures (different tenses, articles, conjugations and so on). The first given example was of Green and Hecht who, in 1992, conducted research on German students majoring in English, where 85% of them successfully explained the term they were asked to explain. Another example from Ellis was the study of Macrory and Stone in 2000, which revealed that British students had adequately good understanding of the past tense in French. They were familiar with the required forms, aware of their function, aware of a final accent on the past participle etc. Having all that in mind, it is best to conclude that there is no promising formula for what parts of grammar to teach and pay attention to. The best thing to do is, according to Ellis, to have in mind two different situations before selecting the grammar structures that will be taught. The first situation relates to the difficulty which learners have in understanding grammatical form or characteristic, while the second concerns all the problems that may make it difficult for learners to use acquired grammatical forms correctly in communication. In addition to this, teachers should also keep in mind learners' differences and the speed of learning while selecting the grammatical structures which will be taught.

### 5.3 How and when to teach grammar?

There is a general opinion that the best time to start learning, especially if it is a language, is at the earliest possible age. At that time, children are developing and absorbing knowledge like sponges. As for grammar, since children are at the beginning of learning and they encounter something new for the first time, it is best to focus on the meaning of words, and later on, as they grow up, introduce them to grammar and

other more complex parts of a language. The knowledge they acquire provides a base for what follows. Ellis (2006) points out initial errors and mistakes in learning and how it is important to correct errors and to focus the learner's attention on what is important on time, because once they adopt incorrect habits, it is harder to correct them later.

When we talk about the way grammar should be taught, learners' abilities should be considered. Ellis (2006) again covered these topics and stated that the problems of selection explain why grammatical syllabuses are so similar and rarely alternate. Why try something new when you can follow what has already been done? In his article, *Current Issues in the Teaching of Grammar: An SLA Perspective*, he describes two styles of teaching grammar that can be used in a classroom. The first one is called *Intensive Grammar Teaching* in which instructions are given for one or a pair of grammatical structures (e.g., only the *Present Simple* tense or the *Present Simple* vs. the *Present Continuous* tense) over a period of time, such as several lessons within a couple of days or weeks. The other method is *Extensive Grammar Teaching*, which includes instructions for a range of grammatical structures in a short period (e.g., teaching all the past tenses in one lesson). In this case, grammatical structures receive minimal attention. Some people agree more with the first method, while some people would go with the second one. For example, Lightbown and Spada (2000) consider it is better to use intensive learning as it allows students to acquire a specific grammatical structure better during different stages of learning. On the other hand, some people see extensive learning as a possibility of acquiring a larger number of grammatical structures. In any case, the teacher has the final choice, choosing a method according to their pupils' abilities and the speed of learning. Nevertheless, the best option, according to Ellis, would be to have both methods involved in the grammar teaching process.

## 6 LEARNING GRAMMAR WITHIN THE CROATIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

In Croatia, the education system begins in institutions with pre-school programs (e.g., kindergarten). Nowadays, parents can choose if they want their child to learn a foreign language as early as in kindergarten. We have already mentioned how children at an early age can immensely absorb different contents because at that age their brain is not burdened with mistakes and the correctness of words. They learn the language, together with its grammar, through games, video clips, songs and other pre-planned activities and situations. In this way, children can learn another language in an accessible and interesting way, which increases their motivation for further language learning.

### 6.1 Elementary school

Guide through the Croatian education system (*Vodič kroz sustav obrazovanja u Republici Hrvatskoj*, 2018) describes elementary education in Croatia as compulsory. It begins with the enrollment in the first grade of elementary school and generally lasts from age six to age fifteen. In the last twenty years, a *second language* has been one of the compulsory subjects in schools. There are different languages offered, depending on the school, but pupils mostly choose English. According to the *Nastavni plan i program* (Eng: *Educational plan and program*, abbreviated NPP), in the first four grades grammatical structures in the English language are never explicitly interpreted; pupils acquire them globally through suggested and already prepared language structures (certain phrases, nouns, numbers, adjectives, and verbs), without mentioning the term *grammar*. In the fifth grade, teachers start to explain grammar explicitly, which means that for instance the *present simple* tense and the *present continuous* tense are explained as tenses for expressing the present and the *simple past tense* for expressing the past. In the sixth and the seventh grades, grammar is interpreted without mechanical remembering of paradigms. Examining rules and contexts is applied. The approach is cognitive and explicit with a gradual use of the term *grammar*, together with the constant systematization of the previously learned material. The eighth grade introduces and practices grammar on communication patterns, constantly repeating and revising previously learned materials, together with comparing grammatical structures in the English language to those similar in the Croatian language.

## 6.2 High school

After finishing elementary education, pupils can continue their education in secondary education institutions, but they are not mandatory. The secondary institutions, depending on the type of educational program, are divided into high schools (grammar schools), secondary schools (vocational schools) and art schools (Croatian education system guide, 2018). The program of the *second language*, in secondary school follows the elementary school program. According to the title and the topic of this thesis, we will here be focusing on English as a second language. In one part of the school year, previously learned material is systematized, and then the knowledge is expanded by deepening the content and enhancing all forms of communication (NPP), preparing pupils for the upcoming *državna matura* exams. At the end of the secondary school, pupils take the so-called *državna matura* exams. The Croatian education system guide explains that the purpose of these exams is to assess and evaluate all the knowledge, skills, and abilities that pupils have acquired during their education. Compulsory exams involve the Croatian language, mathematics, and a foreign language. Grammar is also a part of the *državna matura*, that is, it appears in one of the three parts of the written examination in both Croatian and foreign language exams (in most cases English).

## 6.3 Higher education (college)

Higher education is not compulsory in Croatia, and it is conducted through university or professional studies. When we talk about the learning of a language and grammar at college, syllabuses may differ considerably, depending on a particular type of study. Thus, for example, students of English at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences have courses in English linguistics, English literature and culture, phonetics, phonology and so on, while the students of English at the Faculty of Teacher Education, besides all the above-mentioned, also have English language methodology courses and teaching practice. On the other hand, at the Faculty of Economics, the emphasis is on the business English. According to their syllabus, business English involves vocabulary acquisition, reading and analyzing authentic texts in English about economic sectors, types of economies, entrepreneurship, management, marketing and so on. In addition, students learn about the basics of oral and written expression in a business environment such as the presentation (structure, appropriate

expressions), discussion, business correspondence (format, style, type), resume etc. At the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management the focus is on the language and related to aspects required for a successful communication within the tourism and hotel management jargon. Therefore, the students will expand their vocabulary, be able to define and interpret key concepts in tourism and hospitality, be able to describe different processes and trends in tourism and hospitality and after all, apply that knowledge and skills in various social and professional situations related to tourism. (the lists of the used syllabuses can be found in *References*).

## 7 THE INFLUENCE ON FORMING ATTITUDES TOWARDS GRAMMAR

Sometimes people think that opinion and attitude are the same things, but in fact, there is a small difference. In order to better understand this chapter and, after all, this whole thesis, here are the definitions of both terms. Oxford's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary (2010) defines an opinion as "your feelings or thoughts about somebody/something, rather than a fact", while the definition of an attitude is "the way that you behave towards somebody/something that shows how you think and feel." In other words, attitude is more associated with emotions and how they affect our final actions. Opinion, however, is more logical and it can make influence on attitude. For example, if someone thinks that learning grammar is a waste of time (opinion), he/she will not be interested in learning it and will act indifferent (attitude).

Smith (1971) considers that no one is born liking or disliking a *second language* (usually foreign). In addition, he mentions how a learner enters the class with a neutral attitude about the language and grammar, and that attitude will later be strongly influenced by the surrounding environment and the situations that follow. Being surrounded by a motivating environment and a good teacher who can present grammar in an interesting way can result in an increase of positive attitudes to the importance of grammar. In other words, the attitude toward the importance of grammar and language knowledge will increase with the increase of the learner's motivation.

Forming attitudes is a rather complex matter. According to Meizhi (2017), attitude is a combination of three psychological components. The first one is related to the cognitive level. Cognition implies that a learner has the knowledge and understanding of already significant learning progress which gives him/her the confidence for moving on to a new component. For example, after a learner acquires some elements of the language learned (e.g., vocabulary), and comprehends it, they start to focus more on grammar. Any person who has a clear target including how and what they want to learn about grammar, also has a positive attitude towards grammar. On the other hand, someone who lacks motivation has a negative attitude towards it due to the lack of confidence. Meizhi considers the second factor, the emotion factor, to be the core component of an attitude. As an example, he describes students who listen to a successful English speaker. They listen to the way he/she uses grammar structures, making the sentences more fluent and accurate. That increases their learning

motivation. The third component is behavioral intention. Meizhi describes it as “operational readiness for the given target and practical action impulses or actual operation fortitude.” It means that the learner's behavior and intention, such as extra time spent in learning grammar (not only the time spent learning in the classroom but also doing extracurricular activities at home), significantly contributes to the formation of attitudes towards grammar. The continuous commitment to grammar learning is one way of being motivated and brings a positive attitude towards grammar and its importance.

Although behavioral intention implies that extra time spent on learning can influence attitudes towards grammar, the research of Akay and Toraman (2015) revealed that in fact the time spent on learning has no significant difference. Gender and age of students are two other factors that do not seem to be significant. In their study, they wanted to see if university studies have an impact on their attitudes. They found out that the difference in students' attitudes toward learning grammar may vary according to the institution at which they study. The students of Economics and Humanities had a somewhat less positive attitude, while the Communication and Business Administration students had a very positive attitude, since their future jobs will require an excellent knowledge of the language and its grammar and therefore, they take grammar seriously.

Teachers were not mentioned in Akay's and Toraman's research, but they were mentioned in the research that Polat did in 2017. In his study on teachers' attitudes towards grammar, he discovered that teachers' work experience might play an important role in forming their attitudes towards the importance of grammar. Teachers with seven or fewer years of experience are more flexible with the curriculum and teaching methods comparing to the older teachers. Older teachers firmly follow the curriculum and focus more on grammar, while younger teachers work more on communication. Since none of the above-mentioned studies mentioned future teachers (i.e., students who are studying to become teachers), it would be interesting to see their attitudes towards grammar. That is exactly what this thesis is about, and the results can be seen in the following chapters.



## 8 THE STUDY

### 8.1 Research aims and questions

Regardless of whether students like grammar or not, our aim was to find out what they think about its importance and usefulness. In this study, we wanted to explore future teachers' point of view concerning the importance of grammar in two different contexts. The first context is teaching and learning English as a *second language* and the second is *first language* instruction. In order to elicit answers the following questions were asked:

1. What are the students' attitudes, as future teachers, towards the importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2?
2. What are the students' attitudes, as future teachers, towards the importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1?

There is one more question that imposed itself in the process:

3. Is there a significant difference in the participants' attitudes according to their year of study?

### 8.2 Research hypotheses

According to Bailey (1978), a hypothesis is a proposition which can predict a potential result between two or more variables. If we put it in other words, it would mean that researchers have specific theories or predictions of the upcoming results.

For this study, considering the previous literature review, research aims and questions, the following hypotheses were set:

1. As future teachers, students consider grammar as a very important factor in *second language* teaching, taken into consideration that they are the ones who need to teach someone that has not yet been in touch with that language yet.
2. As future teachers, students consider grammar important in teaching the *first language*, but not as much as in foreign language teaching, since pupils are already acquainted with the grammar of their *first language* owing to its "natural" acquisition.

3. There is a difference in attitudes between first and third-year students owing to their teaching practice experience (third-year students, unlike first-year students, have had some teaching experience).

## 9 METHODOLOGY

The present research is qualitative, based on open-ended questions. Using open-ended questions gave the participants complete freedom in expressing their thoughts, which in the end resulted in better and more detailed answers, including the ones we did not envisage.

### 9.1 Participants

Our participants were the first year and third-year students of English (future generalist teachers and elementary school teachers of English). Two different elements influenced our final choice of the groups of participants. Firstly, it was important to hear the opinions of people who will one day play a significant role in teaching children. Secondly, it was important to have groups with different levels of the acquisition of English, as well as with different teaching experience. At the time of this study, the first-year students had just started learning English in an analytical way, since it is one of their majors. In addition, they had not yet been in the classroom as teachers, while the third-year students are already advanced in English and somewhat experienced in teaching practice.

After deciding on the groups in which the survey would be conducted, the questionnaire was distributed to 80 the participants. Forty-three (N=43) freshmen students formed Group 1, while the rest (N=37) were third-year students (Group 2).

Looking at the age, the participants in Group 1 were mostly between the ages of 18 and 19, since they had just enrolled in the faculty, while the participants in Group 2 were somewhere between 20 and 21 years old. Also, considering that there are more female students enrolled, there were more women than men in this study.

### 9.2 Instruments and methods

Prior to filling out the questionnaire, all the participants in the study were informed about the anonymity, the purpose of the research, and the content of the questionnaire. They were then given short instructions for filling in the questionnaire. Also, they were informed about the importance of writing their honest opinions so that the information obtained could be as accurate as possible, which can later be used for further research or the improvement of grammar teaching.

The only instrument used for this research was an anonymous paper-and-pen questionnaire. Both groups received equal questionnaires so that their attitudes could be compared. The questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions (Appendix 1), in which the first question was based on the importance of grammar in learning and teaching English as a *second language*, while the second focused on their *first language*. The participants were given approximately fifteen minutes to fill in the questionnaire.

## 10 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, the study was conducted through qualitative methods. Taken into the account that the questions were open-ended, the answers were more easily categorized than counted or measured. For this reason, we could not use any statistical analysis data program. Instead, the answers were assigned to the corresponding categories that were formed after reading and noticing the most common and the most similar responses. All the answers, together with the description of the categories and a comparison between them, will be shown in the upcoming chapters. It is also important to highlight that the participants were not limited by the number of words, sentences, or anything else, and therefore could express more thoughts, attitudes, ideas, and so on, which resulted in receiving more than one answer to a particular question, or answers being found to suit different categories.

The results (the most common answers) are shown in numbers and percentages and followed by a brief report. More detailed explanations of the categories and the comparison of the results according to language, category and year of study will be shown in discussion.

### 10.1 Group 1 (first year)

#### 10.1.1 The importance of grammar in teaching and learning Eng. as L2

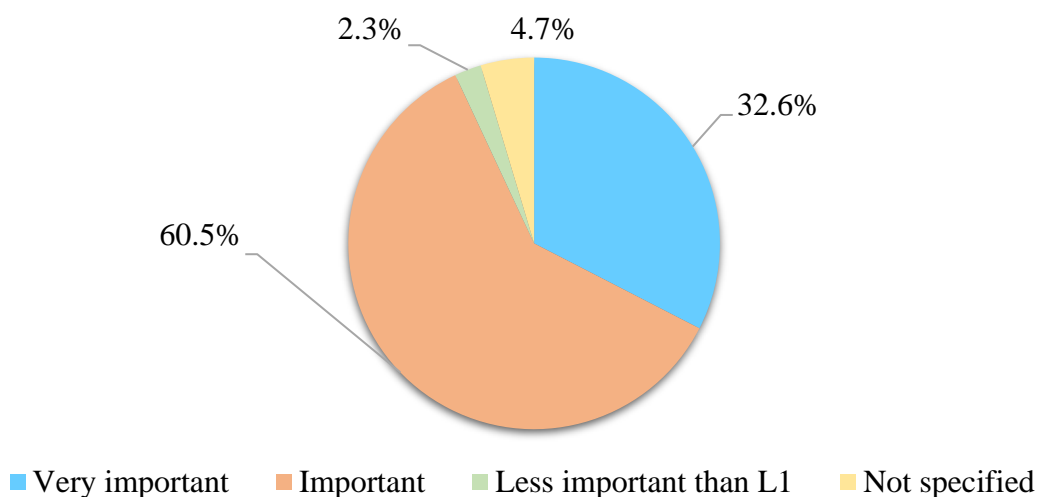
Table 1. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2*

Very important (more than L1)	14 (0)
Important (as important as L1)	26 (1)
Less important than L1	1
Not really important	-
Not specified	2

As seen from the table 1, out of 43 students in Group 1, 26 of them (60.5%) considered grammar 'important', with one (N=1) of them stating that grammar in L2 (*the second language*) is as important as in L1 (*the first language*). The second most frequent answer, with 32.6% (N=14), was that teaching and learning L2 grammar is 'very important'. None of those fourteen participants answered that the grammar of English as the *second language* is more important than the grammar of their L1. One

participant in the group considered grammar in L2 less important than in L1. Two answers did not precisely specify if they consider it important or not.

Figure 1. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2 – percentage*



As for detailed explanations, the participants came up with a surprising 53 different answers, which ended up creating eight different categories, as shown in Table 2.

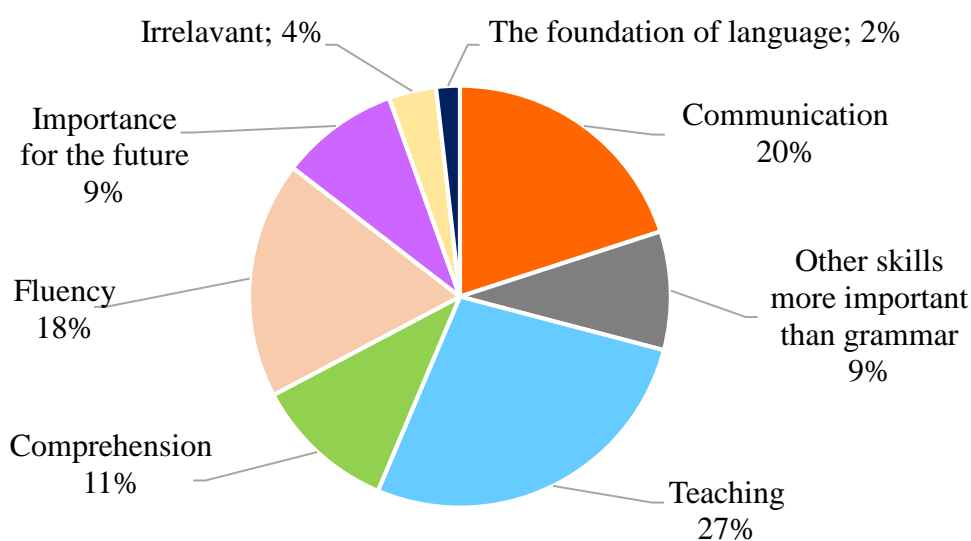
Table 2. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as a foreign language – the most frequent answers*

Teaching	15
Communication	11
Fluency	10
Comprehension	6
Other skills more important than grammar	5
Importance for the future	5
Irrelevant	2
The foundation of language	1

Out of the categories, the one with the most answers was *Teaching*, with 27% (N=15). It was followed by *Communication* and *Fluency*. *Communication* received 11 answers (20%), while *Fluency* had 10 (18%). The lowest number of answers, or 2% (N=1), was for *The foundation of language*, where the participant considered grammar important as it is the key part (foundation) of a language. Two questionnaires contained answers

irrelevant to the question. The same number of answers, N=5 (9%) were fell into the categories *Importance for the future* and *Other skills more important than grammar*. Out of the five answers from the category *Other skills more important than grammar*, four participants stated vocabulary to be more important, and one claimed that grammar is as important as vocabulary. The category *Comprehension* obtained six answers (N=6) or 11%, taking the fourth place among the most common answers.

Figure 2. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2 – the most frequent answers in percentage*



### 10.1.2 The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1

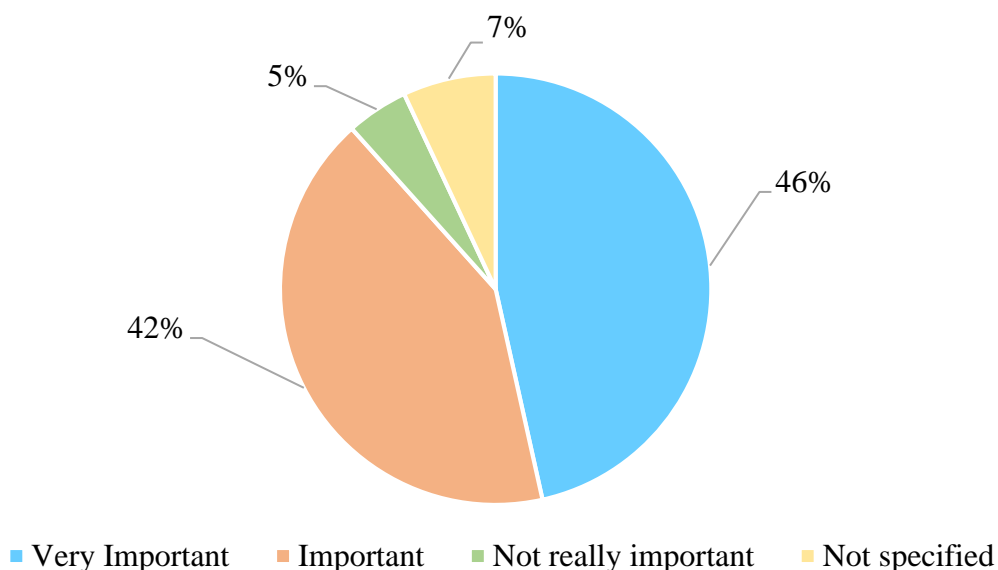
Table 3. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1*

Very important (more than L2)	20 (7)
Important (as important as L2)	18 (0)
Less important than L2	-
Not really important	2
Not specified	3

The participants considered the *first language* grammar ‘very important’, to be more precise, 46% of them. Interestingly, out of those twenty (N=20) participants, seven agreed that grammar of the *first language* is more important than the one in the *second language*. Eighteen of the participants (42%), thought that grammar knowledge of the

*first language* is ‘important’, but none of those eighteen considered it as important as in L2. Three participants of the group did not clearly define their attitude on grammar importance, while 4.7% (N=2) stated that grammar is ‘not really important’. None of the participants mentioned that the grammar of the *first language* was less important than the *second language*. The graphic illustration in Figure 3 gives a better perception of the difference between the answers.

Figure 3. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1 - percentage*



Unlike the first question, where the participants provided a larger number of answers to the question, in this one they mostly answered with a single answer.

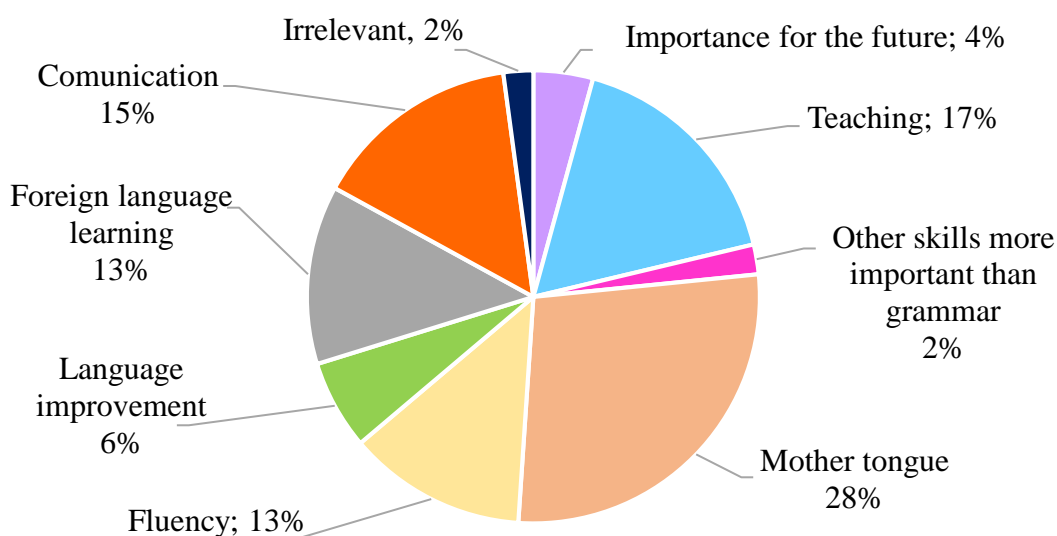
Table 4. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1 – the most frequent answers*

Mother tongue	13
Teaching	8
Communication	7
Fluency	6
Foreign language learning	6
Language improvement	3
Importance for the future	2
Other skills more important than grammar	1
Irrelevant	1



After the analysis of all the answers, it turned out that they form an additional category when compared to Question 1, making them nine in total. Some categories got repeated, but we also encountered new ones like *Language Improvement*, *Foreign Language Learning*, and *Mother Tongue*. A better insight into the answers can be obtained from Table 4, or from the graphic illustration (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1 – the most frequent answers in percentage*



Most of the group, 28% (N=13), considered L1 grammar important, as it is an important part of their *first language* (or *Mother tongue*, as written by the participants). The lowest number of answers, with only 2% (N=1) fall into the category *Other skills more important than grammar*, where the participant attributed more importance to vocabulary than grammar. Both *Foreign language learning* and *Fluency* got six answers (13%). *Communication* was in the third place, with 15% (N=7), while *Teaching* was the second most listed answer, with 18% (N=8). Two participants wrote *Importance for the future* (4%), while three (7%) suggested *Language improvement*, the category that did not appear in the question 1 (on the importance of grammar in L2).

## 10.2 Group 2 (third year)

### 10.2.1 The importance of grammar in teaching and learning Eng. as L2

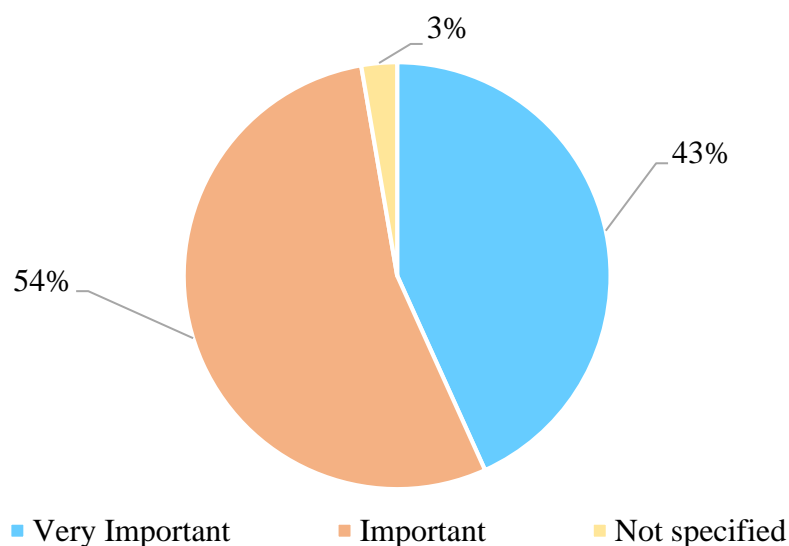
The participants of Group 2 were simple and clear about their general impression of the importance of grammar, as can be seen in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2*

Very important (more than L1)	16 (0)
Important (as important as L1)	20 (0)
Less important than L1	-
Not really important	-
Not specified	1

Out of 37, only one participant did not exactly point out his/her perception of the importance of grammar knowledge. The difference between the two most frequent answers was not significant. The majority of the participants, N=20 (54%), considered L2 grammar ‘important’, but none of those twenty participants thought it is as important as L1. Only four fewer (N=16), i.e. 43%, considered L2 grammar ‘very important’, with none of the participants mentioning it is more important than L1. We did not find any statements about L2 grammar being less important than L1 or not being important at all.

Figure 5. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2 - percentage*



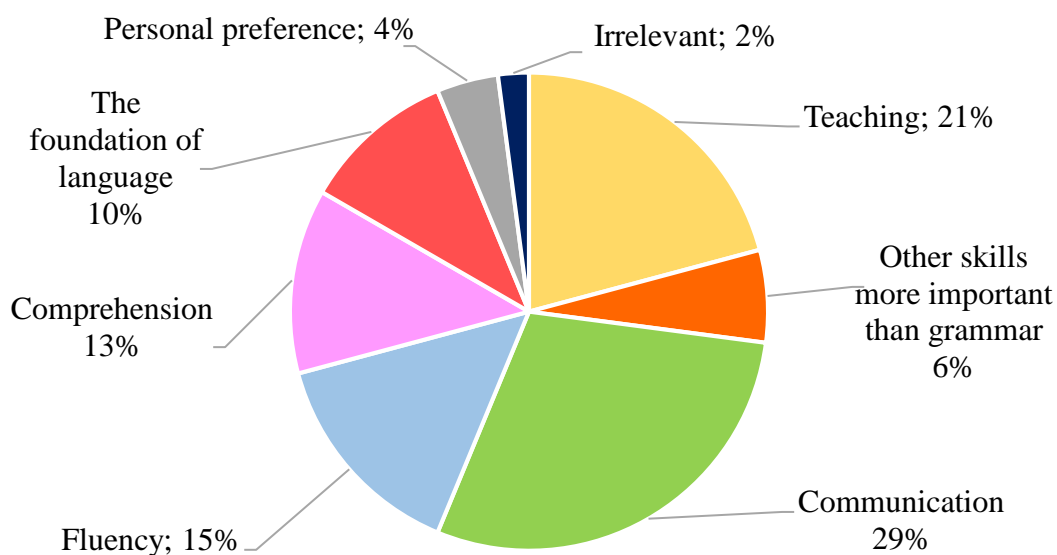
If we look at the explanations the participants wrote about the importance of grammar, it is evident that they were quite generous with the answers. Eleven participants wrote more than one answer to the question. Eventually, out of 37 completed questionnaires, we received as many as 48 different answers, not including the one which was unrelated to the question. After reading and analyzing the answers, they were all sorted

into one of the following categories: *Teaching, Communication, Other skills more important than grammar, Comprehension, Fluency, The foundation of language, Personal preference* and *Irrelevant*.

Table 6. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2 – the most frequent answers*

Communication	14
Teaching	10
Fluency	7
Comprehension	6
The foundation of language	5
Other skills more important than grammar	3
Personal preference	2
Irrelevant	1

Figure 6. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2 – the most frequent answers in percentage*



*Communication* was the most frequent answer of the participants (N=14, which amounts to 29%). The following most frequent answer was *Teaching* (N=10, which amounts to 21%). As mentioned before, one answer was irrelevant to the asked question. *Personal preference*, with only 4%, was the response that was mentioned by

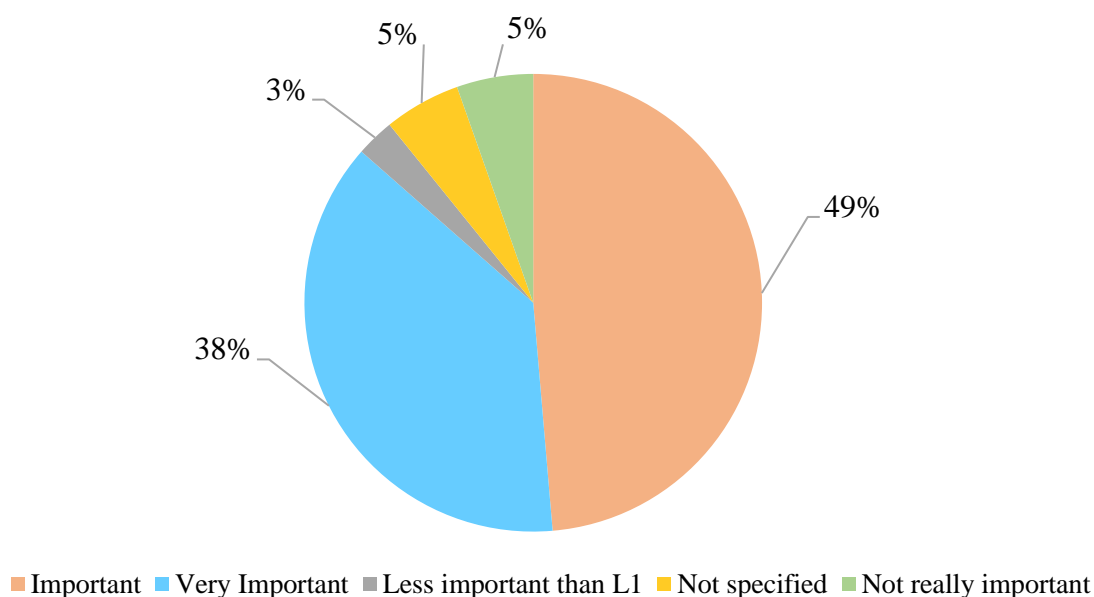
the smallest number of people (N=2). Three participants (6%), who responded that the other skills are more important, stated that vocabulary is more important than the knowledge of grammar. The category *The foundation of language* obtained 5 answers (10%), *Comprehension* 6 answers (13%), and *Fluency* 7 answers (15%).

### 10.2.2 The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1

Table 7. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1*

Very important (more than L2)	14 (5)
Important (as important as L2)	18 (1)
Less important than L2	1
Not really important	2
Not specified	2

Figure 7. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1 – percentage*



Almost half of the participants (49%) saw grammar as an ‘important’ component of learning L1. Out of those 18 participants, only one rated the importance of grammar in L1 as important as the one in the L2. On the other hand, five participants pointed out that the *first language* grammar is more important than the *second language* grammar. These five answers were put in the same category as ‘very important’ which, in total, amounted to 38% (N=14) participants. Two participants perceived L1 grammar as ‘not really important’ (5%). One participant described the *first language*

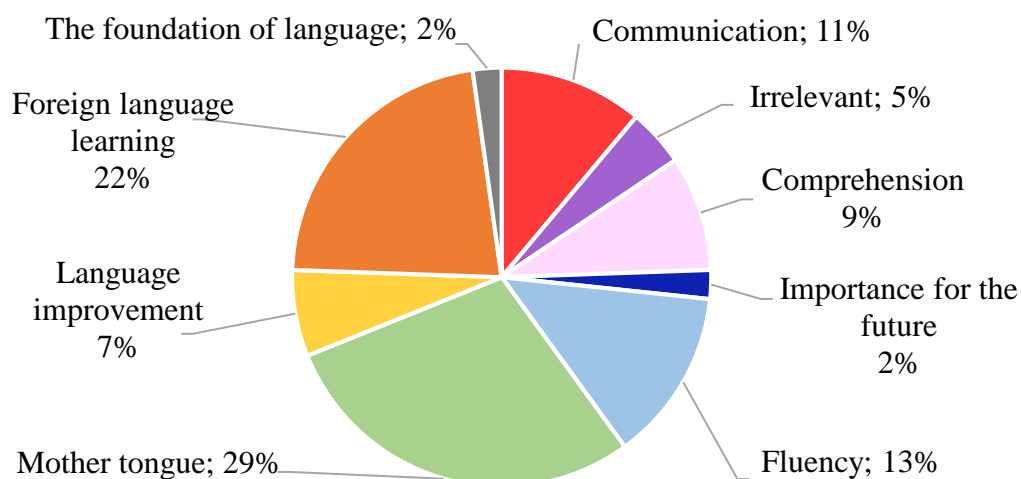
grammar *less important* than the *second language* one, while two participants were not specific in their answers.

Answering this question, the participants were again very helpful, giving more than one answer to the question, which eventually resulted in many different and creative answers. Forty-three different answers were noted, excluding the two that were not related to the question asked. There were nine categories formed. Some appeared in the Question 1, but there were also different ones like *Language improvement*, *Foreign language learning*, *Mother tongue*, and *Importance for the future*.

Table 8. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1 – the most frequent answers*

Mother tongue	13
Foreign language learning	10
Fluency	6
Communication	5
Comprehension	4
Language improvement	3
Irrelevant	2
Importance for the future	1
The foundation of language	1

Figure 8. *The importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1 – the most frequent answers in percentage*



There were no significant differences between the two most common answers. The most frequently mentioned reason (N=13) is *Mother Tongue*, with 29%. It is followed by *Foreign Language Learning*, with 25% (N=10). The two categories that obtained the lowest number of responses (N=1) were *Future* (2%) and *The foundation of language* (2%). Only three participants cited *Language improvement* (7%), while two wrote suggestions on how to conduct a grammar class, instead of writing their attitudes towards the importance of grammar, putting these two answers in the irrelevant category. The third most frequent answer, with 13% (N=6), was *Fluency*, while the fourth most frequent answer was *Comprehension* with four answers (9%).

After analyzing the joint results of both groups of respondents, it could be concluded that all the participants consider grammar important in teaching and learning both the *first* and the *second language*. To be more specific, more than a half, 57.5% (N=46), out of all 80 participants, consider grammar of the *second language* ‘important’, while 37.5% (N=30) consider it ‘very important’. None of the participants stated that the grammar of L2 is more important than L1. However, one participant thinks that L2 grammar is equally important as L1 grammar, while one states that the *second language* grammar is less important than the *first language* grammar. The answers to the question about the importance of L1 grammar are slightly different. Thirty-six participants, out of 80, think that grammar is ‘important’, with only one thinking that L1 grammar is as important as L2 grammar. A very similar number of respondents (N= 34) say that the knowledge of L1 grammar is ‘very important’. Out of those 34 participants, twelve rank L1 grammar more important than L2 grammar. On the other hand, one participant thinks that L1 grammar is less important than L2 grammar, while four participants do not consider L1 grammar really important. According to these five participants, our *first language* (usually mother tongue) surrounds us from the moment we are born, so we naturally acquire all its components, including grammar, and there is no purpose in forcing people to learn what they already know when they can focus on learning something new (for example other languages).

When looking at the distribution of answers over the categories, we can see many surprises. In order to understand the results better, it is necessary to describe each category to which the answers were assigned. We have seen that the categories *Communication* and *Teaching* hold the first place when the first question is concerned (the question on the importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2),

each with 25 answers. As an example of the importance of grammar in the *communication* category, the most frequently mentioned answers include grammar as a way of avoiding possible misunderstandings and enabling easier communication between people. In addition, some participants describe English as one of the most widespread languages in the world and therefore consider grammar important and needed at a higher level of acquisition. As for the *teaching* category, the answers are mostly, as expected, written from the future teachers' point of view. Students consider grammar important because one day they will be teaching others a new language, one that pupils do not use in everyday situations, and therefore are not so familiar with it. Furthermore, they will be their role models, showing how to speak and use their *second language* properly. The second most frequent answer to the first question, when summing up the results of both groups, is *Fluency*, with 17 responses. The first-year students mentioned 'fluency' more than the third-year students. The participants see grammar as a precondition proficiency in L2. Some answers mention that knowing grammar may add to the overall picture of the learner as an educated and/or professional person. Some of the participants even believe that people will get you more seriously if you show that your grammar knowledge is on a high level. Both groups have the equal (N=6) number of answers to *Comprehension*, which implies that grammar knowledge enables easier understanding of a language. Moreover, understanding one language, according to the participants, makes it easier to understand other languages. The fifth most common answer (N=8) is the *Other skills more important than grammar*. In this category, the participants in Group 1 (first-year) gave fewer answers, compared to the participants in Group 2 (third-year), but both groups emphasized the importance of the vocabulary rather than grammar several times. Another answer written by both groups is *The foundation of language*. To be more specific, six participants in each group state that the importance of grammar knowledge is high because it is the key part of a language, that is, grammar is foundation of a language. This time the third-year students mentioned *The foundation of language* more than the first-year students. One more difference, between the two groups regarding the first question (on the importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2) is that the third-year students provided the answer *Personal preference*, which was not the case among the first year. The third-year participants agree that the importance of grammar also depends on the learning context. If a language is learned for professional reasons then grammar is considered very

important, especially when it comes to future English teachers. On the other hand, the participants think grammar is less important if a language is learned just for pleasure, free time or for acquiring general language knowledge for private purposes such as traveling, reading books, watching movies, and so on. Although the first-year participants did not mention answers connected to the category *Personal preference*, they did provide answers connected to the category *Importance for the future*. They regarded grammar as an important component in making carrier progress easier, improving personal qualities that can contribute in finding better job opportunities, gaining advantages for different study programs such as student exchange, scholarships, or additional education like a doctoral program and similar. There are also a couple of irrelevant answers in each group, i.e., the answers that are not closely related to the question asked. Three participants from both groups indicate how to make grammar lessons easier, but do not exactly explain why it is, or it is not, important. If we take into account that someday this thesis might be read by future teachers, new teachers, or teachers who have been teaching for years, then it would be a good idea to list these answers as they may help to create new and creative ideas for grammar teaching.

Here are the above-mentioned answers:

*I think it is important to learn and teach grammar by using some interesting games and techniques. Motivation in learning grammar plays an important role.*

– Student A

*It is obviously important, but it is easier to learn through listening to the language for a longer period alongside learning through books. I do not think learning grammar rules by heart is the best way to learn.*

– Student B

*In my opinion, grammar should be explained thoroughly and established in a way that everybody understands it when moving on to another tense or a part of grammar.*

– Student C

As for the second question (on the importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1) and its categories, the situation is as follows:



There are some new categories, and the one with the most answers is *Mother tongue*. If we sum up the results of both groups, we will get as many as 26 answers connected to this category. In this category, the answers mostly describe L1 grammar as an important component since it is a part of our own (*first*) language, sometimes also called *mother tongue*. The participants consider L1 grammar important, even more than in L2, because we use our first language in everyday formal and informal situations and intercommunication, and therefore it deserves a proper use. Several participants even consider that insufficient knowledge of grammar can affect our reputation in a way that we do not appear educated enough or that we even look uncultured by not nurturing our own language. The second most frequent category includes answers associated with *Foreign language learning*. There are 15 answers from both groups. The participants believe that grammar knowledge of the *first language* can be beneficial in acquiring a foreign language. It can help find similarities between the languages and connect them, understand how a foreign language and its components work, and it is an excellent basis for upgrading any already existing knowledge of a foreign language. Another category that appeared in the answers to the question number two, and was provided by both groups, is *Language improvement*. The participants mostly pointed out their positive attitude towards grammar learning in order to improve and perfect the already existing knowledge of the language. The third-place is shared by answers belonging to the categories *Communication* and *Fluency*, which we have already described at the beginning of the discussion part on page 37. Speaking of the answers given by the participants, there is another interesting fact common to both groups - none of the participants mentioned nor fear (anxiety) of learning, nor fear of grammar.

There were also some differences between the groups and the categories. For example, it is interesting to see that the third-year students did not at any point connect the importance of L1 grammar to their future teaching job, but considered some other things more important, such as communication, comprehension, and fluency. On the other hand, the first-year participants regard teaching as one of the essential factors and therefore consider grammar as a very important component of a language. Another difference between the groups of respondents is found in *The foundation of language* and *Comprehension* categories. These categories were provided by the answers to the second question (the question on the importance of grammar in teaching and learning

L1) by third-year participants, but no answer of the first-year participants can be linked to those.

Now that all the categories and the answers have been presented and explained, it is possible to compare the final results with the initial research questions and hypotheses.

The first question and hypothesis were as follows:

**Q:** *What are the students' attitudes, as future teachers, towards the importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2?*

**H:** *As future teachers, students consider grammar as a very important factor in second language teaching, taken into consideration that they are the ones who need to teach someone that has not yet been in touch with that language yet.*

After analyzing the results of this research, the answer to our first initial question is that, no matter what group we are looking at, the students consider grammar important. As far as the first hypothesis is concerned, even though we thought that students would consider grammar *very important*, they did surprise us with the majority saying it is just *important*. Furthermore, our prediction saw *Teaching* as the most common answer, which the participants of the Group 1 (first-year students) listed the most, whereas the third-year (Group 2) participants surprised us by giving the advantage to other categories over *Teaching*.

The second question and hypothesis were:

**Q:** *What are the students' attitudes, as future teachers, towards the importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1?*

**H:** *As future teachers, students consider grammar important in teaching the first language, but not as much as in the second language teaching, since pupils are already acquainted with the grammar of their first language owing to its "natural" acquisition.*

The situation with this question and hypothesis is different from the previous one. The answer to this question is that grammar of the *first language* is important for the students, just as we have assumed, although there was a minimal difference between

*very important* (N=34) and *important* (N=36). Our prediction of the most mentioned answers turned out to be correct, since the majority of students considered that L1 grammar is learned naturally because it is a part of the language that surrounds us and is being used on a daily basis.

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the research part of this thesis, there was one question that imposed itself in the process of the research. The question was:

**Q:** *Is there a significant difference in the participants' attitudes according to their year of study?*

Alongside with the following hypothesis:

**H:** *There is a significant difference in attitudes between first and third-year students due to their teaching practice experience (third-year students, unlike first-year students, have had some teaching experience).*

Looking at the results between the two groups, we can notice that there is a slight difference. The first-year participants (Group 1) mainly focused on teaching others, both in the *second* and the *first language*, as a primary reason for grammar knowledge. Even though the participants of Group 2 (third year students) also mentioned teaching several times, they put a little more emphasis on communication and fluency. However, it is interesting to see that they did not consider teaching as an important factor for learning L1 grammar. We may presume that their teaching experience might have shaped their opinion. As they already spent some time in a classroom through their teaching practice, they might understand some things better than the first-year students, such as recognizing what language elements should be included and given more attention to, and how much time should be spent on teaching them when planning a lesson. In conclusion, we can say that the difference between first-year students and third-year students should be looked into in another study.

## 11 CONCLUSION

The research results showed that the importance of teaching and learning grammar was considered important among future teachers, with a slight emphasis on the importance of the *first language* grammar. Even though the participants put a little more emphasis on the importance of the *first language* grammar, in most of their answers they stated that living in the *first language* environment makes it easier to learn different elements (including grammar) because they are acquired naturally. As for the explanations on the importance of grammar are concerned, most of the students provided more than one answer to the questions asked, which resulted in a diversity of answers in both questions. The most common answers mentioned were *Teaching* and *Communication* both for L1 and L2. On the other hand, the least mentioned answers, not including those irrelevant to the questions asked, were *Personal preference* and *The foundation of language* in the first question (on the importance of grammar in teaching and learning English as L2), and *Importance for the future* and *The foundation of language* in the second question (on the importance of grammar in teaching and learning L1).

Furthermore, a slight difference was found between the first and the third-year participants, presumably due to their teaching practice experience. It was also interesting to see how the third-year students did not mention teaching at all as a reason for the importance of grammar in teaching and learning the *first language*.

What the participants of both groups did not mention was language anxiety. With that in mind, we can conclude that the participants believe that if a learner overcomes a language and grammar then he/she feels safe and confident, which automatically reduces or even excludes the language anxiety.

Talking about attitudes towards grammar, there are many things that can make an influence on them. The best way for people to start liking and considering grammar important is to be surrounded by a motivating environment and a good teacher with an interesting way of teaching and presenting grammar. Some of the participants expressed their opinion on how to teach grammar in the elementary school. Here are some of the answers:

*In my opinion, grammar should be explained thoroughly and slowly so that everybody understands it before moving on to another structure or tense.*

- Student 1

*In lower primary school, grammar should be taught and learned passively, acquired through various songs, videos, games..., without obvious stress on it.*

- Student 2

*I think it is important to teach and learn grammar by using some interesting games and techniques. Motivation in learning grammar plays an important role.*

- Student 3

*In my opinion, it is more important to learn vocabulary first and then upgrade to grammar lessons when the learner is older and can understand that there are rules in every language.*

- Student 4

To conclude, there is no language without grammar and ignoring or not knowing grammar brings about constraints and makes it difficult for a learner to develop the knowledge of a language. In addition, poor knowledge of grammar can affect communication in terms of misunderstanding. Grammar has an important role in perceiving and understanding the different elements of which a language is composed, making everything we read, hear, write or say comprehensible. After all, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said, (...) *the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language.*

## 12 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis puts emphasis on students' attitudes towards grammar importance. Because the focus was on the students, the emphasis was given to the future teachers (student teachers) rather than the teachers who have been teaching for a longer period of time. We only explored the respondents' attitudes towards grammar of their *first* and their *second language* and compared them according to their year of study. Future research could look into the possible differences between the respondents depending on their age and/or gender. Another possibility is to extend this research by including the same students and trying to examine their opinions about forming attitudes about grammar.

Another possibility is to conduct this same study, i.e., to give the questionnaire from this research to additional two groups. The first group could include the "fresh" teachers (who have just graduated and started to have their own class or have been teaching for less than five years) and to the teachers who have been teaching for a longer period, such as at least ten years. These groups could include elementary school teachers, high school teachers or college professors.

Another suggestion would be to do research in a completely different area of studies and, for example, include students of other majors and elicit their opinions and attitudes on the importance of grammar, subsequently making comparisons with the results of the respondents in the present study – future generalist teachers and teachers of English.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR

**Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to compare future teachers' attitude towards the importance of teaching and learning grammar.**

**Since the questionnaire does not have correct and incorrect answers, please answer honestly about how you feel and think in relation to a particular question. This questionnaire is anonymous and all information obtained will only be used for research purposes of the master thesis.**

**By agreeing to fill in this questionnaire, you consent to have the results of this study presented and published. Before you start, please write your year of study.**

**Year: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Please, answer the following questions in writing. You can write in English or Croatian.**

*Q1: What is your opinion about the importance of grammar in:*

a)...teaching and learning English as FL/L2? (*foreign language/second language*)

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b)...teaching and learning L1? (*first language/mother tongue*)

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!**

Anja Radočaj

## IZJAVA

Izjavljujem da sam ja, ANJA RADOČAJ, student UČITELJSKOG STUDIJA S POJAČANIM ENGLESKIM JEZIKOM Učiteljskog fakulteta u Zagrebu, samostalno provela aktivnosti istraživanja literature i napisala diplomski rad na temu:

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES REGARDING THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH  
AND CROATIAN GRAMMARS

U Zagrebu, 27. rujna 2018.