

THE ACQUISITION OF THE COPULA *BE* IN PRESENT SIMPLE TENSE IN
ENGLISH BY NATIVE SPEAKERS OF RUSSIAN

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ABSTRACT

THE ACQUISITION OF THE COPULA *BE* IN PRESENT SIMPLE TENSE IN ENGLISH BY NATIVE SPEAKERS OF RUSSIAN

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This thesis investigates the acquisition of the copula *be* in present Simple Tense in English by native speakers of Russian. The aim of the study is to determine whether or not Russian students with different levels of English proficiency encounter any problems while using the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English. The study also identifies the domains related to the use of the copula *be* that appear to be most problematic for native speakers of Russian. To carry out the current research two diagnostic tests measuring receptive and productive skills related to the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English were developed. The data were collected from three groups of Russian students who were in the first, fourth and eighth years of learning English. The data in each of the domains related to the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English were classified under four main categories: (i) correct use, (ii) omission, (iii) misinformation, (iv) addition. Both, quantitative and qualitative analyses were used in the study. The results

of the study indicated that all the native speakers of Russian who participated in the study had difficulties with the acquisition of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English. The findings of the study revealed that along with the developmental mistakes/errors (i.e., omissions of the copula *be* and misuse of the forms of the copula *be*), which seem to disappear with the lasting exposure to English, there are other mistakes/errors in the performance of the native speakers of Russian which are persistent. Negative transfer at the morphological level and incomplete understanding and application of the rule are suggested as the underlying reasons for the persistent mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners.

Keywords: Copula *be*, Second Language Acquisition, Interlanguage, Errors/Mistakes, Interference

ÖZ

ANA DİLİ RUSÇA OLANLARIN İNGİLİZCENİN ŞİMDİKİ BASİT ZAMANINDA *BE KOŞACI* EDİNİMLERİ

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Bu tez çalışması anadili Rusça olanların İngilizcenin Şimdiki Basit Zamanında *be koşacı* edinimlerini araştırır. Yapılan bu çalışmanın amacı, değişik seviyelerdeki İngilizce öğrenmekte olan Rus öğrencilerin İngilizcenin Şimdiki Basit Zamanında *be koşacı* kullanımında problem yaşayıp yaşamadıklarını tespit etmektir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda ana dili Rusça olanların *be koşacı* edinimlerinde en fazla hangi alanlarda sorun yaşadıklarını da belirler. Bu çalışmayı yapabilmek için, İngilizcenin Şimdiki Basit Zamanında *be koşacı* kullanımında alımlayıcı ve üretken beceriyi ölçmek için iki bulgulayıcı test geliştirildi. İngilizce öğreniminde, birinci, dördüncü ve sekizinci yılında olan üç grup Rus öğrencilerden veri toplandı. İngilizcenin Şimdiki Basit Zamanında *be koşacı* kullanılması ile ilgili her bir gruptan toplanan veriler dört ana kategoride sınıflandırıldı: (i) doğru kullanım, (ii) eksik kullanım, (iii) yanlış kullanım, (iv) fazla kullanım. Bu araştırmada nitel ve nicel analizlerin her ikisi de kullanıldı. Sonuçlar, anadili Rusça olarak bu çalışmaya katılanların tümünün İngilizcenin Şimdiki Basit Zamanında *be*

koşacı kullanımında güçlükler yaşadığını göstermiştir. Çalışmanın bulguları, öğrencilerin *be koşacı* edinimlerindeki kimi hataların geçici, kimi hataların ise kalıcı olduğunu göstermiştir. Geçici hataların (*be koşacı*'nın eksik kullanılması ve *be koşacı* formlarının yanlış kullanılması) zaman içerisinde, İngilizce öğrenimi ilerledikçe yok olmaktadır. Kalıcı hataların sebepleri biçimbilimsel seviyede ana dil girişimi, ve eksik anlama ve kural uygulama olarak tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: *Be koşacı*, İkinci Yabancı Dil Edinimi, Aradil, Hatalar, Ana Dil Girişimi.

To my family

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TABLE OF CONTENT

PLAGIARISM	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ÖZ.....	vi
DEDICATION.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENT	x
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xvii
LIST OF GRAPHS	xx
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxi
CHAPTER I	
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0. Presentation	1
1.1. Background to the study	1
1.2. Purpose and scope of the study.....	3
1.3. Research questions	4
1.4. The significance of the study	5
CHAPTER II	
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
2.0. Presentation	7
2.1. Theories of Second Language Acquisition	7
2.1.1. Contrastive Analysis.....	8
2.1.2. Universal Grammar	12

2.2.	Interlanguage in SLA.....	15
2.2.1.	Interlanguage: Definition.....	15
2.2.2.	Interlanguage cognitive processes	18
2.2.2.1.	Language transfer	19
2.2.2.2.	Transfer of training.....	21
2.2.2.3.	Strategies of second language learning.....	22
2.2.2.4.	Strategies of second language communication	23
2.2.2.5.	Overgeneralization.....	25
2.2.2.6.	Fossilization.....	27
2.3.	Error Analysis.....	29
2.3.1.	Overview of Error Analysis.....	29
2.3.2.	Classifications and methodology of EA	30
2.3.3.	Implications of research in EA	34
2.3.4.	Weaknesses of EA Research	36
2.4.	English Language in Russia.....	40
2.4.1.	History of English-Russian language contacts.....	40
2.4.2.	English language in Russian state schools.....	43
2.5.	The copula <i>be</i> in English and Russian languages	44
2.5.1.	The copula <i>be</i> as a learning problem	44
2.5.2.	Research on the copula <i>be</i> in SLA.....	48
CHAPTER III		
METHOD OF RESEARCH.....		50
3.0.	Presentation	50
3.1.	Participants	50
3.1.1.	Group 1.....	50
3.1.2.	Group 2.....	50

3.1.3.	Group 3.....	51
3.2.	Materials.....	51
3.2.1.	Questionnaire.....	52
3.2.2.	Tests	52
3.2.2.1.	The definition of knowledge of the copula <i>be</i> in Present Simple Tense	52
3.2.2.2.	Description of the tests	53
3.2.2.3.	Validity and reliability of the instruments	55
3.3.	Procedure.....	58
CHAPTER IV		
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS		59
4.0.	Presentation	59
4.1.	Distributional characteristics	59
4.2.	Performance of the students on the recognition and approximate production tasks.....	62
4.3.	Analyses of the learners' mistakes/errors in relation to the domain of the use of the copula <i>be</i> in Present Simple Tense	64
4.3.1.	The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the First Domain of the use of the copula <i>be</i> in Present Simple Tense.....	67
4.3.1.1.	Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I.....	69
4.3.1.1.1.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a noun or a noun phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I.....	69
4.3.1.1.2.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I.....	75
4.3.1.1.3.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a numeral: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I.....	80

4.3.1.1.4.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I.....	81
4.3.1.2.	Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I	87
4.3.1.2.1.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a noun or a noun phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I	87
4.3.1.2.2.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I	90
4.3.1.2.3.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a numeral: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I	94
4.3.1.2.4.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I	95
4.3.1.3.	Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I	100
4.3.1.3.1.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a noun or a noun phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I	100
4.3.1.3.2.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I	101
4.3.1.3.3.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a numeral: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I	103
4.3.1.3.4.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adverbial prepositional phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I	103
4.3.1.4.	Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners’ performance on Domain I.....	106
4.3.2.	The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the second domain of the use of the copula <i>be</i> in Present Simple Tense.....	110
4.3.2.1.	Performance of the first-year learners on Domain II	111
4.3.2.2.	Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain II.....	113
4.3.2.3.	Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain II.....	115

4.3.2.4.	Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain II.....	116
4.3.3.	The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the third domain of the use of the copula <i>be</i> in Present Simple Tense.....	117
4.3.3.1.	Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III.....	119
4.3.3.1.1.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adjective and an adjective phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III.....	119
4.3.3.1.2.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a participle or a participle phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III.....	124
4.3.3.1.3.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III.....	128
4.3.3.2.	Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III.....	130
4.3.3.2.1.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III.....	130
4.3.3.2.2.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a participle or a participle phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III.....	135
4.3.3.2.3.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III.....	138
4.3.3.3.	The performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III	140
4.3.3.3.1.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III	140
4.3.3.3.2.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a participle or a participle phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III	143
4.3.3.3.3.	The copula <i>be</i> is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III	145
4.3.3.4	Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain III	148
4.3.4	Performance of the learners on Domain IV	150

4.3.4.1.	Performance of the first-year learners on Domain IV	152
4.3.4.2.	Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain IV	156
4.3.4.3	Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain IV	159
4.3.4.4	Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain IV	161
4.3.5	Performance of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners on the positive, negative and interrogative items of the tests	163

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS.....	168
5.0. Introduction	168
5.1. Summary	168
5.2. Results	171
5.3. Implications for ELT	174
5.4. Limitations of the Study	177
5.5. Suggestions for further research	178
REFERENCES	180
APPENDICES	187
Appendix 1	187
Appendix 2	188
Appendix 3	189
Appendix 4	197
Appendix 5	199

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test I scores.....	56
Table 3.2: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test II scores.....	57
Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics for the first-year learners.....	60
Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics for the fourth-year learners.....	60
Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics for the eighth-year learners.....	61
Table 4.4: Paired samples T-test of Test I and Test II mean numbers comparison of the first-year learners.....	62
Table 4.5: Paired samples T-test of Test I and Test II mean numbers comparison of the fourth-year learners.....	63
Table 4.6: Paired samples T-Test of Test I and Test II mean numbers comparison of the eighth year learners.....	63
Table 4.7: Overall performance of the students on Domain I.....	107
Table 4.8: Overall performance of the students on Domain II.....	116
Table 4.9: Overall performance of the students on Domain III.....	148
Table 4.10: Overall performance of the students on Domain IV.....	162

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: Quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners in the questions related to Domain I.....	68
Figure 4.2: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain I, Test I.....	71
Figure 4.3: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain I, Test II.....	71
Figure 4.4: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain II, Test I.....	76
Figure 4.5: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain II, Test II.....	76
Figure 4.6: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain III, Test I.....	80
Figure 4.7: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain III, Test II.....	80
Figure 4.8: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain VI, Test I.....	82
Figure 4.9: Group I: Domain I, Subdomain VI, Test II.....	82
Figure 4.10: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain I, Test I.....	88
Figure 4.11: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain I, Test II.....	88
Figure 4.12: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain II, Test I.....	92
Figure 4.13: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain II, Test II.....	92
Figure 4.14: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain III, Test I.....	94
Figure 4.15: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain III, Test II.....	94
Figure 4.16: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain VI, Test I.....	95
Figure 4.17: Group II: Domain I, Subdomain VI, Test II.....	95
Figure 4.18: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain I, Test I.....	100
Figure 4.19: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain I, Test II.....	100
Figure 4.20: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain II, Test I.....	101
Figure 4.21: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain II, Test II.....	101
Figure 4.22: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain III, Test I.....	103

Figure 4.23: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain III, Test II.....	103
Figure 4.24: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain IV, Test I.....	104
Figure 4.25: Group III: Domain I, Subdomain IV, Test II.....	104
Figure 4.26: Quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners in the questions related to Domain II.....	111
Figure 4.27: Group I: Domain II, Test I.....	112
Figure 4.28: Group I: Domain II, Test II.....	112
Figure 4.29: Group II: Domain II, Test I.....	114
Figure 4.30: Group II: Domain II, Test II.....	114
Figure 4.31: Group III: Domain II, Test I.....	115
Figure 4.32: Group III: Domain II, Test II.....	115
Figure 4.33: Quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, fourth- and eighth- year learners in the questions related to Domain III.....	118
Figure 4.34: Group I: Domain III, Subdomain I, Test I.....	120
Figure 4.35: Group I: Domain III, Subdomain I, Test II.....	120
Figure 4.36: Group I: Domain III, Subdomain II, Test I.....	125
Figure 4.37: Group I: Domain III, Subdomain II, Test II.....	125
Figure 4.38: Group I: Domain III, Subdomain III, Test I.....	129
Figure 4.39: Group II: Domain III, Subdomain I, Test I.....	131
Figure 4.40: Group II: Domain III, Subdomain I, Test II.....	131
Figure 4.41: Group II: Domain III, Subdomain II, Test I.....	135
Figure 4.42: Group II: Domain III, Subdomain II, Test II.....	135
Figure 4.43: Group II: Domain III, Subdomain III, Test I.....	138
Figure 4.44: Group III: Domain III, Subdomain I, Test I.....	141
Figure 4.45: Group III: Domain III, Subdomain I, Test II.....	141

Figure 4.46: Group III: Domain III, Subdomain II, Test I.....	144
Figure 4.47: Group III: Domain III, Subdomain II, Test II.....	144
Figure 4.48: Group III: Domain III, Subdomain III, Test I.....	146
Figure 4.49: Group I: Domain IV, Test I.....	153
Figure 4.50: Group I: Domain IV, Test II.....	153
Figure 4.51: Group II: Domain IV, Test I.....	157
Figure 4.52: Group II: Domain IV, Test II.....	157
Figure 4.53: Group III: Domain IV, Test I.....	160
Figure 4.54: Group III: Domain IV, Test II.....	160
Figure 4.55: Performance of the students on the positive, negative and interrogative sentences in Test I.....	164
Figure 4.56: Performance of the students on the positive, negative and interrogative sentences in Test II.....	164

LIST OF GRAPHS

- Graph 3.1: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test1 scores.....56
- Graph 3.2: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test2 scores.....57

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Accusative
ADJ	Adjective
ADV	Adverb
AP	Adjective Phrase
CA	Contrastive Analysis
CI	Completion Items
DAT	Dative
DEM	Demonstrative
EA	Error Analysis
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as Second Language
FEM	Feminine
GEN	Genitive
IL	Interlanguage
INF	Infinitive
INST	Instrumental
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MASC	Masculine
MC	Multiple Choice
MOD	Modal

NEUT	Neutral
NL	Native Language
NOM	Nominative
NP	Noun Phrase
NUM	Numeral
PART	Particle
PASW	Package of Statistical Work
PER	Person
PL	Plural
POSS	Possessive
PREP	Preposition
PREPOS	Prepositional
PRN	Pronoun
PR T	Present Tense
Q W	Question Word
SG	Singular
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TL	Target Language
UG	Universal Grammar
USE	Unified State Exam

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Presentation

This chapter presents the background to the study, its significance and the research questions to be answered.

1.1. Background to the study

What could give more content to the teacher than working with motivated learners who are eager to absorb the material and who are grateful for the knowledge they receive?! I have to confess I am a lucky one from this point of view. Just after graduating from the faculty of foreign languages I had an opportunity to work as a teacher of English in the secondary school at the Embassy of Russia in Turkey. I was teaching English to the children of Russian diplomats, who were on duty abroad. Influenced by the position of their parents and by the necessity to live in foreign countries, my students were highly motivated to learn the language and tried their best to master it. Working with such children was very interesting and pleasant, on the one hand. On the other hand, it was challenging and responsible, because in case of failure I could not blame my students for being lazy and inactive but had to find other reasons why they were making errors and could not succeed in a

certain topic. My observations of the learners' interlanguage and reflections on their errors headed my attention to the different factors that could cause inhibitory effect in their foreign language learning. The leading of them seemed to be the interference from Russian language. At some points the learners tended to resist alien structures and calqued Russian patterns in their English speech. (Further I found support for my assumption when I started teaching English to Turkish learners as I realized that mainly Turkish students encountered difficulties with absolutely different English structures). The identification of a problem makes working out of it possible. Thus, in my attempts to find a practical solution I turned to various modifications of the textbook material, additional exercises and explanations, as well as comparing and contrasting of the native (NL) and target languages (TL). It is superfluous to mention that I am neither the first nor the only one who has made an effort to help their students overcome problems while learning a foreign language. Numerous teachers and scholars have been trying to find out why learners make errors and what mental processes are involved in the construction of the interim grammar between first (L1) and second (L2) languages. Since the 1960s, with introduction of the term "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972), which refers to "the successive linguistic system that a learner constructs on his way to the mastery of a TL" (Sridhar, 1980:107), and the theory of Error Analysis (Corder, 1967), which suggested "a new way of looking at the errors made by the learner of a TL" (Sridhar, 1980:105), much emphasis has been put on the processes the learner goes through to achieve mastery in the TL. Among these processes, language transfer has

been regarded as a basic one (Selinker, 1972; Richards, 1972; Ellis, 1994). “From the nineteenth century on, the standards of evidence for transfer have been rising, and the empirical support for the importance of cross-linguistic influences on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc., is now quite strong” (Odlin, 2000:24).

1.2. Purpose and scope of the study

The copula *be* is one of the first (if not the first) topic introduced in foreign language classes and generally it is treated as an easy one in the textbooks. My teaching experience and later revision of the teaching materials have revealed that predominantly authors focus on the subject-verb agreement that is on the different forms of the verb *to be*. The explanation when the copula *be* is used and why it is distinct from all other verbs in English is omitted (Vereschagina, 1999; Peterson, 1994) or presented in a vague and unsystematic way (Panova, 1994). However, as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) pointed the copula *be* may pose problems for learners of different NL backgrounds and levels of proficiency. Most likely the understanding of the topic will be more complicated if the use of the copula *be* is different in L2 and L1 of the learner. Russian language is such a case and Russian learners seem to face difficulties in the use of the copula *be*, for which the reason is assumed to be the influence of the native language.

To the best of my knowledge, no research has been conducted on the acquisition of the copula *be* by Russian learners of English. Therefore, the current study aims to be a first step in the filling this gap by:

- a) Investigating the performance of Russian learners with different levels of proficiency in the use of the copula *be*;
- b) Examining how the task type (i.e., recognition or production) influences the performance of learners in the use of the copula *be*;
- c) Analyzing the domains of the use of the copula *be* that seem to be most problematic for Russian students.

1.3. Research questions

The research questions that the current study aims to answer are the following:

1. Do Russian learners encounter difficulties in the learning of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English?
2. How does the task type (recognition and production) influence the performance of the learners?
3. Are there any persistent mistakes/errors made by the native speakers of Russian related to the use of the copula *be*? And if there are such mistakes/errors what may be the reasons for them?

1.4. The significance of the study

The present work addresses the acquisition of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English by native speakers of Russian and tries to illustrate the difficulties encountered by Russian learners of English while acquiring the topic under investigation. By illuminating the differences between the use of the copula *be* between Russian and English languages, the current research provides a detailed analysis of mistakes/errors made by the native speakers of Russian with different levels of proficiency while using the copula *be* and tries to uncover possible reasons for them.

It is hoped that by presenting a comprehensive picture of the use of the copula *be* by Russian learners in different years of learning English, the study will draw the attention of ESL teachers to the problems students may encounter in learning the copula *be* in Present Tense in English. The findings of the study may alert instructors about cross-linguistic influence, enable them to minimize the interference coming from the NL and facilitate mastering of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English.

The problem under investigation claims to be a very important issue for the whole process of mastering of English language, mainly for the following reasons:

1. The misunderstanding and misuse of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense may influence learning of some further grammatical topics such

as, for example, Past and Future Tenses of the copula, Passive voice, Simple and Continuous aspects in the English language.

2. The failure at the initial stages of the language learning may have a destructive effect on students' motivation which is regarded as a leading factor in the successful language learning (Gardner and Lambert, 1972).

Therefore, as it was put by Comenius, an outstanding scholar of the seventeenth century,

the beginning should be slow and accurate, rightly understood and immediately tested. Unless the first layer is firm, nothing should be built on it; for the whole structure will be developed from the foundations. All the parts should be bound together so that one flows out of the other, and the later units include earlier ones. Whatever precedes forms a step to what follows and the last step should be traceable to the first by a clear chain of connection (Comenius, cited in Mackey, 1965:205).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0. Presentation

This chapter deals with the explanation of the term “interlanguage”, its main features and cognitive processes involved in it. Main second language acquisition (SLA) theories such as Contrastive Analysis and Universal Grammar are also presented briefly. Complying with the method of the current study Error Analysis is further discussed. The history of English-Russian language contacts and position of the English language in the secondary Russian school is considered as well. Lastly, the copula *be* in Russian and English language as well as the recent research on the copula *be* in SLA are summarized.

2.1. Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Humans must be taught chemistry or how to use a computer but they do not have to be taught to walk and talk (Fromkin and Rodman, 1998). You cannot prevent a human being from learning a language and no explicit instructions are necessary for it as all the knowledge about a language is automatically available to a human being in his first language acquisition (Chomsky, 1995).

However, the picture is different in the second language: even when a lot of time and effort are put into language learning, complete knowledge of L2 is

seldom achieved (Bley-Vroman, 1989). Therefore, a lot of researchers have investigated and attempted to understand the nature of the second language acquisition (SLA) processes (among others Lado, 1957; Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1971; Chomsky, 1965). The ultimate goal in many of these studies has been to increase the effectiveness of SLA and this in turn led to the introduction of different theories/frameworks in the field, namely Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage and Universal Grammar.

2.1.1. Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) was one of the earliest approaches in SLA. It involves “the comparison of equivalent portions of two languages for the purpose of isolating the probable problems that speakers of one language will have in acquiring the other” (Valdman, 1966:287).

CA was influenced by Behaviorism which was pioneered by Skinner and was very popular in the USA in the late 1950. The theory focused on the stimulus-respond connections. It viewed language acquisition as a habit formation process based on imitation, practice and reinforcement.

CA was based on two assumptions (Saville-Troike, 2006):

1. Language acquisition essentially involves habit formation in a process of Stimulus- Response – Reinforcement. Learners respond to the stimulus (linguistic input), and reinforcement strengthens (i.e. habituates) the response, they imitate and repeat the language that they hear, and when

they are reinforced for that response, learning occurs. The implication is that “practice makes perfect”.

2. There will be transfer in SLA that is “an influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired”. Transfer may have a positive or negative effect. (Odlin, 1989:27). Negative transfer is known as **interference**.

Lado (1957) in his classical guide to CA suggested that the easiest and, generally, the earliest structures learnt in L2 are those that exist in the same form, meaning and distribution in L1 of the learner; and thus they are accessible through transfer. Those forms in L2 that do not exist in L1 have to be learnt but it is not very difficult if these forms have meaning and distribution equivalent in the native language of the learner. However, Lado (1957) argued there are some ‘trouble spots’, cases of partial overlapping such as two languages may have some structures that are the same in form but different in meaning and distribution or the same in meaning and form but different in distribution, and alike. Such cases, probably, will cause the main problem to learners and reveal interference of L1.

Contrastive analysis aimed at increasing efficiency of the L2 learning process through systematical comparison of the native language and the language being learnt and, thus, mainly had pedagogical implications. Fries (1945) argued that CA was an essential component in L2 methodology. He maintained that “the most efficient materials are those that are based upon a

scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner' (1945:9).

Lado (1957) insisted that it is necessary to focus, describe and compare the surface forms of L1 and L2. He suggested that CA should be applied at every level of the language, precisely one level at a time, starting from the phonology of L1 and L2, then morphology and finally syntax.

The advocates of the approach regarded CA as the panacea for easy second language learning. Lee (1968:186), in his version of CA Hypothesis presented a clear formula how to find what should be taught in L2 classes. It can be best done by comparing the two languages and then subtracting what is common to them, so that "what the student has to learn equals the sum of the differences established by the contrastive analysis."

Sacks (1964:7) argued that thanks to CA "he (the teacher) is able to predict the difficulties which students will encounter in learning the target language and, on the basis of these, to construct teaching materials calculated to establish habitual responses in that language."

Lado (1957:3) suggested that "the most important new thing in the preparation of teaching materials is the comparison of native and foreign language and culture in order to find the hurdles that really have to be surmounted in the teaching. It will soon be considered quite out of date to begin writing a textbook without previously compared the two systems involved." He emphasized that "the linguistic comparison is basic and really

inescapable if we wish to make progress and not merely reshuffle the same old material”.

CA can be considered as an important starting point in SLA and linguistics, mainly for the following reasons:

1. CA introduced a continuing major theme of SLA research, the influence of the mother tongue in learning a second language at the phonological, morphological and syntactic levels;
2. Aspects of CA procedures are incorporated in later approaches;
3. CA has made contribution to linguistic typology;
4. CA procedures are relevant in machine translating.

However, in the further empirical studies, the theory of Contrastive Analysis proved to be predictive mostly at the level of phonology but failed to be valid at the other levels and found a lot of opponents.

George (1972) in his book “Common Errors in Language Learning “argued that two third of the mistakes made by his students couldn’t be traced to L1 structure.

Thus, it became clear that language learning cannot be understood only by comparing native and target languages and other factors should be taken into consideration so those who were concerned with language investigation turned to error analysis, interlanguage studies and universal grammar.

2.1.2. Universal Grammar

The latest major approach trying to explain the process of SLA is Universal Grammar (UG). It originated from studies on the nature of L1 acquisition and is based on the following assumptions:

1. Language acquisition is innate and every human being possesses an innate biologically endowed language faculty (Chomsky, 1965; Pinker, 1984), which allows the L1 acquirer to arrive at a linguistic system on the basis of the input;
2. UG is a part of this faculty and consists of principles, that are common across languages, and parameters, that may differ from language to language;
3. UG constrains L1 acquisition as well as adult native-speaker knowledge of language.

In L2 acquisition learners face an analogous task to that of L1 acquirers that is they need to arrive at a linguistic system which accounts for the L2 input, allowing the learner to understand and speak the second language. “Given this apparent similarity, the question of whether UG also mediates L2 acquisition, and to what extent, has been investigated and debated since early 1980s” (White, 2003:15). In these studies researchers mainly place emphasis on parameters that allow variations between languages and make it possible to investigate whether UG constrains grammars in SLA and to what extent L1 influences L2 learning (White, 2000).

There are three main positions within the theory:

i. No access to UG

L2 learners do not have any access to UG (Bley-Vroman 1989; Cook 1988; Schachter 1988). This position argues that mechanisms in L1 and L2 acquisition are absolutely different and L2 learners have no access to UG, L2 competence is created in a totally different way. As L2 has no access to UG it can be learnt from a grammar book or from drills. L2 learning in this case is a parallel process to L1 learning but without any connection to UG.

The explanation of how it is possible to learn a foreign language with no access to UG was proposed by Bley-Vroman (1989) in the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis: “My specific proposal here is that the function of the innate domain-specific acquisition system is filled in adults (though indirectly and imperfectly) by their native knowledge and by a general abstract problem-solving system” (Bley-Vroman, 1989:50).

According to the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis the difference between child language development and foreign language learning looks as the following:

<i>Child language development</i>	<i>Adult foreign language development</i>
<i>Universal Grammar</i>	<i>Native language knowledge</i>
<i>Domain-specific learning</i>	<i>General problem-</i>
<i>procedures</i>	<i>solving systems</i>

Bley-Vroman (1989:52) proposed that the adult foreign learner constructs a kind of surrogate for Universal Grammar from knowledge of the native language.

The supporters of the *No access model* (Clahsen and Muysken (1989), Tsimpli and Roussou (1991), cited in Cook (1988)) claim that the implications are different for principles and parameters: the later cannot be reset in L2 learning while the principle are available via L1 knowledge.

ii. *Indirect access to UG*

This point of view recognizes the role of both L1 and UG: L2 learners are indeed assumed to have access to principles and parameters of UG but in the beginning, access would be via L1 grammar, with the possibility of subsequent grammar restructuring and parameter resetting, in the light of exposure to L2 input. L2 has access to L1 competence, which is based on UG. L2 will only reflect those parts of UG that operate in L1. In indirect access learners start from L1 settings for the parameters, then they recognize a match or a mismatch of the parameters between native and foreign languages, and further, if L1 and L2 differ they reset the parameter (Flynn, 1996).

iii. *Direct access to UG*

According to this view, L2 learners indeed have access to UG and this access is direct (Cook 1988). According to this point of view L2 learners arrive at

the relevant properties of L2 independently of L1 grammar and their interlanguage grammars are constrained only by UG principles. To put it in different words, the relation between L1 learning and Universal Grammar leads to L1 competence and the relation between L2 learning and Universal Grammar leads to L2 competence.

There is no consensus between linguists which of the positions is relevant for SLA and there have been many empirical studies supporting each of them.

The problem in choosing between these models of access, as Cook and Newson (1997) stated, is that they might be true for different learners, or for different aspects of language for the same learner; L2 learning depends on an interaction between learner and situation, unlike first language acquisition (Cook and Newson, 1997:295).

2.2. Interlanguage in SLA

2.2.1. Interlanguage: Definition

The successive linguistic system that the learner constructs on his way to TL grammar has received several names in SLA.

Nemser (1971) referred to it as an “approximative system”. He defined “approximative system” as a “the deviant linguistic system actually employed by the learner attempting to utilize the target language. Such approximative systems vary in character in accordance with proficiency level, learning experience (including exposure to a target language script system),

communication function, personal learning characteristics, etc.” (Nemser, 1971:55).

Corder (1971:158-172) suggested the term “idiosyncratic dialect”. The choice of the term was determined by his two considerations:

1. The spontaneous speech of the second language learner is meaningful, it is systematic and regular, it can be described in terms of a set of rules, that is it has grammar.
2. The learner’s language is a dialect as it shares some rules of grammars, at least, of two languages, the target language and the native language of the learner.

Thus, the idiosyncratic dialect of the second language learner is “regular, systematic, meaningful and describable in terms of a set of rules, some subset of which is a sub-set of the rules of the target social dialect. His dialect is unstable and...many of its sentences present problems of interpretation to any native speaker of the target dialect” (Corder, 1971:161).

Selinker (1972) pointed at the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from the learner’s attempted production of a TL norm and he called it “an interlanguage” (IL). Selinker (1972) suggested that the set of utterances for most L2 learners at the stage of interlanguage is not identical to the hypothesized corresponding set of utterances which a native TL speaker would produce when attempting to express the same meaning; and “successful second language learning is the reorganization of linguistic material from an IL to identify with a particular

TL” (Selinker, 1972:48). He considered the development of the interlanguage to be a creative process, driven by inner forces in interaction with environmental factors, and influenced both by L1 and by input from the TL (Saville-Troike, 2006).

To sum up what is mentioned above, though the researchers suggested different terms for the phenomenon they all underlined the main features of the linguistic system of the L2 learner, namely:

1. Deviation from the norm of TL, mostly due to interaction between TL and native language of the learner;
2. Systematic and regular character which can be described in terms of a set rules;
3. Transitional and unstable nature.

In the current literature on the subject, as Sridhar (1980) posed, the term “interlanguage” has established as preferable for the following reasons:

- First, it captures the indeterminate status of the learner’s system between his native language and the TL;
- Second, it represents the “atypical rapidity” with which the learner’s language changes, or its instability;
- Third, focusing on the term “language”, it explicitly recognizes the rule-governed, systematic nature of the learner’s performance and its adequacy as a functional communicative system (from the learner’s point of view, at least).

- Finally, it is neutral as to the directionality of attitude-the other terms imply a TL-centered perspective (Sridhar, 1980:107).

Taking into consideration the above mentioned statements, the term “interlanguage” will be used further to refer to the phenomenon.

2.2.2. Interlanguage cognitive processes

Selinker (1972:31-55) underlined that interlanguage development in L1 acquisition by children and in SLA are different including different cognitive processes. He suggested the following cognitive processes as central in SLA:

1. Language transfer
2. Transfer of training
3. Strategies of second language learning
4. Strategies of second language communication
5. Overgeneralization
6. Fossilization

In the following sections each of these processes will be introduced and discussed briefly.

2.2.2.1. Language transfer

The role of the language transfer or, as Kellerman and Sharwood (1986) defined it, “cross-linguistic influence” has been investigated for several decades in Second Language Acquisition (e. g., Ellis, 1994; Kellerman, 1983; Odlin, 2000; Gass and Selinker, 2008). It refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from a known language to a language being learnt. Several definitions of transfer have been proposed so far. The most operational ones are those suggested by Selinker (1969) and Odlin (2000). Selinker (1969:103) defined transfer as a “process occurring from the native to the foreign language if frequency analysis shows that a statistically significant trend in the speaker’s native language...is then paralleled by a significant trend toward the ‘same’ alternative in the speaker’s attempted production of the foreign language sentences, phonetic features, phonetic sequences, etc.” According to Odlin (2000:27) transfer “is an influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired, transfer may have a positive (facilitation) or negative (inhibition) effect. Negative transfer includes underproduction, overproduction, production errors and misinterpretation (Odlin, 2000).

The first attempts to analyze this phenomenon in foreign language learning date back to the beginning of the 20th century (Sweet, 1899; Jespersen, 1912; Palmer, 1917). Since that time innumerable linguists and methodologists have been discussing this powerful factor in learning another language (Andersen, 1979; Kellerman, 1983; Flynn, 1996).

Beyond L1 and L2 features, researches have paid attention to other factors such as learner's age, nature of task and learning context that may trigger transfer. In this respect, Arabski (2006) underlined that younger learners seem more flexible in accepting differences/novelties presented by the new language as their L1 system is not fixed yet. On the other hand, Odlin (2000) noted that advanced students can compare systems of languages better and benefit from the similar material than beginners. This statement was proved by Jiang and Kuehn (2001) in their study on the transfer in the academic language development of post-secondary learners of English, in which quantitative and qualitative evidence on positive transfer of prior linguistic and cognitive skills from L1 to L2 was provided.

The nature of the task is another factor influencing how much a learner would rely on the knowledge from his L1. Ellis (1994) suggested that in production tasks, translation particularly, learners tend to lean on their native language more and, thus, language transfer appears more often.

Odlin (2000) pointed at the learning context as an important factor in language transfer and suggested that in the focused context (classroom settings) negative transfer is less likely to occur as learners are instructed to pay attention to certain norms and rules of a target language. Herein, Odlin (2000) underlined the role of a teacher in the learning process: "...teaching may become more effective through a consideration of differences between languages and between cultures. Also, consideration of the research showing similarities in errors made by learners of different backgrounds will help

teachers to see better what may be difficult or easy for anyone learning the language they are teaching” (Odlin, 2000:5).

2.2.2.2. Transfer of training

Richards (1972:89) stated: “In a foreign language setting, where the major source of the input for English is the teacher manual and the teacher, the concept of transfer of training may be a basic analytic approach, since many of the errors observable are directly traceable to the manner of presentation of the language feature in the school course”.

Selinker (1972) underlined that this process is quite different from language transfer and it may cause a difficulty even if the native language of the learner and L2 are the same from the point of view of a certain phenomenon. As an example Selinker (1972) mentioned Serbo-Croatian speakers who, at all levels of proficiency, tend to use *he* instead of *she*, though the distinction between *he* and *she* is the same in Serbo-Croatian as it is English. The overuse of *he* is due to the transfer of training. The case is that textbooks and teachers almost always present drills with *he* and almost never with *she*. Under this condition, the learners, “even though they are consciously aware of the distinction and of their recurrent error, in fact, regularly produce *he* for both *he* and *she*, stating that they feel they do not need to make this distinction in order to communicate” (Selinker, 1972:39).

2.2.2.3. Strategies of second language learning

Selinker (1972) pointed to the L2 learning strategies as an important factor influencing the performance of the learner. However, he admitted that very little was known about what strategies the L2 learner uses when mastering a foreign language and a viable definition of it did not seem possible at that time. The most spread strategy at that time was considered simplification of the TL system.

Thus, Coulter (1968, cited in Selinker, 1972) reported that Russian learners of English tended to avoid grammatical formatives such as articles, plural forms and past tense forms. He attributed this simplification to a communicative strategy due to the past experience of the speaker which had showed him that if he cared about the grammatical accuracy of the utterance his speech would be hesitant and slow, leading native speakers to be impatient with him.

At present, more research on the topic has been conducted (Rigney, 1978; Oxford, 1990; Skehan, 1989) and the strategies utilized in second language learning have been investigated in a variety of ways.

Language learning strategies are defined as the often-conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, reception, recall, and use of new information (Oxford, 1990).

Studies (Chamot and Kupper, 1989) demonstrated that language learners at different levels of proficiency use different learning strategies, but some of them might not be aware of it. Learning strategies depend upon many factors

such as goals and needs of the learner, the nature of the task and material, level and culture of the student.

Oxford (1990) stated that language learners may use different strategies, namely: metacognitive techniques for organizing and evaluating one's learning; affective strategies for controlling emotions and attitudes; social strategies for cooperating with other members of the learning process, cognitive strategies for linking new information with existing schemata, classifying and analyzing it; and compensation strategies to overcome the lack of the current language knowledge.

2.2.2.4. Strategies of second language communication

Strategies of communication were first mentioned by Selinker (1972) in his paper "Interlanguage" to account for certain errors made by L2 learners. "These errors were regarded as a by-product of the attempt of the learner to express his meaning in spontaneous speech with an inadequate grasp of the target language" (Corder, 1981:103).

Faerch and Kasper (1983 cited in Selinker and Mascia, 2001:23) defined communication strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal".

"These potential conscious plans" depend not only upon the learner's knowledge of the language but also on the interlocutor, his linguistic and

discourse competence. Moreover, Corder (1971:103) argued that “since communication is a cooperative enterprise, one must suppose that we may adopt both productive and receptive strategies of communication”. The latter, however, has received very little attention so far.

Corder (1981:104-106) considered that all language users adopt certain communicative strategies but in the native speaker’s speech they are not noticeable because “he always has the linguistic means to express the messages he wishes to communicate”. In the foreign language learner, on the other hand, the relation between “means and wishes” is not in balance as his linguistic knowledge may be not enough for the messages he would like to convey. In such a situation the learner has only two ways:

1. The learner can adjust his message to the resources he has. Corder (1981) named these procedures as message adjustment or risk-avoidance strategies. The extreme form of the message adjustment strategies is “topic avoidance”. The less acute one may be “message reduction” or “semantic avoidance”.
2. The learner can “attempt to increase his resources by one means or another in order to realize his communicative intentions”. Corder (1981) called them resource expansion or risk-running strategies. These strategies refer to an attempt to use invented or borrowed items adopted to the TL. The extreme form of borrowing is “switching” to another language. The less risk-running strategies are “to use

paraphrase or circumlocution, that is getting round your problem with the knowledge you have” (Corder, 1981: 106).

From the pedagogical point of view the second group of communicative strategies, that is resource expansion strategies, is the most valuable because as Corder (1981) underlined they are “success oriented and may eventually lead to language learning”.

Selinker and Mascia (2001:24) also maintained that strategies of second language communication are very helpful for language acquisition not only because they enable the learner to keep the conversation going and, consequently, provide more possibilities for input, but also because they could be used as “a learning tool to reveal the gaps between a learner’s interlanguage and the target language”.

2.2.2.5. Overgeneralization

Selinker (1972) stated that overgeneralization is well known in language learning and may cause typical mistakes of learners with different native language backgrounds. Jakobovits (1969, cited in Richards, 1971:174), defined overgeneralization or transfer as “the use of previously available strategies in new situations. In second language learning some of these strategies will prove helpful in organizing the facts about the second language, but others, perhaps due to superficial similarities, will be misleading and inapplicable”.

Richards (1971) maintained that overgeneralization occurs when the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his knowledge of the target language. Richards (1971) demonstrated dozens of overgeneralization items, such as *he can sings, we are hope, he come from*. He argued that overgeneralization may cover items which are contrasted in the grammar of the language but do not carry significant contrast for the learner. “The *-ed* marker, in narrative or in other past context, often appear to carry no meaning, since pastness is usually indicated lexically...,thus the learner cuts the tasks involved in sentence production” (Richards, 1971:175).

Taylor (1980) contrasted overgeneralization with language transfer. The later, he said, often occurs at the elementary levels of proficiency when learners rely extensively on their native language for support because of the lack of familiarity with the new linguistic system. With increased proficiency of the target language, students rely more often on their knowledge of it, copying directly with it and overgeneralizing its rules. Taylor (1980) suggested a remedial approach which involves review, contrast, and re-review, in order to help learners to overcome overgeneralization errors.

Richards (1971:175) also warned that certain types of teaching techniques increase the frequency of overgeneralized structures. “Many pattern drills and transform exercises are made up of utterances that can interfere with each other to produce a hybrid structure:

Teacher	Instruction	Student
<i>He walks quickly.</i>	Change to continuous form	<i>He is walk quickly</i> ".

2.2.2.6. Fossilization

Selinker (1972) defined fossilizable linguistic phenomena as “linguistic items, rules, and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL will tend to keep in their IL relative to a particular TL, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the TL.” (Selinker, 1972:36)

Selinker and Mascia (2001) used the definition of ‘fossilize’ taken from Random House Dictionary:

“Ling. (of a linguistic form, feature, rule, etc) to become permanently established in the interlanguage of a second-language learner in a form that is deviant from the target-language norm and that continues to appear in performance regardless of further exposure to the target language.” (Random House Dictionary, 2001:22)

Gass and Selinker (1994), cited in Selinker and Mascia (2001:23) stated that fossilization results when new (correct) input fails to have an impact on the learner’s grammar.

Selinker (1972:36) regarded as the most crucial fact in fossilization, “regular reappearance in IL productive performance of linguistic structures which were thought to be eradicated”. A lot of these phenomena re-emerge when the

learner's attention is focused on another difficult or new subject, or when he is excited; and sometimes when the learner is extremely relaxed, which seems rather strange.

Selinker and Mascia (2001) noted that classically, the following properties are assigned to the process of fossilization:

1. Fossilization is equivalent to cessation of development;
2. Fossilization can take place at every level of the interlanguage, namely, phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical, discoursal and others;
3. Fossilization features are resistant;
4. Fossilization may hit any L2 learner, no matter what his age, exposure to the TL or nationality is;
5. Fossilizable features tend to manifest themselves as backsliding in performance.

Selinker & Mascia (2001) pointed out that over the past decade fossilization had been discussed within two distinct traditions: developmental and ultimate attainment. The former analyzes the issue in terms of sociolinguistics, while the latter explains the phenomenon in term of Universal Grammar. In the developmental tradition researchers try to answer the question: *How do we as observers know that interlanguage development has ceased?* In the ultimate attainment tradition the question is stated a bit differently: *How do we know that the attainment to date is the final steady state grammar?*

2.3. Error Analysis

2.3.1. Overview of Error Analysis

The notion of error analysis (EA) was not a new one for pedagogy and linguistics before the 70th. First of all, as Schacher & Celce-Murcia (1980) argued that sophisticated language teachers who paid attention to the interlanguage of their students used EA as the main technique for investigating learners' interlanguage for decades. Secondly, EA had a certain place in CA, which ascribed errors to interference coming from the native language and consequently a major part of EA was devoted to comparing the mother tongue and the TL. However, the errors that could not be explained in this way were overlooked and underestimated. (Corder, 1981:1)

The systematic approach to the problem of errors started as a result of the reflections and research of such scientists as Corder (1967, 1971, 1974, 1981), Richards (1971, 1974), Selinker (1972).

Corder (1967) in his influential paper "The significance of learner's errors" suggested a new way of looking at the errors made by L2 learners. He said: "We interpret the child's 'incorrect' utterances as being evidence that he is in the process of acquiring language and indeed, for those who attempt to describe his knowledge of the language at any point in its development, it is the 'errors' which provide the important evidence" (Corder, 1967:23). Further, he proposed that the second language learner might go through analogous process while acquiring a foreign language and his errors are

evidence of a definite language system and are themselves systematic (Corder, 1967).

At this point Corder (1967) introduced a distinction between “mistakes” and “errors”. Mistakes are deviations due to performance, which may be caused by memory lapses, physical states and psychological conditions. They are non-systematic, do not reflect a defect of the language knowledge and are readily corrected by the learner when his attention is drawn to them. Errors, on the other hand, are systematic and reveal the learner’s “underlying knowledge of the language to date, i. e. his *transitional competence*” (Corder, 1967:25).

Corder (1971) emphasized the importance of analyzing the interlanguage with the help of the EA technique by saying “the study of the language development of a second language learner would rely heavily upon the techniques of what we call ‘error analysis’” (Corder, 1971:135).

Since it might be rather difficult to distinguish whether a misuse in the learner’s performance is a mistake or an error, every incorrect use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense will be taken into consideration and analyzed in terms of the current research.

2.3.2. Classifications and methodology of EA

Richards (1972) proposed a three-way classification of errors:

1. Interference errors
2. Intralingual errors
3. Developmental errors

The interference errors are those caused by the influence of the mother tongue of the learner and, as Richards (1972:182) expressed, are considered “a major source of difficulty in second language learning”.

The intralingual errors are those that occur due to the complexity of the TL. These errors reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as overgeneralization, or incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which the rule applies.

The developmental errors reflect the strategies the learner uses when acquiring a foreign language. These errors usually appear when the exposure to the TL is limited. A major justification for labeling an error as developmental comes from recording the similar mistakes produced by children acquiring the TL as their native.

Corder (1971) suggested another classification of the second language learner’s errors. He classified them as presystematic, systematic and postsystematic.

The presystematic errors are not random, as the learner has not been informed about the structure in the target language. The systematic errors appear when the learner is aware of the rule in the target language. The postsystematic

errors are met at the stage when the learner knows the target language norm but uses it incorrectly at times.

The classifications devised by Corder (1971) and Richards (1971) are not used in the study. Because the both of them require longitudinal studies that would allow tracing the process of language development and error modification of the learner. Also, in order to understand the strategies of the students, their reflections on the incorrect forms seem to be obligatory.

As the present study is based on the datum coming from Russian students living in Moscow, which was collected at one time, the above mentioned frameworks do not look feasible and applicable. Therefore, it was decided to refer to the more objective and clear-cut classification proposed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:151). The researchers defined the following types of TL modifications:

1. Omission: The absence of an item that should be used in a well-formed sentence.
2. Addition: The presence of an item that should not be used in a well-formed sentence.
 - a) Regularization: e.g., *eated for ate*.
 - b) Double-marking: e.g., *he did not went*.
 - c) Simple addition: can be explained with neither regularization nor double-marking.
3. Misinformation: The incorrect use of a target form.
 - a) Regularization: e.g., *Do they be happy?*

- b) Arch-forms: e.g., using *me* both as a subject and an object pronoun.
 - c) Alternative forms: e.g., using *no+V* instead of *do not+V*.
4. Misordering: The incorrect placement of forms in the string of a sentence.

Sridhar (1980) stated that the traditional EA method consists of the following steps:

1. Collection of data;
2. Identification of errors;
3. Classification into error types;
4. Statement of relative frequency of error types;
5. Identification of the areas of difficulty in the TL;
6. Therapy (remedial drills, lessons, etc.).

“While the above mentioned methodology,” he continues, “is roughly representative of the majority of error analyses in the traditional framework, the more sophisticated investigators (Rossipal, 1971; Duskova, 1969) went further, to include one or both of the following:

1. Analysis of the source of errors (e.g., mother tongue interference, overgeneralization, inconsistencies in the spelling system of the TL, etc.);
2. Determination of the degree of disturbance caused by the error (or the seriousness of the error)” (Sridhar, 1980:103).

The present study will include all the procedures listed above except for therapy that generally requires the discussion of several methodological approaches and material development, which is not in the focus of the research.

2.3.3. Implications of research in EA

Corder (1981) marked that EA has two functions. The first one is theoretical, which is part of the systematic study of the learners' language and necessary for understanding the processes of the second language acquisition. "In order to find out the nature of these psychological processes, we have to have a means of describing the learner's knowledge of the target language at any particular moment in his learning career in order to relate this knowledge to the teaching he has been receiving" (Corder,1981:45).

The other, pedagogical or practical, aspect of EA is "its function in guiding the remedial action", because "a good understanding of the nature of errors is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them could be found. (Corder, 1981:1)

Sridhar (1980:103) pointed out that EA was "conceived and performed for its "feedback" value in designing pedagogical materials and strategies" and was to help in:

1. Determining the sequences of presentation of target items in textbook and classroom;
2. Deciding the relative degree of emphasis, explanation and practice required in putting across various items in the TL;
3. Devising remedial lessons and exercises;
4. Selecting items for testing the learner's proficiency.

This dual character of EA implication, precisely pedagogical and theoretical value, is a significant factor that assured a place of the approach in the whole systematic study of second language acquisition and accounts for the longest tradition in the field.

The choice of the framework for the current study was determined mainly by the purpose of the research, which is to identify and analyze the difficulties Russian learners may encounter learning the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English.

UG approach examines just limited factors that may influence second language learners' performance, namely, access to universal grammar and the native language of the learner. Besides, it seems rather difficult to find pedagogical implication for the findings of the UG study in the classroom context.

As for CA, it proved to be incapable not only to predict but also to explain most of the errors second language learners make.

EA framework, on the other hand, allows me to trace, identify and analyze the persistent errors of second language learners and provides valuable feedback for further remedial treatment.

In the current study, the procedure which was proposed by Lee (1957, cited in Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980) but has not been put into practice often because “it is very laborious and complex in practice” (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980:121) will be adopted. For language learners with the same mother tongue, Lee (1957), cited in Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1980), proposed that errors be collected and investigated at several levels so that persistent errors be distinguished from “self-correcting” ones. This procedure will be applied in the frames of the topic “The copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English”.

2.3.4. Weaknesses of EA Research

Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1980) in their article “Weaknesses in Error Analysis Research” pointed out potential weak sides of the EA. They outlined them under following headings: analysis of errors in isolation, the proper classification of identified errors, statements of error frequency, the identification of points of difficulty in the target language, the ascription of causes to systematic errors, and the biased nature of the sampling procedures.

Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1980) started by saying that when investigators focus on the errors without the corpus they may misinterpret the reason why the learner produces the error.

Further, they continued that very often errors may be very ambiguous for classification; and without students' reflection on the incorrect answer and comparing his production with that of children acquiring the language as native, it may be impossible to classify the error.

Another problematic issue is the statement of error frequency. Some EA-based studies make informal statements about frequency of errors (Burt and Kiparsky, 1972, cited in Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980), which cause serious omissions. Other studies provide extensive numerical totals (Neuman, 1977, cited in Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980), which allows the reader to "arrive at sounder pedagogical conclusions" (1980:125); however they are less useful than studies which consider *relative frequency* (Angello, 1977, cited in Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980). "In such a study relative frequency refers to a fraction obtained by using as numerator the number of times an error was committed and as denominator the number of times the error type could have occurred" (1980:126). Such relative statements of frequency are very informative, however, an obligatory condition here is contexts should be examined but not separate errors.

The identification of points of difficulty in the TL may be a vexed question too. The case here is that generally the most difficult material is determined based on the statements of error classification and frequency, which are questionable themselves. Besides, as the authors of the article underlined, there may be areas of difficulty that are not revealed by a high frequency of

production errors simply because learners avoid producing construction which they find difficult.

Further, Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1980) urged investigators upon behaving very cautiously when they suggest causes of errors because there are large number of errors that are ambiguous as to whether they are interlingual (due to interference), intralingual or developmental. As an example they considered the obligatory copula in English. For Chinese, Arabic, Russian students deletion of this form can be explained through interference because their native languages lack the copula. However, the same error can be regarded as a developmental one since “monolingual English learners (i.e., children) and native speakers of languages like Spanish, which exhibits no structural differences with English in this area, also produce this “error” when learning English” (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980:127).

The last weakness of the EA research is due to the biased nature of sampling procedures. Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1980) pointed out that researchers using EA data tend to overlook the fact that they may be studying a very limited and biased sampling in any one of the following areas:

1. Background languages (assuming a researcher is working with a heterogeneous group);
2. Subjects;
3. Data samples.

The authors argued that the sampling in any of these areas is seldom (if ever) “random” in the statistical sense of the word since researchers work with available participants. Therefore, trying to draw statistically significant findings from such samples may be *a priori* a questionable practice...And there is the ever-present danger of treating performance data as if they were the only and ultimate truth” (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980:128-129).

In conclusion, the authors emphasized that the above listed pitfalls would help researchers carrying EA studies improve the quality of the research and assist teachers and students in reading and evaluating the merits and limitations of various EA projects.

Taking into consideration the article “Weaknesses of error analysis research” written by Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1980), the following measures have been taken in order to decrease the risks mentioned by the authors:

1. The errors will be evaluated within the whole corpus so that the correct answers will be taking into consideration as well;
2. The errors will be elicited from the specially developed objective diagnostic tests to exclude the possibility that the subjects will avoid producing the structures under investigation;
3. The errors will be classified according to the objective and clear-cut framework suggested by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:151);
4. The data will be collected from homogeneous groups (only Russian) of students at different ages and proficiency levels;

5. The tests will be applied to students who have been taught English by different teachers;
6. The ascription of causes to the errors will be presented in the form of hypotheses.

2.4. English Language in Russia

2.4.1. History of English-Russian language contacts

An overview of the history of English language in Russia reveals that English “has come into and gone out of fashion with ebbs and flows of Russian (Soviet) relations with English-speaking nations” (Proshina and Etkin, 2005:439). In the article “English-Russian language contacts” Proshina and Etkin (2005) presented stages of English-Russian language and cultural contacts.

The history of Russian and British contacts dates back to the middle of the sixteenth century when the Russian Czar Ivan the Terrible granted an audience to Richard Chancellor, the aim of whose expedition was to open a new market for British merchandise. The beginning of Russian-British trading triggered the development of the relations between the two countries. Many British specialists started working in Russia. The first interpreters and translations of books appeared at this period. And Russia sent a lot of young people to learn the language and get education in Britain.

However, in the middle of the seventeenth century, Russian-British relations deteriorated due to several political and economical reasons. The thaw in the English-Russian language and cultural contacts began only with the epoch of Peter the Great who enlivened the relations between the two countries and interest in English language. The czar promoted the field of translation and sent a lot of Russian students to Britain to master the language and crafts.

In the second half of the eighteenth century the first Translators' Society was established and many Russian intellectuals studied English to be able to read English books and watch English-language plays.

In the nineteenth century English was the second (after French) most widely studied foreign language in the country. Russian people studied the language mainly for the sake of English literature and culture.

Anglophilia continued till the seventies of the nineteenth century. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by weak contacts between Britain and Russia that were changed into hostile relationship after the Russian proletariat revolution in 1917.

In the thirties of the 20th century the interest in the English language and British and American cultures was stimulated by the anti-Nazi alliance of World War Two. At that time English became a school subject, relying chiefly on the grammar translation method of teaching. A lot of teaching material was published.

After the Second World War, as Proshina and Etkin (2005) noted, the negative attitude emerged to everything foreign including English as the language of imperialism. English as a lesson was still on the time-table but its curriculum reflected Soviet reality and textbooks were full of politicized clichés and propaganda.

The end of the Cold War “changed both the geographical and political landscape” (Proshina and Etkin, 2005). At the end of the twentieth century, the English language boom began in Russia.

On the one hand, Russian people got access to foreign entertainment industry, brands, internet and travelling abroad, which, no doubt, promoted the spread of the English language among the Russian population.

On the other hand, as the result of the development of the international business relations, oral and written contacts in English increased incredible.

And finally, English has become important for Russian society “as a means for spreading Russian culture throughout the world” (Proshina and Etkin, 2005).

These political, economical and cultural changes have fostered the interest of Russian people in English. English departments at many universities have become the most prestigious, a lot of language courses have been opened and more attention has been given to English language at schools. Now “knowledge of English is considered to be fitting for a cultured person, and a potential advantage in a difficult job market” (Lovtsevich, 2005:463).

2.4.2. English language in Russian state schools

The educational system in Russia provides for an eleven-year school course which is compulsory since September 1, 2007. The eleven-year school term is split into elementary (grades 1-4), middle (grades 5-9) and senior (grades 10-11) levels. Children are accepted to the first grade at the age of 6 or 7, depending on the individual development of each child. The school year extends from September, 1 to the end of May and is divided into four terms. The study program is fixed; schoolchildren and/or their parents cannot choose school subjects.

English lesson, as a rule, starts at the second grade of the elementary school. Children have English twice a week in the elementary school and three times a week in the middle and senior classes. However, as English has gained prestige and is considered “an essential part of being an educated person” (Lovtsevich, 2005:463) there is a tendency to increase the number of English classes up to four or five a week by reducing the curricula in chemistry, physics and biology or by adding optional classes (Bartasheva, 2004). For foreign language lessons the class is divided into two groups therefore there are not more than 12-15 students in English classes.

Standardized set of textbooks, approved by the Ministry of Education, is used. “All Russian teachers of English undergo a rigorous five-year training program in language pedagogy as well as the separate systems of the language” (Lovtsevich, 2005:463). As it was noted by several researchers

(Lovtsevich, 2005; Bartasheva, 2004; Tolstaya, 2002; Leontovich, 2005), language teaching methodology in Russia is marked by “its own indigenous traditions, which are the efforts of Russian scholars and educators” (Lovtsevich, 2005:462) and which have developed independently of language teaching traditions of English speaking countries. The permeation of methodology, teachers and textbooks from English speaking countries is still limited in Russia and unacceptable for the state Russian schools. Language teaching methodology used in Russia is not discussed in the current paper as it is beyond the focus of the research.

Among other subjects taught in the secondary school, the general level of students’ knowledge in English is considered rather high. As the results of the nation-wide Unified State Exam (USE) session of 2008 covering all regions of Russia indicated, English is one of the subjects (along with French and society studies) in which the highest grades were recorded (Ria Novosti, June, 13, 2008 cited in Wikipedia).

2.5. The copula *be* in English and Russian languages

2.5.1. The copula *be* as a learning problem

The grammatical systems of Russian and English are fundamentally different. English is an analytic language. In English grammatical meaning is mainly expressed through the use of additional words and by changes in word order. Russian is a synthetic language. Most of grammatical forms are made through changes in the structure of words, by means of a developed system of prefixes

and inflectional endings which indicate declension, conjugation, person, number, gender and tense. But there is no real fixed word order and there are no auxiliary verbs like *do*, *have* or *will* in Russian (Swan and Smith, 2001:150-151).

As for the verb *to be*, it is used in future and past tenses in Russian but omitted in present tense, as a rule. For example, “in Russian we say: *I salesclerk; My mother teacher; He interesting*” (Szczepanska, 2005:18).

This difference in the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense between Russian and English languages, as well as potential problems that learners may encounter with the copula *be*, are indicated and discussed in some grammar books of English and Russian (Panova, 1994; Szczepanska, 2005; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Thus, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999:53-57) argued that though the forms of the copula *be* are superficially simple to describe and understand yet they pose problems for learners at all levels and especially at the initial stage. Firstly, the multiplicity of forms explains why learners may use a wrong form of the verb *be* in their speech or writing. Secondly, the copula *be* can be followed not only by adjective phrases but also by noun and adverbial prepositional phrases, that is it is the grammatically the most flexible copula verb. Thirdly, the syntactic behavior of the copula *be*, which behaves like an auxiliary verb and has operator function in question and negation formations, is very different from other verbs like *go*, which require additional a *do* auxiliary as the operator if there is no other auxiliary verb. And finally, as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-

Freeman (1999:53-57) underlined, that the copula *be* does not appear in all languages. The speakers of the languages that have nothing equivalent to the copula *be* tend to transfer the literal translation pattern from their native language to English.

At this point I would like to consider another case with copula *to be* which may cause Russian learners problems not only in acquiring the copula itself but also in understanding some other grammatical phenomena.

There are several cases when copula *be* followed by an adjective like in *to be thirsty, to be ill, to be fond of, to be late and others* are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian language. For example,

1. *He is thirsty.*

Он хочет пить.

He-[PRN., MASC., SG., NOM.] want- [VERB, PR. T., 3 PER., SG.] drink – [VERB, INF.]

2. *She is ill.*

Она болеет.

She – [PRN., FEM., NOM.] be ill –[VERB, PR.T., 3 PER., SG.]

3. *He is fond of sport.*

Он любит спорт.

He-[PRN., MASC., SG., NOM.] like – [VERB, PR. T., 3PER., SG.] sport –[NOUN, SG, ACC.] (Smirnitski, 1989).

Such cases might be especially confusing for the native speaker of Russian because they seem to be beyond the general rule of the copula *be* which should be followed by noun-, adjective- or adverbial prepositional predicates but never a verbal one. This misunderstanding may cause the following errors in the production of students:

1. Learners may transfer morphological properties of Russian verbs to English adjectives and therefore process these adjectives as verbs. For example:

**He fond of sport.*

**Does he fond of sport?*

**He does not fond of sport.*

2. On the other hand, this morphosyntactic difference may complicate understanding of Present Simple Tense and may result in overgeneralization like:

**He is like sport*

**He is not like sport*

**Is he like sport;*

simply because the sentences *He likes sport* and *He is fond of sport* correspond to the same Russian sentence *Я люблю спорт* (*I* – [PRN., 1 PER. SG., NOM]. *like* – [VERB, PR. T., 1 PER., SG.] *sport* – [NOUN, ACC.]) with a verbal predicate.

As far as I am aware this distinction has been discussed neither in the grammatical sources nor in the latest research papers published on the topic. However, relying on my teaching experience and professional opinion of colleagues (who are native speakers of Russian teaching English to students whose mother tongue is Russian) I hypothesize that such morphosyntactic differences between the languages may cause another problem in the acquisition of the copula *be* by Russian learners of English.

2.5.2. Research on the copula *be* in SLA

Overview of the literature revealed that there have been only few studies dealing with the acquisition of the copula *be* in L1 or L2.

Hawkins (2001) investigated the acquisition of the copula *be* both by native and foreign learners. He suggested that at the early stages of L1 and L2 acquisition simple NP-AP (noun phrase-adjective phrase) utterances which lack the obligatory copula verb occur with high frequency in the both processes. His statement corroborated the view that omission of the copula *be* is typical for all foreign learners regardless of whether their native language has an equivalent form or not and for children learning English as their L1 as well.

Rasinger (2005) analyzed the influence of the age of arrival on the acquisition of English auxiliary and copula constructions among a community of Bengali immigrants in East London.

He investigated the speech of the ten immigrants (6 males and 4 females) at the age between 25 and 45. The speech data were collected by use of open interviews on general topics, which were conducted in groups of two to three foreign speakers. In addition to the interview, a short questionnaire was used to cover basic social variables. The data elicited allowed the researcher insights to what extent and at what frequency the subjects were able to produce certain syntactic structures. The qualitative analysis was used in the study. Rasinger (2005) argued that there is no negative correlation between the age of learners' arrival and their copula and auxiliary performance. He

suggested that learners' length of residence in Britain is a much stronger influencing factor when the focus is on copula and auxiliary verbs.

Geeslin and Guijarro-Fuentes (2005) investigated the effect of native language and length of exposure and type of input on the acquisition of the copula choice in Spanish. A group of 27 speakers of L2 Spanish whose L1 backgrounds are English (N=11), French (N=4) and German (N=11) participated in the study. They ranged in age from 21 to 60. The group was comprised of 22 females and 4 males. The participants were studying Spanish in a Spanish university as part of their degree program. The proficiency level varied within the group. The data for the research were collected from the placement test and a background questionnaire. The cross-tabulation data and chi-tests were used in the analysis. The results of the study revealed no influence of L1 or existent knowledge of additional languages on production of the copula. No correlation between the copula performance and study abroad or the copula performance and length of exposure to the language was established.

CHAPTER III

METHOD OF RESEARCH

3.0. Presentation

This chapter presents the participants from whom the data were collected, instruments developed for the research with their features of usefulness, data collection procedure and data analysis methods utilized in the study.

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study are three groups (five classes) of students of state Russian schools in Moscow, who were chosen randomly. Russian is their L1 and the language they use in their daily communication. The information about the students' background was obtained from their answers in the questionnaire (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

3.1.1. Group 1

The first group consists of 30 students. They are 8-10 years old. Their L2 is English and they have been instructed for it two times a week for a year. They have been taught by one teacher.

3.1.2. Group 2

The second group of the participants consists of 30 students. They are 11-12

years old. The students are in their fourth year of studying English and have been having classes three times a week.

The students in the both groups have not taken any extra-curricular or additional English courses. None of them has been to an English speaking country for more than a week. The students do not watch English programs, read English books or have any regular interactions with native speakers of English regularly. Thus, their knowledge of English is mainly due to their classes at school.

3.1.3. Group 3

There are 16 students in the third group. They have been studying English for eight years. They are 14-15 years old. The students are having classes at least five times a week with two different teachers. The students, according to their answers in the questionnaire, are interested in English, they regularly watch English programs, mainly films; some of them read English books and have friends whose native language is English. The students work on English hard because in two years they are to have a Unified State Exam which includes English section as well. So the students are familiar with test-format exam very well.

3.2. Materials

To carry out the research I designed a questionnaire and two tests. The study was piloted with three Turkish and two Russian students. They were chosen

randomly. The students belong to different age groups, from 8 to 12 years old, and go to different schools in Ankara. Their periods of learning English differ as well, from 1 to 5 years. In order to learn the students' opinion about the tests and discuss the mistakes/errors made in the tasks, the post-test interview was held with the students who took part in the piloting procedure. Additionally, after examining the data collected in the pilot study, the reliability coefficients of the tests were calculated (Heaton, 1975:164) which will be discussed further.

3.2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire includes 9 questions (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). The participants were asked to provide personal information such as name, age, sex in the first three questions. The next six questions were designed to get the information about the period the participants have been learning English and about the factors that may influence their learning of English such as reading books or watching TV in English, communicating with native speakers of English and staying in an English speaking country.

3.2.2. Tests

3.2.2.1. The definition of knowledge of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense

In defining the construct under investigation, that is the knowledge on the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English, I used the definition of

grammatical knowledge suggested by Bachman and Palmer (1996). They defined it as “knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and graphology” which is involved in comprehending or producing formally accurate utterances or sentences (Bachman and Palmer, 1996:68).

Referring to the Bachman and Palmer’s point of view I defined the knowledge of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense as an ability to comprehend and produce formally accurate utterances in which the copula *to be* is used as a linking verb between the subject and nonverbal predicates such as nouns, adjectives, particles, numerals and adverbial prepositional phrases. This ability implies knowledge of the spelling of the different forms of the verb *to be* in Present Simple Tense, knowledge of the subject-verb agreement and distinguishing cases when the copula *be* should be used.

3.2.2.2. Description of the tests

To examine the learners’ knowledge on the copula *be* I developed two diagnostic tests: a multiple-choice (MC) test with 35 items and a completion items (CI) test with 40 items. The tests cover the main aspects of the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999. *The Grammar Book. An ESL/EFL Teacher’s Course*).

The MC test (Appendix 3) was developed as an instrument that would diagnose whether the students can recognize cases when and which form of

the copula *be* should be used. The choice of the MC test was determined by its following characteristics suggested by Heaton (1975):

1. MC tests prove to be useful when it is necessary to measure students' ability to recognize correct grammatical forms on a certain topic;
2. MC tests give an opportunity to test every point of grammar which is to be examined.
3. With the help of MC tests the areas of difficulties inside the topic can be diagnosed;
4. MC tests prove to be a useful means of testing in various learning situations (particularly at the lower levels);
5. Well-prepared MC tests are considered to be very reliable;
6. MC tests are easy to examine statistically.

To test the participants' ability to produce appropriate forms with the copula *be*, the CI test (Appendix 4) was designed. This test type was chosen because CI tests give an opportunity to examine learners' knowledge on the topic in details and assess students' production skills independently of their speaking and writing competence. Thus, intending to assess the performance of learners starting from the elementary level, I considered a CI test as an optimal variant to test their production skills. However, I have to admit that the production comprises a wider range of skills such as an ability to produce appropriate forms in the oral and written speech but not only the ability of filling in the blanks. That is why, to denote the limited character of the

production skills examined in the study, the term “approximate production” will be used.

In the tests along with sentences with omitted forms of the verb *to be* I added sentences with the omitted forms of the verbs *do* and *can* in order to examine whether the student understand in what cases the verb *to be* and in what cases other verbs should be used.

3.2.2.3. Validity and reliability of the instruments

To validate the instrument I examined its content and criterion-based validity because “an important requirement for a test to qualify as valid is that its validity should be investigated in at least two types of validity” (Enginarlar, 1994). At the beginning of the study, the tests were distributed to four experienced teachers (Appendix 5) for expert feedback. They were asked to analyze the instrument, particularly its content coverage and relevance. After the experts’ comments were considered and slight modifications were made, the tests were piloted. To determine the criterion-based validity of the tests I asked the teacher of the fourth-year learners of English to rank them. The teacher of the fourth-year students had been teaching them for three years, thus, I believe, had an objective idea about the language knowledge of her students. Further, the teacher’s ranking and the tests scores were correlated to investigate the extent of the relation between them. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was calculated with PASW and the results are reported below.

Table 3.1: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test I scores

		rank	T.1
rank	Pearson Correlation	1	,930(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	30	30
T.I	Pearson Correlation	,930(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	30	30

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Graph 3.1: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test I scores

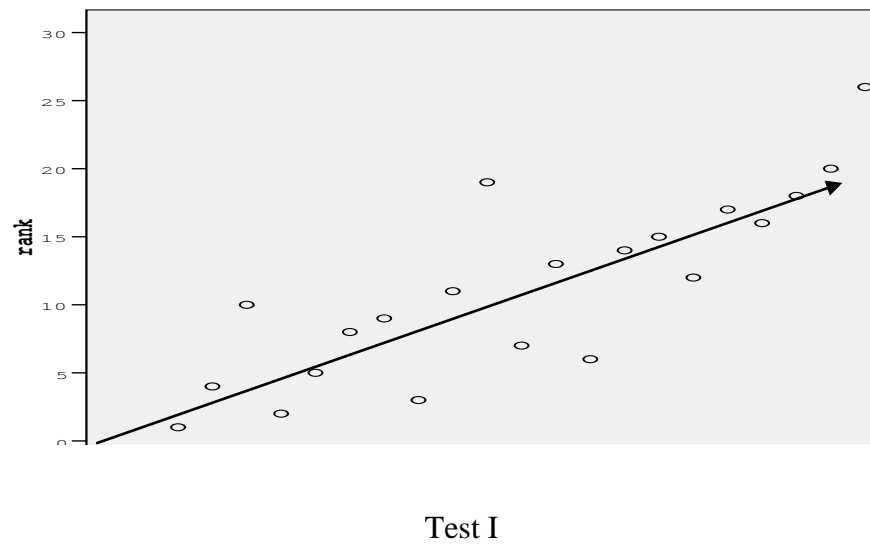
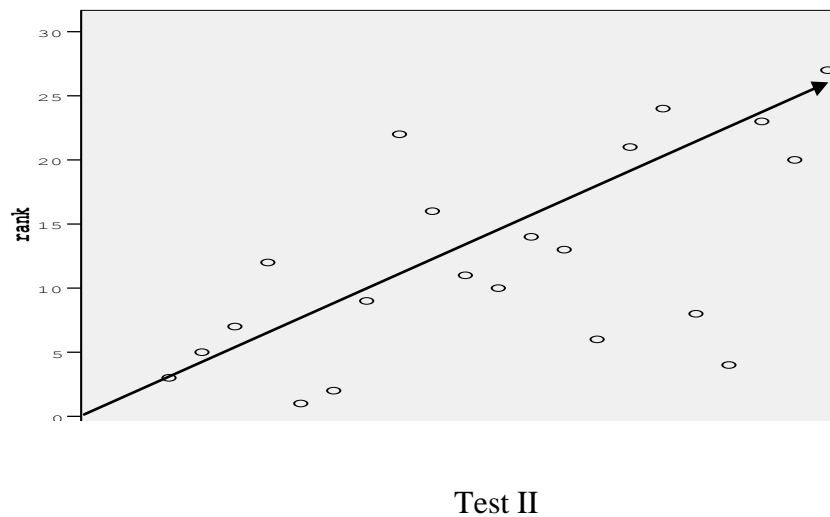


Table 3.2: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test II scores

		rank	T.2
rank	Pearson	1	,758(**)
	Correlation		,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
T.II	Pearson	,758(**)	1
	Correlation		,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
N		30	30

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Graph 3.2: Correlation between the students' ranking and their Test II scores



After examining the data collected in the pilot study, the reliability coefficient of the MC test was calculated as 0,9 and reliability coefficient of the CI test was established as 0,97 (Heaton, 1975:164).

Although, the reliability and validity coefficients are rather high I have to admit that authenticity and interactiveness of the tests are pretty low. The main reason for it is that the processes involved in the actual selection of one out of four options or completion blanks with appropriate form bear little relation to the way a language is used in the real life and require minimum involvement of the test takers' individual characteristics such as topical knowledge, metacognitive strategies, affective schemata and others. But I think that in the current case such deficiencies are inevitable as I aim at examining every point of rather a limited grammar topic starting from the elementary level.

3.3. Procedure

The tests were given to the participants during class time, as a part of the instructional activity on two different days with a week period between them. The learners were not instructed to revise the topic before the tests, which allowed me to measure their “permanent knowledge” on the topic.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.0. Presentation

In this chapter, the analyses of the data and interpretation of the results of the study are presented. As stated earlier the main aim of the present study is to investigate whether native speakers of Russian encounter difficulties in learning the copular *be* in Present Simple Tense and, if there are problems available, what might be the reasons for them. In order to explore this, both quantitative and qualitative analyses were made use of. Though EA is used to explain some of the finding of the study, the presentation of the results is descriptive for the majority of the contexts. The descriptive methodology was chosen because, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study on the acquisition of the copula *be* by native speakers of Russian and, thus, the aim of it is to provide as much information about the process of acquisition of the copula *be* by native speakers of Russian as possible.

4.1. Distributional characteristics

In order to uncover whether Russian learners encounter difficulties while acquiring the copula *be*, the data were analyzed first in terms of central

tendency (namely, mean and median) and standard deviation. The results are reported in the tables below:

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics for the first-year learners

		Test 1	Test 2
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		49,60	50,53
Median		48,00	51,50
Std. deviation		9,554	13,668

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics for the fourth-year learners:

		Test 1	Test 2
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		63,07	63,07
Median		64,50	65,00
Std.deviation		13,406	14,883

Looking at the mean and median in the recognition and approximate production tests of the first- and fourth-year learners of English it can be concluded that the students have not mastered the topic properly. Moreover, assuming the grading system standard of Russia: “a paper is worth an unsatisfactory mark if fifty percent of the task or less has been fulfilled correctly” (State Standard of Grading System for Secondary School approved by Ministry of Education, 2000:7), the performance of the first-year group can be estimated as poor. Russian system of grading correlates with the international grading system where students have to fulfill at least sixty

percent of the task to get a credit. Using this criterion as the base it can be argued that the performance of the fourth-year students seems to be rather low too though certain progress is being observed.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics for the eighth-year learners:

		Test 1	Test 2
N	Valid	16	16
	Missing	0	0
Mean		84,94	84,00
Median		86,00	87,00
Std.deviation		10,168	12,307

The learners in the third group demonstrated a much better level of recognition and approximate production skills on the topic. However, taking into consideration that they had been studying English for eight years, at present five times a week with two different instructors and had covered such topics as *the copula 'be' in Present, Past, Future Tenses; Passive Voice; Continuous Aspect* (recorded from the students' current instructors of English), which imply multiple revision of the copula *be* forms and use, their performance on such an 'elementary' topic cannot be considered relevant to their proficiency level and period of English learning.

Thus, it may be suggested that Russian learners of English encounter difficulties in learning such a 'comparatively easy' topic as the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense.

4.2. Performance of the students on the recognition and approximate production tasks

In order to understand whether the task type (i.e., recognition and approximate production) influences the performance of the students, which is the second question of the study, T-tests were conducted and the recognition and production ability of the learners were compared within each group.

Table 4.4: Paired samples T-test of Test I and Test II mean numbers comparison of the first-year learners

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			
Pair 1 test1- test2	-0,93	9,479	1,731	-4,473 2,606	- 0,539	29	0,594

The results presented in Table 4.4 show that a Paired Samples T-test of the first-year learners failed to reveal a statistically reliable difference between the means of Test1 (Mean=49,6; S=9,554) and Test2 (Mean=50,5; S=13,6), $t(29)=0,594$; $\alpha = .05$.

A similar result was obtained after comparing the means of Test I and Test II of the fourth-year students. As seen in Table 4.5 a Paired Samples T-test of the fourth-year students failed to reveal a statistically reliable difference between the means of Test1 (Mean=63,07; S=13,406) and Test2 (Mean=63,07; S=14,883); $t(29)=0,00$; $p=1,00$; $\alpha = .05$.

Table 4.5: Paired samples T-test of Test I and Test II mean numbers comparison of the fourth-year learners

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			
Pair 1 test1- test2	0,000	12,852	2,346	-4,799 4,799	0,000	29	1,000

Finally, the results of the eighth-year learners in Test I and Test II were compared and once again a Paired Samples T-test failed to reveal a statistically reliable difference between the means of Test1 (Mean=84,94; S=10,168) and Test2 (Mean=84,00; S=12,307); $t(15)=0,649$; $p=0,526$; $\alpha = .05$. (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Paired samples T-Test of Test I and Test II mean numbers comparison of the eighth year learners

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper			
Pair 1 test1- test2	0,938	5,779	1,445	-2,142 4,017	0,649	15	0,526

The results of the three Paired Samples Tests revealed that the performance of the learners in all of the studied groups on the recognition task did not differ

from their performance on the approximate production task. Since the performances of the students on the both tasks were parallel to each other, it seems possible to conclude that the learners' performance in the tests was not affected by the type of the task.

4.3. Analyses of the learners' mistakes/errors in relation to the domain of the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense

Since one of the goals of this study is to identify areas related to the use of the copula *be* that appear to be the most problematic for native speakers of Russian at different levels of English language learning, the test items were classified according to the domain. Taking into consideration the characteristics of the copula *be* in English and Russian languages explained in Section 2.5.1, the following classification was developed for the present study relying on the description of the copula *be* presented in sources such as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), Panova (1994), Smirnitski (1989).

- i. The copula *be* is followed by adjective, noun, numeral or prepositional adverbial phrases which are translated with adjective, noun, numeral and prepositional adverbial predicates in Russian, such as:

- a. *The book is interesting;*

- Книга интересная;*

- Book – [NOUN, FEM., SG., NOM.] interesting – [ADJ.,*

- FEM., SG., NOM.]*

- b. *She is a doctor;*

Она врач;

She – [PRN., FEM., SG., NOM.] *doctor* – [NOUN, SG., NOM.]

c. *My father is 47;*

Моему папе 47;

My – [POSS., MASC., SG., DAT.] *father* – [NOUN, MASC., SG., DAT.] *47* – [NUM.]

d. *The child is in the garden;*

Ребенок в саду;

Child – [NOUN, SG., NOM]. *in* – [PREP.] *garden* – [NOUN, MASC., SG., PREPOS.]

ii. The copula *be* is used with a dummy subject or a demonstrative pronoun, such as:

a. *It is a cat;*

Это кошка;

It – [DEM. PRN.] *cat* – [NOUN, FEM., SG., NOM.]

b. *These are my friends;*

Это мои друзья;

These – [DEM. PRN.] *my* – [POSS. PRN., PL., NOM.] *friends* – [NOUN, PL., NOM.]

iii. The copula *be* is followed by adjective, participle and prepositional adverbial phrases which correspond to verbal predicates in Russian sentences. For example:

a. *She is angry with you;*

Она сердится на тебя;

She – [PRN., FEM., SG., NOM.] *to be angry* – [VERB, PR. T., 3 PER., SG.] *on* – [PREP.] *you* – [PRN., 2 PER., SG., ACC.];

b. *I am interested in football;*

Я интересуюсь футболом;

I – [PRN., 1 PER., SG., NOM.] *to be interested* – [VERB, PR. T., 1 PER., SG.] *football* – [NOUN, MSC., SG., INST.];

c. *Nick is on duty today*;

Ник дежурит сегодня;

Nick – [NOUN] *to be on duty* – [VERB, PR. T., 3 PER., SG.] *today* – [ADV.];

iv. Sentences with Present Simple Tense and modal verb *can* as distractors

a. *My sister lives in Paris*;

Моя сестра живет в Париже;

My – [POSS. PRN., FEM., SG., NOM.] *sister* – [NOUN, FEM., SG., NOM.] *live* – [VERB, PR. T., 3 PER., SG.] *in* – [PREP.] *Paris* – [NOUN, MASC., SG., PREPOS.]

b. *I cannot knit*;

Я не могу вязать;

I – [PRN., 1 PER., SG., NOM.] *not* – [PART.] *can* – [MOD. VERB, PR. T., 1 PER., SG.] *knit* – [VERB, INF.].

First, the percentage of the students' errors/mistakes was examined in every domain for each group of the learners with the help of PASW. These results portray in which domain the students made the biggest number of the mistakes/errors and how the quantity of the mistakes/errors changed with further learning (i.e., in the fourth and eighth years of learning English).

Second, the mistakes/errors in every group of the classifications were described in terms of the classification suggested by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:151), that is **omission** (i.e., students produce a sentence without any verb in it, e. g. *They from London*), **addition** (i.e., the copula *be*, for instance,

is used in the sentence along with another verb in Present Simple, e.g. *my granny is watch TV every morning*), **misinformation** (i.e., The use of the auxiliary *do/does* in the interrogative form of the sentence with the nominal predicate, e.g. *Do they in the office?*). **Misordering**, which is presented in the classification of Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) was not included in the description because the testing techniques used in the present study (i. e., MC and CI) do not allow the examination of this domain.

Classification of errors, as Ellis (1994) put it, helps diagnose the learners' learning problems at every stage of their development and will allow me to trace how error patterns change over time. Together with the error frequency, it will enable me to define the types of the major persistent errors and suggest possible reasons for them.

4.3.1. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the First Domain of the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense

As it was defined in Section 4.3 the first domain of the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense relates to the cases when the copula *be* is followed by adjective, noun or prepositional adverbial phrases which are translated with noun-, adjective and prepositional adverbial predicates in Russian.

Figure 4.1 displays changes in the number of the incorrect answers of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year students' performance on the questions related to Domain I in TestI and TestII.

Figure 4.1: Quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners in the questions related to Domain I

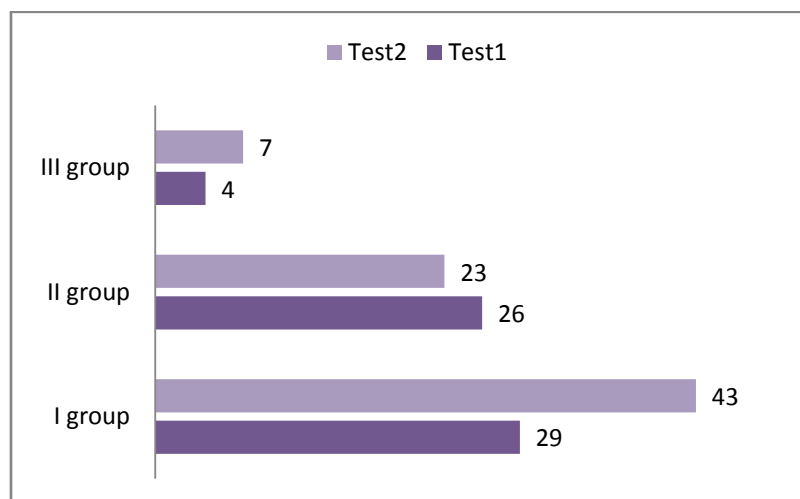


Figure 4.1 shows that the number of the mistakes/errors in this domain decreased from 29 % in the performance of the first-year learners to 4 % in the performance of the eighth-year learners in Test I, and from 43 to 7 % in Test II. The percentage of the fourth-year students' incorrect answers in the recognition test was 26 %, and in the approximate production test it was 23%. The fourth-year learners made 4 % of mistakes/errors in the recognition and 7 % in the approximate production test.

For more detailed scrutiny the performance of the learners was investigated within several subcategories of the first domain. The following subdomains were defined for the analysis:

- i. The copula *be* is followed by a noun or a noun phrase;
- ii. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase;

- iii. The copula *be* is followed by a numeral;
- iv. The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase.

4.3.1.1. Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I

4.3.1.1.1. The copula *be* is followed by a noun or a noun phrase:

Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I

The first subdomain includes the cases when the copula *be* is followed by a noun or a noun phrase which are translated with a noun predicate in Russian. In the recognition test there are 4 questions related to this subdomain. They are:

1. *Their names ... Tom and Jim.*
 a) *Are* b) *do* c) *is* d) *-*
2. *Our mother ... a nurse.*
 a) *Are* b) *-* c) *is* d) *does*
3. *My name ... John Smith.*
 a) *Am not* b) *is not* c) *does not* d) *not*
4. *What ... your parents?*
 a) *Do* b) *does* c) *are* d) *-*

In the approximate production test there are 5 questions related to this subdomain. They are:

1. *My mother and father ... doctors in this hospital.*
2. *You ... a real friend!*
3. *You ... (not) a bad tennis player.*
4. *Their uncle ... (not) a pilot.*

5. ... Prague a nice city?

The analysis of the both tests revealed that the first-year learners answered 19% of the recognition task and 41% of the approximate production task incorrectly. The important difference in the results in the performance of the first-year students on the recognition and approximate production tasks is observed. This difference is not surprising when the learners have a low level of proficiency because as Williams (1999, cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008) suggested they lack the ability to focus on the language form and attend more to the meaning. Further, if there is learners-generated attention to form (like in grammar tests, for example), the attention is generally given to words but not to other linguistic features. Thus, in this subdomain of the approximate production task the learners might have focused more on the words (that is, their meanings or spelling of different forms of the copula *be*) and the linguistic features (that is, differentiation between the different forms of the copular *be* and other verbs, such as *do* and *can*) might have been left less focused on. In the recognition test, on the other hand, the students had to choose among the offered variants, they did not need to care about the spelling of the word forms but could concentrate only on the linguistic features, therefore in the recognition task the first-year students demonstrated much better performance. Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 display the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the first-year students in Test I and Test II.

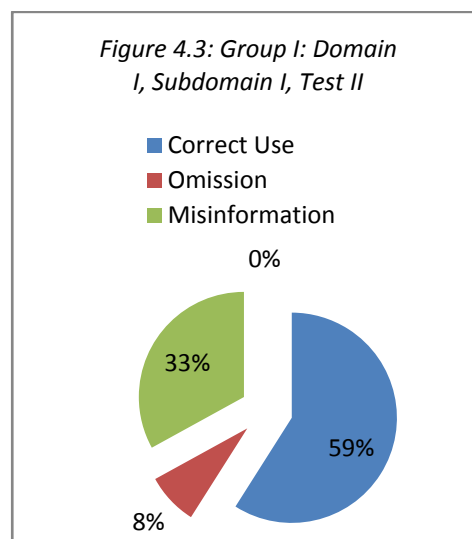
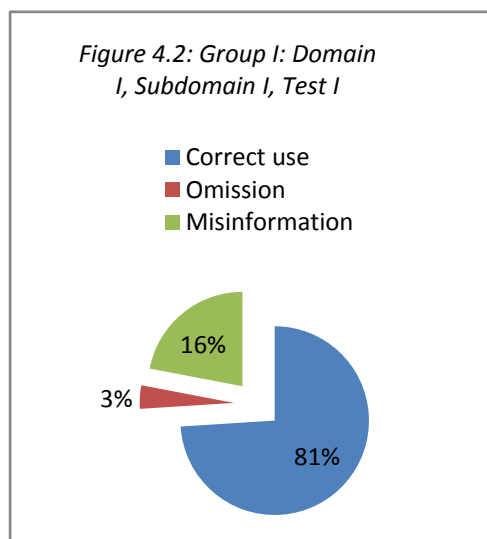


Figure 4.2 shows that in Test I the first-year students answered 81% of the questions correctly, made 16% misinformation and 3% omission mistakes/errors.

Some examples of the omission mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners are shown in Examples 4.1-4.3:

Example 4.1:

**Their names Tom and Jim.*

Example 4.2:

**Our mother a nurse.*

Example 4.3:

**My name not John Smith.*

That is, the sentences that the first-year learners constructed in English mirror the ones in Russian: Subject+NP. The subject is followed by NP and there is not a verb of any kind.

The number of the omission mistakes/errors was relatively small though when compared with the misinformation errors (3% omission < 16% misinformation). Among the misinformation mistakes/errors only 30% were related to the use of a wrong form of the copula *be* as in Examples 4.4-4.5.

Example 4.4:

My name **am not John Smith.*

Example 4.5:

Their names **is Tom and Jim.*

In the 70% of the misinformation mistakes/errors the students used the auxiliary *do/does* instead of the copula *be*, as in Examples 4.6-4.7. An interesting fact about these mistakes/errors is that the students seem to know the subject-verb agreement (e.g. singular subject + does) and they used it correctly but they replaced the copula *be* with *do*.

Example 4.6:

Our mother **does a nurse.*

Example 4.7:

What **do your parents?*

Figure 4.3 shows that in Test II the first-year learners made more mistakes/errors however, the ration of the misinformation and omission incorrect answers was analogous to that in Test I. In Test II 8% of the mistakes/errors were omissions. The major number of the omissions (7 out of total 10) was found in one sentence, that is:

Example 4.8:

**You a real friend.*

Omissions are ambiguous errors (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980) as there could be two possible explanations for them. First, mother tongue influence might be responsible for them because in Russian, as it was pointed in Section 2.5.1, the copula *be* is omitted in Present Tenses. Second, omission of the copula *be* might be a developmental mistake/error reflecting the strategies of L2 learners “since monolingual English learners (i. e., children) and native speakers of languages such as Spanish, which exhibits no structural differences with English in this area, also produce this “error” when learning English” (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1980:127). However, taking into consideration that the Russian first-year learners did not make omission mistakes/errors in the other analogous sentences in the subdomain, such as *My mother and father are doctors in the hospital; You are not a bad tennis player* and *Is Prague a nice city?* I can suggest that omissions are developmental mistakes/errors. Further examination of the availability of omission errors in the fourth and eighth years of learning English may prove or disprove this suggestion.

In Test II the misinformation mistakes/errors were observed in 33% of the examined examples. Only one sixth of them are due to the misuse of the forms of the copula *be*. Among them the most common case was the substitution of the plural *are* by the singular *is* as in Examples 4.9-4.11.

Example 4.9:

**My mother and father is doctors in the hospital*

Example 4.10:

**You is a real friend.*

Example 4.11:

**You is not a bad tennis player.*

As Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) pointed out the multiplicity of the forms of the copula *be* may cause problems for the beginners. Besides, the English pronoun *you* seems to be confusing too. In Russian there are two second person pronouns, one of them is singular and the other one is plural while in English *you* is always plural. This difference may be one of the reasons why the first-year students made such mistakes/errors as e.g., **You is a real friend.*

More than 80% of the misinformation mistakes made by the first-year learners in Test II are the cases when the auxiliary *do/does* was used instead of the copula *be*. More than 60% of the students used the auxiliary *does* in the item illustrated in Example 4.12:

Example 4.12:

**Does Prague a nice city?*

About 30% of the learners substituted the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do* in the following sentence:

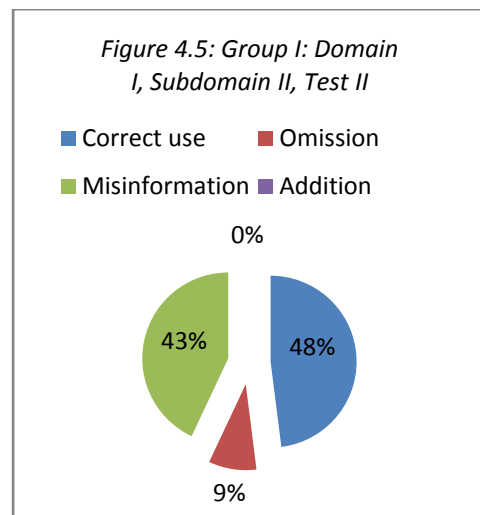
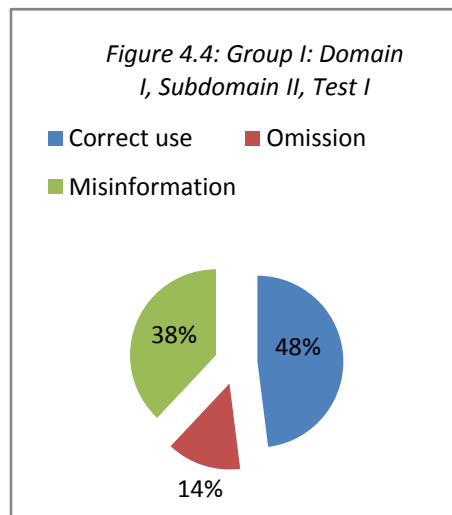
Example 4.13:

**You do not a bad tennis player.*

Relying on my personal experience of a teacher of English language who worked with native speakers of Russian for ten years I can suggest that mostly incomplete understanding and application of the rule may account for this kind of mistake/error. As it was noted in Section 1.2 the copula *be* is one of the first topics introduced in foreign language classes and it is treated as an

3. ... these tasks difficult for you?

The analysis of the students' results in Test I and Test II showed that the first-year learners answered 52% of each task incorrectly. The quantity of the mistakes/errors indicates that this subcategory caused a lot of difficulties to the beginner level students. The distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in the recognition and approximate production tests is presented in Figure 4.4 and in Figure 4.5.



It is interesting to notice that the first-year learners gave exactly the same number of the incorrect answers in the recognition and approximate production tasks. Since, in fact, it is the only subcategory where the first-year students' recognition skills were not better than their approximate production skills I can suppose that the recognition items might include some elements that may have caused additional difficulties to the first-year learners and which I will try to find out and discuss further. Figure 4.4 shows that nearly one fourth of the incorrect answers (14% out of 52%) in the recognition test was due to omission.

Example 4.14:

**You good at sport.*

The analysis revealed that all the omission mistakes/errors are found in the above mentioned item. The misinformation mistakes/errors were made in 38% of the questions. It is worth mentioning that there are no incorrect forms of the copula *be* among the distracters (Appendix 3, Questions 12 and 28) and it might be one of the reasons why the first-year learners demonstrated such a low performance in this subdomain in Test I. The students seem to have more difficulties in distinguishing the cases when the copula *be* should be used than in choosing the right form of the copula *be*. Thus, in 74% of the misinformation mistakes the learners used auxiliary *do/does* in place of the copula *be*, as Examples 4.15-4.16 given below demonstrate:

Example 4.15:

You **do good at sport.*

Example 4.16:

****Does** English easy for you?*

The modal verb *can* was chosen instead of the copula *be* in 17% and the verb *have* was used in 9% of the misinformation mistakes/errors.

Example 4.17:

****Have** English easy for you?*

Example 4.18:

You **can good at sport.*

Figure 4.5 shows that in the approximate production test, the omission mistakes/errors took place in 9% of the examples. According to the analysis

of the first-learners results, the omissions were found in every items of this subdomain in Test II (Examples 4.19-4.21).

Example 4.19:

**Our city modern and nice.*

Example 4.20:

**You not very polite.*

Example 4.21:

**These tasks difficult for you?*

As it is evident from Figure 4.5 the first-year learners made the misinformation mistakes/errors in 43% of the sentences in Test II. The analysis of the results revealed that 13% of the misinformations are the cases when a wrong form of the copula *be* was used (see Examples 4.22-4.23):

Example 4.22:

Our city **are modern and nice.*

Example 4.23:

You **is not very polite.*

It is necessary to note that nearly all the cases of the wrong use of the copula *be* (11 out of 13%) occurred in the latter statement (Example 4.23). Based on this result it might be suggested that this mistake/error might have been mainly caused not by the multiplicity of the forms of the copula *be* but by the differences between English and Russian pronouns of the second person *you*, which were discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.1.

The analysis of the data revealed that the main portion of the misinformation mistakes/errors belongs to the cases when the copula *be* was replaced by

other verbs, namely *do/does* and *can*. Precisely, in 74% of the misinformation mistakes/errors the copula *be* was substituted with the auxiliary *do/does* and in 13% with the modal verb *can*.

Example 4.24:

**Do these tasks difficult for you?*

70% of the group made this mistake/error. A possible reason for this is the incomplete explanation and application of the rules which was discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.1. Another reason might be due to the transfer of training (Selinker, 1972). Relying on my professional experience, I can assume that the collocation *do the task* is often pronounced by the teacher and therefore sets in learners' minds. That is why seeing the word *task* the students might have automatically added the word *do*.

Example 4.25 demonstrates the sentence in which 23% of the first-year students replaced the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does*.

Example 4.25:

You **do not very polite.*

The misuse of the modal verb *can* caused the following mistakes/errors:

Example 4.26:

Our city **can modern and nice.*

Example 4.27:

**You cannot very polite.*

Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7 show that the students did not make omission mistakes/errors in this subdomain. As for misinformation mistakes/errors, the analysis of the data revealed that in Test I all of the misinformation mistakes/errors are the cases when a wrong form of the copula *be* was chosen (see Example 4.28)

Example 4.28:

**Tim are six.*

In Test II 13% of the learners used the plural form of the copula *be* instead of the singular one as in Example 4.29; and 10% of the students replaced the copula *be* with the auxiliary *does* as in Example 4.30.

Example 4.29:

**Their grandmother are eighty years old.*

Example 4.30:

**Their grandmother does not eighty years old.*

4.3.1.1.4. The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain I

In this subcategory the copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase which is translated with an adverbial prepositional predicate in Russian. In the recognition test there are 4 questions related to this subdomain. They are:

1. *I ... at school now.*

a) *Do* b) *am* c) *is* d) –

2. *My friends ... from Spain.*

a) - b) *do* c) *is* d) *are*

3. *The children ... at home now.*

a) *Are not* b) *do not* c) *have not* d) –

4. *When ... Mr Smith in his office?*

- a) *Does* b) *has* c) *is* d) –

In the approximate production test there are 5 questions related to this subdomain. They are:

1. *Paris ... (not) in Spain.*
2. *Your pens ... (not) in my bag.*
3. *... you in the library on Saturdays?*
4. *Why ... we here?*
5. *... I in your team?*

The analysis of the tests revealed that the percentage of the correct answers in Test I was 64% and in Test II it was 43%. The distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in the both tasks is presented in Figure 4.8 and in Figure 4.9.

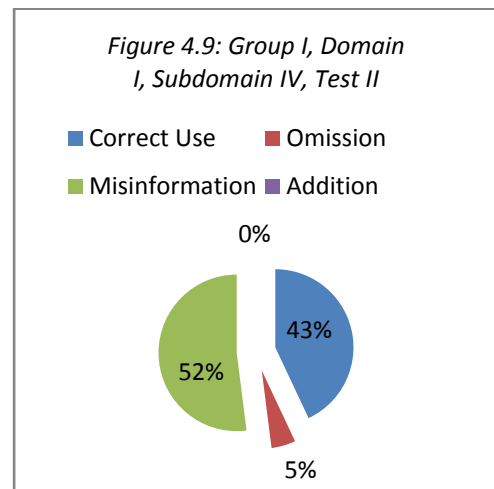
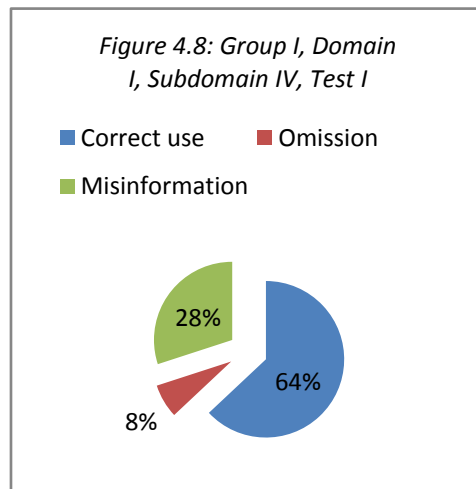


Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9 display that the number of the misinformation mistakes/errors significantly overpassed the number of the omission

mistakes/errors both in the recognition and approximate production tests. The copula *be* was omitted in 8% of the items in Test I and in 5% of the items in Test II. The following examples demonstrate the cases of omission in this subdomain.

Example 4.31:

**I at school now.*

Example 4.32:

**My friends from Spain.*

Example 4.33:

**They at home now.*

Example 4.34:

Paris **not in Spain.*

Example 4.35:

Your pens **not in my bag.*

Example 4.36:

**Why we here?*

The cases of misinformation were observed in 28% of the examples in Test I. In 10% of the test items a wrong form of the copula *be* was used. However, the major part of the misuse of the form of the copula *be* occurred in one sentence (10 cases out of 12), which can be seen in Example 4.37:

Example 4.37:

My friends **is from Spain.*

The misinformation cases when the copula *be* was replaced with other verbs were found in 18% of the examples in the recognition test; in 13% of the

sentences the verb *do* (see Examples 4.38-4.41) and in 5% of the sentences the verb *have* (see Example 4.42) were used instead of the copula *be*.

Example 4.38:

I **do at school now.*

Example 4.39:

My children **do not at home.*

Example 4.40:

When **does Mr Black in his office?*

Example 4.41:

When **has Mr Black in his office?*

The analysis of the approximate production test revealed that the percentage of the misinformation mistakes/errors was 52%; among them 23% were the cases of misuse of the forms of the copula *be* and 77% were the cases when the copula *be* was replaced with another verb.

The following examples demonstrate the cases when the first-year learners used a wrong form of the copula.

Example 4.42:

Your pens **is not in my bag.*

In this sentence the biggest number of the incorrect form of the copula *be* (12 out of total 18) was found.

Example 4.43:

****Is** you in the library on Saturdays?*

Example 4.44:

****Are** I in your team?*

As it was mentioned above there were the cases when most of the learners used a wrong form of the copula *be* as in Examples 4.37 and 4.42, while in the other analogous items they did not make such mistakes/errors. Relying on my professional experience I can suggest that such cases might have occurred due to the transfer of training. The teacher often presents drills using words denoting objects from our everyday life such as *relatives (mother, father, sister), friend, book, desk, pen, school, etc.* and more often these words are used in singular than in plural forms. Further, learners unconsciously tend to treat the above mentioned words as if they are singular though the latter may be in plural.

As it was noted above the biggest group of the misinformation mistakes/errors in this subdomain (77%) was the mistakes/errors when the copula *be* was substituted with another verb. In 58% of the cases the copula *be* was replaced with the auxiliary *do/does* and in 23% it was replaced with the modal verb *can*. The examples below demonstrate the cases:

Example 4.45:

**Do you in the library on Saturdays?*

This mistake/error was made by the 53% of the first group.

Example 4.46:

**Do I in your team?*

This mistake/error was found in 37% of the students' answers.

Example 4.47:

**Why do we here?*

Example 4.48:

Your pens **do not in my bag.*

Example 4.49:

Paris **does not in Spain.*

Example 4.50:

****Can** I in your team?*

Example 4.51:

****Can** you in the library on Saturdays?*

Example 4.53:

Your pens **cannot in my bag.*

Example 4.54:

Paris **cannot in Spain.*

To sum up the results discussed above about the acquisition of the copula *be* in Domain I by the Russian first-year learners of English, the following hypotheses may be suggested:

1. At the initial stage the native speakers of Russian had difficulties with acquisition of the copula *be* in this domain.
2. The first-year learners of English demonstrated better performance on the recognition than on the approximate production tests.
3. The most problematic among the examined subcategories appeared to be Subdomain II in which the copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase and Subdomain IV in which the copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase.

4. The first-year learners made different kinds of mistakes/errors such as omission of the copula *be*, use of a wrong form of the copula *be* and substitution of the copula with other verbs.
5. The mistakes/errors due to omission occurred much more seldom in comparison to the misinformation incorrect answers.
6. The misinformation mistakes/errors when the copula *be* was replaced with the auxiliary *do/does* were the most common and very high in quantity at this stage.
7. Taking into consideration the differences between the use of the copula *be* in Russian and English languages (see Section 2.5.1) it may be suggested that the omission mistakes/errors may be triggered by L1 influence.
8. Taking into consideration the absence of the omission mistakes/errors in many of the items related to this domain it may be suggested that the omissions seem to be developmental mistakes/errors.
9. The incomplete understanding and application of the rule was suggested to be responsible for the most of the misinformation mistakes/errors.

4.3.1.2. Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I

4.3.1.2.1. The copula *be* is followed by a noun or a noun phrase:

Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I

The analysis of the performance of the fourth-year learners in the first subdomain revealed that 83% of the recognition test and 75% of the approximate production were done correctly. Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11

show the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers related to the first subdomain in Test I and Test II.

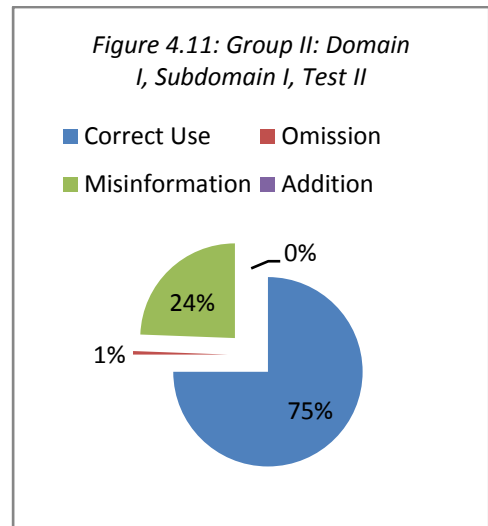
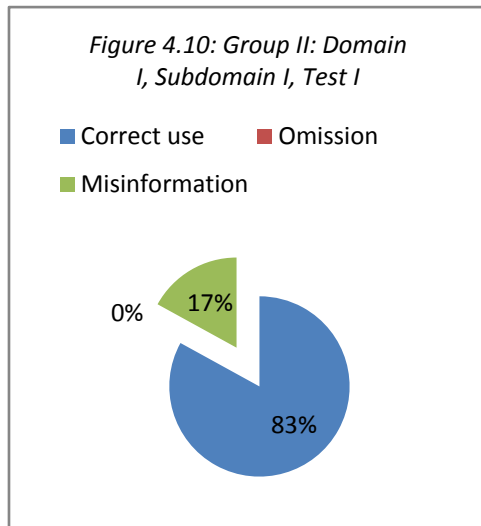


Figure 4.10 shows that there were no omission mistakes/errors in the recognition test and according to Figure 4.11 just one student in one item (less than 1%) made an omission mistake/error in the approximate production test. Thus, it is possible to say that all the available incorrect answers in this subdomain were the cases of misinformation. The analysis of the data revealed that in Test I 10% of the misinformation mistakes (2 out of 20) were due to the misuse of the form of the copula *be*. One student used *are* in place of *is* (see Example 4.54) and another learner replaced *is not* with *am not* (see Example 4.55).

Example 4.54:

**Their names is Tom and Jim.*

Example 4.55:

My name **am not John Smith.*

Since the above mentioned examples were single instances I can conclude that in the examined subdomain in the recognition task the major part of the mistakes/errors made by the fourth-year learners was due to the replacement of the copula *be* with another verb. For instance, every second student of the group used auxiliary *do* instead of the copula *be* in the sentence given in Example 4.56:

Example 4.56:

What **do your parents?*

In Test II the distribution among all the misinformation mistakes/errors was following: the percentage of the cases of the misuse of the copula *be* was 22%. The biggest number of a wrong form of the copula *be* (6 out of 8) was found when the copula *be* was preceded by a personal pronoun *you* as in Examples 4.57 and 4.58, which allows me to suggest that the misuse of the form of the copula *be* might be caused by the personal pronoun *you* but not by the copula *be* itself (see Section 4.3.1.1.1.).

Example 4.57:

You **is a real friend.*

Example 4.58:

You **is not a bad tennis player.*

The percentage of the misinformations due to the substitution of the copula *be* with another verb was 78% in the approximate production test. Predominately the learners used the auxiliary verb *do/does* in place of the copula *be*. This

type of mistake/error was suggested to be due to the incomplete understanding and application of the rule discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.1. The below listed examples demonstrate the cases of substitution of the copula *be* with another verb found in Test II.

Example 4.59:

You **do not a bad tennis player*

This mistake/error was found in every third work.

Example 4.60:

Their uncle **does not a pilot.*

Example 4.61:

****Does** Prague a nice city?*

Example 4.62:

You **cannot a bad tennis player.*

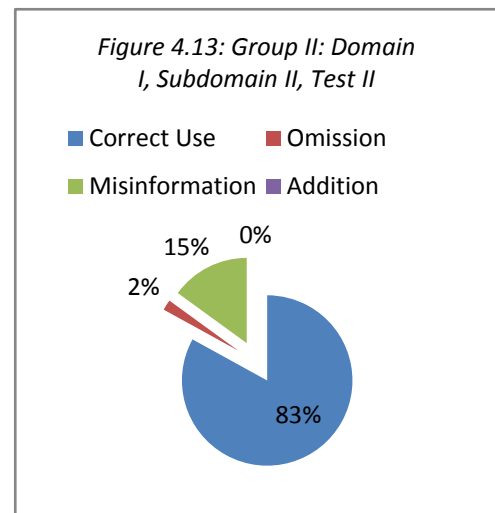
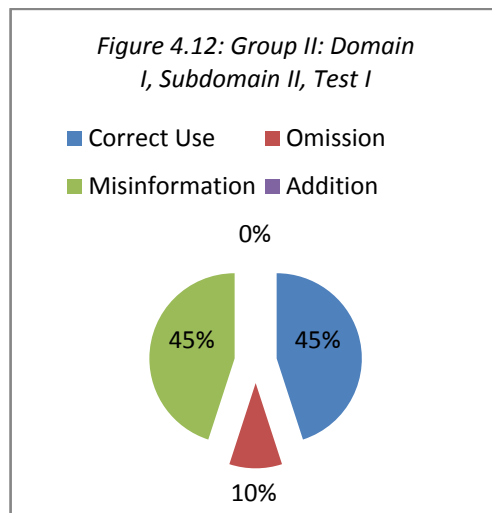
4.3.1.2.2. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I

The analysis of the data revealed that the percentage of the correct answers in the recognition test was 45% and in the approximate production test it was 83%. The fourth-year learners showed quite a good performance in the approximate production test; however, their results in the recognition test were very low. This difference in the students' performance on the recognition and production tests in this subdomain seems very unusual because, firstly, as a rule, production tasks are usually regarded as more difficult than recognition ones simply because in the former not only the knowledge on the topic is tested but also skills such as writing or speaking are

required from the learner (Heaton, 1975). Secondly, in all other subdomains the fourth-year learners performed better in the recognition task than in the approximate production task.

A plausible explanation for the poor performance of the students on the recognition task together with their good performance on the approximate production task may be the MC format used in the study. A well-developed MC test may occur very difficult for learners, even for the more able ones, because as Heaton (1975) noted the MC test should be developed in such a way that the student who is not sure what the correct answer is, will find every distractor very attractive. Heaton (1975:32) also underlined that “plausible distractors are best based on (a) mistakes of the students, (b) their answers in previous tests, (c) teacher’s experience, and (d) a contrastive analysis between the native and target languages.” Developing MC items for the current study all the above mentioned factors were taken into consideration; therefore it may be possible to suggest that the chosen distractors differentiated students who were proficient in the topic and those who were not competent in it.

Figure 4.12 and Figure 4.13 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the fourth-year students in the subdomain in Test I and Test II.



As it is shown in Figure 4.12 and in Figure 4.13 the percentage of the omissions was 10% in Test I and 2% in Test II.

The omission mistakes/errors were found in the following items:

Example 4.63:

**You good at sport.*

Example 4.64:

**Our city modern and nice.*

Example 4.65:

**English easy for you?*

The misinformation mistakes/errors were made in 45% of the recognition test and in 15% of the approximate production test. In the recognition items of this subdomain there are no options with incorrect form of the copula *be* (Appendix 3, Questions 12 and 28). The students had to choose between the copula *be*, other verbs such as *do/does*, *have*, *can* and blank/nothing option. Such distractors might have made the task more difficult for the learners because as the data analysis showed so far the students had the most

difficulties in distinguishing when the copula *be* and when other verbs such as *do/does* should be used. The analysis of the recognition test showed that in the item illustrated in Example 4.66 and in Example 4.67 70% of the group substituted the copula *be* with another verb (to be more precise the auxiliary *does* was chosen in 53% and the verb *have* was used in 17% of the examples). Such a big number of the use of the auxiliary *does* instead of the copula *be* may have been triggered by the collocation of words *to do English* which might often be used in English classes, for instance, as a part of the sentences like *I do my English homework every day*; or *We do a lot of English exercises every lesson*; etc.

Example 4.66:

**Does English easy for you?*

Example 4.67:

**Have English easy for you?*

The analysis of the data showed that in the approximate production test the instances of the misuse of the form of the copula *be* were found in 14% of the misinformation mistakes/error, while the cases of the replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do* occurred in 86% of the misinformation mistakes/errors. All of the misinformation mistakes/errors took place in one item of the production test (see Examples 4.68 and 4.69)

Example 4.68:

**Is these tasks difficult for you?*

Example 4.69:

**Do these tasks difficult for you?*

4.3.1.2.3. The copula *be* is followed by a numeral: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I

In this subdomain the copula *be* is followed by a numeral. Figure 4.14 and Figure 4.15 display the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the fourth-year learners in Test I and Test II.

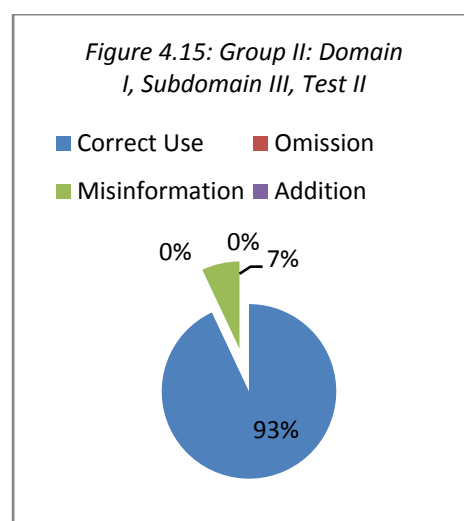
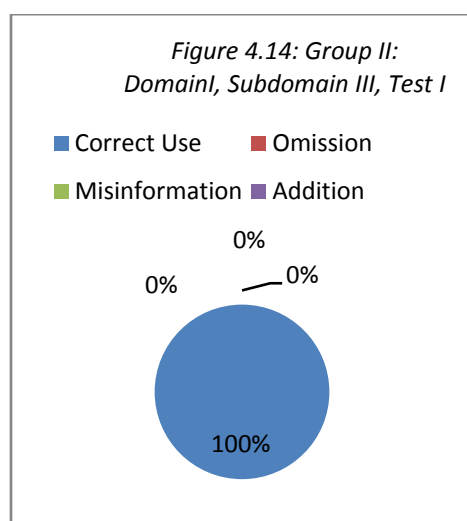


Figure 4.14 and Figure 4.15 show that in the recognition test no mistakes/errors were made in this subdomain; in the approximate production test 7% of the answers were incorrect and all of them were the cases of misinformation. One student (out of 30) used a wrong form of the copula *be* as in Example 4.70 and another learner replaced the copula *be* with the auxiliary verb *does* as Example 4.71 demonstrates.

Example 4.70:

Their grandmother **are not eighty years old.*

Example 4.71:

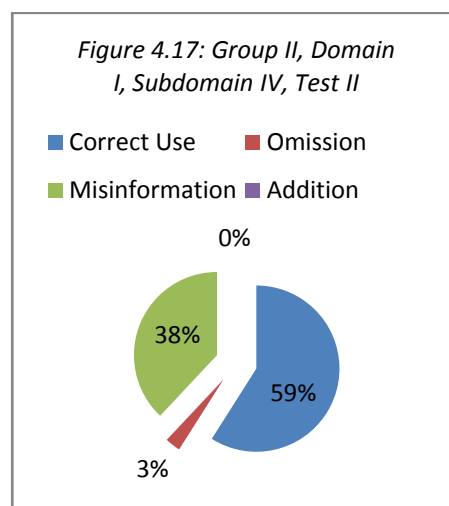
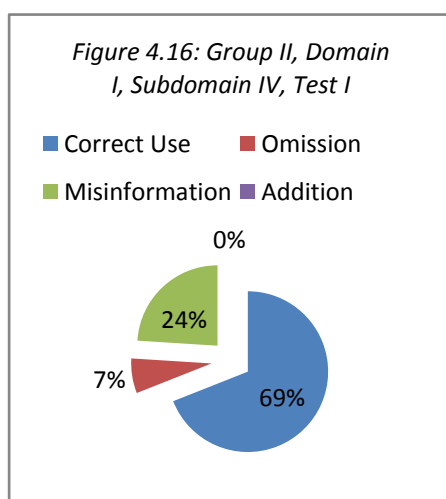
Their grandmother **does not eighty years old.*

Since the above mentioned examples were single instances in Test II and since Test I was done correctly by the whole group, it is possible to conclude that the fourth-year learners did not have difficulties in this subdomain.

4.3.1.2.4. The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase:

Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain I

The fourth subdomain includes cases when the copula *be* is followed by the prepositional adverbial phrase. Figure 4.16 and Figure 4.17 show the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in the recognition and approximate production tests in this subdomain.



As it can be seen in Figure 4.16 and Figure 4.17 the percentage of the correct answers in Test I was 69% and in Test II it was 59%. Thus, taking into consideration the performance of the fourth-year learners on the both tests I

can suggest that this subdomain seems the most problematic for the fourth year group in Domain I. The students made omission mistakes/errors in 7% of the examples in Test I and in 3% of the sentences in Test II. It is interesting to mention that the most cases of omission took place in the sentence which seems very easy at first sight. Namely, six out of thirty learners omitted the copula *be* in the sentence illustrated in Example 4.72.

Example 4.72:

**My friends from Spain.*

I consider that this mistake/error cannot be just due to the influence of Russian language because the general rate of omission mistakes/errors is very low in the rest of the items (1-2 out of 30). A plausible explanation for this mistake/error might be found in the visual and audible forms of the sentence. In the written form the sentence is incorrect but if it is pronounced, the utterance sounds correct. Or to put it in different words, the incorrect sentence *My friends from Spain* happens to be the absolute homophone of the sentence *My friend's from Spain* which is grammatically correct. This likeness in the audible forms of the two sentences might have confused the students and be a possible reason for the mistake/error.

Figure 4.16 and Figure 4.17 show that the percentage of the misinformation mistakes/errors was 24% in the recognition test and it was 38% in the approximate production tests.

The analysis of Test I revealed that 10% of the misinformation mistakes/errors were the cases of the misuse of the forms of the copula *be*, as

Example 4.73 illustrates; and 90% were instances of the replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* as shown in Examples 4.74-4.76.

Example 4.73:

My friends **is from Spain.*

Example 4.74:

I **do at school now.*

Example 4.75:

The children **do not at home now.*

Example 4.76:

When **does Mr Black in his office?*

The analysis of Test II revealed that the misuse of the form of the copula *be* took place in 13% of the misinformation mistakes/errors and the substitution of the copula *be* with another verb occurred in 87%.

The biggest percentage of the misuse of the form of the copula *be* took place in the item of Example 4.77.

Example 4.77:

Your pens **is not in my bag.*

Every third student of the forth-year group made this mistake/error. And a plausible explanation for this mistake/error is the transfer of training which was suggested and discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.4.

The other cases of the misuse of the form of the copula *be* seem not very significant because each of them occurred just once in the whole group.

The analysis of the substitutions of the copula *be* with another verb revealed that in 88% of the cases the learners replaced the copula *be* with the auxiliary

verb *do/does* as illustrated in Examples 4.78 - 4.82 and in 12% with the modal verb *can* as in Examples 4.83 – 4.86.

Example 4.78:

Paris **does not in Spain.*

Example 4.79:

Your pens **do not in my bag.*

Example 4.80:

****Do** you in the library on Saturdays?*

Example 4.81:

Why **do we here?*

Example 4.82:

****Do** I in your team.*

The last three items seem the most problematic for the fourth-year learners because the rates of mistakes/errors were very high in them, 53%, 30% and 27% respectively.

Example 4.83:

Paris **cannot in Spain.*

Example 4.84:

Your pens **cannot in my bag.*

Example 4.85:

Why **can we here?*

Example 4.86:

****Can** I in your team?*

The instances of the substitution of the copula *be* with the modal verb *can* were not numerous and besides they dispersed among all the items of the subdomain. Therefore, I can conclude that the replacement of the copula *be*

with the modal verb *can* seems not a very common mistake/error for the fourth-year learners in this subdomain.

To sum up everything what was discussed above about the acquisition of the copula *be* related to Domain I by the Russian fourth-year learners of English, the following hypotheses may be suggested:

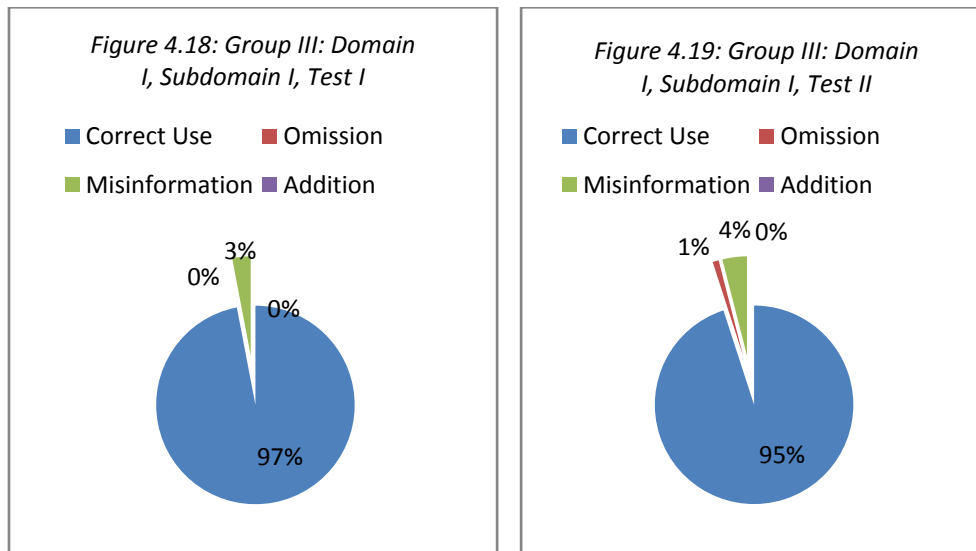
1. In the fourth year of learning English the native speakers of Russian still seem to encounter difficulties with the copula *be* in this domain;
2. Generally, the fourth-year learners of English demonstrated better performance on the recognition than on the approximate production tests;
3. The least problematic subdomain for the fourth-year learners was Subdomain II (i.e., the Subdomain in which the copula *be* precedes a numeral);
4. The most problematic subdomain for the fourth-year students seems to be Subdomain IV (i.e., the subdomain when the copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrases);
5. The percentage of the omission mistakes/errors was rather low;
6. The misinformation mistakes/errors when the copula *be* is replaced with the auxiliary *do/does* were the most common and still high in quantity;
7. The incomplete understanding and application of the rule was suggested to be responsible for the most of the misinformation mistakes/errors.

4.3.1.3. Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I

4.3.1.3.1. The copula *be* is followed by a noun or a noun phrase:

Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I

The analysis of the data revealed that the eighth-year learners completed 97% of the recognition task and 95% of the approximate production task correctly. Figure 4.18 and Figure 4.19 show the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers related to this subdomain in Test I and Test II.

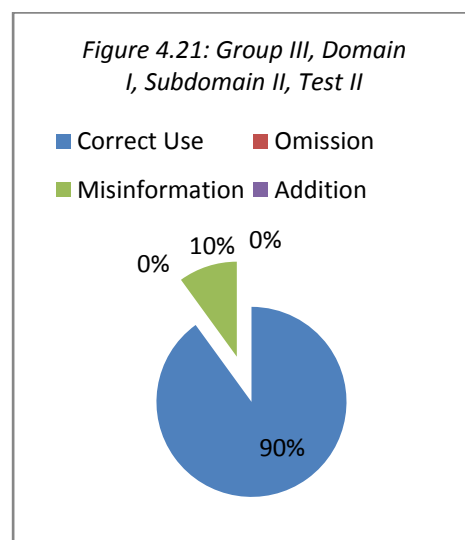
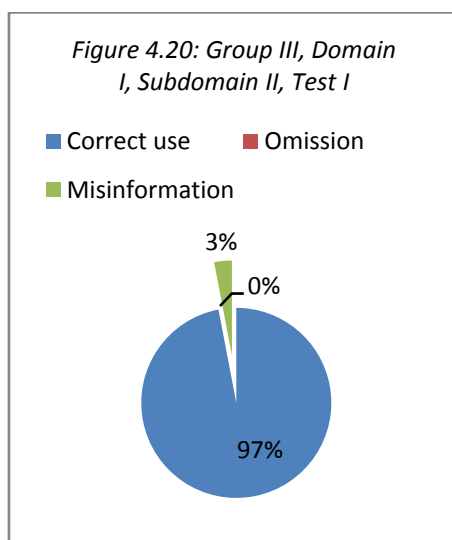


As it is seen in Figure 4.18 and Figure 4.19 the percentage of the incorrect answers in this subdomain was very low. There was one case of omission in the approximate production test. The misinformation mistakes/errors occurred in 3% of the examples in Test I and in 4% of the sentences in Test II. The misuse of the forms of the copula *be* was found once in every test and replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* occurred one time in Test I and twice in Test II. Therefore, it seems possible to conclude that the

low percentage of the incorrect answers indicates that the eighth-year students are competent in the use of the copula *be* within this subdomain.

4.3.1.3.2. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I

The analysis of the data revealed that the percentages of the correct answers in Test I and Test II were 97% and 90% respectively. Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in the items related to this subdomain.



As Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21 show that the percentage of the incorrect answers was very low and only misinformation mistakes/errors were made by the students in Test I. Actually, one student of the group substituted the copula *be* with the auxiliary *does* as in Example 4.87.

Example 4.87:

**Does English easy for you?*

The analysis of the approximate production test showed that the percentage of the incorrect answers was 10% but all of the mistakes/errors were made just in one item of the subdomain, that is:

Example 4.88:

.....these tasks difficult for you?

Two students of the group used a wrong form of the copula *be* as Example 4.89 illustrates and three of them substituted the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do*, as in Example 4.90.

Example 4.89:

**Is these tasks difficult for you?*

Example 4.90:

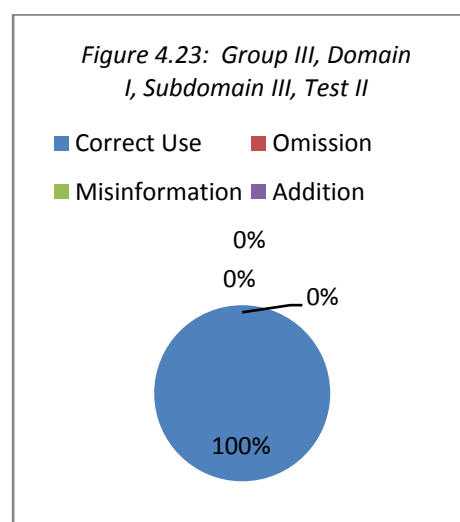
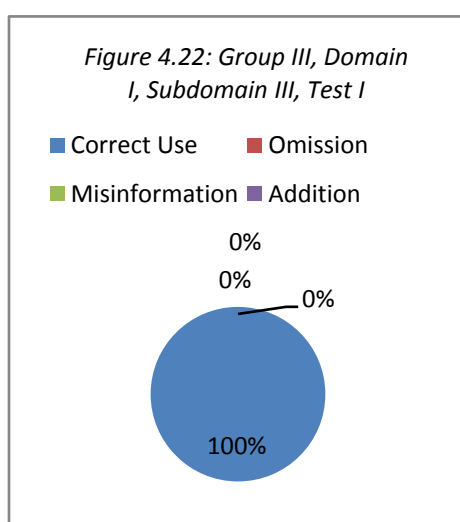
**Do these tasks difficult for you?*

The misinformation mistake/error of Example 4.90 may be due to the transfer of training because as it was mentioned in Section 4.3.1.1.2 the collocation *do the task* is often used in the English teaching/learning process. However, no other logical explanation but the slip of the tongue/pen due to carelessness can be suggested for the misinformation given in Example 4.89.

Taking into consideration the rate and the distribution of the incorrect answers it may be suggested that the group performed well on this subdomain on the whole.

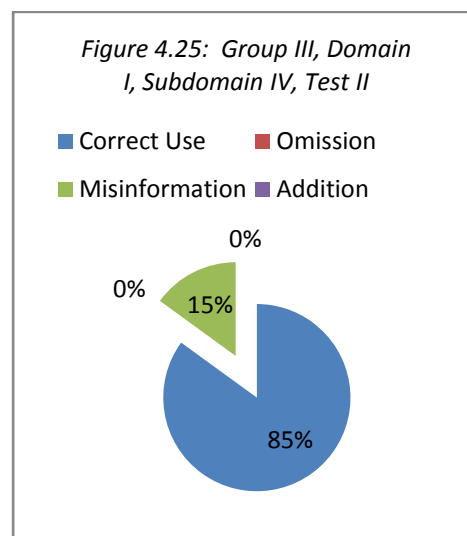
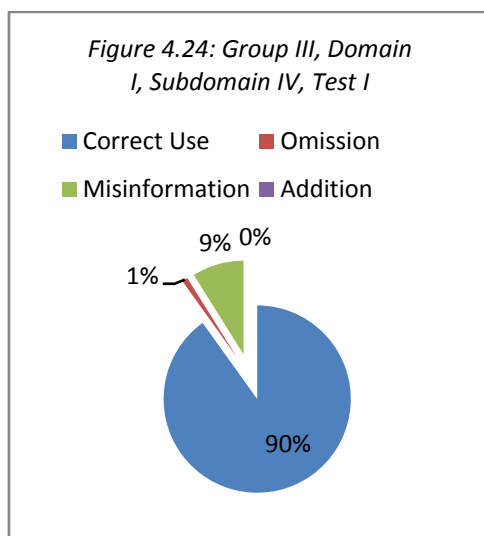
4.3.1.3.3. The copula *be* is followed by a numeral: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I

Figure 4.22 and Figure 4.23 demonstrate the performance of the eighth-year learners on the third subdomain. As it is shown in Figure 4.22 and Figure 4.23 the group completed the task correctly. The absence of incorrect answers indicates that the eighth-year learners did not encounter any difficulties in the examined subdomain.



4.3.1.3.4 The copula *be* is followed by an adverbial prepositional phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain I

The analysis of the data revealed that the percentages of the incorrect answers on this subdomain were 9% and 15% in Test I and Test II respectively. Figure 4.24 and Figure 4.25 present the distribution of the incorrect answers in the recognition and approximate production tests.



As it is shown in Figure 4.24 in the recognition test 1% of the answers were the cases of omission of the copula *be* and 9% of them were due to the misinformation. Example 4.91 illustrates the single case of the omission found in the subdomain.

Example 4.91:

**My friends from Spain.*

In the both tests the major number of the misinformation mistakes/errors was the cases of the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary verb *do/does* as Examples 4.92 and 4.93 illustrate:

Example 4.92:

**When does Mr Black in his office?*

13% of the group made this mistake/error.

Example 4.93:

**Do you in the library on Saturdays?*

13% of the group made this kind of misinformation mistake/error.

In every examples listed below there was one case of the misinformation found, which formed 3% of the group's results.

Example 4.94:

**Your pens do not in my bag.*

Example 4.95:

**Why do we here?*

Example 4.96:

**Do I in your team?*

To find out a plausible explanation for the misinformation mistakes/errors made by the 13% of the eighth-year learners (see Examples 4.92 and 4.93) I referred to the post-test interview which was held with Russian learners of English who participated in the pilot study. It is necessary to mention that they made the same mistakes/errors in the examined items. Relying on the responses of the learners it may be suggested that the students associate adverbial prepositional phrases such as *on Saturdays, on Mondays, in summer, every day*, as well as the question word *when* with the auxiliary verb *do/does* and with Present Simple Tense of main verbs. As far as my personal teaching experience is concerned I can add that the adverbial modifiers of time such as mentioned above are usually introduced with the grammatical topic Present Simple Tense to emphasize the difference between the Simple and Continuous Aspects. Therefore, it may be suggested that incomplete understanding and application of the rule as well as the transfer of training might be responsible for this mistake/error.

To sum up the findings discussed in this section about the acquisition of the copula *be* in Domain I by the Russian eighth-year learners of English, the following hypotheses may be suggested:

1. The eighth-year learners did not encounter difficulties in the most subcategories of the domain;
2. The students did not produce omission mistakes/errors with the exception of random ones;
3. The most problematic subdomain for the eighth-year students seems Subdomain IV (i.e., the cases when the copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase);
4. The misinformation mistakes/errors made by the learners were suggested to be due to the incomplete application of the rule and the transfer of training.

4.3.1.4. Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain I

In order to be able to trace how the students' performance on Domain I changed over the years of learning English, Table 4.7 was created. Table 4.7 shows the quantity and distribution of incorrect answers in the subcategories of Domain I in the examined three groups (i.e., the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners of English).

Table 4.7: Overall performance of the students on Domain I

DOMAIN I SUBCATEGORIES		PERCENTAGE OF INCORRECT ANSWERS	LEARNERS		
			FIRST YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	EIGHTH YEAR
I <i>copula + noun</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	19	17	3
		OMISSION	3	0	0
		MISINFORMATION	16	17	3
	TEST II	INCORRECT	41	25	5
		OMISSION	8	1	1
		MISINFORMATION	33	24	4
II <i>copula + adjective</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	52	55	3
		OMISSION	14	10	0
		MISINFORMATION	38	45	3
	TEST II	INCORRECT	52	17	10
		OMISSION	9	2	0
		MISINFORMATION	43	15	10
III <i>copula + numerals</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	7	0	0
		OMISSION	0	0	0
		MISINFORMATION	7	0	0
	TEST II	INCORRECT	23	7	0
		OMISSION	0	0	0
		MISINFORMATION	23	7	0
IV <i>copula prepositional adverbial phrase</i> +	TEST I	INCORRECT	36	31	10
		OMISSION	8	7	1
		MISINFORMATION	28	24	9
	TEST II	INCORRECT	57	41	15
		OMISSION	5	3	0
		MISINFORMATION	52	38	15

Table 4.7 shows that the first-year learners made the biggest number of mistakes/errors in all of the subcategories with the exception of the recognition test in the second one. The first group seems to have problems with every subcategory of the domain but demonstrated unsatisfactory results

in the subcategories when the copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adverbial prepositional phrase. The fourth-year learners' performance seems very contradictory. In some of the subcategories of Domain I, namely the third and the fourth ones, some progress in comparison with the first-year group is evident. However, in the recognition test of the first subcategory the difference in the quantity of the incorrect answers between the two groups is not important; moreover, the performance of the fourth-year learners happened to be worse than that of the first-year students in the recognition test of the second subcategory. A plausible explanation for this may be discussed on two levels, precisely on the micro and macro levels. On the micro level the MC format might be responsible for the low performance of the fourth-year learners. As it was suggested and discussed in Section 4.3.3.2, the MC format with plausible distractors may happen very confusing for those learners who are not competent in the topic and not sure of the correct answers. On the macro level the contradictory performance of the fourth-year learners might be due to the strategies that they use in their attempt to master English. As it is pointed in Selinker (1972:39) the language learning strategies for handling TL linguistic material affect to a large extent the surface structure of IL utterances and evolve whenever the learner realizes, either consciously or subconsciously, that he has no linguistic competence with regard to some aspect of the TL. Foreign language learners use different learning strategies at different levels of proficiency (Chamot and Kupper, 1989); however as Harley and Hart (2002, cited in Singleton and Ryan, 2004) argued children mostly rely on their memory while adolescents and adults'

L2 outcomes are much likely to their verbal analytical skills. Bearing in mind everything what was mentioned above about the language learning strategies of learners of different ages and proficiency levels, it seems possible to suggest that the fourth-year learners might use a kind of cognitive techniques for finding links and differences among the grammatical notions they were exposed to. Taking into consideration that the most mistakes of the fourth-year learners were the cases of the replacement of the copula *be* with other verbs, predominantly with the auxiliary *do/does* it may be proposed that the fourth-year learners do not have a clear-cut concept of the copula *be*, fail to distinguish the cases when it should be used and seem to be in the process of clearing it up for themselves. The numerous errors might reflect their attempts to master the topic. In the eighth year of learning English the quantity of the mistakes/errors decreased in the most of the subdomains which makes it possible to suggest that the most of the mistakes/errors in the domain are developmental. The only exclusion seems to be the fourth subcategory when the copula *be* is followed by the prepositional adverbial phrase. The biggest percentage of the incorrect answers in the subdomain in the first-, fourth-year groups and significant number of the errors in the both tests even in the eighth-year group allows me conclude that the errors of this subcategory may be named as persistent.

4.3.2. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the second domain of the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense

As it was discussed in Section 4.3, Domain II includes the cases when the copula *be* follows the dummy subject. In the recognition test there are two items related to the domain. They are:

1. *These ... my books.*

a) *am* b) *are* c) *is* d) *–*

2. *It ... half past nine.*

a) *does no* b) *has not* c) *is not* d) *not*

In the approximate production test there are two items related to the second domain. They are:

- *This ...my neighbor, Mr Green.*

- *It ... (not) half past seven.*

Figure 4.1 displays changes in the number of the incorrect answers of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year students' performance on the second domain in Test1 and Test2.

Figure 4.26: Quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year students in the questions related to Domain II

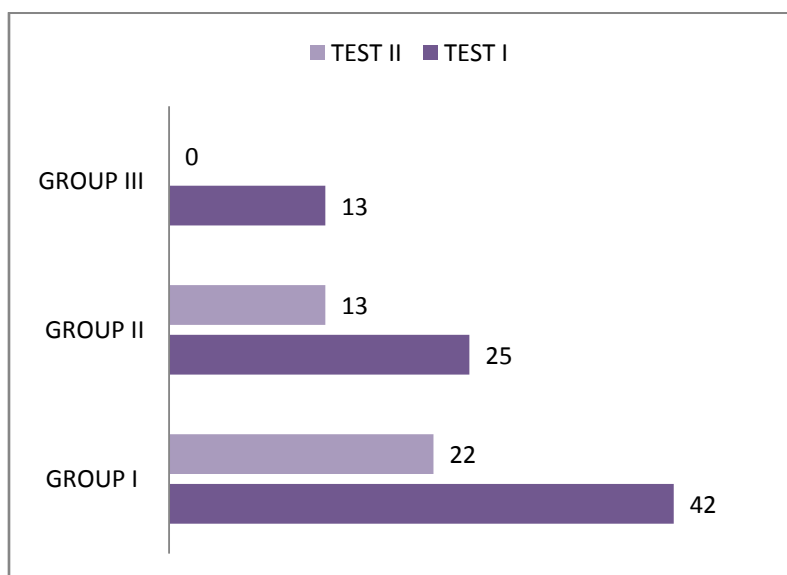
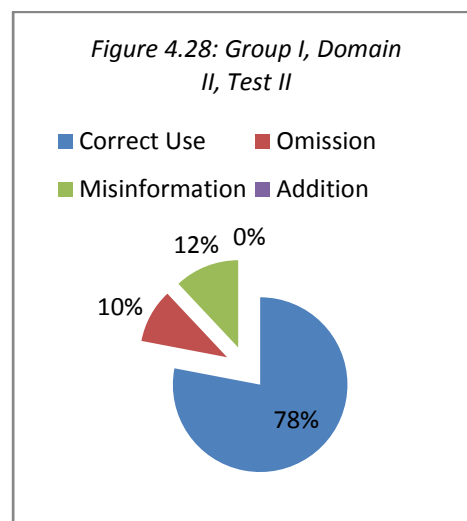
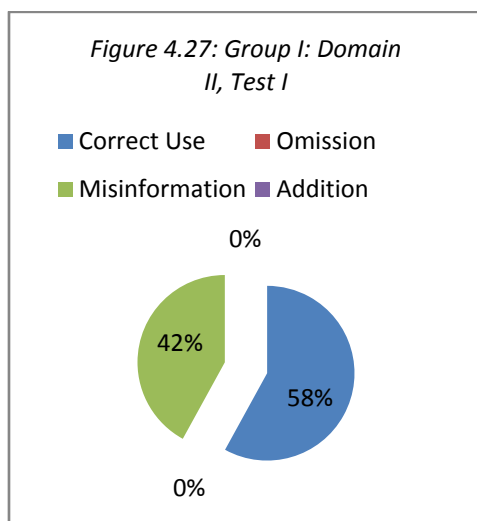


Figure 4.26 shows that the number of the mistakes/errors in this domain decreased from 42% in the performance of the first-year learners to 13% in the performance of the eighth-year learners in Test I, and from 22% to 0% in Test II. The percentage of the fourth-year students' incorrect answers in the recognition test was 25%, and in the approximate production test it was 13%.

4.3.2.1. Performance of the first-year learners on Domain II

The analysis of the results of the first-year students on the questions related to Domain II revealed that the percentages of the correct answers were 58% and 78% in Test I and in Test II respectively. Figure 4.27 and Figure 4.28 show the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the group in the both tests.



As it is seen in Figure 4.27 no omission mistakes/errors were found in the recognition test. All the incorrect answers were cases of misinformation. The analysis of the data revealed that in the first item of the recognition test, 43% of the learners substituted the singular form of the copula *is* with the plural *are*, as Example 4.97 illustrates. In the second item of the domain in Test I, the copula *be* was replaced with the auxiliary *do/does* in 27% and with the verb *have/has* in 13%, as in Examples 4.98 and 4.99.

Example 4.97:

**These is my books.*

Example 4.98:

**It does not half past nine.*

Example 4.99:

**It has not half past nine.*

In the first item of the approximate production test 20% of the group omitted the copula *be* and 7% used a wrong form of it (See Examples 4.100 and 4.101). In the second item of the approximate production test the copula *be* was substituted with the auxiliary *do/does* by 10% of the first-year students

and with the verbs *can* and *have* by 3% each, as shown in Examples 4.102-4.104.

Example 4.100:

**This my neighbor, Mr Green.*

Example 4.101:

**This are my neighbor, Mr Green.*

Example 4.102:

**It does not half past seven.*

Example 4.103:

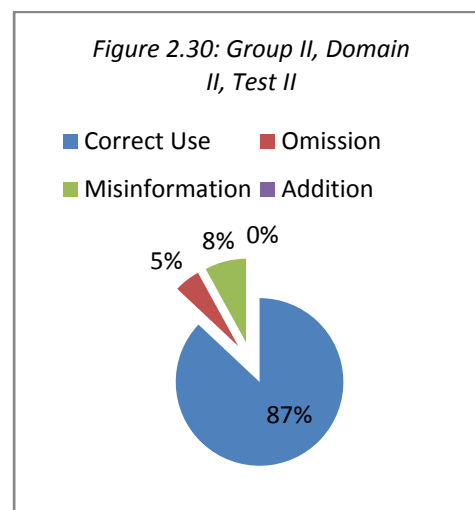
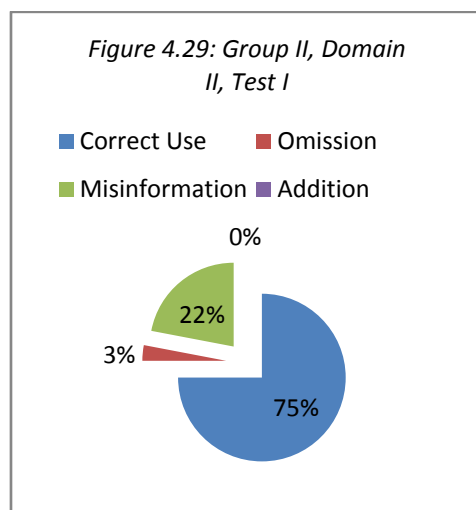
**It cannot half past seven.*

Example 4.104:

**It has not half past seven.*

4.3.2.2. Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain II

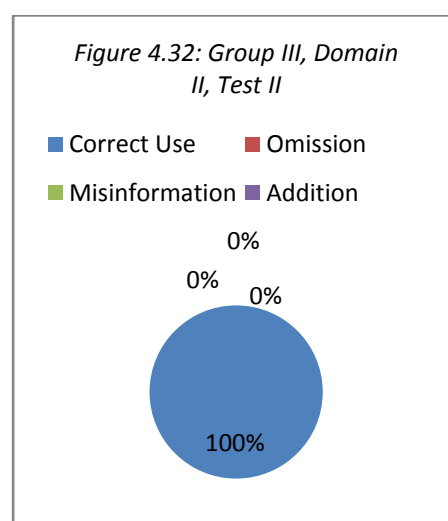
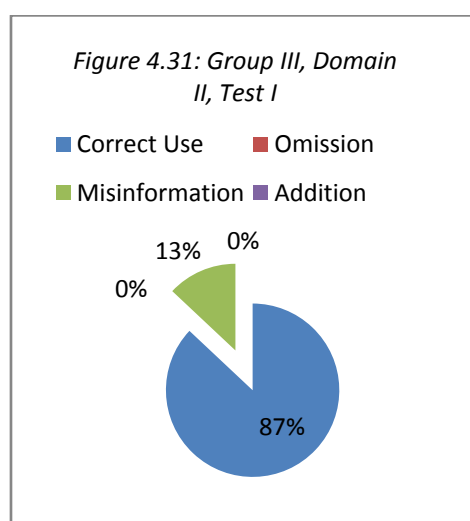
Figure 4.29 and Figure 4.30 display the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers given by the fourth-year learners in the items related to Domain II in the recognition and approximate production tests.



As Figure 4.29 and Figure 4.30 show the percentages of the correct answers were 75% in Test I and 87% in Test II. Few omission mistakes/errors were found in the both tests and they were distributed equally among all the items of the both tests. The biggest number of the misinformation mistakes in Test I were the cases of the misuse of the form of the copula *be*. Thus, 27% of the group used *is* instead of *are* in the first item of the domain in Test I, as shown in Example 4.97. The percentage of the replacement of the copula *be* with the verb *have* was 13% and with the auxiliary *do/does* was 3% in Test I. All the cases of the replacement were found in the second item of the domain (see Example 4.98 and Example 4.99). In the approximate production test the misuse of the form of the copula *be* as well as the replacements of the copula with the auxiliary verb *do/does* were random and few in number.

4.3.2.3. Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain II

Figure 4.31 and Figure 4.32 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the eighth-year learners in the items related to Domain II in the recognition and in the approximate production tests.



As Figure 4.31 and Figure 4.32 show all the items related to Domain II were done correctly by the eighth-year learners in Test II; however 13% of the misinformation mistakes/errors were observed in Test I. It is interesting to notice that all of them were the cases of the misuse of the forms of the copula *be* and were found in one item. The learners used the singular *is* instead of the plural *are*, as shown in Example 4.97 above. The reason for this mistake/error seems to be not the multiplicity of the forms of the copula *be* because no other mistakes/errors of the kind were made by the eighth-year learners in the both tests. A plausible explanation for the misuse may be in the plural form of the pronoun *this/these*. Relying on my teaching experience I can suggest that the pattern *This is...* is very often used by the teacher at the initial stage when

learners are not even introduced the singular and plural forms. Later, though the difference between the plural and singular forms of pronouns is introduced, learners very often neglect the rule and tend to use the demonstrative pronoun *this* in both singular and plural constructions. Thus, it is possible to argue that the above discussed mistake/error might be due to the overgeneralization which is not linked with the learners' competence in the use of the copula *be*.

4.3.2.4. Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain II

In order to be able to trace how the students' performance on Domain II changed depending on their period of learning English, the overall showing table was developed. Table 4.8 shows the quantity and distribution of the incorrect answers in the second domain given by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners of English.

Table 4.8: Overall performance of the students on Domain II

DOMAIN II SUBCATEGORIES		PERCENTAGE OF INCORRECT ANSWERS	LEARNERS		
			FIRST YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	EIGHTH YEAR
I <i>Dummy subject + copla</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	42	25	13
		<i>OMISSION</i>	0	3	0
		<i>MISINFORMATION</i>	42	22	13
	TEST II	INCORRECT	22	13	0
		<i>OMISSION</i>	10	5	0
		<i>MISINFORMATION</i>	12	8	0

Table 4.8 shows that all the groups made more mistakes/errors in the recognition test. A reason for this might be overgeneralization due to the overuse of the pronoun *this* for both singular and plural constructions and might not be linked to the multiplicity of the forms of the copula *be* (see Section 4.3.2.3). As it is seen in Table 4.8 the quantity of the incorrect answers on the questions related to Domain II in the both tests decreased with further input of the language which makes it possible to suggest that the mistakes/errors made by the learners in this domain are developmental.

4.3.3. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the third domain of the use of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense

As it was discussed in Section 4.3, Domain III consists of the cases when the copula *be* is followed by adjective, participle or adverbial prepositional phrases that correspond to verbal predicates in Russian. The following subcategories were defined in Domain III:

1. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase which are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian.
2. The copula *be* is followed by a participle or a participle phrase which are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian.
3. The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase which is translated with a verbal predicate in Russian.

Figure 4.33 displays changes in the number of the incorrect answers of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year students' performance to the questions related to Domain III in Test I and Test II.

Figure 4.33: Quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year students made in the questions related to Domain III

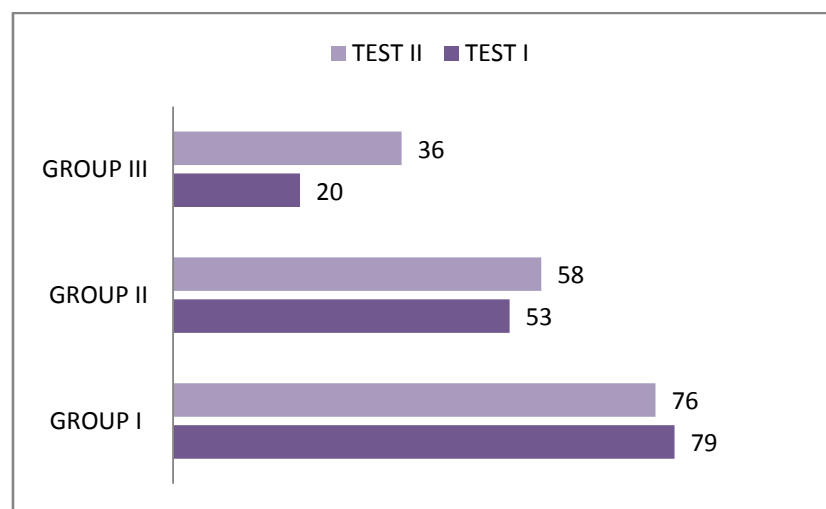


Figure 4.33 shows that the first-year learners completed 79% of the recognition and 76% of the approximate production task incorrectly. The percentage of the fourth-year students' incorrect answers in the recognition test was 53% and in the approximate production test it was 58%. The eighth-year students fulfilled 20% of the recognition and 36% of the approximate production task with mistakes/errors. It is worth pointing that the performance of the groups on Domain III was noticeably worse than on Domain I and Domain II.

4.3.3.1. Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III

4.3.3.1.1. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective and an adjective phrase: Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III

As it was pointed above the first subdomain includes the cases when the copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase which are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian. There are eight items related to this subdomain in the recognition test. They are:

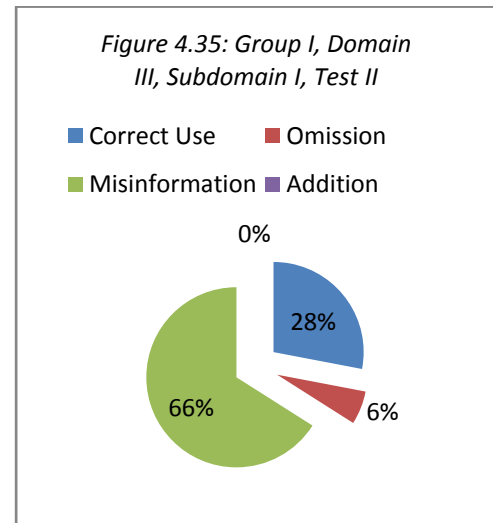
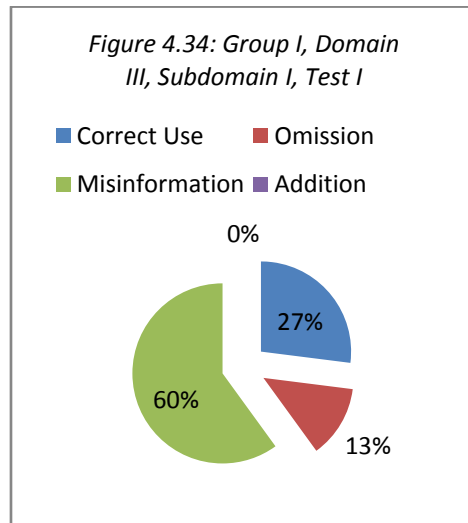
1. *Our son ... always very thirsty after school.*
a) *are* b) *does* c) *is* d) –
2. *I ... afraid of dark.*
a) *am not* b) *do not* c) *does not* d) *not*
3. *You ... late for classes today!*
a) *not* b) *do not* c) *are not* d) *does not*
4. *You ... ill today!*
a) *not* b) *is not* c) *do not* d) *are not*
5. *... you proud of your family?*
a) *Can* b) *Does* c) *Are* d) –
6. *Why ... you angry with me?*
a) *-* b) *do* c) *have* d) *are*
7. *What music ... you fond of?*
a) *are* b) *do* c) *have* d) –
8. *Why ... our dog hungry?*
a) *do* b) *is* c) *are* d) *does*

In the approximate production test there are five items related to this subdomain which are listed below:

1. *We ... fond of fruit.*

2. *We ... (not) angry with you.*
3. *I ... (not) fond of pop music.*
4. *... Helen afraid of dark?*
5. *Why ... you late again?*

The percentages of the correct answers in the first subcategory of Domain III given by the first-year learners were 27% and 28% in the recognition and in the approximate production test respectively. Figure 4.34 and Figure 4.35 display the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in the subdomain.



As it is seen in Figure 4.34 the percentage of the omission mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners in Test I was 13%. More than 50% of them were related to one item which is illustrated in Example 4.105. The other cases of the omission mistakes/errors observed in Test I were distributed among the other seven items of the recognition test more or less equally.

Example 4.105:

**Our son always thirsty after school.*

Figure 4.35 shows that in the approximate production test the percentage of the omission mistakes/errors was 6%. It is worth mentioning that 70% of all the omissions were found in one item shown in Example 4.106. The rest of the omissions were single cases.

Example 4.106:

**We fond of fruit.*

As Figure 4.34 and Figure 4.35 show the percentages of the misinformation mistakes/errors were very high and formed 60% and 66% of the answers in the recognition and in the approximate production test respectively. It is worth noting that only 6% of all the misinformation mistakes/errors in the recognition test and 8% of the misinformation the mistakes/errors in the approximate production test were cases in which a wrong form of the copula *be* was used. In the recognition test, all but two cases of the misuse of the form of the copula *be* were found in the item of Example 4.107, in which the copula *be* follows the personal pronoun *you*. The replacement of the plural form with the singular one was linked to the differences between the Russian and English pronoun *you* and was discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.1. The cases of the use of a wrong form of the copula *be* in the approximate production test could be regarded as random.

Example 4.107:

**You is not ill today.*

The major portion of the mistakes/errors in this subdomain was the cases of the replacement of the copula *be* with other verbs, predominantly with the auxiliary verb *do/does*. The analysis of the data revealed that 76% of all the

misinformation mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners in Test I and 77% of the incorrect answers in Test II were due to the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does*. Thus, in the recognition test more than 60% of the first-year group replaced the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do* as illustrated in Examples 4.108-4.110; the copula *be* was replaced with *do* by 52% of the students in the sentences presented in Examples 4.111-112 and 43% of the first-year learners made the mistake/error as in Example 4.113.

Example 4.108:

**I do not afraid of dark.*

Example 4.109:

**Why do you angry with me?*

Example 4.110:

**What music do you fond of?*

Example 4.111:

**You do not ill today!*

Example 4.112:

**You do not late for classes today!*

Example 4.113:

**Why does our dog hungry?*

In the approximate production test, the copula *be* was replaced with the auxiliary *do/does* in the item of Example 4.114 by 67% of the first-year group; 60% of the learners substituted the copula *be* with *do/does* as Examples 4.115 and 4.116 illustrate and the same kind of mistake/error was made by 53% of the students as Example 4.117 shows.

Example 4.114:

**Why do you late again?*

Example 4.115:

**We do not angry with you.*

Example 4.116:

**Does Helen afraid of dark?*

Example 4.117:

**I do not fond of pop music.*

The data analysis showed that along with the auxiliary verb *do/does*, the first-year students used the modal verb *can* and verb *have* instead of the copula *be*. However, the percentages of these substitutions were less than the percentage of the misuses of the auxiliary *do/does*. To be precise, 11% of all the misinformation mistakes/errors observed in Test I and 15% of the incorrect answers in Test II were the cases when the copula *be* was replaced with the modal verb *can*; and the verb *have* was used instead of the copula *be* in 7% of the answers in Test I. Examples 4.118-4.124 given below illustrate the cases when the copula *be* was replaced with the modal verb *can* and the verb *have*; however, as it was mentioned above these mistakes/errors were not so numerous:

Example 4.118:

**We can fond of fruit.*

Example 4.119:

**We cannot angry with you.*

Example 4.120:

**I cannot fond of pop music.*

Example 4.121:

**Can you proud of your family?*

Example 4.122:

**Why have you angry with me?*

Example 4.123:

**What music have you fond of?*

Example 4.124:

**Can Helen afraid of dark.*

It is worth mentioning that the major portion of the omission mistakes/errors (64%) made by the students in this subdomain occurred in the positive sentences (see Examples 4.105 and 4.106) while 96% of the replacements of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* were found in the negative and interrogative sentences (see Examples 4.108-4.117).

4.3.3.1.2. The copula *be* is followed by a participle or a participle phrase:

Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III

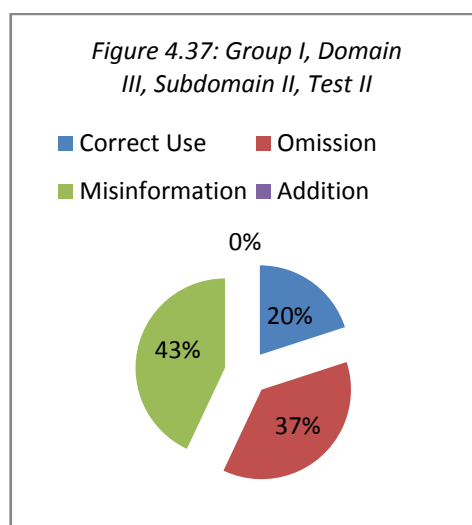
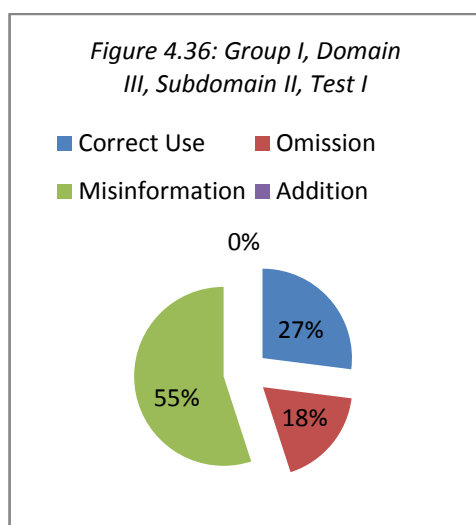
As it was pointed in Section 4.3 the second subdomain includes the cases when the copula *be* is followed by a participle or a participle phrase which are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian. There are two items related to this subdomain in the recognition test. They are:

1. *We ... interested in stamps.*
a) *are not* b) *cannot* c) *do not* d) *not*
2. *Our aunt ... married to a journalist.*
a) *not* b) *is not* c) *do not* d) *does not*

In the approximate production test there are three items related to the subdomain:

1. *You ... always tired after work.*
2. *I ... interested in French.*
3. *... your sister married to Mr Smith?*

The analysis of the first-year learners' data revealed that the percentages of the correct answers were 27% and 20% in the recognition and in the approximate production tests respectively. Figure 4.36 and Figure 4.37 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers given by the first-year group in the subdomain.



As it is evident from Figure 4.36 and Figure 4.37 the percentages of the incorrect answers in the both tests significantly overpassed the number of the correct answers. The omission mistakes/errors were observed in 18% of the answers in Test I and in 37% of the examples in Test II. The detailed analysis of the students' tests showed that in the recognition test 18% of the group members omitted the copula *be* as Examples 4.125 and 4.126 show:

Example 4.125:

**I not interested in stamps.*

Example 4.126:

**Our aunt not married to a journalist.*

As for the approximate production test, all but one case of omission were found in two items of the subdomain (see Examples 4.127 and 4.128).

Example 4.127:

**You always tired after work.*

Example 4.128:

**I interested in French.*

Every second student of the group made these mistakes/errors.

It is also interesting to notice that there was only one case of omission found in the interrogative sentence in this subdomain in Test II.

The percentages of the misinformation mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners were 55% and 43% in the recognition and in the approximate production test respectively. In Test II the misuse of the form of the copula *be* occurred in 8% of the answers (see Examples 4.129 and 4.130), while in Test I there were no such cases because a wrong form of the copula *be* is not given among the distractors.

Example 4.129:

**You is always tired after work.*

Example 4.130:

**Are your sister married to Mr Smith?*

The analysis of the data revealed that the replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* was made in 89% of all the misinformation

mistakes/errors while in the other 11% the copula *be* was substituted with the modal verb *can*. Thus, 57% of the first-year students made the mistake/error that is illustrated in Example 4.131 and 40% of the learners replaced the copula *be* with *do/does* as Example 4.132 illustrates.

Example 4.131:

**Our aunt does not married to a journalist.*

Example 4.132:

**We do not interested in stamps.*

In Test II the copula *be* was substituted with the auxiliary *do/does* in 62% of all the misinformation mistakes/errors. It is worth pointing that 88% of the replacements of the copula *be* with *do/does* were made in the interrogative item given in Example 4.133:

Example 4.133:

**Does your sister married to Mr Smith?*

Besides the auxiliary verb *do/does*, in 28% of the students' answers the copula *be* was replaced with the modal verb *can* and there was a single case of the substitution of the copula *be* with the verb *have* (see Examples 4.134-4.137).

Example 4.134:

**You can always tired after work*

Example 4.135:

**I can interested in French.*

Example 4.136:

**Can your sister married to Mr Smith?*

Example 4.137:

**Have your sister married to Mr Smith.*

Taking into consideration the above examples of the mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners in the second subdomain as well as the students' incorrect answers in the first subdomain it seems possible to induce that the quantity of the substitutions of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* mainly appeared in the negative and interrogative items. Taking into consideration the differences between Russian and English languages discussed in Section 2.5.1 and relying on my teaching experience I can presuppose that the students might perceive the adjectives and participles of the subdomains as main verbs and therefore process them with the auxiliary verb *do/does* as it is required in the negative and interrogative sentences with main verbs in Present Simple Tense. Further examination of the fourth- and eighth-year learners' data may prove or disprove this presupposition.

4.3.3.1.3. The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase:

Performance of the first-year learners on Domain III

As it is pointed in Section 4.3 the third subdomain includes the cases when the copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase which is translated with a verbal predicate in Russian. There is one item related to this subdomain in the recognition test, that is:

1. *When ... I on duty?*

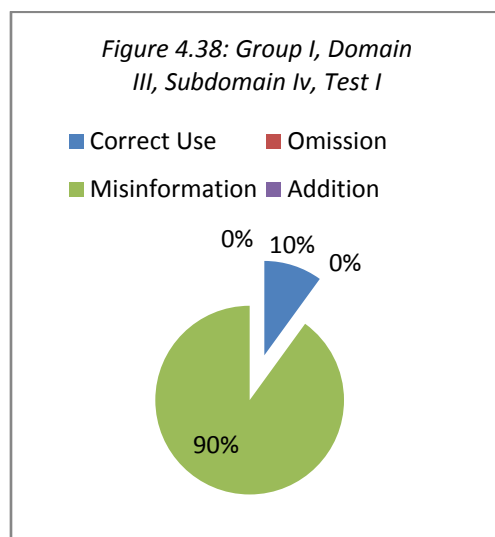
a) *am*

b) *do*

c) *can*

d) *have*

Figure 4.38 displays the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in this subcategory given by the first year learners.



As Figure 4.38 shows only 10% of the group answered correctly and all the mistakes/errors were the cases of misinformation. The analysis of the data revealed that there were no cases of the use of a wrong form of the copula *be*; however 73 % of the learners substituted *be* with the auxiliary *do* and 17% used the modal verb *can* instead of the copula *be* (See Examples 4.138 and 4.139).

Example 4.138:

**When do I on duty?*

Example 4.139;

**When can I on duty?*

Examples 4.138 and 4.139 show that the students formed the interrogative sentences as if there were a main verb available in them.

To sum up the results discussed above about the acquisition of the copula *be* in Domain III by the Russian first-year learners of English, the following hypotheses may be suggested:

1. The first-year learners encountered a lot of problems with the use of the copula *be* in this domain.
2. The highest percentage of the incorrect answers (79 in Test I and 76 in Test II) in comparison with the first two domains (29/43 in Domain I and 42/22 in Domain II) indicates that Domain III seems the most difficult for the first-year group.
3. The students performed poorly in all the subcategories of the domain.
4. The first-year learners made both omission and misinformation mistakes/errors in the items related to this domain.
5. The substitutions of the copula *be* with other verbs predominantly with the auxiliary *do/does* occurred the most often.
6. The group demonstrated a tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive items of the domain and substitute it with the auxiliary verb *do/does* in the negative and interrogative sentences.

4.3.3.2. Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III

4.3.3.2.1. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III

The analysis of the data of the fourth-year learners revealed that 46% of the recognition test and 41% of the approximate production test were done

correctly. Figure 4.39 and Figure 4.40 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the group in the recognition and approximate production tests.

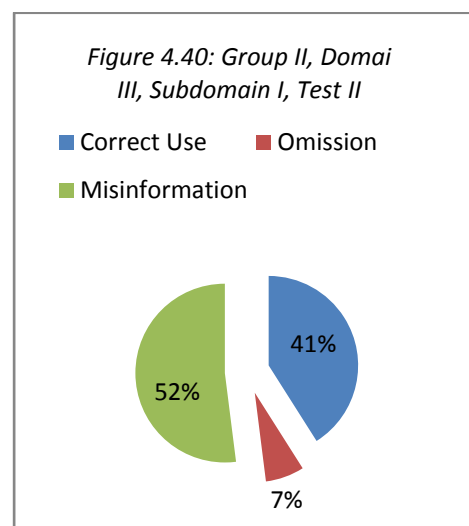
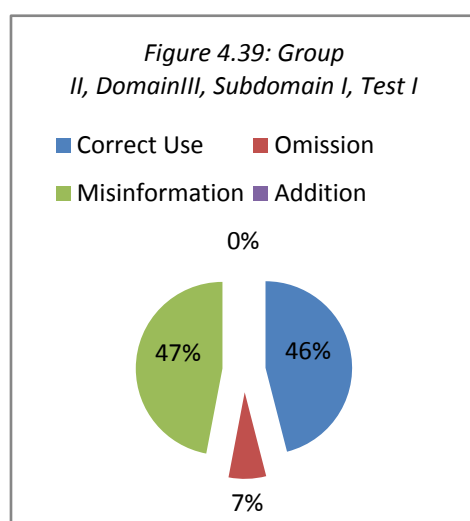


Figure 4.39 and Figure 4.40 show that the percentage of the omission mistakes/errors made by the fourth-year learners in the questions of this subdomain (see Section 4.3.3.1.1) was 7% both Test I and Test II. In the recognition test 33% of the fourth-year learners omitted the copula *be* in the sentence illustrated in Example 4.140. The other cases of omission were single and distributed among the items of the subdomain.

Example 4.140:

**Our son always very thirsty after school.*

In the approximate production test all but one instance of the omissions were found in the item presented in Example 4. 141.

Example 4.141:

**We fond of fruit.*

As the analysis of the omission mistakes/errors showed the second-year learners kept the tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive sentences of the subdomain which was also observed in the performance of the first-year learners in the subdomain. A plausible explanation for this will be suggested and discussed after analyzing the misinformation mistakes/errors made by the group.

The percentage of the misinformation mistakes/errors made by the fourth-year group in the recognition test was 47%. The detailed analysis of the learners' answers in the subdomain in Test I revealed that only 4% of all the misinformation mistakes/errors were due to the wrong use of a form of the copula *be* (see Example 4.142 and Example 4.143). The major portion of the misinformation mistakes/errors (80%) was the cases of the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary verb *do/does*. For instance, 63% of the group used *do* instead of the copula *be* in the item shown in Example 4.144; 60% of the fourth-year learners substituted *be* with *do* as illustrated in Example 4.145; every second student made the mistake/error presented in Example 4.146 and more than 30% of the group replaced the copula *be* with *do/does* as in Examples 4.147 and 4.148.

Example 4.142:

**Our son are always thirsty after school.*

Example 4.143:

**You is not ill today!*

Example 4.144:

**You do not late for classes today!*

Example 4.145:

**Why do you angry with me?*

Example 4.146:

**What music do you fond of?*

Example 4.147:

**You do not ill today!*

Example 4.148:

**Why does our dog hungry?*

The modal verb *can* and the verb *have* were misused in 16% of all the misinformation mistakes/errors.

In the approximate production test the misinformation mistakes/errors were made in 52% of the students' answers. Among them there were no cases of the use of a wrong form of the copula *be*. But in 7% of the misinformation mistakes/errors the copula *be* was replaced with the modal verb *can* and in 93% the auxiliary *do/does* was used in place of the copula *be*. It is interesting to mention that all the cases of the substitution of the copula *be* with *can* were observed in the positive item of Example 4.149 and none of the second-year learners used the auxiliary verb *do/does* in this item.

Example 4.149:

**We can fond of fruit.*

The analysis of the misinformation mistakes/errors made by the fourth-year learners in this subdomain revealed that all the cases of the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary verb *do/does* were made in the negative or interrogative items of this subdomain. For instance, more than 60% of the group used *do/does* in the items illustrated in Examples 4.150 and 4.151, 30%

of the learners made the same kind of misinformation mistake/error as in Examples 4.152 and 4.153.

Example 4.150:

**Why do you late again?*

Example 4.151:

**Does Helen afraid of dark?*

Example 4.152:

**I do not fond of pop music.*

Example 4.153:

**We do not angry with you.*

The analysis of the fourth-year learners' results related to this subdomain in the recognition and approximate production tests revealed that the students tended to omit the copula *be* in the positive sentences while the substitutions of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* were predominantly observed in the negative and interrogative items. The analogous tendency was traced in the performance of the first-year group in this subdomain. A plausible explanation for these mistakes/errors and their distribution among positive, negative and interrogative items might be the influence of L1 (i.e., Russian) of the students. As it was discussed in Section 2.5.1 the items in this subdomain are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian and that is why the native speakers of Russian might perceive the adjectives of this subdomain as verbs and process them as verbs in the negative and interrogative sentences as demonstrated below:

My sons **fond of football.*

My sons **do not fond of football.*

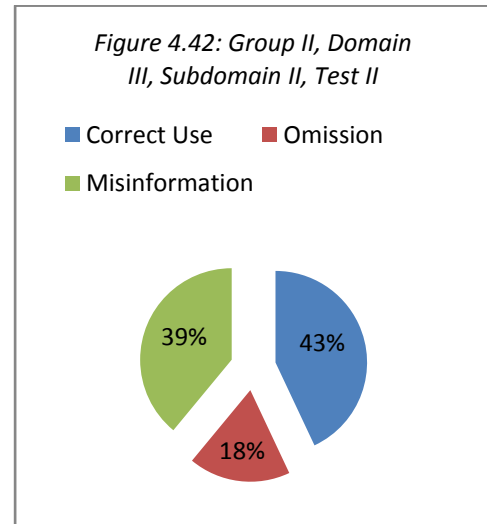
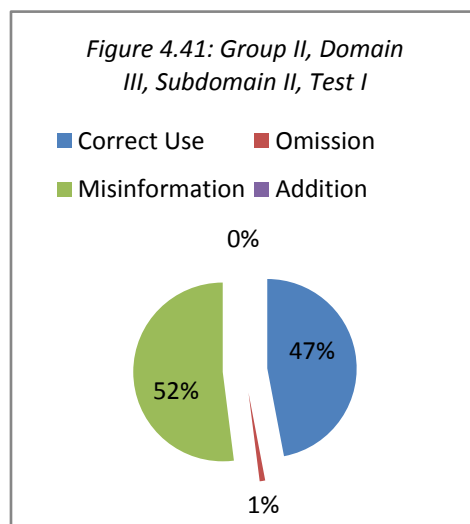
**Do your sons fond of football?*

This presupposition explains why the major number of the omissions occurred in the positive sentences while in the negative and interrogative ones, the students used the auxiliary verb *do/does*. The validity of this presupposition will be checked through further data analyses.

4.3.3.2.2. The copula *be* is followed by a participle or a participle phrase:

Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III

Figure 4.41 and Figure 4.42 display the percentages and distribution of the correct and incorrect answers related to the second subdomain of Domain III in the recognition and approximate production tests.



As Figure 4.41 and Figure 4.42 show 53% of the students' answers in Test I and 57% in Test II were incorrect. It is intriguing that there were only 1% of the omission mistakes/errors in Test I while the percentage of the omissions in Test II was 18%. A plausible explanation for such a big difference in the

performance of the students on the two tests may be found in the absence of positive sentences in the recognition test. To put it in different words, in this subdomain the fourth-year learners kept the tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive sentences, that is why there were no omission mistakes/errors in the recognition test, on the one hand; on the other hand, all the cases of the omission mistakes/errors observed in Test II were made by the students in the positive items as Examples 4.154 and 4.155 demonstrate:

Example 4.154:

**You always tired after work.*

Example 4.155:

**I interested in French.*

As it is seen in Figure 4.41 and Figure 4.42 the misinformation mistakes were made in 52% of the items in the recognition test and in 39% of the items in the approximate production test. The analysis of the recognition test revealed that 97% of all the misinformations were due to the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does*. Precisely, 60% of the group used *does* in Example 4.156 and 40% replaced *be* with *do* as in Example 4.157:

Example 4.156:

**Our aunt does not married to a journalist.*

Example 4.157:

**We do not interested in stamps.*

The analysis of the approximate production test showed that there was just one case of the use of a wrong form of the copula *be* that is of Example 4.158; however the percentages of the substitution of the copula *be* with

do/does and *can* were 84% and 13% respectively. In the fourth-year group 67% of the learners used the auxiliary *does/do* as Example 4.159 displays, additionally 17% of the students replaced the positive form of the copula *be* with the negative of the auxiliary *do* as in Example 4.160:

Example 4.158:

**You is always tired after work.*

Example 4.159:

**Does your sister married to Mr Smith?*

Example 4.160:

**You do not always tired after work.*

The analysis of the misinformation mistakes/errors made by the fourth-year students in the both tests makes it possible to suggest that the majority of the misinformation mistakes/errors were due to the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* and the learners mainly made this kind of mistake/error in the negative and interrogative items.

Relying on the performance of the fourth-year learners in this subdomain it may be concluded that the students followed the tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive sentences and substitute it with the auxiliary verb *do/does* in the negative and interrogative sentences. This finding supports the presupposition made and discussed in Section 4.3.3.1.2.

4.3.3.2.3. The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase:

Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain III

Figure 4.43 displays the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the fourth-year learners in the items of the third subdomain.

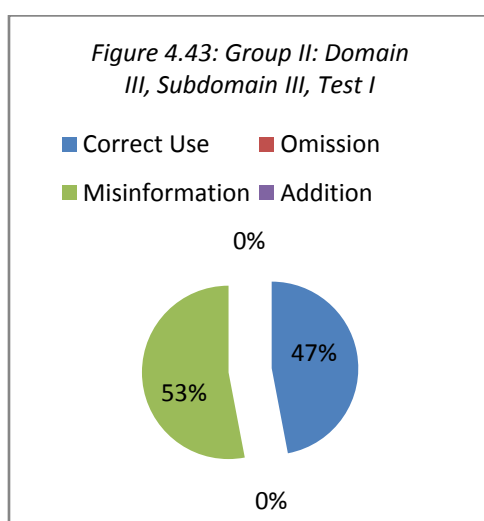


Figure 4.43 shows that 53% of the answers were incorrect and all of them were the cases of misinformation. The analysis of the students' tests revealed that 33% of the group members substituted the copula *be* with the auxiliary verb *do*, 3% of the students used *can* and 17% of them replaced the copula *be* with the verb *have* (See Examples 4.161-4.163).

Example 4.161:

**When do I on duty?*

Example 4.162:

**When have I on duty?*

Example 4.163:

**When can I on duty?*

A plausible explanation for these mistakes/errors may be found in L1 influence. Example 4.164 presents the contrastive analysis of the sentence in Russian and English languages.

Example 4.164:

English: When am I on duty?

Russian: Когда я дежурю?

When – [Q W] I- [PRON., 1 PER., SG., NOM.] on duty-[VERB, PR. T., 1 PER. SG.]

English: When do I have my duty?

OR

Russian: Когда у меня дежурство?

When – [Q W] at – [PREP]. me – [PRON., 1 PER., SG., GEN.] duty – [NOUN., NEUT., SG., NOM]

English: When do I have my duty?

As the example above illustrates the English phrase *to be on duty* corresponds to the verb or to the verbal phrase ‘*to have a duty*’ in Russian. That is why the native speakers of Russian may associate the prepositional adverbial phrase ‘*on duty*’ with the verbal phrase and process it as a verb in the interrogative sentence.

To sum up the findings discussed above about the use of the copula *be* in Domain III by the Russian fourth-year learners of English, the following hypotheses may be suggested:

1. The fourth-year learners encountered a lot of problems with the use of the copula *be* in this domain.
2. The highest percentage of the incorrect answers (53 in Test I and 58 in Test II) in comparison with the first two domains (26/23 in Domain I

and 25/13 in Domain II) indicates that Domain III seems the most difficult for this group of students.

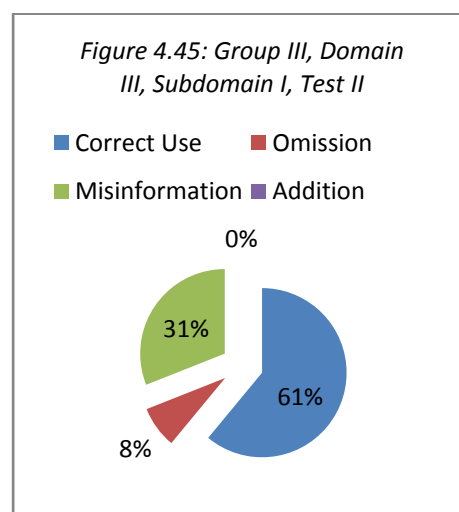
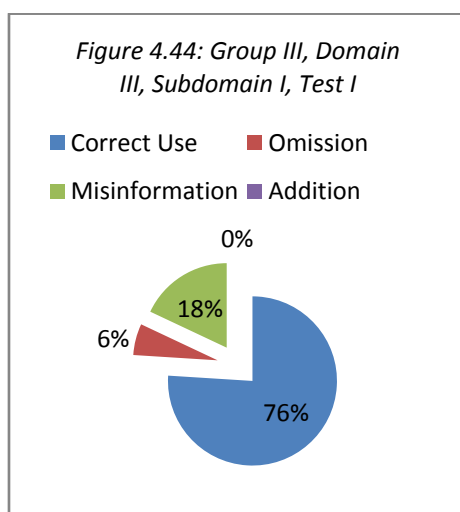
3. The students showed an unsatisfactory performance in all the subcategories of the domain.
4. The fourth-year learners made both omission and misinformation mistakes/errors.
5. The substitutions of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* occurred the most often.
6. The group seems to keep the tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive items of the domain and substitute it with the auxiliary verb *do/does* in the negative and interrogative sentences.
7. L1 influence appeared to be one of the reasons for the mistakes/errors and their distribution.

4.3.3.3. Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III

4.3.3.3.1. The copula *be* is followed by an adjective or an adjective phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III

The analysis of the eighth-year learners' answers related to the first subdomain showed that 76% of the answers in the recognition test and 61% of the answers in the approximate production test were correct (i.e., the group performed better in the recognition task). A plausible explanation for the better results in Test II was suggested by the current instructor of the learners

who linked it to the constant training of the students in the MC format before the USE which they would take in two years. Figure 4.44 and Figure 4.45 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the eighth-year students on the items related to the first subdomain in the recognition and approximate production tests.



As it is seen in Figure 4.44 and Figure 4.45 6% of the answers in the recognition test and 8% of the answers in the approximate production test were the cases when the eighth-year learners omitted the copula *be*. The analysis of the omission mistakes/errors made by the students in the both tests revealed that all of them occurred in the positive sentences. Thus, 20% of the group members omitted the copula *be* as Examples 4.165 and 4.166 illustrate.

Example 4.165:

**Our son always very thirsty after school.*

Example 4.166:

**We fond of fruit.*

The analysis of the misinformation mistakes/errors in Test I and Test II showed that all of them were due to the substitution of the copula *be* with other verbs. Precisely, the percentages of the replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* were 82% and 84% in Test I and Test II respectively. The modal verb *can* was used instead of the copula *be* in 18% of the misinformation mistakes/errors made in the recognition test and in 16% of the misinformations in the approximate production test. The following examples demonstrate the instances of the substitutions of the copula *be* with other verbs made by the eighth-year learners in the subdomain.

Example 4.167:

**I do not afraid of dark.*

Example 4.168:

**You do not late for classes today!*

Example 4.169:

**You do not ill today!*

Example 4.170:

**I do not fond of pop music.*

Example 4.171:

**Does Helen afraid of dark?*

Example 4.172:

**What music do you fond of?*

Example 4.173:

**Why do you late again?*

Example 4.174:

**I cannot fond of pop music.*

Example 4.175:

**We cannot angry with you.*

Example 4.176:

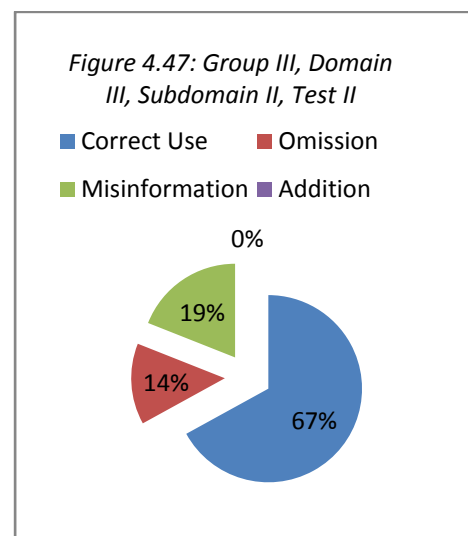
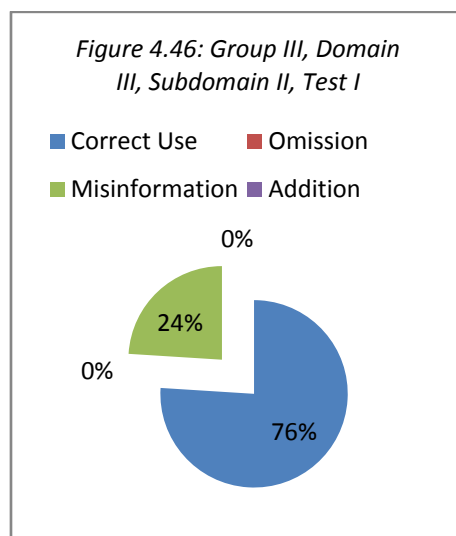
**Can you proud of your family?*

The above mentioned mistakes/errors were distributed equally among the items of the subdomain.

It is worth mentioning that all but one replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* were observed in the negative and interrogative sentences; which along with the tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive sentences indicates that the eighth-year learners seem to perceive the adjectives used in the items of the subdomain as verbs and process them as main verbs in Present Simple Tense in the negative and interrogative forms.

4.3.3.3.2. The copula *be* is followed by a participle or a participle phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III

Figure 4.46 and Figure 4.47 display the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers related to the second subdomain in the recognition and approximate production tests of the eighth-year students.



As it is evident from Figure 4.46 and Figure 4.47 the percentages of the correct answers were 76% and 67% in Test I and Test II respectively. The performance of the eighth-year learners was better in the recognition test and a plausible explanation for that is suggested training of the students in the MC format due to the USE (see Section 4.3.3.3.1). The analysis of the data showed that no omission mistakes/errors were made by the learners in the recognition test; however, in 14% of Test II the learners omitted the copula *be*. All the omissions were found in the positive sentences in the approximate production test (see Examples 4.177 and 4.178).

Example 4.177:

**You always tired after work.*

Example 4.178:

**I interested in French.*

The misinformation mistakes/errors were made in 24% of the examples in the recognition test and in 19% of the items in the approximate production test. The analysis of the data showed that all the misinformation mistakes/errors

made by the eighth-year learners in this subdomain in the both tests were due to the replacement of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* as Examples 4.179- 4.181 demonstrate.

Example 4.179:

** We do not interested in stamps.*

Example 4.180:

**Our aunt does not married to a journalist.*

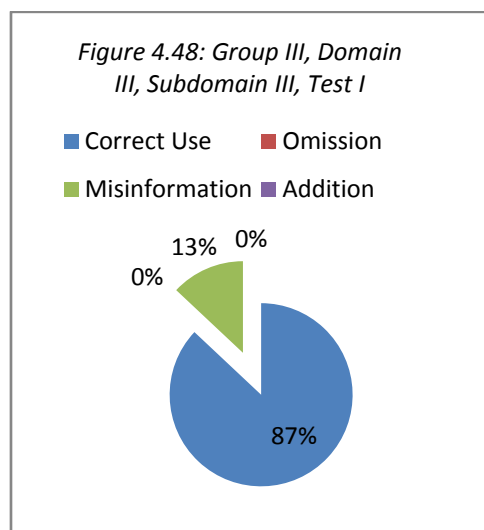
Example 4.181:

**Does your sister married to Mr Smith?*

All the cases of the substitution of the copula *be* with the auxiliary verb *do/does* occurred in the negative and interrogative items of the subdomain.

4.3.3.3.3 The copula *be* is followed by a prepositional adverbial phrase: Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain III

Figure 4.48 presents the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the eighth-year learners in the subdomain.



As it is seen in Figure 4.48 87% of the students made the task correctly. There were no cases of omission but 13% of the group substituted the copula *be* with other verbs. The analysis of the subdomain revealed that the auxiliary *do* and the modal verb *can* were used in the equal proportions in place of the copula *be* (see Examples 4.182 and 4.183).

Example 4.182:

**When can I on duty?*

Example 4.183:

**When do I on duty?*

To sum up the findings discussed above about the acquisition of the copula *be* in Domain III by the Russian eighth-year learners of English, the following hypotheses may be suggested:

1. The quantity of the mistakes/errors made by the eighth-year learners in this domain indicates that the students still encountered problems with the use of the copula *be* in this domain.

2. The percentage of the incorrect answers in the domain (20% in Test I and 36% in Test II) significantly overpassed the percentage of the incorrect answers in Domain I and Domain II (4/7 in Domain I and 13/0 in Domain II).
3. The eighth-year learners performed better in the recognition than in the approximate production task.
4. The mistakes/errors were available in all the subcategories of the domain.
5. The fourth-year learners made both omission and misinformation mistakes/errors.
6. The substitutions of the copula *be* with the auxiliary *do/does* occurred the most often.
7. The group kept the tendency to omit the copula *be* in the positive items of the domain and substitute it with the auxiliary verb *do/does* in the negative and interrogative sentences.
8. A possible reason for the mistakes/errors made in this domain and their distribution was suggested L1 influence at the morphological level. As it was discussed in Section 4.3.3.2.1 the learners relying on the Russian equivalents of the items examined in this domain may have perceived them as verbs and processed them as main verbs in Present Simple Tense.

4.3.3.4 Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain III

In order to be able to trace how the students' performance on the questions related to Domain III changed depending on their period of learning English, a table showing the overall results was developed. Table 4.9 shows the quantity and distribution of the incorrect answers in the subdomains of the Domain III given by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners of English.

Table 4.9: Overall performance of the students on Domain III

DOMAIN III		LEARNERS			
SUBCATEGORIES		FIRST YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	EIGHTH YEAR	
I <i>copula + adjective</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	73	54	24
		OMISSION	13	7	6
		MISINFORMATION	60	47	18
	TEST II	INCORRECT	72	59	39
		OMISSION	6	7	8
		MISINFORMATION	66	52	31
II <i>copula + participle</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	73	53	24
		OMISSION	18	1	0
		MISINFORMATION	55	52	24
	TEST II	INCORRECT	80	57	33
		OMISSION	37	18	14
		MISINFORMATION	43	39	19
III <i>copula + prepositional adverbial phrase</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	90	53	13
		OMISSION	0	0	0
		MISINFORMATION	90	53	13
	TEST II	INCORRECT			
		OMISSION			
		MISINFORMATION			

Table 4.9 shows that the first-year learners made the biggest number of mistakes/errors in all of the subcategories. The first group seemed to have problems with every subcategory of the domain and demonstrated unsatisfactory performance in each of them. The percentage of the incorrect answers indicates that the current domain could be considered the most problematic for the first-year learners in comparison with Domain I and Domain II. The percentage of the mistakes/errors made by the fourth-year learners was less than that of the beginners. However, since the fourth-year students made the mistakes/errors in more than half of the recognition and production tests in all the subdomains it seems possible to suggest that the fourth-year learners' competence in this domain of the use of the copula *be* was also unsatisfactory. The percentage of the mistakes/errors in the performance of the eighth-year learners decreased significantly in comparison with the quantity of the incorrect answers in the first two groups. Nevertheless, the mistakes/errors in 20% of the recognition task and 36% of the approximate production task allow me to conclude that the eighth-year students still had difficulties in acquiring the copula *be* in the examined domain. As it is evident from Table 4.9 all the subcategories of the domain occurred problematic for the group. Taking into consideration that the students had been learning English for eight years and had been exposed to several topics such as *the copula be in Past and Future Tenses, Passive Voice, Continuous and Indefinite Aspects, Reported Speech* (See Section..), which implied the multiple revision of the copula *be*, it seems possible to suggest that the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners in the examined

domain fossilized and could be classified as persistent. Along with the highest percentage of the total mistakes/errors made by the eighth-year learners, this domain is noticeable for the quantity of the omission mistakes/errors which as it was discussed were mainly observed in the positive sentences. The detailed analysis of the mistakes/errors and their distribution among positive, negative and interrogative items related to Domain III enabled me to argue that the native speakers of Russian might perceive the adjectives, participle and prepositional adverbial phrases as verbs and process them as main verbs in Present Simple Tense. A plausible explanation for this misuse was suggested the influence of Russian as L1 at the morphosyntactic level.

4.3.4 Performance of the learners on Domain IV

As it was pointed out in Section 4.3 Domain IV in the current study includes the items that function as distractors in the recognition and approximate production tests. They are sentences with main verbs in Present Simple Tense and with the modal verb *can*. The distractors were included in the tests for two reasons, first, to examine whether the learners would be able to distinguish the cases when the copula *be* should be used; second, to see whether or not the incomplete competence in the use of the copula *be* might influence the performance of the learners on the items with main and modal verbs in Present Simple Tense. In the current section the influence of the incomplete competence in the use of the copula *be* on the learners' acquisition of the above mentioned grammatical aspects will be examined and

discussed. The mistakes/errors that cannot be linked to the incomplete competence in the use of the copula *be*, such as for instance the replacement of *do* with *does*, using the main verb with *-(e)s* ending after the modal verb *can* or in the negative and interrogative along with the auxiliary *does* and alike, will not be discussed in the study because they are beyond the scope of the present research. In the recognition test there are eleven distractors. They are:

1. *Tom's father ... works as a doctor.*
a) *Am* b) *do* c) *is* d) –
2. *My dog ... swim very well.*
a) *Can* b) *have* c) *is* d) –
3. *Our granny ... goes to the doctor every month.*
a) *Am* b) *can* c) *do* d) –
4. *I ... play basketball every Friday.*
a) *Am* b) *are* c) *does* d) –
5. *I ... watch TV in the morning.*
a) *Are not* b) *do not* c) *have not* d) *not*
6. *My mother ... drive a car.*
a) *Not* b) *have not* c) *is not* d) *cannot*
7. *The boys ... dance very well.*
a) *Not* b) *is not* c) *cannot* d) *are not*
8. *Grandpa ... play chess.*
a) *Not* b) *do not* c) *is not* d) *does not*
9. *... you play the piano well?*
a) *Are* b) *can* c) *have* d) –
10. *When ... the play start?*
a) *Does* b) *have* c) *is* d) –
11. *What ... you do very well?*
a) *Is* b) *are* c) *does* d) *can*

In the approximate production test there are sixteen items-distractors.

They are listed below:

1. *We ...have five classes every day.*
2. *Ann ...works as an actress.*
3. *I ... help my grandmother in the garden.*
4. *I ... speak three languages.*
5. *My aunt ... cook very well.*
6. *I am sorry, I ...(not) help you now.*
7. *Tom ... (not) often go the cinema.*
8. *My granny ...(not) use a computer.*
9. *Betty ... (not) drink Coca-cola.*
10. *Our parrot ... (not) talk.*
11. *My parents ... (not) like watching TV.*
12. *... Pam study art?*
13. *... you show the way to the post-office?*
14. *... you niece live in Minsk?*
15. *... I see you on Friday?*
16. *... your pets walk in the park?*

4.3.4.1. Performance of the first-year learners on Domain IV

Figure 4.49 and Figure 4.50 present the distribution of the mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners in the items related to Domain IV in the recognition and approximate production tests.

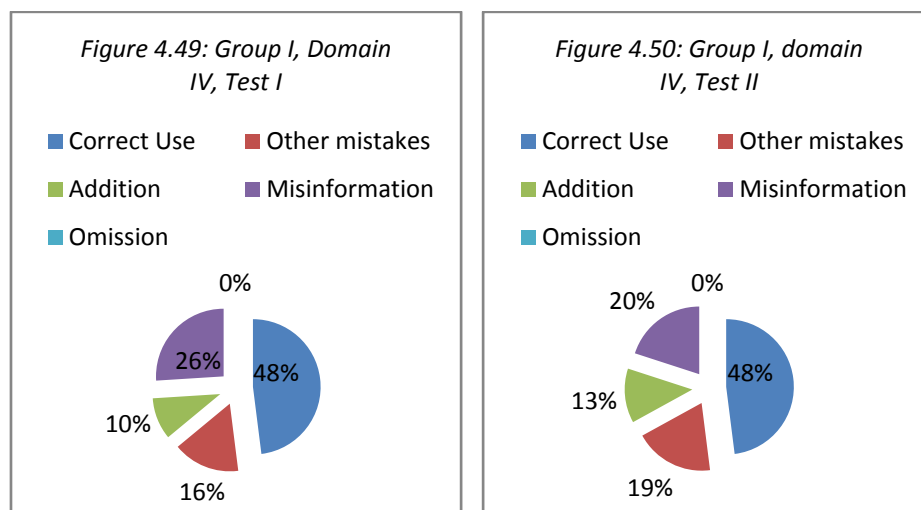


Figure 4.49 shows that the percentage of the incorrect answers in the recognition test was 52%. Among the mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners in this subdomain of the test, 70% (i.e., 36% out of 52%) are suggested to be related to the lack of the competence in the use of the copula *be*. Within this group 20% of mistakes/errors (i.e., 10% out of 52%) were the cases of addition and 50% (i.e., 26% out of 52%) were due to the replacement of the auxiliary verb *do/does* or the modal verb *can* with the copula *be*. For instance, every second person in the group used the copula *be* along with the main verb in Present Simple as Examples 4.182 and 4.183 illustrate.

Example 4.182:

**Tom's father is works as a doctor.*

Example 4.183:

**I am play basketball every Friday.*

More than half of the group substituted the auxiliary *do/does* with the copula *be* in the items of Examples 4.184 and 4.185:

Example 4.184:

**When is the play start?*

Example 4.185:

**What are you do very well?*

The copula *be* was used along with the main verb in place of the modal verb *can* in 40% of the first-year learners' tests (see Examples 4.186 and 4.187).

Example 4.186:

**The boys are not dance very well.*

Example 4.187:

**My dog is swim very well.*

The analogous mistakes/errors were also found in the other items of the domain in Test I but in the less quantity (see Example 4.188-4.190).

Example 4.188:

**My granny is not use a computer.*

Example 4.189:

**Our parrot is not talk.*

Example 4.190:

**Tom is not often go to the cinema.*

35% of the group made the mistakes/errors as illustrated in Examples 4.188-4.190.

Figure 4.50 shows that the percentage of the mistakes/errors made by the first-year learners in the approximate production test was 52%. Among all the incorrect answers 63% (i.e., 33% out of 52%) are suggested to be related to the incomplete competence in the use of the copula *be*. The misinformation mistakes/errors were made in 20% of the examples and the addition

mistakes/errors were available in 13% all the students' answers in Test II. The analysis of the items of the domain revealed that the first-year learners tended to substitute *do/does* with *be* as examples below show.

Example 4.191:

**Betty is not drink Coca-cola.*

Example 4.192:

**Is your niece live in Minsk?*

The misinformation mistakes/errors presented in Examples 4.191 and 4.192 were made by every fourth student of the group.

The modal verb *can* was replaced with the copula *be* by 30% of the first-year learners on the average (see Examples 4.193-4.195). The substitutions of the modal verb *can* with the copula *be* reflect the same tendency of the students to use the copula *be* along with the main verb in the sentences in Present Simple Tense.

Example 4.193:

**My aunt is cook well.*

Example 4.194:

**I am sorry, I am not help you now.*

Example 4.195:

**Are you show the way to the post-office?*

About 30% of the first-year students used the copula *be* in the sentences with main verbs in Present Simple. Examples 4.196-4.199 present the cases of addition made by the first-year students in Test II.

Example 4.196:

**We are have five classes every day.*

Example 4.197:

**Ann is works as an actress.*

Example 4.198:

**I am help my grandmother in the garden.*

Example 4.199:

**I am speak three languages.*

Thus, the analysis of the data revealed that the first-year students seem to overuse the copula *be* in the sentences with main verbs in Present Simple Tense. This tendency might be regarded as a support of the incomplete understanding and application of the rule hypothesis suggested and discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.1. It was argued that due to the lack of the clear-cut notion of the copula *be* the learners failed to distinguish cases when it should be used. The misunderstanding and misuse of the copula *be* might influence the learning of Present Simple Tense in the sentences with main verbs. As a result the learners could tend to overgeneralize and create one deviant structure in place of two correct ones, for instance: **I do not a good cooker*; instead of *I do not cook well*; and *I am not a good cook*; OR ** I am not study*; instead of *I do not study*; and *I am not a student*.

4.3.4.2. Performance of the fourth-year learners on Domain IV

Figure 4.51 and Figure 4.52 display the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers in the performance of the fourth-year students on the

questions related to Domain IV in the recognition and approximate production tests.

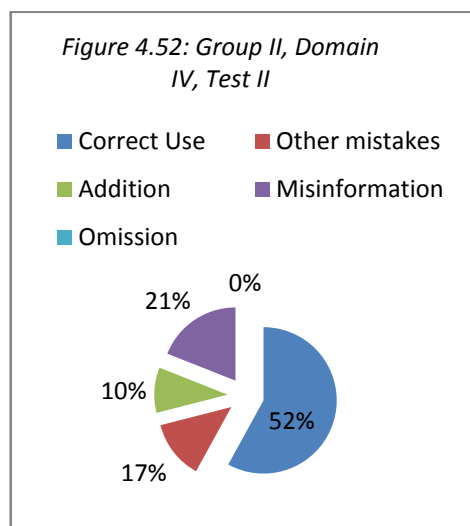
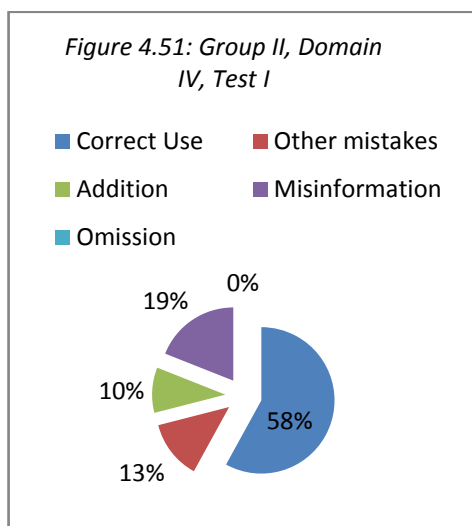


Figure 4.51 and Figure 4.52 show that the percentages of the incorrect answers were 42% and 48% in the recognition and approximate production tests respectively. In Test I 70% of all the mistakes/errors (29% out of 42%) and in Test II 65% of all the mistakes/errors (31% out of 48%) made by the fourth-year learners are suggested to be triggered by the incomplete understanding of the copula *be*. In the both tests the cases of addition were observed in 10% of the distractors. Thus, in the recognition test nearly 40% of the fourth-year learners used the copula *be* along with the main verb in Present Simple Tense as Examples 4.200 and 4.201 illustrate:

Example 4.200:

**Tom's father is works as a doctor.*

Example 4.201:

**I am play basketball every Friday.*

In the approximate production test the analogous mistake/error was made by more than 30% of the group (See Examples 4.202-4.204)

Example 4.202:

**We are have five classes every day.*

Example 4.203:

**I am help my grandmother in the garden.*

Example 4.204:

**I am speak three languages.*

The cases of misinformation were observed in 19% of the items in the recognition and in 21% of the examples in the approximate production test. The analysis of the data showed that the learners replaced the auxiliary verb *do/does* or modal verb *can* using the copula *be* along with the main verb in Present Simple Tense as Examples 4.205-4.216 illustrate:

Example 4.205:

**I am sorry, I am not help you now.*

Example 4.206:

**Tom is not often go the cinema.*

Example 4.207:

**My granny is not use a computer.*

Example 4.208:

**Betty is not drink Coca-cola.*

Example 4.209:

**Our parrot is not talk.*

Example 4.210:

**The boys are not dance very well.*

Example 4.211;

**Grandpa is not play chess.*

Example 4.212:

**Are you show the way to the post-office?*

Example.4.213:

**Is your niece live in Minsk?*

Example 4.214:

**Are you play the piano well?*

Example 4.215:

**When is the play start?*

Example 4.216:

**What are you do very well?*

The percentage of the incorrect answers in the above mentioned items varied from 10% to 40% of the fourth-year group.

4.3.4.3 Performance of the eighth-year learners on Domain IV

Figure 4.53 and Figure 4.54 present the distribution of the correct and incorrect answers of the eighth-year learners to the questions related to Domain IV in the recognition and in the approximate production tests.

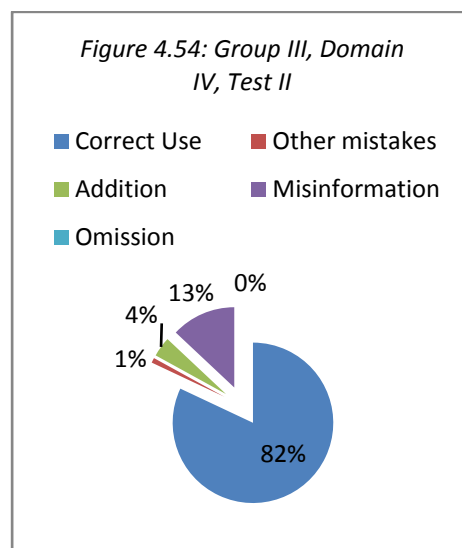
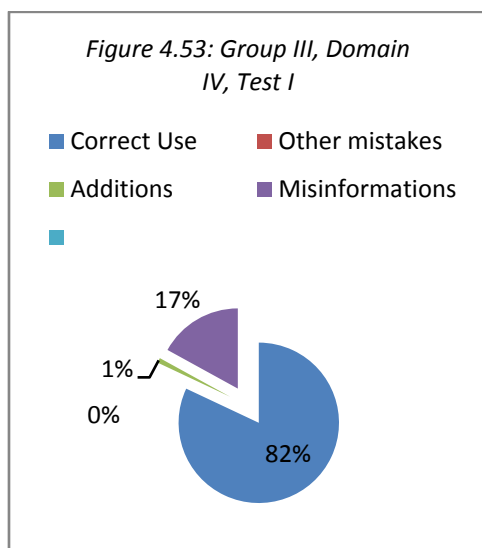


Figure 4.53 and Figure 4.54 show that 18% of the questions in the recognition and in the approximate production tasks were done incorrectly. Nearly all the mistakes/errors made by the eighth-year students in this domain seem to be related to the incomplete understanding of the use of the copula *be*. The addition mistakes/errors due to the overuse of the copula *be* along with the main verb in Present Simple Tense were observed in 1% of the items in Test I and in 4% of the items in Test II. The additions made by the eighth-year learners in the tests are illustrated in Examples 4.217-4.220:

Example 4.217:

**I am play basketball every Friday.*

Example 4.218:

**We are have five classes every day.*

Example 4.219:

**I am help my grandmother in the garden.*

Example 4.220;

**Ann is works as an actress.*

The misinformation mistakes/errors made by the eighth-year learners in this domain were found in 17% of the items in the recognition test and in 13% of the items in the approximate production test. The analysis of the data showed that the substitutions of the auxiliary verb *do/does* or modal verb *can* with *be* were found in every item of the domain and the highest percentage of the incorrect answers in the group (i.e., 25%) was observed in the items listed in Examples 4.221-4.223:

Example 4.221:

**What are you do very well?*

Example 4.222:

**Are you play the piano well?*

Example 4.223:

**The boys are not dance very well.*

4.3.4.4 Comparative analyses of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on Domain IV

In order to be able to trace how the students' performance on Domain IV changed depending on their period of learning English, a table showing the overall results of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year students in Domain IV was developed. Table 4.10 shows the quantity and distribution of the incorrect answers in Domain IV given by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners of English.

Table 4.10: Overall performance of the students on Domain IV

DOMAIN IV T		PERCENTAGE OF INCORRECT ANSWERS	LEARNERS		
			FIRST YEAR	FOURTH YEAR	EIGHTH YEAR
<i>Distractors</i>	TEST I	INCORRECT	52	42	18
		<i>OTHER MISTAKES</i>	16	13	0
		<i>ADDITIONS</i>	10	10	1
		<i>MISINFORMATION</i>	26	19	17
	TEST II	INCORRECT	52	48	18
		<i>OTHER MISTAKES</i>	19	17	1
		<i>ADDITIONS</i>	13	10	4
		<i>MISINFORMATION</i>	20	21	13

Table 4.10 shows that the biggest percentage of the mistakes/errors made by the first- and the fourth-year learners referred to the cases that are related to the incomplete competence in the use of the copula *be*. Thus, in the first-year group 70% of all the incorrect answers in Test I (i.e., 36% out of 52%) and 63% in Test II (i.e., 33% out of 52%) were due to the overuse of the copula *be*. In the second group 70% of all the mistakes/errors in Test I (i.e., 29% out of 42%) and 65% of the incorrect answers in Test II (i.e., 31% out of 48%) were also the cases of the overuse of the copula *be*. It was interesting to find out that the analogous mistakes/errors were made even by the eighth-year learners and in fact it seems possible to suggest that the incomplete competence in the use of the copula *be* appeared the only source of the incorrect answers in Domain IV in the third group (see Table 4.10). The analysis of the students' performance on the questions related to Domain IV in the recognition and approximate production tests supports the suggestion that misunderstanding and misuse of the copula *be* might cause difficulties in

acquisition of the other aspects of English, namely negation and question formations in Present Simple Tense.

Table 4.10 shows that the quantity of the incorrect answers in the domain in the recognition and approximate production tests decreased with further input of the language. However, the percentage of the mistakes/errors made by the students after eight years of learning English still seems rather high, which allows me to regard these errors as fossilized. As it was suggested in Section 4.3.1.1.1 and further discussed in Section 4.3.4.1 the incomplete understanding of the use of the copula *be* by the learners might cause overgeneralization. Jakobovits (1969, cited in Richards, 1971) stated that generalization or transfer “covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of the other structures in TL, for example *it is occurs* ,*we are hope*, etc. ” (Richards, 1971:174). Therefore, it is possible to name the instances of the mistakes/errors made by the students in Domain IV as classical examples of overgeneralization and relate them to the incomplete understanding and application of the rule.

4.3.5 Performance of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners on the positive, negative and interrogative items of the tests

Figure 4.55 and Figure 4.56 display the percentage of the mistakes/errors made by the first-, third- and eighth-year learners on the positive, negative and interrogative items in the recognition test and in the approximate production tests.

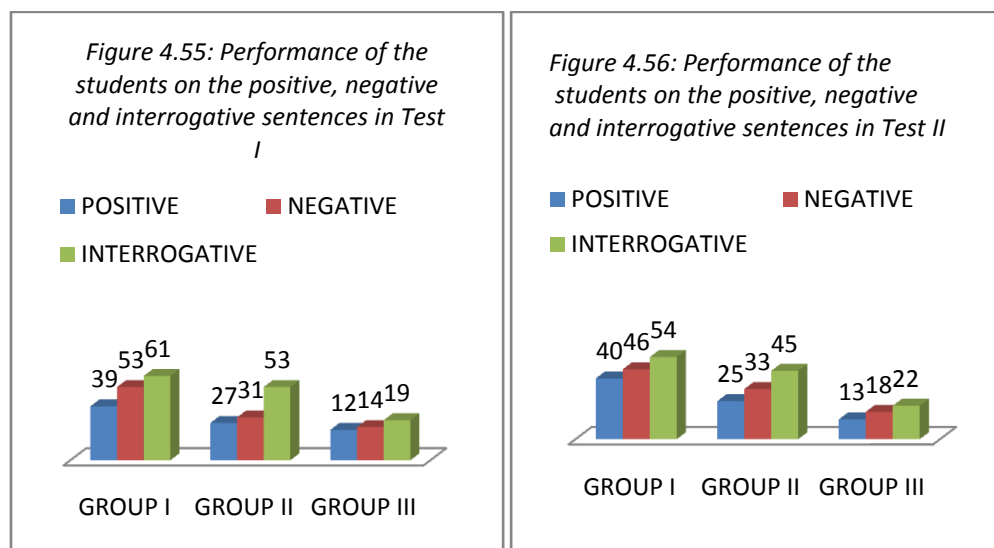


Figure 4.55 and Figure 4.56 show that the students of all the three groups made the least percentage of the mistakes/errors in the positive sentences both in Test I and Test II while the biggest number of the incorrect answers is observed in the interrogative sentences in the both tests.

A plausible explanation for such distribution of the mistakes/errors among the positive, negative and interrogative items may be suggested in terms of Universal Hierarchy of Difficulty (Richards and Sampson, 1974), which is concerned with the inherent difficulty for man of certain phonological, syntactic or semantic items and structures. Richards and Sampson (1974) stated that the concept of difficulty in language learning “has been defined by psycholinguists in terms of such factors as sentence length, processing time required, derivational complexity, number of transformations, and semantic complexity” and may be presumed to affect the learner’s organization of what he perceives and what he produces (Richards and Sampson, 1974:13-15).

Taking into consideration that the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners made the bigger number of mistakes/errors in the interrogative and then in the negative items of the recognition and approximate production tests it seems possible to suggest that learners with different levels of proficiency commonly found negative and especially interrogative structures more difficult. Derivational complexity and influence of L1 may be suggested as factors causing difficulties in the negative and interrogative sentences. Thus, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) pointed to the fact that many of ESL/EFL students find syntactic negation problematic. One reason for that is L1 influence since different languages and Russian is among them tend to place their negative particle in different positions in the sentence, allow multiple negation in one sentence and do not need an operator verb, for instance:

Я не знаю этого человека.

I – [PRN., 1 PER., NOM.] *not* – [NEG.PART.] *know* – [VERB, PR.T., 1 PER., SG.] *this* – [DEM. PRN, MASC., SG., ACC.] *man* – [NOUN, MASC., SG., ACC].

I do not know this man.

The other reason is the complexity of the derivation of the negative surface structure which implies applying additional rules such as

- i) copying subject features on the tense;
- ii) an operator addition if one is missing;
- iii) the *not* placement and subject-verb agreement (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 187-189).

The difficulty in perception and production of interrogative sentences is also may be linked to the complexity of the derivation of the interrogative structure which includes the most operations in comparison with positive and even negative sentences. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) identified the following mapping rules for the derivation of the interrogative structure:

- i. outputting of base;
- ii. copying subject features on the tense;
- iii. *wh-* fronting in special questions, operator addition if required;
- iv. subject-operator inversion (with exception of Subject *Wh-* questions);
- v. subject-verb agreement (1999:205-250).

Research (Ultan, 1978, cited in Celce-Murcia, 1999) showed that most language including Russian use a distinctive international pattern for questions and do not require complex derivation rules, for instance:

Она учительница.

She – [PRN., 3 PER., SG., NOM] teacher – [NOUN, FEM., NOM.]

She is a teacher.

Она учительница?

She – [PRN., 3 PER., SG., NOM] teacher – [NOUN, FEM., NOM.]

Is she a teacher?

Therefore, it is not surprising that due to the complexity of the mapping rules, questions in English are very problematic for ESL/EFL students.

Another possible explanation for the problems students have with negative and positive structures might be the teaching methodology used in the classroom. Thus, Richards (1971:177-178) maintained that the use of questions is a common teaching device. Relying on my personal observations of ELT teachers I can also suggest that typically, questions are used by teachers as a means of eliciting sentences, positive or, more seldom, negative from their students. Therefore, it may be suggested that the transfer of training might be also responsible for the lower competence of students in the formation of the interrogative and negative sentences.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

5.0. Introduction

In this chapter, first summary of the research including the purpose of the study, the procedures of data collection of the study are summarized. Then, some conclusions are drawn and the implications regarding the acquisition of the copula *be* by native speakers of Russian is discussed. Finally, some limitations of the study and suggestions for further research regarding the acquisition of the copula *be* by second language learners are presented.

5.1. Summary

This thesis investigated the acquisition of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English by the native speakers of Russian and tried to determine whether or not the Russian students with different levels of proficiency encounter problems while using the copula *be* in English. By analyzing the performance of the informants of the current study this thesis discussed some of the possible reasons for the mistakes/errors made by the native speakers of Russian while using the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English.

To carry out the research a questionnaire and two tests (recognition and approximate production) were designed. After piloting the tests, the reliability and validity coefficients of the tests were calculated.

The data for this study were collected from three groups of Russian students who are in the first, fourth and eighth year of learning English. The data were collected in two stages. First the students were asked to fill in a background questionnaire. In the questionnaire the participants of the study were asked two sets of questions. The aim of the first set of questions was to elicit the personal information related to the participants such as name, age and gender. The second set of questions aimed to collect information about the English learning experience of the participants such as how long they had been learning English and what kind of materials they had used so far (for a detailed list of questions see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Then, the students were given two diagnostic tests that measured both their receptive and approximate productive skills related to the use of the copula *be* in Simple Present Tense in English (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 4). After the process of collecting data, all the mistakes/errors made by the learners were identified in the recognition and approximate production tests. The analyses of the data were held in four steps.

First, in order to uncover whether the native speakers of Russian encounter difficulties in acquiring the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense the data were analyzed in terms of central tendency and standard deviation with the help of PASW.

Second, to be able to conclude whether the task type (recognition and approximate production) might affect the performance of the learners three Paired Samples T-tests were conducted to compare the recognition and approximate production test scores within each group.

Third, as one of the goals of this study was to identify areas related to the use of the copula *be* that appear to be the most problematic for the native speakers of Russian with different levels of proficiency in English, the test items were classified into different classes according to the domain. The classification was based on the characteristics of the copula *be* in English and Russian languages explained in Section 2.5.1. In order to uncover in which domains the students made the biggest number of mistakes/errors and how the quantity of the mistakes/errors changed with further learning the percentages of the incorrect answers were examined in every domain for each group of the learners with the help of PASW. The data were analyzed and discussed using four major categories: a) *correct usage*, b) *omission*, c) *misinformation*, d) *addition*. The groups of the major (persistent) mistakes/errors were identified and some plausible reasons for them were suggested.

Finally, the performance of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners was investigated in the positive, negative and interrogative items of the recognition and approximate production tests. The percentages of the mistakes/errors made by the students in every sentence type were calculated with the help of PASW and the results were discussed.

5.2. Results

The present study intended to answer the following research questions:

- I. Do Russian learners encounter difficulties in the use of the copula *be* in Present simple Tense in English?

The finding of the present study showed that all the native speakers of Russian who participated in the research regardless of their level of proficiency had difficulties with the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English.

- II. How does the task type (recognition and approximate production) influence the performance of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners?

Since the three Paired Sample T-tests failed to reveal significant difference in the performance of the each group on the recognition and approximate production tasks it is possible to conclude that the performance of the students in general was not affected by the type of the task.

- III. Are there any persistent mistakes/errors made by the native speakers of Russian related to the use of the copula *be*? And, if there are such mistakes/errors, what are the plausible reasons for them?

Relying on the fact proved by several linguists and researchers (among others Selinker, 1969; Ellis, 1994; Kellerman and Sharwood, 1986; Odlin, 2000;) that L1 is a major factor that influences learning of another language and taking into consideration the differences between English and Russian

languages which were discussed in Section 2.5.1 it was suggested that Russian learners may encounter problems in the acquisition of the copula *be* at two levels, namely:

- syntactic level, because generally native speakers of Russian language which has nothing equivalent to the copula *be* in Present Tense tend to transfer the literal translation pattern from their native language to English and omit the copula *be*;
- morphosyntactic level, because there are several cases when the copula *be* followed by an adjective, a participle or a prepositional adverbial phrase are translated with a verbal predicate in Russian, which may cause a transfer of morphological properties of Russian verbs to English adjective, participle and adverbial phrases.

Thus, assuming the possibility of transfer due to the differences between Russian and English languages the omission mistakes/errors made by the students in Domain I and in Domain II were suggested to be triggered by L1 influence at the syntactic level; while the mistakes/errors made by the students in Domain III were argued to be linked to L1 influence at the morphosyntactic level. Another interesting finding in this study was that the cases of omission of the copula *be* in Domain I and Domain II were not so numerous even at the initial stage of the language learning and seem to be developmental because with the further exposure to the language, in the fourth year, they decreased and further, in the eighth year, nearly disappeared. On the other hand, the mistakes/errors made by the learners in Domain III

seem to be fossilized and were suggested to be named as persistent. These findings of the study support the view of Hyams (1994), White (2002), Herschensohn (2000), cited in White (2003:190-195) who argued that properties of L1 grammar have effect on the realization of L2 morphology and made a point that “morphology must be learned. That is morphological paradigm must gradually be added to the lexicon, just like word. More abstract syntactic properties, on the other hand, do not require learning” (White, 2003: 194).

Besides the persistent errors that were suggested to occur due to the L1 influence at the morphosyntactic level, the analysis of the data revealed that the students tended to replace the copula *be* with other verbs, predominantly with the auxiliary verb *do/does*, on the one hand; on the other hand, they added the copula *be* in the positive sentences along with the main verb or use *to be* in the negative and interrogative items in place of the auxiliary *do/does*. These kinds of mistakes/errors were suggested to be related to the incomplete understanding and application of the rule of the use of the copula *be*. Richards (1970, cited in Richards and Sampson, 1974) named these generalizations intralingual interference and referred them to the cases when the L2 learner tries to derive the rules behind the data and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor target language (Richards and Sampson, 1974:6). Taking into consideration the percentage of the mistakes/errors of the kind made by the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners, it seems possible to label them as persistent.

To conclude the discussion about the persistent mistakes/errors related to the different domains of the use of the copula *be* made by Russian learners of English with different levels of proficiency it is interesting to note that the findings of the study disagree with the stereotype of the way the Russian speaks English which was described in Odlin (2000). The analysis of the data revealed that though the Russian speaking English may sometimes omit the copula *be*, more often he tends to substitute it with the auxiliary verb *do/does*.

The analysis of the first-, fourth- and eighth-year learners' performance on the positive, negative and interrogative sentences showed that the students of all the groups made the least number of the mistakes/errors in the positive items of the recognition and approximate production tests, while the biggest number of incorrect answers was observed in the interrogative sentences. Derivational complexity and influence of L1 were suggested as plausible factors causing difficulties in the negative and interrogative sentences.

5.3. Implications for ELT

A major outcome of the implication of the current research to pedagogy is somehow to change the common attitude to the investigated topic, highlight the problems Russian students may encounter in the acquisition of the copula *be* and help overpass them. The thesis identified several domains and subdomains related to the use of the copula *be*, presented detailed analyses of the possible problems that Russian learners may encounter in every subdomain and uncovered plausible reasons for them. The results of the

current study revealed that the omission mistakes/errors and the misuse of the forms of the copula *be*, which are the focus in most grammar and coursebooks, occurred the most insignificant mistakes/errors made by the native speakers of Russian on the topic because they are developmental and with the lasting exposure to the language seem to disappear. The research revealed other persistent cases with the use of the copula *be* that may cause Russian learners problems not only in acquiring the copula *be* but also in understanding some other grammatical phenomena. In order to overpass the difficulties related to the understanding of the copula *be* in English, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration in the teaching/learning process:

1. Russian learners should have a clear-cut notion of the copula *be* and the cases when it is used. That is why the basic rule should be presented to the students. Since the examined topic is initially introduced to beginners and in the school setting they are traditionally 7-8 years old the rule should be very simple without many linguistic categories. As far as my professional experience is concerned, the following formulation may be suggested: *“If in the Russian sentence there is no verb, in the English sentence the verb ‘to be’ is used”*. The rule should be presented in NL and with numerous examples in the both languages.
2. Every domain related to the use of the copula *be* should be introduced and practiced separately and special attention should be paid to the domain in which adjective, participle and prepositional adverbial

phrases preceded with the copula *be* are translated with verbal predicates in Russian, such as *to be late* [COPULA+ADJECTIVE] – *опаздывать* [VERB]. Even it can be suggested to introduce such phrases as exclusions of the main rule and ask students to learn them by heart in the form of RUSSIAN VERB=TO BE+ADJECTIVE.

3. To enable students to distinguish between the copula *be* and the auxiliary *do/does* the presentation of the topic ‘Present Simple Tense in the Sentences with Main Verbs’ is suggested to be after but not parallel with the acquisition of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense; multiple contrast between these two grammatical aspects is also advisable.

Though the present study examined the acquisition of the copula *be* by native speakers of Russian, the findings of the current research may be beneficial for instructors working with learners of different NL backgrounds. On the one hand, semantically the same structures may possess different morphological properties in the other languages as well, for instance in Turkish *korkmak-* [VERB] corresponds to English *to be afraid-* [COPULA+ADJECTIVE]. On the other hand, the mistakes/errors made by the Russian learners due to the incomplete understanding and application of the rule sooner may not depend on the L1 background of students and may be suggested universal.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Throughout the research process some limitations concerning the method and subjects of the study may be observed. The subjects from whom data for this study were collected were chosen among the students of Moscow schools and this might lead to restrictions in generalizing the conclusions to other schools in Russia. Because of the capital status, availability of numerous foreigners and very high requirements for entering Moscow universities in comparison with other provincial cities and towns, the motivation for learning English among Moscow students may be higher than among learners in other parts of Russia.

The present study analyzed and presented results based only on the data coming from students, however, ELT instructors might also have been involved in the research to provide additional information about the acquisition of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English by Russian children. This in turn, would have increased the reliability of the research results.

Another limitation of the study concerning its methodology is related to the data collection process. Only written data were collected and analyzed in this study but it is known that sometimes there might be contrasting differences between the spoken and written performance of the students.

Another possible limitation may arise from the instruments of the research. In order to measure the productive skills of the learners, the CI format was

used. But it is necessary to admit that the production comprises a wider range of skills such as an ability to produce appropriate forms in oral and written forms but not only the ability to fill in the blanks. However, CI tests allowed me the opportunity to examine learners' knowledge on the topic independently of their speaking and writing competence, which is very important in the work with elementary learners.

5.5. Suggestions for further research

In the present study only written data were used for the analyses. In the future studies oral data can also be taking into consideration. Moreover, by using some other methods of data collection (among others, composition, translation from NL into English, correcting items tests) and different methods of data analyses, the findings of this research may be compared with the results of other studies, which will make possible to check the validity and reliability of the current research and to generalize its findings.

Besides, the same topic can be investigated using the data collected in other cities and towns of Russia. Involving of teachers and instructors of English into the research will also be desirable. Such studies may be very beneficial for generalization of the results of the current study.

The acquisition of the copula *be* in Present Simple Tense in English by learners of other NL backgrounds may appear very interesting and helpful research for the ELT process because the analogous mistakes/errors due to

the transfer at the morphosyntactic level or incomplete understanding of the grammar phenomenon may be made by students of other NL backgrounds as well.

Additionally, as Odlin (2000) pointed out there is a need for the bidirectional research which may “provide a better idea of the general structural principles that affect transfer” (Odlin, 2000:156). Therefore, further research on the difficulties that English speakers learning Russian have in the acquisition of the structures corresponding to copula *be* in Russian language may certainly be useful.

Finally, the present thesis can be used as a spring-board for the further ELT research. Relying on the findings of the current study the evaluation of the coursebooks used in Russian schools can be made and if necessary supplementary materials can be developed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

АНКЕТА

Перед выполнением задания ответь, пожалуйста, на вопросы:

1. Как тебя зовут?

2. Сколько тебе лет?

3. Твой пол?

Мужской _____ Женский _____

4. Сколько лет ты изучаешь английский язык?

5. Сколько уроков английского языка у тебя неделю?

6. Читаешь ли ты книги на английском языке? _____

Если 'да', то как часто? _____

7. Смотришь ли ты телепередачи на английском языке?

Мультфильмы _____ Новости _____ Фильмы _____

Если 'да', то как часто?

8. Если ли у тебя друзья, для которых английский язык родной?

Если 'да', то как часто ты с ними общаешься? _____

9. Бывал ли ты в Англии или другой англоязычной стране?

Если 'да', то как долго ты там находился?

Appendix 2

QUESTIONIARE

Before doing the tests would you please answer following questions:

1. What is your name?

2. How old are you? _____

3. What is your gender?

Male _____ Female _____

4. How long have you been learning English?

5. How many English classes do you have every week?

6. Do you read books in English? _____

If you do then how often do you read books in English? _____

7. Do you watch programs in English?

Cartoons _____ News _____ Films _____

If you do then how often do you do that?

8. Do you have friends who are native speakers of English?

If you do then how often do you meet them? _____

9. Have you ever been to an English speaking country?

If you have then how long did you stay there?

Appendix 3

TEST 1

Выберите правильный ответ:

1. Tim..... six.
 - a) Am
 - b) –
 - c) Is
 - d) Are

2. I.....at school now.
 - a) Do
 - b) Am
 - c) Is
 - d) –

3. These.....my books.
 - a) Am
 - b) Are
 - c) Is
 - d) –

4. Tom's father.....works as a doctor.
 - a) Am
 - b) Do
 - c) Is
 - d) –

5. Their names.....Tom and Jim.
- a) Are
 - b) Do
 - c) Is
 - d) –
6. Our mother.....a nurse.
- a) Are
 - b) –
 - c) Is
 - d) Does
7. My dog.....swim very well.
- a) Can
 - b) Have
 - c) Is
 - d) –
8. My friends.....from Spain.
- a) –
 - b) Do
 - c) Is
 - d) Are
9. Our granny.....goes to the doctor every month.
- a) Am
 - b) Can
 - c) Do
 - d) –

10. Our son.....always very thirsty after school.

- a) Are
- b) Does
- c) Is
- d) –

11. I.....play basketball every Friday.

- a) Am
- b) Are
- c) Does
- d) –

12. You.....good at sports.

- a) Do
- b) Are
- c) –
- d) Can

13. The children.....at home now.

- a) Aren't
- b) Don't
- c) Haven't
- d) –

14. I.....watch TV in the morning.

- a) Aren't
- b) Don't
- c) Haven't
- d) Not

15. My name.....John Smith.

- a) Am not
- b) Isn't
- c) Doesn't
- d) Not

16. Ithalf past nine.

- a) Doesn't
- b) Hasn't
- c) Isn't
- d) Not

17. I.....afraid of dark.

- a) Am not
- b) Don't
- c) Doesn't
- d) Not

18. My mother.....drive a car.

- a) Not
- b) Haven't
- c) Isn't
- d) Can't

19. You.....late for classes today.

- a) Not
- b) Don't
- c) Aren't
- d) Doesn't

20. We.....interested in stamps.

- a) Aren't
- b) Can't
- c) Don't
- d) Not

21. The boys.....dance very well.

- a) Not
- b) Isn't
- c) Can't
- d) Aren't

22. Our aunt.....married to a journalist.

- a) Not
- b) Isn't
- c) Don't
- d) Doesn't

23. Grandpa.....play chess.

- a) Not
- b) Don't
- c) Isn't
- d) Doesn't

24. You.....ill today!

- a) Not
- b) Isn't
- c) Don't
- d) Aren't

25.you proud of your family?

- a) Can
- b) Does
- c) Are
- d) –

26. When.....Mr Black in his office?

- a) Does
- b) Has
- c) Is
- d) –

27.English easy for you?

- a) Does
- b) Is
- c) Have
- d) –

28. What.....your parents?

- a) Do
- b) Does
- c) Are
- d) –

29. Why.....you angry with me?

- a) –
- b) Do
- c) Have
- d) Are

30.you play the piano well?

- a) Are
- b) Can
- c) Have
- d) –

31. When.....I on duty?

- a) Am
- b) Do
- c) Can
- d) Have

32. When.....the play start?

- a) Does
- b) Have
- c) Is
- d) –

33. What music.....you fond of?

- a) Are
- b) Do
- c) Have
- d) –

34. Why.....our dog hungry?

- a) Do
- b) Is
- c) Are
- d) Does

35. What.....you do very well?

- a) Is
- b) Are
- c) Does
- d) Can

Appendix 4

TEST 2

Закончите предложения, употребляя *am, am not, is, isn't, are, aren't, do, don't, does, doesn't, can, cannot*, где необходимо:

1. Their grandmothereighty years old.
2. Wehave five classes every day.
3. Annworks as an actress.
4. Thismy neighbor, Mr Green.
5. Ihelp my grandmother in the garden.
6. Wefond of fruit.
7. Ispeak three languages.
8. Our city.....modern and nice.
9. Youalways tired after work.
10. My mother and fatherdoctors in this hospital.
11. My auntcook very well.
12. Youa real friend!
13. Iinterested in French.
14. I am sorry, I (not) help you now.
15. You (not) a bad tennis player.
16. Their uncle..... (not) a pilot.
17. Tom (not) often go to the cinema.
18. Paris..... (not) in Spain.
19. We (not) angry with you.
20. Your pens (not) in my bag.
21. My granny (not) use a computer.
22. Betty (not) drink Coca-cola.
23. You (not) very polite!
24. Our parrot (not) talk.

25. My parents (not) like watching TV.
26. It (not) half past seven.
27. I (not) fond of pop music.
28. Pam study art?
29. Prague a nice city?
30. these tasks difficult?
31. you show the way to the post-office?
32. you in the library on Saturdays?
33. your niece live in Minsk?
34. Helen afraid of dark?
35. Why we here?
36. Why you late again?
37. I see you on Friday?
38. your pets walk in the park every day?
39. your sister married to Mr Smith?
40. I in your team?

Appendix 5

The list of the instructors who took part in the validation of the tests

NAME	POSITION	EXPERIENCE	LAST WORKING PLACE
Ciler Hatipoglu	Assist. Prof. Dr.	10 years	METU
Oksana, Yakubovich	Instructor of English	8 years	State school, Moscow
Evrin, Atik	Instructor of English	8 years	University Atilim
Bilge, Yilmaz	Instructor of English	7 years	University Atilim

