

## **Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to focus on speaking skills, strategies and their development for the Maturita exam in the English language. English is considered to be the global language, moreover, most of all people can speak English at least at a basic level. In addition, the trend of globalization has brought us a lot of opportunities for travelling, learning or working abroad. Thus, it is very important for students to be able to communicate in foreign language. However, many of them are afraid to talk in the English language despite the fact that they might have been learning it since their early childhood. Very often we can see lack of self-confidence of students and what is more, sometimes there is also dominance of receptive skills over the productive ones. Therefore, we have decided to search, analyse and compare the techniques that are used in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3), in order to prepare students for their Maturita oral exam. This thesis is divided into theoretical and practical part.

Our diploma thesis, *Effective methods of preparing secondary school students for the Maturita exam in English – focused on speaking*, is divided into 2 parts and both of them deal with speaking skills.

In the first part, we provide some basic information about speaking skills and explain why it is important. The methods that are mentioned in this part, may also reveal the importance of many aspects that take place in the teaching-learning process, when speaking is concerned. Not only students and teachers are important, but also aspects like motivation, assessment and evaluation, classroom management, interaction, authentic materials and many others. These methods can be used during whole 4 years at secondary schools and help students to develop their speaking skills.

The second part is practical and it covers the analysis of three sets of books that are used during the English lessons in secondary education. We present the comparison of three basic techniques that are required during the Maturita oral exam, namely a picture description, discussion, expressing opinions and giving reasons, and we study their appearance and range in the books. Furthermore, we also provide the results from our observations in one grammar school in Prague.

One of the the main aims of this thesis is to find out whether the tasks that are included in the books for secondary education can meet the Requirements of the Maturita exam in order to be successful in the Maturita oral exam as well as in their possible future communication in the English language.

## ***I. Theoretical part***

### ***1 Speaking at schools***

There is never enough time for everything that teachers want to do in classrooms with their students, however, they should always find time for practising speaking. Speaking is a necessity in every single lesson. Students are supposed to learn a foreign language probably at every single school in our country, because it is considered to be very good for them and some day in the future they will need it for sure. In our country, it is the English language that is considered to be the most important. It can rise from the fact that English is often labelled as “a global language” and everybody can speak it at least a little bit. So children start with learning foreign languages very early; some of them want to, some of them are not really interested in it, but they have to. Whatever the situation is, teachers should be able to include everybody in the teaching-learning process.

#### ***1.1 Classroom management***

Jim Scrivener (79) states that classroom management is the ability to create the conditions for the teaching-learning process. It includes both actions as well as decisions; all participants of the teaching-learning process must interact not only with each other, but also with their environment. There are some areas that fall into the classroom management:

- Grouping and seating – forming groupings is essential (students work alone, in pairs or groups, they can mingle), which is closely connected to arranging and rearranging seating (it should be done as quickly and quietly as possible). Teachers also must decide, where they should stand or sit, whether to walk around or take notes. The most crucial moment is to reform class as a whole group after activities and be able to smoothly continue in the teaching-learning process.
- Classroom interaction – this area includes teacher's and student's talk. Obviously, students should be those who speak more, and teachers can help them by increasing student to student interaction also through seating arrangement.
- Activities – important in the whole process of learning-and-teaching, so they should be prepared properly. Logical connection between the activities is better than jumping from one subject to another. Students should know, why they are asked to do particular tasks and what they will learn.
- Authority – the personality of teachers should be recognizable. They must be able

to gather and hold students' attention, give orders and requests. However, teacher should also be friendly, understandable, confident and fair. In other words, teachers should be human.

- Critical moments – for fluent and pleasant course of the lesson, teachers must be very good and skilful at starting and finishing lessons, dealing with unexpected problems and maintaining appropriate discipline.
- Tools and techniques – there are many things that can be used throughout the teaching-learning process, for instance: black/whiteboard (it provides visual input), body language (using gestures and facial expressions to clarify instructions or explanations), voice (not only volume and speed, also silence is acceptable in some occasions).
- Working with people – teachers also must have many competences, not only teaching skills. They should be able to spread their attention evenly and appropriately to all their students, not only communicate with talkative students. Working with people at schools is similar to working with people anywhere else. Mainly in this time, when all the teaching-learning process is learner-centred; students' feelings and emotions are very important, teachers must be aware of this fact and be able to help them when it is necessary.

### ***1.2 Speaking versus talking***

Gaining speaking skills is very important in a foreign language. Students can pick up the language by just being exposed to it, they can memorize some vocabulary and grammar patterns or rules. “Learning by gaining” is especially important in the case of speaking. Students cannot learn to speak without their active participation. This could be often a big problem in classes – students are not willing to co-operate in such activities. Where do these problems lie? Many reasons and observations have arisen from the research connected to this paper. A lot of authors believe that students are reluctant to speak from several reasons. The most common observations are:

- Students are not all the same – firstly, they are human beings and after that they are learners. They have different personalities and preference. Some of them are introverts and some of them are extroverts. Teachers cannot expect all their students to be interested in the same topic or to be willing to share their ideas and feelings. All of them need special attention and approach.
- Students are not interested in the given topic – despite the fact that writers of

students' books want to make them as close to students as possible, learners find many topics irrelevant and boring, thus they do not want to participate in that particular conversation.

- Students do not have the reason to talk – in their L1, people usually communicate to give or get some message. All their speaking performances have a purpose. This is often missing in the teaching-learning process. Some authors, for example Michael Lewis and Jimmie Hill (118-119) think that “a conversation lessons” is possibly the least effective and successful of all language lessons. They say that many teachers have a tendency to bring to such classes very serious topics and issues (for instance pollution, government and so on), expecting that their students would join the conversation, whereas they would rather talk about sport or fashion.
- Lack of spontaneity – including students in the conversations against their will is not helpful either. All attempts of teachers to start or maintain conversations that include questions like “Lucy, what do you think about it?”, “Johnny, would you like to add anything?” or “Steve, do you agree with your partner?”, evidently do not have a required effect. It just make students more reluctant to speak, because if they had anything to add and were interested in that topic, they would do it without querying.
- Students do not know how to converse – many students feel awkward and strange when they have to make a conversation in the foreign language. They have no problems communicating in their L1, but when it comes to L2, they feel lost. Teachers should also teach students to have a conversation – to respond to their partner's speech. Reactions that make all conversations fluent and alive, need to be presented to students. It is more than enough if somebody says “Really?”, or “No way!” and all conversation has a vivid flow. And what is more, the speaker knows that he is being heard for sure.

Teachers cannot prevent any of these situations in their classrooms at all times. But they should be aware of these facts and try to minimize them as much as possible. It is up to them to bring some creativity and spontaneity to their classrooms and teach students not only what is in their book, but mainly, what they need for life. Conversation in the foreign language is not very much different from that one they usually have with their friends or family. It is very important to show them the right path and be the best example for them. Teachers who are interested in what their students say and make them feel good in the conversations, have eventually less problems with unwillingness to communicate in their

classrooms.

### ***1.3 Advantages and disadvantages of pair work and group work***

There are many potential problems that teachers can face in order to make students speak in a foreign language. Some of the main problems, according to Paul Seligson (Seligson, 10-14), which were stated by teachers themselves, are:

- Too many students to do pair work or group work,
- Too many different levels of ability in one classroom,
- Students speak L1 in groups and pairs,
- Students make too much noise when speaking together,
- Students do not co-operate or do not want to speak English,
- Students make so many mistakes that cannot be corrected,
- Students want to say many things they have not been taught yet.

How to deal with these dilemmas? Seligson also suggests some solutions, for instance, he advises not to be afraid of letting students work together in pairs or groups, even if there are many students in the classroom. It is still possible to put them together in groups and let them speak to each other. It is indisputable that students have more chances to practise their speaking skills. In connection to the prior problem, teachers also should not be worried about a certain amount of noise that comes with speaking in groups or pairs, because *“it is usually a sign of success”* (Seligson, 11). However, teachers must have very good organizational and management skills to avoid unbearable amount of noise, too. Furthermore, there are many different levels of ability in one class, which can also be seen rather positively. Using group or pair work is good for everybody in classrooms: teachers, good students as well as weaker students. Teachers have time to monitor and listen to their students and also find out what they can or cannot do or say. There is also a chance to help the students who need their help. At this point, what is also very important is that in groups or pairs, students have many chances to learn something from their peers. It is a safe environment for them, they are not afraid to present themselves and their ideas.

Next problem is related to using L1 immediately; whenever students have a chance, they do it. This is a very delicate situation for teachers as well. Nevertheless, there are situations in which L1 could be used, mainly with younger students. Seligson (20) provides a list of classroom uses of L1, for instance:

- Providing a quick translation of an unknown word,
- explaining the purpose of an exercise,
- giving or re-giving instructions,
- explaining language rules,
- highlighting problems and making explicit comparisons between languages,
- analysing errors,
- praising, disciplining and counselling students,
- using bilingual dictionaries, grammars, texts and readers,
- creating interest, variety and fun.

So as we can see, there are some areas of the teaching-learning process, where L1 can be used. And it can be done not only by teachers, but also by students. Although, teachers should make sure students use it as little as possible.

How to manage a situation, when students do not want to speak or co-operate with teachers? As Paul Seligson (12) recommends, students can be trained *by choosing between “disciplined fun” or “disciplined boredom”*, which means that students preferably choose fun, not boring grammar exercises.

Problems with mistakes, which are basically attempts, because students make them when they use language they do not know yet, are again very frequent. It is normal and absolutely correct, not to correct them, if their common aim is to practise fluency. When practising accuracy, for instance, pronunciation, the third person in present simple tense or word order, teachers should correct all mistakes that occur. But if it is fluency and students want to perform what they can say and what they know in English, making mistakes is normal and acceptable.

### **1.3.1 Functions of groups**

There are many reasons why students should be put into groups and interact with each other. This is of course the main reason – to give students a chance to communicate. Group work as such also offers many other opportunities how to help students. For instance, Sharron, K. Bassano and Mary A. Christison (in: Long, Richards, 201-207) divide groups due to their functions and objectives. They believe that activities which are not personal, such as games, problem-solving, information gathering or reporting, should be replaced by activities which make students sharing their feelings, beliefs and values. They

work with these six strategies:

- Restructuring – this strategy is used to break down expected classroom structures and to minimize students' fears. Restructuring activities are usually non-personal, non-verbal and students communicate through actions, drawings or written statements.
- One-centred – it gives students an opportunity to “be heard and seen”. It provides individual attention and acceptance of the whole group. However, it is done on a voluntarily and students can choose, whether they would speak from their seats or stand up in front of the class.
- Unified group – this technique requires the participations of all students in the group. It helps to establish co-operation and value of each group member. Everybody must do their parts in the activity, otherwise it could not be completed successfully.
- Dyads – activities done in pair work. It gives students a chance to share their own feelings and emotions and to give them some privacy at the same time. Before the actual speaking, they can think about it and after that they can share their thoughts and ideas.
- Small groups – in small groups, students learn, how to co-operate with each other. Not only do they develop their speaking skills, but they also practise their listening skills and improve the listening patterns, such as sharing their attention, fair interruptions and turn-taking.
- Large groups – the goals for large groups are the same as goals for smaller groups, only with more people involved.

Teachers can either be a part of these conversation techniques, or they can stay behind and observe their students. Mostly there are not involved in students' activities directly, nevertheless, when students are in need, they are in roles of facilitators and participators.

### ***1.4 Key competencies***

Nowadays, as it was already stated above, the teaching-learning process is learner-centred, which means that students are considered to be partners to teachers, they are considered to be partners with teachers. In the last few years, there was a new curricular system of education introduced into the Czech educational system. All the years in a school

system, students are guided and led by the framework educational programme. It is the national document, where all processes, procedures, aims and goals of the teaching-learning process are stated. This document is profoundly learner-centred, it focuses on students and what they should achieve during their years at school mainly. Not only are subjects, their goals and objectives included there, but also key competencies that students should obtain at schools. It is considered to be good for them and schools can provide not only knowledge, but also shaping personality of individual students. These competencies are interlinked with the whole teaching-learning process. Hana Čechová and Stephan von Pohl (in: Nezval 11) provide the English translation of key competencies: “*Key competencies represent the system of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and values that are important to the individual’s personal development and to the individual’s role in society*”. Key competencies are:

- learning competencies
- problem-solving competencies
- communication competencies
- social and personal competencies
- civil competencies
- working competencies (business competencies at high schools)

#### **1.4.1      *Language competence***

Above mentioned competencies are general, they are connected with the personality of individual students. However, there are also many other competencies students can acquire. For purposes of this paper, language competence is the most significant one. Language competence is within the all speaking skills. Acquisition of this competence means that students are able to use:

- lexical means and required phraseology,
- language functions,
- grammatical means,
- texture and structure rules,
- phonetic means.

Students can prove that they can apply various lexical means and language functions (for instance, to formulate complaints or requests, apologies and regrets) and

respond to them. They also observe norms of courtesy and differences typical for given area or topic. Students also correctly operate with the repertoire of common grammatical means and respect standard rules of variety of the English language (British or American). Their oral performances are understandable and fluent (depending on their level), and what is more, their intonation and pronunciation do not affect their speech (if so, it should be barely noticeable).

Students should be capable of communication in many topics, communication situations and areas. They are all stated in *The Requirements of the Maturita exam*. Communication situations within the particular topics include the following components:

- environment, place and time (when and where situations take place),
- participants (people who are involved in particular communication situations and what are their roles),
- events/actions/tasks (what is happening during communication situations),
- the subject matter (what/who are they talking about).

## ***2 Speaking as a skill***

It is one of the four skills, which one needs for a successful conversation in a foreign language. It is also one of the productive skills, along with writing. Students often have a big difficulty with this skill. There is not a problem with gaining it, but it is problematic to use it. This can be caused by shyness or lack of self-confidence of students, when it comes to speaking in a foreign language. As in mother tongue, one should gain these skills in a preferable order. First comes listening, then speaking, after that reading and finally writing.

### ***2.1 Why it is important***

Martin Bygate (3) compares knowledge and usage of a language to knowledge and usage of cars. He says: *“There is a difference between knowledge about a language, and skill in using it.”* It is not enough if one knows what to do, if it is only at a theoretical level. One must also practise this knowledge and be able to use it – to feel certain about starting, maintaining, changing or finishing the conversation, or avoiding obstacles and dealing with them, if they occur.

Why do we communicate at all? Is language our main goal in communication? Penny Ur (3) says that *“language is never used (except in the classroom) for its own sake, but always for the sake of achieving an objective, or to perform a function: to persuade, inform, inquire, threaten, etc.”* So teachers' goal is to help students to be able to perform these functions in a foreign language.

### ***2.2 Communicative language teaching (CLT)***

At the beginning of this chapter we would like to present a basic terminology from this field and demonstrate the differences between the words: an approach, a method and a technique (Dvořák, B., lectures: April, 2011).

Within this terminology we distinguish:

- An approach is a general philosophy of the language, a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language.
- A method is developed from the approach. It is a plan for the presentation of language. Also different factors have to be taken into consideration (age of students, their level of English...) when we choose the particular method.
- A technique is an implementation of the method, what we see in the classrooms.

The origins of CLT are dated from the late 1960s. Its predecessors were: The Grammar-Translation Method, The Direct Method and The Audiolingual Method. The change was in the fact that the prior methods were focused more on grammar and drill, they were not able to provide students with creativity and fluency. However, CLT is focused on developing speaking skills and encouraging people to talk in foreign language.

The British supporters of this approach emphasized the communicative and functional potential of language. They said that it was more important “*to focus in language teaching on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.*” (Richards and Rodgers, 64)

For an illustration, we present the major distinctive features of the Audio-lingual Method and the Communicative Approach demonstrated by Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983. (in Richards and Rodgers, 67-68)

	<b>Audio-lingual method</b>	<b>Communicative Language Teaching</b>
1	Attends to structure and form more than meaning.	Meaning is paramount.
2	Demands memorization of structure-based dialogues.	Dialogues, center around communicative functions and are not memorized.
3	Language items are not necessarily contextualized.	Contextualization is a basic premise.
4	Language learning is learning structures, sounds or words.	Language learning is learning to communicate.
5	Drilling is a central technique.	Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
6	Grammatical explanation is avoided.	Any device which helps the learners is accepted.
7	Communicative activities come only after a long process of rigid drills and exercises.	Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
8	Linguistic competence is the desired goal.	Communicative competence is the desired goal.
9	The teacher controls the learners and prevents them from doing anything that conflicts with the theory.	Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.
10	Accuracy is a primary goal.	Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.
11	The teacher is expected to specify the language that students are to use.	The teacher cannot know exactly what language students will use.

**Table 1: The major distinctive features of the Audio-lingual Method and the Communicative Approach**

Howatt (in Richards and Rodgers, 66) distinguishes between a “strong” and a “weak” version of CLT:

1. The weak version – it has become more or less standard practice at schools. It stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use English for communicative purposes. Tasks are done regularly step by step. “Learning to use English”.
2. The strong version – language is acquired through communication. “Using English to learn it”.

**2.1.1 Roles of learners**

Breen and Candlin (in Richards and Rodgers, 76-77) present roles for learners as following: *“The role of learner as negotiator – between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning – emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way.”*

**2.1.2 Roles of teachers**

There are several teachers' roles. For instance, teachers can act as controllers, assessors, facilitators, observers, organisers, or even participants when they join groups in activities. In CLT, teachers are in the roles of facilitators and helpers.

Breen and Candlin (in Richards and Rodgers, 76-77) differentiate these main roles:

1. The first role of teachers is to facilitate the communication process in classrooms.
2. The second role is to act as an independent participant in the learning-teaching process.
3. The third role is a researcher and learner, which is connected to his/her appropriate knowledge and experience in learning.

Richards and Rodgers (76-77) contrast other types of roles: needs analyst,

counselor, group process manager.

- Needs analyst – teachers should respond to their learners' language needs. It can be done informally or formally. The informal way is a personal dialogue with students through which teachers can find out about their student's learning style, assets or goals. The formal way is done through a needs assessment instrument, which is distributed to students. These formal assessments “*contain items that attempt to determine and individual's motivation for studying the language*”. On the basis of these assessments, teachers should plan activities and lessons that respond to the learners' needs.
- Counselor – teachers are expected to illustrate students, how an effective communication looks like. The important thing is to keep the communication channels open and avoid any confusion between speakers and hearers. This can be achieved by the use of paraphrase, confirmation and feedback.
- Group process manager – teachers organise the classroom for the communication purposes – through seating arrangement. This way, there is more space for communicative activities and interaction and teachers should mainly monitor, encourage students to talk. However, they should not correct the mistakes immediately, only note them for later commentary.

Although this movement was the British innovation, in the 1970s it has expanded and nowadays it is seen as an approach rather than a method.

### **2.1.3 Communicative competence**

The communicative approach stresses the needs to teach communicative competence, rather than linguistic competence that was used before within the previous methods. Communicative approach is learner-centred, students usually work in small groups or in pairs and they practise communicative activities. It also emphasizes the importance of learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.

The interpretations of what communicative competence is differs from an author to author. For example Canale and Swain, 1980, (in: Tarone and Yule, 17-20) present 3 competences within communicative competence:

- grammatical competence – represents the knowledge of language as a set of forms and rules: the grammatical rules, the lexicon, the phonology, spelling, pronunciation, etc. These rules are very important for language learners and they

give them the ability to produce grammatically or phonologically accurate sentences.

- sociolinguistic competence – however, concentration only on grammatical rules is not sufficient enough. Learners also have to be able to recognize the situation and differentiate between formal and informal contexts. In other words: the appropriateness of utterances within different social contexts must be tied to communicative function, it cannot be isolated.

For instance, the following 2 sentences are perfectly correct from the grammatical point of view, but there is a huge difference in the meaning and form:

1) Give me that knife! - Grammatically perfectly correct, although it sounds very impolite. It can be seen as an order.

2) Can I have that knife? - this is a softened way of asking for something. It sounds more polite and it can be interpreted as a request.

- strategic competence – it is the ability to get the message across. It is important to organize the utterances as effectively as possible and be able to prevent the breakdowns in communication. Another significant element of this competence is compensation – trying to avoid silence and find a way to get around the word that is not in our vocabulary range and we are not able to produce.

It is also the ability to use both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies.

## **2.2 *Methods which enhance speaking***

### **2.2.1 *Interaction***

Interaction is not only about some actions and getting some reactions. It is a smooth process where not only are both parties considered significant, but also everything around them – the situation, the responses, the topics, the environment.

Classroom interaction is very important. Teachers must be also aware of a significant factor, which takes place in classroom interaction. And it is talking, more specifically: teacher's talk and students' talk. Teachers should try to minimize their talking time and increase the students' talking time. Sometimes it is quite difficult, but it can be achieved with the help of a classroom management – seating arrangement, pair work, group work and so on.

Peers in classrooms can interact among themselves during group work. It is a great opportunity to talk in a safe environment and not to be afraid of making some mistakes. Students can also help and encourage each other. Penny Ur (15) points out some problems that can occur in group work, such as organizational difficulty and problem with

interaction. The first problem refers to an ability of teachers to divide students into groups and set the instructions. The second complication arises from the groups themselves: some students can be more active and do all the talking, whereas the others are passive and do not communicate at all. Ur also suggests, how to make the group work more successful and interesting for students, and it is by “*combination of challenge and ensured success.*” The tasks should not be too easy, otherwise students can get bored very quickly, but on the other hand, if the tasks are too difficult, students can be discouraged and stop trying.

Harmer (87-88) provides three basic reasons why speaking tasks should be included in classrooms. Language that is used in such activities is encouraging fluency, thus it is not controlled and anticipated at all times, students use “*any and all the language at their command to perform some kind of oral task.*” These reasons are:

1. Rehearsal – it is a chance for students to practise the conversation in the safe environment of the classroom, and gives them an opportunity to rehearse some situations, which they can deal with in real life. For instance, students take a part in a role-play at an airport check-in desk and the phrases they use may help them with real-life situations.
2. Feedback – for students and for teachers as well. Speaking activities where students use any language they are able to, help them realize the mistakes or uncertainty they may have. Teachers can see these problems and it also gives them the feedback on their teaching strategies.
3. Engagement – students should be motivated by all the speaking activities and participate fully. It requires a good preparation from teachers and willingness of students to enjoy these activities.

### **2.2.2 Motivation**

We distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The first one is the motivation that comes from inside of a person; the second one is the motivation that is external. In a teaching-learning process, both kinds of motivation are essential. Intrinsic factor for students is inner desire to learn, they learn because they want to. Learning is their goal, desire and achievement. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is conditioned by something they get in exchange (such as marks, money, parents' appreciation and so on).

Motivated students are more willing to participate in the teaching-learning process, thus it is very important to keep them interested and involved. Students' motivation can be a great deal of help for teachers, as well as it can be the biggest problem.

To imply it on conversational skills, teachers should make their lessons as visual and interactive as possible, s/he should make all students participate as much as possible, s/he should be positive and give rewards (such as marks, verbal praise, body language, facial expressions), s/he should know her/his students and their expectations and aims to be able to help them.

### **2.2.3     *Authentic materials***

There are many materials that are used in language learning-and-teaching process and Richards and Rodgers (79-80) name three kinds of them important for CLT: text-based materials (focused on speaking), task-based (games, role-plays, simulations, jigsaw) and realia (authentic materials in the classrooms – newspapers, magazines, maps).

Authentic materials are any materials that were not created for teaching-learning process originally. We can distinguish several categories: (Siposova, 62-63)

- Authentic audio and audio-visual materials: TV programmes (commercials, sitcoms, cartoons, news, weather forecast), radio programmes (ads, songs)
- Authentic visual materials: photographs, pictures from magazines, postcards, maps
- Authentic printed materials: newspapers (articles, astrology columns, horoscopes, sport reports, advice columns), song lyrics, restaurant menus, tourist information brochures, timetables, cooking recipes
- Realia: coins, currency, holiday decorations (Halloween masks, Christmas decorations...)

According to the categorization mentioned above, it may seem that authentic materials are more compatible with receptive skills, but they can definitely help to develop productive skills as well. For instance, after a reading activity, students can comment on the topic and have a discussion about it. They can also do various speaking activities using realia, such as guessing game, describing items, narrative stories and so on.

### **2.2.4     *Assessment and evaluation***

Assessment is something that occurs in the teaching-learning process and plays a big role in it. Why is it essential? It has several functions: diagnostic, motivating, checking and so on. For our purposes the most significant is the motivating function. How can students be motivated by assessment? Firstly, there are two different types of assessment:

formative and summative assessment.

Formative assessment is used whenever during lessons, it is informal and unplanned. Teachers do not use it to express students' progress by marks, but they apply it to encourage them in their work by using facial expressions, body language or a short feedback. It can be realized during group work, when teachers have time to observe and evaluate students' work. The most important thing for teachers is to be positive and praise students for their accomplishments and effort.

Summative assessment, on the other hand, concentrates on the results of learning. It is formal, planned and it measures students' progress at the end of some period (at the end of semester, lesson or unit).

So how can teachers' assessment influence students' desire to talk, or even help to enhance their speaking performances? The essential key here is to apply formative, which means informal assessment as often as possible to be positive and make students notice their success and improvement. Positively appraised students are more motivated to speak and make their learning process more effective.

### **2.2.5 Accuracy and fluency**

Accuracy and fluency are both significant for students' speaking skills. In accuracy oriented tasks students practise speaking in a controlled way, so they can show their ability to use their knowledge of the English language. It includes pronunciation, grammar and phrases. These tasks are often used with beginners to help them practise in a safe environment and learn how to use the language.

Fluency tasks, on the other hand, are not controlled, students' knowledge of the language is used freely, the answers are not anticipated, teachers do not know, what kind of language are students about to use exactly. It develops students' ability to communicate freely and fluently in a foreign language. The focus is aimed at the development of speaking sub-skills.

### 3 *Maturita exam in the English language*

In this chapter, we outline some basic information about the Maturita exam in the English language, more specifically about both productive, as well as receptive skills. The information is taken and further adapted from the catalogues of requirements, which are accessible to the public on the web pages of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, namely *Katalog požadavků zkoušek společné části maturitní zkoušky – Anglický jazyk: základní úroveň obtížnosti (The Catalogue of Requirements for Exams of the Common Part of the Maturita Exam – The English language: basic level)* and *Katalog požadavků zkoušek společné části maturitní zkoušky – Anglický jazyk: vyšší úroveň obtížnosti (The Catalogue of Requirements for Exams of the Common Part of the Maturita Exam – The English language: higher level)*. They are both valid from the school year 2009/2010. (Further referred to as “the Catalogue – higher level”, “the Catalogue – lower level”).

In this thesis we focus both, on B1 as well as B2 level, therefore we compare these levels from many different aspects. However, since the basic information are the same at both levels, we cite them from one catalogue.

What can we find in the Catalogues? There are several areas, which are described and presented in details. The Catalogues include:

- the definitions of component skills, which arise the fact what students are able to do,
- the characteristics of recordings/texts/written or oral performance of students,
- the characteristics of communicative situations and areas of language usage and topics,
- general demarcations of language means and functions.

These requirements always have to be considered and assessed altogether, because all the components are connected and complementary to each other (the Catalogue – higher level 4).

The Maturita exam from the English language is a complex exam. It covers receptive, productive, as well as interactive skills. There are two levels of difficulty. The differences between these levels are not only in the range and depth of skills and knowledge, but also in the assignments of the particular part of the exam (the Catalogue – higher level 3).

Since the interactive skills could be examined only within the oral performance of the Maturita exam, they are stated only within oral interaction in the Catalogues (the Catalogue – higher level 4).

Students, who take the Maturita exam from the English language at the higher level, are expected to respond and communicate within the common topics and situations. Beyond these common topics and situations, there is also a space for specific topics, situations and skills, which are set by schools themselves. (the Catalogue – higher level 4). The same requirements are applicable for the basic level as well. (the Catalogue – basic level 4).

The basic level of difficulty corresponds with the outcomes of educational framework in the subject “*foreign language without the continuity of primary school*”, whereas the higher level of difficulty is consistent with the outcomes of educational framework in the subject “*foreign language with the continuity of primary school*”. (the Catalogue – higher level 3).

### 3.1 *Basic specifications and components of the Maturita exam*

In the Maturita exam, there is a didactic test with two sub-tests examining receptive skills (reading and listening) as well as language competence of students. Moreover, there is a writing part, where writing skills and sub-skills are examined. Another productive skill, which is speaking, is tested in oral performance along with interactive skills and strategies. (the Catalogue – higher level 19). There are slight differences in timing between both levels.

In the following part, we provide the comparison of levels B1 and B2 with reference to the parts of the Maturita exam:

<i>Maturita exam from the English language – B1 level</i>			
<b>Didactic test</b>		<b>Writing</b>	<b>Speaking</b>
Sub-test	Sub-test		
Listening	Reading and language competence	Written performance	Oral performance and interactive skills

**Table 2:** *The components of the Maturita exam – B1 level*

<b>Parts of exam</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Skills/competences</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Number of parts</b>
<b>Didactic test</b>	50.00%	Listening	30 minutes	4
		Reading	60 minutes	4
		Language competence		1
<b>Writing</b>	25.00%	Writing	60 minutes	2

<b>Speaking</b>	25.00%	Speaking and interaction	15 minutes	4
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*Table 3: The specification of the Maturita exam's parts – B1 level*

<i>Maturita exam from the English language – B2 level</i>			
<b>Didactic test</b>		<b>Writing</b>	<b>Speaking</b>
Sub-test	Sub-test		
Listening	Reading and language competence	Written performance	Oral performance and interactive skills

*Table 4: The components of the Maturita exam – B2 level*

<b>Part of exam</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Skills/competences</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Number of parts</b>
<b>Didactic test</b>	50.00%	Listening	40 minutes	4
		Reading	60 minutes	4
		Language competence		2
<b>Writing</b>	25.00%	Writing	90 minutes	2
<b>Speaking</b>	25.00%	Speaking and interaction	15 minutes	4

*Table 5: The specifications of the Maturita exam' parts – B2 level*

As we can see from the tables, there are few differences between the levels. The higher level has more tasks as well as time.

This comparison is done with the data that are included in the Catalogues. However, according to the Decree No. 177/2009 Coll., as amended in 2011 by the Decree No. 273/2011 Coll. § 7, students at both levels have more time for their tasks. At the basic level, students have more time to do their didactic test, specifically they have five more minutes for listening. At the higher level, students have also five more minutes to accomplish the listening tasks in their didactic test.

### **3.2 Receptive skills**

Both listening and reading are receptive skills, which means people receive messages that can be either spoken or written. But only receiving messages does not mean that these skills are passive. In order to be able to understand some texts, people must

interact with it and try very hard to decode the message. Understanding and decoding texts are thought with the help of listening and reading sub-skills, which are also examined in the Maturita exam.

### **3.2.1     *Listening***

Students are able to listen for:

- main ideas,
- intentions, opinions and attitudes of speakers,
- gist,
- details,
- detailed orientation instructions.

These sub-skills are the same for both levels. (the Catalogues 5). However, B1 level students have two additional sub-skills to cover:

- to differentiate topics,
- to understand easy technical information concerning objects of everyday use.

The texts that are used in the Maturita exam are of various styles, such as publicist, artistic or non-fiction. Types of the texts could be: warnings, instructions, news, interviews, weather forecast, commercials, extras from books or films and so on. The most common sources of these texts are media and audio recordings of public productions. The types of conversations could be: monologues, dialogues, discussions, interviews and so on. The texts for listening for B2 level students are related to concrete, abstract, familiar as well as unfamiliar topics and situations, which students can meet with in their personal, social, academic and professional lives. The texts that are used for B1 level students during the Maturita exam are related to concrete and common topics and situations. They are connected to authentic situations, which students can find themselves in, when they travel to foreign countries or in everyday life (the Catalogues 5).

### **3.2.2     *Reading***

Students are able to read for:

- main ideas,
- gist,

- intentions, feelings, opinions and attitudes of speakers,
- specific information,
- details.

The other basic sub-skills that should be covered are:

- looking for important details,
- gathering specific information from different parts of text,
- gathering specific information from many short texts,
- guessing unknown vocabulary,
- finding out if texts contain some relevant information

The texts for the Maturita exam used for reading are also of various styles, such as publicist, artistic and non-fiction, for instance: announcements, instructions, recipes, offers, programmes, critical reviews, extracts from books, letters and so on. The main sources of these texts are British or American authentic texts, for example: web pages, newspapers, magazines, commercial or propaganda materials, signs, and so on. These texts could be shortened or modified for the purposes of the Maturita exam. The texts could be short (up to 100 words), medium (approximately half of one page) and long (one page of A4 format). The length of these texts is limited to A4 format maximum. The topics and situations for reading are the same as in listening (the Catalogues 7).

### **3.3      *Productive skills***

These skills are considered active, because speakers (or students) take an active part in communication. They produce a piece of writing or speech. Sub-skills of productive skills are also examined during the Maturita exam.

#### **3.3.1      *Writing***

Students are able to:

- describe people, places, things, events, experience,
- provide information,
- formulate questions and respond to them,
- formulate offers, requests, complaints,
- express their feelings, opinions,

- state the pros and cons,
- summarize.

Individual sub-skills are examined by various stylistic types, such as: formal and informal letters, emails, curriculum vitae, narration, articles, critical reviews, essays, made-up stories and so on.

There are two parts in the Maturita exam in writing and they are different from each other. Students are capable of comprehensible and consistent writing, developing their ideas and thoughts and follow the rules of texture and structure of texts and paragraphs. Their piece of writing is appropriately organized and sequenced. The influence of their mother tongue is acceptable at B1 level. (the Catalogues 8-9).

### **3.3.2 *Speaking***

It will be discussed in the next chapter in details. However, we must also include some basic information about oral performance and examination.

#### **3.3.2.1 *Oral performance and examination***

Oral examination takes maximally 15 minutes and students also have twenty minutes to prepare. During the preparation, students are allowed to make some notes and use them afterwards. It is also permitted to use dictionaries. Students have a worksheet that specifies instructions of the oral examination. The worksheet has a unified structure and it has 4 parts:

1. Motivational introduction and students' responds to examiner's questions. These are related to general topics.
2. Oral performance of students including common topics with the help of their outline and stimuli (for instance photographs, maps)
3. Oral performance or interaction with regard to specific or technical topics set by schools themselves.
4. Interaction between students and examiners within common communicative situations and general topics. (the Catalogues 18, 20).

#### **3.3.2.2 *Types of tasks***

There are two basic types of tasks used in the Maturita exam, namely open and closed tasks. Open tasks are the same for both levels; however, only first three of closed tasks are used for all students. Multiple matching and sequencing is only for the higher level (the Catalogues 19, 21).

Open tasks can be divided into:

- Short answers: students make their own answers, which are very brief and short, for example numbers, letters, one to three words
- Wide answers: students make their own answers, which could be consistent written or oral performance/interaction.

Closed tasks have different forms, such as:

- Multiple choice selection – according to information from their text, students choose from more options, mostly there are three or four alternatives,
- True/false selection – according to information from their text, students decide whether the given possibilities are true or false,
- Matching – with the help of their text, students match short parts of the text (for instance, headlines) from two different groups. There is always just one correct option.
- Multiple matching – students work with a few short texts that are marked with letters as alternatives. Then they match one just one right alternative to one of the tasks. Each task has just one correct solution. However, some of the alternatives could be used repeatedly, so they could be a solution to more than one task.
- Sequencing – students try to sequence some parts of their text into the right order due to certain rules.

### **3.3.3      *Assessment scale for speaking***

How students are assessed and what is necessary for the final mark from their Maturita exam, is listed in the following table/<sup>1</sup>. Examiners have to observe several categories in order to agree on students' marks after their performance. Students can obtain three, two, one or zero points for each category. All four parts of the Maturita speaking exam are taken into consideration. The highlighted parts of the text refer to the higher level

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<sup>1</sup> For the original copy see Appendix 9

only.

	<b>Assignment/Content and performance</b>	<b>Lexical competence</b>	<b>Grammatical competence</b>	<b>Phonological competence</b>
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' performances correspond with the assignments. Their speech is purposeful, clear and detailed enough</li> <li>- it is also continuous with a linear sequence of their thoughts/<b>coherent</b></li> <li>- communicative strategies are used adequately and the help of the examiners is not necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (specific) vocabulary is of wide range, it is used correctly</li> <li>- mistakes do not make the understanding difficult/<b>do not disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range of language means, including texture and structure, is wide and they are used correctly</li> <li>- mistakes do not make the understanding difficult/<b>do not disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' speech is so fluent that the addressee understands perfectly</li> <li>- their pronunciation and intonation is correct and natural/<b>effective</b></li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' performances mostly correspond with the assignments. Their speech is usually purposeful, clear and detailed enough</li> <li>- in most cases their speech is continuous with a linear sequence of their thoughts/<b>coherent</b></li> <li>- communicative strategies are mostly used adequately – sometimes the help of the examiners is necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (specific) vocabulary is mostly of wide range, usually it is used correctly</li> <li>- mistakes sometimes make the understanding difficult/<b>disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range of language means, including texture and structure, is mostly wide</li> <li>- they are used correctly in many cases</li> <li>- mistakes sometimes make the understanding difficult/<b>disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' speech is so fluent that the addressee does not have to make a lot of effort to understand them</li> <li>- their pronunciation and intonation is mostly correct and natural/<b>effective</b></li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' performances mostly do not correspond with the assignments. Their speech is not usually purposeful, clear and detailed enough</li> <li>- in most cases their speech is not continuous with a linear sequence of their thoughts/<b>coherent</b></li> <li>- in most cases, communicative strategies are not used adequately</li> <li>- the help of the examiners is required a lot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (specific) vocabulary is limited, usually it is not used correctly</li> <li>- in most cases, mistakes make the understanding difficult/<b>disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range of language means, including texture and structure, is mostly limited</li> <li>- they are not used correctly in many cases</li> <li>- mistakes often make the understanding difficult/<b>disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' speech is so incoherent that the addressee has to make a lot of effort to understand them</li> <li>- their pronunciation is mostly incorrect</li> <li>- their intonation is a little bit natural/<b>effective</b></li> </ul>
<b>0</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the assignment does not correspond with students' oral performance despite examiners' constant help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (specific) vocabulary does not cover the adequate range, it is not used correctly</li> <li>- mistakes make the understanding difficult/<b>disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range of language means, including texture and structure, does not cover the adequate range</li> <li>- they are not used correctly</li> <li>- mistakes make the understanding difficult/<b>disturb the understanding</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students' speech is so incoherent that the addressee cannot follow it</li> <li>- their pronunciation makes is difficult to understand</li> <li>- their intonation is unnatural</li> </ul>

*Table 6: Assessment scale for speaking*



## **4 Maturita oral performance and interaction**

In this chapter we present detailed information about the speaking part of the Maturita exam. We look separately on both levels of difficulty, as well as oral performance and interaction. Subsequently, we compare them to each other.

### **4.1 Elementary level**

#### **4.1.1 Oral performance**

All of the following information are taken and adapted from the Catalogue – basic level (10-11).

Students are able to:

- describe places, directions, people, things, activities, events, and so on,
- describe and/or introduce themselves and other people,
- provide basic and not complicated information,
- state details,
- compare alternatives,
- summarize information,
- develop arguments,
- express thoughts, feelings, dreams, hopes, and so on,
- express opinions (for instance on TV programme, social events, and so on),
- express the essence of thoughts or problems in a sufficient way,
- express disagreements/agreements,
- explain their plans, opinions and give a brief clarification on them,
- explain and/or emphasize what is important to them,
- explain why something is a problem,
- ask and make sure if the expression that was used was correct.

##### **4.1.1.1 *Characteristic of oral performance***

It should be consistent, understandable and sufficiently fluent. While their oral performance, there could be evident pauses caused by thinking about grammatical and lexical rules, trying to find appropriate formulations or because of attempts to connect their thoughts. Not complicated messages are communicated sufficiently accurate. They are

formulated and presented as a linear sequence of thoughts and their argumentation is adequately developed. More complicated messages can be expressed with limited exactness and range, but it is evident what students want to say. Students communicate correctly within familiar contexts, they use basic rules of the text structure and common repertoire of strategies and language means. However, for their performance they do need an outline that would help them organize their ideas. Fluency of the oral performance could be interrupted by looking for suitable language means. Influence of their mother tongue can be noticeable, but it cannot violate its understandability.

#### 4.1.1.2 *Characteristic of communicative situations and topics*

Oral performances are related to concrete, familiar and common topics as well as to daily and easily predictable situations. Students are able to talk about abstract topics in a limited range and accurateness.

The topics are divided into these areas:

- the area of personal life – a family, friends, lifestyle, life in a city or village,
- the area of personality traits – hobbies and interests,
- the area of public life – transportation, services, events,
- the area of education – a school, education,
- the area of social life – an environment, culture, sport, media,
- the area of working life – common professions, basic working equipments.

#### 4.1.1.3 *Evaluation*

What is really important, when evaluating the oral performances is that it does not cover only grammatical and lexical spheres, but a communication purpose must be taken into consideration as well. Teachers assess two aspects of students' oral performances:

- *whether* they say, what they want to/ have to say
- *how* they say, what they are supposed to say

These aspects are monitored by means of evaluation criteria:

Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adequacy towards assignment,</li> <li>- clear and unambiguous communication,</li> <li>- factual accuracy,</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- meeting the task,</li> <li>- the range, relevance, understandability of thoughts and/or information</li> <li>- a balance between thoughts and information</li> </ul>
Language means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exactness of language means and its influence on understandability of messages</li> <li>- the range of language means</li> <li>- the effects of communication on receivers</li> </ul>
Functions of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range and exactness</li> </ul>
Formal and content coherence and cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the logical structure of thoughts and information</li> <li>- the range and exactness of textual cohesion and coherence</li> <li>- fluency (pace, planning, hesitation, self-correction)</li> <li>- structure and length of oral performance</li> </ul>
Phonetic aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understandability, pronunciation, and intonation</li> </ul>

**Table 7:** *The evaluation criteria for oral performance/B1 level*

#### **4.1.2 Interactive skills and strategies**

All of the following information are taken and adapted from the Catalogue – basic level (12-13).

Students are able to:

- find out, give, verify and confirm uncomplicated information,
- show and ask for directions,
- start, maintain and finish conversations, as well as to be initiative,
- ask their partners to express themselves,
- comment briefly and to judge their opinions,
- respond to expressed feelings,
- discuss about problems and develop argumentation,
- summarize a discussion,
- compare, consider and discuss about alternatives how to solve problems,
- answer basic questions considering details,
- repeat what was said to make sure they understand each other,
- ask for a repetition, clarification or development,

- ask to make sure that they used a correct term or expression,

#### **4.1.2.1 *Characteristic of interactive skills***

Uncomplicated messages are expressed in an intelligible way and they are sufficiently accurate. Their formulations are simple with adequately developed argumentation. More complicated ideas could be said with limited exactness and range, but it is obvious what students want to say.

Students communicate in an understandable way and correctly in common and familiar contexts. They use basic principles of text structure and also a basic repertoire of strategies, language means and functions. The degree of formality is selected with respect to the situations and receivers. If it is appropriate in their speech, some common colloquial expressions could be used. However, in their communication, there could be evident pauses caused by planning the grammatical and lexical structures, looking for more suitable formulations or because of attempts to connect their thoughts. The influence of their mother tongue could be noticeable, but it cannot disturb its understandability.

Students are able to follow and understand the oral performance that is addressed to them and adequately respond to it.

#### **4.1.2.2 *Characteristic of communication situations and topics***

The interaction of students and partners in communication are related to concrete, daily and easily predictable situations that could happen for example in an interaction with a foreigner or native speaker in the Czech republic, when travelling to foreign countries or during their visit abroad (accommodating, shopping, dealing with offices and so on). Students are also able to handle abstract topics or less common situations, for example a testimony at a police station. These situations and topics are divided into following areas:

- the area of personal life – a family, friends, accommodation,
- the area of personality traits – hobbies, interests,
- the area of public life – transportation, services, events,
- the area of education – education, events organized by the school,
- the area of working life – part-time jobs, future plans, common professions.

#### **4.1.2.3 *Evaluation***

What is really important, when evaluating the oral performances is that it does not cover only grammatical and lexical spheres, but a communication purpose must be taken into consideration as well. Teachers assess two aspects of students' oral performances:

- *whether* they say, what they want to/ have to say
- *how* they say, what they are supposed to say

These aspects are monitored by means of evaluation criteria:

Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adequacy towards assignment,</li> <li>- clear and unambiguous communication,</li> <li>- factual accuracy,</li> <li>- meeting the task,</li> <li>- the range, relevance, understandability of thoughts and/or information</li> <li>- a balance between thoughts and information</li> </ul>
Language means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exactness of language means and its influence on understandability of messages</li> <li>- the range of language means</li> <li>- the effects of communication on receivers</li> </ul>
Functions of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range and exactness</li> </ul>
Formal and content coherence and cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the logical structure of thoughts and information</li> <li>- the range and exactness of textual cohesion and coherence</li> <li>- fluency (pace, planning, hesitation, self-correction)</li> <li>- structure and length of oral performance</li> </ul>
Phonetic aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understandability, pronunciation, and intonation</li> </ul>
Interactive skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge and usage of interactive strategies (for example turn taking)</li> <li>- a degree of dependence upon a partner in communication</li> <li>- an attitude towards their partners in communication (for example showing interest)</li> </ul>

**Table 8:** *The evaluation criteria for interactive skills/B1 level*

## 4.2 *Higher level*

### 4.2.1 *Oral performance*

All of the following information are taken and adapted from the Catalogue – higher level (11-12).

There are receptive and productive skills examined through the Maturita exam. Speaking is one of the productive skills and therefore it includes skills such as:

- to describe people, places, things, events or experience in detail,
- to give information in detail,
- to summarize information and arguments from various resources,
- to compare alternatives,
- to express the relationships between people and objects,
- to express thoughts, opinions and to be able to support them by relevant arguments,
- to justify one's opinion,
- to express agreement/disagreement,
- to develop and give reasons for main ideas,
- to explain a problem,
- to take into consideration possible causes and consequences of problems,
- to formulate hypothesis,
- to ask for a clarification that expression that was used was correct.

These skills are evaluated through more difficult types of speaking:

- detailed description,
- the ability to put across consistent and more complicated messages,
- the ability to perform a high level of information richness,
- book summaries.

#### **4.2.1.1 *Characteristics of oral performance***

It should be understandable, natural, fluent and spontaneous. Students do not have to put a lot of effort into the process of decoding messages. They have no problems with stating their opinions or understanding the other speakers. The oral performance is coherent and clear.

Students are able to communicate without any difficulties within the familiar contexts. They apply the rules of text structure and texture; they use subordinate clauses, idioms and fixed phrases. Students are able to correct themselves if any mistakes occur.

During their speech, fluency might be disturbed by looking for an adequate expression or when they try to formulate long and detailed sentences.

#### 4.2.1.2 *Characteristics of communicative situations and topics*

Oral performances are related to concrete, abstract, familiar as well as unknown topics. The topics are divided into these areas:

- the area of personal life – a family, health, lifestyle, life in a city or village,
- the area of personality traits – an identity, a world view,
- the area of public life – transportation, services, events,
- the area of education – a school, education,
- the area of social life – an environment, nature, global problems, science and technology, sport, media,
- the area of working life – professions, working equipments.

#### 4.2.1.3 *Evaluation*

What is really important, when evaluating oral performances is that it does not cover only grammatical and lexical spheres, but also a communication purpose must be taken into consideration as well. Teachers assess two aspects of students' oral performances:

- *whether* they say, what they want to/ have to say
- *how* they say, what they are supposed to say

These aspects are monitored by means of evaluation criteria:

Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adequacy towards assignment,</li> <li>- clear and unambiguous communication,</li> <li>- factual accuracy,</li> <li>- meeting the task,</li> <li>- the range, relevance, understandability of thoughts and/or information</li> <li>- a balance between thoughts and information</li> </ul>
Language means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exactness of language means and its influence on understandability</li> </ul>

	of messages - the range of language means - the effects of communication on receivers - the degree of mother-tongue interference
Functions of language	- the range and exactness
Formal and content coherence and cohesion	- the logical structure of thoughts and information - the range and exactness of textual cohesion and coherence - fluency (pace, planning, hesitation, self-correction) - structure and length of oral performance
Phonetic aspects	- understandability, pronunciation, and intonation - the degree of mother-tongue interference

**Table 9:** *The evaluation criteria for oral performance/B2 level*

#### **4.2.2 Interactive skills and strategies**

All of the following information are taken and adapted from the Catalogue – higher level (13-14).

Students are able to:

- find out, give, verify and confirm information,
- exchange information and advice,
- start, maintain and finish conversation,
- take parts in communication,
- discuss about problems and help to develop a discussion,
- summarize the discussion,
- initiate the discussion,
- ask questions and react promptly,
- ask complementary questions,
- develop and comment on their partner's thoughts and ideas,
- assess alternative suggestions,
- react to arguments, opinions and hypotheses,
- react to expressed feelings and show interest,
- react to problems and give explanations,
- present reasons to complaints,

- state the compromises that should be done in a communication,
- ask for clarification of phrases they are not sure about.

#### 4.2.2.1 *Characteristics of interactive skills*

Students communicate in a natural way, they are spontaneous and they do not have to put a lot of effort into their communication. Their speech is developed in a systematic way and it forms a clear, coherent whole. Students are able to communicate properly in familiar contexts. They avoid the repetition. The degree of formality is chosen with the respect to the situations and receivers. Students take an active part in the conversations and interactions. Their pace, pronunciation and accent are standard. In addition, they might use some colloquial expressions as well.

#### 4.2.2.2 *Characteristics of communicative situations and topics*

The interaction is related to concrete, abstract, familiar as well as unknown topics. The topics are divided into several areas, which are the same as in oral performance.

- the area of personal life – friends, health, lifestyle, accommodation,
- the area of personality traits – an identity, a world view,
- the area of public life – transportation, services, social, sport and cultural events,
- the area of education – a school, events organized by schools,
- the area of working life – part-time jobs, professions.

#### 4.2.2.3 *Evaluation*

What is really important when evaluating oral performances is that it does not cover only grammatical and lexical spheres, but a communication purpose must be taken into consideration as well. Teachers assess two aspects of students' oral performances:

- *whether* they say, what they want to/ have to say
- *how* they say, what they are supposed to say

These aspects are monitored by means of evaluation criteria:

Assignment	- adequacy towards assignment, - clear and unambiguous communication,
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- factual accuracy,</li> <li>- meeting the task,</li> <li>- the range, relevance, understandability of thoughts and/or information</li> <li>- balance between thoughts and information</li> </ul>
Language means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exactness of language means and its influence on understandability of messages</li> <li>- the range of language means</li> <li>- the effects of communication on receivers</li> <li>- the degree of mother-tongue interference</li> </ul>
Functions of language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the range and exactness</li> </ul>
Formal and content coherence and cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the logical structure of thoughts and information</li> <li>- the range and exactness of textual cohesion and coherence</li> <li>- fluency (pace, planning, hesitation, self-correction)</li> <li>- structure and length of oral performance</li> </ul>
Phonetic aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understandability, pronunciation, and intonation</li> <li>- the degree of mother-tongue interference</li> </ul>
Interactive skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- knowledge and usage of interactive strategies (for example turn taking)</li> <li>- a degree of dependence upon a partner in communication</li> <li>- an attitude towards their partners in communication (for example showing interest)</li> </ul>

**Table 10:** *The evaluation criteria for interactive skills/B2 level*

### **4.3 Comparison of B1 and B2 levels**

At this point, we compare these two levels and find out the differences between oral performances and interactions.

#### **4.3.1. Comparison of oral performances**

The differences in oral performances of these two levels lay mainly in the specificity of topics, range, accurateness and variability of expected language means and at

the syntactic level as well. Another difference is also in evaluation – students at B2 level should be aware of the degree of mother-tongue interference, as it is also included in their evaluation criteria.

At the basic level (B1), students are expected to provide sufficient amount of information, their speech can be slower, pauses and hesitations are expected, too. Oral performances of students are examined by the basic types of discourse:

- simple descriptions of things, places, people, situations, events, working procedures,
- uncomplicated narration,
- effortlessly formulated presentation.

On the other hand, students at the higher level (B2) must provide more detailed information, be able to develop their ideas and they should be fluent and spontaneous in their speech. Oral performances of these students are examined by more difficult types of discourse:

- detailed descriptions of places, events, working procedures,
- fluent and more complicated narration from the linguistic as well as contextual perspective,
- information-rich presentation,
- a summary of a book.

Some tasks are similar at both levels, such as comparing the alternatives, expressing agreement or disagreement and asking for clarification of some words they use.

#### ***4.3.2. Comparison of interaction***

Interactive skills are very similar in both cases. All students are examined by common types of interactions, such as:

- formal and informal dialogue,
- informal discussion,
- structured interview.

B2 level students are more active, they are able to take turns in conversation, be initiative, ask complementary questions and exchange advice and information. There is also a difference in evaluation concerning the degree of mother-tongue interference.

B1 level students are not initiative, they answer questions in a simple way, provide some uncomplicated information and they should be able to respond promptly and in a

satisfactory way.

Some features are the same for both levels, such as:

- to find out, provide, verify and confirm information,
- to start, maintain and finish conversation,
- to discuss about problems and develop some ideas.

## **II. Practical part**

### **5 *Quantitative research***

In this part we would like to focus on the course books that are used in the teaching-learning process at schools. The books are examined from the perspective of the preparation for the Maturita exam. The aim is to find out whether and how they enable students to obtain and improve their speaking skills with regard to being successful in the Maturita exam.

#### **5.1 *Sets of books***

We use three sets of books for our research and we analyse the speaking activities important for the Maturita exam only. The level of the books is chosen according to the levels which correspond with the levels that are used for the Maturita exam diversification. We choose pre-intermediate level for B1 level and upper-intermediate level for B2 level. We realize that the differences and range of the levels are overlapping and books chosen for particular schools can differ.

The books we choose are: Maturita Solutions, New Headway and New English File. According to our Internet research, these book are used in several schools in the Czech Republic<sup>2</sup>.

The books Maturita Solutions are divided into two parts in this research: firstly we examine the section called “*Get ready for your exam*” separately and secondly we analyse the rest of the book. The two other sets of books are observed and analysed as a whole, we do not differentiate between any parts within them. Students can practise and develop their speaking skills using these particular techniques: picture-based discussions, topic-based discussions and situational role-plays in all of these books.

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2 For more information see the following web pages

<<http://www.gytool.cz/predmetove-komise/aj/?s=ucebnice>>

<[http://www.gjb-spgs.cz/pouzivane-ucebnice-anglicky-jazyk-predmetove-komise-k\\_38.html](http://www.gjb-spgs.cz/pouzivane-ucebnice-anglicky-jazyk-predmetove-komise-k_38.html)>

<<http://www.gymjat.cz/vzdelavani/seznamy-ucebnic#8>>

<<http://chemgym.cz/?id=gymnazium-ucebnice>>

Let us introduce these books briefly:

1. Maturita Solutions/pre-intermediate – there are ten units which represent more or less basic and everyday themes. After the first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth unit, there are special sections dedicated to practising skills for the Maturita exam mainly. These sections are called “*Get ready for your exam*”. This book is very nice, colourful and well organized. Topics are interesting and they cover some of the Maturita topics as well.
2. Maturita Solutions/upper-intermediate – there are also ten units in this book, however, the topics are different and the section “*Get ready for your exam*” appears after every unit. The book is attractive and level appropriate. At the end of this book there are some extra communicative activities which require some cooperation.
3. New Headway/pre-intermediate – this book includes twelve units and again, the topics are age appropriate and intriguing for students. There is no such thing as practising students' knowledge after every unit in the book itself. At the end of this book there are further materials dedicated to pair work activities.
4. New Headway/upper-intermediate – twelve units are there for students in this book. The topics are quite nice for students, but there are a lot of grammar-oriented tasks and therefore it is more difficult. Complementary exercises for speaking are added at the end of the book as well.
5. New English File/pre-intermediate – there are nine units that cover everyday topics which are very close to students. After each unit, there is a place for the practical English, where students can apply all their knowledge from the prior sections. At the end of this book, there are some additional exercises for practising communication for student A and B.
6. New English File/upper-intermediate – this book has seven units and after each of them, there is a “*Revise and check*” segment for students, to realize how much they know or do not know. At the end of this book, there are extra exercises for communication and pair work. It also has an English-Czech dictionary at the end.

In our research, we always have a look at pictures, tasks for discussions and challenges for expressing students' opinions and thoughts. The category “Discussions” is also divided into several sub-categories. The reason for this is that within this category, there are many different types of exercises so at the end of each analysis we provide a chart to illustrate it.

### ***5.2 Techniques for examining and evaluating the oral performance***

According to *The Catalogue of Requirements for the Maturita Exam (18 basic level, 20 higher level)*, there are several tasks that must be accomplished during the oral performance of students. These tasks are divided into four parts.

The first part is a small motivational discussion, teachers ask a few questions and students should react in as much detail as they can. The questions are related to common topics. This part is the same for both levels.

The second part also concerns about common topics, however, it is connected to a picture description; at basic level, students choose and describe one of the given pictures, they compare the pictures with each other and they might also share some of their experiences within the given topic. At the higher level, students compare and contrast the pictures. Moreover, they should also express their opinion about some statements or thoughts given and say whether they agree or disagree with them.

The third part is the profile part, which allows individual schools to include specific topics set by themselves. It may contain two or three different tasks. Firstly, students are supposed to talk on their own about the given topic and secondly, there can be a role-play. Students and interlocutors talk together.

In the fourth part, there is also a role-play. Here, students must show the ability to decide, choose and perhaps recommend or suggest the best ideas and concepts. Examiners usually play the role of students' friends or teachers.

Students always have some pictures and suggestions to help them to organize their thoughts and ideas. The instructions and tasks differ according to the level of difficulty, but in their foundations they are the same. We can say that there are three basic techniques how to examine and evaluate speaking skills, namely: a picture description, a discussion and expressing opinions and giving reasons.

### ***5.3 A picture description***

This technique is very important for students as well as for teachers. It shows teachers students' ability to describe, compare or contrast different things. They can also observe if students differentiate between continuous and simple tenses and many other aspects of their knowledge of the English language. In the Maturita exam, pictures are on a separate handout and they are very important for students, therefore they should be very well prepared for this kind of activity.

#### ***5.3.1 Maturita Solutions/pre-intermediate***

In this book, there are many opportunities for students to work with pictures. For instance, the very first exercise from the segment “Get ready for your exam” is from the category “picture-based discussion”, but it is done in a quite unusual way; students do not describe the picture on their own, they have to match the beginnings of sentences from column A with the endings from column B/<sup>3</sup>. This is a good kind of practice for them, since they see and are assured of what tense they should use when they describe a picture. The following exercises make students more active and they are stimulated to take a part in speaking. In connection to the picture description, there are many phrases and various kinds of language that student can use. They apply this gained knowledge immediately – after such phrases or sentences, there is another picture where they can try to use it.

In this special section, there is also a part called “(speaking) exam task”, where students can see the concrete and specific exercises that are used for the Maturita exam. For example, there is the picture/<sup>4</sup> with a group of people and several questions, such as: “Where are the people?”, “What are they doing?” and so on. Students should also give reasons for their opinions.

Another nice exercise for describing pictures is matching two different pictures with given words/<sup>5</sup>. The activity related to this task is done in pairs and students should compare the photos, in other words, to find some similarities and differences. There are also some phrases to help them with comparing the pictures.

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3 See Appendix 1

4 See Appendix 1

5 See Appendix 2

Other tasks related to the description of pictures are very similar to the ones mentioned above. Sometimes there are some alternatives or modifications. For instance, when students should compare and contrast two pictures, they also have a few additional ideas to think about, so they do not only describe what they can see, but also what can be hidden.

Within this section, there are 9 picture-describing activities.

The rest of this book is filled up with pictures and tasks for description as well. Altogether, there are approximately 30 exercises based on describing pictures. There are also some other tasks with pictures, but it is mostly labelling. These activities, students are supposed to do, are very similar to the activities mentioned in the special section. Every time there is a text and reading or listening activity, there are also some pictures students should describe. They are used mainly as pre-speaking activities or post-speaking activities. The most frequent task is to describe what is happening in the photos. Many of the pictures are also accompanied by more additional questions that require a personal input of students.

### **5.3.2      *Maturita Solutions/upper-intermediate***

This book is very similar to the previous one in its layout, but the exercises differ, which is expected due to the differentiation of the levels. Nevertheless, there are many pictures to be described and this kind of task can be found throughout the whole book.

The part “*Get ready for your exam*” supplies students with several picture-description tasks and they are alike to the exercises in the pre-intermediate version of this book. Altogether, there are 6 tasks where students work with some pictures. All the activities ask students to compare and contrast the pictures. In comparison to the lower level of this book, there are less exercises for practising a picture description. But on the other hand, if students need more practice, there are many pictures without connection to this specific task that can be used for it without a doubt.

The rest of the book is filled with 24 other exercises for practising this specific sub-skill. In terms of picture-based descriptions, the tasks are very similar to the ones

mentioned above, for instance what is happening, where are the people and so on/<sup>6</sup>. In addition, there are some exercises with matching and labelling the pictures that are good for practising new vocabulary.

### **5.3.3      *New Headway/pre-intermediate***

There are two kinds of picture description activities in this book. We labelled them as “Pictures for description” and “Pictures for illustrations”/<sup>7</sup>. The difference between them is that the first category is the one for practising speaking skills, whereas the second category includes exercises, where pictures are mentioned within the instructions, however, they are not necessary for the task itself. They only represent some sort of illustration and link to the exercises. Nevertheless, many of these pictures can be used for a description if teachers insist on it.

Within the first category, there are eighteen exercises which invite students to practise their skills and communication strategies. Usually, the instructions call for a description of people and places/<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, students can also predict or guess what happens next. Some exercises also have quite a few questions regarding to the pictures. Two tasks that are included in this group are classified as writing activities in the book, but they can be also used as speaking activities.

The second category, which basically covers pictures with no explicit request for description, is also important. Even though, students do not have to use these pictures in order to complete the tasks successfully, they can be a great help for some students, who prefer working with concrete images and visualizations. Altogether, there are fifteen exercises of this kind.

### **5.3.4      *New Headway/upper-intermediate***

This book supplies 9 exercises for a picture description. Some of them are connected to the usual description – who is there and what are they doing; some of them require also some students' experience or opinion to add/<sup>9</sup>. One of the exercises even challenge students to describe it for their partners. The students who listen must guess what their partners describe. There are also very interesting picture-description exercises, which

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6 See Appendix 3

7 See Appendix 4

8 See Appendix 5

9 See Appendix 6

ask students to find similarities between some pictures and headline or statements.

Nine opportunities to practise one particular task is maybe not enough, but as in many other books, there are lots of photos that can be used for practising descriptions and improve this technique if it is necessary.

### **5.3.5      *English New File/pre-intermediate***

In this book, there are many pictures, but not all of them are specifically used for descriptions. Pictures, which require describing<sup>10</sup>, can be found in 18 exercises. The task is standard – students should say what they can see and what is happening on the pictures. There are also tasks, which ask for pair work and one of the students tries to describe his/her picture to the other one and following the first student's instructions, the other one must draw it and vice versa. These tasks also have some grammatical background; students look at the picture for one minute and then close the book and try to remember what is in it, using “there is/there are” when describing the picture.

As in the other books, here are also 15 exercises connected to some pictures, but the instructions say only “Look at the photos”, and the following task could be done regardless of these pictures. They are only illustrations for children. Of course, they can be used for descriptions if it is needed. This book has also many other pictures, which are not taken into consideration within the instructions, but teachers are welcome to work with them.

### **5.3.6      *English New File/upper-intermediate***

This book provides even less chances to practise this specific sub-skill. The pictures are again divided into two exact categories as in the prior analysed books. The total number of the photos, which should be described by students, is 11. The exercises are very similar to the previous book. Students should describe what they can see and what is happening in the pictures, moreover, they describe their picture to the other one and they have to guess what it is and vice versa.

The other nine pictures from the second category have the same purpose as in the previous books; they only illustrate the topic and may help students to imagine and understand the topic better.

## **5.4 Discussion**

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 7

This particular sub-skill of speaking practice is essential for students. Without it they would not be able to take an active part in talking, they would not know how to ask for some opinions or advice. Students learn not only how to talk, but also how to listen and react. In the Maturita exam, there are many occasions which lead to question-answer communication and students must know how to deal with it.

#### **5.4.1 Maturita Solutions/pre-intermediate**

The part called “*Get ready for your exam*” includes only two exercises for discussion or pair work. One of them is a post-speaking activity and students should recall one particular thing from the text. Although this activity should be done in pairs (as stated in the book), there is not a lot of space for discussion.

The second speaking task is more suitable for discussion. Students should agree on an event and think about some conditions and circumstances related to the topic.

In the rest of the book, there are plenty of exercises for practising speaking in pairs. From the exercises that are used in this book, the most frequent one is “Ask and answer” task. There are 32 activities based on working in pairs and having discussion. The other tasks include interviews, role-plays and many other activities.

The most common type of task, as we named it, is “Ask and answer”. In this exercise students usually work in pairs and practise asking and answering questions. The questions are either related to the topic or they make students practising some grammatical structures. It overlaps with the exercises that are also grammar-oriented but they are based on dialogue rather than queries, for instance descriptions, inventing reasons to do or not to do something, using direct speech, detecting problems and finding solutions, and so on. Here is an example of “Ask and answer” exercises:

- Work in pairs. Ask and answer the questions.
  - How often do you use a mobile phone?
  - What do you use it for?
  - What do you think you will use it for in the future? p. 56
- Work in pairs. Ask and answer questions with *How long...?* and *for* or *since*. Use the phrases from the box and your own ideas.
  - Be at this school?
  - Know me?

The next type of exercises, which can be labelled as “Tell me about yourself” contain speaking about students' interests, likes and dislikes and their wishes. It is usually done in pairs.

The next kind of task is a role-play. There are two types of role-plays in this book. The first one is based on the dialogues students should read together and then practise them as role-plays. The second one is based on students imagination, they invent a similar role-play and act it out in front of their classmates.

Another group of exercises is connected to interviews. It can again overlap with “Ask and answer” tasks or with role-plays.

More exercises that concern speaking activities are tied to the articles in the book and students should express their opinions about some facts or issues.

There is also one very interesting discovery. In this book, there is only one activity for group work. All the activities are done in pairs, very few of them are done individually and only one is done in small groups. Maybe it is caused by the topic itself related to this particular activity. The task is to discuss the problems of the environment and how to improve it. It can be seen as a controversial topic so the discussion could be very lively.

The very last type of tasks that is included in speaking activities comes under the category of “The others”. These exercises do not have common features with the prior categories and students do not communicate with the other students. There are activities such as memory games and talking on their own.

For a better overview we provide this table:

<i>Type of task</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Role-plays	12	15.19%
“Ask and answer”	38	48.10%
Discussion	12	15.19%
Group work	1	1.27%
The others	16	20.25%
<b>Together</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 11: Types of tasks/Maturita Solutions: pre-intermediate*

To sum it up, from the table we can see that the most popular activity used in this

book is based on asking and answering the questions. Students very often work in pairs and they practise it together. The second most used exercise is talking on their own, students usually tell some stories to the class. The least used task is group work – there is only one exercise.

#### **5.4.2 Maturita Solutions/upper-intermediate**

The section “*Get ready for your exam*” includes 7 tasks that are based on discussions. These tasks differ from the ones in the book of pre-intermediate level in the number of tasks and their variations. Students are supposed to discuss in pairs about some topics and come to some conclusions which they can present in front of their classmates. They also have to work with charts and tables to gain the needed information and discuss it with their partners. Another type of speaking activity that is included in this part is making a list of various things that are related to some topics and discuss its advantages and disadvantages. An interview is also included in this section.

The rest of the book covers a lot of exercises that are suitable for preparation for the Maturita oral performance. The tasks are again divided into several categories, thus it helps to keep it clear and evident. The grammar-oriented exercises are done within two other categories, which are “Ask and answer” and “Discussion”.

Moreover, there is one thing that contrasts with the previous book and that is group work. Students who use this book are more challenged to work and discuss in groups and express their opinions or feelings. In the groups, students either discuss and agree on something or they brainstorm some ideas. They also learn how to give suggestions, reasons and opinions. Some exercises are explicitly done for groups, other exercise can be done in pairs or groups. It probably depends on teachers and students and their decision.

The category “The others” includes speaking tasks that do not have to be done in pairs or groups, however, some speaking is required. These activities are done either individually or in pairs, but students do not interact with each other; they simply say their part and wait for their partner to finish as well.

For a better overview we provide this table:

<i>Type of task</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Role-plays	2	2.56%
“Ask and answer”	15	19.23%

Group work	5	6.41%
Discuss in pairs	38	48.72%
The others	18	23.08%
<b>Together</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 12: Types of tasks/Maturita Solutions: upper-intermediate*

To draw a conclusion, we must say that there is sufficiently enough space for discussions and for exchanging information in this book. Although there is quite a small number of role-plays and interviews, the technique of asking and answering questions is covered very well. Students also have a lot of opportunities to express themselves individually.

### **5.4.3      *New Headway/pre-intermediate***

In this book, there are many speaking activities which could help students improve their speaking skills. Few of the speaking tasks are focused on pronunciation and stress, but we do not analyse them.

The most frequent exercises are from the category “Ask and answer”. Students give questions and provide answers on the variety of topics. These can be personal questions or simply grammatical exercises, where students practise forming questions or try to apply some new grammatical or lexical structures/<sup>11</sup>.

The second most frequent task, which is discussion, can be done in pairs, in small groups, or even as communication with a teacher. These tasks prepare students for the next step, which is expressing their own opinion or giving some reasons for their ideas and thoughts. Students usually discuss the questions related to the current topic and their lives or questions that are either pre-speaking activities or follow-up speaking activities to listening or reading tasks. Many questions occur with additional “Why/Why not?” questions. This allows students to formulate their ideas and thoughts as well as present them in the safe environment of the small groups or pairs. Naturally, these exercises are also grammar-oriented.

The previous category slightly overlaps with group work, where we can find the same features. The reason why they are separated is the instructions in the book. Group work is explicitly required in 8 exercises.

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 8

There is also no specific demand for interviews, either. However, it can be covered within the category of role-plays. These role-plays are more or less all accuracy-oriented, because they desire to use new expressions or structures. Students are even asked to learn some of them by heart and then act it out in front of their classmates.

The last category we established in this book is the category “The others”. It covers exercises where students speak on their own and it can nicely coincide with the different strategies, such as expressing their opinions. Students describe, tell something to their partners or to the whole class, give directions, and so on.

For a better overview we provide this table:

<i>Type of task</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Group work	8	10.13%
Discussion	18	22.78%
Role-plays	11	13.92%
“Ask and answer”	33	41.77%
The others	9	11.39%
<b>Together</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 13: Types of tasks/New Headway: pre-intermediate*

We can see that in this book, there is much more space for discussion and conversation, than it is for talking individually. The most frequent exercise involves querying and getting particular information. There is a big contrast between the interactive and non-interactive exercises.

#### **5.4.4      *New Headway/upper-intermediate***

This book offers quite a lot of chances to talk together or discuss. Altogether, there are 51 exercises where students can use their speaking sub-skills in practice. In the contrast to the other books, this one provides less opportunities for asking and answering questions oriented on grammatical structures. But bearing in mind that this practical area of language should already be at a higher level, this book focuses mostly on activities for oral fluency. This can be proved also by the fact that more speaking activities from this book are categorized in the section of expressing students' opinions.

The most common task is discussion in small groups. The exercises in this category are very similar to the other ones, the main distinction is that they are done in groups rather than in pairs or individually. Students are not only asked to discuss, but also argue and

agree on some topics or statements, they should present their ideas for or against different sayings or propositions. One of the tasks is also to suggest some solutions. Very interesting thing to do as a speaking activity is a class debate, where students agree on one topic they would like to talk about. Then in small groups they discuss it, brainstorm and list group's ideas and beliefs. Afterwards the groups present their conclusions and have a further discussion as a whole class. All of these categories are almost equal in amount and value.

The group of exercises which familiarize students with talking on their own is also presented in this book and the tasks are very similar to the previous ones. For instance, students are asked to talk to their partners about their lives and experiences, or they should show their ability to talk in front of the whole class. There is also one very intriguing activity which makes students cooperate with each other and gain some required information. It is arranged as a game and it is based on speaking as well as listening. Students should investigate a murder and by working together they should come to the successful end. After the game they also discuss some questions concerning their actions and investigation.

For a better overview we provide this table:.

<i>Type of task</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
“Ask and answer”	11	21.57%
Discuss	7	13.73%
Role-plays	10	19.61%
Group work	12	23.53%
“The others”	11	21.57%
<b>Together</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 14: Types of tasks/New Headway: upper-intermediate*

These information lead to the conclusion that exercises in this book are sorted out equally and students can practise all kinds of speaking activities.

#### **5.4.5      *New English File/pre-intermediate***

This book is a little less communication-oriented than the previous ones. It contains 67 exercises that provide students some space to practise their communicative skills. These exercises are divided into five categories, specifically group work, interviews, role-plays,

“Ask and answer” and “The others”.

The most repeated exercise in this book is from the category “Ask and answer”. It covers more than a half of the speaking activities and students are encouraged to work in pairs and interact together. The topics they talk about are either personal or connected to the new grammatical structures that students are supposed to learn and practise. Sometimes the whole questions are given and students have to answer them in pairs. These are usually fluency-oriented.

- Ask and answer with a partner.
  - Do you do any sports? Which one(s)?
  - Which sports do you enjoy/hate watching?
  - Are you a fan of a sports team? Which one? p. 58

Another technique how they can practise asking questions is that students have only some words given and they have to form the correct questions. These are usually grammar-oriented.

- Make five questions with the present perfect and a superlative. Then ask your partner the questions.
  - What/hot place/ever/be to?
  - What/bad film/ever/see?
  - Who/generous person/ever/meet? p. 51

Occasionally they can ask what they want. Group work is not done very often in this book, but there is a lot of opportunities to practise speaking in pairs.

There are also some exercises for interviews and role-plays. Again, there can be an overlap with the category “Ask and answer” where students talk to each other and ask many questions. However, they have a chance to pretend to be somebody else when they role-play an interview.

The last category put into this division is the category “The others” where students do not interact with their classmates, even though many of these exercises are done in pairs. They simply talk about some events from their lives and they listen to each other. When one of them is finished, the second one may ask some additional questions, but s/he should continue with his/her speech, too.

For a better overview we provide this table:

<i>Type of tasks</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
“Ask and answer”	43	64.18%

Group work	3	4.48%
Role-plays	8	11.94%
“The others”	13	19.40%
<b>Together</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 15: Types of tasks/New English File: pre-intermediate*

To sum up, the most frequent exercise in this book prepares students for asking and answering the questions. The ability to talk on their own can be achieved with the help of this book as well, because there is more than one fifth of the total amount.

#### **5.4.6      *New English File/upper-intermediate***

In this book, students have many different tasks to accomplish during the speaking activities. They have more opportunities to be creative. They do not only ask and answer questions, but they have some discussions with their partners as well. They can practise interaction within interviews and role-plays, too.

Talking with partners or in groups is the most frequent task in this book. Students talk about many different topics and from many different purposes. Sometimes they are asked to talk about their lives and their experiences, sometimes the discussion is connected to the texts and some extra questions related to it. Discussion can sometimes overlap with group work, students can discuss either in pairs or groups. It probably depends on classroom management.

Several times, there is a specific demand for working in groups and in these cases, students have many challenging tasks to accomplish. For instance, they have to decide or argue and afterwards agree on something, they must talk, discuss and give examples or simply ask and answer some questions about various topics.

Students are also given the opportunity to talk on their own and exercises made for this purpose vary. For example, students tell some stories, they try to persuade their partners by their arguments, they do a presentation. The last but not the least, is the exercise, where students should talk about one topic for about one minute while their partner watches the time and then they swap.

For a better overview we provide this table:

<i>Type of tasks</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
“Ask and answer”	10	15.15%

Discussion	36	54.55%
Group work	10	15.15%
Role-plays	3	4.55%
“The others”	7	10.61%
<b>Together</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Table 16: Types of tasks/New English File: upper-intermediate*

All in all, there is a slight difference between this book and the previous ones, because the category “Ask and answer” is recognizably smaller. On the other hand, it has a bigger number of tasks in the category of group work.

### **5.5 Expressing opinions and giving reasons**

Discussion is always very important when practising speaking skills. Nevertheless, students should be very well prepared for their Maturita exam also from the other point of view. In fact, they should be able to talk on their own as well. The important thing is that they have to learn how to organize their thoughts and ideas, how to express these concepts within one holistic context and how to put into words whether they agree or disagree with their opponents' statements.

#### **5.5.1 Maturita solutions/pre-intermediate**

In the “*Get ready for your exam*” part we can find some tasks that encourage students to talk on their own and express their feelings, ideas or opinions. Altogether there are 3 such activities. The first of them is to choose two things from the list that makes them happy and tell why. All the sentences are linked to their free time and relationships.

The second speaking task is connected to gadgets and their usage and students are supposed to articulate which one is the most important and useful. There are also some complementary questions about their life with and without domestic appliances.

The last exercise dealing with a discussion in this section is connected to the weather and natural disasters. Students should think of problems caused by the weather in their countries.

The rest of the book is also filled up with similar tasks. Altogether, there are 25

exercises for expressing students' ideas. For example, there are some statements in the book which students have to comment on, say whether they agree or disagree with them. In addition, they must give reasons why<sup>12</sup>.

- Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons.
  - Technology is making the world a better place. p. 58

A modification of these exercises can be seen in the task where students should choose their favourite and least favourite style of fiction.

Students should also state, what do they think about many issues connected to the texts in the book.

- What do you think of the advice that Lucy gives? Would you give different advice?  
p. 80

One more category that is included in this section is called “Questions without addressees” and these may test common knowledge of students or simply ask about some facts from students' lives. It is not clear whether students should answer them in pairs or on their own. Therefore we put them into individual category.

- Have you read any of the books in exercise 1? Do you know any other books by the same authors?  
p. 94

### 5.5.2 *Maturita solutions/upper-intermediate*

The part “*Getting ready for your exam*” is more satisfactory in terms of expressing opinions and giving reasons than the previous book. There are 4 tasks for practising this speaking sub-skill. These tasks are constructed as statements and students should be able to respond to them. They express their opinion and give reasons why they think what they think.

The rest of the book deals with this issue very well. There are 36 activities concerning students' opinions and reasons. They could be sorted into several categories, such as:

- “Agree/disagree” - this category is self-explanatory, students should decide whether they agree or disagree with the given statements or quotations and tell the reasons why<sup>13</sup>.
- “Work in pairs and justify your opinion” - it is similar to the exercises students do

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12 See Appendix 1

13 See Appendix 3

in discussions, but they have to also justify their own statements.

- “Group work” - students are divided into two groups; one of them is in favour of something and the other one is against. Students form their arguments and reasons and discuss it with their opponents.
- “Imagine” - this is a kind of tasks that is very common in course books. It asks students questions like “What would you do if...”
- “What do you think” - students express their opinions on some issues or topics. It can be done as an individual work or in groups or pairs.

### **5.5.3      *New Headway/pre-intermediate***

New Headway offers 46 chances to comment on divers topics and queries. We also divide them into two categories, namely “What do you think” and “Questions without addressees”.

The first one covers questions that can be answered either by individuals or groups of students. It is a special kind of exercise in this book, its proper name also corresponds with our label. However, there are many types of tasks under this category. They are either connected to the articles and songs or students' personal experiences. Pupils also answer the questions about everyday life. Students can answer them on their own or discuss their ideas and opinions in small groups.

- The teenage years can be difficult for both children and parents. Why, do you think? What can go wrong? Why do teenagers feel the need to rebel against their parents? p. 42

The second group contains also questions that could be answered both orally or in writing. Moreover, it is not clear who should reply to these questions and if they should be answered and discussed at all.

- Do you often go shopping? What do you like going shopping for? What don't you like going shopping for? p. 36

Sometimes it seems that they are only for evoking the atmosphere for students there and for a purpose of a lead-in. For this reason, it is essential that teachers would be proactive and set clear instructions for these exercises. This category accommodates twice as much exercises as the previous one. All in all, every single exercise is very important for students' ability to tell what they think and why.

### **5.5.4      *New Headway/upper-intermediate***

Three basic categories that occur in all of the books are presented here as well. The most exercises are included in the category “What do you think”. Students are asked many different questions about their lives and their opinions about some facts in order to express their feelings and beliefs.

- What do you think?
  - Which theories are the most believable/unbelievable?
  - What is it about the Internet that breeds such theories? p. 38

Students must also show that they are able to formulate their ideas and thoughts about various topics and whether they agree or disagree with given statements.

- What arguments do the anti-globalization protesters make against Starbucks and other multinational corporations? Do you agree? p. 59

There is also one category that contains questions for nobody and for everyone; these questions does not have any addressees and they inquire about common knowledge or students' experiences.

- Do you know any films about cowboys and Indians? What is a typical plot? Who are the “good guys” and who are the “bad guys”? Do you have a favourite western? p. 90

Altogether, there are 49 exercises for students to provide some space to put into words what is in their minds.

#### **5.5.5      *New English File/pre-intermediate***

Together, there are 23 exercises divided into three categories. There is a very fine distinction between the categories which are labelled as “What do you think” and “Questions without addressees”. In the first category, there are tasks which ask students to articulate their opinions on specific subject matter and support their statements by saying why yes or no. In the second category, there are questions that are related more to students' experiences or common knowledge. They do not have to give the reason why they think so or not. Here are the examples from the book:

- “What do you think” - “Who do you think knows you better, your family or your friends? Why?” (p. 6)
- “Questions with no addressees” - “When was the last time you went to an airport (or station)? Were you meeting someone or going somewhere?” (p. 28)

There is, however, one thing these two tasks do have in common. Neither of them states whether they should be discussed in pairs, groups or if they should be answered individually. It is not even clear whether these tasks are meant for speaking or writing activities. It seems that it is up to teachers and their decisions.

There is also one more type put into this category, which is named “Agree/disagree”. Even though, there is only one such exercise, this particular technique can be easily and nicely practised within the previous two categories.

### **5.5.6 *New English File/upper-intermediate***

In this book, there are plenty of exercises which help students to express their opinions and state their thoughts. As in the previous book, there are two categories which contain almost the same questions, however, there is a small difference. “What do you think” and “Questions with no addressees” ask for students answers, opinions, plans or desires, but they do instruct them how they should do it. These activities can be done in pairs or groups, they can be answered individually or they can be only thought of.

Students should state whether they agree or disagree with something in 5 exercises. Furthermore, it can be done individually, in pairs or groups as well. New task for them is to give reasons why do they think or say so; explicitly it is requested in two exercises, but they can surely express these facts in other exercises, too.

In total number, there are 42 exercises for students to talk about their ideas and opinions.

As an example, we provide two exercises from both categories:

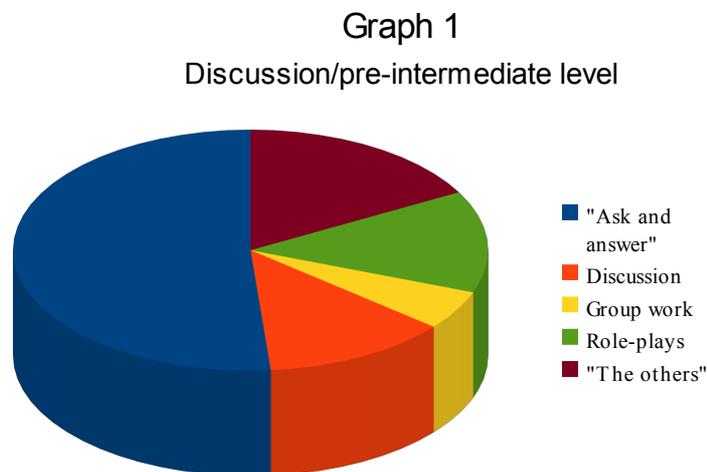
- “what do you think” - “What do you think of Amy and the way she trained her husband? Is there anyone you would like to train? What technique do you think would work best?” (p. 57)
- “questions with no addressees” - “Which of the places he mentions would you most like to see? How would you answer the same questions about a city or town that you know well?” (p. 90)

## **5.6 *Conclusion***

The analysis of these books shows us how students can be prepared for their Maturita oral examination. For better comparison we use the arithmetic mean of all exercises to find out the frequency of tasks used for speaking activities.

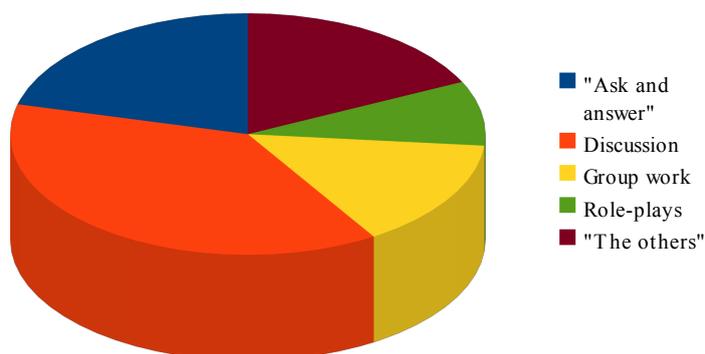
To compare the frequency of specific exercises at different levels we put all the categories at both levels together and compare them. For this purpose we use so called pie charts.

Firstly we compare exercises that are related to discussions at pre-intermediate level. As it is shown in Graph 1, tasks from the category “Ask and answer” occupy more than half of it. Students at this level are involved in gaining and providing information more than in any other task. Mostly, this activity is done in pairs, which also influence students' participation in groups. The category that is labelled “The others” includes the second most common exercise, which requires that students talk on their own. Discussions and role-plays are approximately of the same size.



The second graph shows the difference between the frequency of categories used at higher level. Clearly, students are more involved in discussions, which require more interaction with their partners. It is not only about queering and providing information, students also have to listen and pay attention to their partners. Their participation in groups is also bigger. However, the category “The others” appears to be the same at both levels.

Graph 2  
Discussion/upper-intermediate level

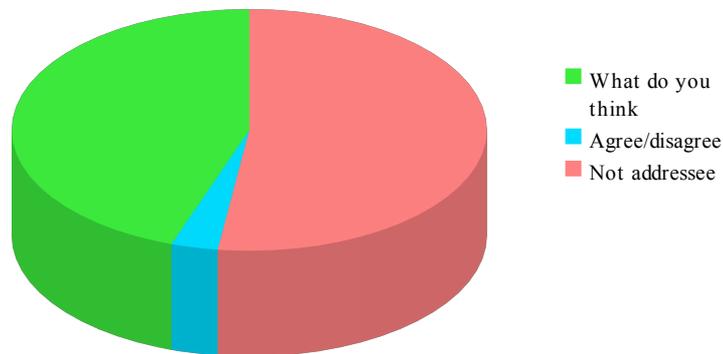


The third graph implies that at pre-intermediate level students face a lot of questions that do not have a particular addressee. Nevertheless, these questions are not purposeless. They do contain all different types of questions, such as stating students' opinions, giving the reasons for their answers, agreeing or disagreeing with some statements and so on. The only problem is with the instructions. That is the reason why they are included in a separate category. Students must be guided how to cope with these questions, because it is not evident from the instructions.

The second big part that occurs at pre-intermediate level includes the exercises from the category "What do you think". Here, students should present their opinions or feelings and as we can see, it is covered quite well at this level.

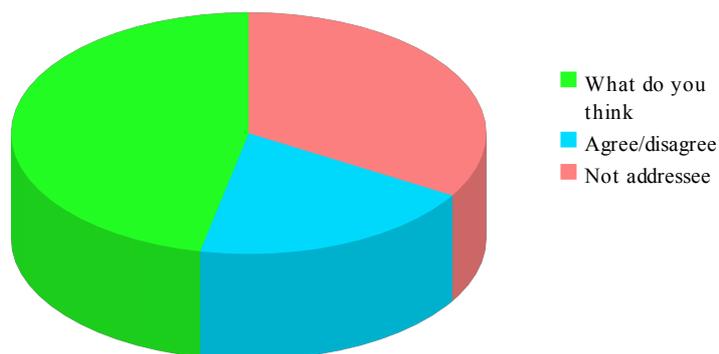
According to the graph, the exercises from the third category do not occur very often. On the other side, the questions that ask for students' agreements or disagreements can be found also within the other two categories. The reason, why it is like this, is because of the instructions. Many times, they are very extensive and they include more tasks in one exercise. Therefore, this categorization could be done differently by somebody else. Thus, it does not mean that there are not enough exercises for presenting students' agreements or disagreements.

Graph 3  
Opinions/pre-intermediate level



The last graph displays the differences between the levels and the exercises. As we can see from the comparison of the graph number three and four, there is a big contrast between the “Agree/disagree” categories. At the higher level, through all the upper-intermediate books we analyse, this category is used more often and more clearly within the instructions. As a result, the two remaining categories are smaller and almost identical in size.

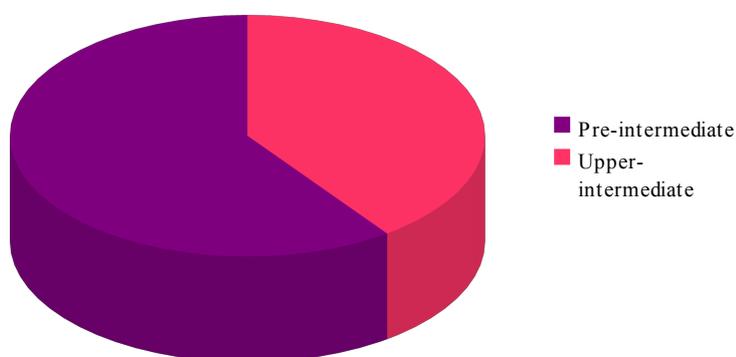
Graph 4  
Opinions/upper-intermediate level



To talk about pictures, we also provide the comparison of usage of pictures at different levels. We can see that the graph number 5 points to the obvious dominance of pictures used at pre-intermediate level. However, it does not tell us anything about the photos that are placed in these books. As it is already mentioned in our analysis, many pictures are not taken into consideration, when it comes to speaking activities. All the

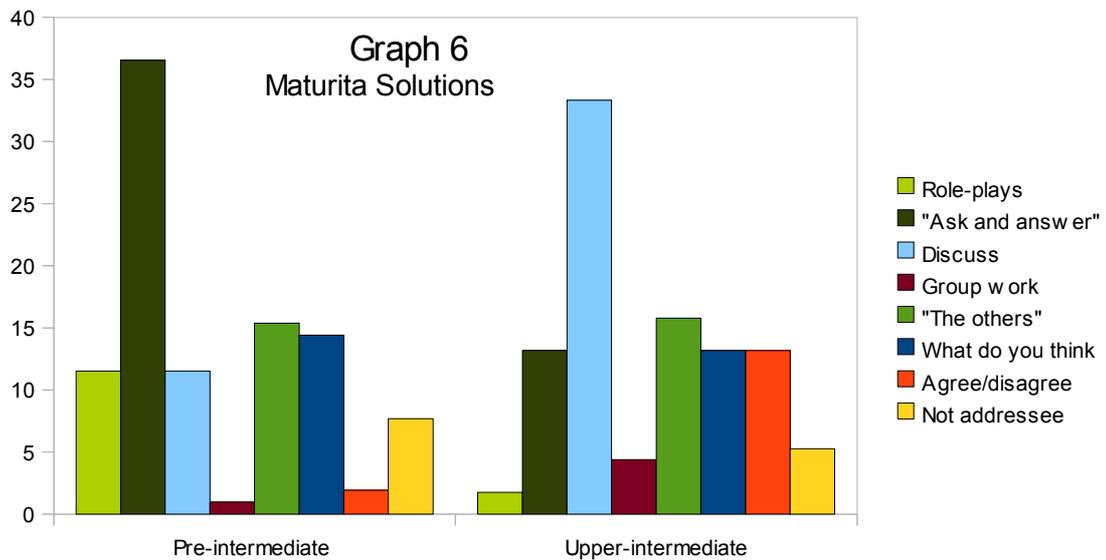
books are very nice and colourful with plenty of pictures and they can be assigned for description by teachers any time.

Graph 5  
Pictures/both levels

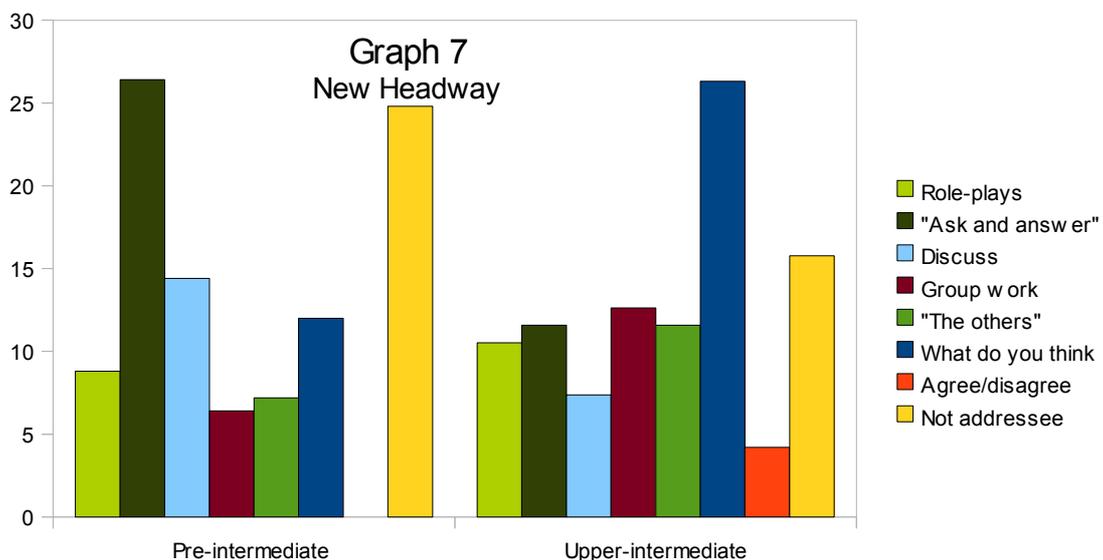


In the following graphs, we provide the comparison of the exercises that are used at different levels within each set of books.

As we can see, in the first set of books, there is a big difference between the categories “Ask and answer”, “Discuss” and role-plays. We can observe that at pre-intermediate level, students have more chances to practise asking and answering questions, which is very useful for their further communication. The change is also in the number of tasks, where students should state whether they agree or disagree with some statements.

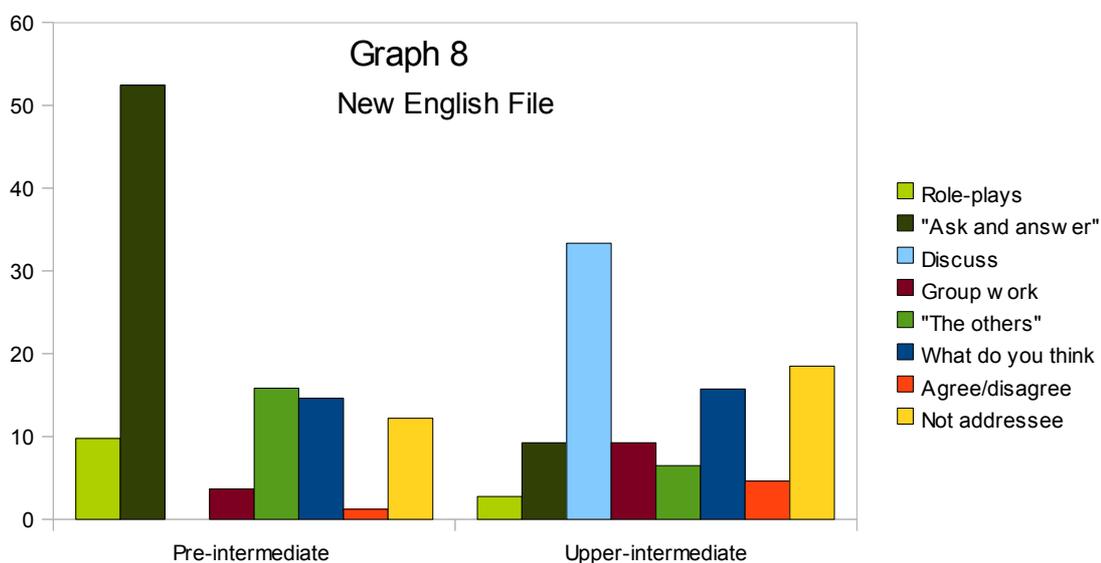


The second set of books shows that at pre-intermediate level, there are more opportunities to ask and answer questions as well as discuss about various topics with their classmates. Group work, however, is less used at this level. Upper-intermediate students have better chances to express their opinions and thoughts.



In the last set of books, there is also dominance of the category “Ask and answer” at pre-intermediate level over the upper-intermediate level. What can be also surprising is the fact that according to this graph, there are no opportunities to have discussions at pre-

intermediate level for students. That is not entirely true, since there are many exercises, where students can discuss within the other categories, such as group work, “What do you think” or “Questions with no addressee”.



In conclusion, according to these graphs, we can say that there are specific tasks at each level of difficulty. At pre-intermediate level, there is a predominance of the category “Ask and answer”, which can be caused by the desire to make students feel safe when they use the English language, since they practise most of these tasks in pairs.

There are also some specifications for the higher level, such as occurrence of tasks that are connected to discussions, expressing students' opinions and beliefs. Secondly, group work is also more present at this level.

## 6 Qualitative research

Our qualitative research was done in the archbishop grammar school situated in Prague 2/<sup>14</sup>. It is an eight-year church school and like all grammar school, it provides mainly general education. However, students can choose from many different elective subjects. The school is well equipped with normal, as well as specialized classrooms. There is also a library and small chapel. All students must learn at least two foreign languages and Latin. Even though it is a church school, all students are welcomed here, regardless of their religious beliefs.

The number of students, who attend this school in daily attendance, is approximately 500 in 16 classes. Students are divided into two parallel classes in each of the eight years.

The school follows a new reformed curriculum called *Eight Liberal Arts* aimed at a greater variability of the forms of study and modern approaches from the school year 2009/2010.

We know this school quite well, because we did our teaching practise there for one month last year. The teachers here are very friendly, nice and qualified. We could not work with the teacher who was our trainee teacher during the teaching practise, since she does not have any Maturita classes this year. Fortunately, we were lucky to work with another very nice teacher – PhDr. Ivana Hajičová. Both Mrs. Hajičová's classes were nice, the students were communicative and cooperative. The atmosphere was also very friendly and pleasant. We found out that the teacher spent a lot of time building good relationships with her students at the beginning of the school year, because it was important for her.

She introduced her students to us and described them as very talented and hard-working people. All of them were getting ready for the Maturita exam from the English language at B2 level. She also familiarized us with the concept of her lessons and how they were preparing for the Maturita oral exam. Most of the time, they were practising for their didactic test, which included listening a reading exercises, too. In addition, everybody had one presentation of different topics. That might explain the high level of self-confidence of students during their oral performances at the classroom. The discussed, expressed their

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14 <http://www.arcig.cz/eng/>

opinions, share their ideas, changed the subject very smoothly, they could even articulate whether they agree or disagree with some statements and tried to persuade their opponents. Therefore, the techniques of discussing and expressing their thought were practised adequately and it was noticeable.

Altogether, we observed five lessons in this school.

### **6.1 Observations**

The observations of two parallel classes took place on 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> march 2012. During the first day of our observation, there were two lessons for each parallel. The first lesson was dedicated to the presentation, which students were supposed to prepare, but we did not observe it. We attended the second lesson of this group, where the students were asked to communicate and discuss about the given topic. The topic was connected to schools and different systems of education. Just before the break, the teacher had asked the students to think about the most important things in schools.

Our observation started at this point, and after the break, when all students were present, the teacher repeated this question again. She had to ask some questions at the beginning to encourage her students to share their ideas. This included questions like “What do you think?” “Do you agree with this statement?” and so on. Consequently, the discussion between them started to be very lively. Students were talking about their opinions, but it was still the same pattern: the teacher was the initiator of their conversation and students responded to all their questions. This discussion took approximately fifteen minutes and all of the students participated, some of them more, some of them less, but everybody was involved in communication. She also recommended them, what to do and how to answer some questions during the Maturita exam. When there were no attempts to maintain the conversation from the students, the teacher decided to complete the information that had not been mentioned during the presentation from the previous lesson. She mentioned various types of schools in two different school systems, specifically English and American school systems and afterwards she compared them to Czech school system. She spoke for about fifteen minutes and at the end she asked for some questions, comments or remarks, but there were not any.

The last fifteen minutes were devoted to the Maturita exam and techniques that are used to test students speaking abilities. The teacher brought the students' as well as interlocutors' samples of the Maturita speaking task sheets and handouts. She showed them the tasks and how the instructions differed in interlocutor's and student's copy. They also discussed the strategies that should be used during the Maturita exam, mainly omitting the short answers and saying "I do not know". Students were very interested in this presentation, since they saw it for the first time and it was very important for them. When they read through all four parts of the Maturita exam, students had some additional questions about the specific topics that are set by the school.

The second group we observed that day was more communicative and students interact a lot with each other. At the beginning of their lesson, the teacher greeted them and asked them to think about the most important things in schools. The students immediately started to tell her their opinions, so she had to stop them and asked them to discuss it in pairs. Students were talking for several minutes and then they were told to remember what they agreed on. The reason for this was that one of the students prepared a presentation and it was time for him to present it.

He looked very confident and his performance was very convincing. The topic was connected to schools and their systems as well. He dealt with his role of a teacher very well. Firstly, he started with brainstorming and asked his classmates some questions. The students thought about many interesting ideas and they also started to discuss with each other. They were very eager to talk, so the next task was to come up with the definition of education. Students expressed their opinions, and at some point, they were even trying to persuade each other about their truth. There was a small discussion about the different points of view at education. The presenter got some questions from his classmates and he answered them without any problems.

The presentation was handled nicely and the presenter enjoyed himself in this role. He attended one school in Canada and his experiences nicely fit into this topic. The students were very curious and they asked him a lot of questions. He was also able to compare this two different systems as well as their advantages and disadvantages. The teacher, who played the role of a student, occasionally stepped in and asked additional

questions or helped him with complicated questions. At the end of the presentation, students had an opportunity to ask any questions. But due to the prior discussion, there were no further questions. However, students were really excited about the fact that their friend spent some time abroad and insisted on talking about it.

This presentation took a lot of time, so the rest of the lesson was done very quickly. The teacher provided some other information that could be useful for their Maturita exam. She also asked complementary questions and tried to elicit the answers from the students. Then they discussed the Maturita oral performance – all four parts. The procedure was the same as in the previous group.

28<sup>th</sup> march was the second day of our observations. This day we took an active part in the lessons. Students role-played their Maturita speaking exams. Due to the odd number of students, we were asked to play the interlocutor's part. Students were divided into pairs and every pair got the copies of the Maturita speaking exam sheets.

We practised these tasks with the student called Lucka. At first, she was a little bit nervous, but she could speak English very well. Maybe this was the reason why after few seconds she started to behave more confidently.

We started with a small talk. We asked her to briefly introduce herself to the committee and tell us something about herself, too.

Then there was the part where we asked some questions that we had in our handout for interlocutors and the student answered. We were talking about mass media and their influence of people's lives. This task was very smooth and the student did not have any problems with it.

The next task was more complicated. The student had problems with describing the pictures, because she did not know what to compare, contrast and what to talk about. But finally we managed to deal with it.

Then we moved to the next task, which was expressing student's opinion. She read it aloud and said what she thought about it. This task was also easy for her.

We skipped the profile part and continued with the last task, which was a role-play. Since it was very similar to the other tasks (except of the description of the pictures), the student played her role very well.

When we finished, the teacher asked the class, how did they feel and how did they do. The responds were a little bit hesitant, so the teacher insisted on students repeating the whole procedure again with another topic. For this reason, we ended up practising the techniques for the Maturita oral exam most of the time.

The rest of the lesson students, which was approximately 20 minutes, the students were practising their listening skills.

We had also a chance to speak with the student and asked her, what was the best and worst part for her. She said that everything was quite all right, although she did not feel very confident about describing the pictures. The reason was that they did not use to practise this particular technique for the Maturita oral exam. When we mentioned this comment to the teacher, she agreed and explained that this technique had not been practised during the lessons very often, because of the fact that the students were going to use it only for the Maturita exam. Thus, they were practising it at that moment, just before the exam.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Since it was very close to the Maturita exam, the students were practising all of their skills a lot. We were interested in the speaking skills and techniques, which are used during the Maturita exam, and how they were applied into their communication. According to this observation, we must say that students were prepared very well for discussions, role-plays and expressing their opinions. However, the picture description was a little bit difficult for them, as they did not spend a lot of time working on it. But when they were told, what to look at and what to compare or contrast, students managed this technique without any further problems.

## Conclusion

This thesis deals with speaking skills and interaction that are essential for the Maturita oral exam. One of the main aims is to show the importance of speaking skills and and its development in order to be successful during the Maturita oral exam.

In the theoretical part we describe speaking as a skill and analyse the specifications and components of the Maturita oral exam.

The practical part contains qualitative as well as quantitative research. The quantitative research concerns about the course books that are used in grammar schools and prepare students for their Maturita exam. We have analysed several categories in three sets of books so that we could compare them and find out whether they meet *The Requirements of the Maturita exam*. All of these books cover speaking skills very well. However, there are some discrepancies between the levels of the books. We have found out that at the basic level the exercises are more accuracy-oriented. The prevalent exercise at this level is from the category “Ask and answer”. Students drill asking and answering questions, which is very good practice for the next level. Most of the time, they work in pairs, so they are not under pressure and can work at their speaking skills in a safe environment. However, students at the higher level are challenged to express their opinions, thought and beliefs more often. The exercises are also more fluency-oriented.

Sometimes, there was a problem with the categorization and we were not sure, where to put some of the exercises due to unclear instructions. We assigned several categories and all the exercises were divided according to some common features. Moreover, most of the exercises could overlap with each other and this was also the reason that made it more difficult.

Our small qualitative research was done in one grammar school in Prague and we were observing how the students were prepared for their Maturita oral exam. We found out that students were very well prepared for their oral exams in the English language. The only problem they had was with the pictures and their description. However, after a few hints and their teacher's assistance, they managed to complete this task as well.