

The Development of the Speaking Skill: a textbook analysis

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Diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i
njemačkog jezika i književnosti

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**The Development of the Speaking Skill:
Textbook Analysis**

Diplomski rad

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Summary

This paper focuses on the development of the speaking skill in English as a foreign language in the elementary school. The research was done on the corpus of tasks compiled on the basis of the analysis of the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks for English as a foreign language in primary school. The paper contains two main parts. The first part deals with the theoretical background related to the speaking skill and the second part describes the research regarding the speaking tasks in the aforementioned textbooks and workbooks.

The paper talks about the speaking skill in general, components of speech, information gap activities, topic-based activities, task-based activities, fluency, accuracy, problems regarding speaking activities, the role of the teacher and about teaching speaking to young learners. It then explores all of the speaking tasks thorough eight years of elementary school, comparing them to Croatian National Education Standard (2006) and the Common European Framework of Reference (2005). In the end it draws a conclusion about the quality of the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks regarding the speaking skill.

Keywords

Speaking skill, speaking tasks, textbook analysis, Croatian National Education Standard, Common European Framework of Reference.

Sažetak

Ovaj se rad bavi razvitkom vještine govora u engleskom kao stranom jeziku u osnovnoj školi. Istraživanje je provedeno na korpusu zadataka prikupljenih analizom udžbenika i radnih bilježnica za engleski jezik u osnovnoj školi "Dip In". Rad sadrži dva glavna dijela. Prvi se dio bavi teorijskim postavkama vezanim uz vještinu govora, a drugi dio opisuje istraživanje zadataka povezanih s govorom u ranije spomenutim udžbenicima i radnim bilježnicama.

Ovaj rad govori općenito o vještini govora, sastavnicama govora, informacijskom jazu, aktivnostima koje se temelje na temi, aktivnostima koje se temelje na zadatku, tečnosti, točnosti, problemima koji se tiču govornih aktivnosti, ulozi nastavnika i o podučavanju mlađih učenika vještini govora. Nakon toga istražuje sve zadatke vezane uz vještinu govora kroz osam godina osnovne škole, uspoređujući ih s Hrvatskim nacionalnim obrazovnim standardom (2006) i Zajedničkim europskim referentnim okvirom za jezike (2005). Na kraju se donose zaključci o kvaliteti "Dip In" udžbenika i radnih bilježnica u kontekstu vještine govora.

Ključne riječi

Govorna vještina, zadatci vezani uz vještinu govora, analiza udžbenika, Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard, Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike.

1. Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to see how the speaking tasks develop through eight years of elementary school in the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks and what are the opportunities given to the learners for the development of the speaking skill in elementary school.

The first part of this paper is theoretical and it talks about the speaking skill in general. It covers all of the components of speech, different types of speaking tasks, problems with speaking activities, roles of the teacher, teaching speaking to young learners and some important terms like fluency, accuracy, information gap etc.

The second part of this paper is the research itself. All of the speaking tasks in eight textbooks and workbooks in the series “Dip In” are analyzed in terms of types, aims and progression.

The final part of this paper aims to research whether the tasks in these textbooks and workbooks comply with the Croatian National Education Standard (2006) and the Common European Framework of Reference (2005).

2. Speaking

Speaking, writing, reading and listening are the four main skills, which need to be acquired in the foreign language classroom. According to Widdowson (1978) speaking and writing are the productive skills, whereas reading and listening are said to be receptive. This paper will concentrate on the development of the speaking skill in elementary school, because the speaking skill is often referred to as the most important skill. It is also considered to be the most difficult skill of language use, because successful speaking depends on automation, there is no time to check over the message and the speaker has to process his or her thoughts very fast. The speaking skill is a productive skill and therefore it is more difficult to learn to speak a language than to understand it. The skill of speaking involves both receptive and productive participation (Widdowson, 1978).

Carter and Nunan (2001) claim that the speaking skill is the most difficult skill, because many people can participate in a conversation or any kind of communication, which makes the conversation less predictable and the speakers cannot be always prepared. Speakers have to decide what they want to say very quickly, they do not have time to check the message and correct it, they have to produce the language “on line”.

According to Nunan (1999) functioning in another language is characterized by being able to speak that particular language. When we talk about knowing a language, we usually mean speaking the language, which also makes the speaking skill the most important skill.

Celce-Murcia (2001) claims the same when it comes to knowing a language. The ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing a language, because speech is the most basic means of communication.

Chastain (1976) talks about the fact that most of the learners, who attend second language classes, are there because they want to learn to speak the language. Problems appear when not enough time is devoted to speaking activities and the learners do not develop their communication skills in the foreign language. Chastain (1976) also talks about the fact that learning to speak the language is never completed, especially when it comes to vocabulary. Errors will always occur, despite the knowledge or the experience of the speakers. A lot of theorists consider errors a crucial part of the language learning process and they do not see them as a problem. He also claims that the learners will never achieve native-like proficiency by learning a foreign language in the classroom; they will learn how to communicate and make themselves understood. Oral communication is a two way process that involves the speaker and the listener, therefore it combines the productive speaking skill with the receptive listening skill (Byrne, 1977).

According to Chastain (1976) the main goal in learning to speak any second language is to be able to communicate with a native speaker. It is unrealistic to expect from the learners to achieve native-like proficiency in a foreign language, it is actually practically impossible. Realistic expectation is the ability to communicate with native speakers. If they can make themselves understood in the foreign language, both the teacher and the learners should be satisfied with their achievement.

2.1. Components of speech

Pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are three main components of speech (Chastain, 1976). Practicing and learning all of these is necessary for the successful development of the speaking skill in any language.

When the learners make errors in pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar, teachers can use several strategies depending on the situation and the task: ignore the error, make a mental note, rephrase the sentence, rephrase and expand, or present a lesson later on (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

2.1.1. Pronunciation

Pronunciation is usually introduced at the very beginning of foreign language learning through repeating after the teacher or after the recording, which are important stages in preparation for more difficult activities. Pronunciation is an important part of speaking and wrong pronunciation can sometimes compromise the meaning of the message. But sometimes teachers put too much emphasis on pronunciation, they usually correct all of the pronunciation mistakes that the learners make, which can be very discouraging for the learners. Teachers should understand that communication is far more important than pronunciation and perfect pronunciation is not necessary in order to communicate in the target language. It is possible to communicate normally with people who have a noticeable accent.

Celce-Murcia (2001) claims that pronunciation is the language feature that most often identifies speakers as non-native. Proficient speakers can sometimes be discriminated because of their pronunciation, therefore teaching pronunciation is an important part of teaching learners how to use the language to communicate.

The best way to teach pronunciation in a foreign language is to identify the differences between the target language and the native language, because these differences can cause errors. Teachers should emphasize these differences and practice them in class. Learners should also listen to spoken language as often as possible; most useful is to listen to a native speaker. Teacher can provide that through video and audio recordings (Chastain, 1976).

2.1.2. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the crucial part of learning to speak in a foreign language, because learners can not express themselves if they lack appropriate vocabulary. Celce-Murcia (2001) states that lexical competence is a central part of communicative competence, therefore teaching vocabulary is the central part of foreign language teaching.

Repeating after the teacher or after the recording is not useful if the learners do not understand what they are saying. In the beginning they should be introduced to vocabulary that is relevant to their lives and they should be provided with the opportunities to use that vocabulary in communicative situations. In later stages of language learning they can learn new vocabulary from context and they can elicit the meanings of unknown words by themselves. The important task of the teacher is to reintroduce previously learned vocabulary so the learners do not forget what they have learned earlier. Broad vocabulary and good communication skills are very

closely connected, because people who have strong vocabulary in a particular language can communicate more successfully.

2.1.3. Grammar

Grammar is also a crucial part of the spoken language, because the use of language is governed by various rules. Native speakers know and use these rules intuitively, whereas foreign language learners have to acquire these rules. Each language system has a basic knowledge, which has to be acquired in order to communicate in that particular language. Like with pronunciation, communication is, of course, more important than grammar. Usually we can communicate with people who make a lot of mistakes and misuse grammar rules, but it does not mean that it is not one of the most important components of speech. If the learners want to develop their speaking skill correctly, they will have to learn and apply grammar rules of the target language (Chastain, 1976).

Celce-Murcia (2001) encourages balance between grammar and communication. Speaking is the part of communicative competence, just as being able to communicate in an appropriate manner, i.e. grammatically correct. Teachers have to present grammar rules and expect learners to acquire them, but they also have to provide different communicative interactions to practice these rules.

2.2. Information gap

Information gap is the important characteristic of natural communication, which should be achieved at some point in the foreign language classroom. Information gap is a situation where certain information is known only by some of the people involved in the communication and this gap is necessary in order to promote real communication between learners. Information gap activities can be done between teacher and his or her learners, but also between learners in pairs or groups. Usually when the teacher asks questions there is no real information exchange, because the learners know the answers, therefore the teacher has to prepare activities which involve a real information transfer. Information gap activities give the learners opportunities to use the language in situation, which reflect real life language use.

According to Rapton (2001) there are four characteristics of a successful speaking activity: learners talk a lot, participations is even, motivation is high and language is of an acceptable level. Rapton (2001) claims that information gap activities satisfy these criteria.

Information gap activities are the best way to make learners talk and participate, to motivate them and if the teacher prepares the learners for the topic, the language will be, in most cases, of an acceptable level.

2.3. Topic-based vs. task-based activities

In topic-based activities the learners are asked to talk about a controversial subject, the main object of the communication is the discussion itself. Whereas in task-based activities the discussion is only a means to an end, the learners are asked to perform something and the tasks have a clear result or an outcome.

Ellis (2004) puts more emphasis on task-based activities, because he thinks that the language should be a tool for communicating, and not an object for study or manipulation. Topic-based tasks sometimes do not have clear goals and learners can be reluctant to participate, because they do not see the purpose. They will be more willing to do task-based activities with clear goal and outcomes. Despite that, topic-based activities should not be neglected, because they can also help learners to practice and use their speaking skill. Both topic-based and task-based activities should be incorporated in the foreign language classroom in order to develop the learners' full speaking potential and to give them enough opportunities to practice their speaking skill.

2.4. Fluency vs. Accuracy

Fluency and accuracy are two very important terms when it comes to the speaking skill. Fluent speaking is the ability to use the language without thinking about the speaking itself too much and communicating without putting emphasis on accuracy. Accurate speaking, on the contrary, puts a lot more emphasis on grammatical and syntactical correctness. In order to develop full potential of the learner, both accuracy and fluency have to be incorporated in the foreign language classroom. If the focus of a certain task is on fluency, teachers should let the learners talk freely and should not correct every mistake they make. The communicative approach encourages fluency; according to it learners should be provided with enough opportunities to communicate without focusing on accuracy. The mistakes should be corrected only if they can compromise the meaning of the message or cause misunderstanding. If the focus of a certain task is on accuracy, teachers have to correct the mistakes learners make, they should not pay much attention to the content itself.

Carter and Nunan (2011) claim that accuracy and fluency can influence each other in a negative way. If the learners have to focus on accuracy, they may not be that fluent, they would not show everything they know. At the same time if they try to develop fluency it can make learners use simple language, instead of more complex grammatical forms.

Discussions are especially interesting, according to Harmer (2007), because they can range from highly formal discussions in large groups to informal small-group interactions. Discussions can be both topic-based and task-based, they can focus both on fluency and accuracy, and they can also be done in the form of an information gap activity. Celce-Murcia (2001) considers discussions the most commonly used activities in the oral skills class.

We can also distinguish two types of learners according to fluency and accuracy. There are learners, which are not intimidated to express themselves, they say what they want despite the possible mistakes and are not afraid to make them. Whereas some learners think about everything they want to say, they process every sentence carefully and correct their own mistakes while speaking. Teachers have to find a balance between these two, they have to motivate the learners to speak both fluently and accurately.

Nunan and Carter (2001) talk about automation when it comes to fluency and accuracy. Automation is necessary when communicating in any language, but for the learners it will be difficult to incorporate both fluency and accuracy in their speaking, because they lack automation. They are not capable of paying attention to all of the processes at one.

2.5. Problems with speaking and learners' attitudes

Chastain (1976) considers learners' attitudes an important factor in the development of the speaking skill. Learners have to be motivated, they have to have something to talk about and they need to participate actively in order to achieve a certain level of competence. Young learners usually have a very positive attitude toward foreign language learning, they are very motivated and eager to learn. The problems with attitudes usually occur when dealing with older learners, because they sometimes have preset negative attitudes towards a particular language based on other people's experiences. The role of the teacher is very important in these kinds of situations, because the teachers can influence the attitudes of the learners, they can motivate them and help them in achieving the desired level of competence.

Chastain (1976) emphasizes the fact that the ability to speak a language is not easily acquired. Learners have to be interested and motivated over a long period of time, which is also one of the tasks of the teacher, to keep them motivated and willing to learn. Enthusiasm in learning a

language is closely connected to success, which means that the learners will usually have positive attitudes about speaking in a particular language if they are successful in completing speaking activities in the classroom.

It can sometimes be really easy to make learners participate in a discussion, especially if the teacher gives them an interesting topic or task. But there are situations when the learners are reluctant to take part in the activities and the role of the teacher is very important in these situations. Speaking can only be learned through speaking and the teachers have to involve the whole class in the speaking activities and give everyone the opportunity to express themselves. Learners are sometimes reluctant to participate in the speaking activities, simply because speaking requires more effort than just sitting back and listening to other learners or the teacher.

The problems with the speaking activities, which can appear in the classroom, are inhibition, having nothing to say about a certain topic, uneven participation of the learners, the usage of the mother tongue and lack of appropriate language.

2.5.1. Inhibition

Learners are often intimidated to express their opinion about a certain topic, because they suffer from lack of confidence or are afraid of making mistakes. Pair and group work are a good way to lower the inhibition of the learners, because there are less people involved in the discussion and the learners, who are afraid to express themselves in front of the whole class, can say what they think to a smaller group of people.

Harmer (2007) lists some methods, which can be very helpful in lowering inhibition and motivating learners to speak. He talks about preparation, which can help learners to perform much better, because they have time to think about the topic and to prepare themselves. Harmer (2007) also mentions the importance of repetition, which allows learners to improve what they did before. Each time they do something they have more confidence and they are not that inhibited to speak.

Chastain (1976) mentions the link between success and confidence. If the material is presented in such a way to minimize errors and to maximize success, learners will have more confidence and they will be willing to participate.

2.5.2. Nothing to say

Learners are sometimes not interested in the topic that is being discussed or they have nothing to say about a certain topic. Topics have to be interesting and motivating for the learners and they have to have a clear purpose. If the learners can not relate to the topic, i.e. connect it with their own experience or knowledge, they will usually not be interested and motivated to take part in the activity. If the topic is not that interesting, but has to be dealt with, the teacher should find the ways to present the topic in an interesting way or to connect the topic to the learners' own experience or knowledge. As with inhibition, preparation can also be very helpful when learners have nothing to say. They can explore the topic, do some research, and find something to talk about.

2.5.3. Uneven participation

One of the major problems is the participation of the learners, because there are always people who participate in every activity and there are those who never say anything. It is important to motivate learners to participate, because it does not mean that they do not know something if they do not express themselves. Pair and group work are useful methods, because the learners are in some way forced to talk, because there are only a few people involved in the communication. Teacher should not let talkative learners take over; they should make sure that all of the learners have enough opportunities to express themselves and to participate in different activities. It is also important for the teacher to know when to stop talking and when to give the opportunity to the learners to do certain tasks by themselves. It is not useful when the teacher does all the work, active class participation is very important in developing the speaking skill.

2.5.4. Mother tongue use

Learners often use mother tongue in the foreign language classroom, especially when doing group work or pair work, because it is more natural for them to communicate in the first language. Mother tongue use can also be connected to fear of making mistakes, because learners are often reluctant to express themselves in the target language, when they are not sure how to say something correctly. Mother tongue use can be prevented through monitoring and through giving tasks, which have to have an outcome in the target language. If the learners have to present something they did in groups, they will be forced to use the target language to some

extent, because it is the language they have to use during their presentations. Teacher is not the only one who can do the monitoring during a group work, one of the learners in each group can be named the monitor and he or she has to remind the whole group to use the target language.

2.5.5. Lack of appropriate language

Learners often can not express themselves, although they might want to, because they lack the language knowledge needed for a certain activity. Scaffolding¹ can be very helpful, because it can help to stimulate learners to talk and to express their own opinions. Some learners may be excellent speakers and can have an excellent vocabulary in some areas, but still they can have difficulties discussing topics, which are unfamiliar to them.

The role of the teacher is to prepare the learners for the activity. The teacher has to go through the topic with the learners, has to clarify any unknown words, so that the learners can participate in the activity and express themselves.

2.6. The role of the teacher

Main concern of language teachers is to develop the ability of the learners to use the language for the purpose of communication. Teachers have to provide the best conditions for learning and they have to be the instrument to see that the learning takes place (Byrne 1977).

Harmer (2007) states that the teacher plays three important roles during speaking activities: prompter, participant and feedback provider. He talks about the situations when the learners get lost, they can't think of what to say next and they lose the fluency. Teacher as a prompter can help them with discrete suggestions, without interrupting the discussion. The teacher also has to participate in the activities to some extent, being careful not to participate too much. If the teacher participates too much, learners can get used to it and they will expect the help from the teacher, which can cause them not to use their full potential. Harmer (2007) says that the teacher has to be a good animator, helping the learners and maintaining a creative atmosphere. He also talks about the feedback provider, the last role of the teacher. Teachers have to give feedback, but they have to be careful about the timing. If they interrupt the learners during activities it can inhibit them, but on the other hand it can also get them out of misunderstandings and hesitations.

¹ Scaffolding is an instructional technique whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy or task, then gradually shifts responsibility to the students.

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1scaf.htm>

There are some preconditions, according to Nunan (1999) that the teacher has to provide to the learners in order to achieve effective motivation. He talks about supportive environment, which means that the teachers have to be skilled in classroom management, give positive feedback and the learners should feel comfortable while speaking in the classroom. Teachers also have to give tasks which are appropriate for the learners; they should not be too easy or too difficult. If the tasks are too easy, learners would not develop their full potential, but at the same time if they are too difficult, learners will be discouraged and probably reluctant to participate. Learners also have to be familiar with the criteria for every task, they have to know what is expected from them and what they have to do, or say when it comes to speaking. He also talks about meaningful learning, which means that each task has to have its purpose, the learners should be always given a reason to do something. The use of different strategies is also very important, they have to be various and not overused. Using the same strategies all the time can be very boring and not motivating for the learners. The content of the tasks is also very important; learners have to be able to relate the tasks to their own experiences. If they find the task interesting, they will put a lot more effort into it and will be more successful in completing a particular task.

Chastian (1976) also says that the teacher has to remind the learners that learning to speak a language is a lengthy process and they should not be discouraged if they do not know something. The ability to speak a language is not easily acquired; learners have to be motivated for a very long period of time.

2.7. Speaking skill – young learners

According to Intihar Klančar (2006), teachers should give as many different speaking opportunities to the young learners and with time their speaking time should rise in order to prepare them for real communicative situations. Taking into account the differences of young learners, when it comes to their abilities, motivation, knowledge and learning styles, teachers have to provide them with various communicative techniques and situations.

According to Chiarantano (2007) teachers should put emphasis on fluency when working with young learners. Correcting their mistakes can create negative attitudes towards English learning and can lower a child's interest in learning.

Young learners often do not know the language that well, and therefore cannot express themselves accurately, which does not mean that they should not be involved in the speaking activities. Learners have to start with the nonproductive speaking tasks and they should gradually

be introduced to the productive tasks. That way they will acquire the speaking skill step by step, which will be much easier for the learners and for the teacher. They should be provided with the opportunities to speak from the beginning of language learning, despite the possible mistakes, and in time their speaking skill will develop.

3. Research

3.1. Research materials

The “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks were used to research the development of the speaking tasks and the speaking skill in English as a foreign language, because these are one of the most often used textbooks and workbooks in teaching English as a foreign language in Croatia. The following eight textbooks and eight workbooks were analysed:

- Džeba, B. (2007) *Dip In 1 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Džeba, B. (2006) *Dip In 1 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Džeba, B. and Mrdešić, M. (2006) *Dip In 2 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Džeba, B. and Mrdešić, M. (2004) *Dip In 2 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Mrdešić, M. (2005) *Dip In 3 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Mrdešić, M. (2004) *Dip In 3 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Ban, S. and Blažić, D. (2006) *Dip In 4 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Ban, S. and Blažić, D. (2006) *Dip In 4 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Ban, S. (2010) *Dip In 5 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Ban, S. (2010) *Dip In 5 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Mardešić, M. (2010) *Dip In 6 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Mardešić, M. (2010) *Dip In 6 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Anić, V. and Pavlinek, B. (2010) *Dip In 7 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Anić, V. and Pavlinek, B. (2010) *Dip In 7 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Breka, O. (2010) *Dip In 8 (Textbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Breka, O. (2010) *Dip In 8 (Workbook)*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

3.2. Criteria for the analysis of the speaking tasks

The main goal of this research was to see how the speaking tasks develop through the eight years of English learning during elementary school in the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks. Speaking was chosen because it is the most important skill in learning to communicate in a particular language and it is also considered to be the most important skill in the English language in general.

In this paper different types of speaking tasks will be explored in terms of which types are used at which level and how often, and what are the aims of the tasks. The paper will also deal with the progression of the speaking tasks through the first four years of English language learning, i.e. with the question whether the progression develops logically and when are new types of tasks introduced. Lastly this research will try to determine, whether the tasks are developed in coherence with the Croatian National Educational Standard (2006) and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2005).

3.3. Analysis of the tasks

3.3.1. Types of tasks

There are many different speaking tasks used in the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks. Some of the tasks are productive, some are partly productive and some are nonproductive.

The distribution of different speaking tasks in the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

In the first grade there are no productive speaking tasks, because the pupils are beginners and they are only able to repeat. There are only three types of tasks used: repeating after the recording, singing a song and reciting. In the beginning learners do not know how to pronounce words in English and repeating after the model can help them learn and it can also minimize the pronunciation and intonation errors. Repeating after the recording is usually used when new vocabulary items are introduced. Singing a song is one way for the learners to pronounce whole phrases and sentences in English, and it is usually used with young learners.

These types of tasks are more than enough for beginners, because they are just starting to use the language and it would be unrealistic to give even partly productive tasks to the first grade learners. Despite the small variety of the speaking tasks, learners are well prepared for the tasks

following in the next year of language learning, they learn how to pronounce words and they learn some vocabulary, which are the main components of speech.

In the second grade partly productive tasks are introduced: learners start pronouncing words and expressions on their own. The most frequently used tasks are still repeating after the recording and singing a song, but there is also some repeating after the teacher, reading aloud, acting out, reciting, asking questions and giving answers. Reading aloud is a bit more advanced, because the learners do not hear how the words are pronounced, they have to do that by themselves, based on their previous knowledge. Although these kinds of tasks are nonproductive, they are important in the beginning because the learners practice pronunciation and intonation. Both pronunciation and intonation are very important parts of the spoken language, because they can change the meaning of the sentence.

Nonproductive tasks are introduced at the very beginning of language learning, but they also appear during later years, because they can also improve the speaking skill significantly. Through repeating young learners are also involved in speaking situations to some extent.

Asking questions and giving answers is also introduced at this level of language learning and it is one of the most important activities, because it prepares the learners for real life situations, where they have to be involved in a conversation between two or more people. Asking questions and giving answers can be an excellent information gap activity, which is, as mentioned earlier in the paper, best way to make learners talk and participate. Learners are usually provided with a pattern for forming question and answers, which makes this kind of task only partly productive.

Besides pronunciation and vocabulary, grammar is slowly being incorporated in the lessons, which is the third component of speech that needs to be acquired. These kinds of tasks also help to practice pronunciation and intonation, but they are also a good preparation for independent, productive speaking.

In the third grade reporting is introduced, where the pupils have to report to the class something they have read or an interview they have done. Other types of tasks used in the first and second grade are used here also.

Finally in the fourth grade there are plenty different speaking tasks introduced and used, including the productive ones: discussing, interviewing, reporting, telling a story and describing. Discussing and talking freely about a certain topic is one of the most often used types of tasks, learners are asked to comment and to brainstorm about certain topics or materials. These types of tasks are the most important activities in the development of the speaking skill, because the learners are taught how to communicate through them, which is the final goal of foreign language learning. Saying or actually talking freely, discussing and describing are all the best

ways to develop the speaking skill, because the learners speak on their own, they have to form and produce their own sentences. Discussions are especially interesting and useful, as mentioned in chapter about fluency and accuracy.

Tongue twisters and spelling words out loud are also introduced in the fourth class for the first time.

Table 1: Distribution of different speaking tasks in the “Dip In 1”, “Dip In 2”, “Dip In 3” and “Dip In 4” textbooks and workbooks

Types of tasks	1 st Grade	2 nd Grade	3 rd Grade	4 th Grade
	<i>Dip In 1</i>	<i>Dip In 2</i>	<i>Dip In 3</i>	<i>Dip In 4</i>
Repeating after the teacher	/	5	2	3
Repeating after the recording	27	20	3	1
Reading aloud	/	3	1	4
Singing a song	13	13	7	8
Reciting	1	1	1	2
Acting out	/	2	2	3
Spelling	/	/	/	1
Asking questions and giving answers	/	6	12	26
Reporting	/	/	1	4
Interviewing	/	/	/	2
Discussing	/	/	/	24
Saying	/	16	8	3
Describing	/	1	1	1
Telling a story	/	/	/	3
Tongue twisters	/	/	/	1
Retelling	/	/	/	/

Table 2: Distribution of different speaking tasks in the “Dip In 5”, “Dip In 6”, “Dip In 7” and “Dip In 8” textbooks and workbooks

Types of tasks	5 th Grade	6 th Grade	7 th Grade	8 th Grade
	<i>Dip In 5</i>	<i>Dip In 6</i>	<i>Dip In 7</i>	<i>Dip In 8</i>
Repeating after the teacher	3	1	/	/
Repeating after the recording	/	5	/	/
Reading aloud	/	3	2	/
Singing a song	6	/	/	/
Reciting	/	/	/	/
Acting out	2	5	3	3
Spelling	1	/	2	/
Asking questions and giving answers	17	13	16	14
Reporting	/	1	5	12
Interviewing	6	3	5	1
Discussing	7	10	17	18
Saying	18	17	24	30
Describing	12	4	5	6
Telling a story	1	2	1	3
Tongue twisters	/	/	/	/
Retelling	/	4	2	1

In the fifth grade the focus is on productive tasks, like talking freely, asking questions and giving answers, describing etc. There is a very small amount of nonproductive tasks, because these tasks are not challenging enough for this level of English language learning.

In the sixth grade focus is again, as expected, on productive tasks. The most frequently used tasks are asking questions and giving answers, discussing and talking. There is also a smaller amount of partly productive and non productive tasks, like repeating, spelling and reading aloud. Retelling is introduced for the first time, which is a very challenging task and requires good speaking skills. Learners are usually required to retell a story or a course of events and they

should be able to successfully complete these types of tasks at this level of English language learning.

In the seventh grade two most often used activities are talking and discussing, which are at the same time the most productive tasks. Learners are able to express themselves freely and they have enough knowledge of the language to successfully participate in these types of tasks. There are almost no nonproductive tasks, only reading aloud appears, but not that often.

In the last grade of the elementary school the speaking tasks are very similar to those in the seventh grade. Besides the speaking tasks, which are integrated into the lessons and other tasks, “speak out boxes” are introduced for the first time. Speak out boxes are small boxes at the end of each lesson, which contain some kind of a speaking task, which can help learners to practice their speaking skill more thoroughly. Usually they contain questions, which are a basis for discussion and are connected to the topic of the unit. This is a good way to make sure that the learners develop and use their speaking skill in every lesson and as often as possible. Emphasis is put on communication and fluency.

The learners are provided with various speaking tasks in these textbooks and workbooks which enable them to develop their speaking skill.

3.3.2. Aims of the tasks

In “Dip In 1” there are no fully productive speaking tasks, learners are only asked to repeat and to sing. The aims of these tasks are to introduce the learners to the spoken language and to encourage them to repeat certain words and sentences correctly. They practice pronunciation through these kinds of task and prepare themselves for more demanding speaking tasks.

In “Dip In 2” descriptions are introduced, which belong to the group of productive tasks. The aim of this kind of task is to encourage learners to use the language independently or with some help. All of the tasks in the 2nd year of learning have their focus on fluency; learners are still beginners and are not able to express themselves completely accurately.

“Dip In 3” introduces reporting for the first time, which means that the learners have to talk about something they did. These tasks have actually two aims, learners have to do a certain task, which is one aim, and then they have to report what they did, which is the second aim. The number of productive and nonproductive tasks is similar to the second year.

“Dip In 4” uses various productive and nonproductive tasks, including discussing, telling a story and interviewing. The productive tasks appear very often in the fourth year and the aims of

the tasks are various. For the first time the focus is sometimes put on accuracy and the learners are expected not only to express themselves, but also to do that accurately.

In “Dip In 5” there are still some nonproductive and partly productive tasks. Different tasks have different aims, the focus changes depending on the type of the task. The teacher has to make sure that the learners know what is expected of them, to be accurate or to be fluent.

“Dip In 6” goes a bit back to the nonproductive tasks and to accuracy. Learners are again asked to repeat and to read aloud, the aim of these tasks is to practice pronunciation and intonation. There is also a great number of productive tasks, which provide the learners with the opportunity to practice independent speaking.

In “Dip In 7” learners are expected to use the language independently, therefore the most frequently used task is free speaking. The aim in most of the tasks is to encourage learners to use the language fluently, and both task-based and topic-based activities are used at this level of language learning.

In the final textbook “Dip In 8” learners are not provided with a great variety of tasks, most of the tasks are completely productive and require a good knowledge of the English language and highly developed speaking skill. Learners are expected to combine fluency and accuracy, which is a realistic expectation at the end of elementary school. All of the components of speech, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, should be at A2 level according to CNES (2005) by the end of elementary school.

3.3.3. Progression of the tasks

The progression of the tasks in textbooks and workbooks “Dip In” is logical.

In the beginning only three types of speaking tasks are used: repeating after the recording, singing a song and reciting. These types of tasks are appropriate for beginners and for young learners. In the second year, repeating after the teacher is introduced, although repeating after the recording is still used more often. Learners start reading aloud, which they could not do in the first year, because they were just learning to read. They are also introduced to simple questions and answers, descriptions, acting out and saying things independently. In “Dip In 3” the speaking tasks do not progress as much, only one new type of task is introduced, namely reporting. And finally in the fourth year, in “Dip In 4”, the progression of the tasks reaches its highest point. New speaking tasks introduced are spelling, interviewing, discussing, telling a story and tongue twisters. In the next grade there are no new types of tasks, learners are only introduced to the more difficult varieties of the tasks they are already familiar with. For example instead of just

acting out, they have role plays. They have to come up with a dialogue themselves, they have their roles and then they act them out. In “Dip In 6” retelling is the only new speaking task. Learners are usually asked to retell a story or a course of events. This is a very logical progression, because the learners should have developed their speaking skill by now and they should be able to retell a story or a course of events without much help of the teacher or the textbook. In the last two years of elementary school there are no new types of speaking tasks introduced, only the speak out boxes are introduced in the eighth grade. These speak out boxes are actually not a new type of task, they are only parts of lessons with already familiar types of speaking tasks.

Through all eight years the speaking tasks progress and develop logically, which is very important, because they have to give the learners the opportunity to master a certain type of task, before introducing a new one. Different types of tasks are gradually introduced and the learners are able to develop their speaking skill thoroughly. Through this logical progression learners also develop positive attitudes towards language learning, because learning step by step lowers inhibition, they are better prepared, they are not using mother tongue that often and they know more in general.

3.3.4. Croatian National Educational Standard

Croatian National Educational Standard (CNES, 2006) was developed in 2005 and it was created as a basis for changes in teaching programs and working methods in elementary schools in Croatia.

CNES (2006) eliminates unnecessary educational contents and it introduces a contemporary way of teaching based on research teaching, independent and group work, and acquiring theoretical knowledge and skills that can be used in practice.

In the school year 2005/2006 Croatian National Educational Standard (2006) was experimentally introduced in 5% of the schools in Croatia, more specifically 45 schools. In the following school year it was implemented in all of the elementary schools.

The goal of this standard is to create schools which will be fully adjusted to the needs of the learners.²

² taken from the official website of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=2199>

3.3.4.1. *First year of learning*

According to CNES (2006) at the end of the first year of English language learning learners should be familiar with the following topics: meeting and greeting people, me and my friends, me and my family, classroom conversation, colors, school equipment, my classroom, breakfast and holidays. By the end of the first year learners should be able to understand around 130 lexical units and to actively use around 80 lexical units. When it comes to speaking, the expectations at the end of the first year are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the first year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 82)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

- the ability to recognize, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language according to a sound sample
 - the ability to correctly reproduce spoken or recorded sound samples of words and short sentences
 - reproducing simple rhymes, songs for singing and speaking with movement, including *jazz chants* and *rap*
 - basic description of a picture template
 - taking part in very short dramatizations (2 – 3 short sentences)
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - answering simple questions in the context of familiar language structures and theme areas
-

All of the topics, which should be dealt with during the first year according to CNES (2006), are to be found in the “Dip In 1” textbook and workbook, except one. CNES (2006) states that the learners should know who the different members of the family are and how to introduce them, which was not mentioned in this textbook. Vocabulary dealing with family is an important part of teaching vocabulary to young learners, so it is a smaller drawback that it was not introduced in the first year of English language learning, but it is compensated for in the textbooks and workbooks for the grades that follow.

By the end of the first year learners can meet the expectations of CNES (2006) when it comes to speaking. The only exception is the expected ability to give basic description of a picture template and there are no description tasks in the textbook.

3.3.4.2. *Second year of learning*

At the end of the second year of English language learning the following topics should be dealt with according to CNES (200): formal and informal greetings, addressing, introducing family members, colors and describing objects, my toys, school equipment, pets, main meals of the day, my body, clothes and holidays. By the end of the second year learners should be able to actively use 180 lexical units and to recognize 250 lexical units. The expected development of the speaking skill is listed in Table 4.

Table 4: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the second year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 84)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

-
- the ability to recognize, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language according to a sound sample
 - the ability to correctly reproduce spoken or recorded sound samples of words and short sentences
 - reproducing simple rhymes, songs for speaking and singing, including *rap*
 - naming and simple descriptions of people, objects and operations
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - asking simple questions and giving answers in the context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - taking part in mini-dialogues including changing some elements
 - taking part in shorter dramatizations according to a given template
-

The following topics suggested by CNES (2006) are not dealt with in “Dip In 2” textbook and workbook: toys, meals of the day and clothes.

There are some crucial parts that are missing from this textbook and workbook, but they are mentioned in the following years, in “Dip In 3” and “Dip In 4”. The lack of description tasks in the previous year is compensated for and all of the other tasks needed for the development of the speaking skill according to CNES (2006) are introduced and used.

3.3.4.3. *Third year of learning*

Table 5: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the third year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 87)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

-
- the ability to recognize, differ, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language according to a sound sample
 - the ability to correctly reproduce spoken or recorded sound samples of words, shorter sentences, rhymes and songs (including *rap* and *jazz chants*)
 - reproducing of spoken or recorded sound templates
 - imitation or pronunciation of specific sounds of the English language in words
 - making up and producing short sentences with appropriate sentence intonation
 - describing a picture template
 - naming and describing objects, people and operations
 - connecting story elements with the help of picture-books or picture-cards
 - introducing results of a group work, for example a poster with one of the topics that was dealt with
 - retelling a course of events
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - asking simple questions and giving answers in context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - reproducing short dialogues in which the learners independently change some elements
 - independent conduction of short dialogues in the context of familiar situations
 - taking part in shorter dramatizations and role-plays
-

At the end of the third year of English language learning learners should be familiar with the following topics (CNES, 2006): me, my friends and my family, my home, clothes and shoes, domestic and wild animals, in the classroom, time, free time and sports, school breaks and how we spend them, meals and holidays. Learners should be able to actively use 260 and to understand 350 lexical units. The expectations, regarding the speaking skill at the end of the third year of learning are listed in Table 5.

The third textbook in the series, “Dip In 3” is the most complete so far. It deals with every topic suggested by CNES (2006) in useful and interesting ways. This textbook also contains some topics which should have been introduced in the previous two textbooks, like toys, clothes and meals of the day. The fact that the topics were in the end presented to the learners is more important than the fact that they were not presented in the year of learning suggested by CNES (2006).

Again there were few description tasks in this textbook, which leads to a conclusion that the learners do not develop their ability to describe picture templates completely. Also, there was no retelling or story telling, which the learners should have done by now.

3.3.4.4. *Fourth year of learning*

According to CNES (2006) at the end of the fourth year of English language learning the following topic should be introduced to the learners: my family and friends, free time, in school, in the city/in the countryside, vacations, meals of the day, clothes, my body and health, animals and holidays.

At the end of the fourth year learners should be able to actively use 380 lexical units and should be able to understand 500 lexical units. The expected development of the speaking skill by the end of the fourth year is listed in Table 6.

The fourth textbook analysed in this paper “Dip In 4” also gives the learners vast opportunities to learn new things and to practice what they have learned during the previous three years. Although some of the topics in the first two years were not dealt with, they were introduced in the third and fourth year.

Finally, all the different types of speaking tasks are also present, like retelling, spelling and tongue twisters. This textbook and workbook should enable learners to reach the expected level of the speaking skill according to CNES (2006).

Table 6: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the fourth year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 90)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

- the ability to recognize, differentiate, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language according to a sound sample
 - the ability to memorize and correctly reproduce spoken or recorded sound samples of words, sentences, songs and rhymes connected to suggested language contents and situations
 - spelling (pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet)
 - the ability to use several simple sentences for describing people, objects and situations
 - connecting elements of a story with the help of picture-books or picture-cards and the ability to describe a picture template
 - taking part in shorter dramatizations/dialogues with suggested language contents
 - introducing results of a group work or individual work, for example a poster with one of the topic that was dealt with
 - the ability to retell shorter texts or courses of events
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - asking simple questions and giving answers in the context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - reproducing short dialogues in which the learners independently change some elements
 - independent conduction of short dialogues about familiar situations
 - taking part in shorter dramatizations
-

3.3.4.5. Fifth year of learning

By the end of the fifth year of English language learning, the following topics should be mentioned (CNES, 2006): me, my family and friends, home and around it, what do we learn in school (school subjects), free time activities, expressing time, my world and around it, health and holidays. After five years learners should be able to actively use 580 lexical units and should be

able to understand 660 lexical units. Table 7 shows the expected development of the speaking skill after five years of English language learning.

Table 7: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the fifth year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 93)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

-
- the ability to recognize, differentiate, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language according to a sound sample
 - the ability to memorize and correctly reproduce spoken or recorded sound samples of words, sentences, songs and rhymes connected to suggested language contents and situations
 - spelling (pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet)
 - the ability to use several simple sentences for describing people, objects and situations
 - connecting elements of a story with the help of picture-books or picture-cards and the ability to describe a picture template
 - introducing results of a group work or individual work, for example a poster with one of the topic that was dealt with
 - the ability to retell a course of events
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - asking simple questions and giving answers in context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - reproducing short dialogues in which the learners independently change some elements
 - independent participation in short dialogues about familiar situations
 - taking part in shorter dramatizations/dialogues
-

All of the topics, that should be dealt with during the fifth year of English language learning according to CNES (2006) are mentioned in this textbook and workbook. There is a variety of topics dealing with family, world around us and school subjects. For the first time a topic dealing with English speaking countries is introduced, although it is not mentioned in CNES (2006) until

the sixth year of learning. The expected development of the speaking skill according to CNES (2006) can not be completely achieved through this textbook, because there are no tasks dealing with retelling and reporting. According to CNES (2006) the learners should practice reporting what they did individually or in a group and they should be able to retell a course of events, but these two types of tasks are not present in this textbook. There are a lot of descriptions, free talking and asking questions and giving answers.

3.3.4.6. *Sixth year of learning*

At the end of the sixth year of learning the English language learners should be familiar with the following topics according to CNES (2006): me, my family and friends, my home, our health and environment, literature, arts and music, countries of the English speaking areas, free time and holidays.

Table 8: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the sixth year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 96)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

-
- reproducing sentence intonation
 - reproducing sound samples
 - spelling (pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet)
 - correctly reproducing spoken or recorded sound samples
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - the ability to memorize and reproduce the content of the unit, which was dealt with
 - the ability to ask and answer questions in the context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - the ability to describe people, objects or situations
 - the ability to describe a picture template
 - connecting elements of a story, dialogue, conversation into a meaningful whole
 - introducing results of a group work or individual work
 - the ability to retell a course of events with the help of picture stimulants
-

Learners should be able to independently use 780 lexical units and to understand 880 lexical units. What is expected when dealing with the development of the speaking skill is shown in Table 8.

Most of the topics mentioned in CNES (2006) are introduced in the “Dip In 6” textbook and workbook. According to CNES (2006) textbooks at this level should include topics on literature, arts and music. In the present textbook music is dealt with in a really good way, through The Beatles, as an important part of the English culture. Literature is also mentioned, but not other types of arts. This is not major drawback, because it is alone of many topics that were dealt with in this textbook and workbook.

Reporting and retelling, which should have been introduced in the previous year, are introduced in the sixth year of English language learning. Spelling is the only type of task that is missing, but it is not a drawback, because it was introduced and used in the previous two years. Learners are provided with enough different speaking tasks through which they can achieve the expected level of the speaking skill in the sixth year of English language learning according to CNES (2006).

3.3.4.7. *Seventh year of learning*

CNES (2006) lists the following topics to be dealt with in the seventh year of English language learning: the life of teenagers and their problems, everyday life, free time and how we spend it, adventures and imagination, the countries of the English speaking areas and holidays. Learners should be able to actively use 1000 lexical units after seven years of language learning and they should understand 1100 lexical units. The expected development of the speaking skill is shown in Table 9.

“Dip In 7” contains all of the topics which, according to CNES (2006), should be dealt with during the seventh year of English language learning. It also deals with the topic of arts and literary masterpieces, which should have been mentioned in the previous year.

According to CNES (2006) learners should be able to imitate and pronounce specific sounds of the English language and they should be able to reproduce spoken or recorded acoustic models. The development of both of these abilities is not encouraged through this textbook. Despite this drawback “Dip In 7” still gives a lot of opportunities for the development of the speaking skill, because all of the other types of tasks suggested by CNES (2006) are to be found in this textbook and workbook.

Table 9: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the seventh year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 98)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

- imitation and pronunciation of specific sounds of the English language
 - the ability to recognize, differentiate, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language
 - the ability to correctly reproduce spoken or recorded acoustic models
 - spelling (pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet)
 - the ability to memorize and reproduce the content of the unit, which was dealt with
 - the ability to describe people, objects, situations
 - giving instructions on how to get to a specific location in a place/town
 - the ability to describe a picture template
 - connecting elements of a story, dialogue, conversation into a meaningful whole
 - presenting results of a group work or individual work (poster, text etc.)
 - the ability to retell with the help of picture stimulants, retelling a course of events
 - the ability to retell personal experiences
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - the ability to ask and answer questions in the context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - reproducing dialogues in which the learners independently change some elements
 - independent participation in dialogues about familiar situations
 - taking part in dramatizations and role-plays
-

3.3.4.8. Eighth year of learning

In the last year of elementary school the following topics should be dealt with (CNES, 2006): a person in the family and in the social environment, teenagers and their interests, travelling, the world around us, the countries of the English speaking areas and holidays. Learners should be able to actively use 1300 lexical units and they should be able to understand 1400 lexical units. Table 10 shows the expected development of the speaking skill by the end of the last year of elementary school.

Table 10: The expected development of the speaking skill at the end of the eight year of English language learning according to CNES (2006: 101)

Speaking: speaking interaction and production, pronunciation

- the ability to recognize, differentiate, understand and repeat phonological, rhythmical, accent and intonational characteristics of the English language
 - the ability to correctly reproduce the language contents, which were dealt with
 - spelling (pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet)
 - the ability to describe people, objects, situations
 - the ability to describe a picture template
 - introducing results of a group work or individual work on a project in the context of the topics, which were dealt with
 - the ability to retell texts/courses of events in the context of the topics, which were dealt with
 - verbal reaction to verbal and nonverbal impulses in the context of basic language functions
 - the ability to ask and answer questions in the context of familiar language structures and theme areas
 - taking part in shorter dialogues in which the learners independently change some elements
 - taking part in dramatizations
-

All of the topics which should be dealt with during the last year of elementary school according to CNES (2006) are mentioned in “Dip In 8”. The textbook also combines a lot of the topics which were discussed during all of the eight years of English language learning. That makes it a textbook which provides a good closure for language learning in elementary school.

“Dip In 8” concentrates on the productive part of the speaking skill. Most of the tasks are not as guided as in the previous textbooks, learners have to do more on their own and they are expected to use everything they have learned so far. Main focus of the speaking tasks is on reporting, discussing and free speaking. Speak out boxes are also introduced for the first time. These boxes are a great way to encourage learners to develop their speaking skill even further.

“Dip In 8” wraps up all of the speaking tasks very well and through it learners are provided with enough opportunities to develop their speaking skill as expected by CNES (2006).

3.3.5. Common European Framework of Reference

“Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” (2005) is a document that provides clear standards which should be attained at certain stages of foreign language learning. It was put together by the Council of Europe³ as the main part of the project “Language Learning for European Citizenship”. It provides a clear method of assessing and teaching, which can be applied to all languages. According to this document, learners should, in their first four years of foreign language learning, achieve the A1+ level. A1+ is a transitional level between A1 and A2 levels, which are basic user levels. After eight years of language learning, at the end of the elementary school, they should achieve the A2 level of language proficiency. A2 level is also called a waystage or an elementary level.⁴ Levels A1 and A2 in general are explained in Table 11.

Table 11: A1 and A2 levels of proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference (2005) - global scale

A1 Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

A2 Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

³ The Council of Europe is an international organization promoting co-operation between all countries of Europe in the areas of legal standards, human rights, democratic development, the rule of law and cultural co-operation.

⁴ Taken from the official webpage of the Council of Europe.
<http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/levels.html>

When we look back on all of the tasks provided for the learners to develop their speaking skill, we can be almost completely sure that they will achieve the A2 level by the end of the eight year of English language learning. Learners learn how to communicate in a simple way, how to exchange information and how to describe their own background, environment and important matters. Through the textbooks “Dip In” they also learn everyday expressions, how to introduce themselves or others and answer simple questions, which, according to CEFR (2005), is A2 level of language proficiency. They should learn how to communicate independently, how to make themselves understood in the English language, which is the reason why they have to develop their speaking skill. Through the eight years of elementary school they are also introduced to many types of tasks through which they can develop their communication skills.

Levels A1 and A2 regarding the speaking skill are explained in Table 12.

Table 12: Common Reference Levels: Self-assessment grid - speaking

	A1	A2
Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I’m trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can’t usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.
Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.

4. Conclusion

The goal of this research was to determine what are the opportunities given to the learners for the development of the speaking skill during English language learning in elementary school. The research was done through the analysis of the speaking tasks in the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks.

The results of the analysis show that the “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks give enough opportunities for the development of the speaking skill. They contain various types of speaking tasks, which progress in a very logical and clear way. New tasks are gradually introduced and at the end of the eighth year the learners are familiar with almost every type of speaking tasks. Learners have the opportunity to learn all of the components of speech, such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. They are also taught how to interact with people through various information gap activities, topic-based and task-based activities, and tasks which focus both on fluency and accuracy.

The “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks are developed in complete coherence with the Croatian National Educational Standard (2006). They deal with all of the topics listed in CNES (2006) and through the speaking tasks in these textbooks and workbooks learners should achieve the expected level of the speaking skill.

The “Dip In” textbooks and workbooks are also developed in coherence with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2005). At the end of elementary school, learners’ language proficiency should be at the A2 level, which is also expected by the Croatian National Educational Standard (2006).

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