



Practicing Grammar Online: Multiple-choice or Fill-in-the-blanks

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Abstract

This paper reports findings of an original research project that investigated how grammar can be practiced effectively using closed activities on a learning platform. 47 learners enrolled in an intermediate German course at a West Coast university were divided into two groups in order to practice German prepositions in the context of fairy-tales. Results showed that the group who used a fill-in-the-blanks activity type outperformed the group who used a multiple-choice activity type. A paired sample t-test based on a pre/post-test analysis showed that those differences were statistically significant.

1 Introduction

There are several approaches using technology in foreign language learning. The literature provides many practical examples for in-class and out-of-class teaching (e.g. Chappelle & Jamieson, 2008; Meskill & Anthony, 2010; Singleton & Cook, 2014). In a review of online activities used in foreign language learning, Lai and Li (2011) argue that one has to carefully consider the goal of the learning activity, the proficiency level, the feedback as well as individual factors such as motivation of the learner. It is desirable if online activities are geared towards a communicative goal, just as classroom activities often are (Meskill & Anthony, 2010; Willis & Willis, 2007). An example for that are chats and forums. However, sometimes online activities need to serve the learner to practice and repeat information on his or her own. An example for that are closed activities that provide direct feedback so that learners are not left wondering what to do (Ellis, 2009). This was the premise of this study testing how simple activities such as multiple-choice (MC) or fill-in-the-blanks (FiB) might benefit the language learner.

A question for every language learner as well as teacher is how to become fluent in another language, speak that language with accuracy, and be able to use complex language forms. These three criteria – fluency, accuracy, complexity - were first proposed by Skehan and Foster (1997) and subsequently developed further (Skehan & Foster, 2012). The study presented here focused on accuracy, particularly, what type of structured activities should be used to improve accuracy of grammatical forms. Structured activities require the learner to perform a closed activity: fill-in-the-blank, assemble words in a sentence, select from a multiple-choice menu (Nunan, 2004; Long, 2014). In order to be effective, they need to be linked to sequencing; they have to be put in a certain order to guide the learner towards producing accurate speech (Norris, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Skehan & Foster, 2012). Furthermore, one has to keep in mind that these types of activities are non-communicative in the sense that no new information is exchanged (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Rather,

previously acquired information is being reviewed. The type of feedback provided by structured activities has to be carefully considered (Lyster & Saito, 2010), particularly when using technology (Blake, 2008; Robinson, 2011). In a study on verb-preposition collocations carried out at a North American uni-versity, Vyatkina (2016) used a data-driven dictionary that contained a large corpus of German words and phrases. Students of an intermediate German course (B1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference) were divided into two groups. One group used the corpus digitally on a computer, the other on paper. The analysis of the twenty items selected for the study showed that participants in both groups scored higher on the post-test compared to the pre-test, showing that both data-driven types (digital and on paper) were equally effective. At the same time, both groups performed better on the structured (fill-in-the blanks) part of the test compared to the open (sentence-writing) part of the test. In a similar study with Iranian ESL learners carried out in Iran using the Brown corpus ten years earlier, Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) had found the data driven learning approach to be highly effective when testing collocation of prepositions.

The question of how the choice of structured activity types may provide better benefits for the learner, in particular in relation to the grammatical topic and the proficiency level of learners, has yet to be explored (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2014). A simple question is if multiple-choice or fill-in-the blanks activity-types benefit the foreign language learner when practicing grammar by using technological tools, and in case they do, if one of these activities leads to higher learning gains than the other. The focus of this research is on the learner and how s/he can learn grammar effectively.

2 Context

A common approach to teach grammar is to provide the learner with as much input from authentic sources as possible. However, input alone is not sufficient to acquire a foreign language (e.g. Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Long, 1996). Rather, it is also beneficial to the learner that they over-come incomplete or incorrect knowledge of grammatical forms or regularities, or that their attention be drawn to these forms and regularities as they arise incidentally in communication and texts (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Skehan, 2014).

One way to accomplish acquisition is to provide students with corrective feedback (e.g. Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Nassaji & Fotos, 2010). Two types of corrective feedback are distinguished: direct feedback (providing the correct form) and indirect feedback (providing a clue to what the correct form is). Studies in this area have come to different conclusions, some arguing in favour of direct and others in favour of indirect feedback. As Sauro (2009) points out, problems learners sometimes have when receiving indirect feedback is to identify it as such. Although indirect feedback is the preferred pedagogical method, if learners do not realize they are given feedback, they will not act on it. Regardless of direct or indirect feedback, it has to occur shortly after an activity has been completed (Mackey, 2012).

It has been long argued that technology highlighting language categories and grammatical forms (known as input enhancement; Polio, 2007; Sachs & Polio, 2007) can assist in providing feedback to learners (Bergsleithner, Frota, & Yoshioka, 2013; Sharwood-Smith, 1993). However, this type of feedback is restricted. It only signals to the learner what choices he or she might have. For example, all prepositions in a text can be highlighted, but the learner still needs to figure out how the preposition was used. Technology therefore has to go further by providing tools that allow a learner to practice and receive feedback during practice (Amaral & Meurers, 2011; Heift & Schulze, 2007). A good example is the *etutor*, a language tutoring system for German (Heift, 2004). Learners can practice German with structured activities (i.e. fill-in-the blanks) and receive specific feedback by informing the user of the type of error (i.e. verb conjugation).

A challenge for native speakers of English learning German is to use prepositions properly. Research has shown that even at an advanced proficiency level, learners have difficulties (Baten, 2011). In order to use prepositions properly in a foreign language such as German, the learner needs to practice how prepositions are used in context (meaning). At the same time, familiarity with the case system (grammatical rule) may assist the learner. In fact, in the context of teaching

German in North America, most North-American textbooks have a strong emphasis on the grammatical rule when introducing German prepositions. As the case system is not evident in English, learners have difficulties acquiring prepositions (as well as other grammatical features such as pronouns and determiners) in German. With regard to meaning, prepositions can often not be directly translated from English. For example, in German the English preposition “for” is most often used in German in the sense of “bei” [at], “nach” [to; principle of Inanimacy] or “zu” [to; principle of Animacy] but not in the sense of “für” [for]. A common mistake among learners of German whose first language is English is an overuse of “für” as they have difficulty finding the correct meaning of the preposition in context, which in turn determines which grammatical rule applies. Therefore, prepositions need to be practiced much.

In detail, this paper reports findings of an original research project that was carried out in the German department of a West Coast university in North America. The project investigated intermediate learners of German practicing German prepositions on a learning platform that was commonly used at the university. One group of students practiced the prepositions using a multiple-choice activity type, while another group used a fill-in-the-blanks activity type. Each of these activities required a different type of processing as well as L2 skill. A general distinction is made between “maintenance processing” and “elaborate processing” (Craik & Lockhart, 1972; reformulated by Baddeley, 1978, 1999; see also Cowan, 1999; Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001). While the fill-in-the-blank activity focuses on production (elaborate processing/L2 skill of recall), the multiple-choice activity focuses on comprehension (maintenance processing/L2 skill of recognition). The advantage of a comprehension activity is that learners see the correct answers continually. However, they are not required to actively produce the grammatical form, which is something they would have to do when speaking to someone in another language. The advantage of a production activity is that, during elaborate processing, all language faculties in the brain are active, which increases the learning potential. However, the feedback is limited, as learners only get confirmation as to which is the correct form, if they produced it correctly, or if it is provided at the end of the activity.

The research question was: What activity type assists intermediate learners to master prepositions in German while practicing grammar on a learning platform?

3 Methodology

The study was carried out in the fall of 2015 and 2016 with learners enrolled in a course called “Intermediate German I.” For each course, pages were created with the learning platform used at the West Coast University where the research took place. One set of pages was used by a group of students using the multiple-choice function and one by a group of students using the fill-in-the-blanks function. Each set of pages consisted of six pages. On each page, students were given the text of a fairy-tale. Fairy-tales provide a rich context for students as they originated in Central Europe but are known in North America. Therefore, the level of difficulty can be mastered by a learner enrolled in an intermediate course. Furthermore, each page had a log that kept track of how many prepositions a learner had identified and produced correctly, how many attempts he or she needed and how much time he or she needed.

3.1 Participants

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled at a West Coast university in an “Intermediate German I” course. For most students, this is the third course learning German which they have to take in sequence. Students in this course are generally at an A2 level of proficiency (Common European Framework of Reference). At that level, prepositions have been acquired by learners in the sense that students are familiar with the prepositions but now need to be mastered in terms of correctly applying and using the prepositions. Much practice is required.

In both terms (fall of 2015 and 2016), students were divided into two groups based on the scores of the pre-test. A term consisted of thirteen weeks with three contact hours per week. The pre-test

served to establish a baseline of how well students were able to apply prepositions correctly. The scores were used to form one group which then practiced prepositions using a multiple-choice activity type as well as one group which practiced using a fill-in-the-blanks activity type. The groups were homogenous: in each group were students who had high, medium and low scores on the pre-test. Students with equal scores were assigned to the multiple-choice or the fill-in-the-blanks group by random draw. First, students' names had been replaced with numbers. Then, the numbers were written on a piece of paper and drawn from a hat. Of the 52 students enrolled in both terms, 47 participated in the project from start to finish. 25 of those 47 students were in the multiple-choice group (15 female and ten male students) and 22 in the fill-in-the-blanks group (13 female and nine male students). All students were between 18 and 22 years old and spoke English as their L1.

3.2 Procedure

Participants of each group worked on one fairy-tale per week (see Appendix 1 for sample texts). The fairy-tales had been edited for content to adjust to the level of an intermediate learner as well as to be consistent in terms of length and number of prepositions practiced. The number of words per fairy-tale was between 447 words and 554 words. In each fairy-tale, 29 prepositions (less than 500 words) or 30 prepositions (over 500 words) were practiced.

For the multiple-choice group, the prepositions of each text were blanked out and four possible answers provided for each preposition. Once selected, the page indicated if the selection was correct or incorrect. If incorrect, learners were allowed to try again until they found the correct answers. For the fill-in-the-blanks group, the prepositions of each text were blanked out and the learner had to type in the correct form. The learner had unlimited attempts. When the learner was finished with a text, regardless if he or she was able to come up with all of the correct prepositions, he or she clicked on "submit answers." After that, the learner automatically got to see the text of the fairy-tale with all the correct prepositions. The prepositions were highlighted in colour. After seeing this page, participants of each group had to answer five questions in regard to the content of each fairy-tale to ensure that they understood the texts.

A log kept track of every click by a participant or what a participant had typed. Therefore, afterwards, the number of correct and incorrect attempts could be calculated per participant and per group. The log also kept track of how much time each participant spent on each text. Although students could have worked on the activity from home in form of an assignment, the study was carried out in the digital language lab of the university in order to maintain control. A lab assistant provided technical assistance, if needed.

3.3 Tests

A pre- and a post-test were carried out. The pre-test consisted of eighteen sentences that were subdivided into three segments of six sentences each. The first segment (labelled A) tested prepositions where the grammatical rule (case) provided a hint that narrowed down the options of which preposition to use. The second segment (labelled B) tested prepositions where no such rule provided a hint. The third segment (labelled C) tested prepositions as part of phrases and idioms. All sentences were taken from the six fairy-tales (three sentences from each fairy-tale). The prepositions were tested in the fill-in-the-blanks format, as one of the goals in language learning is to be accurate; in this case, that goal was to be able to produce preposition correctly.

The pre-test was used to determine group membership so that each group consisted of students with high, medium and low scores.

The first post-test was carried out one week after the last practice session. It was identical to the pre-test. The second post-test was carried out two weeks after that as part of a general grammar test. It contained the same sentences as the pre-test, but this time the multiple-choice format was used. The reason that the testing conditions for the second post-test were different (see section on Limitations below) was the time constraint in carrying out this study with learners enrolled in a language

course. The course required students to learn other grammar as well as vocabulary, and practice all of the language skills.

3.4 Limitations

One has to keep in mind that the study tested closed activities using a learning platform. The results have to be seen in the context of those activities whose purpose is for learners to practice and receive direct feedback.

The testing conditions were different. The first post-test, which took place one week after the last practice session, was identical to the pre-test (both using the fill-in-the blanks format), and apart from the prepositions, nothing else was tested. The second post-test, which took place three weeks after the last practice session, used a different format (multiple-choice) compared to the pre-test and was part of a test where other grammatical points, learned by students in the course, were tested.

It can be argued that the testing conditions were favourable to the fill-in-the blanks group in terms of consistency, time and being able to concentrate on one activity. It can also be argued that the first post-test provided another practice session and therefore gave an advantage to the multiple-choice group. A key aspect, however, is that both groups took part in both post-tests and were tested in both formats. Nevertheless, the limitations of the testing conditions have to be kept in mind when discussing the results.

It was possible for students to access the learning platform outside the assigned lab sessions, because access was with the regular log-in that students used for all their courses. However, the log of the platform recorded that activity. Results of students who did access the set of course pages outside the lab sessions, thereby having more exposure to the texts, were not used in the analysis. Naturally, it could not be controlled how much students studied prepositions in addition to what was done in class. However, the likelihood of a few students practicing prepositions on their own was the same for participants in both groups.

4 Results

The pre- and post-tests were analyzed using a paired samples t-test, while the analysis of the logs was descriptive. All statistical analyses were carried out with SPSS v. 22 in consultation with a statistical consultant of the University where the study took place.

The first post-test showed that both, the multiple-choice group as well as the fill-in-the-blank group, improved on their test scores significantly (see Tables 1 and 2). It was carried out one week after the last practice using the fill-in-the blanks format.

Table 1. Multiple-choice group: Pre-test vs. post-test 1

	Pre-test		Post-test 1		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	5.80	1.60	7.56	2.00	.000
Prep. + Det.	2.32	0.80	2.76	0.87	.087
Prep.	2.12	0.78	3.32	0.90	.001
Idiom. Expr.	1.36	0.86	1.48	1.26	.559

Note: The test carried out was a paired samples t-test. "Total" refers to the 18 prepositions tested. "Prep. + Det." refers to segment A (prepositions plus determiners), "Prep." to segment B (prepositions without determiners), and "Idiom. Expr." to segment C (idiomatic expressions). In each part, six prepositions were tested.

Table 1 shows that the idiomatic expressions provided the greatest difficulty for students followed by the prepositions they had to identify without determiners followed by the prepositions that came with a grammatical hint. This is how the test had been structured and the results indicate that the test was reliable. Interestingly enough, the only significant gains student made was with the prepositions they had to identify without determiners. A plausible explanation is that the repetitive

nature of a multiple-choice activity that provides constant feedback is geared towards one aspect of learning. The prepositions that came with a grammatical hint did not benefit from the multiple-choice activity as much. However, the grammatical hint was a part of the sentence of the test, rather than a part of the actual preposition. The hint narrowed down the choice of prepositions. It seems that learners just focused on the preposition itself, as this is where the continuous feedback was given by clicking on the four choices until the correct one was displayed. This also explains why there was next to no improvement on the idiomatic expressions, as those can only be identified by looking at the entire sentence.

Overall, it took a while for a learning effect to develop for students in the multiple-choice group. The log showed that, as of Text 5, the number of incorrect clicks went down substantially. The numbers were: 564 (Text 1), 546 (Text 2), 540 (Text 3), 510 (Text 4), 447 (Text 5), 434 (Text 6). At the same time, the number of minutes participants took to complete the text went down as well, although the pattern was more continuous: 17:36 (17 minutes, 36 seconds: Text 1), 16:15 (Text 2), 16:05 (Text 3), 15:10 (Text 4), 14:33 (Text 3), 14:12 (Text 6).

Table 2. Fill-in-the-blank groups: Pre-test vs post-test 1

	Pre-test		Post-test 1		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	5.95	2.18	9.38	3.21	.000
Prep. + Det.	2.28	1.14	3.47	1.24	.000
Prep.	2.09	0.99	3.57	1.02	.000
Idiom. Expr.	1.33	0.96	2.33	1.49	.000

Table 2 shows that learners in the fill-in-the-blanks group significantly improved their test scores on all aspects of the test. The pre-test scores were very similar to the one of the multiple-choice group indicating that the test was reliable. The log showed that on average learners for Text 4 scored over 50 percent: 36.64% (Text 1), 42.14% (Text 2), 47.18% (Text 3), 51.35% (Text 4), 51.72% (Text 5), 54.36 (Text 6). This confirms the results for the multiple-choice group: participants had to practice at least three times until a learning effect developed. At the same time, the average number of minutes participants of the fill-in-the-blanks group took to complete each text was constant: 34:42 (34 minutes and 42 seconds: Text 1), 32:04 (Text 2), 32:58 (Text 3), 31:29 (Text 4), 31:56 (Text 5), 32.12 (Text 6).

This learner behaviour was different compared to the multiple-choice group that had used less and less time. Furthermore, the number of minutes taken by the fill-in-the-blanks group on average was about double that of the multiple-choice group. This can be explained with the type of processing required: elaborate processing that requires producing a correct form is more time-consuming than maintenance processing that requires recognizing a correct form. Another possibility might be that the multiple-choice group became bored, as clicking on the prepositions until the correct one was highlighted was too repetitive after a while.

It was already mentioned that the pre-test scores were very similar for both groups as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. A paired samples t-test confirmed this finding (see Table 3).

Table 3. Pre-test comparison: Multiple-choice vs. fill-in-the-blank groups

	Multiple-choice		Fill-in-the-blank		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	5.80	1.60	5.95	2.18	.692
Prep. + Det.	2.32	0.80	2.28	1.14	.886
Prep.	2.12	0.78	2.09	0.99	.841
Idiom. Expr.	1.36	0.86	1.33	0.96	.803

The post-tests, however, showed different scores (see Table 4). These were statistically significant (using a paired samples t-test) overall for the prepositions that could be identified with help of a grammatical hint as well as the ones who were used in idiomatic expressions. The prepositions which could only be identified by themselves were not statistically different, because both groups significantly improved in that part of the test.

Table 4. Post-test 1 comparison: Multiple-choice vs. fill-in-the-blank groups

	Multiple-choice		Fill-in-the-blank		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	7.56	2.00	9.38	3.21	.045
Prep. + Det.	2.76	0.87	3.47	1.24	.030
Prep.	3.32	0.90	3.57	1.02	.470
Idiom. Expr.	1.48	1.26	2.33	1.49	.048

Another observation is that the Standard Deviation was higher in both the pre-test and the post-test for the fill-in-the-blank group compared to the multiple-choice group. One explanation is that the difficulty of producing correct forms compared to recognizing them results in greater learner variability: for some learners, the fill-in-the-blanks activity provided a very helpful tool to improve their knowledge of prepositions, but for other learners it did not.

The second post-test showed that both the multiple-choice group as well as the fill-in-the-blank group improved on their test scores significantly (see Tables 5 and 6). It was carried out three weeks after the last practice as part of a general grammar test using the multiple-choice format.

Table 5. Multiple-choice groups: Pre-test vs post-test 2

	Pre-test		Post-test 2		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	5.80	1.60	7.89	1.77	.000
Prep. + Det.	2.32	0.80	3.01	0.77	.062
Prep.	2.12	0.78	3.47	0.81	.000
Idiom. Expr.	1.36	0.86	1.41	1.30	.702

The multiple-choice group improved the most number of identifying prepositions without a grammatical hint, the second most number of prepositions with a grammatical hint and hardly at all when it came to idiomatic expressions. This pattern was the same as in the first pre-test. Scores were slightly higher in all three segments compared to the first pre-test, particularly for prepositions that came with a grammatical hint. This indicates that the mode of testing did play a role as the multiple-choice format was the format the multiple-choice group practiced with.

Table 6. Fill-in-the-blank groups: Pre-test vs post-test 2

	Pre-test		Post-test 2		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	5.95	2.18	8.03	2.40	.000
Prep. + Det.	2.28	1.14	3.25	1.02	.017
Prep.	2.09	0.99	2.71	1.14	.063
Idiom. Expr.	1.33	0.96	2.09	1.30	.052

The fill-in-the-blanks group only scored significantly higher in the second post-test as compared to the pre-test when prepositions came with a grammatical hint. This pattern is different compared to the first post-test that had shown significantly higher scores for prepositions with determiners, prepositions without determiners as well as idiomatic expressions. All scores were lower compared

to the first post-test, thus confirming that the mode of testing matters. The difference in score between the first and second post-tests for prepositions that had to be identified without a grammatical hint was the most pronounced. The elaborate processing required to recall those prepositions did not have the same learning effect when recognition was tested. In fact, the score of the multiple-choice group in the second post-tests on prepositions without a grammatical hint was higher than that of the fill-in-the-blank group as the multiple-choice group practiced recall (maintenance processing) and was tested on recall. None of the differences between the multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank group in the second post-tests were significant, though.

Table 7. Post-test 2 comparison: Multiple-Choice vs. Fill-in-the-Blank groups

	Multiple-choice		Fill-in-the-blank		P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Total	7.89	1.77	8.03	2.40	.551
Prep. + Det.	3.01	0.77	3.25	1.02	.699
Prep.	3.47	0.81	2.71	1.14	.051
Idiom. Expr.	1.41	1.30	2.09	1.30	.057

5 Conclusion

One of the ideas behind this study was to be able to give advice to students. Over the past decade, contact hours in the classroom have been reduced at many universities from five to four or three hours per week. Therefore, some aspects of language learning, such as practicing grammar, has been moved outside the classroom. Learning platforms commonly used at universities provide a vehicle for such practice. The question is then how students can practice effectively.

The results confirmed previous studies showing that structured activities are effective when learning prepositions (Koosha & Jafarpour, 2006; Vyatkina, 2016). The research presented there sought to find out what type of structured activities are the most effective. The fill-in-the-blanks activity requiring elaborate processing and recall led to higher learning gains than the multiple-choice activity requiring maintenance processing and recognition in both post-tests regardless of the mode of testing. There was one exception. The multiple-choice group outscored the fill-in-the-blank group on prepositions without determiners when using the multiple-choice test format the group had practiced with. As Nation and Webb (2011) explain, the mode of testing should be carefully considered. How do we apply these findings to the classroom?

One of the goals in language learning is to produce accurate forms, that is, to be able to recall a grammatical form correctly. This study showed that practicing prepositions online using the fill-in-the-blanks format leads to significant learning gains. It also requires quite a bit of time. Using the multiple-choice format is not as effective, although learners do improve and they do so in half the time the fill-in-the-blanks format requires. An option might be to combine the two, starting with multiple-choice activities and then moving on to fill-in-the-blanks activities. That procedure might also counter the effect that some students might get bored using the multiple-choice format. It would be helpful to repeat the study outlined here by leaving all factors constant except the mode of practice that would be changed to three multiple-choice sessions followed by three fill-in-the-blanks sessions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to research other proficiency levels and repeat the study with beginning learners.

We have to keep in mind that the study was carried out in the North American context of acquiring a foreign language. Learning German in a German-speaking country will likely produce different results, as the learner will be in a different learning and teaching environment, using different textbooks, and be exposed to different teaching methodologies as well as to the German language in its daily use outside class. Last but not least, we have to be aware that practicing grammar online does not work for all learners. In particular, the fill-in-the-blanks activity showed degrees of variation that indicated that some learners did not improve their knowledge of prepositions despite the

practice sessions. Overall, online activities can be tiring for learners and decrease their motivation. One has therefore to be careful under what circumstances these activities are used.

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Appendix 1

Sample text (Fill-in-the-blank exercise)

Der Gestiefelte Kater.

Es war einmal ein Müller, der hatte drei Söhne, einen Esel und einen Kater. Als der Müller starb, bekam der älteste Sohn die Mühle, der zweite den Esel und den jüngsten blieb nur der Kater. Als er aber deswegen traurig war, dass er nur so wenig geerbt hatte, begann der Kater zu sprechen: "Hör zu, ich bin kein gewöhnlicher Kater. Wenn du mir ein paar schöne Stiefel machen lässt, will ich dir helfen." Der Müllerssohn war sehr erstaunt, aber er ließ dem Kater ein Paar Stiefel machen. Der Kater zog sie an und ging zwei Beinen wie ein Mensch zur Tür hinaus den Wald und fing Rebhühner einem Sack. Dann brachte er sie zum König, denn er wusste, dass der König sein Leben gern gebratene Rebhühner aß. Als er dem König stand, sagte er: "Diese Rebhühner schickt mein Herr, ein vornehmer und reicher Graf." Der Kater bekam einen Lohn und trug diesen dem armen Müllerssohn und erzählte ihm alles.

Sample text (Multiple-choice exercise)

Der Gestiefelte Kater.

Es war einmal ein Müller, der hatte drei Söhne, einen Esel und einen Kater. Als der Müller starb, bekam der älteste Sohn die Mühle, der zweite den Esel und den jüngsten blieb nur der Kater. Als er aber deswegen traurig war, dass er nur so wenig geerbt hatte, begann der Kater zu sprechen: "Hör zu, ich bin kein gewöhnlicher Kater. Wenn du mir ein paar schöne Stiefel machen lässt, will ich dir helfen." Der Müllerssohn war sehr erstaunt, aber er ließ dem Kater ein Paar Stiefel machen. Der Kater zog sie an und ging zwei Beinen wie ein Mensch zur Tür hinaus den Wald und fing Rebhühner einem Sack. Dann brachte er sie zum König, denn er wusste, dass der König sein Leben gern gebratene Rebhühner aß. Als er dem König stand, sagte er: "Diese Rebhühner schickt mein Herr, ein vornehmer und reicher Graf." Der Kater bekam einen Lohn und trug diesen dem armen Müllerssohn und erzählte ihm alles.

Five options each.

For example, in the last sentence, the correct preposition is *zu*.

The options given are *nach, in, zu, von* and *ohne*.

Sample pre- / post-test questions

Easy: The grammatical rule provided a hint of what preposition can be used.

Dort wohnte ein Holzhacker _____ seiner Frau und zwei Kindern.

Medium: The grammatical rule did not provide a hint of what preposition can be used; the correct preposition to be used was based on meaning only.

Das Dach war _____ Zucker

Difficult: Cases of colloquial use; the preposition is part of phrases and idioms.

Rotkäppchen schaute Großmutter tief _____ die Augen.