

# CROATIAN AND SPANISH EFL LEARNERS' BELIEFS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A FOCUS ON GRAMMAR

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Split, 2020.

University of Split  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English Language and Literature

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Master's Thesis

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# 1. Introduction

The growing spread of English in today's world inevitably involves a huge demand for English teaching. In an attempt to respond to these challenges in the ever-evolving teaching profession, there has been a considerable amount of research over the past 50 years into the effects and appropriateness of the second language (L2) instructional approaches and teaching methods. One of the issues that has received the most attention from teachers, researchers and applied linguists is the role of grammar in second language acquisition (SLA). The central issue has been *how* to teach grammar to help learners learn the target language (TL), and with the advent of communicative teaching approaches, *whether* to teach it at all. The current assumption is that since both explicit and implicit instruction are effective, including elements of both is “most likely to ensure that language pedagogy is efficient” (Ellis, 2015: 313).

Another rather ambiguous and elusive concept that we have to consider for ensuring effective L2 development are learner beliefs. Although beliefs have been disregarded as unscientific and irrelevant by linguists and practitioners alike (see, e.g., Barcelos, 2003), there are numerous studies indicating that there is a strong link between learner beliefs and L2 success and development (e.g., Barcelos, 2000; Bernat, 2006; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Riley, 1997; Šegedin and Semren, 2013; Tse, 2000; Wenden, 1998; White, 1999; Yang, 1992, to name a few). Some have argued that beliefs should influence instructional practices, curricula development, and textbook writing (Kuntz, 1996). Due to their apparent relevance in the language learning process, the present thesis investigates what learners believe about one of the most controversial issues that has been debated in the history of language teaching and learning – the role of grammar. To be more precise, it set out to investigate how Croatian and Spanish learners view the ever-growing dominance of today's *lingua franca*, with a special emphasis on its grammar and different forms of teaching and learning grammar.

The interest in this topic partly stems from the author's familiarity with Croatia's and Spain's educational systems – namely, her direct experience as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner in Croatia, and as an EFL teacher in Spain. The other factor was the lack of research comparing the learners of different nationalities with regards to their beliefs about English language learning and grammar. While there exists a series of studies focusing solely on learner beliefs, and less frequently, on learner beliefs about English as a Second Language (ESL)/EFL

learning and grammar (e.g., Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Martínez Agudo, 2014; Palacios Martínez, 2007; Pazaver and Wang, 2009; Rahuma, 2016; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Simon and Taverniers, 2011), there are almost none – up-to-date and to the best of our knowledge – that deal with comparing Croatian and Spanish learner beliefs about English language and grammar.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first is a theoretical part and the second a practical part. The theoretical part consists of one chapter with four subchapters which are intended as a review of relevant literature. The practical part consists of five chapters. Chapter number three states the aims (subchapter 3.1) and describes the methodology and methods employed in the study (subchapter 3.2). Next chapter outlines quantitative and qualitative results, which is then followed by a discussion and conclusion in chapters five and six, respectively.

In more detail, the thesis begins by providing an overview of EFL education in Croatia and Spain (subchapter 2.1 of chapter 2), which encompasses the current position of EFL in educational settings of Croatia and Spain by comparing the two countries in different aspects – English learning in the classroom (EFL curricula), their English proficiency levels and exposure to English in non-instructional settings. Subchapter 2.2 gives a brief summary of the role that grammar instruction has played in SLA, together with separate subchapters on types of L2 instruction, and relevant recent studies on grammar teaching. Subchapter 2.3 presents various ideas of the concept of learner beliefs and individual differences (IDs) as well as terminology associated with learner beliefs. It presents a summary of approaches to the investigation of learner beliefs, followed by an overview of the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1988), supported by a selection of BALLI items which mirror some of the present study items. The last subchapter of chapter two analyses relevant studies dealing with learner beliefs about the teaching and learning of grammar (subchapter 2.4). Chapter three reports on the present study, including the aims of the study, a presentation of the participants, the instrument, and the procedures of how the data were collected and analysed. Results in chapter four outline study findings, starting with the quantitative results on learners' beliefs about the English language, and followed by learners' beliefs about grammar learning and teaching (subchapter 4.1). Next subchapter (4.2) is devoted to qualitative findings. In the discussion section (chapter five), connections are established between the literature, previous similar research and our research findings. Teaching implications are discussed in a separate subchapter (5.1) so as to rethink current teaching practices and

stimulate teachers' professional learning. In chapter six – the conclusion – we give a final evaluation of our findings and study limitations, before suggesting future research lines.



## 2. Theoretical part: literature review

### 2.1. The context of the study

Due to a globalized world, the English language has become *lingua franca* (Dewey, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011) – the *de facto* language of international communication. It can be said that the English language of today no longer belongs to its historic centers in the United Kingdom and the United States. In a world in which more than three-fourths of all English speakers are non-native, English is progressively becoming the language of non-native speakers, with nearly two billion English learners worldwide (EF Education First<sup>1</sup>, 2011, 2015). This, as a consequence, has greatly affected the status of English in the quickly evolving world of language teaching and learning where it has become “a basic skill required of every learner in every education system” (EF, 2015: 3).

Between 1982 and 2000, only Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Germany (and therefore, neither Spain nor Croatia) required English to be the first foreign language for all learners (EF, 2011). In 2002, the Barcelona European Council recommended that at least two foreign languages should be taught to all learners from an early age, which was mostly implemented in secondary education across Europe (Eurostat, 2019).

In 2007, the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports lowered the primary school learners’ starting age of learning English from 8 to 6 years (Vostrovská, 2013). For instance, in 2012/13 in Spain, the number of learners who were learning the first foreign language (in the majority of cases, the English language) as a school subject with respect to the total number of learners enrolled in each educational stage, amounted to 77.3% in the second cycle of pre-school education (3 to 6 years), to 99.6% in primary education (6 to 12 years), 99.9% in compulsory secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* – ESO, 12 to 16 years) and 96.8% in upper secondary education (*Bachillerato*<sup>2</sup>, 16 to 18 years). This means that almost 100% of Spanish learners in 2012/13 learned English throughout their compulsory education, i.e. primary

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<sup>1</sup> Established in 1965, EF Education First (EF) is an international education company that combines language training with educational travel, cultural exchange and academic programs. EF is currently collaborating with some of the world’s top universities (Cambridge University, Harvard University and Peking University) in order to foster the development of language learning. Importantly, EF has been creating natural immersive environments in order to maximise learning (EF, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> A Spanish non-compulsory educational stage which follows compulsory secondary education (ESO) and is intended for learners aged 16-18 years who want to enter vocational training or university.

education and ESO (Arroyo Pérez et al., 2015). When it comes to higher education, only as low as 3.6% of Spanish students, who by that age had studied English for a minimum of 10 years, keep attending English classes at their universities (Vostrovská, 2013).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most state- and privately-owned kindergartens in Croatia offer English lessons (for example, American International School of Zagreb (AISZ), Bukovac, Calimero, Little Star, English Speaking Playschool of Zagreb, Iskrice, Maksimir, Montessori School Srčeko). In 2006, Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports approved a curriculum for primary schools (*Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu*, 2006), and in it, outlined an overall plan and specific strategies for the development of oral and written communicative competence in a foreign language, including the elements of sociocultural, intercultural and literary competence. The document introduced a program for the teaching of English throughout primary school (6 to 14 years) (*Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu*, 2006). This practice started in 2003 when it became compulsory to learn one foreign language (English or German) from the beginning of primary education (ages 6 or 7) (Buljan Culej, 2013; Prpić, 2009). Croatian learners normally learn English for twelve years; eight years in primary education and four years in secondary education<sup>3</sup> (Prpić, 2009). In higher education, English studies are a popular choice among university students. Moreover, many Croatian non-language university studies have compulsory English language classes in their programmes (Poljaković and Martinović, 2009 as cited in Martinović, 2018).

More recent data show that in 2017, all or nearly all (99-100 %) primary school learners in both Croatia and Spain learnt English as a foreign language. When it comes to secondary education, almost all EU learners (94.7%) were studying English as a foreign language in the same year (Eurostat, 2019).

Both Spain and Croatia define foreign language (English), math, and Spanish/Croatian as the three key subjects (EF, 2013; Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2012). This is evident from the fact that learners from both countries have to take an English exam as a part of their secondary school exit exam/university entrance exam. Croatia started with *Državna matura* exam in 2010, which is an obligatory secondary school exit exam for grammar school (*gimnazija*) learners and an optional exam for learners in vocational secondary schools (Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, 2012). The Spanish university entrance exam (PAU *Selectividad/EVAU* or

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<sup>3</sup> Learners of vocational schools lasting three years learn English for only three years, which is eleven years in total.

EBAU) includes first foreign language (English, French, Italian or Portuguese) in its compulsory part, meaning that all learners are required to pass it for the admission to Spanish universities (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2020). This practice first took place in 2014 (EF, 2013). Spain's prioritizing of English is also evident in a large-scale bilingual English-Spanish education<sup>4</sup> experiment in primary and secondary schools (EF, 2015). In these schools, learners receive at least 30% of their daily lectures in English, be it the language itself or other subjects such as history, math or science (EF, 2013). According to data from 2017, there were over 350 public primary schools in Madrid and another 180 private primary schools offering this type of bilingual instruction<sup>5</sup> (EF, 2017). Thus, it can be argued that English, for the past decade or so, has been "the number one" foreign language in educational contexts in Croatia and Spain alike.

Notwithstanding, if we are to look at English proficiency levels, the two countries exhibit certain differences. In the first EF EPI (English Proficiency Index<sup>6</sup>) report from 2011, published using data gathered from 2007 to 2009, Spain ranked last among all European countries, and 24<sup>th</sup> out of 44 world countries (EF, 2011, 2013). Despite some progress (e.g., it ranked 18<sup>th</sup> out of 54 in 2012, 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 60 in 2013, 20<sup>th</sup> out of 63 in 2014, 23<sup>rd</sup> out of 70 in 2015, 25<sup>th</sup> out of 72 in 2016, 28<sup>th</sup> out of 80 in 2017), more recent figures show that English proficiency in Spain has been declining (EF, 2012-2017). Specifically, the latest 2019 EF EPI across 100 countries and regions, showed that Spain was ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the world and 25<sup>th</sup> in Europe. In the same period, Croatia was ranked among world's 14 best nations with 'very high [English] proficiency,' having one of the best results in Central and Eastern Europe by ranking 12<sup>th</sup> in Europe. Analogously, Croatia was 17<sup>th</sup> in 2018 while Spain was 32<sup>nd</sup> which shows slight progress on Croatia's part, and a step backwards for Spain (EF, 2018). Additionally, Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) in 2016 found that 60% of Spaniards over 18 could not speak, write, or read in English. Only 27.7% said

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<sup>4</sup> The MECD/British Council bilingual programme, initiated in 1996/97 school year as a unique experiment within the Spanish state education system, is based on the Spanish National Curriculum and aspects of the National Curriculum for England and Wales. Its objective is to offer bilingual/bicultural education to children aged 3-16 years (Arroyo Pérez et al., 2015).

<sup>5</sup> According to one university study, learners who studied science in English were found to know less than their peers by the end of primary school, which raised questions about the effectiveness of the said instruction (EF, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> The EF English Proficiency Index calculates a country's average English skill level annually (EF, 2011). For example, EF EPI in 2018 was based on test data from more than 1.300.000 participants who took the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) in 2017. The EF SET is an online, standardized test of reading and listening skills designed to classify learners' language abilities into one of the six levels established by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (EF, 2018). CEFR is a framework that describes language proficiency from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have reached a native level. EF SET is available to any Internet user for free (EF, 2018).

that they were able to speak and read in English. However, it was shown that education in languages is very important for them, as it was ranked second, after mathematics (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2016). Egido and Valle (2015) found that although children in Spain start learning English early and devote more time to it than most European countries, few learners become ‘independent users’ (B level according to CEFR, 2020).

There are a few issues that might be relevant to Spain’s poor results in spite of the importance the country has been placing on English as a school subject. Firstly, more than 577 million people (7.6% of the world’s population) across the globe speak Spanish, from which 480 million are native-Spanish speakers, according to the data from 2018. Spanish is also the third most frequently used language on the Internet (Instituto Cervantes, 2018). In comparison, Croatian is spoken by somewhat more than 5.5 million people (Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje, 2020). It seems logical to assume that speakers of Spanish would not feel the same need or amount of pressure to learn a foreign language since theirs has international significance.

Secondly, educational reforms<sup>7</sup> introduced in the 1990s and 2000s put Spain’s educational standards in line with those of the rest of Western Europe. Prior to that, in the mid-1980s, Spain was 45<sup>th</sup> in the world in per capita spending on education, which was far behind its neighbouring countries. This might suggest that although the necessary changes have taken place, the overall reform process is still slow and gradual, which means the final results are yet to be seen (EF, 2011).

Furthermore, the lack of continuous (daily) exposure to English could be seen as a major problem in Spain. This is partly connected with Spain’s practice of dubbing foreign content. It has been recognized that one of the advantages of subtitling as opposed to dubbing is that subtitling encourages foreign language acquisition (in an involuntary manner) (e.g., Almeida and Costa, 2014; Araújo and Costa, 2013; Čepon, 2011; European Commission, 2011; Jelić, 2012; Rupérez Micola et al., 2019). Willing censors during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco’s regime (1939-1975) “protected Spaniards from “contamination” by “dangerous” products, whether Spanish or foreign in origin” (Merino and Rabadán, 2002). This is how cinema was used as a means of propaganda and how dubbing of foreign films took off. After the death of Franco in 1975, censorship laws were soon abolished, but dubbing of media as a practice has continued to

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, “an extensive package of reforms to the basic law governing public education in Spain lists ‘improving foreign language learning’ as one of its seven explicit goals” (EF, 2013: 29).

this day. For instance, in the year 2000 in Catalonia<sup>8</sup>, 1.542.985 people saw movies with subtitles, whereas 25.462.818 saw dubbed versions. The tradition also plays a role in that ‘dubbing countries’ generally reject subtitling and vice versa. In spite of the much greater cost of dubbing, a mix of historical, political, economic and cultural reasons has made dubbing a strong and profitable industry in Spain. Additionally, Spain dubs 80-100% of all audio-visual products of foreign origin (e.g. live-action films, television series, animated films, games, web sites, computer software) (Palencia Villa, 2002). Although some newer studies (Marzà and Torralba, 2015) suggest that Spanish children (or at least those born into immigrant families) are slowly starting to embrace subtitles, the overall proficiency of the citizenry does not reflect such practice. Besides that, we could assume that music is a major source of continuous foreign language input in dubbing countries as much as in subtitling ones. However, an interesting fact was revealed by Spotify in 2019 – over the course of the last decade, only four out of 20 most listened-to artists in Spain are English natives and therefore sing exclusively in English, while the rest are of Spanish/Hispanic origin.

Smaller countries, such as Croatia, characterised by a significant number of imported films (Ayonghe and Ategha, 2018) normally choose subtitling over dubbing for all films and television series because of the high cost of dubbing<sup>9</sup> (Jelić, 2012). This is why Croatians are exposed to English through media in informal settings on an almost daily basis (e.g., Didović Baranac, Falkoni-Mjehović and Vidak, 2016; Ložnjak Fabjanović, 2017; Mihaljević Djigunović and Bagarić, 2007; Pavičić Takač and Bagarić Medve, 2015). Importantly, studies have not only shown that subtitling encourages foreign language acquisition, but also, as logically follows, that countries with subtitled original version broadcasts (e.g., Croatia) have better foreign language competence than countries where foreign media is dubbed (e.g., Spain) (e.g., Almeida and Costa, 2014; Araújo and Costa, 2013; Mitrović, 2012; Rupérez Micola et al., 2019). This is especially true for listening comprehension (Rupérez Micola et al., 2019).

The purpose of the current chapter was to point out the apparent similarities in regards to the place of English in Croatia’s and Spain’s educational settings, whilst considering discrepancies in their English proficiency levels and certain cultural practices (dubbing vs subtitling) which

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<sup>8</sup> Catalonia is a pro-dubbing Spanish region (Gottlieb, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> The one exception is dubbing of animated films (meant for young children) which began in former Yugoslavia and continued to this day (Babić, 2015).

result in distinct learning environments and out of school language learning contexts. Some researchers (Riley, 1989) have suggested that certain beliefs about language and learning are culture-specific, and that “understanding students’ beliefs means understanding their world and their identity” (Riley, 1989, as cited in Barcelos, 2000: 42). This is why looking into the role of English in educational practices of Croatia’s and Spain’s recent history and the present is a prerequisite to analysing learners’ beliefs in their specific cultural situations. Namely, the educational backgrounds might have implicitly affected learners’ perception of English language learning (see chapter five for further discussion).

## **2.2. Grammar teaching in SLA**

This chapter will provide different definitions of grammar and look at trends in SLA – changes that have taken place in language teaching approaches and methods, which in consequence shaped the way grammar has been perceived and taught. Moreover, it shows how differences among methods manifest themselves in the choice of learning and teaching activities. Subchapter 2.2.1 addresses different types of L2 instruction with regards to linguistic structures whereas subchapter 2.2.2 concludes by highlighting relevant recent studies on grammar teaching and the current place of grammar in SLA.

From the point of view of Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003: 14), grammar “consists of the sounds and sound patterns, the basic units of meaning such as words, and the rules to combine all of these to form sentences with the desired meaning.” If we oversimplify its nature, grammar can be defined as “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” (Ur, 1996: 75). Importantly, grammar should not be perceived as a “discrete set of meaningless, decontextualized, static structures. Nor is it helpful to think of grammar solely as prescriptive rules about linguistic form. [...] Grammatical structures [...] are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics)” (Larsen-Freeman, 2014: 252). This well-known three-dimensional grammar framework relates to learners being able to use the language accurately, meaningfully and appropriately. For example, if we look at phrasal verbs, we know that simply recognizing their structure or form is not enough. Learners also have to be able to recognize figurative phrasal verbs and distinguish them from literal ones, which accounts for the meaning dimension of the framework. The final dimension of use has to be mastered by learners in order to know *when*

(informal vs formal speech) a phrasal verb is preferred to a single-word verb (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

When we consider the above-outlined nature of grammar – its complexity as well as its uniqueness, i.e. the fact that every language has its own set of grammatical patterns, we can better understand the ongoing debate around grammar instruction. Although most of the academic community nowadays agrees that grammar should be an integral part of SLA, the debate on *communication vs structure* (what, when, how, and to what extent should grammar be taught) is still a controversial one.

In the beginnings of ESL/EFL teaching<sup>10</sup>, grammar was treated as the most important language area as it was sufficient to master grammar in order to be considered fully competent in an L2. This mastery was achieved by what later came to be known as the Grammar-Translation Method, which focused on the accurate translation of readings, had its origins in the eighteenth century, and fully developed in the nineteenth century (Howatt and Smith, 2014; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). However, we now know that it is needed a lot more than just grammar knowledge to use a foreign language effectively.

After the turn of the century, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Direct Method marked a shift from traditional approaches – grammar and translation – towards speech-oriented methods. The Direct Method focused on the development of oral skills whilst employing the inductive method of teaching grammar (Howatt and Smith, 2014; Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Grammar again came to the fore with the applications of the British Situational Method and American Audio-lingual Method, which both shared similar structuralist views of the nature of language and behaviorist views of language study. According to the Situational Method, a foreign language had to be connected to real-life situations, while the Audio-lingual Method was primarily characterized by tedious, repetitive and monotonous drills which allowed no individuality in learning styles. Audiolingualism uses dialogues and drills (e.g. repetition, inflection, replacement, restatement, completion) as key activities. After a dialogue has been memorized, certain grammatical patterns become the focus of drill and pattern-practice exercises (Howatt and Smith, 2014; Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

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<sup>10</sup> For a complete historical overview of the changes in grammar teaching see, e.g. Ellis and Shintani, 2013; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004; Richards and Rodgers, 2001.

Attributable to the fact that the primary objective of learning a language is to be able to use it both fluently and accurately, the preceding methods fell short of this expectation as the learners were not able to communicate effectively outside the language classrooms. The cognitive revolution during the last third of the twentieth century challenged all the established assumptions about language learning and subsequently gave rise to numerous new ideas and methods such as the Total physical response (TPR), Suggestopedia, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or 'The Communicative Approach' and the Natural approach (Howatt and Smith, 2014; Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

TPR, which attempts to teach language through physical activity, reflects a grammar-based view of language. The central linguistic motif is the verb in the imperative, the general objective is to teach oral proficiency at a beginning level, and imperative drills, accompanied by role-plays and slide presentations, are the major classroom activity (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Suggestopedia (or Desuggestopedia), developed by G. Lozanov and derived from Suggestology, has *suggestion* at the heart of its underlying theory of learning. It is characterized by decoration, furniture, and arrangement of the classroom, music, and teacher as an authoritative source. By harnessing and redirecting nonconscious influences, it tries to deliver advanced conversational proficiency (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

CLT, which emerged in the 1970s, has a weak and a strong version. The weak version only slightly differs from traditional approaches to language teaching, while the strong version, otherwise known as the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a more radical alternative to traditional approaches. In TBLT, the content consists of a set of "tasks" and learners are encouraged to use language for communication instead of simply practising correct usage (Ellis and Shintani, 2013). CLT/TBLT, therefore, advocated the use of activities that involve real communication and a "task" as a central activity type. One classification (Willis, 1996) of activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks names listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. Another classification (Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993) includes "information-gap" tasks, "jigsaw" tasks, "problem-solving" tasks, "decision-making" tasks, and "opinion exchange" tasks. Accordingly, tasks are "the pivot point for stimulation of input-output practice, negotiation of meaning and transactionally focused conversation" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 229).



The rise of the Naturalist movement in language teaching in the early 1980s undermined the importance of teaching grammar with S. Krashen (1981) as the prominent advocate of *comprehensible input* and ‘zero grammar’ approach. Krashen even labelled grammar teaching as being counter-productive and argued that “if we provide discussion, hence input, over a wide variety of topics while pursuing communicative goals, the necessary grammatical structures are automatically provided in the input” (Krashen and Terrell, 1983: 72). In other words, his argument was that learners could come to know grammar with very little or even without direct teaching of grammar.

Most of the new methods in the 1980s and 1990s jumped on the Communicative Language Teaching bandwagon, which negated or *only* minimized the effectiveness of grammar instruction. Good examples of the inadequacy of such insistence on communication and avoidance of focus on the form are Canadian French immersion programs where learners were not able to reach satisfactory levels of accuracy after long and meaningful exposure to the L2<sup>11</sup> (e.g., Swain, 1989).

### **2.2.1. Types of instruction**

Ellis (2001: 2) defined form-focused instruction (FFI) as “any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form.” It can also be defined as “any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners’ attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly” (Spada, 1997: 73). FFI serves as a generic term for “analytic teaching,” “focus on form,” “focus on forms,” “corrective feedback/error correction,” and “negotiation of form” (Ollerhead and Oosthuizen, 2005). Long (1988) in Ellis (2002) distinguished between two types of FFI: a focus on formS (FonFS) and a focus on form (FonF). FonFS refers to “traditional approaches to grammar teaching based on a structure-of-the-day approach” (Long, 1988, as cited in Ellis, 2002). In detail, the curriculum design is based on the division of the language according to lexis, structures, notions or functions, which are selected and sequenced for learners to learn in a uniform and incremental way. Therefore, exposure to the language is intentionally restricted and rationed. Especially with regard to grammatical structures, it is assumed that the discrete parts of the syllabus gradually build on each other so that the learner is eventually able to master L2 (Klapper and Rees, 2003). The aim of FonFS is to “*direct* learner

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<sup>11</sup> General consensus is that children require 4-7 years of exposure to the TL, even in immersion programs in order to gain native-like proficiency (EF, 2011).

attention and to exploit *pedagogical grammar*” (Doughty and Williams 1998: 232, as cited in Ellis, 2015: 262). FonFS involves explicit instruction, which then involves “some sort of rule being thought about during the learning process” (DeKeyser 1995, as cited in Ellis, 2015: 341). Explicit L2 knowledge is declarative knowledge – i.e. knowledge of rules – which learners are able to report. It is closely linked to metalinguistic knowledge. In this type of instruction, learners are encouraged to develop metalinguistic awareness of the rule, which can be achieved by means of *deductive* or *inductive instruction*. Deductive instruction normally provides learners with an explicit rule, which is followed by them practising the rule in one way or another. Inductive instruction encourages learners to induce rules from examples given to them, or it asks them to practise the use of the rules. Table 1 presents additional information on explicit and implicit instruction. A distinction can be made between other two types of explicit instruction: *integrated* and *isolated instruction*. Integrated instruction involves the explicit explanation of the target feature which is embedded into the practice activities rather than introduced before the practice. In isolated instruction, the explanation of the target feature is introduced before the practice activities, like in presentation-practice-production (PPP)<sup>12</sup> instruction (Ellis, 2015).

Table 1 *Implicit and explicit forms of form-focused instruction (based on Housen and Pierrard, 2005: 10)*

<b>implicit instruction</b>	<b>explicit instruction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ attracts attention to target form</li> <li>▪ is delivered spontaneously (e.g. in an otherwise communication-oriented activity)</li> <li>▪ is unobtrusive (minimal interruption of communication of meaning)</li> <li>▪ presents target forms in context</li> <li>▪ makes no use of metalanguage</li> <li>▪ encourages free use of the target form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ directs attention to target form</li> <li>▪ is predetermined and planned (e.g. as the main focus and goal of a teaching activity)</li> <li>▪ is obtrusive (interruption of communicative meaning)</li> <li>▪ presents target forms in isolation</li> <li>▪ uses metalinguistic terminology (e.g. rule explanation)</li> <li>▪ involves controlled practice of the target form</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> PPP is a type of traditional, explicit instruction that involves a fixed sequence of activities. It starts with the presentation of the target feature, which is followed by controlled practice activities, and it ends with free-production activities (Ellis, 2015).

FonF refers to an approach that attempts to draw learners' attention to linguistic forms (and the meanings they realize) in the context of activities whose primary focus of attention is on meaning and communication (Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2015; Long, 1988). Instruction might be regarded as FonF if it meets the following criteria: (a) learners engage with the meaning of a structure before paying attention to the form, through tasks that ensure target forms are needed for the successful completion of the tasks; (b) instruction occurs as a result of analysing learner needs; and (c) learners' attention should be drawn to a form quickly yet noticeably, so as to achieve a balance between unobtrusiveness and salience (Norris and Ortega, 2001).

FonF is the key theoretical construct that informs implicit instruction (Ellis, 2002; Ellis, 2015; Long, 1988). Implicit instruction (see Table 1) contrasts with explicit instruction in that it provides no direct explanation of the target feature. It aims to enable learners to learn an L2 incidentally by attracting their attention to the target form *while* they are experiencing use of the L2 and primarily focusing on meaning. Implicit instruction enables learners to acquire the kind of knowledge needed to engage in communication. This means that explicit instruction is not sufficient and should ideally be accompanied by implicit instruction. Activities that give rise to FonF have a central role in implicit instruction (Ellis, 2015).

There are two broad types of implicit instruction in language pedagogy, the first of which is entirely meaning-focused; i.e. no attempt is made to attract the learners' attention to form. This type is employed by Krashen and Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach advocates and during extensive reading. The second type employs instructional strategies to induce learners to attend to form (e.g. through enhanced input). This can be achieved by highlighting the specific features, using intonation, and ensuring that the specific features occur with high frequency. The second way of attracting learner attention to form while learners are primarily engaged in communicating is through TBLT (Ellis, 2015).

The goals of implicit and explicit instruction are the same – the focus is primarily on learners being able to communicate effectively while the importance of conscious attention to form is always emphasized. The difference is that implicit instruction supposes that attention to form has to be achieved while learners are engaged in meaningful communication. In other words, it does not perceive explicit knowledge as the starting point (Ellis, 2015).

### 2.2.2. Research on types of instruction

It remains to address the important issue of the current position grammar holds in SLA. In contrast with purely communicative approaches of the past, SLA research literature over the last four decades shows that much of the academic community is in agreement when it comes to the important role grammar needs to have in today's L2 classrooms (e.g., Akakura, 2012; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Doughty and Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2002; Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen, 2002; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, 2015; Fotos, 1994; Housen, Pierrard, and van Daele, 2005; Klapper and Rees, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2014; Lightbown and Spada, 1990; Long, 1983; Millard, 2000; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Rahman, and Rashid, 2017; Spada and Tomita, 2010; Spada et al., 2014; Ur, 1996). This suggests that grammar is once again considered a central feature of language teaching.

In the 1990s, in the words of Celce-Murcia (1991), grammar became just “one component in a model of communicative competence”<sup>13</sup> (Canale and Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), and thus could no longer be viewed “as a central, autonomous system to be taught and learned independent of meaning, social function, and discourse structure” (Celce-Murcia, 1991: 476-477). This entailed the need to incorporate grammar instruction into a skill-based curriculum as well as a tendency towards communicative methods and contextualized and meaningful materials (e.g., Ellis, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2014; Lightbown and Spada, 1990; Millard, 2000; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004).

Indeed, in the same way studies have shown that grammar teaching works, they have also shown that it should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a skill development (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). Some studies have found that the combination of grammar teaching and communicative teaching (a FonF approach) gives the best results (see, e.g., Ellis, 2002; Lightbown and Spada, 1990; Larsen-Freeman, 2014; Millard, 2000; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004).

On the basis of currently available research literature (e.g. Klapper and Rees, 2003; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Rahman and Rashid, 2017; Spada and Tomita, 2010; Ellis, 2015), we can see that both explicit and implicit instruction are effective. In accordance with the mixed results, research has become concerned with the *relative* effectiveness of each type of instruction. Even though it has demonstrated that there are benefits to implicit instruction in the form of incidental learning,

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<sup>13</sup> “Communicative competence consists of the knowledge required to understand and produce messages in a language” (Ellis, 2015: 338). It normally entails linguistic, discourse and pragmatic competence (Ellis, 2015).

it seems that the effects of explicit instruction on grammar learning are superior (e.g., Akakura 2012; Harley 1989; Housen et al. 2005; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Spada and Tomita, 2010). Nonetheless, as Ellis (2015) pointed out, language curriculums that include both explicit and implicit instructional components should allow for effective and efficient language pedagogy. Choosing between one and the other is, therefore, unnecessary (Ellis, 2015).

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a partial account of the issue of grammar teaching in SLA. The focus was on some important approaches and methods of the past, as well as on types of L2 instruction and research into grammar instruction. Although research findings are sometimes inconclusive, there is no doubt among today's academics and practitioners that grammar must be taught in foreign language learning. As it appears that languages are taught more efficiently when FFI is combined with meaningful communication, we were interested in investigating whether this will be reflected in learners' beliefs.

### **2.3. The role of learner beliefs**

The focus of attention in this section is on describing learner beliefs that, according to some taxonomies (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Pawlak, 2009), fall into the category of IDs. To be more precise, this chapter attempts to provide definitions of the concept by various authors, as well as terminology associated with learner beliefs. It also includes information concerning the relationship between learner beliefs, learner behaviour and learning outcomes. Approaches to the investigation of learner beliefs by Barcelos (2000, 2003) are explained in a separate subchapter (2.3.1). Lastly, another separate subchapter (2.3.2) offers an overview of the most widely known instrument for measuring learner beliefs, which is Horwitz's BALLI (1985, 1987, 1988), while special emphasis is given to BALLI items which parallel some of the present study items.

IDs, according to Dörnyei (2005, 2009), are "attributes that mark a person as a distinct and unique human being" (Dörnyei, 2009: 231). Ellis (2015) sees them as "differences in how learners learn an L2, in how fast they learn, and in how successful they are" (Ellis, 2015: 343). Some IDs taxonomies (e.g., Pawlak, 2009) include the following IDs: age, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive and learning styles, learning strategies, motivation, anxiety, beliefs and willingness to communicate. Ellis (1985) suggested the following three broad categories: cognitive, affective and

social variables<sup>14</sup> (Ellis, 1985; Olejarczuk, 2015; Pawlak, 2012). In general, some ID taxonomies include learner beliefs/attitudes (e.g., Gardner, 1985; Pawlak, 2009), while others do not (e.g., Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003; Dörnyei, 2006; Williams and Burden, 1997). The reason for this lies in the fact that beliefs were not always seen as sufficiently stable and enduring and therefore, a “proper” ID variable as others (Dörnyei, 2005).

In the classroom context, as an important social ID variable (Olejarczuk, 2015) in SLA since the mid-1980s (Aragão, 2011; Barcelos, 2003), *learner beliefs* can be defined as “general assumptions that learners hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language learning and teaching” (Victori and Lockhart, 1995, as cited in Saeb and Zamani, 2013: 80). Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro (2018) see them as learners’ opinions, ideas and conceptions about L2 learning and teaching and language itself. Owing to their dynamic and multidimensional nature (Alexander and Dochy, 1995), beliefs are not only seen as a cognitive concept, but also as social constructs born out of experiences and problems (Barcelos, 2003). Indeed, learner beliefs are often born out of one’s past learning experiences and the assumption that a certain type of instruction is the most effective way for them to learn (Hedge, 2000). Moreover, beliefs about language learning are considered as a component of metacognitive knowledge (Flavell, 1987, as cited in Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005; Wenden, 1986), which comprises of all that individuals understand about themselves as learners and thinkers, including their goals and needs (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005).

Grotjahn (1991) argued that learner beliefs are “highly individual, relatively stable, and relatively enduring” (as cited in Loewen et al., 2009: 91; Dörnyei, 2005). According to Barcelos (2003), beliefs are a complex and elusive concept to define. They were frequently described “as synonyms for preconceived notions, myths or misconceptions” (Barcelos, 2003: 11) which implies that learners’ beliefs were considered wrong and false and scholars’ opinions right and true (Barcelos, 2003). This multitude of existing definitions and possible interpretations clarifies Pajares’ (1992) referring to them as a “messy” construct.

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<sup>14</sup> “Social aspects are external to the learner and concern the relationship between the learner and native speakers of the L2 and also between the learner and other speakers of his own language. Cognitive and affective aspects are internal to the learner. Cognitive factors concern the nature of the problem-solving strategies used by the learner, while affective factors concern the emotional responses aroused by the attempts to learn an L2” (Ellis, 1985: 100).

In order to differentiate between attitudes and beliefs, Dörnyei proposed that attitudes are strongly embedded in our minds due to our past experiences, including the influence of significant persons around us whereas beliefs are supported by stronger facts or evidence (Dörnyei, 2005). From social psychologists' point of view, the characteristic attribute of attitude is its evaluative (pro-con, pleasant-unpleasant) nature. As a personality trait, attitude is a hypothetical construct which is inaccessible to direct observation and thus must be inferred from measurable responses (Ajzen, 1991). Several additional definitions of learner beliefs are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 *Terms and definitions for language learning beliefs (adapted from Barcelos, 2000: 43)*

<b>terms</b>	<b>definitions</b>
Folklinguistic theories of learning (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995)	"Ideas that students have about language and language learning." (p. 294)
Learner representations (Holec, 1987)	"Learners' entering assumptions about their roles and functions of teachers and teaching materials." (p.152)
Representations (Riley, 1989, 1994)	"Popular ideas about the nature of language and languages, language structure and language use, the relationship between thought and language, identity and language, language and intelligence, language and learning, and so on." (1994, p. 8)
Learners' philosophy of language learning (Abraham and Vann, 1987)	"Beliefs about how language operates, and, consequently, how it is learned." (p. 95)
Metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1986)	"The stable, storable although sometimes incorrect knowledge that learners have acquired about language, learning and the language learning process [...]" (p. 163)
Beliefs (Wenden, 1986)	"Opinions which are based on experience and the opinions of respected others, which influence the way they [students] act." (p. 5)
Cultural beliefs (Gardner, 1988)	Expectations in the mind of teachers, parents and students concerning the entire second language acquisition task." (p. 110)
Learning culture (Riley, 1997)	"A set of representations, beliefs and values related to learning that directly influence [students'] learning behaviour." (p. 122)
Culture of learning languages (Barcelos, 1995)	"Learners' intuitive implicit (or explicit) knowledge made of beliefs, myths, cultural assumptions and ideals about how to learn languages. This knowledge, [...], is based upon their previous educational experience, previous

	(and present) readings about language learning and contact with other people like family, friends, relatives, teachers and so forth.” (p. 40)
Culture of learning (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996)	“The cultural aspects of teaching and learning; what people believe about ‘normal’ and ‘good’ learning activities and processes, where such beliefs have a cultural origin.” (p. 230)

Research literature informed us that *learner beliefs* have been referred to as *attitudes*, *metacognitive knowledge*, *preconceived notions*, *myths*, and *misconceptions*. Apart from those terms and as evident from table 2, they have also been identified as *folklinguistic theories of learning* (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995), *(learner) representations* (Holec, 1987; Riley, 1989, 1994), *learners’ philosophy of language learning* (Abraham and Vann, 1987), *cultural beliefs* (Gardner, 1988), *learning culture* (Riley, 1997), and *culture of learning (languages)* (Barcelos, 1995; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). In the Croatian context, they are most commonly referred to as *učenička vjerovanja/učenički stavovi* while the Spanish context uses term *creencias de los estudiantes*. Barcelos (2003) noted that all the definitions from Table 2 acknowledge the fact that beliefs about SLA refer to the nature of language and language learning. Moreover, nearly all definitions, apart from Wenden (1986), recognize that learners’ beliefs are learners’ subjective ideas and opinions (e.g. “expectations in the mind”) and therefore need not be – or cannot be – correct or incorrect. In line with this, teachers, researchers, and theoretical linguists alike should recognize learners’ beliefs as valuable sources of information so as to improve the learning experience altogether. This does not imply learners taking over the role of teachers, but perhaps bringing about points of alignment and disagreement by methods of group dialogues and discussions. This issue is touched upon later on in subchapter 5.1 of chapter five. Definitions in Table 2 also indicate that four different authors related the notion of *culture* to *beliefs*. Two of them (Barcelos, 1995; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996) explained in more detail the nature of the connection. We could infer from their explications that learners’ beliefs have an important cultural dimension. In other words, emphasizing learners’ cultural assumptions, environment and background may signify that beliefs are culture-specific. Since newer evidence does indicate that learner beliefs are closely linked to learners’ backgrounds and teaching/learning contexts (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Pazaver and Wang, 2009), and the present study compared beliefs of learners from distinct backgrounds and contexts, we have decided to adopt definitions by Barcelos (1995) and Cortazzi and Jin (1996) as our point of reference.



Research has shown that learner beliefs strongly influence various aspects of SLA, which is why we can deem them a key factor in L2 development and success. It is generally recognized that learner beliefs about language learning influence, i.a., their language learning strategies or styles, language learning behavior, anxiety, consciousness, attitudes about how their instruction should be delivered, and commitment to and involvement in the learning process/motivation (see, e.g., Abraham and Vann, 1987; Alexander and Dochy, 1995; Barcelos, 2000; Benson and Lor, 1999; Bernat, 2006; Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Mori, 1999; Park, 1995; Riley, 1997; Šegedin and Semren, 2013; Tse, 2000; Wenden, 1995; Wenden, 1998; White, 1999; Yang, 1992). By extension, learner beliefs can have both positive and negative influences on the language learning process. For instance, if they are understood as *misbeliefs*, they could influence language development negatively by decreasing motivation and increasing anxiety. If they are, on the other hand, appropriate/positive, they might contribute positively to the overall language learning process (Kuntz, 1996; Šegedin and Semren, 2013).

A number of studies have examined learner beliefs in connection to other ID variables and factors, including attitude (e.g., Banya and Cheng, 1997; Riley, 1997), personality traits (e.g., Bernat, 2006; Bernat, Carter and Hall, 2009), language proficiency (e.g., Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Peacock, 1998; Tanaka and Ellis, 2003), motivation (e.g., Banya and Cheng, 1997), anxiety (e.g., Banya and Cheng, 1997; Oh, 1996; Truitt, 1995), strategy use (e.g., Horwitz, 1999; Hong, 2006; Sakui and Gaies, 1999; Yang, 1992), gender (e.g., Bernat and Lloyd, 2007), autonomy (e.g., Cotterall, 1995), emotions (e.g., Aragão, 2011; Barcelos, 2015; Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018) and identities (e.g., Barcelos, 2015; Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018). Apart from ID variables, other factors have also been recognized to influence beliefs. These include family and home background, cultural background, classroom/social peers and interpretations of prior repetitive experiences (Bernat and Gvozdenko, 2005).

### **2.3.1. Approaches to the investigation of learner beliefs**

This subchapter will review three different approaches to investigating learner beliefs: the normative approach, the metacognitive approach, and the contextual approach (Barcelos, 2000, 2003). The first two approaches fall into the category of traditional approaches. As in Barcelos (2003), we will discuss their definition of beliefs, methodology, the relationship between beliefs

and actions, and finally their advantages and disadvantages. The subchapter closes by mentioning newer lines of research relating to the contextual approaches (Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018).

#### *2.3.1.1. The normative approach*

The normative approach uses the term beliefs as a synonym for preconceived notions, myths or misconceptions. As was already mentioned, this implies that learners' beliefs are wrong or false, while the opinions of second language scholars are right and true. The normative approach includes studies that have used Likert-type questionnaires to investigate learner beliefs. Data collection normally involves the use of questionnaires, while data analysis is done through descriptive statistics. The most widely used questionnaire to investigate learner beliefs (BALLI) is described in detail in the following subchapter. Some researchers have adapted BALLI (e.g., Mantle-Bromley, 1995, as cited in Barcelos, 2003), while many developed their own questionnaires (e.g. Kuntz, 1996). Others like Sakui and Gaies (1999) made use of interviews as a way of validating questionnaires. They were the ones who claimed that learners have different interpretations of the questionnaire items and may wish to describe their beliefs in ways different than what questionnaires allow.

As stated, learner beliefs can influence learner behaviour where either their general approach to learning is affected or the language learning strategies they use. The implicit assumption of the normative approach is that productive beliefs lead to successful strategies or behaviour and that unproductive beliefs can lead to unsuccessful strategies. Barcelos (2003) warns that this is a simplification as the relationship between beliefs and actions undoubtedly exists, but is a complex one.

When considering advantages and disadvantages of the normative approach, it has been recognized that questionnaires have a number of advantages, such as being less threatening than observation and useful in case of limited resources, time, and large size samples. They also afford precision and clarity, allow access to outside contexts, and allow data collection at different time periods. On the downside, beliefs are measured out of context. Learners might interpret the items differently from the researcher's intention. In addition, the beliefs presented by the researcher may be different from the beliefs learners think are significant in their learning. And lastly,

questionnaires make it difficult to investigate beliefs in learners' own terms (Barcelos, 2000, 2003).

#### *2.3.1.2. The metacognitive approach*

The metacognitive approach sees beliefs as metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1986) (see table 2). Similar to the normative approach, where a certain implicit distinction is made between knowledge and beliefs, a more explicit distinction is made here by Wenden (1986) who described knowledge as factual and beliefs as subjective understandings. The type of data collected within the metacognitive approach is verbal accounts gathered through semi-structured interviews and self-reports. The data is analysed by means of content analysis. Although few studies have used questionnaires, none have used the BALLI. The difference between the normative approach methodology and the metacognitive one is in the framework that defines beliefs as metacognitive knowledge and the relationship between beliefs and autonomous behaviour. In fact, metacognitive knowledge is considered an essential part of self-directed language learning instruction (Wenden, 1998, as cited in Barcelos, 2003).

The advantages of this approach are that interviews, unlike questionnaires, give learners the opportunity to elaborate and evaluate their experience as they see fit. Also, this approach does not infer beliefs from actions, but only from intentions and statements, and it does not consider the social context of beliefs. Consequently, beliefs are seen only as ways to transform unsuccessful learners into good and successful learners (Barcelos, 2000, 2003).

#### *2.3.1.3. The contextual approach*

This approach grew as a reaction to the traditional approach and its criticism (Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018). Since the contextual approach sees learner beliefs as complex and embedded within sets of beliefs forming a multilayered web of relationships, the researchers have tried to get a better understanding of beliefs in specific contexts, rather than making generalizations about them. Within this approach, learner beliefs are chiefly defined as contextual, dynamic and social, i.e. interrelated with learners' environment.

Instead of using questionnaires, researchers have investigated beliefs by ethnographic classroom observations, interviews, diaries and narratives in different modalities, metaphor analysis, and discourse analysis. This is a heterogeneous group since it proposes a variety of different methodologies to investigate beliefs. Nonetheless, all of them incorporate a qualitative and interpretative paradigm. The advantage of this approach is that it involves a more positive view of learners than the normative and metacognitive approaches. The contextual approach acknowledges learners as social beings interacting in their environment. However, using most of the methods (e.g. classroom observations, metaphors, discourse analysis) requires a lot of time and effort (Barcelos, 2000, 2003; Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018). Newer lines of research relating to the contextual approaches (e.g., the discursive, sociocultural/dialogical, affective, and complexity/ecological approaches) have raised lots of interest in SLA over the last decade or so. The major shift in beliefs research has been from a narrow focus on beliefs alone – as if possessed by a learner – to a focus on beliefs being constructed by a learner interacting with others. This view sees both parties as individuals who think, feel and act. On the whole, the interplay with other factors (emotions, agency, and identities) is now seen as much more complex than was previously thought (Barcelos, 2015; Kalaja, Barcelos and Aro, 2018).

### **2.3.2. Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI)**

Elaine Horwitz (1985, 1987, 1988) became a pioneer of research on learner beliefs by developing one of the most widely used questionnaires – BALLI. Her instrument encouraged a number of studies on learner beliefs (BALLI studies) to take place in the coming years (e.g., Al Bataineh, 2019; Apairach and Vibulphol, 2015; Ariogula, Unala and Onursala, 2009; Bernat, 2006; Boakye, 2007; Chai, 2013; Didović Baranac, Falkoni-Mjehović and Vidak, 2016; Ghobadi Mohebi and Khodadady, 2011; Hong, 2006; Lepota and Weideman, 2002; Li, 2011; Mihaljević Djigunović and Kovačić, 1996; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006; Oh, 1996; Okura 2016; Park, 1995; Pašalić and Sinovčić Trumbić, 2014; Riley, 2006; Settar Abid, 2012; Stodolová, 2013; Šegedin and Semren, 2013; Truitt, 1995; Tumposky, 1991; Wu, 2008; Yang, 1992).

BALLI consists of 27 or 34 self-report items which assess learner beliefs in five<sup>15</sup> main areas: (a) difficulty of language learning, (b) foreign language aptitude, (c) the nature of language

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<sup>15</sup> For the initial 27 statements (ESL-BALLI), Horwitz created four themes: foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, and appropriate language learning strategies (Kuntz, 1996).

learning, (d) learning and communication strategies, and (e) motivation and expectations (Dörnyei, 2005). Three different BALLIs are in use: one for ESL learners consisting of 27 statements (1984, 1987), another for foreign language teachers consisting of 27 statements (1985), and a third for foreign language learners consisting of 34 statements (1988, 1990) (Kuntz, 1996). All versions employ a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006). BALLI’s validity was criticized by Kuntz (1996) for its teachers-generated items/themes, the lack of explanations for themes, and the over-reliance on descriptive statistics (Chai, 2013).

Certain BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) items relate to some of our items regarding the importance of learning English (see Tables 4 and 5, items 3, 6-8, Appendices C, D and E). These BALLI items are all related to learners’ motivation and the opportunities that a foreign language could provide them with. For example, BALLI 20: “People in my country think that it is important to speak English<sup>16</sup>” evokes our item 3: “English is seen as an important language in my country.” BALLI 29: “If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job” mirrors our items 6: “Mastering English will help me with my future employment in my country,” and 7: “Mastering English will help me with my future employment if working abroad.” The last similar item is BALLI 31: “I want to learn to speak English well” which could be related to our item 8: “My goal is to speak English fluently.” Research has shown that learners generally agree with the above statements and thus believe in the importance of the English language (e.g., Al Bataineh, 2019; Apairach and Vibulphol, 2015; Boakye, 2007; Chai, 2013; Didović Baranac, Falkoni-Mjehović and Vidak, 2016; Ghobadi Mohebi and Khodadady, 2011; Hong, 2006; Horwitz, 1987; Lepota and Weideman, 2002; Pašalić and Sinovčić Trumbić, 2014; Riley, 2006; Settar Abid, 2012; Stodolová, 2013; Šegedin and Semren, 2013; Wu, 2008; Yang, 1992). Our findings also confirm previous studies and are presented in subchapter 5.1.1.

There are several items in BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) that deal specifically with grammar instruction. These include BALLI item 9: “You shouldn’t say anything in the foreign language until you can say it correctly<sup>17</sup>” (learning and communication strategies), BALLI item 23: “The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar” (the nature of language learning), and BALLI item 20: “Learning a foreign language is mostly a matter of learning a lot of

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<sup>16</sup> The original items (20, 29, and 31) have been adapted to refer to English language learning.

<sup>17</sup> This item is related to the issue of error correction, too.

grammar rules” (the nature of language learning) (Horwitz, 1988; Kuntz, 1996; Loewen et al., 2009). Although this questionnaire, as previously shown, primarily deals with learners’ general beliefs about language learning, these grammar-related statements did pave the way for the research into the role of grammar instruction in L2/foreign language learning. Loewen et al. (2009) argued that results from the BALLI studies seem to suggest many learners agree with the last statement (item 20). We found that a number of other studies came to similar conclusions regarding the last two statements where learners leastwise recognized the value of grammar study (items 23 and 20). However, the majority of learners disagreed with the first statement (item 9) (e.g., Al Bataineh, 2019; Apairach and Vibulphol, 2015; Ariogula, Unala and Onursala, 2009; Bernat, 2006; Boakye, 2007; Chai, 2013; Horwitz, 1987; Mihaljević Djigunović and Kovačić, 1996; Pašalić and Sinovčić Trumbić, 2014; Settar Abid, 2012<sup>18</sup>; Stodolová, 2013; Šegedin and Semren, 2013; Wu, 2008). There are, however, BALLI studies that report learners not valuing grammar (e.g., Ghobadi Mohebi and Khodadady, 2011; Li, 2011; Riley, 2006). Eleven studies focusing exclusively on learner beliefs about the teaching and learning of grammar will be reviewed in more detail in the next subchapter (2.4).

As Horwitz (1985) pointed out, BALLI served as an advance organizer to course content and as a guide for curriculum organization, which expectedly led to improving learner learning as well as their satisfaction with the foreign language course. This suggests the need to determine learners’ beliefs for the purposes of implementing adequate teaching/learning methods and optimizing learning outcomes.

To conclude, this chapter was an attempt by us to shed some light on the abundance of definitions and terms associated with one single phenomenon. Although there is no “universally” accepted definition of learner beliefs, their importance lies in their connection with SLA success. Research has shown that learner beliefs might strongly influence many different aspects of the SLA process, including learners’ language learning strategies or styles, behaviour, anxiety, consciousness, attitudes about how language instruction should be delivered, and motivation (see studies mentioned above). The theoretical basis in this chapter, at least to a certain extent, enabled us to better understand why learners in our study answered in the way they did.

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<sup>18</sup> Contrary to most studies, Settar Abid (2012) found that more than 70% of learners believed one should not say anything in English until he/she can say it correctly.

We have adopted a normative approach for the study, but also opted for a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses as well as an investigation into the learners' EFL contexts (see subchapter 2.1 of chapter 2). This was done to ensure a more thorough insight into the learner beliefs and to add the social and contextual dimension to the study that our questionnaire on its own would have perhaps lacked. The intention was to subsequently put the well-known, although ambiguous, notion of *learner beliefs*, as described in this chapter, into a wider perspective of beliefs in specific EFL contexts of Croatia and Spain.

## **2.4. Previous studies on learner beliefs about grammar**

In this chapter, some representative studies dealing with learner beliefs and perceptions about the teaching and learning of grammar will be reviewed. The one exception is Martínez Agudo' study (2014) since its aims do not focus on grammar instruction, but the study covers other variables of our interest: Spanish EFL learners, learner beliefs and comments on preferred instruction. As it would be impossible to cover the majority of studies, only the most pertinent ones for the present research will be addressed. The chapter presents and discusses their methodology and findings with respect to the learners' ESL/EFL context, the type of grammar instruction, other language areas, etc. The studies are listed in chronological order with their respective year of publication in brackets. Aside from Schulz's 2001 replication study of her 1996 study whose focus was a cross-cultural comparison, the rest of the below-mentioned studies focused on investigating learner beliefs about grammar in one particular ESL/EFL context. Specifically, the studies were carried out in Croatia (Hrgović, 2012), Spain (Martínez Agudo, 2014; Palacios Martínez, 2007), Belgium (Simon and Taverniers, 2011), U.S. (Loewen et al., 2009; Schulz, 1996), Canada (Jean and Simard, 2011; Pazaver and Wang, 2009), Colombia (Schulz, 2001), Libya (Rahuma, 2016) and Korea (Kang, 2017).

The first two studies worth looking at in terms of learner beliefs about grammar are those carried out by Schulz (Schulz, 1996, 2001). The first study (Schulz, 1996) examined and compared the beliefs of U.S. postsecondary foreign language students and teachers regarding the benefits of a focus on form and error correction in language learning. Questionnaires were administered to a total of 824 students and 92 teachers of numerous languages who participated in the study. Results revealed that all the students surveyed showed a preference towards a focus on form approach and that students had more favourable attitudes towards the formal study of grammar than the teachers.

The second study (Schulz, 2001) set out to replicate the 1996 study with 607 Colombian foreign language students and 122 of their teachers. Data comparisons indicated that there were no significant cross-cultural differences, apart from Colombian students and teachers leaning more towards explicit grammar instruction and corrective feedback than their U.S. colleagues. According to the study, Colombian students favored traditional language teaching, acknowledging that it should preferably be complemented by real-life communication. Kang (2017) asserted that U.S. ESL learners had more negative attitudes towards traditional grammar teaching and error correction because of ESL tradition emphasizing implicit instruction through authentic communication.

Palacios Martínez (2007) analysed the attitudes of 48 fifth-year Spanish university students of English Philology towards grammar teaching. The participants' age ranged from 21 to 24. The author used two main instruments for his study: a worksheet and a questionnaire. He concluded the process with a general discussion with the students on some of the issues included in the questionnaire, which demanded further elaboration. Owing to dissatisfaction with his own teaching results, Palacios Martínez (2007) set out to “look for alternative ways to teach grammar” and to “investigate students' attitudes and opinions on their perceptions of grammar and its pedagogy” (Palacios Martínez, 2007: 2). The study found that Spanish majors of English see grammar as important and an essential part of their language study. Notwithstanding the importance of grammar teaching in general, the students were in favour of learner-centred approaches and discovery learning activities. This is not in accordance with the findings of Hrgović (2012) since she found learners to be more in favour of formal, explicit instruction. Palacios Martínez (2007) also stated that, unlike him, the students were mostly satisfied with the methods and procedures their English teachers employed in the classroom.

Loewen et al. (2009) explored second language learners' beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction among U.S. university students. The students were enrolled in 13 different language courses<sup>19</sup>, with English being the most common one (n=157). Most were native speakers of English, with Korean being the next largest native/first language (L1) group. However, more than 45 L1s were claimed by the participants. A total of 754 students, whose average age was 21, participated in the study by completing a questionnaire which consisted of a quantitative and

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<sup>19</sup> Participants were studying one of 14 TLs; English, German, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Korean, Turkish, Thai, Persian, Nepali and Urdu.



qualitative section. It was found that students' beliefs varied significantly based on the TL they studied. In sum, Loewen et al. (2009) conducted a factor analysis to uncover the students' beliefs and found the following six underlying factors: "efficacy of grammar, negative attitude toward error correction, priority of communication, importance of grammar, importance of grammatical accuracy, and negative attitude toward grammar instruction" (Loewen et al., 2009: 91). Nonetheless, ESL students were less concerned about grammatical accuracy and error correction than other foreign language students. The authors concluded that this might be due to varying levels of exposure to the TL; ESL learners had more opportunities for communicating in the TL, while foreign language learners were restricted to the FL classroom communication.

Pazaver and Wang (2009) conducted their study on a group of 16 immigrant students from seven Asian countries (China, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, India, and Sri Lanka) who were enrolled in a credit ESL course at a Canadian university. The study aimed to investigate students' language learning experiences and their perceptions regarding focus on form and error correction by interviewing them face-to-face in groups of four. Each researcher recorded the conversations and transcribed them verbatim. During the interviews, they tried to gather the needed information without letting the participants know what their research questions were. To the greatest extent, they found that Asian learners' perceptions of explicit grammar instruction varied widely depending on their educational background, language proficiency, previous learning experiences, and their personal/academic needs and goals. That means that learners had different perceptions regarding whether, when, and how often grammar should be taught in the ESL classroom. They, however, almost universally valued error correction, especially in writing.

Simon and Taverniers' study (2011) focused on examining learners' beliefs by comparing their beliefs about English grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary among tertiary-level learners of English in Flanders (Belgium). A questionnaire containing a 6-point semantic differentiation scale and a 6-point Likert scale<sup>20</sup> was completed by 117 first year Flemish students aged between 17 and 21 (average age=18.9). As one of the very few studies dealing with a comparison of grammar, pronunciation as well as vocabulary, this study revealed that students perceived vocabulary to be a lot more important for communication purposes than grammar or pronunciation.

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<sup>20</sup> The semantic scale included the following options: 1. *not likely at all*, 2. *rather unlikely*, 3. *not so likely*, 4. *somewhat likely*, 5. *quite likely*, 6. *very likely*, while the Likert scale included the following options: 1. *strongly disagree*, 2. *mostly disagree*, 3. *somewhat disagree*, 4. *somewhat agree*, 5. *mostly agree*, 6. *strongly agree*.

However, the students also reported that they felt more confident while communicating when it came to their English vocabulary usage than their grammar or pronunciation use. The second relevant finding had to do with students' beliefs about language learning strategies. The students believed that both 'studying hard' and in-class activities should enable them as non-native speakers of English to attain native-like or near-native fluency, which implies an error-free use of English grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The authors did not look into a more detailed analysis of students' preferred language teaching and learning practices.

Jean and Simard' study (2011) focused on both learners' (n=2,321) and teachers' (n=45) beliefs about grammar teaching and learning in the bilingual context of Montreal (Quebec, Canada). With the help of a questionnaire, they investigated ESL (n=1,328) and French as a second language (FSL) (n=993) learners' and their teachers' beliefs about grammar accuracy, error correction, and different ways of teaching and learning grammar. The average age of ESL learners was 14 years, and of the FSL learners 15 years. The authors' main findings suggested that grammar instruction was perceived by both learners and teachers as necessary and effective, but not as something they enjoyed doing. In other words, they "did not report liking learning grammar, but they reported valuing it" (Jean and Simard, 2011: 478), which means they saw it as "a necessary evil" (Jean and Simard, 2011: 478). Importantly, there were no significant mismatches in the beliefs of learners and their teachers, as is often the case (Banya and Cheng, 1997; Gabillon, 2012; Peacock, 1998). Both learners and teachers, for the most part, valued grammatical accuracy, error correction and mechanical-type exercises. In general, however, learners were even more favourable toward error correction and traditional grammar instruction than the teachers.

As a part of her master's thesis, Hrgović (2012) examined 200 Croatian secondary school learners' beliefs about English grammar. The participants' average age was 17 years, and a questionnaire was used as the main instrument for collecting data. The main goals of the study were to determine learners' beliefs about grammar, to investigate the connection between their beliefs and perceptions of teaching methods and finally, to explore the relationship between their beliefs and perceived level of success in English grammar. As stated in the study, Croatian secondary school learners held negative attitudes towards grammar, describing it as boring and too detailed. Moreover, most of the learners found it difficult to master grammar. The results, on the other hand, showed that most learners agreed with the statement that grammar learning was necessary. Hrgović (2012) also found that all learners valued both explicit and implicit grammar

teaching, but they preferred explicit instruction. Based on the learners' self-assessment of their grammar knowledge, she found that those who were better at English grammar learning rated it higher than those who were less successful, meaning that more successful learners "expressed a more positive overall attitude towards grammar" (Hrgović, 2012: 41).

Martínez Agudo (2014) studied 211 Spanish secondary school learners' expectations for their English classes and whether they were satisfied with their previous English courses and their current proficiency in English. Participants' average age was 17, ranging from sixteen to nineteen years. Martínez Agudo (2014) employed a questionnaire developed by Sakui and Gaies (1999), which uses a combination of original items and items from previous questionnaires, mainly Horwitz's BALLI. The results showed that even though the learners expressed their wants for a communicative approach in the classroom, the more traditional approaches to language learning based on the grammar-translation method were still prevailing. This means that learners' expectations were not met. In the main, Martínez Agudo (2014) noted that Spanish EFL learners were not satisfied with their past English learning experiences or with the progress they made, which as a consequence might have "a negative effect on classroom instruction and ultimate learning outcomes" (Martínez Agudo, 2014: 297).

Rahuma's (2016) study, which formed part of her PhD thesis, examined both teacher (n=13) and learner (n=629) beliefs about teaching English grammar at Tripoli university. The sample was chosen randomly from the student population at Tripoli University, English Department, where the whole population was targeted. The author employed a mixed-methods approach; quantitative data from students were collected through a questionnaire while qualitative data were collected with the help of semi-structured interviews for lecturers who taught grammar at the English department. The study wanted to unveil beliefs about the role of grammar, methods and techniques for teaching grammar, difficulties of teaching grammar, and error correction. The findings showed that students and lecturers valued formal grammar study and thought grammar should be recognised in all the skills. Even though the students did not enjoy learning grammar, they valued both isolated and integrated grammar instruction and corrective feedback. The findings also revealed that the participants were not satisfied with the way grammar was taught at their university.

Kang (2017) investigated teacher and learner beliefs about different types of grammar instruction, grammar learning and error correction in the Korean EFL context. The author

employed a learner and a teacher questionnaire adapted from Jean and Simard (2011) to examine beliefs of 487 participants who were divided into five groups: two learner subgroups (secondary school (n=205) and college (n=196) and three teacher subgroups (non-native Korean secondary school (n=28), non-native Korean college (n=25), and native college (n=32)). The participants highly valued accuracy but disliked grammar learning and teaching. While both learners and teachers believed that implicit and explicit grammar instruction could be useful, Korean teachers generally had more positive views on grammar instruction than Korean learners. The majority of the participants preferred error correction in writing to the one in spoken production. Some individual differences among the subgroups were also found. For example, cultural differences were observed in that native teachers of English at college were most negative about teaching grammar and accuracy, confirming Schulz's (2001) study. Importantly, Kang (2017) concluded that the reason why all Korean participants valued grammar practice might reflect the cultural aspect of Korean traditional grammar instruction, as opposed to ESL tradition which emphasizes implicit grammar instruction through authentic communication, as evident in Loewen et al. (2009) and Schulz (2001).

What we can take from all the studies considered above is that learners hold very firm beliefs about the place of grammar in language teaching, perceiving it as effective and necessary. However, many studies found that learners did not enjoy learning grammar (e.g., Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Rahuma, 2016). Martínez Agudo (2014) and Rahuma (2016) found that learners were not satisfied with the way grammar was taught to them, while Palacios Martínez (2007) found the opposite – that learners were mostly satisfied with the methods and procedures their English teachers employed in the classroom. When it comes to learners' disposition towards different types of grammar instruction, the results are inconclusive. Some learners believed in the positive influence of explicit grammar teaching on language learning, preferred more traditional types of activities and likewise favoured explicit grammar instruction over implicit instruction (e.g., Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Schulz, 2001; Rahuma, 2016). Others, like Spanish EFL learners (e.g., Martínez Agudo, 2014) and U.S. ESL learners (Loewen et al., 2009; Schulz, 1996) were more inclined towards communicative grammar activities and implicit instruction. While some researchers found that learners value error correction (e.g., Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Pazaver and Wang, 2009), Loewen et al. (2009) reported on learners' negative attitude toward error correction with ESL learners showing

the least concern for it. As was mentioned, this might be due to ESL learners having more opportunities for authentic communication in the TL than the rest of FL learners (Loewen et al., 2009).

The majority of researchers adopted a normative approach by employing questionnaires as main instruments (Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Martínez Agudo, 2014; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Simon and Taverniers, 2011). Only Pazaver and Wang (2009) opted for a metacognitive approach by interviewing their participants, while Palacios Martínez (2007) combined a worksheet and a questionnaire with a discussion, and Rahuma (2016) used a mixed-methods approach (normative and metacognitive) by combining semi-structured interviews with a questionnaire.

The majority of studies investigated beliefs of university students (Loewen et al., 2009; Palacios Martínez, 2007; Pazaver and Wang, 2009; Rahuma, 2016; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Simon and Taverniers, 2011). While Kang's (2017) sample consisted of both college and secondary school learners, some (Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Martínez Agudo, 2014) focused on beliefs of secondary school learners. No one, therefore, investigated beliefs of primary school learners. This was the reason we decided to focus on younger learner population (older primary school learners and younger secondary school learners) for the present study.

When Horwitz (1999) gave a comprehensive review of the cross-cultural belief studies, her data suggested it would be “premature to conclude that beliefs about language learning vary by cultural group” (Horwitz, 1999: 575, as cited in Dörnyei, 2005: 215). However, as evident from the present studies, newer evidence indicates that a link between learners' beliefs and their backgrounds and teaching/learning contexts exists (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Pazaver and Wang, 2009). It was for this reason that we decided to focus on comparing learners from distinct cultural/educational backgrounds and EFL contexts. Our goal was to collect new information about grammar learning and teaching practices so as to complement earlier studies and stimulate further research.

This concludes the theoretical part of the thesis. The following chapters are concerned with the practical part of the study, starting with the aims and methodology in the next chapter.

## **3. Research on Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs: aims and methodology**

### **3.1. Aims**

The aims of this thesis are as follows:

1. to investigate and compare Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about the importance of the English language,
2. to investigate and compare Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about learning English grammar;
  - 2.1. to establish whether there is a significant difference in how Croatian and Spanish EFL learners view English grammar and its importance in their respective contexts,
  - 2.2. to establish whether there is a significant difference in Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about different techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar,
3. to investigate Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' likes and dislikes with regards to grammar learning and teaching.

The first two research questions refer to the quantitative part of the study, while the third question was answered within the qualitative analysis.

### **3.2. Methodology**

#### **3.2.1. Sample**

The sample in the study involved one primary school and one secondary school in Split (Croatia) and one primary and one secondary school in Madrid (Spain). The sample consisted of 400 learners: 200 Croatian and 200 Spanish learners. Croatian participants were in the last two years of primary school<sup>21</sup> (13-14 years), and in the second and overwhelmingly third year of secondary school (16-17 years). Spanish participants were in their last year of primary school (12

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<sup>21</sup> Primary education in Croatia starts at the age of 6 or 7 up until 14 years. Secondary education lasts until the age of 17 or 18. Spanish children have primary education (6-12 years), followed by ESO (12-16 years), and non-obligatory *Bachillerato* (16-18 years). Hence obligatory education in Croatia ends at the age of 14, while in Spain at the age of 16.

years) or distributed over all the years in secondary education (12-18 years), with the majority being in their second (13-14 years) or third year of ESO (14-15 years). Sample data are presented in Table 3.

Croatian learners' mean age was 15.5 (range=13-17). The sample consisted of 73 male learners and 125 female learners, while two participants provided no answer. Almost all Croatian learners (98%) said that Croatian is their L1, while only four learners reported German, English or Polish as their L1. Croatian learners' average final English grade was 4.4 out of 5. More than 75% of learners started learning English when they were six or seven years old. The remaining learners began learning English at a different age, which resulted in less-frequent answers<sup>22</sup> (range=3-8). When asked about how they learned English, approximately 80% of the learners mentioned either school, music, movies, the Internet, books or a combination of these. Everyone mentioned school accompanied by usually two or three additional ways of learning English. The most common combination (11%) was the one which included school, music, movies and the Internet. The rest mentioned a different, somewhat less-frequent combination. While some of the learners (12.5%) said that they were not learning any other foreign languages, around 35% and 27% of them studied Italian or German, respectively. The remaining 38.5% studied some other foreign language or a combination of languages. Learners provided a wide range of answers, but the Spanish language followed Italian and German with approximately 8%, while the most frequent combinations of languages were those of Italian and German or Italian and Spanish (3%).

As shown in Table 3, the mean age of Spanish learners was 14 (range=12-18). The sample consisted of 96 male learners and 99 female learners, while five learners provided no answer. Ninety-four per cent of Spanish learners said that Spanish is their L1. Other than Spanish, other languages mentioned were Chinese, Arabic, English, German, Romanian, a combination of Spanish and English, or of Spanish and Chinese. Spanish learners' average final English grade was 6.5 out of 10. Forty-three per cent of learners started learning English when they were three years old, while fifteen per cent of them started at the age of 6. The rest of the learners started learning English at different ages, which gave us less-frequent answers (range=0-7). The majority of Spanish learners (72%) said that they had learned English only in the school environment. The remaining – and significantly less frequent options – covered a wide range of answers (e.g., bilingual parents, the media, studying abroad). Whilst 24% of the learners stated that they were

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<sup>22</sup> Such less-frequent, diverse answers are not presented.

not learning any other foreign languages, more than half of the learners were learning French as a foreign language. The remaining 17% were studying one or more foreign languages other than the French language.

Table 3 *Learners' background information*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Croatian EFL learners</b>	<b>Spanish EFL learners</b>
N (of learners)	200	200
L1	Croatian (98%)	Spanish (94%)
average age	15.5	14
gender	M: 73 (36%) F: 125 (63%) no answer: 2 (1%)	M: 96 (48%) F: 99 (49%) no answer: 5 (3%)
last English final grade	Mean:* 4.42	Mean: 6.53
starting age of English language learning	6 or 7 (75.5%)	3 (43%) 6 (15%)
forms of English language learning	school; music; movies; the Internet; books; all the above (80%)	school (72%)
foreign languages	Italian (34.5%); German (27%)	French (58.5%); none (24%)

\*Mean = mean value; Croatia uses a 1-5 grading scale; Spain uses a 0-10 grading scale

The sample was not entirely comparable owing to a slight age and gender imbalance. In Croatia's sample, we had more female participants, while Spain's sample was almost identical across the gender variable.

While the majority of Croatian learners (75.5%) started learning English at primary school starting age (six years), many Spanish learners (43%) reported starting earlier – at preschool starting age (three years), with only 15% starting at the age of six.

It is not surprising that over 70% of Spanish learners said they had learned English in school. As previously mentioned, this might be attributed to the fact that, unlike Croatian children, children in Spain have somewhat limited contact with English outside of school. Spanish children are less exposed to foreign languages from an early age because nearly all foreign content is normally dubbed to Spanish. Croatian children, on the other hand, seem to be exposed to English often and in a variety of circumstances, as evidenced from the fact that an overwhelming majority of them stated that they learned English in a number of different ways: in school, by listening to



music, through movies, on the Internet, and by reading books. The most common answer was the one which included school, music, movies and the Internet.

While English is the number one foreign language spoken in Croatia, German and Italian are the next most studied languages, due to their direct political influence from past centuries (Glovacki-Bernardi and Jernej, 2004). This was also evident in our sample, where most Croatian learners reported studying either Italian or German. Owing to their geographical proximity and the high status of French in the European Union, most primary school learners in Spain learn French as a foreign language (irrespective of English) (Eurostat, 2019), as can be seen from Table 3.

Croatian learners' average final English grade was 4.4 out of 5, whereas Spanish learners' average grade was 6.5 out of 10. According to Croatia's academic grading scale (insufficient/fail (1), sufficient (2), good (3), very good (4), excellent (5)), the learners' average grade was "very good", and coming very close to "excellent" (4.5-5.0). Spain uses the following grading scale for primary education, ESO and Bachillerato: 0-2.9 (very deficient/fail), 3-4.9 (insufficient/fail), 5-6.9 (sufficient), 7-8.9 (notable), and 9.0-10 (outstanding). In line with this, Spanish learners earned a "sufficient" grade, as a result of which, on average, Croatian learners had better grades in English than did Spanish learners. This finding is in accordance with EF EPI rankings discussed in subchapter 2.1 (e.g., EF, 2018).

### **3.2.2. Instrument, data collection and data analysis**

A questionnaire was developed to collect the data. Questionnaire design and structure were informed by the literature review on learner beliefs about grammar (e.g., Horwitz, 1985, 1987, 1988; Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Loewen et al., 2009; Martínez Agudo, 2014; Palacios Martínez, 2007; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Simon and Taverniers, 2011) and practical guides on research methods in SLA (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007; Mackey and Gass, 2012). Questionnaire item 9 (see Appendix C) was taken verbatim from Hrgović (2012) while open-ended prompts were adapted from Loewen et al. (2009).

To an extent, we followed a sequence suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) whilst planning and designing our questionnaire. Their guidelines included deciding the objectives of the questionnaire, the population and the sample, generating the topics/issues to be addressed, deciding on the kinds of scales/responses required, writing the actual items, checking that each issue has been addressed (by writing several items for each issue), and finally administering the

questionnaire. The penultimate stage they proposed was piloting the questionnaire and then refining the items. In our case and due to time constraints, a pilot study was not carried out.

After consulting the above literature, the first version of the questionnaire was written. This 80-item, 5-level Likert scale questionnaire with six open-ended prompts was reviewed by an independent researcher, and then rewritten into a 32-item questionnaire by deletion of similar, repeated items.

The present questionnaire (see Appendices C, D and E) consisted of 25 items to be rated in a 5-level Likert scale ((1) *strongly agree*, (2) *agree*, (3) *neither agree nor disagree*, (4) *disagree*, (5) *strongly disagree*). The learners had to circle a number next to the statement which best described their opinion. However, the data were later converted to a three-point response scale ((1) *agree*, (2) *neither agree nor disagree*, (3) *disagree*) for the purposes of our descriptive analyses. The questionnaire consisted of three main parts: (a) general information, (b) quantitative section, and (c) qualitative section. In more detail, the first part dealt with learners' background information. The learners were asked about their L1, age, gender, last final English grade, and language background (Table 3). The second set of items (see Tables 4-5, 7-10, 12-13) combined statements about the importance of learning the English language and English grammar. The first sub-set of items 1-8 (see Tables 4 and 5) aimed to investigate learners' beliefs about the English language in general – whether learners wanted to master it, whether they saw it as important and necessary, how their country perceived it, and whether it was relevant for their future, be it in their country or abroad. The second sub-set of items 9-16 (Tables 7-10) presented an overview of learners' preferences for language learning areas and their beliefs about English grammar learning. In other words, the statements were designed to uncover learners' beliefs about the role of grammar and the place it occupies in EFL contexts (e.g. *Grammar is an essential component of foreign language learning*). The last sub-set of items ranging from 17 to 25 (Tables 12 and 13) investigated learners' beliefs about different techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar. The items covered learners' stance on the effectiveness of certain techniques and strategies (more traditional approaches vs. communicative approach), sources (e.g., *I use the Internet (videos, explanations etc.) to learn grammar*), their preference for techniques employed by their English teachers, and their past experiences (e.g. *I am pleased with how English grammar is taught in my school*). The last part of the questionnaire contained the following four open-ended prompts about grammar study which were adapted from Loewen et al. (2009): *I like studying*

*grammar because ..., I don't like studying grammar because ..., I like to be taught grammar in the following ways ..., I don't like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...*

The present questionnaire was first put together in English (Appendix C) and then translated into Croatian (Appendix D) by independent researchers from Croatia, and into Spanish (Appendix E) by another independent researcher from Spain. Later final changes to the questionnaire and the introductory part of the Spanish version were translated by the author of the thesis. This was done to ensure that research participants understood the questionnaire items as fully as possible. As stated, due to time constraints, a pilot study was not conducted, which is why seven ambiguously formulated items had to be subsequently excluded from the analyses. Two open-ended prompts (*I think knowing grammar is important because ...*, and *I struggle with grammar because ...*) were also later removed because they required the same responses as *I like studying grammar because ...* and *I don't like studying grammar because ...*.

The data for the present study were collected in June 2019 in Croatia and Spain. The access to schools was approved by the school administration. Questionnaires were distributed by the English teachers at the beginning of English classes. Learners were told that their responses would be anonymous, and their participation in the study was voluntary. They were also asked to give their consent by signing the document in Appendices A or B. Croatian learners were given the consent form in Croatian (Appendix A), while Spanish learners were given the same form in Spanish (Appendix B). According to the Code of Ethics for Research Involving Children (Grgurić and Ethics Committees, 2003), children aged 14 and above can give their own consent for the participation in the research. As for younger learners, their parents/guardians were asked for consent via the teachers. Learners were also asked to follow written guidelines on the first page of the questionnaire. Average completion time of the questionnaire was 13 minutes.

After collecting the data, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed to analyse the respective sections of the questionnaire. IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics, version 25, was used to identify the Likert-scale scores for the quantitative section (descriptive statistics and t-tests) (Pallant, 2002). Qualitative data were analysed by transferring learner responses to separate Microsoft Word documents (one for Croatian learners and the other for Spanish learners) and then by looking at recurring themes in order to generalize our findings.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Quantitative results

This section outlines the quantitative results of the study and refers to the research questions 1 and 2. It commences with learners' beliefs about the English language (subchapter 4.1.1) and then proceeds with learners' beliefs about grammar learning and teaching (subchapter 4.1.2).

#### 4.1.1. Learners' beliefs about the English language

This subchapter attempted to answer our first research question, which focused on the difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about the importance of the English language. The subchapter concludes with an independent samples t-test (Table 6) which was used to investigate whether there are significant differences between Croatian and Spanish learners in terms of their beliefs about the English language.

The data in Table 4 show Croatian learners' beliefs about the importance of learning English.

Table 4 *Croatian learners' beliefs about the importance of learning English*

Variable	No*	Min*	Max*	M*	SD*	Mo*	A* (%)	N* (%)	D* (%)
<b>Item 1:</b> English is an important language.	200	1.00	5.00	1.47	1.084	1	181 (90.5)	2 (1)	17 (8.5)
<b>Item 2:</b> English is the most important language nowadays.	200	1.00	5.00	1.77	1.115	1	166 (83)	16 (8)	18 (9)
<b>Item 3:</b> English is seen as an important language in my country.	199	1.00	5.00	2.26	1.080	2	132 (66)	48 (24)	19 (9.5)
<b>Item 4:</b> Knowing English is a necessity in today's world.	200	1.00	5.00	1.53	1.138	1	178 (89)	5 (2.5)	17 (8.5)
<b>Item 5:</b> My country values proficiency in English.	200	1.00	5.00	2.45	0.928	3	104 (52)	73 (36.5)	23 (11.5)
<b>Item 6:</b>							131	47	22

Mastering English will help me with my future employment in my country.	200	1.00	5.00	2.21	1.019	2	(65.5)	(23.5)	(11)
<b>Item 7:</b> Mastering English will help me with my future employment if working abroad.	200	1.00	5.00	1.47	1.120	1	178 (89)	4 (2)	18 (9)
<b>Item 8:</b> My goal is to speak English fluently	200	1.00	5.00	1.56	1.110	1	177 (88.5)	5 (2.5)	18 (9)

\*No= the number of respondents, Min= Minimum, Max= Maximum, M= mean value, SD= standard deviation, Mo= Mode. Values A, N, and D represent frequencies and percentages. A= collapsed scores for *Strongly agree* and *Agree*, N= *Neither agree nor Disagree*, D= collapsed scores for *Disagree* and *Strongly disagree*

According to the data, 181 Croatian learners agreed that English was an important language, which accounts for an impressive 90.5% of participants (item 1). What is more, 166 (83%) of them believed that it was the most important language nowadays (item 2). Almost 70% or 132 learners thought that English was considered an important language in Croatia (item 3). When asked if they believed English proficiency to be truly valued in Croatia, the positive responses somewhat decreased, as now 104 learners (52%) believed that being proficient in English was truly valued in Croatia, while 73 learners (36.5%) were undecided on the statement (item 5). Nonetheless, a slightly higher number of learners (131 individuals or 65.5%) believed that their English proficiency would be of help when looking for a job in Croatia (item 6). In comparison, as high as 89% of the learners (n=178) thought that mastering English would be helpful for their future employment if working abroad (item 7). Finally, the exact high percentage of learners (approx. 89%) agreed that knowing English was an essential requirement in today's world (n=178) (item 4) and that their goal was to speak English fluently (n=177) (item 8).

The results from Table 5 present Spanish learners' beliefs about the importance of learning English.

Table 5 Spanish learners' beliefs about the importance of learning English

Variable	No	Min	Max	M	SD	Mo	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)
<b>Item 1:</b> English is an important language.	200	1.00	5.00	1.61	0.907	1	175 (87.5)	16 (8)	9 (4.5)
<b>Item 2:</b>	200	1.00	5.00	2.05	1.001	2	146 (73)	36 (18)	18 (9)

English is the most important language nowadays.									
<b>Item 3:</b> English is seen as an important language in my country.	195	1.00	5.00	2.34	1.145	2	134 (67)	39 (19.5)	22 (11)
<b>Item 4:</b> Knowing English is a necessity in today's world.	200	1.00	5.00	1.65	0.890	1	174 (87)	17 (8.5)	9 (4.5)
<b>Item 5:</b> My country values proficiency in English.	200	1.00	5.00	2.22	0.952	2	136 (68)	45 (22.5)	19 (9.5)
<b>Item 6:</b> Mastering English will help me with my future employment in my country.	199	1.00	5.00	1.70	0.988	1	166 (83)	21 (10.5)	12 (6)
<b>Item 7:</b> Mastering English will help me with my future employment if working abroad.	199	1.00	5.00	1.28	0.722	1	194 (97)	1 (0.5)	4 (2)
<b>Item 8:</b> My goal is to speak English fluently	200	1.00	5.00	1.67	0.942	1	170 (85)	18 (9)	12 (6)

The results indicate that a significant number of Spanish learners (175 participants or 87.5%) saw English as an important language (item 1). While the percentage was slightly lower for those who thought that English was today's most important language (item 2), it was still high at 73% (146 participants). Of 195 learners, 134 (67%) said that English was seen as an important language in Spain (item 3). Almost the same number of learners (136 participants, 68%) believed that proficiency in English was considered valuable in Spain (item 5). However, positive responses increased for the next statement, where 166 learners (83%) stated that mastering English would help them with their future employment in Spain (item 6). Notably, only four learners (around 2%) did not think that being adept in English would be helpful to those who are planning to work abroad, which means that 194 learners (97%) held that opinion (item 7). Lastly, 174 Spanish learners (87%) said that knowing English was compulsory nowadays (item 4), while nearly the same number of learners (170 or 85%) expressed their desire to be fluent in English (item 8).

An independent samples t-test (Table 6) was conducted in order to investigate if there was any statistically significant difference between Croatian and Spanish learners in terms of their beliefs about the English language (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 6 *Independent samples t-test: difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about the English language*

t	0.330
df	344.982
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.741

Results (Table 6) indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the two groups of learners when it comes to their beliefs about the importance of learning English ( $p > 0.05$ ). This conclusion and the data in Tables 4 and 5 indicated that both Croatian and Spanish learners regarded English as a global, useful and highly important language. Although no significant differences were found since items 1, 5, 8 – and especially items 3 and 4 – indicated that learners shared the same beliefs, items 2, 6 and 7 did suggest slight differences in learners' beliefs. Accordingly, Croatian learners were more convinced about English language being the most important language nowadays<sup>23</sup>, while Spanish learners were more convinced that English knowledge would help them in landing a job, either in Spain or abroad.

#### **4.1.2. Learners' beliefs about grammar learning and teaching**

The present subchapter deals with the second research question which consists of two supporting questions. It is, therefore, devoted to presenting the results of learners' beliefs about learning and teaching English grammar.

First subsection (4.1.2.1) refers to the first supporting question (*establishing whether there is a significant difference in how Croatian and Spanish learners view English grammar and its importance in their respective contexts*). By comparing learners' preferences for language learning areas, we wanted to establish the importance of grammar amongst other areas as reported by

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<sup>23</sup> This finding is not surprising considering the worldwide influence and importance of the Spanish language, as mentioned in section 2.1 of chapter 2.

learners (see Tables 7 and 8). Second subsection (4.1.2.2) also deals with the first supporting question (see Tables 9 and 10). The last subsection (4.1.2.3) outlines results dealing with the second supporting question of the second research question (*establishing whether there is a significant difference in Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about different techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar*) (see Tables 12 and 13).

The statistical significance of the observed differences was determined by means of independent samples t-tests for between-group comparisons, which are presented in the final part of subsections 4.1.2.2 and 4.1.2.3 (see Tables 11 and 14).

#### 4.1.2.1. Learners' preference for language learning areas

Questionnaire item 9 (see Appendix C) aimed to investigate how the learners rate grammar, vocabulary and language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) based on their preferences (Tables 7 and 8). The learners had to circle the number which best described their opinion where '1' meant 'like the least' and '5' 'like the most'.

Table 7 presents Croatian learners' preferences for English language learning areas.

Table 7 Croatian learners' preference for various English language areas

<b>Variable</b> N=200	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mo</b>
vocabulary	1.00	5.00	3.80	1.103	4
grammar	1.00	5.00	3.03	1.164	3
reading	1.00	5.00	4.13	1.056	5
writing	1.00	5.00	3.51	1.130	4
listening	1.00	5.00	3.95	1.142	5
speaking	1.00	5.00	4.41	1.023	5

As data in Table 7 show, grammar was the least favourite language area among Croatian learners (M=3.03, SD=1.164). The learners reported that writing was their second least favourite area (M=3.51, SD=1.130), followed by vocabulary (M=3.80, SD=1.103) and listening (M=3.95, SD=1.142). On the other hand, reading was the second most liked language area by the learners



(M=4.13, SD=1.056). Finally, speaking was the best-rated language area, with a mean value of 4.41 (SD=1.023).

Table 8 presents Spanish learners' preferences for English language learning areas.

Table 8 *Spanish learners' preference for various English language areas*

<b>Variable</b> N=200	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mo</b>
vocabulary	1.00	5.00	2.61	1.260	3
grammar	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.186	3
reading	1.00	5.00	2.75	1.318	3
writing	1.00	5.00	2.71	1.210	2
listening	1.00	5.00	2.61	1.392	1
speaking	1.00	5.00	2.52	1.487	1

As visible from Table 8, Spanish learners' answers do not show a lot of variance in their preferred language areas. Firstly, the area they liked the least was speaking, with a mean value of 2.52 (SD=1.487). Next, speaking was followed by both vocabulary (SD=1.260) and listening (SD=1.392) that were rated as the second least favorite language areas (M=2.61). Writing came third with a mean value of 2.71 (SD=1.210). The language areas the learners liked the most were reading and grammar with mean values of 2.75 (SD=1.318) and 2.93 (SD=1.186) respectively.

What the results in Tables 7 and 8 indicate is that there are differences in Croatian and Spanish learners' ratings of English language learning areas. Most importantly, Croatian learners rated grammar as the language area they liked the least (M=3.03, SD=1.164). Spanish learners rated grammar the highest (M=2.93, SD=1.186) alongside reading; however, no language area averaged above 3 out of 5. Furthermore, Croatian learners prioritized speaking (M=4.41, SD=1.023) over other language areas whilst Spanish learners rated it the lowest among the six (M=2.52, SD=1.487). Their different preferences are also evident from Mo values for both speaking and listening; Croatian learners most frequently opted for 'like the most' (5) for listening and speaking, whereas Spanish students rated them the lowest (1). However, it must be noted that Spanish learners, unlike Croatian learners, poorly rated all the language areas ( $M \leq 2.93$ ) and showed very little variance in their responses. We may therefore conclude that Spanish learners

disliked all language areas almost equally based on their scores<sup>24</sup>, while Croatian learners showed preference for speaking and reading as well as dislike for grammar and writing.

#### 4.1.2.2. Beliefs about the importance of grammar

Table 9 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of Croatian learners' beliefs about the importance of English grammar.

Table 9 Croatian learners' beliefs about the importance of English grammar

Variable	No	Min	Max	M	SD	Mo	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)
<b>Item 10:</b> My goal is to master English grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.658	5	85 (42.5)	16 (8)	99 (49.5)
<b>Item 11:</b> In order to be fluent in English you need to have near perfect grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.296	4	67 (33.5)	47 (23.5)	86 (43)
<b>Item 12:</b> Good learners of a second language usually know a lot of grammar rules.	198	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.388	2	76 (38)	40 (20)	82 (41)
<b>Item 13:</b> Grammar is irrelevant in everyday communication.	199	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.274	3	63 (31.5)	60 (30)	76 (38)
<b>Item 14:</b> If you want to learn a language, you need to learn grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.328	2*	74 (37)	36 (18)	90 (45)
<b>Item 15:</b> Grammar is an essential component of foreign language learning.	197	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.283	3	67 (33.5)	51 (25.5)	79 (39.5)

<sup>24</sup> It is worth pointing out that grammar as the best rated language area according to Spanish learners (M=2.93, SD=1.186) still had a slightly lower mean score than when rated as the least liked language area by Croatian learners (M=3.03, SD=1.164).

<b>Item 16:</b> Mastering English grammar will help me with my future employment.	200	1.00	5.00	2.99	1.369	2	81 (40.5)	43 (21.5)	76 (38)
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\*Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

Almost half of the Croatian learners (99 participants or 49.5%) stated that mastering English grammar was not their goal, while almost 43% (85 participants) answered in the affirmative, stating that it was their goal (item 10). Also, 43% (86 participants) believed that he/she was not required to master grammar to be fluent in English (item 11). Additionally, 90 learners (45%) held the belief that learning grammar was not necessary for learning a new language, whilst 74 (37%) held the opposite belief (item 14). Similarly, almost 40% of them (79 participants) did not agree with the statement that grammar was an essential component of foreign language learning, whereas around 33% (67 participants) had opposing views (item 15). A somewhat higher number of learners (76 or 38%) believed that good learners of a second language normally know a lot of grammar rules. Even more importantly, an even larger portion of learners (82 or 41%) answered negatively to the said proposition (item 12). When it comes to the role of grammar in different contexts to achieve different purposes, 76 (38%) learners thought that grammar was relevant in day-to-day communication, 63 (around 31%) thought it was irrelevant, and 60 (30%) had a neutral attitude (item 13). When considering the importance of mastering English grammar for their future employment, 81 (approximately 40%) learner said that it would be beneficial for them while 76 (38%) believed that it would not be beneficial (item 16).

The results examining Spanish learners' beliefs about the importance of English grammar are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10 *Spanish learners' beliefs about the importance of English grammar*

Variable	No	Min	Max	M	SD	Mo	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)
<b>Item 10:</b> My goal is to master English grammar.	199	1.00	5.00	1.86	0.988	1	160 (80)	27 (13.5)	12 (6)
<b>Item 11:</b> In order to be fluent in English you need to have near perfect grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	2.03	0.760	2	152 (76)	42 (21)	6 (3)

<b>Item 12:</b> Good learners of a second language usually know a lot of grammar rules.	199	1.00	5.00	1.97	0.882	2	152 (76)	40 (20)	7 (3.5)
<b>Item 13:</b> Grammar is irrelevant in everyday communication.	200	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.272	3	71 (35.5)	51 (25.5)	78 (39)
<b>Item 14:</b> If you want to learn a language, you need to learn grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	1.80	0.667	2	180 (90)	16 (8)	4 (2)
<b>Item 15:</b> Grammar is an essential component of foreign language learning.	198	1.00	5.00	1.90	0.888	2	166 (83)	28 (14)	4 (2)
<b>Item 16:</b> Mastering English grammar will help me with my future employment.	200	1.00	5.00	1.70	0.821	1	176 (88)	19 (9.5)	5 (2.5)

Most of the learners (160 participants or 80%) expressed their intention to perfect English grammar (item 10). In accordance with that, 152 (76%) of them thought that a person's grammar needs to be near perfect if they are to be considered fluent in English. Only six learners (3%) thought the opposite (item 11). Very few learners (four participants or 2%) believed that it was not necessary to study grammar to learn a new language. Following that, 180 (90%) answered affirmatively (item 14). Moreover, 166 (83%) of them agreed that grammar was crucial in the process of learning a new language, and again a very low percentage of the learners (four learners or 2%) answered in the negative (item 15). Adding to that, most of them (152 learners or 76%) were of the opinion that good learners of a foreign language usually know a large number of grammar rules (item 12). Almost 40% of the learners (n=78) believed that grammar was important in everyday communication, while close to 36% (n=71) thought the opposite (item 13). When asked about whether being good at grammar might be useful in getting a job, the majority of learners (176 learners or 88%) answered positively, with only around 2% (5 learners) thinking grammar would not be of help (item 16).

In order to investigate if there is any statistically significant difference between Croatian and Spanish learners in terms of their beliefs about English grammar, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the groups of learners (Table 11).

Table 11 *Independent samples t-test: difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about English grammar*

t	14.426
df	303.406
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

The results (Table 11) showed that Croatian and Spanish learners differed significantly in their responses on the issue of English grammar ( $p < 0.05$ ). Both t-test and data in Tables 9 and 10 showed that Spanish learners valued grammar significantly more than Croatian learners<sup>25</sup>. For instance, when asked whether they need to have near perfect grammar to be considered fluent in English (item 11), only 33.5% of Croatian learners agreed with the statement, while more than 40% disagreed. Spanish learners, on the other hand, overwhelmingly agreed with the claim (76%), with only 3% disagreeing. An even greater degree of mismatch in their views is found in item 14 (*If you want to learn a language, you need to learn grammar*). While only 37% of Croatian learners thought it true, as high as 90% of Spanish learners expressed their agreement. The only exception to their expressed levels of disagreement was found in item 13 (*Grammar is irrelevant in everyday communication*) where approximately one third of both groups of learners agreed and disagreed with the statement.

#### 4.1.2.3. *Beliefs about techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching grammar*

The data from Table 12 examine Croatian learners' beliefs about different techniques<sup>26</sup>, strategies and sources of English language grammar learning and teaching.

<sup>25</sup> This is also evident in Tables 7 and 8.

<sup>26</sup> Techniques are "implementational" – that which actually takes place in a classroom. They must be consistent with a method, and thus with an approach, too (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Table 12 *Croatian learners' beliefs about techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mo</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>
<b>Item 17:</b> I find coursebook grammar explanations (and explicit rules) useful.	200	1.00	5.00	2.99	1.262	2	78 (39)	51 (25.5)	71 (35.5)
<b>Item 18:</b> I learn grammar rules by heart.	200	1.00	5.00	3.19	1.335	3	65 (32.5)	54 (27)	81 (40.5)
<b>Item 19:</b> I learn grammar more effectively if it is presented in context.	198	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.582	5	87 (43.5)	26 (13)	85 (42.5)
<b>Item 23:</b> I learn grammar on my own, outside of class.	200	1.00	5.00	2.87	1.350	2	88 (44)	44 (22)	68 (34)
<b>Item 24:</b> I use the Internet (videos, explanations etc.) to learn grammar.	199	1.00	5.00	2.97	1.574	1	89 (44.5)	30 (15)	80 (40)
<b>Item 25:</b> I prefer learning grammar through authentic texts and real-life tasks.	197	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.454	3	79 (39.5)	43 (21.5)	75 (37.5)
<b>Item 20:</b> I am pleased with how English grammar is taught in my school.	199	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.468	1	87 (43.5)	33 (16.5)	79 (39.5)
<b>Item 21:</b> Grammar is predominant in my English classes.	200	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.113	3	60 (30)	76 (38)	64 (32)
<b>Item 22:</b> I want my English classes to focus on communication rather than on grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	3.01	1.423	3	74 (37)	52 (26)	74 (37)

Almost 40% of Croatian EFL learners (n=78) said they found coursebook grammar explanations and explicit rules useful, while closely to 36% (n=71) found them unhelpful (item 17). However, almost the same number of learners (81 learners or approx. 40%) said they did not tend to learn grammar rules by heart whilst 65 learners (approximately 33%) said they did (item 18). On the other hand, when asked about their tendencies to learn grammar outside of the school setting, 88 learners (44%) said they did learn grammar on their own (item 23). Equally, 89 (around 44%) learners said they used the Internet to learn grammar (item 24). Furthermore, the same percentage of learners – around 44% (87 learners) – claimed that they were more successful in learning grammar when it was presented in context. However, 85 (around 43%) learners were not of the same opinion – they did not find it easier to learn grammar in context (item 19). On the same note, close to 40% of the learners (n=79) preferred learning grammar through authentic texts and real-life tasks, whereas close to 38% of them (n=75) did not prefer authentic texts and real-life tasks when learning grammar (item 25).

Items 20, 21 and 22 dealt with Croatian EFL learners’ beliefs about how English grammar was taught to them. Hence, they were grouped together in Table 12, irrespective of their ordering in the questionnaire. Approximately 44% of Croatian learners (n=87) were satisfied with how English grammar was taught in their schools. However, at the same time, almost 40% of them (n=79) were not satisfied (item 20). When asked about whether their English classes were mainly focusing on grammar, the largest number of learners remained neutral. Most learners were undecided on the statement (almost 40% or 76 learners). Out of the remaining 124 learners, 64 learners stated that grammar was not predominant (32%), while the other 60 (30%) said that it was (item 21). The number of learners who said they wished for their English classes to focus more on communication than on grammar and those who provided a negative response was the same (74 learners or 37%) (item 22).

The data in Table 13 present Spanish learners’ beliefs about various techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar.

Table 13 *Spanish learners’ beliefs about techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mo</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>
<b>Item 17:</b>									

I find coursebook grammar explanations (and explicit rules) useful.	200	1.00	5.00	2.36	1.037	2	124 (62)	45 (22.5)	31 (15.5)
<b>Item 18:</b> I learn grammar rules by heart.	199	1.00	5.00	3.02	1.199	3	72 (36)	63 (31.5)	64 (32)
<b>Item 19:</b> I learn grammar more effectively if it is presented in context.	200	1.00	5.00	2.34	0.979	2	120 (60)	59 (29.5)	21 (10.5)
<b>Item 23:</b> I learn grammar on my own, outside of class.	200	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.321	4	72 (36)	43 (21.5)	85 (42.5)
<b>Item 24:</b> I use the Internet (videos, explanations etc.) to learn grammar.	200	1.00	5.00	2.75	1.407	2	102 (51)	30 (15)	68 (34)
<b>Item 25:</b> I prefer learning grammar through authentic texts and real-life tasks.	199	1.00	5.00	2.41	1.103	2	118 (59)	51 (25.5)	30 (15)
<b>Item 20:</b> I am pleased with how English grammar is taught in my school.	200	1.00	5.00	2.54	1.055	2	108 (54)	53 (26.5)	39 (19.5)
<b>Item 21:</b> Grammar is predominant in my English classes.	199	1.00	5.00	2.32	0.901	2	129 (64.5)	53 (26.5)	17 (8.5)
<b>Item 22:</b> I want my English classes to focus on communication rather than on grammar.	199	1.00	5.00	2.08	1.034	1	135 (67.5)	51 (25.5)	13 (6.5)

Most Spanish EFL learners (124 learners or 62%) saw grammar explanations and explicit rules as being useful (item 17). Nonetheless, only around half of that number (72 learners or 36%) admitted to learning grammar rules by heart. About 32% of the learners (n=64) said they either did not learn them by heart (n=64) or were undecided (n=63) (item 18). Around 43% (n=85) did not have a habit of learning grammar on their own, outside of school, whilst only 36% (n=72) said they did (item 23), and yet approximately half of the learners (102 learners or 51%) said they used the Internet, such as videos and explanations, to practice grammar (item 24). Besides that, 120



learners (60%) were better at learning grammar when it was presented in context, with 59 (almost 30%) of them expressing a neutral view (item 19). What is more, practically the same number of the learners (n=118 or 59%) said they preferred learning grammar with the help of authentic texts and real-life activities, and 51 (nearly 26%) learners held a neutral opinion (item 25).

Items 20, 21 and 22 refer to Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about how English grammar was taught to them. This is why they were grouped together in Table 13. More than half of the learners (n=108 or 54%) were pleased with how grammar was taught in their schools. On the contrary, 39 (close to 20%) of the learners expressed disagreement, and 53 (27%) opted for a neutral view (item 20). Moreover, an even larger number of learners (n=129 or 64.5%) said that grammar was prevailing in their English classes (item 21). When asked about whether they would like their English classes to focus mostly on communication, the majority of the learners (n=135 or near 68%) answered in the affirmative, whereas 51 learners (closely 26%) remained detached to any option (item 22).

To determine if the difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching grammar is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was used (Table 14).

Table 14 *Independent samples t-test: difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar*

t	7.189
df	372.206
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' views on techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar ( $p < 0.05$ ). Hence the results in Table 14 together with the data in Tables 12 and 13 pointed out that Croatian learners did not have a strong preference for one specific set of techniques/strategies of grammar teaching and learning while Spanish learners were leaning towards less structured instruction. The results on the whole are somewhat difficult to explain. Namely, although Spanish learners expressed their wants for more communication in the classroom, almost 65% of them claimed grammar was predominant in their classes (item 21) and

more than half (54%) said they were pleased with how it was taught in their school (item 20). The majority (62%) also found coursebook grammar explanations (and explicit rules) useful (item 17). It was even more difficult to draw any firm conclusions about Croatian learners' preferences, as ~30-45% agreed and disagreed on all of the above statements. This is why we had to look at the mode (Mo) to find out the most frequently chosen answers (from 1 for *strongly agree* to 5 for *strongly disagree*). For instance, for item 19 (*I learn grammar more effectively if it is presented in context*), the percentages of agreement and disagreement were almost the same (approx. 44% and 43%), but Mo (5) tells us that most Croatian EFL learners strongly disagreed with the proposition. Another example is item 20 (*I am pleased with how English grammar is taught in my school*) with very similar percentages for agreeing (approx. 44%) and disagreeing (40%) with the statement, but Mo (1) informs us that the largest number of learners opted for *strongly agree*. The only instance where most Spanish learners remained neutral was on the issue of learning grammar rules by heart (item 18), while for the rest of the answers (according to the Mo values) they leaned towards *agree*. The Croatian learners' apparent indecisiveness should encourage further investigation into their views on techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching grammar.

## 4.2. Qualitative results

In addition to the quantitative part of the questionnaire, learners were given four open-ended prompts so that we could get a more thorough insight into their beliefs about grammar. The prompts were adapted from Loewen et al. (2009), and the following layout was in part informed by theirs. They employed content analysis and sometimes included the percentages of the categories. As mentioned in subchapter 3.2.2 of chapter 3, we transferred learner responses from paper questionnaires to separate Microsoft Word documents (one for Croatian EFL learners and the other for Spanish EFL learners) and then looked at recurring themes. Most frequently mentioned themes were categorized and rewritten into a separate document. Since answers were not provided by all learners, and thus the total number of responses for each prompt varied, we decided not to include exact percentages of our results in the analysis. Response rates ranged from ~85% to ~97% across the four prompts. Learner answers were obtained in their respective mother tongues which were later translated into English for the purposes of our analysis. Themes that emerged from learner responses are outlined below, supported by some representative quotes. All

themes were addressed in order of how often they were mentioned by the participants, starting with the most-frequently mentioned ones.

The responses from Croatian learners to the prompt *I like studying grammar because ...* can be categorized into six themes in the following order: “the improvement of speaking skill,” “mastery of English,” “better future and career prospects,” “the usefulness of grammar,” “grammar as a fun and interesting activity,” “and a knack for languages/grammar.”

With regards to the most frequently mentioned topic (the improvement of speaking skill), learners made comments like “Grammar helps me to communicate more effectively,” “It helps me to express my ideas eloquently” and “It enables me to speak correctly and fluently.” Apart from better communication skills, many learners felt that grammar enabled them to master English. Following are representative examples of responses that demonstrate this theme: “Grammar provides a base to help us learn a language,” and “Learning a language requires learning grammar.”

The responses from Spanish learners to the prompt *I like studying grammar because ...* can be categorized into seven themes in the following order: “better future and career prospects,” “mastery of English,” “the improvement of speaking skill,” “the usefulness of grammar,” “grammar as a fun and interesting activity,” “increasing vocabulary,” and “improving writing skill.” Whereas the majority of Spanish learners wrote about the benefits of knowing grammar in terms of better future and career prospects, many also commented on grammar enabling them to learn the language. A few of the responses that expressed these two themes included the following: “I think it’s necessary to learn grammar if you want to find a good job or live abroad” and “Although I don’t like it, grammar knowledge is necessary if I want to learn a new language.”

Both Croatian and Spanish learners commented on the mastery of English, the improvement of speaking skill, better future and career prospects, the usefulness of grammar, and grammar as a fun and interesting activity, but Croatian learners commented most frequently about the improvement of speaking skill (followed by mastery of English), whereas better future and career prospects – followed by mastery of English – were generally the most frequently-mentioned themes for Spanish learners.

The responses from Croatian learners to the prompt *I don’t like studying grammar because ...* can be categorized into eight themes in the following order: “grammar as being boring,” “difficult,” “complicated,” “too much information (rules and exceptions),” “grammar as unintelligible,” “unnecessary,” “laziness,” and “a lack of concentration.”

The resounding comments Croatian learners made to the above prompt were “Grammar is (sometimes) boring” and “Grammar is (sometimes) difficult.” More than half of the learners used those two adjectives to describe grammar. A lot of the times they stressed that it was not always the case, so they used adverbs, such as “sometimes” and “at times” to specify it. Following those two themes were comments about too many complicated rules to memorize and exceptions to those rules that were equally difficult for them to comprehend and internalize.

The responses from Spanish learners to the prompt *I don't like studying grammar because ...* can be categorized into nine themes in the following order: “grammar as being difficult,” “boring,” “unintelligible,” “complicated,” “repetitive,” “too much (indistinguishable) information,” “confusing,” “anxiety,” and “laziness.”

Most Spanish learners complained about grammar being difficult and boring at times. Just like Croatian learners, Spanish learners also used adverbs of time like “sometimes” or “at times” to stress that they did not find the whole of English grammar difficult and boring. Other negative adjectives used to describe why they did not like grammar were “unintelligible,” “complicated,” “repetitive,” etc.

Both groups of learners described grammar as being boring, difficult, complicated, containing too much information, unintelligible, and them being lazy to practice it. What is more, the majority of both groups of learners concluded that they did not like learning grammar due to it being boring and difficult in the first place. The only difference was that more Croatian learners said it was boring while more Spanish learners said it was difficult.

The responses from Croatian learners to the prompt *I like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...* can be categorized into 11 themes in the following order: “communication,” “translation,” “examples,” “context,” “slow/clear/detailed explanations,” “watching movies/videos,” “reading,” “PPT,” “games,” “practice” and “worksheets.”

Many learners referred to activities which are a part of the communicative approach in teaching grammar – speaking and listening activities, conversations, debates, etc. Roughly the same number of learners preferred translation exercises (translating sentences and texts from Croatian to English and vice versa). One important factor here was the age of the learners – younger (primary school) learners were mostly in favour of communicative activities while older (secondary school) learners were mostly in line with translation activities.

The responses from Spanish learners to the prompt *I like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...* can be categorized into eight themes in the following order: “communication,” “examples,” “context,” “watching movies/videos,” “games,” “practice,” “slow/clear/detailed explanations,” and “lecturing in Spanish.”

In response to the third prompt, the majority of learners wrote that they preferred learning grammar through activities that involved communication and context or the use of (real-life) examples and situations. These learners made comments such as “I like when we work on a text involving real-life situations,” and “What works best for me is when our teacher slowly explains a new grammatical structure using examples and then we practice it in our next lesson or two.”

There was a strong correspondence of views between Croatian and Spanish learners regarding the need for communicative grammar instruction, teaching grammar in context and with the help of examples. One important difference was in the area of translation – while a lot of Croatian learners commented on the usefulness of translation activities, there were no such mentions by Spanish learners. However, both groups of learners agreed on some other ways of learning, too: watching movies/videos, slow/clear/detailed explanations, games and practice.

The responses from Croatian learners to the prompt *I don't like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...* can be categorized into six themes in the following order: “writing the rules down,” “rote learning,” “worksheets,” “reading,” “speaking” and “translation.”

The last prompt, *I don't like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...*, showed less variance in learners' responses with a total of six different themes. The majority of learners, however, stated that they did not like writing the rules down and rote learning. This was reflected through comments like: “I don't like it when we only write rules while half of the class doesn't understand anything,” “I hate having to memorize numerous pointless rules” and “when we have to simply copy rules from the board and then learn them by heart on our own.”

The responses from Spanish learners to the prompt *I don't like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...* can be categorized into six themes in the following order: “writing the rules down,” “rote learning,” “English-only instruction,” “books,” “speaking” and “reading.”

In response to this prompt, the resounding answer was “writing the rules down.” Many learners commented on writing-related activities, such as “writing a long list of bad examples” and “copying theory off of board with no examples.” Similarly, many learners expressed their dislike for “pure” memorization, saying “it is boring and useless.” A number of learners found English-

only instruction to be very difficult: “it’s impossible for me to learn if I don’t understand what the teacher is saying.”

Two common themes that were mostly mentioned by both Croatian and Spanish learners in relation to how grammar should not be taught were writing down and rote learning of grammar rules. The only difference was that more Spanish learners opted for writing the rules down while Croatian learners commented on both writing and rote learning of rules with the more or less same frequency. The learners also agreed on reading and speaking activities as their non-preferred ways of learning grammar.

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter, the findings which emerged from quantitative and qualitative analyses will be interpreted and analysed. The focus is on relating the findings to our research questions, the existing literature and previous studies. The chapter will also present pedagogical implications and recommendations for teaching practice. The limitations of the study and avenues for further research will be presented in the conclusion.

The aims of the present study were to investigate and compare beliefs of Croatian and Spanish EFL learners on the following issues: their views on the English language, on the place of grammar in language teaching and learning, as well as on the different techniques, strategies and sources used for grammar teaching and learning.

The first research question was formulated in order to investigate the assumption that learner beliefs are closely linked to learner backgrounds and teaching/learning contexts (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Pazaver and Wang, 2009). We also wanted to test Riley's (1989) argument that some beliefs about language (and learning) are culture-specific, and therefore, "understanding students' beliefs means understanding their world and their identity" (Riley, 1989, as cited in Barcelos, 2000: 42). This is why we planned on making a comparison between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about the importance of the English language (see Tables 4 and 5). In response to the said research question, we found no significant differences among learners (see Table 6). Both Croatian and Spanish EFL learners thought of English as a highly important language. What is more, 83% of Croatian learners and 73% of Spanish learners saw it as the world's most important language. They also deemed it necessary and valuable for their professional goals and were accordingly interested in speaking English fluently (specifically, 88.5% of Croatian learners and 85% of Spanish learners). This might point to the fact that they were extrinsically motivated to learn and speak English fluently. These findings are not surprising considering the "treatment" English has been getting in both countries for the past two decades. As was previously stated when considering educational contexts in subchapter 2.1. of chapter 2, both Croatia and Spain have been placing greater emphasis on foreign language learning since the 2000s, and particularly on English as the first foreign language (Arroyo Pérez et al., 2015; EF, 2013, 2015, 2017; Eurostat, 2019; *Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu školu*, 2006; Martinović, 2018; Poljaković and Martinović, 2009). The status of English in their respective countries

together with the role of English as a global language might have had a strong influence on learners' overall positive attitudes towards English and their aspiration to master it. Nonetheless, a large number of BALLI studies carried out worldwide has shown that EFL/ESL learners generally believe in the importance of English. In other words, they agreed that people in their countries perceive it as an important language and that the knowledge of English could increase their employability. This could again relate to their extrinsic motivation to speak it well as most believe that speaking fluent English could help them in landing a good job (e.g., Al Bataineh, 2019; Apairach and Vibulphol, 2015; Boakye, 2007; Chai, 2013<sup>27</sup>). Importantly, Martínez Agudo (2014) who used a questionnaire developed by Sakui and Gaies (1999) found that Spanish learners also generally agreed with the above statements. When we take into account our findings (see Tables 4, 5 and 6), the existing literature discussed in subchapter 2.1., and a number of BALLI studies, we can conclude that Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about English might be at least partially influenced by the context in which they learn EFL.

The purpose of the second research question was to investigate and compare Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about learning English grammar. In detail, we looked into (a) how Croatian and Spanish EFL learners view grammar and its importance in their respective contexts, and into (b) differences in Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about different techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar.

The answer to the second research question revealed that Croatian and Spanish EFL learners differed considerably in their responses on the issue of studying English grammar (see Tables 9 and 10). Spanish learners were found to value grammar significantly more than Croatian learners (see Table 11). This, however, does not mean that they reported liking or enjoying learning grammar. In fact, it was found that Spanish learners disliked all language areas more or less equally (see Table 8). This finding is in line with Hrgović (2012), who concluded that, on average, every second Croatian secondary school learner is reluctant to learn grammar. Even though the study did not go into the depths of finding out the reasons behind such beliefs, the author notes that they are likely due to previous inadequate teaching strategies they were exposed to, or the fact that most learners reported experiencing difficulties in grammar learning. Our finding of Spanish learners' disliking of grammar study also parallels findings of many other studies examining EFL/ESL

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<sup>27</sup> The rest of similar BALLI studies are mentioned in subchapter 2.3.2 of chapter 2.



learners' beliefs about grammar (e.g., Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Rahuma, 2016).

One of our important findings is that although learners did not enjoy studying grammar, they did value it. They believed grammar to be a crucial and unavoidable factor in foreign language learning. To be more precise, Spanish learners overwhelmingly agreed that one has to learn grammar to learn a language (90%), and that grammar is an essential component of foreign language learning (83%). It might be that their goal was to master grammar (80%) because they thought it would be of significant value for their future employment (88%). These learners perhaps considered the perceived instrumental value of English by believing their desired proficiency/grammatical accuracy would give them more chances of landing a good job. Our finding of Spanish EFL learners valuing grammar is in accordance with the results of previous research that found learners predominantly perceive grammar as effective and necessary (e.g., Al Bataineh, 2019; Apairach and Vibulphol, 2015; Ariogula, Unala and Onursala, 2009; Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Palacios Martínez, 2007; Rahuma, 2016; Schulz, 2001; Settar Abid, 2012; Šegedin and Semren, 2013). Conversely, Croatian learners not only rated grammar as the language area they liked the least (see Table 7), but they were also generally undecided<sup>28</sup> on all of the antecedent statements about the role of grammar in foreign language learning (see Table 9).

A likely explanation for this discrepancy in Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs might be due to varying levels of exposure to the TL in their EFL contexts. As was already mentioned in subchapter 2.1. of chapter 2, despite the ubiquity of English in Spanish formal educational settings and children starting learning it at a very young age (see Table 3), learners assumingly (as well as based on the author's personal and teaching experience) do not get enough out-of-school exposure to English since nearly all foreign content is dubbed to Spanish (e.g. live-action films, television series, animated films, games, web sites, computer software) (Palencia Villa, 2002). At the same time, Croatian children, who learn English in a subtitled country, are normally exposed to English more often and in a variety of informal settings (e.g., movies/series, the Internet, music, TV, radio, books) (e.g., Didović Baranac, Falkoni-Mjehović and Vidak, 2016; Ložnjak Fabjanović, 2017; Mihaljević Djigunović and Bagarić, 2007; Pavičić Takač and Bagarić

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<sup>28</sup> Undecided here refers to similar numbers of learners agreeing and disagreeing with the statements, as well as some choosing the middle ground.

Medve, 2015). It could even be argued that the Croatian context of English language learning shows features of an L2 learning context in regards to the amount and quality of out-of-school input (Pavičić Takač and Bagarić Medve, 2015). An important finding is that the answers provided in the general part of the questionnaire confirm this assumption (see Table 3). While over 70% of Spanish learners said they had learned English exclusively in school, an overwhelming majority of Croatian learners (~80%) stated that they had learned English in a number of different ways: in school, by listening to music, through movies, on the Internet, by reading books, etc. A very small number of learners mentioned only school.

Moreover, it was not only concluded that subtitling subconsciously encourages foreign language acquisition (e.g., Almeida and Costa, 2014; Araújo and Costa, 2013; Condinho Bravo, 2008; Čepon, 2011; European Commission, 2011; Jelić, 2012; Rupérez Micola et al., 2019), but also that subtitling countries have better foreign language competence than countries where foreign media is dubbed (e.g., Almeida and Costa, 2014; Araújo and Costa, 2013; Mitrović, 2012; Rupérez Micola et al., 2019). The sample of the present study found Croatian learners' average final English grade to be 4.4 out of 5, and Spanish learners' average grade 6.5 out of 10 (Table 3). Croatian learners, therefore, earned a “very good” grade, and came very close to “excellent,” whereas Spanish learners earned a “sufficient” grade. This finding is also in accordance with EF EPI rankings discussed in subchapter 2.1 of chapter 2 (e.g., EF, 2018). Specifically, the latest 2019 EF EPI showed that Spain was ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the world and 25<sup>th</sup> in Europe whereas Croatia was ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in the world and 12<sup>th</sup> in Europe (EF, 2018). Our findings might suggest that learners' beliefs about the usefulness of the TL together with constant exposure to the TL through media could lead to higher proficiency levels (see e.g., Almeida and Costa, 2014; Araújo and Costa, 2013; Buljan Culej, 2013; Mitrović, 2012; Rupérez Micola et al., 2019). This should, however, be further examined because – apart from the learners' final grades – we have no other “proof” of their English language competence.

Our second supporting question shed some light on the first supporting question, and more specifically, on the reasons behind learners' valuing of grammar. As reported by a large number of Spanish learners (64%), grammar was prevailing in their English classes and a slight majority of them (54%) was pleased with how grammar was taught in their school. Since they are not, on average, as exposed to English as Croatian learners and may not be aware of the potential benefits of such exposure, their past classroom experiences might explain why they held grammar

instruction in such high regards. A similar conclusion was made by Pazaver and Wang (2009) who reported that some participants' strong views about grammar being very important were based on their past learning experiences in countries where English is taught as a foreign language and more emphasis is placed on explicit grammar teaching. Rahuma (2016) and Loewen et al. (2009) asserted that foreign language learners might have preferred grammatical instruction over communication in cases where English was taught as a foreign language and thus no out-of-school exposure to the TL was provided. Following the same line of argument, Loewen et al. (2009) found that ESL learners who were able to engage in meaningful communication outside of class preferred communication instead of grammar. However, our results showed that most Spanish learners preferred communication over grammar (approx. 68%). This might be due to them seeing grammar as boring and difficult and therefore not wanting to study it, as is evident from our qualitative results. Nonetheless, 62% did find coursebook grammar explanations (and explicit rules) useful.

Additionally, neither Croatian nor Spanish learners showed high enthusiasm for autonomous learning. While 51% of Spanish learners did say they tended to learn grammar via Internet, only 36% admitted to learning it on their own. This parallels Palacios Martínez's (2007) claim about Spanish university learners not being used to working autonomously. Instead, "they assume they will be formally guided by the teacher and they experience confusion and lack of orientation when they have to take decisions on their own" (Palacios Martínez, 2007: 147). Croatian learners were slightly more inclined towards learning grammar on their own (44%) and via Internet (44.5%).

On the whole, our results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about techniques, strategies and sources of learning and teaching English grammar (see Table 14). Croatian learners did not have a strong preference for one specific set of techniques/strategies to language learning or teaching while Spanish learners preferred teaching and learning grammar in context and with the help of authentic texts and real-life tasks (59-60%). When it comes to results from other similar studies about learners' disposition towards different types of grammar instruction, the results are inconclusive like ours. Some learners favoured explicit grammar instruction over implicit instruction (e.g., Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Schulz, 2001; Rahuma, 2016), while others, like Spanish EFL learners (Martínez Agudo, 2014) and U.S. ESL learners (Loewen et al., 2009; Schulz, 1996), were more inclined towards communication and implicit instruction.

As we have pointed out earlier, we found that a slight majority of Spanish learners (54%) was pleased with how English grammar was taught in their school and that Spanish learners preferred implicit grammar instruction (59-60%), which reflects their preference for communication in their English classes (approx. 68%). However, 64% of Spanish learners said grammar was predominant in their classes. This might suggest that their teachers were teaching grammar implicitly or that learners were pleased with how grammar was taught in their school in spite of (explicit) grammar instruction being predominant. Considering that learners reported grammar being predominant, and that the only way of younger learners realizing this is if it was taught explicitly, it is more probable that they have misunderstood some questionnaire items or answered in terms of what they thought was appropriate and correct. For example, they might have reported being pleased with how English in general was taught in their school, not referring specifically to grammar. Also, Martínez Agudo (2014) commented on the grammar-translation method being widely employed in Spanish educational settings together with an over-emphasis on grammar explanation and translation. Therefore, there is a myriad of factors that might have contributed to this small inconsistency, including learners misinterpreting questionnaire items, learners liking their teachers, or learners being satisfied with the greater part of procedures and methods their teachers employed in the L2 classroom (excluding (explicit) grammar instruction).

In the main, it could be reasonably argued that differences between Croatian and Spanish learners on the issue of learning and teaching techniques/strategies/sources (supporting question 2.2) and the value learners place on grammar (supporting question 2.1), may be attributable to their distinct cultural and educational backgrounds/EFL contexts and past English learning experiences. Observations by Pazaver and Wang (2009) are in accordance with our findings, since they reported “that the value learners placed on grammar instruction depended on their current language proficiency along with their previous learning experiences and other cultural variables” (Pazaver and Wang, 2009: 31). Loewen et al. (2009) came to a very similar conclusion by stating that varying beliefs of different TL groups may be largely influenced by their previous language learning contexts. Kang (2017), along the same lines, concluded that the reason why Korean participants valued grammar practice might reflect the cultural aspect of Korean traditional grammar instruction. Although Schulz’s 2001 replication study of her 1996 study did not find any significant cross-cultural differences, slight differences were observed in that Colombian learners and teachers, unlike their U.S. colleagues, preferred explicit grammar instruction and corrective

feedback. Kang (2017) explained this by asserting that U.S. ESL learners had more negative attitudes towards traditional grammar teaching and error correction because of ESL tradition emphasizing implicit instruction through authentic communication. Apart from the above-mentioned studies, our findings are additionally supported by a wide range of evidence from research literature. Namely, it has been recognized that learners might be greatly affected by their past educational practices, EFL/ESL contexts and that opinions between learners from different educational/cultural backgrounds vary (e.g., McDonough, 1995; Negueruela-Azalora, 2011, as cited in Apairach and Vibulphol, 2015; Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006; Pašalić and Sinovčić Trumbić, 2014; Tumposky, 1991; Yang, 1992).

Research question three (*Croatian and Spanish learners' likes and dislikes with regards to grammar learning and teaching*) dealt with the qualitative analysis part of the study. Our qualitative results supported the thesis' overall findings by confirming our quantitative analysis findings. They also, as expected, added greater insight into the second research question (especially supporting question 2.2). Qualitative data shed light on four main concepts. First, both Croatian and Spanish learners felt that English grammar enabled them to learn the language and to improve their speaking skill as well as their career prospects. Second, the majority of both groups of learners complained about not liking grammar due to it being boring and difficult. Several studies have found that learners did not enjoy studying grammar due to similar reasons (e.g., Hrgović, 2012; Jean and Simard, 2011; Kang, 2017; Loewen et al., 2009; Rahuma, 2016). Third, as seen in some previous studies with Spanish participants<sup>29</sup> (e.g., Martínez Agudo, 2014), when answering to the prompt *I like to be taught grammar in the following ways ...*, Spanish learners expressed the need for communicative activities, teaching grammar in context and with the help of examples. Importantly, learners' answers showed that Spanish learners prioritized improving communication over grammar, while Croatian learners did not have a strong preference for one specific type of instruction. While quantitative results showed that some preferred implicit and some explicit instruction, qualitative analysis pointed out age as the main factor when deciding on the preferred instruction. Primary school Croatian learners preferred implicit grammar teaching and integrating grammar into communicative activities – speaking and listening activities, conversations, games, etc., while secondary school learners preferred translation exercises. It might be that older learners felt more pressure and need to perfect their knowledge of grammar

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<sup>29</sup> The same findings were reported by some studies with U.S. participants (e.g., Loewen et al., 2009; Schulz, 1996).

due to the approaching of *Državna matura* exam at the end of their secondary education (see subchapter 2.1 of chapter 2). Finally, both Croatian and Spanish learners did not like writing down and rote learning of grammar rules. These observations are similar to the conclusions of studies discussed earlier (for example, Loewen et al., 2009).

## 5.1. Pedagogical implications

Researchers have suggested that investigating learner beliefs means focusing on what learners *know* as opposed to what they *must know* (Freeman, 1991, as cited in Barcelos, 2003). If teachers do not know what their learners believe about their own learning, how can they work out possible conflicting views, come up with solutions and in that way, optimize the language learning experience? Šegedin and Semren (2013) pointed out that very few teachers are ready to put in the extra time and effort to find out what their learners believe about the language learning process. This is not surprising as even researchers and theorists disregarded beliefs as unscientific and therefore irrelevant (Barcelos, 2000). However, we are of the opinion that if beliefs are unexplored and thus unaddressed by teachers, they might become a serious impediment in the overall language development. After all, beliefs and motivation are the two factors which most influence how language learning process unfolds (Šegedin and Semren, 2013). If we take into account the fact that many learners are not satisfied with their previous language learning experiences (e.g., Martínez Agudo, 2014; Rahuma, 2016), teachers should first address those issues. In other words, conflicts between learners' preferred and received instruction should be reduced. Some recommendations for teaching practice, as inferred from the present study results and discussion, include the following:

- (a) Employing both explicit and implicit activities in language classrooms should give the best results. For instance, having learners learn and focus on the TL form in class (e.g. by filling out worksheets) can be complemented by learners reading or watching something they enjoy for homework. Both activities are efficient and thus should be encouraged while taking into account learners' age and level of proficiency. This is supported not just by our findings, but also current research literature (e.g., Ellis, 2015; Klapper and Rees, 2003; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Rahman and Rashid, 2017; Spada and Tomita, 2010);
- (b) Teachers should, by means of class discussion, dialogue and anonymous surveys, find out and acknowledge learners' beliefs about language learning and possible problems they

have encountered, and then, if needed, provide them with alternative language learning strategies and solutions. It is very likely that learners are not aware of all the different strategies and forms of learning and their benefits (e.g. incidental learning through subtitled materials). Discussing *why* something is effective and beneficial to them, instead of instructing learners on what they *must* do, should give better results. In this way, learners would be more susceptible to accepting *recommendations* and less prone to rejecting authorities' directives. Expecting learners to accept teachers' methods and instructions uncritically is wishful thinking and, in many cases, counterproductive;

- (c) Language learning materials and methods should meet specific needs and interests of each country's learners (Luján-García, 2012) as different EFL/ESL contexts, cultures and ethnicities play an important role in the language learning process. As suggested by our findings, Croatian learners probably do not require the same teaching approaches and practices as do Spanish learners. This entails teachers should know not only their learners' beliefs, but also their (previous) language learning contexts, and preferably their L1s;
- (d) As follows from the previous recommendation, in environments where TL input is somewhat limited (normally in EFL contexts and particularly "dubbing" countries), teachers should encourage learners to read for pleasure, watch TV, series and movies in the original version, to set their Internet browsers and mobile phones in the TL, etc. By making TL a part of their daily routine, learners' vocabulary as well as listening and reading comprehension are likely to improve (e.g., Matielo, D'Ely and Baretta, 2015; Rupérez Micola et al., 2019);
- (e) Translation should not be dismissed as obsolete and dated. As Condinho Bravo (2008) pointed out, "the place of translation in foreign-language teaching/learning has caused much controversy over the years because the nature of translation has been frequently misunderstood and its function in the learning process not adequately specified" (Condinho Bravo, 2008: 4). We would suggest screen translation in the form of subtitled materials (interlingual for beginner and intermediate levels and intralingual for advanced levels) as a useful language learning activity in non-instructional settings (e.g., for homework purposes), and a complement to a more structured and systematic instruction in the classroom. In this context, subtitled material would serve as an enjoyable activity with the added value of spontaneous language acquisition;

- (f) Learner autonomy should be promoted. Teachers should encourage learners to make use of different resources, such as the Internet, and not to depend heavily on their teachers.



## 6. Conclusion

The present study has discussed learner beliefs in EFL contexts of Croatia and Spain. The aims were to investigate and compare beliefs of Croatian and Spanish EFL learners about the English language, with emphasis on learner beliefs about grammar.

Two significant outcomes of our quantitative analysis showed that both Croatian and Spanish learners thought of English as a highly important language and that their beliefs differed considerably on the issue of grammar teaching and learning. Croatian learners did not have a strong preference for one specific set of techniques/strategies while Spanish learners preferred a less structured instruction which makes use of authentic texts and real-life tasks.

Analysis of the qualitative data showed that most participants believed English grammar enabled them to learn the language and improve their speaking skill as well as their career prospects. Nonetheless, the majority complained about not liking grammar study due to it being boring and difficult. Spanish learners were found to prioritize improving their communication skills over grammar, while Croatian learners did not have a strong preference for one specific type of instruction. Writing down and rote learning of grammar rules were most disliked by both learner groups.

The findings in this thesis are subject to some limitations. Four of them are related to the nature of our instrument. First, it is probable that participants did not interpret all the items as researchers intended (Barcelos, 2000). For instance, some learners reported not understanding the last two prompts, although the questionnaires were written in their L1s. Second, participants might have responded in terms of what they thought was appropriate and correct, and not what they believed was true; a small inconsistency was found when analysing Spanish learners' beliefs about items 19-22 and 25. Third, as statements are predetermined by the researchers, they ignore participants' own ideas (Barcelos, 2000). It is also possible that learners were disinterested and did not give much thought to the meaning behind the statements. Finally, our sample was not entirely comparable owing to a slight gender and age imbalance among Croatian and Spanish learners. Even though the findings of the study cannot necessarily be generalized beyond these learner populations, they contribute to the understanding of learner beliefs and their complex interplay with and dependency on other factors, such as EFL contexts.

In conclusion, the results of quantitative and qualitative research *en masse* suggest that differences in beliefs of Croatian and Spanish EFL learners may be attributable to their distinct cultural and educational backgrounds/EFL contexts and past English learning experiences.

Further research is necessary to allow for the exploration of learner beliefs with under-investigated populations, such as primary school learners. Studies may want to opt for a more in-depth analysis of beliefs with the use of interviews. Researchers might also be interested in investigating learner beliefs and experiences regarding the exposure to the target language and its impact on their language learning. Longitudinal studies could be helpful in testing the firmness and durability of learner beliefs over longer periods of time.

## Summary

This thesis investigated Croatian and Spanish EFL learners' beliefs about English language learning, with a focus on learner beliefs about grammar. The first part of the thesis discusses the educational contexts of Croatia and Spain and presents a brief historical overview of English language teaching methods. The theoretical part also includes the most crucial developments in foreign language grammar teaching and an overview of learner beliefs definitions. The theoretical part concludes with a summary of relevant studies. The second part of the thesis describes the research into learner beliefs. A total of 200 Croatian and 200 Spanish primary- and secondary-school learners aged 12 to 18 participated in the study. The aims of the study were to investigate and compare beliefs of Croatian and Spanish EFL learners about the English language with a special emphasis on grammar. Quantitative analysis results revealed that although from distinct learner backgrounds and EFL contexts, Croatian and Spanish learners shared the same beliefs about the importance of the English language by perceiving it as today's most important language. The results revealed significant differences between Croatian and Spanish learners' beliefs about grammar. More specifically, the main findings suggest that Spanish learners value grammar more than Croatian learners. In general, Spanish learners preferred learning grammar in context and with the help of authentic texts and real-life tasks, while Croatian learners did not have a strong preference for one specific set of grammar teaching and learning techniques and strategies. Themes that emerged from the qualitative data indicate that both groups of learners regarded grammar as difficult and boring, yet necessary in the overall language learning process. The thesis concludes with the pedagogical implications, limitations of the present study and suggestions for future similar studies.

Key words: learner beliefs; grammar; Croatian EFL learners; Spanish EFL learners; primary school; secondary school

## Sažetak

Ovaj rad istražuje vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika o učenju engleskoga, s posebnim naglaskom na učenička vjerovanja o gramatici. U prvom dijelu rada opisan je obrazovni kontekst u Hrvatskoj i Španjolskoj i dan kratki povijesni pregled metoda poučavanja engleskoga. Teorijski dio uključuje i osnovne odrednice u poučavanju gramatike stranoga jezika te donosi pregled definicija učeničkih vjerovanja. Teorijski dio završava pregledom relevantnih istraživanja. U drugom dijelu rada prikazano je provedeno istraživanje. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo ukupno 200 hrvatskih i 200 španjolskih osnovnoškolaca i srednjoškolaca u dobi od 12 do 18 godina. Ciljevi istraživanja bili su utvrditi i usporediti vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika o engleskom jeziku, te detaljnije ispitati učenička vjerovanja vezana za gramatiku. Rezultati kvantitativne analize pokazuju da, usprkos razlikama u obrazovnom kontekstu, hrvatski i španjolski učenici imaju slična vjerovanja o važnosti engleskoga jezika odnosno smatraju ga najvažnijim jezikom današnjice. Rezultati ukazuju na značajne razlike između vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika o gramatici. Španjolski učenici, naime, u većoj mjeri nego hrvatski učenici smatraju da je gramatika važan element učenja stranoga jezika. Španjolski učenici preferiraju učenje gramatike u kontekstu i kroz izvorne tekstove i zadatke vezane za situacije iz stvarnoga života, dok hrvatski učenici ne izražavaju jasan stav vezano za načine i strategije učenja i poučavanja gramatike. Teme spomenute u okviru kvalitativne analize pokazuju da obje grupe učenika gramatiku smatraju teškom i dosadnom, ali i korisnom, odnosno „sredstvom koje opravdava cilj“ u učenju jezika. Na kraju rada raspravlja se o pedagoškim implikacijama te se navode ograničenja istraživanja i daju smjernice za buduća slična istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: učenička vjerovanja; gramatika; hrvatski učenici engleskoga kao stranoga jezika; španjolski učenici engleskoga kao stranoga jezika; osnovna škola; srednja škola

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Informed consent form in Croatian

### OBRAZAC SUGLASNOSTI

Drage učenice i učenici,

upitnik koji ćete danas ispuniti dio je diplomskoga rada pod naslovom *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar* (Vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika o učenju engleskoga jezika s naglaskom na gramatiku) koji pišem na Odsjeku za engleski jezik i književnost Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Splitu.

Za ispunjavanje upitnika bit će vam potrebno oko 10 minuta. U skladu s Etičkim kodeksom istraživanja s djecom, sudjelovanje u istraživanju je u potpunosti dobrovoljno i anonimno. Vaši će odgovori biti korišteni isključivo za potrebe ovog istraživanja te će biti dostupni samo mojoj mentorici doc. dr. sc. Danijeli Šegedin Borovina te meni osobno. Molim vas da na pitanja odgovorite iskreno i pažljivo te vam unaprijed zahvaljujem na uloženom trudu i vremenu.

Srdačno,  
Ina Krip

Ja, \_\_\_\_\_, pristajem na sudjelovanje u istraživanju za diplomski rad pod naslovom *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar* (Vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika o učenju engleskoga jezika s naglaskom na gramatiku).

Potpis učenika/učenice:

Potpis odgovornog istraživača:

Mjesto i datum:

## Appendix B: Informed consent form in Spanish

### FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO

Queridos/as alumnos y alumnas,

El cuestionario que rellenareis hoy forma parte de mi proyecto de fin de máster llamado *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar* (*Creencias de los estudiantes croatas y españoles de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) acerca del aprendizaje del inglés: El enfoque gramático*). En este proyecto estoy trabajando con el Departamento de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad de Split.

Se necesitan unos 10 minutos aproximadamente para completarlo. De acuerdo con el Código de Ética para la investigación en educación con población juvenil, su participación es totalmente voluntaria y anónima. La información que proporcionéis únicamente se utilizará para el desarrollo de este proyecto y sólo tendremos acceso mi tutora y yo.

Por favor, rellenen este cuestionario atentamente para que sea lo más real y veraz posible y les agradezco de antemano su esfuerzo y tiempo.

Saludos cordiales,

Ina Krip

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_, acepto participar voluntariamente en el estudio llamado *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar* (*Creencias de los estudiantes croatas y españoles de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) acerca del aprendizaje del inglés: El enfoque gramático*).

Firma alumno/alumna:

Firma investigador responsable:

Lugar y fecha:

## **Appendix C: Questionnaire in English**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

Dear students,

this questionnaire is a part of my master's thesis entitled *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar* which I am working on in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Split.

The questionnaire has 25 items, 4 open-ended prompts and requires about 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary and anonymous. The information you provide will be used solely for the purpose of the research and will be available only to my mentor and myself.

Please give each question your most thoughtful consideration and complete the questionnaire as truthfully as you can. Thank you in advance for your effort and time!

Kind regards,

Ina Krip



## GENERAL INFORMATION

Your L1: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: M F

At what age did you start learning English? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you learn English (e.g. school, movies/books/music, the Internet, abroad)?

---

What other languages do you learn? \_\_\_\_\_

What grade did you get in English on your last end-of-term report? \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read the following statements about foreign language learning and circle the number that best describes your opinion: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

There are no right or wrong answers, just answers that are true for you.

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. English is an important language.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. English is the most important language nowadays.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. English is seen as an important language in my country.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Knowing English is a necessity in today's world.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. My country values proficiency in English.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Mastering English will help me with my future employment in my country.     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Mastering English will help me with my future employment if working abroad. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. My goal is to speak English fluently.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9. Rate the following parts of the English language based on how much you like them (1= like the least, 5 = like the most):
- |            |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| vocabulary | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| grammar    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| reading    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| writing    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| listening  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| speaking   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
10. My goal is to master English grammar. 1 2 3 4 5
11. In order to be fluent in English you need to have near perfect grammar. 1 2 3 4 5
12. Good learners of a second language usually know a lot of grammar rules. 1 2 3 4 5
13. Grammar is irrelevant in everyday communication. 1 2 3 4 5
14. If you want to learn a language, you need to learn grammar. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Grammar is an essential component of foreign language learning. 1 2 3 4 5
16. Mastering English grammar will help me with my future employment. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I find coursebook grammar explanations (and explicit rules) useful. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I learn grammar rules by heart. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I learn grammar more effectively if it is presented in context. 1 2 3 4 5
20. I am pleased with how English grammar is taught in my school. 1 2 3 4 5
21. Grammar is predominant in my English classes. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I want my English classes to focus on communication rather than on grammar. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I learn grammar on my own, outside of class. 1 2 3 4 5
24. I use the Internet (videos, explanations etc.) to learn grammar. 1 2 3 4 5
25. I prefer learning grammar through authentic texts and real-life tasks. 1 2 3 4 5

Please briefly express your opinion on grammar learning using the prompts below:

*I like studying grammar because . . .*

*I don't like studying grammar because . . .*

*I like to be taught grammar in the following ways . . .*

*I don't like to be taught grammar in the following ways . . .*

## Appendix D: Questionnaire in Croatian

### UPITNIK ZA UČENIKE

Dragi učenici,

ovaj upitnik dio je diplomskog rada pod naslovom *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar (Vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika o učenju engleskoga jezika s naglaskom na gramatiku)* koji izrađujem na Odsjeku za engleski jezik i književnost Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Splitu.

Upitnik se sastoji od 25 tvrdnji i 4 pitanja te je za njegovo ispunjavanje potrebno oko 10 minuta. Popunjavanje upitnika je dobrovoljno i anonimno. Vaši će odgovori biti korišteni isključivo za potrebe ovog istraživanja te će biti dostupni samo mojoj mentorici doc. dr. sc. Danijeli Šegedin Borovina te meni osobno.

Molim vas da na pitanja odgovorite iskreno i pažljivo te vam unaprijed zahvaljujem na uloženom trudu i vremenu.

Srdačno,

Ina Krip

## OPĆI PODACI

Tvoj materinski jezik: \_\_\_\_\_

Dob: \_\_\_\_\_

Spol: M Ž

S koliko godina si počeo/la učiti engleski jezik? \_\_\_\_\_

Kako si naučio/la engleski jezik (npr. škola, filmovi/knjige/glazba, internet, boravci u inozemstvu)?

---

Koje druge jezike učiš? \_\_\_\_\_

Koja ti je posljednja zaključna ocjena iz engleskoga jezika? \_\_\_\_\_

## UPITNIK

Pročitajte sljedeće tvrdnje o učenju stranih jezika i označite koliko se s njima slažete: (1) sasvim se slažem, (2) slažem se, (3) niti se slažem niti se ne slažem, (4) ne slažem se, (5) uopće se ne slažem.

Ovdje nema točnih ni netočnih odgovora. Zanima nas samo **vaše** mišljenje.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Engleski jezik je važan.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Engleski jezik je najvažniji jezik današnjice.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. U mojoj se zemlji engleski smatra važnim jezikom.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Znanje engleskoga jezika je potreba u današnjem svijetu.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. U mojoj se zemlji cijeni savršeno služenje engleskim jezikom.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Ovladavanje engleskim jezikom pomoći će mi pri zaposlenju u mojoj zemlji.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Ovladavanje engleskim jezikom pomoći će mi pri zaposlenju ukoliko budem radio/radila u inozemstvu. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Cilj mi je tečno govoriti engleski jezik.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Ocijenite sljedeća područja engleskog jezika prema tome koliko ih volite (1=najmanje volim, 5= najviše volim):

- |     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|     | vokabular   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9.  | gramatika   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |
|     | čitanje   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |
|     | pisanje   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |
|     | slušanje  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |
|     | govorenje   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. | Cilj mi je naučiti gramatiku engleskoga jezika.   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | Kako bih tečno govorio/govorila engleski jezik, gramatika mi mora biti gotovo savršena.           |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | Dobri učenici stranoga jezika obično znaju mnogo gramatičkih pravila.                             |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | Gramatika je nevažna u svakodnevnoj komunikaciji.   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | Ako želiš naučiti strani jezik, moraš naučiti gramatiku.  |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | Gramatika je temeljni dio učenja stranoga jezika.   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | Ovladavanje gramatikom engleskoga jezika pomoći će mi pri budućem zapošljavanju.                  |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | Mislim da su jasno objašnjena gramatička pravila iz udžbenika korisna.                            |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | Gramatička pravila učim napamet.  |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | Bolje učim gramatiku ako je objašnjena u kontekstu.   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | Zadovoljan/Zadovoljna sam s načinom na koji se gramatika engleskoga jezika poučava u mojoj školi. |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | Na mojim satovima engleskoga jezika prevladava gramatika.   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | Želim da se moji satovi engleskoga jezika temelje na komunikaciji umjesto gramatike.              |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | Gramatiku učim samostalno, izvan nastave.   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | Koristim internet (videa, objašnjenja, itd.) za učenje gramatike.                                 |   |   |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

25. Više volim učenje gramatike kroz izvorne tekstove i zadatke vezane za 1 2 3 4 5  
situacije iz stvarnoga života.

Molila bih da (ukratko!) napišete svoje mišljenje o učenju gramatike tako što ćete nadopuniti  
sljedeće rečenice:

*Volim učiti gramatiku zato što ...*

*Ne volim učiti gramatiku zato što ...*

*Sviđa mi se kad s nastavnicom učimo gramatiku na ove načine: ....*

*Ne sviđa mi se kad s nastavnicom učimo gramatiku na ove načine: ...*

## Appendix E: Questionnaire in Spanish

### CUESTIONARIO PARA ALUMNOS

Queridos/as alumnos y alumnas,

Este cuestionario forma parte de mi proyecto de fin de máster llamado *Croatian and Spanish EFL Learners' Beliefs about English Language Learning: A Focus on Grammar* (*Creencias de los estudiantes croatas y españoles de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) acerca del aprendizaje del inglés: El enfoque gramático*). En este proyecto estoy trabajando con el Departamento de Lengua y Literatura Inglesa de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales de la Universidad de Split.

Este cuestionario consta de 25 puntos, junto con 4 preguntas de respuesta abierta. Se necesitan unos 10 minutos aproximadamente para completarlo y la participación será voluntaria y anónima. La información que proporcionéis únicamente se utilizará para el desarrollo de este proyecto y sólo tendremos acceso mi tutora y yo.

Por favor, rellenen este cuestionario atentamente para que sea lo más real y veraz posible. Gracias de antemano por su tiempo y esfuerzo.

Saludos cordiales,

Ina Krip



## INFORMACIÓN GENERAL

Tu L1 (lengua materna): \_\_\_\_\_

Edad: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexo: H M

¿A qué edad empezaste a estudiar inglés? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cómo empezaste a aprender inglés (p. ej. en la escuela, a través del cine/libros/música, Internet, en el extranjero)?

\_\_\_\_\_

¿Qué otras lenguas estudias? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Qué nota sacaste en inglés en la última evaluación? \_\_\_\_\_

## CUESTIONARIO

Lee las siguientes frases sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras y rodea el número que mejor exprese tu opinión: (1) muy de acuerdo, (2) de acuerdo, (3) indeciso/indecisa, (4) en desacuerdo, (5) muy en desacuerdo.

Recuerde que no hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas. Tus respuestas serán las que en tu opinión sean las verdaderas.

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | El inglés es una lengua importante.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | El inglés es la lengua más importante hoy en día.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | El inglés se considera una lengua importante en mi país.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Saber inglés es una necesidad en el mundo de hoy.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | En mi país se valora el dominio del inglés.                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | Dominar el inglés me ayudará a encontrar trabajo en mi país.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | Dominar el inglés me ayudará a encontrar trabajo en el extranjero. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | Mi objetivo es hablar inglés con soltura.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9. Valora los siguientes aspectos de la lengua inglesa según cuánto te gusten (1= me gusta mucho, 5= no me gusta nada):

- |             |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| vocabulario | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| gramática   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

leer	1	2	3	4	5
escribir	1	2	3	4	5
escuchar	1	2	3	4	5
hablar	1	2	3	4	5

10. Mi objetivo es dominar la gramática inglesa. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Para hablar inglés con soltura, tu gramática debe ser casi perfecta. 1 2 3 4 5
12. Los buenos estudiantes de idiomas suelen conocer muchas reglas gramaticales. 1 2 3 4 5
13. La gramática es irrelevante para comunicarse en el día a día. 1 2 3 4 5
14. Si quieres aprender una lengua, debes estudiar gramática. 1 2 3 4 5
15. La gramática es un componente esencial del aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. 1 2 3 4 5
16. Dominar la gramática inglesa me ayudará en mi futura vida profesional. 1 2 3 4 5
17. Las explicaciones y reglas gramaticales de los libros de texto me parecen útiles. 1 2 3 4 5
18. Me aprendo las reglas gramaticales de memoria. 1 2 3 4 5
19. Aprendo mejor la gramática si se me presenta en contexto. 1 2 3 4 5
20. Me gusta cómo se enseña la gramática inglesa en mi instituto. 1 2 3 4 5
21. La gramática predomina en mis clases de inglés. 1 2 3 4 5
22. Me gustaría que mis clases de inglés se centraran en la comunicación más que en la gramática. 1 2 3 4 5
23. Aprendo gramática por mi cuenta, fuera del aula. 1 2 3 4 5
24. Uso internet (vídeos, explicaciones, etc.) para aprender gramática. 1 2 3 4 5
25. Prefiero aprender gramática a través de textos auténticos y tareas de la vida diaria. 1 2 3 4 5

Expresa tu opinión de la gramática (¡de manera breve!) completando las frases siguientes:

*Me gusta estudiar gramática porque . . .*

*No me gusta estudiar gramática porque . . .*

*Me gusta que me enseñen gramática así . . .*

*No me gusta que me enseñen gramática así . . .*

**Izjava o pohrani završnog/diplomskog/specijalističkog/doktorskog rada u Digitalni repozitorij Filozofskog fakulteta u Splitu**

Studentica: Ina Krip

Naslov rada: Vjerovanja hrvatskih i španjolskih učenika engleskoga kao stranoga jezika o učenju engleskoga jezika s naglaskom na gramatiku

Znanstveno područje i polje: humanističke znanosti, filologija

Vrsta rada: diplomski rad

Mentorica rada (ime i prezime, akad. stupanj i zvanje): doc. dr. sc. Danijela Šegedin Borovina

Članovi povjerenstva (ime i prezime, akad. stupanj i zvanje):

doc. dr. sc. Danijela Šegedin Borovina,

doc. dr. sc. Ivana Petrović,

doc. dr. sc. Mirjana Semren.

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Split, 26.08.2020.

Potpis studentice:



SVEUČILIŠTE U SPLITU  
FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET

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