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TEACHING ARTICLES IN ESL IN UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Čestně prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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INTRODUCTION

The Czech language, like most languages in the Slavic language family, does not have any articles at all. Thus, if English is the first foreign language a learner learns – the articles are a completely new concept to the learner. Coursebooks of German, French etc., courses of these languages, all of these most often start with none other than the articles. Furthermore, these languages have articles divided into genders and they usually inflect other words in the sentence. Is it the simpler nature of the articles in English that makes us complacent and inactive in learning to use the articles properly? The choice of this topic was based on and motivated by exactly that – the immense undervaluation of the articles in English as a second language. There are commercial, everyday products – even media products on the government level that contain striking errors in article usage.

This diploma thesis was built around the practical part. First, several categories were selected and described in the theoretical part of the thesis. The selection of categories and individual examples was based on the frequency of usage in schools and everyday conversation. Then, several research questions were formed and a questionnaire and a test were created. These were handed to teachers and learners from three selected elementary schools in Olomouc. After gathering the filled in tests and questionnaires, the data was transcribed into a computer and evaluated. The results are presented in the practical part of the thesis.

1 PROPER USAGE OF THE ARTICLES

1.1 What is an article?

In the English language, we use three articles: *a/an*, *the*, and *no article*. *A/an* is called the indefinite article, *the* is called the definite article, and *no article* or *zero article* is when no article occurs before a noun (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1). The indefinite article is used only with a singular noun, but the definite article can be used with any noun. As a plural equivalent of the indefinite article, we can sometimes use the word *some* (1), however, a noun can perfectly stand on its own without an article (2) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 198).

Examples:

- (1) Some shelves were put up. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 198)
- (2) Accidents can happen. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 198)

In case of the indefinite article, it distinguishes between *a* and *an*. In modern English, we use *a* before a consonant sound and *an* before a vowel sound (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1). The definite article spells the same way whether in front of a vowel or a consonant, but its pronunciation differs depending on which letter follows. An important aspect to understand when thinking about articles is countability (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1).

1.2 History and purpose

From the historical perspective, the articles are essentially adjectives. Originally, *the* was a form of a demonstrative adjective – *that* (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52). In general, adjectives are words that describe or give information about nouns and pronouns. They are often thought of as their modifiers or limiters (Jarvie, 2007, p. 16).

Specifically demonstrative adjectives are, as their name indicates, those that point out or demonstrate the nouns which they modify. Demonstrative adjectives include the words *this*, *that*, *these* and *those* (Jarvie, 2007, p. 20). The nature of *the* as a demonstrative adjective is apparent in the following sentences.

Examples:

- (3) I was not there at *the* time. – at *that* particular time (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52)
- (4) I told him I was busy at *the* moment. (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52)
- (5) He is an engineer, or something of *the* kind. (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52)

In Old English, the indefinite article *an* was a numeral adjective (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52). Numeral adjectives are those adjectives that are used to denote the number of nouns or the order in which they stand. Common examples of numeral adjectives are *one, two, five, first, third, last, all, some, each, most, several etc.* (Educationtopia, 2019). In the case of *an*, its stressed form became modern English *one*, whereas its unstressed form remained until today as *an*.

Until about the year 1300, *an* was used before consonants as well as before vowel sounds, and until about 1700 before sounded *h* (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52). In the fifteenth century, *a* and *an* were often written joined to the noun. This later led to instances of wrong division which created new words such as *an apron*, originally *a napperon* (from French *nappe*), *an adder*, originally *a nadder*, or *an orange*, whose earlier form was allegedly *a norange* (Eckersley, 1960, p. 52). This form of the word originates in Spain and Persia, where upon their arrival, oranges were given the name *narang* (Phrases, 2019).

1.3 Determiners

To understand how the articles work, it is helpful to first understand what determiners are and see the articles in their context. According to the Bloomsbury Grammar Guide, determiners, like adjectives, give information about nouns and pronouns (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23). However, while the definition of an adjective characterizes this word class by its quality to describe nouns and pronouns, adjectives do not strictly speaking do that. That is the reason why modern grammarians distinguish determiners from adjectives (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23).

Determiners are a nominal syntactic category distinct from both adjectives and nouns, they constitute a functional category (Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 2019). They are sometimes called function words, because they have very little meaning in themselves. They were named determiners because of their primary quality to determine the number and definiteness of the noun phrase to which they are attached (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23). The most common determiners are in the following categories.

Examples:

- (6) Articles: a, an, the (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23)
- (7) Demonstratives: this, that, these, those (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23)
- (8) Possessives: my, your, his / her / its, our, their; mine, yours, theirs (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23)
- (9) Numbers: one, two, three...first, second, third... (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23)
- (10) Indefinite determiners: including all, any, both, each, either, every, few, less, more, enough, neither, no, several, some, only (Jarvie, 2007, p. 23)

1.4 Countability

Nouns can be divided into two types – countable and uncountable. This distinction is based on whether an object can or cannot be counted in numbers. Countable nouns have a singular and a plural form, uncountable nouns usually do not have a plural form (EF Education First, 2019). Countable nouns are for concrete objects that can be counted in numbers, while uncountable nouns usually represent abstract ideas, qualities or physical objects that are too small or too amorphous to be counted (EF Education First, 2019).

The countability of nouns can be distinguished based on several conditions. Nouns are countable if they can be preceded by an indefinite article (11), they can be both singular and plural (12), and they can be counted (13). On the other hand, nouns are uncountable if they are preceded by the word *some* rather than an indefinite article (14), and they cannot be normally counted or pluralized (15) (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5). Most uncountable nouns denote commodities that cannot be counted as individual objects, in some cases there has to be brought another form of measurement (16 through 18) (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5).

Examples:

- (11) a car (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (12) a dog – dogs (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (13) one taxi, two taxis, twenty taxis (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (14) some salt, some marmalade (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (15) two butters, eleven flours (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (16) a bag / spoonful / ton of flour (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (17) a piece of information / music (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)
- (18) a slice of bread / cake / beef (Jarvie, 2007, p. 5)

If we were to define the meaning of the indefinite article in English, it would be *one of two or more*. Its counterpart, the definite article, would then be defined as *one of one* (Porter, 2013, chapter 1). These definitions can be imagined using example 19. We usually use *a* or *an* before singular countable nouns only (20, 21). We cannot use the indefinite article with plural countable nouns or with uncountable nouns (22 through 24) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1).

Examples:

- (19) Imagine your English friend has a bowl of fruit on his kitchen table. In that bowl there are three oranges and one banana. The oranges are perfect but the banana has a spot on it. You are a bit hungry and want to ask your friend for a piece of fruit, but you do not know which article to use. Should you ask for ‘an orange’ or ‘the orange’? Should you ask for ‘a banana’ or ‘the banana’? If you were to desire an orange, the reasoning is straightforward. Since there are three oranges you should ask for ‘an orange’. The three oranges and the two or more in the definition ‘one of two or more’ are identical. Both of them are greater than two. Similarly, if you were to want the banana, the reasoning is only slightly more complicated. Since there is only one, one of one banana you should ask for ‘the banana’. (Porter, 2013, chapter 1)
- (20) a house – singular, countable (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1)
- (21) an orange – singular, countable (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1)
- (22) a houses – plural, countable (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1)
- (23) a luggage – uncountable (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1)
- (24) an information – uncountable (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 1)

In example 19, the author does not state the purpose of the spot on the banana. This could be utilized for article distinction if there were to be two or more bananas. If there were three bananas and one of them had a spot on it, then the guest could ask either for a banana with the spot on it (25) or for one of the two that have no spot on them (26, 27)

Examples:

- (25) Can I have the banana with the spot on it?
- (26) Can I have a banana with no spot on it?
- (27) Can I have one of the bananas with no spot?

Aside from the example, there is an entire thought process regarding countability and article selection based on it that can be acquired. It stems from Porter's (2013, chapter 8) definitions of articles, considers the articles' nature as determiners and their countability. Firstly, the speaker should decide whether a word is a noun. A noun is a person, place, thing, animal or concept (Porter, 2013, chapter 8). Once that is done, the speaker proceeds to determine whether they need an article based on their countability. Plural nouns, uncountable nouns, abstract nouns, and proper nouns do not require an article (Porter, 2013, chapter 8).

If a possessive adjective (*my, his, her, its, our, your, their*) is more appropriate, the speaker should use one instead (Porter, 2013, chapter 8). The speaker should then remind themselves of the definition of the definite and indefinite article and decide, what *one of one* and *one of two or more* means. Finally comes a careful analysis of the context of the sentence or paragraph in which the article appears, and determining whether the following noun begins with a consonant or a vowel (Porter, 2013, chapter 8).

1.5 The preposition *of*

Understanding the preposition *of* is key to understanding the definitions *one of one* and *one of two or more* (Porter, 2013, chapter 2). In general, prepositions are words such as *on, at, to* or *before*. Their purpose in a sentence is to show relations of a noun or a noun equivalent to the rest of the sentence (Jarvie, 2007, p. 50). In particular, the meaning of the

preposition *of* is *origin* or *part*. If we say *one of two or more*, we actually mean *one originating from two or more* (Porter, 2013, chapter 2).

Example:

(28) I took one of the three oranges. (Porter, 2013, chapter 2)

In this example, the origin of the orange the subject took is from the group of three oranges (Porter, 2013, chapter 2).

1.6 Known and unknown

The context is perhaps the most important concept to understand to use articles correctly. The context is the location, environment or situation in which an object appears. In example 19, the oranges are in a bowl on a table, thus the context is the table (Porter, 2013, chapter 2). The table in example 19 is what is called simple context, as it is easy to identify. When there is no context mentioned, the recipient needs to assume the largest context possible – the universe – the most fundamental and general context possible (Porter, 2013, chapter 2) (if we ignore the possibility that we live in a multiverse or that we do not actually even know what the universe is).

When a noun is used, the speaker may be talking about a specific thing, or a specific set of things. For example, they can either talk about a particular book they have in mind, or also a particular set of books (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2). When doing this, the speaker is not talking about all books. However, in other instances the speaker may do just that – talk about all the books in the world, or simply about books in general (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2). Articles are a device that allows us to distinguish between these situations.

When the speaker is thinking about a specific thing or a specific group of things, they will use *the*, provided that the recipient knows or is able to work out which thing or person the speaker is talking about (29). If the listener / reader does not know which person or thing the speaker / writer has in mind, *a/an* must be in place (30, 31) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2). The important point is that it is the recipient that must know what the speaker is thinking of.

The fact that the speaker knows what he himself is thinking of is not enough to use a definite article (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2). If the recipient does not yet know what the speaker has in mind, the speaker can introduce the subject using an indefinite article (32), and then in the following sentence or clause, use the definite article to denote the thing or person already mentioned (33) (Eckersley, 1960, p. 57).

Examples:

- (29) This is the book that I promised to lend you. (Eckersley, 1960, p. 56)
- (30) I bought a blue sweater yesterday. – the speaker knows which sweater, but the listener does not (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (31) We went to a lovely café – the speaker knows which one but the listener does not (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (32) Once upon a time there was a little boy who lived in a cottage. (Eckersley, 1960, p. 57)
- (33) The cottage was in the country and the boy had lived there all his life. (Eckersley, 1960, p. 57)

If the listener knows which thing or person the speaker is has in mind, the speaker uses *the*. If the listener does not know, the speaker needs to use *a/an* with singular countable nouns, and *no article* with plural countable nouns or uncountable nouns (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2).

Sometimes neither the speaker nor the listener know which particular thing or set of things is being talked about (34 through 36). Instead, the speaker is talking about any member of a certain group or category, and it is not important to know which member exactly (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 5). The same usage of articles applies as with the situation where the listener does not know what the speaker is talking about, thus *a/an* with singular countable nouns and *no article* with plural countable nouns and uncountable nouns (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 5).

Examples:

- (34) I'd like a cup of tea. – the speaker does not know which one, neither does the listener, and it does not matter which particular cup of tea (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 5)
- (35) I need to see a doctor. – any doctor, neither the listener nor the speaker is thinking about any particular doctor (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 5)
- (36) Could you pass me a pen please? – any pen, the speaker does not know which one (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 5)

1.6.1 The recipient's surroundings

Sometimes the listener knows which thing or person the speaker has in mind because of the place that the two are in (37, 38). Based on the surroundings, he or she might be able to understand the thing the speaker is talking about (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2). Eastwood (1992, p. 200) explain this context dependency on an example of a hovercraft. If the listener is currently on the hovercraft traveling somewhere, if a captain (39) gets mentioned, it is automatically understood the speaker means the captain of the hovercraft, thus even on the first mention for all the listeners present in the given surrounding, the speaker will use *the*. This is also illustrated in example 19, where the guest uses *the* with the banana on the first mention, because they are in a room where there is a banana in a bowl.

Examples:

- (37) Pass me the glass. – if there is only one glass that they can see, then the listener knows which one the speaker means, because there is no other choice (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (38) I'll put the dishwasher on. – the speaker means the dishwasher that is in the same room as the dialog participants (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (39) The captain was tipped off by radio. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 200)

Similarly, there can be more than one object or person, but if the speaker is referring to them all, they can still use *the* (40). However, sometimes there is more than one object and the listener does not know which one the speaker means, and the speaker should use *a/an* (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2) (41, 42). The size of the situation the dialog

participants are in is not locked – it can be a room, but it can also be a town, city, or country that the participants are in (43, 44) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2).

Examples:

- (40) Please close the windows. – several windows are open, and the speaker wants them all closed (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (41) Please close a window. – three of the windows are open and the speaker wants one of them closed (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (42) He lives in a house overlooking the park. – there are other houses overlooking the park (Eastwood, 1992, p. 201)
- (43) I went to the cafeteria, but it was closed. – the cafeteria in the participants' building (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (44) You can buy apples at the market. – the market is in the participants' town (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)

1.7 Proper nouns

In the previous section, it has been stated that if the surroundings are clear to the listener, the definite article should be used. Sometimes, the surroundings can be very large, so we can simply say that there is only *one* of something, even though it may not be entirely true.

We can use the sun as an example – there are hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy alone and any one of them can be a sun to its solar system, but since most of the time most people refer to our own star, we refer to our sun the *the sun* (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2). The immediate surrounding, then, would be our solar system (45, 46, 47). We sometimes call these *unique things*, as they are unique for our everyday use. However, Jupiter, for example, also has moons (48) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2).

Examples:

- (45) The sun was very hot that day. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (46) I loved learning about the planets in school. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)
- (47) She could see the moon from her bedroom window. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)

(48) Jupiter has a moon called Io. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 2)

Some nouns, however, are so unique, no article is used at all. We use neither *the* nor *a/an*, because there is only one and no more in our entire observable universe. This applies to words such as *Canada* (Porter, 2013, chapter 5). As there is no known circumstance in which two or more Canadas exist, there is no need for any determiner to specify which Canada is being talked about (Porter, 2013, chapter 5). This rule applies to all absolutely unique objects.

However, we can use *a/an* and *the* to describe absolutely unique phrases or names that include non-unique words. For example, although there is only one United Nations, we can use *The United Nations*, because there is more than only one nation – there are two or more nations on planet Earth (Porter, 2013, chapter 5).

1.7.1 Names of people

Another example is a person's name. Porter (2013, chapter 5) illustrated this on his own name. He argues that there is no other person in our universe with his exact DNA, that he is unique Douglas Porter, and so *a*, *an*, nor *the* can be used to describe him. There are many Douglases, as well as there are many Porters, but each of them is a unique individual (Porter, 2013, chapter 5).

Nevertheless, we can use *a/an* or *the* when talking about families, such as *the Porters*, or talking about a non-specific or a specific member of the given family, so we can use *a Porter* when talking about any one Porter of the Porter family, or *the Porter* when mentioning a specific Porter family member (Porter, 2013, chapter 5).

Normally, a person's name does not have an article in front of it. We address or refer to a person using titles such as Mr. for a man, Mrs. for a married woman and Miss for an unmarried woman, none of which is used with any article in front of it (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209). Similarly, an academic or any other title such as *Aunt* or *Lord* is considered a part of a name and has no article either. Some titles such as *doctor* can be used as a part of a name (49) as well as an ordinary noun (50) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209). If the title contains an of-phrase, *the* is used as well (51).

Similarly, there are exceptions for first and last names themselves, as was hinted in the previous paragraph. Examples 52 through 55 demonstrate situations in which an article can be used in front of a person's name. There are also even rarer exceptions such as speaking about a famous person (56) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209). This phenomenon can apply not only to famous people, but also to famous places, foods etc. Usually, in this case *the* is pronounced the way it is pronounced when before a noun that starts with a vowel.

Examples:

- (49) I saw Doctor Fry. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (50) I saw the doctor. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (51) the Prince of Wales (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (52) There's a Laura who works in our office. – a person called Laura (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (53) A Mrs. Wilson called to see you. – someone called Mrs. Wilson (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (54) The Laura I know has dark hair. – the person called Laura (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (55) The gallery has some Picassos. – some pictures by Picasso (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)
- (56) I know a Joan Collins, but she isn't the Joan Collins. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 209)

1.7.2 Place names

Most place names are without an article. Generally, two things determine whether a place name has a definite article or not (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210). First, the kind of place it is – whether it is a lake or a sea for example; and second, the grammatical pattern of the name. However, there are exceptions to every pattern, as the use of *the* in place names is as much idiomatic as it is a grammatical rule (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210).

We do not use *the* with a possessive (57). Regions like lakes, mountains, continents, islands, countries, states, counties, cities, towns and villages – most of them are without *the* (58 through 61) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9).

Examples:

- (57) Cleopatra's Needle (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (58) We visited Lake Geneva (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (59) I saw Mount Fuji from the airplane. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (60) She loved living in Asia. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (61) They live in New Jersey (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)

An exception are names ending with words like *republic* or *kingdom* (62, 63). Plural names also have *the* (64 through 66) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210). We always use an article with patterns such as the of-phrase (67, 68) or an adjective (69, 70). Rivers, mountain ranges, deserts, oceans, seas, groups of islands, lines and points on the Earth – all of these are usually used with *the* (71 through 78) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9).

Examples:

- (62) the Dominican Republic (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (63) the UK (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (64) the Netherlands (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (65) the Bahamas (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (66) the USA (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (67) the Isle of Wight (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (68) the Palace of the Congresses (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (69) the Royal Opera House (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (70) the International School (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (71) The river Nile flows through Egypt. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (72) The Severn is the longest river in the UK. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (73) We ski in the Alps every year. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (74) She traveled across the Sahara. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (75) We sailed around the Mediterranean. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (76) They went to the Canary Islands. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (77) The crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, the Equator, the Arctic Circle and the International date line. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (78) They hiked to the North Pole. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)

Exceptions occur during which places which are normally used with no article at all may have *the* or even *a/an*. If we take the place name Plymouth for an example, in certain context it can be seen with an indefinite article (79), and with a definite article as well (80) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210).

Examples:

- (79) There's a Plymouth in the USA. – a place called Plymouth (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)
- (80) The Plymouth of today is very different from the Plymouth I once knew. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 210)

Places in a city also divide into two large groups of those that have no article and those that use *the*. Areas in a city usually have no article (81), with the exception of areas that are made up of normal words (82) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9). Parks, stations, shops, all of these have no article (83 through 85), except for shops that include the word *shop* itself in it (86). Bridges, roads, streets, squares are without *the* as well (87 through 89) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9). Churches and synagogues are without *the* (90, 91), but other religious buildings such as mosques and temples often have *the* if the name includes the word *mosque* or *temple*. Schools and colleges also have no article (92, 93) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9). Exception with any of the aforementioned are always names with of-phrases or with an adjective or noun modifier (94, 95) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 211).

Examples:

- (81) They visited a restaurant in Manhattan. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (82) the West End (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (83) Shall we go to Central Park this afternoon? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (84) Our train leaves from Grand Central Station. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (85) You can buy things very cheaply in Primark. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (86) the Body Shop (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (87) Have you been to Tower Bridge? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (88) He really hates shopping on Oxford Street. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (89) How do I get to Trafalgar Square? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)

- (90) St Paul's Cathedral was designed by Sir Christopher Wren. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (91) He attends Bevis Marks Synagogue in London. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (92) The children went to Westminster School. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (93) He works at Birkbeck College. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (94) the Chapel of Our Lady (Eastwood, 1992, p. 211)
- (95) the Open University (Eastwood, 1992, p. 211)

On the other hand, museums and art galleries (96) are some of the first of the second group that we more often than not see with the definite article. Most hotels have *the* (97) except for the majority of those with possessive names (98) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9). Most theater names have *the* as well (99), with the exception of possessive form names (100). Pub names have *the* (101), with the exception of, once again, possessive form names (102) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9).

Examples:

- (96) You must go to the British Museum. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (97) Have you ever had tea at the Ritz? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (98) Brown's Hotel (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (99) She often goes to the Royal Opera House. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (100) St Martin's Theatre (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (101) We went to the Crown and Anchor. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (102) Molly Mogg's (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)

Some of the areas and buildings in a city have names equally distributed among those that have the definite article and those that have no article. Universities have no article if the name ends with the word *University* (103), and they start with *the* if the name has the word *University* at the beginning, followed by the preposition *of* (104) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9). Cinemas that constitute of or include a place name (105) are always with no article, whereas cinemas that do not include any place name (106) have *the*. Similarly, libraries that include a place name have no article as well (107), while libraries that include an adjective have *the* (108) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9). Restaurants and cafés have no article (109) if their name does not meet the condition for having *the*, which is that the name is either made up of normal words (110), or the definite article is included in the

name itself (111), and in that case it starts with a capital *T* and these names have to be memorized individually (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9).

Examples:

- (103) She studied at Cambridge University. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (104) She studied at the University of Cambridge. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (105) We saw the new film at Curzon Soho. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (106) He went to the IMAX. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (107) I borrow a lot of books from Wimbledon Library. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (108) I love working at the British Library. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (109) We had dinner at Pizza Hut. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (110) I'd love to eat at the Fat Duck. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)
- (111) We had dinner at The Wolseley. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 9)

1.7.3 Phrases of time

In a phrase of time we often use a singular noun without an article. But the noun takes *a/an* or *the* if there is an adjective before the noun or if there is a phrase or clause after it (112 through 114) (Eastwood, 1992, p. 207). Years (115, 116), seasons (117, 118), months (119, 120), special times of the year (121, 122), days of the week (123, 124), parts of the day and night (125, 126), meals (127, 128), and phrases with *last* and *next* (129, 130), all of these have no article in their default form, but have *the* or *a/an* when specifying which exact time is being talked about, usually with the use of an of-phrase or an adjective. Each of the phrases is illustrated with an example with no article first, followed by an example that includes *the* or *a/an* (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208).

Examples:

- (112) a very cold winter (Eastwood, 1992, p. 207)
- (113) the Monday before the holiday (Eastwood, 1992, p. 207)
- (114) the winter when we had all that snow (Eastwood, 1992, p. 207)
- (115) The party was formed in 1981. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (116) 1981 was the year the party was formed. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)

- (117) If winter comes, can spring be far behind? (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (118) the winter of 1947 (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (119) June is a good month to go away. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (120) That was the June we got married. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (121) I hate Christmas. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (122) It was a Christmas I'll never forget. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (123) Wednesday is my busy day. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (124) I posted the letter on the Wednesday of that week. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (125) They reached camp at sunset. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (126) It was a marvelous sunset. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (127) Breakfast is at eight o'clock. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (128) The breakfast we had at the hotel wasn't very nice. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (129) These flats were built last year. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)
- (130) The flats have been built the previous year. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 208)

1.8 Specific and general

As discussed in section 1.6, sometimes when a noun is used, it is used to denote a particular thing. For example, a speaker might have a certain car in mind. If the speaker thinks their listener knows which car the speaker means, they will use *the*, otherwise they will use *a/an*.

Nevertheless, sometimes we want to talk about cars in general. In this case, a speaker is not thinking about a particular car or a group of cars, instead they are thinking about all the cars in the world – about the category of cars (131) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). And when talking about something in general, we use no article.

The important thing to remember is that we usually cannot use *no article* with singular countable nouns, so if we want to talk in general with *no article*, we must use either a plural countable noun (132) or an uncountable noun (133) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). We can, however, use a singular noun with *a/an* or *the* for some generalizations. In examples 134, 135, the statements are both about all camels, about camels in general, even when using *the camel*. However, we cannot use *the camels* for a generalization (Eastwood, 1992, p. 203).

Examples:

- (131) Cars cause a lot of pollution. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (132) She loves cats. – not ‘She loves cat’ (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (133) Children need love. – ‘love’ is uncountable (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (134) A camel can close its nose. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 203)
- (135) The camel can close its nose. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 203)

Sometimes the line between specific and general is not clear. In an example with books, in example 136, the speaker is clearly talking about specific books, as much as in example 137 they are clearly speaking about books in general (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). However, in examples 138 and 139, there is not a clear, definite line between general and specific, and in the middle it is often possible to choose either *the* or *no article*. In such situations where we can choose, using *the* makes it clear that the speaker thinks the listener knows which particular group of things or people they are talking about (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). Apart from that, there are unfortunately no clear rules about this particular phenomenon, only tips to help oneself orientate.

Pre- and post-modification is one of these vantage points (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). We often use nouns in a general way even if they have an adjective or a noun adjunct. In example 140, the speaker talks about Italian coffee in general. If they wanted to talk about a particular Italian coffee and they think the listener understands which coffee they mean, then *the* can be used in a normal way (141) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3).

Examples:

- (136) The books on the table are mine. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (137) Books are useful. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (138) It’s important for young people to have access to (the) books in the library.
(Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (139) (The) books in England are quite expensive. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (140) I love Italian coffee. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (141) I love the Italian coffee that they serve in this café. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)

In the same way, examples 142 through 147 illustrate some of the other nouns which are used in a general way, but have an adjective or noun adjunct in front.

Examples:

- (142) I love red wine. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (143) The company imports British beef. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (144) 1920s music is very popular in London just now. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (145) He wrote his thesis on 21st-century art. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (146) I enjoy studying French philosophy. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (147) She hates vegetable soup. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)

Sometimes, the choice between general and specific depends more on the grammar of the sentence than the meaning of the words. As made clear in earlier sections, we use *no article* when there is an adjective before the noun (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). However, when we follow the noun with the preposition *of*, we tend to use *the*, even when the meaning is the same (148, 149). When the noun has a different preposition, it is less likely to need *the*. It is once again possible to choose equally between *no article* and *the* (150) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3).

Examples:

- (148) The music of the 1920s is very popular in London just now. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (149) I enjoy studying the philosophy of France. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (150) I love (the) coffee from Italy. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)

It is also possible to use *the* + singular countable noun to talk about a whole category of people. This sounds slightly formal, as if we were talking about the typical example of the given group (151, 152) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3). We can also even use an adjective in the place of a noun to achieve the same effect (153, 154). This applies even when talking about nationalities (155, 156), but if the nationality adjective ends with *-an*, as in *American*, *Australian*, *Canadian* etc., it is often also used as a noun and in that case

we use *no article* when talking about *Americans, Colombians, Germans* etc. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 204).

Examples:

- (151) Banks should pass on savings to the customer. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (152) We should consider how these changes to classes will affect the student.
(Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (153) We should have an interpreter for the deaf. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (154) The government gives a lot of help to the disabled. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)
- (155) The French love eating in restaurants. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 203)
- (156) The Japanese tend to think education is very important. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 3)

1.9 Abstract Ideas

Contrary to the previous section, we can sometimes use *the* + singular noun to talk about a whole category. In that case, we are thinking about the category as a general abstract idea (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4). In a sense, they are things that everybody knows, so we use *the*. Many of these words can be used as normal nouns as well, so we can use them in multiple ways (157, 158) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

Examples:

- (157) I like going to the library. – though we use *the*, we mean any library, the abstract idea of a library (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (158) I'm going to the library today. – the speaker may be thinking about a specific library, but they may just as well be thinking about any library and they have not yet decided which one to go to (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)

We often use *the* to talk about entertainment and recreation as a general idea (159, 160). Words like this include *the cinema, the opera, the ballet, the theater, the gym, the park, the zoo, the library* etc. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4). Shops and other businesses (161, 162) also take *the* in most cases. These include *the baker's, the bank, the dentist's, the doctor's, the hairdresser's, the post office, the pub* (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4). There

is an exception with *the café* and *the restaurant* – if we use the definite article with these two places, we always mean a specific place.

Musical instruments are another category of abstract words that is usually used with *the*. With both examples 163 and 164, the instruments mentioned mean any instrument – and they usually follow the verb *play* (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

We also use *the* with transport, specifically public transport. When we talk about taking *the bike* or *the car*, we usually mean one that we or someone close to us owns, but when talking about public transport, we use *the* even though we may not have a specific vehicle in mind (165, 166) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

Usually we use nouns related to public transport together with verbs such as *get on*, *get off*, *take*, *be on etc.*, and these nouns include *the bus*, *the underground / metro / subway*, *the plane*, *the train*, *the boat / ferry*, as well as places we go to get transport (167, 168) such as *the airport*, *the (train) station*, *the bus station*, *the bus stop* – unless they are a proper noun – then they would have *no article* (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

Communication and media are another category that usually takes *the* even when not being talked about in any specific way (169, 170), apart from *television*, which is used with *no article* as an abstract idea and with *the* as a physical object (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4). We also use *no article* with communication when referring to it using the preposition *by* (171, 172). Parts of the body take *the* when being talked about in general (173), but usually they take a *possessive* instead of an article (174) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

Examples:

- (159) I often go to the cinema. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (160) She loves the opera. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (161) Can't you buy bread at the baker's? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (162) You should put your extra money in the bank. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (163) John plays the piano beautifully. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (164) Have you ever learned to play the guitar? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (165) We took the bus to school. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)

- (166) She gets off the underground in central London. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (167) What time does her plane arrive at the airport? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (168) Shall I give you a lift to the station? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (169) Julie is on the phone. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (170) We often listen to the radio. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (171) We usually communicate by phone. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (172) The news was broadcast by radio. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (173) I've hurt my leg. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (174) He broke his arm when he was skiing. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)

Other abstract ideas that in most cases take the definite article include inventions (175), plants and animals (176), names of dances (177), geographical expressions (178), weather (179), time words (180), grammatical expressions (181) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

Examples:

- (175) The wheel was probably invented around 10,000 years ago. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (176) The snow leopard is in danger of becoming extinct. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (177) The tango originated in Argentina. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (178) I like living in the city because there's so much to do. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (179) The sounds of the wind makes me feel cold. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (180) I like drinking coffee in the morning. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (181) Put these sentences into the present simple. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)

1.9.1 Words that generally have no article

Although the word language itself is often used with an article, particular languages such as *Japanese*, *Spanish* etc. have *no article* (182), with the exception of an occasional unusual use (183). The same applies for names of meals including *breakfast*, *lunch*, *dinner*, *supper*, *tea* etc. (184, 185), as well as sports (186, 187) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4). Months (188), days of the week (189), special days and holidays (190), all of these have *no*

article, as well as dates (191), apart from when they have number first (192), parts of the day (193), seasons (194), years (195) (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4).

Examples:

- (182) She speaks Japanese. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (183) The French that they speak in Montreal is different from the French that they speak in Paris. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (184) What shall we have for dinner? (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (185) The lunch we had after the wedding was excellent. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (186) I love playing football. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (187) The football that they play in the USA is completely different from the football that we play in the UK. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (188) I'll see you in December. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (189) I met Julia on Monday. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (190) We usually eat turkey on Christmas day. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (191) She met him on November 16th. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (192) We got married on the 22nd of September. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (193) I met John on Friday morning. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (194) She always goes to Spain in summer. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)
- (195) She was born in 1991. (Beckwith, 2013, chapter 4)

1.9.2 Idioms and phrases

We also use articles in many special cases such as idioms and fixed expressions. These include phrases such as expressions of price, speed etc. (196, 197), phrases of measurement (198, 199) etc. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 212). Other idiomatic expressions have to be memorized individually.

Examples:

- (196) The speed limit of motorways is seventy miles an hour. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 212)
- (197) Roger shaves twice a day. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 212)
- (198) Boats can be hired by the day. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 212)

(199) Carpets are sold by the square meter. (Eastwood, 1992, p. 212)

2 METHODS OF TEACHING THE ARTICLES

2.1 How people learn language

In order to be able to structure a lesson, one has to first understand the process that goes on in a student's mind when he/she is learning a new language. At first, the learner doesn't know anything about the item. The next step is he/she hears or reads examples of the item, but doesn't particularly notice it (Scrivener, 1994, p. 111). The learner then begins to realize that there is a feature he/she doesn't fully understand, which prompts him/her to start looking more closely at the item and try to work out the formation rules and the meaning, possibly with the help of reference information, explanations and other help (Scrivener, 1994, p. 111). In the next step, the learner will try to use the item in his/her own speech or writing, perhaps hesitantly and with many errors. The final stage occurs when the learner fully integrates the item into his/her own language and uses it without thinking and with only minor errors (Scrivener, 1994, p. 111).

2.2 Methods and their focus

Methodology is one of the three main subcomponents of curriculum – *syllabus design, methodology and evaluation*. While syllabus design has to do with selecting, sequencing and justifying content, and evaluation has to do with how well students have mastered the objectives of the course, methodology has to do with selecting, sequencing and justifying tasks and experiences (Nunan, 2003, p. 4).

A language teaching method is a single set of procedures which teachers are to follow in the classroom. Methods are also usually based on a set of beliefs about the nature of language and learning (Nunan, 2003, p. 5). These include the teacher's belief about what language is, how people learn, how teaching helps people learn. Based on those beliefs, one can make methodological decisions about the aims of a course, what to teach, teaching techniques, activity types, ways of relating with students and ways of assessing (Scrivener, 1994, p. 38). There are many methods regarding English language teaching. Out of those, two of the most prevalent methods were selected for their contrasting characteristics.

2.2.1 Grammar translation

A method considered to be outdated in most developed countries. The main characteristics of this method are the teacher rarely using target language and relatively little focus on speaking and listening skills (Scrivener, 1994, p. 38). The lack of using target language can be detrimental for students learning articles.

However, according to Richards (1986, p. 3) “grammar translation is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by the application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences.” This means that grammar translation, as its name suggests, has grammar as its primary focus, which has a positive and a negative side.

The positive side is the grammar focus, but the negative side is the translation focus – it is hard to translate articles from English to Czech, since the Czech language is from a different language family and has a distinct way of determining concreteness etc.

2.2.2 Direct method

In the nineteenth century, reformers attempted to build a methodology around observation and child language learning. These attempts led to *natural* language learning principles, and the most widely known of these methods is the *Direct method* (Richards, 1986, p. 9).

In practice, the direct method stands for principles and procedures such as the requirement that the classroom instruction be conducted exclusively in the target language; only everyday vocabulary and sentences are taught; oral communication skills are built up in a careful progression; grammar is taught inductively etc. (Richards, 1986, p. 11).

2.3 Deductive vs inductive approach to teaching

Methods and approaches to teaching generally can be divided in a number of ways. One of them is the division between teaching grammar deductively, or in other words teaching *teaching grammar from rules*, and the other one is teaching grammar inductively, or *teaching grammar from examples*.

According to Thornbury (1999, p. 29), there is a definition for each of these two approaches of teaching grammar:

- 1) “A deductive approach starts with the presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied.” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 29)
- 2) “An inductive approach starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred.” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 29)

Furthermore, Thornbury (1999, p. 29) illustrates the difference between these approaches on a simple real-life example. He explains that if we were to arrive to a completely new country, a deductive way of learning its customs would be that someone tells us that the local people rub their nose to greet each other. On the other hand, an inductive way would be that we observe the people for a while and see that they rub their nose every time they greet each other – thus, rubbing one’s nose must mean they are greeting each other.

Richards (1986, p. 51) argues that analogy provides a better foundation for language learning than analysis. “Analogy involves the processes of generalization and discrimination” (Richards, 1986, p. 51). Explanations are not given until students have practiced a pattern in a variety of contexts and are thought to have acquired an understanding of the analogies involved. Then, drills are an adequate tool to solidify these analogies and prevent learners from acquiring incorrect ones (Richards, 1986, p. 51).

However, even though the inductive approach makes for a more solidified foundation of understanding a grammar category, the deductive way teaches grammar in a more organized and systematic way (Richards, 1986, p. 4). The deductive approach is traditionally associated with Grammar-Translation, something that Thornbury (1999, p. 29) calls unfortunate, because Grammar-Translation as a method has been criticized for many of its aspects.

When it comes to a definitive decision as to which method is better, Nunan (2003, p. 158) explains that the decision is context-dependent. More specifically, it depends on the grammar point being taught and the learning style of each individual student. From Nunan’s own experience, he summarizes that his students like the deductive way better because it requires less mental effort, but he himself prefers the inductive way because

despite it being more demanding for the students' energy and time, he says it will result in a more effective learning in the longer term (Nunan, 2003, p. 158).

2.4 Productive vs. receptive skills

Language skills can be divided into two categories, each of which has another two of its subcategories. Productive skills include speaking and writing – the production of language. This aspect of language skills provides easier feedback possibilities than receptive skills (IELTS, 2019). Receptive skills then represent the receiving end – listening and reading. They are more suitable for acquisition and learning of a language. On an imaginary scale, receptive skills are more on the learning end, while productive skills are on the outcome end (TeachingEnglish, 2019).

2.4.1 Speaking

Speaking is the first of the two productive skills. When we say productive, we mean the ability to produce the given language – in this case orally, by speaking. Scrivener (1994, p. 146) argues that there is no point in knowing about a language if one can't speak it – thus, fluency and confidence are the main goals of teaching speaking. Lessons should be designed so that the learners mainly talk together.

In relation to the articles, speaking more of an outcome of learning the articles, the harder of the two productive skills, rather than the most effective device for learning them. The articles can be practiced through a discussion and a simultaneous error correction on the teacher's part.

2.4.2 Writing

Writing is the other productive skill. It can be exercised on a scale from copying, doing exercises, through guided writing, all the way to unguided writing (Scrivener, 1994, p. 193). Some teachers believe that there is very little in-class work that can be done on writing, believing that writing is essentially an individual activity.

However, there are some possible steps that can be done between setting a writing task and collecting the work (Scrivener, 1994, p. 193). Among the possible guiding actions are: choosing a topic, choosing a genre, selecting between ideas, planning the organization

of the text, getting feedback on content, co-writing sections of text in groups etc. (Scrivener, 1994, p.).

Writing is another skill that serves more as an outcome of learning articles rather than for learning itself, even more so than speaking, since it is even harder to assess and correct errors compared to speaking.

2.4.3 Listening

“Even if someone knows all the grammar and lexis of a language, it doesn’t necessarily mean they will be able to understand a single word when it is spoken.” (Scrivener, 1994, p. 170). Listening occupies 45 percent of the time adults spend in communication, significantly more than speaking, which accounts for 30 percent. Yet, teachers often fail to give listening the attention it needs, even though learners often say it is the most challenging of the four skills (British Council, 2019). Provided that the learners understand the words surrounding the articles, listening may serve as a considerably quicker, yet less accurate way of exercising the articles compared to reading.

2.4.4 Reading

Scrivener (1994, p. 184) makes a point that many learners read sentences given to them very slowly and try to understand every word separately. While this may be beneficial for improving their vocabulary and understanding of grammar, this type of word-by-word approach may not necessarily make them into better readers. Scrivener (1994, p. 184) reminds that it is not the way people do most of their reading in real life. The goal then is to teach learners to read quickly, to grasp the idea of the sentence.

For this the learner has to have a sufficient vocabulary so that they do not get slowed down by unknown words. Articles are among the most automatic occurrences in the English language – we do not often realize we use them. Thus, the goal should be to give as simple of a blueprint for comprehending the principle to the articles to enable learners not to stop and think about every definite and indefinite article in a sentence.

2.5 Practicing the articles

Scrivener (2010, p. 46) calls the gap-fill text a “humble classic” in the sphere of practice activities of the articles, during which students work either individually or in pairs to fill in the missing articles. Another exercise that Scrivener (2010, p. 46) suggests for practicing the articles is text reordering. This activity introduces several mixed up sentences which the learner is required to reorder in a meaningful way. The purpose of text reordering is to “help students focus on the use of articles to shape a conversation or text” (Scrivener, 2010, p. 46).

Furthermore, Scrivener (2010, p. 46) warns that if a teacher wishes to create their own exercises, it comes with a risk of unwittingly putting in questions that are very problematic to answer or to explain. Articles are at the same time necessary from the beginner level and also have truly advanced-level complexities. Finally, Scrivener (2010, p. 46) advises that for teaching lower levels, if the teacher is unsure of their linguistic ground, the articles are the one language area where it may be best to adhere to published sources for exercises.

3 THE RESEARCH

Introduction to the research

The research was conducted on three elementary schools in Olomouc – ZŠ Tererova, ZŠ Zeyerova, and ZŠ Hálkova. For the purposes of anonymity, the schools in the result part of the research are presented in a different order. All results are interconnected using letters *A*, *B*, *C*, including three teachers per school that took part in the research.

There was no research hypothesis, although the underlying assumption when conducting the research was that the level of the learners' ability to use the articles is very sub-par, which of course projects to adult persons who speak English as a second language not being able to use the articles correctly, which then often projects into everyday products containing striking errors. Instead of a research hypothesis, a series of research questions laid down:

- How do the teachers teach and practice the articles?
- How much attention and importance do the teachers attribute to the articles as a grammatical category and as a subject matter?
- How well do the learners perform overall?
- Which categories are the learners' strong suit?
- Which categories do the learners have problems with?
- Do the learners' performances correlate with the performances and preferences of the teachers from their schools?

The research was divided into two parts – a questionnaire and a test for the teachers, and a test for the learners. All of the research was conducted using printed questionnaires and tests. The researcher considers this method more reliable in terms of participants' effort. It is less reliable and more work-demanding for data evaluation, but the researcher has created several simple programs using Microsoft Visual Studio that made the transition of the data from paper to a computer much more fluid.

3.1 Teacher results

Nine teachers in total were given and filled in the questionnaire for teachers – three English teachers per each school that took part in the research. The questionnaire contained a space for filling in classes that each individual teacher teaches that took part in the questionnaire – the space was titled ‘for correlation purposes’, but some of the teachers left the field blank, or simply put down ‘9th grade’, which is the only grade that took part in the questionnaire anyway. Furthermore, most classes are divided in half. For that reason, the results will contain no correlation between teachers and their particular classes. Instead, the comparison will be focused of differences between entire schools.

The questionnaire was three A4 pages long and consisted of five multiple-choice questions, three open questions, six percentage-comparison questions, and the gap-fill test that was given to the learners. Aside from the gap-fill test, all questions were presented in Czech. Aside from one two-option question, each of the multiple-choice questions had three options and a fourth option titled ‘other’ in case any one teacher wished to answer in their own way. In percentage-comparison questions, the teachers were asked to compare certain aspects of teaching or using the articles and divide their preference into the sum of 100. There were three percentage-comparison questions with two options, two with three options, and one with four options.

The research results are not presented in the same order as were the questions in the questionnaire. For the purpose of language consistency, all questions and answers are translated into English.

3.1.1 Teaching style in general

The first of the more general questions asked in the questionnaire concerns the teaching style of each teacher. Three styles were introduced covertly – their exact terms were not mentioned in the question, only part of the definition of each term – authoritative, liberal, and democratic. Authoritative and liberal styles are often viewed as negative and these terms already carry a negative connotation. I tried to make their definitions sound as neutral as possible.

Question:

How would you describe your teaching style?

- a) I use authority, commands, and the effectiveness of reward and punishment
- b) I try for a minimal management of the learners, have lower demands, I do not necessarily check the fulfillment of those demands
- c) I lead by example, prompt the learners' activity
- d) Other: _____

The dominant answer was definitely c). All three teachers from both school A and school B answered c). Teachers from school C circled d) and added:

- 1) Teacher A: The combination of all three options.
- 2) Teacher B: I try to be a leader and lead children to mutual cooperation, tolerance, and understanding. I aim for a pleasant classroom climate.
- 3) Teacher C: a, b, c – depending on the situation

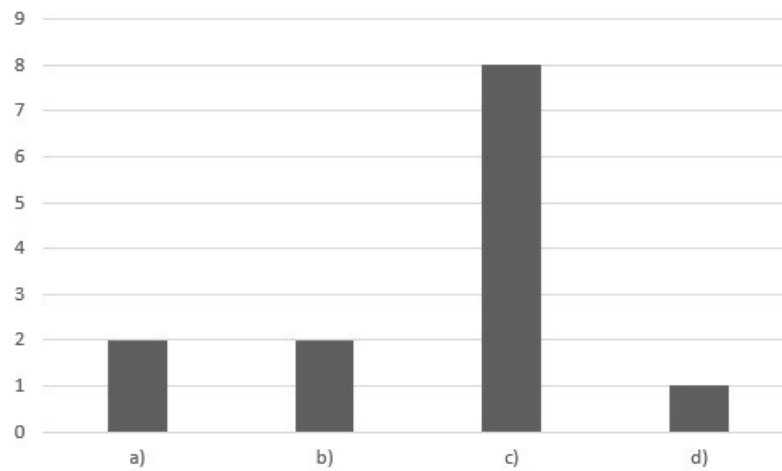


Figure 1 – Overall preference in teaching style

Another question that could be considered rather general was a percentage-comparison one. The questions asked the teachers to divide the 'speaking time' of the teacher and the learners.

Question:

How often do you vs. the learners speak?

a) Teacher: _____ %

b) Learners: _____ %

The teachers from school A seem to have the most equality-oriented approach to teacher-learner speech time, as all three answered 50% teacher / 50% learners. The choice of exactly half suggests that the teachers try to keep their learners active. Teachers A and B from school B also answered 50% teacher / 50% learners. Teacher C from school B, however, answered 60% teacher / 40% learners. Furthermore, all three teachers from school C also incline towards longer speech time for teachers. The exact answers were 60% teacher / 40% learners for teacher A, 70% teacher / 30% learners for teacher B, and 60% teacher / 40% learners for teacher C. Particularly the choice of a 7:3 speech time ratio may be a sign of lower learner activity in classes.

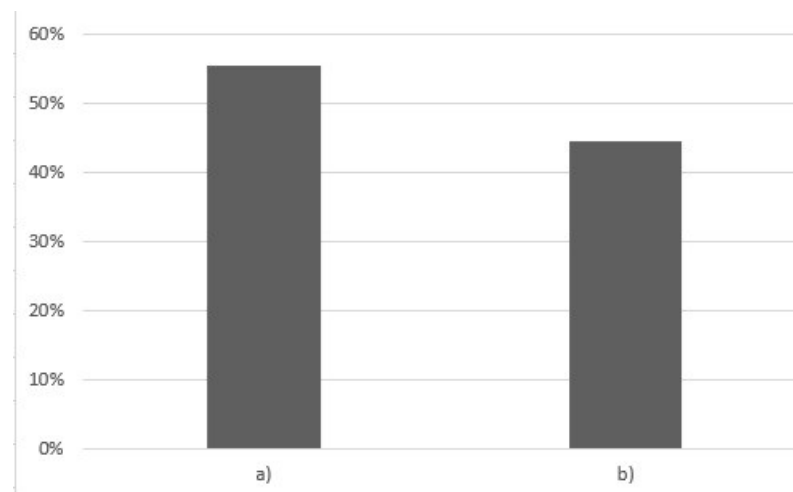


Figure 2 – Overall preference in speech time

Finally, the last of the more general questions has to do with English - the teachers were asked how much they utilize Czech vs. English in their lessons. Utilizing either language dominantly may be a factor in how often the learners are exposed to the articles in practice, as listening to a teacher who speaks English is much more beneficial for acquiring the proper usage of articles than listening to a teacher who speaks Czech, since Czech as a language does not use articles at all.

Question:

How often do you speak Czech vs. English in your lessons?

- a) Czech: _____ %
- b) English: _____ %

Teacher A from school A answered 50% Czech / 50% English, teacher B from school A answered 25% Czech / 75% English, and teacher C from school A answered 20% Czech / 80 % English. Teacher A from school B answered 10% Czech / 90% English, teacher B from school B answered 50% Czech / 50% English, and teacher C from school B answered 60-70% Czech / 40-30% English. Particularly with teacher C from school B the preference of the Czech language is visible from the ascending nature of the Czech approximation (60-70), whereas the English approximation has a descending number (40-30). Teacher A from school C answered 50% Czech / 50% English, and added a note: “Depends on the grade – the higher the grade, the higher the percentage of using English in lessons.” Teacher B from school C also answered 50% Czech / 50% English, and teacher C from school C answered 30% Czech / 70% English.

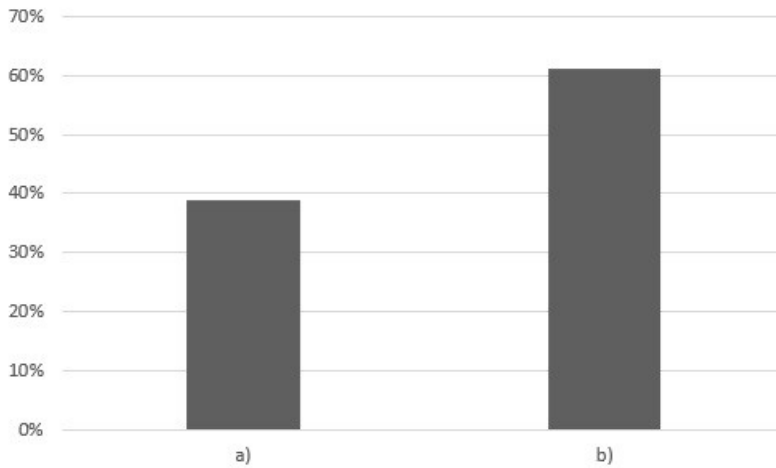


Figure 3 – Overall preference in classroom language usage

3.1.2 Introducing the articles

Several questions were asked concerning the way each teacher prefers to explain the articles to their pupils – two multiple-choice questions, one open question, and one percentage-comparison question. The questions focused on whether to teach the articles inductively or deductively, explicitly or implicitly, and finally, the teachers were ‘challenged’ to try and provide an explanation of the articles using exactly two sentences.

The open question sought to find out whether the teachers prefer to introduce the articles inductively or deductively. The options in the question did not include the words *deductive* or *inductive* in them, they were rather the sum of the definition of each.

Question:

Which way do you introduce the articles as a new subject matter?

- a) First I explain the rules, then the learners exercise
- b) I give the learners an exercise from which they themselves can try to figure out the rules
- c) Other: _____

All three teachers from school A unanimously selected option b). Teacher A from school B circled option c) and added: “both of the aforementioned.” Teacher B from school B circled option b). Teacher C from school B circled all three options and added: “I alter between both variants , depends on the situation”. Teacher A from school C added a commentary to option c): “I combine both options.” Teacher B from school C was the only one who decidedly circled option a) – the deductive approach. Teacher C from school C inclines to the deductive approach as he/she circled c) and added: “Usually option a) applies, depends on the composition of the class.”

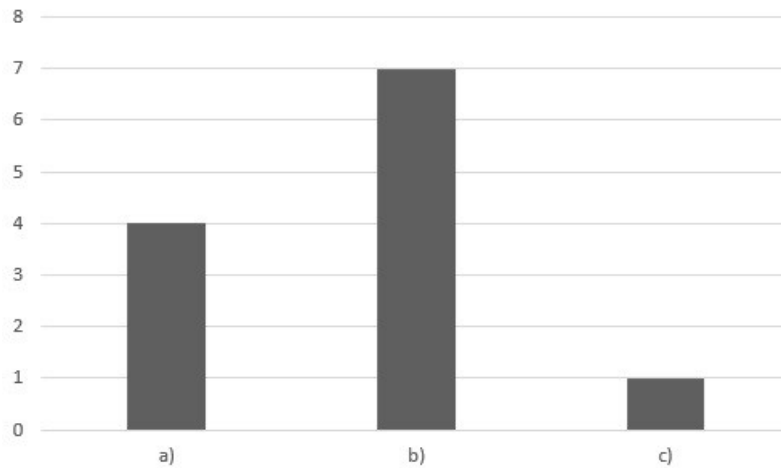


Figure 4 – Overall preference in methods for introducing a new subject matter

Another question incorporated to the questionnaire asked about how the learners learn about the articles – whether they find about them and exercise them explicitly or implicitly. This question serves to find out how useful it is to devote entire lessons to the articles as opposed to simply relying on the learners acquiring the ability to use the articles as a part of other lessons.

Question:

To what extent do you think the learners learn about the articles explicitly (i.e. a lesson named “The Articles”) vs. implicitly (i.e. as an integral part of other lessons)?

- a) Explicitly: _____ %
- b) Implicitly: _____ %

Teacher A as well as teacher B from school A both answered 20% explicitly / 80% implicitly. Teacher C from school A answered 40% explicitly / 60% implicitly. Teacher A from school B answered 30% explicitly / 70% implicitly, teacher B from school B answered 20% explicitly / 80% implicitly, and teacher C from school B is the only one from the first two schools who believes the learners learn the articles more overtly than covertly, answering 60% explicitly / 40% implicitly. School C is predominantly inclined to the belief that the learners learn about the articles explicitly. Teacher A from school C answered 70% explicitly / 30% implicitly, teacher B from school C answered 80%

explicitly / 20% implicitly, and teacher C from school C answered 70% explicitly / 30% implicitly.

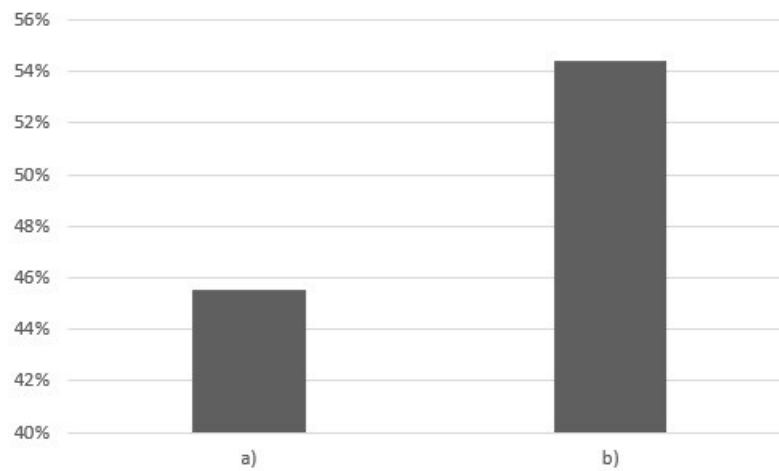


Figure 5 – Overall preference about explicit / implicit learning of the articles

The other of the two multiple-choice questions regarding explaining the articles concerned the way in which the teachers prefer to present the subject matter – more precisely the aids utilized for the explanation.

Question:

What do you think is the most effective way of explaining the articles?

- a) Using pictures / diagrams
- b) Oral explanation
- c) The learners read the study material
- d) Other: _____

The dominant answer to this question was clearly b). Teacher A from school A circled option b). Teacher B from school A circled option a) and d) and added: “Depends on which learner type the learner is.” Teacher C from school A circled option b). Teacher A from school B circled option b). Teacher B from school B circled option a) as well as b). Teacher C from school B also circled option b). Teacher A from school C is the only one who selected option c), but with that also selected option b). Teachers B and C from school C once again selected option b).

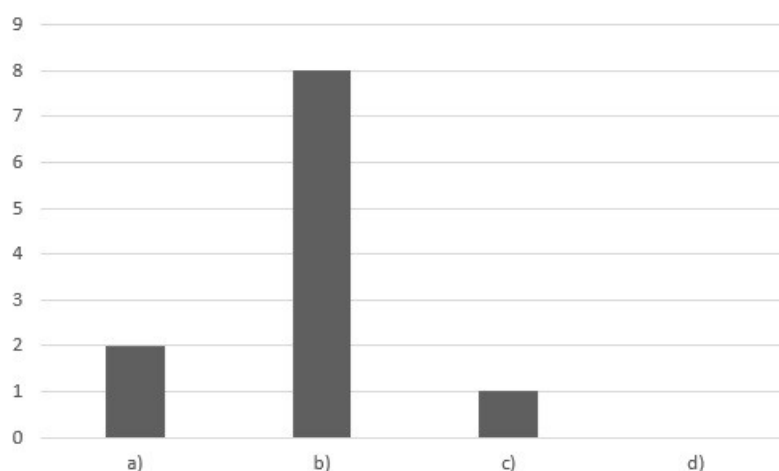


Figure 6 – preference in aids used for introducing the articles

The last of the questions related to introducing the articles as a new subject matter was an open one. Although the question was designed to ‘challenge’ the teachers, since it is not possible to explain the entirety of the grammar category of the articles in two sentences, it is often exactly what teachers tend to do – devote to sentences to explaining the matter and then move on to the exercises. The answers varied considerably, including cases where the teacher did not try to explain the principle of the articles, but instead provided a simple example – something that most of the learners did in their questionnaire, but that is more understandable. Nevertheless, an example may be the best way to explain something, so even that may be a demonstration of different styles of teaching as complex a phenomenon as the articles are.

Once again, most of the answers were provided in Czech (aside from the ones with examples), but for the purpose of language consistency of this project, the answers were translated into English. All of the questions were translated exactly as they were put on the paper, so if any teacher used an ellipsis, then the transcription contains the ellipsis. If any of the teachers used three sentences instead of two, then the transcription contains three sentences.

Question:

If you were to explain the principle of the articles to the learners using only two sentences, what would you tell them (Czech or English)?

Teacher A from school A:

“a” (an) serves for naming things in general, and “the” determines that concrete thing

Teacher B from school A:

Zero article is for abstract terms and substances, the indefinite article for things that are not specified more closely, and the definite article is for concrete things. The articles are sometimes a ‘mystery’ even for native speakers.

Teacher C from school A:

Teacher C from school A did not answer this question.

Teacher A from school B:

They are auxiliary words that help determine and differentiate nouns – i.e. singular/plural, countability, specific/general, a particular thing or an indeterminate thing...

Teacher B from school B:

The English articles describe the things we talk about more closely. If we talk about some unknown or closely unspecified thing, we use the indefinite article (corresponds with the Czech *nějaký, některý*). If we are describing a concrete thing or one that we have previously talked about, we use the definite article (corresponds with the Czech *ten, ta, to*).

Teacher C from school B:

I would begin in Czech and present the translations in English. If I speak of something for the first time, I use a/an, if I speak of something for the second time, I use the.

Teacher A from school C:

I can see a boy. The boy is playing tennis.

Teacher B from school C:

Here's a café. The café is the oldest in Olomouc.

Teacher C from school C:

He's got an apple. The apple is red.

↓

↓

I speak of something for the first time. I speak of something for the second time (a concrete thing).

3.1.3 Practicing the articles

One multiple-choice question and two percentage-comparison questions were introduced in the questionnaire regarding the way each teacher practices the articles with their learners.

The multiple-choice question is similar to the one regarding explaining the articles – it asks what the teacher thinks is the most effective way of practicing the articles.

Question:

What do you think is the most effective way of practicing the articles?

- a) Gap-fill exercise
- b) Reading / listening to materials containing the articles
- c) Translating materials containing the articles
- d) Other: _____

Option c) was put in the questionnaire to see if anyone even circles it, as, once again, Czech does not use the articles at all, to translating an English text into Czech may seem inexpedient, but on the other hand, it may do the exact opposite, as it may serve as a challenge to figure out a way to translate sentences containing the articles into meaningful sentences in Czech.

Teacher A from school A selected two options – option a) and option b). Teacher B from school A selected option a) and teacher C from school A selected option b). Teacher A from school B selected option a), teacher B from school B selected options a) and c), and teacher C from school B selected option c) only. Teacher A from school C selected options a) and b) while both teacher B and teacher C from school C selected option a).

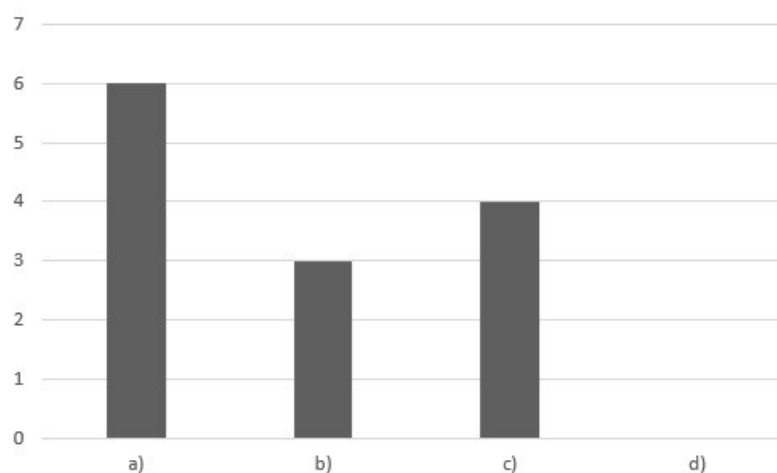


Figure 7 – Overall preference in aids used for practicing the articles

The first of the two percentage-comparison questions regarding practicing the articles aimed to find out which aids the teachers prefer to use for practicing the articles.

Question:

To what extent do you use the following aids for teaching the articles?

- a) A coursebook: _____ %
- b) Own sources of materials: _____ %
- c) Own creation of materials: _____ %

The results vary greatly even among teachers from same schools. Teacher A from school A claims to be using 80% coursebook, while dividing own sources and own creation to 10% and 10%. Teacher B from school A does not create own materials at all, while relying 60% on a coursebook and 40% on own sources. Teacher C from school A only uses the coursebook 40% of the time, while using own sources 30% of the time, and own creation of materials 30% of the time as well. Teacher A from school B uses the coursebook 60% of the time while dividing the remaining two between 20% and 20%. Teacher B from school B uses 50% coursebook, and the other half is materials other than a coursebook, 30% of which are own sources and 20% are own creation. Teacher C from school B uses the coursebook for practicing the articles 70% of the time, while dividing the rest equally between 15% and 15%. Teacher A from school C uses the coursebook for most of the practicing of the articles – 80%, while using own sources 15% of the time and own creation a symbolic 5% of the time. Teacher B from school C uses the coursebook 70% of the time, own sources 20% of the time, and own creation of materials 10% of the time. Teacher C from school C admits to only use the coursebook – a full 100%, while giving the other two options 0%.

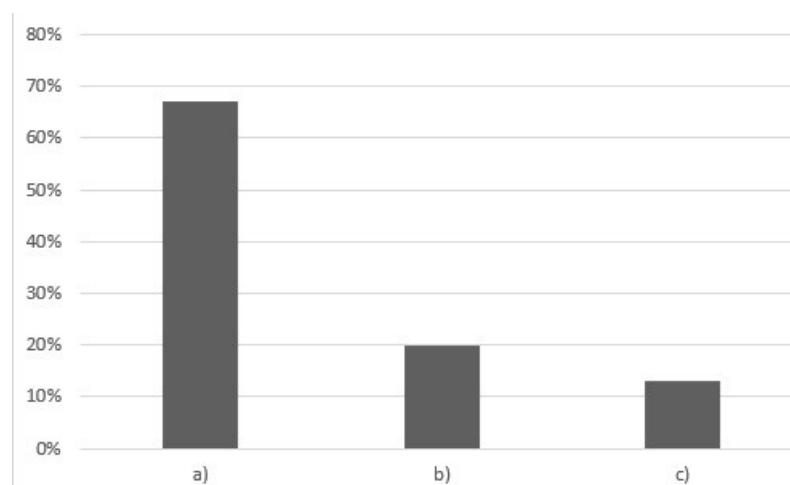


Figure 8 – Overall preference in sources of exercises

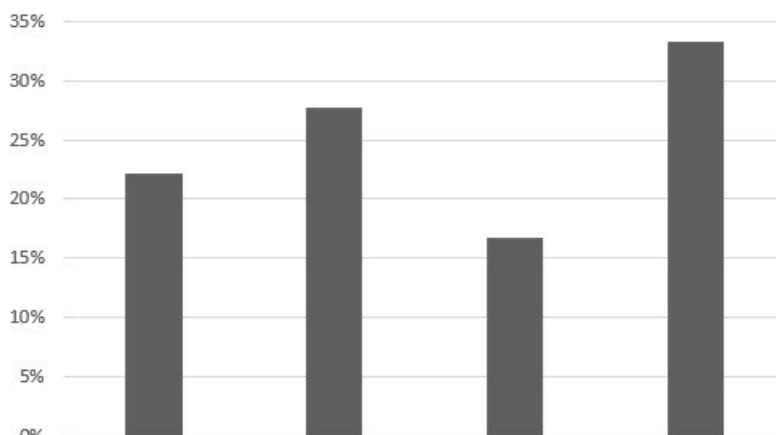
The last of the questions concerning the practicing of the articles aims to find out which of the four essential language skills the teachers find most suitable for practicing the articles.

Question:

To what extent do you consider each of these skills suitable for teaching the articles?

- a) Speaking: _____ %
- b) Writing: _____ %
- c) Listening: _____ %
- d) Reading: _____ %

The results once again vary significantly. Some teachers strongly prefer one skill over the others while other teachers only slightly prefer two over the other two. Teacher A from school A believes reading is the most appropriate way for practicing the articles, as he/she answered reading 70% while dividing the rest equally among 10%, 10% and 10%. Teacher B from school A has the strongest preference for writing as a means of practicing the articles, answering 40% writing, 30% reading, 20% speaking, and 10% listening. Teacher C from school A prefers reading, giving it 40% while dividing the rest among 20%, 20%, and 20%. Teacher A from school B does not have a clear preference of one specific skill, instead he/she slightly prefers the productive skills over receptive ones, giving 30% to speaking, 30% to writing, 20% to listening, and 20% to reading. Teacher B from school B also has no clear preference of one skill, instead slightly prefers textual skills over oral, giving 30% to writing, 30% to reading, 20% to speaking, and 20% to listening. Teacher C from school B, however, strongly prefers writing, giving it 70% while dividing the rest among 10%, 10%, and 10%. Teacher A from school C prefers speaking, listening, and reading equally, giving each 30%, while giving writing 10%. Teacher B from school C, just as teacher A from school B, slightly prefers productive skills over receptive ones, giving 30% to speaking, 30% to writing, 20% to listening, and 20% to reading. Finally, teacher C from school C prefers reading the most, giving it 50%, then inclines to speaking, to which he/she gives 30%, and then divides the remaining two between 10% and 10%.



3.1.4 Attitude toward the articles

A series of questions was asked to learn about the teachers' attitude toward teaching the articles, how they prioritize them, and what they think is the biggest problem for the learners. One multiple-choice question, two open questions, and one percentage-comparison question appeared in the questionnaire regarding the teachers' attitude toward the articles.

The multiple-choice question sought to find whether the teachers think the articles are given enough attention in elementary schools.

Question:

Do you think the articles are given enough attention in elementary schools?

- a) They should be given more attention
- b) They could be given less attention
- c) They are given an adequate amount of attention
- d) Other: _____

All teachers answered c) except for teacher B from school C, who circled c) and also d) and added: “hard for the learners – high error rate even after practicing”. However, teacher A from school B, even though he/she circled option c), and even though there is a space for commentary at the end of the questionnaire, he/she left a sticker note under the attitude questions that said: “After viewing the results of my group – thank you for the impulse, OMG! – I will devote myself more to this in my English classes! [smiling emoticon]”

The two open questions are interconnected as the first one asks the teachers to write down one grammatical category they consider more important than the articles and give a brief reason for their opinion, and then the second one asks the teachers to write down one grammatical category they consider less important than the articles and once again give a brief reason for their opinion.

Q1:

Name one grammatical category of the English language which you consider more important than the articles. Give a brief reason for your opinion.

Q2:

Name one grammatical category of the English language which you consider less important than the articles. Give a brief reason for your opinion.

Teacher A from school A:

Q1: Past tense – I generally consider the articles lowly important

Q2: I think the articles are not fundamental for ordinary communication, they are usually taught covertly

Teacher B from school A:

Q1: Conjugation of the verb “to be” + past tense – interconnectedness with other subject matter

Q2: Can’t think of any

Teacher C from school A:

Q1: Use of the tenses – eases orientation while reading, speaking

Q2: Teacher C from school A did not answer this question.

Teacher A from school B:

Q1: Verb tenses – more important for understanding

Q2: Maybe prepositions, but probably not

Teacher B from school B:

Q1: Present tenses (simple x continuous) – the learners often mix them up and often do not realize the difference in meaning

Q2: Question tags – not very used in communication

Teacher C from school B:

Q1: Verb tenses

Q2: Conversations – in oral address I accentuate communication over the correct use of the articles

Teacher A from school C:

Q1: I cannot judge which grammatical category is more or less important, the language works as a complex structure, it is not possible to view individual categories separately

Q2: Teacher A from school C did not answer this question.

Teacher B from school C:

Q1: Hard to judge, everything is important. The important thing is not to be afraid to speak

Q2: Adverbs of frequency

Teacher C from school C:

Q1: Tenses – important for understanding

Q2: Punctuation – in English far less important than in Czech, almost never impedes understanding

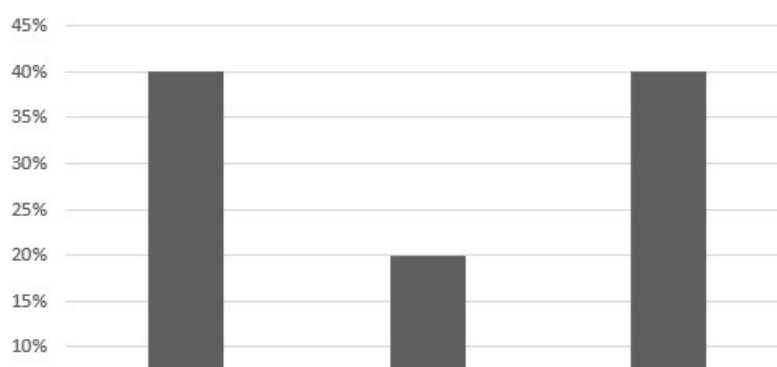
The last of the questions in this category seeks to discover whether the teachers think learners overuse, underuse or use the articles in wrong places. A percentage-comparison question has been used for this purpose.

Question:

From your experience, what do you think is the most frequent error in using the articles in speech or writing?

- a) Mixing up the definite and indefinite article
- b) Overusing the articles
- c) Underusing the articles

Teacher A from school A thinks that 50% of the problem is underusing the articles, and divides the other two options between 25% and 25%. Teacher B from school A thinks that overuse of the articles is no problem at all, while giving 70% to underuse and 30% to mixing up the articles. Teacher C from school A thinks that mixing up of the definite and indefinite article is 70% of the problem, gives 20% to overuse, and only 10% to underuse. Teacher A from school B gives 50% to underuse of the articles, 30% to overuse, and 20% to mixing up. Teacher B from school A divides the two main reasons between 40% for mixing up and 40% for underuse, while giving 20% to overuse. Teacher C from school B did not answer this question. Teacher A from school C gives 50% to mixing up and divides the remaining two between 25% and 25%. Teacher B from school C sees the major problem in mixing up, giving it 60% while dividing underuse and overuse between 20% and 20%. Teacher C from school C gives 60% to underuse of the articles, 30% to mixing up, and 10% to overuse of the articles.



3.2 Learner results

The learners have filled in a test containing 17 sentences that had 20 gaps distributed throughout them. 127 learners in total took part in the test, 56 of which are from school A, 33 are from school B, and 38 are from school C. All of the learners are ninth grade learners. Since the numbers of learners per each school are imbalanced, and 75% of 8 learners is fewer people than 30% of 27 – each percentage will be followed by two numbers in parentheses – the first one represents the number of learners to whom the current statistic applies, and the second one represents the complete sample, the number which equals to 100%. The test was also filled in by the teachers as the last part of their questionnaire.

The sentences in the gap-fill test were chosen based on the categories in the theoretical part of the thesis, they were spread across the test in an unpredictable way, and results of the research are divided into categories matching the ones in the theoretical part.

All of the sentences were chosen based on a judgement of how likely the learners are to know the words in the sentences. The results are not presented in the same order as were the sentences in the test. Sentences that were part of the test will be written with a blank space to indicate which part was intended for the learners to fill in, followed by the correct answer in parentheses. Additionally, some parts of the gap-fill test have more than one gap. All sentences contain numbers such as *1)* in italics, and then are referred to as ‘gap 1)’ etc.

3.2.1 Known and unknown

The first series of sentences relates to chapter *Known and unknown* from the theoretical part of the thesis.

Sentences:

Tom: Do you have any food?

Mike: There's 1) ____ (a) bowl with some fruit on 2) ____ (the) table. There are 3) ____ (zero) three oranges and 4) ____ (a) banana.

Tom: Can I have 5) ____ (the) banana please?

Gap 1) did not constitute any difficulty for the majority of the learners from all three schools. 91% (51/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an*, a full 100% of learners from school B answered *a/an*, and 92% (35/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an* as well. 9% (5/56) of learners from school A answered *zero* while nobody from school A answered *the*. All learners from school B were errorless on gap 1). 8% (3/38) of learners from school C answered *zero* while nobody answered *the*.

In total, 94% (119/127) of all learners answered *a/an*, while 6% (8/127) answered *zero*, and nobody answered *the*. This result implies that the learners are 94 percent familiar with the usage of an indefinite article when a sentence introduces a new object which was not previously mentioned.

All teachers from all three schools answered *a/an* on gap 1).

Gap 2) posed the first minor challenge for some of the learners, although it still should be considered reasonably elementary. School A performed best percentage-wise on this particular gap, 89% (51/56) of its learners answered *the*. 76% (25/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 79% (30/38) of learners from school C answered the correct answer *the* as well. Even despite visibly higher number compared to the other two schools, school A has the lowest share of wrong answers for gap 1) not only percentage-wise, but in number of persons – 11% (6/56) of its learners answered *a/an*, while 24% (8/33) of learners from school B, and 21% (8/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*.

These numbers add to a total of 83% (105/127) of all learners answering *the*, 17% (22/127) of all learners answering *a/an*, and none of the learners answering *zero*. Answering this gap correctly need slightly more imagination, as *the table* may have been

introduced for the first time in the sentence and pose as something unknown for the learner, but it had been a part of the context for the

All nine teachers from all three schools unanimously answered *the*.

Gap 3), although quite unexpectedly, was the first real challenge for the learners. Only with difficulty did the number of students who answered correctly exceed half. Not in school A, though. Only 41% (23/56) of learners from school A answered *zero*. In fact, the only school who exceeded half and ‘saved’ the average of all schools was school B. 82% (27/33) of learners from school B answered *zero*. School C had only 45% (17/33) of its learners answer the correct answer – *zero*. 55% (31/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an*, while 4% (2/56) answered *the*. 18% (6/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an* while nobody answered *the*, and 47% (18/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*, and 8% (3/38) answered *the*.

The total percentage of learners who answered *zero* is 53% (67/127). 43% (55/127) of all learners answered *a/an*, and 4% (5/127) answered *the*. The result suggests that the learners have no trouble recognizing that the oranges are introduced for the first time in the mind of one of the conversation participants, but have noticeable trouble distinguishing between the difference of using the articles with singular and plural of countable nouns.

Obviously, all nine teachers answered *zero*.

Gap 4) introduced another new object in the sentence which required the same thought process as gap 3), only this time the noun was singular. 79% (44/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an*, 73% (24/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an*, and 76% (29/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*. The incorrect answers were distributed equally between 11% (6/56) and 11% (6/56) among learners from school A, 18% (6/33) of learners from school B answered *zero*, and 9% (3/33) answered *the*. 13% (5/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*, and 11% (4/38) answered *the*.

In total, 76% (97/127) of all learners that took the test answered *a/an*, 13% (17/127) answered *zero*, and 10% (13/127) answered *the*. No correlation between wrong answers in gap 3) and gap 4) was found – some of the learners answered only one of the gaps correctly, and some answered both incorrectly.

All nine teachers answered *a/an* on gap 4).

Gap 5) introduces a first real problem for the learners. Not only does the correct answer not exceed half of all learners' choices, one specific incorrect answer does. Only 36% (20/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, 36% (12/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 37% (14/33) answered *the*. Additionally, 5% (3/56) of learners from school A and 5% (2/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*. That means that the majority of learners from each school answered *a/an*, specifically 59% (33/56) for school A, 64% (21/33) for school B, and 58% (22/38) for school C.

Overall, 60% (76/127) of learners answered *a/an* – one of the two incorrect answers, while only 36% (46/127) answered correctly. The other incorrect answer was answered by 4% (5/127) students in total. There may be multiple reasons for this error – either the learners are not familiar with the difference between known and unknown in regard to the articles, or simply fail to look at the conversation as a whole and view each sentence individually.

Teacher B from school C answered *a/an* – the incorrect answer. All other teachers answered *the*.

Sentence:

This is 6) ____ (the) book I promised to lend you.

Gap 6) presents another very challenging gap. Only 38% (21/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, 48% (16/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 39% (15/38) of learners from school C answered *the*. Once again, there was a predominant incorrect answer, in this case *a/an*, with 59% (33/56) of learners from school A answering *a/an*, 52% (17/33) of learners from school B answering *a/an*, and 55% (21/38) of learners from school C answering *a/an*. Two learners from school A and two from school C answered *zero*, while none of school B answered *zero*.

In summary, 41% (52/127) of all learners answered correctly *the*, 56% (71/127) answered incorrectly *a/an*, and 3% (4/127) answered *zero*. This could either mean that the learners filled in the questionnaire as they read it, without reading the full sentence first (since the information that they need to put a definite article in gap 6) is at the end of the

sentence), or fail to imagine that even though the book is introduced as a new object to the reader, it is something that was before mentioned for the participants of the hypothetical conversation.

All teachers answered correctly *the*.

Sentence:

7) ____ (The) B/books on the table are mine.

Gap 7) contradicts all potential reasons for error mentioned for gap 6). Most learners answered gap 7) correctly. 70% (39/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, 61% (20/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 47% (18/38) of learners from school C answered *the*. The dominant incorrect answer was *zero*, with 20% (11/56) of learners from school A answering *zero* and 11% (6/56) of learners from school A answering *a/an*, 33% (11/33) of learners from school B answering *zero* and 6% (2/33) answering *a/an*, and 45% (17/38) of learners from school C answering *zero* and 8% (3/38) answering *a/an*.

61% (77/127) of all learners thus answered correctly, leaving 31% (39/127) for the more frequent incorrect answer, and 9% (11/127) for the less frequent one. The frequency of correct answers to gap 7) contradicts the assumption that the learners do not read the rest of the sentence before filling in the gap. Perhaps the learners are familiar with some sort of a mnemotechnical help such as “when we point at something, we use *the*” or “where we can use *this, that, those* etc., we use *the*”. In most cases, apart from school C, the learners seem to most of the time be able to correctly prioritize this decision over the visible plural number. This can also recall the problem from gap 3) where 43% of all learners ignored the plural number and used an indefinite article.

The reason for the higher number of *zero* answers among learners from school C can perhaps be traced to their teachers, as teacher A and teacher B from school C both answered *zero*. All of the remaining teachers answered correctly *the*.

Sentence:

I bought 8) ____ (a) blue sweater yesterday.

The majority of the learners, although not a convincing majority, answered gap 8) correctly. 71% (40/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an*, 70% (23/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an*, and 66% (25/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*. There was no distinctive wrong answer, 14% (8/56) and 14% (8/56) of learners from school A distributed between the two wrong answers, 18% (6/33) of learners from school B answered *the* while 12% (4/33) answered *zero*, and 13% (5/38) of learners from school C answered *the* while 21% (8/38) answered *zero*.

69% (88/127) of all learners answered answered *a/an* while 15% (19/127) answered *the*, and 16% (20/127) answered *zero*.

All teachers answered gap 8) correctly.

Sentence:

They visited 9) ____ (a) restaurant in Manhattan.

Gap 9) represented no major problem for the learners, 73% (41/56) of learners from school A, 82% (27/33) of learners from school B, and 82% (31/38) of learners from school C answered correctly *a/an*. 11% (6/56) of learners from school A answered *the* while 16% (9/56) answered *zero*. 9% (3/33) of learners from school B answered *the* and 9% (3/33) answered *zero*. 11% (4/38) of learners from school C answered *the*, and 8% (3/38) answered *zero*.

No visible fluctuation per school as 78% (99/127) of all learners answered correctly *a/an*, 10% (13/127) answered *the*, and 12% (15/127) answered *zero*.

Interestingly enough, one teacher, specifically teacher C from school A, answered *the*. All other teachers answered *a/an*. Of course, there are instances in which “the restaurant in Manhattan” is used correctly, but that would require previous sentences to introduce a specific or multiple specific restaurants, so for the purposes of this research, *the restaurant* in gap 9) is considered an incorrect answer.

3.2.2 Specific and general

Multiple sentences in the gap-fill test aimed to find whether the learners can distinguish between using the articles with specific and general things. Sentences that contain a specific noun have already been revealed in part 3.1.1.1, this part presents two sentences that mention something in general.

Sentence:

10) ____ (zero) C/cars cause a lot of pollution.

Gap 10) presented fluctuating results from school to school. School A had 46% (26/56) of its learners answer *zero*, school B 76% (25/33) of its learners answer *zero*, and school C had 55% (21/38) of its learners answer *zero*. 43% (24/56) of learners from school A answered *the* and 11% (6/56) answered *a/an*. Incorrect answers spread equally between 11% (4/33) and 11% (4/33) for learners from school B. In school C, 24% (14/38) of learners answered *the*, and 21% (8/38) answered *a/an*.

Overall, 57% (72/127) of learners answered *zero*, 29% (37/127) answered *the*, and 14% (18/27) answered *a/an*. Once again, school C had the lowest number of persons who answered *zero*. It is unclear whether the learners recognize that something is being talked about in general or they simply see plural and react with not using an article. Learners from school C seem to struggle with differentiating between using the articles with singular and plural nouns.

All teachers answered *zero* in gap 10).

Sentence:

11) ____ (A/The) C/camel can close its nose.

The only gap in the test that has two correct answers. However, the results are between all three options, so the learners seem not to recognize any pattern in talking about a thing in general. 34% (19/56) of learners from school A answered *the* while 30% (17/56)

answered *a/an*. 12% (4/33) of learners from school B answered *the* and 42% (14/33) answered *a/an*. 13% (5/38) of learners from school C answered *the* while 24% (9/38) answered *a/an*. The only wrong answer was actually the dominant one in all three schools. 36% (20/56) of learners from school A, 45% (15/33) of learners from school B, and up to 63% (24/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*.

This amounts to 31% (40/127) of all learners answering *a/an*, 22% (28/127) answering *the*, and 46% (59/127) answering *zero*.

All teachers chose either of the two correct answers – teacher A and teacher B from school C answered *the*, the rest answered *a/an*.

3.2.3 Place names

Four sentences were chosen to test the learners' ability to select the correct article with place names.

Sentence:

She loved living in 12) ____ (zero) Asia.

36% (20/56) of learners from school A answered *zero*, 48% (16/33) of learners from school B answered *zero*, and 45% (17/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*. Up to 45% (25/56) of learners from school A answered *the* and 20% (11/56) answered *a/an*. 42% (14/33) of learners from school B answered *the* while 9% (3/33) answered *a/an*. 39% (15/38) of learners from school C answered *the* and 16% (6/38) answered *a/an*.

42% (53/127) of learners in total answered *zero*. 43% (54/127) answered incorrectly *the*, and 16% (20/127) answered incorrectly *a/an*. Perhaps the learners learn some type of a rule that place names usually have *the* or they simply deduced that there is only one Asia, and it is a specific place, so it gets a definite article.

Of course, all teachers answered *zero*.

Sentence:

She loved living in 13) ____ (the) USA.

It seems that the learners faced much fewer complications when deciding for an article for the USA than for Asia. A strong 73% (41/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, 88% (23/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 74% (28/38) of learners from school C answered *the*. 14% (8/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an* while 13% (7/56) answered *zero*. 12% (4/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an* while nobody answered *zero*. And the frequency of incorrect answers distributed equally for learners from school C, between 13% (5/38) and 13% (5/38).

Overall, 77% (98/127) of learners filled in *the* as their answer. 13% (17/127) filled in *a/an*, and 9% (12/127) had *zero* filled in. The frequency of correct answers is significantly higher compared to the previous sentence, even though apart from the place name the two sentences were identical.

All nine teachers answered *the*.

Sentence:

They visited a restaurant in 14) _____ (zero) Manhattan.

Gap 14) may have been a slight knowledge challenge for the learners, as even though Manhattan is a well-known place, not all people have to know it. However, it is no different from names of towns and cities which also use *zero* article. Nevertheless, 41% (23/56) of learners from school A answered *zero*, 64% (21/33) of learners from school B answered *zero*, and only 29% (11/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*. The rest constitutes of 45% (25/56) of learners from school A answering *the*, 14% (8/56) of learners from school A answering *a/an*, 24% (8/33) of learners from school B answering *the*, 12% (4/33) of learners from school B answering *a/an*, 50% (19/38) of learners from school C answering *the*, and 21% (8/38) of learners from school C answering *a/an*.

Once again, school B 'saves' the total average, as the amount of correct answers only with difficulties becomes the highest number among the percentages with 43% (55/127). The second most frequent answer was the definite article with 41% (52/127) and the least frequent answer was the indefinite article with 16% (20/127).

Despite the imbalance in learners' answers, none of the teachers answered gap 14) incorrectly.

Sentence:

I borrow a lot of books from 15) ____ (zero) Wimbledon Library.

Gap 15) was one of the toughest parts of the test. Only 9% (5/56) learners from school A answered *zero*, 24% (8/33) of learners from school B answered *zero*, and 16% (6/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*. The dominant incorrect answer for all three schools was *the*. Up to 88% (49/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, while the remaining 4% (2/56) answered *a/an*, 67% (22/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, while the rest, 9% (3/33) answered *a/an*, and 71% (27/38) of learners from school C answered *the*, with 13% (5/38) answering *a/an*.

Only 15% (19/127) of all learners selected *zero*. A full 77% (98/127) of all learners selected the incorrect answer – *the*. The rest – 8% (10/127) have selected *a/an*. Perhaps the only clue that could lead the learners to deciding for *zero* article was the capital letter in the word *Library*.

The interesting thing is that apart from teacher B and teacher C from school A, 7/9 teachers filled in the correct answer – *zero* article.

3.2.4 Fixed phrases

Various categories were selected to test the learners' knowledge of the usage of the articles with fixed phrases – phrases of time, phrases involving abstract ideas, phrases of quantity, etc.

Sentence:

I borrow 16) ____ (a) lot of books from Wimbledon Library.

As opposed to the second part, the first part of the sentence posed no major problem for the majority of the learners. 82% (46/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an*, 79% (26/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an*, and 89% (34/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*. School A has 9% (5/56) and 9% (5/56) of its learners per each incorrect answer, while none of the other two schools had any learners answer *the*, and 21% (7/33) of learners from school B answered *zero*, and 11% (4/38) of learners from school C answered *zero*.

83% (106/127) overall answered correctly *a/an*, while 13% (16/127) answered *zero*, and 4% (5/127) answered *the*.

All teachers answered correctly.

Sentence:

June is 17) _____ (a) good month to go away.

Gap 17) seems to have caused no problems to most of the learners – 77% (43/56) of learners from school A answered correctly *a/an*, 82% (27/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an*, and 74% (28/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*. 16% (9/56) of learners from school A answered *zero* while 7% (4/56) answered *the*, 12% (4/33) of learners from school B answered *zero* while 6% (2/33) answered *the*, and 26% (10/38) of learners from school C answered *zero* while none of them answered *the*.

In total, 77% (98/127) of all learners answered *a/an*, while 18% (23/127) answered *zero*, and 5% (6/127) answered *the*.

The least frequent and incorrect answer the learners filled in – *the* – has however been answered by teacher A from school A. All the remaining teachers answered correctly.

Sentence:

I told him I was busy at 18) _____ (the) moment.

This sentence enjoyed the highest frequency of correct answers. Specifically, 96% (54/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, 97% (32/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 95% (36/38) of learners from school C answered *the*. None of the learners from any of the schools answered *zero*, while 4% (2/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an*, 3% (1/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an*, and 5% (2/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an*.

The total amounts to 96% (122/127) of learners answering correctly *the*. 4% (5/127) selected *a/an* as their answer.

All teachers answered correctly.

Sentence:

John plays 19) ____ (the) piano beautifully.

Gap 19) is a fixed phrase that the learners are likely to have heard at least once in English. 50% (28/56) of learners from school A answered *the*, 61% (20/33) of learners from school B answered *the*, and 37% (14/38) from school C answered *the*. Although with difficulty, for each school the correct answer is the highest number of all three options. 32% (18/56) of learners from school A answered *a/an* while 18% (10/56) answered *zero*, 27% (9/33) of learners from school B answered *a/an* while 12% (4/33) answered *zero*, and 34% (13/38) of learners from school C answered *a/an* while 29% (11/38) answered *zero*.

The total percentage of learners answering *the* is 49% (62/127), while 31% (40/127) answered *a/an*, and 20% (25/127) answered *zero*. Perhaps those learners who answered incorrectly applied a rule of known/unknown or specific/general instead of treating it as a fixed phrase.

Teacher B from school C answered *zero* as their answer for gap 19), all of the other teachers answered *the*.

3.2.5 Proper nouns

Various sentences were already presented that represent proper nouns. There is one more that cannot be categorized as a place name.

Sentence:

20) ____ (The) S/sun was very hot that day.

The majority of the learners filled in the correct answer. 75% (42/56) of learners from school A answered *the*. 70% (23/33) of learners from school B answered *the*. And 58% (22/38) of learners from school C answered *the*. 16% (9/56) of learners from school A answered *zero* and 9% (5/56) answered *a/an*. 21% (7/33) of learners from school B answered *zero* and 9% (3/33) answered *a/an*. 29% (11/38) of learners from school C answered *zero* and 13% (5/38) answered *a/an*.

In total, 69% (87/127) of all learners that to part in the test answered *the*, 21% (27/127) answered *zero*, and 10% (13/127) answered *a/an*.

All teachers filled in the correct answer.

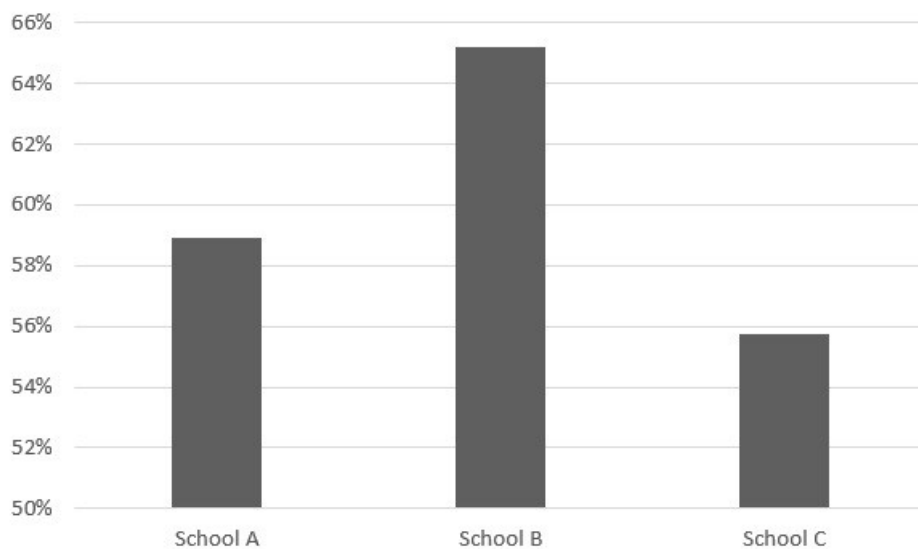


Figure 11 – Overall performance in the test – The average percentage of correct answers per school

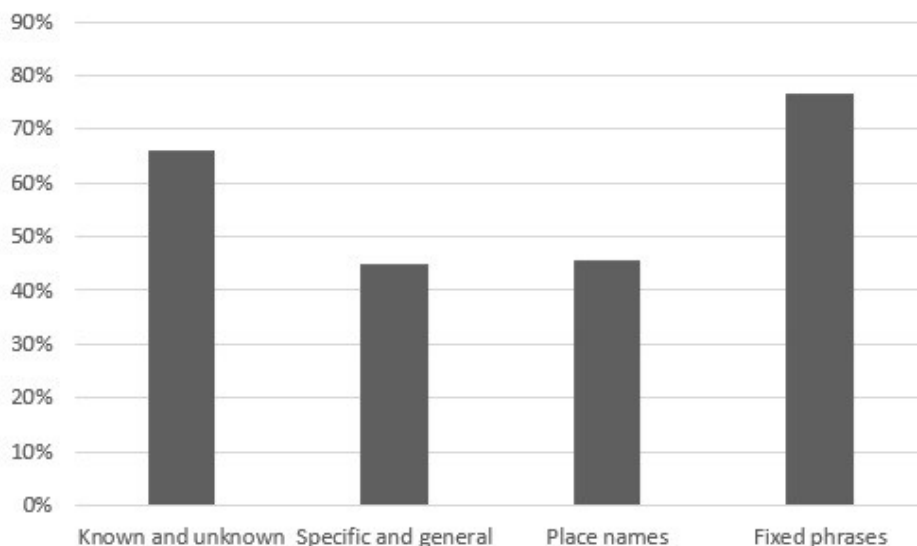


Figure 12 – Overall performance in the test – The average percentage of correct answers per category

CONCLUSION

The research suggests that the teachers may have an influence over the learners' ability to use the articles, as visible in test sentences where most teachers answered correctly, but two teachers from the same school answered incorrectly, and the frequency of incorrect answers was higher for learners from that particular school compared to others as well. It thus seems that despite the teachers' belief that learners mostly acquire the ability to use the articles covertly during other learning, the teachers' explanation and way of teaching the articles does play a role.

Most teachers consider the articles generally unimportant and were unable to name a grammatical category they consider less important than the articles. One particular teacher, however, named question tags as a less important category, and they indeed should be less important than the articles. Yet they get almost an equal amount of attention in schools.

The overall performance showed that the strongest suit are fixed phrases, in other words phrases that the learners hear repeatedly in classes and simply recognize them. Place names, as well as talking about something specifically vs. talking about something in general were the biggest obstacle.

Lastly, even though school B had the highest percentage of correct answers – this research was not meant to be a competition of which school has the brightest learners, but to find out which teaching patterns of the teachers lead to best results among learners.

The articles are what makes English sound fluent and meaningful. Without them or with strikingly incorrect use, the language sounds cumbersome. Perhaps we should not rely on the learners acquiring the ability to use articles from other lessons and give them a clear, well-arranged blueprint for how to correctly use the articles in English.

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ABSTRACT

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Rok obhajoby:	2019

Název práce:	Výuka členů v angličtině na 2. stupních základních škol
Název v angličtině:	Teaching articles in ESL in upper primary schools
Anotace práce:	Práce se zabývá výukou členů v anglickém jazyce, různými kategoriemi užívání členů a úspěšností jejich zvládnutí u žáků na 2. stupních základních škol.

Klíčová slova:	členy v angličtině, člen, určitý, neurčitý, gramatika, dotazník, test, základní škola
Anotace v angličtině:	The thesis deals with the teaching of articles in English as a second language, different categories of article usage, and the upper primary schools' learners' performance in using the articles correctly.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	articles in English, article, definite, indefinite, grammar, questionnaire, test, elementary school, upper primary school
Rozsah práce:	73 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický jazyk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Teachers – Questionnaire and test

Appendix 2: Learners – Test

Appendix 1: Teachers – Questionnaire and test

Výuka členů v angličtině na 2. stupních základních škol

Dobrý den,

mnohokrát děkuji za Vaši pomoc. Pokusil jsem se najít kompromis mezi šetřením Vašeho cenného času a získáním dostatku informací. Tento dotazník slouží k účelům výzkumu pro diplomovou práci, nicméně zároveň mě upřímně zajímá Váš pohled na danou problematiku v rámci inspirace z praxe zkušenějších učitelů. Proto prosím dotazník vyplňte zcela na základě Vašich vlastních hodnot a pohledu na věc. Dotazník je zcela anonymní.

Pro účely propojení získaných dat Vás pouze poprosím o vyplnění následujících polí.

Všechny **třídy**, které učíte anglický jazyk a účastnily se dotazníku:

Názvy používaných **učebnic**:

Dotazníková část:

1. Jak byste popsal/a Váš styl výchovy?

- a) Využívám autority, příkazů, účinnosti trestů a odměn
- b) Snažím se o minimální řízení dětí, kladu ménši požadavky, nekontroluji nutně jejich splnění
- c) Působím jako vzor, který mají děti následovat, podněcuji k činnosti
- d) Jiné:

2. Co je podle Vás nejefektivnější způsob vysvětlení principu členů?

- a) Pomocí obrázků / diagramů

- b) Slovní vysvětlení
 - c) Žáci si přečtou výukový materiál
 - d) Jiné:
-

3. Co je podle Vás nejefektivnější způsob procvičování členů?

- a) Doplnovací cvičení
 - b) Čtení / poslech materiálů obsahujících členy
 - c) Překládání materiálů obsahujících členy
 - d) Jiné:
-

4. Kdybyste měl/a žákům vysvětlit princip členů v angličtině pomocí pouze dvou vět / souvětí, co byste jim řekl/a (česky či anglicky)?

5. Jakým způsobem uvádíte členy coby nové učivo?

- a) Nejdříve vysvětlím pravidla, poté žáci pracují na cvičeních
 - b) Zadáám žákům cvičení, ze kterých se mohou sami pokusit vyvodit pravidla
 - c) Jiné:
-

6. Je podle Vás věnován učení členů na základních školách dostatek pozornosti? Mělo by se jim věnovat více či méně pozornosti?

- a) Mělo by se jim věnovat více pozornosti
 - b) Mohlo by se jim věnovat méně pozornosti
 - c) Venuje se jim vhodné množství pozornosti
 - d) Jiné:
-

7. Jmenujte jednu gramatickou kategorii anglického jazyka, která je podle Vás důležitější než znalost členů. Svůj názor stručně zdůvodněte.

8. Jmenujte jednu gramatickou kategorii anglického jazyka, která je podle Vás méně důležitá než znalost členů. Svůj názor stručně zdůvodněte.

Porovnávání:

Vyplňte prosím prázdná pole tak, aby jejich součet uvnitř každé otázky dával dohromady 100 %.

1. Z Vaší vlastní zkušenosti, co je podle Vás nejčastější chybou v používání členů při mluvení nebo psaní?

Zaměňování členů určitých a neurčitých: _____ %

Nadměrné používání členů tam, kam nepatří: _____ %

Vynechávání členů tam, kam patří: _____ %

2. Do jaké míry si myslíte, že se žáci učí členy otevřeně (např. lekce pojmenovaná „členy“) vs. skrytě (např. jako nedílná součást jiných lekcí)?

Otevřeně: _____ %

Skrytě: _____ %

3. Jak často v hodinách mluvíte vy vs. žáci?

Učitel/ka: _____ %

Žáci: _____ %

4. Jak často v hodinách mluvíte česky vs. anglicky?

Česky: _____ %

Anglicky: _____ %

5. Do jaké míry používáte následující pomůcky pro výuku členů?

Učebnice: _____ %

Vlastní zdroje výukových materiálů: _____ %

Vlastní tvorba výukových materiálů: _____ %

6. Jak vhodné považujete jednotlivé schopnosti pro výuku členů ve vzájemném porovnání?

Mluvení: _____ %

Psaní: _____ %

Poslech: _____ %

Čtení: _____ %

Test:

Nakonec Vás poprosím o vyplnění prvního cvičení z testu pro žáky.

1. I told him I was busy at _____ moment.
2. **Tom:** "Do you have any food?"
Mike: "There's _____ bowl with some fruit on _____ table. There are _____ three oranges and _____ banana."
Tom: "Can I have _____ banana please?"
3. This is _____ book I promised to lend you.
4. _____ B/books on the table are mine.
5. I bought _____ blue sweater yesterday.
6. _____ S/sun was very hot that day.
7. She loved living in _____ Asia.
8. She loved living in _____ USA.
9. They visited _____ restaurant in _____ Manhattan.
10. I borrow _____ lot of books from _____ Wimbledon Library.
11. June is _____ good month to go away.
12. _____ C/cars cause a lot of pollution.
13. _____ C/camel can close its nose.
14. John plays _____ piano beautifully.

Poznámka:

Chcete-li, přidejte jakoukoli další radu, poznatek týkající se výuky či názor k samotnému dotazníku. Ještě jednou mockrát děkuji za Vaši pomoc.

Appendix 2: Learners – Test

Test je zcela anonymní. Přečti si prosím vše pozorně a odpovídej bez dlouhého zamýšlení.

Předem děkuji za tvou pomoc!

*Doplň **the** nebo **a/an** nebo ponech pole **prázdné**.*

1. I told him I was busy at ____ moment.
2. **Tom:** “Do you have any food?”
Mike: “There’s ____ bowl with some fruit on ____ table. There are ____ three oranges and ____ banana.”
Tom: “Can I have ____ banana please?”
3. This is ____ book I promised to lend you.
4. ____ B/books on the table are mine.
5. I bought ____ blue sweater yesterday.
6. ____ S/sun was very hot that day.
7. She loved living in ____ Asia.
8. She loved living in ____ USA.
9. They visited ____ restaurant in ____ Manhattan.
10. I borrow ____ lot of books from ____ Wimbledon Library.
11. June is ____ good month to go away.
12. ____ C/cars cause a lot of pollution.
13. ____ C/camel can close its nose.
14. John plays ____ piano beautifully.