UNIT 13. THE EXPRESSION OF QUANTITY.

Table of Contents

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1. Introduction

The expression of quantity is a fundamental aspect of language that allows speakers and writers to convey information about the amount, number or degree of entities and phenomena. In English, a variety of linguistic tools, known as quantifiers, help express quantity with precision and nuance. These range from simple determiners like *some*, *many* and *few* to complex phrases and structures that depend on context, syntax and pragmatic considerations.

This theme explores the linguistic, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions of expressing quantity in English, and provides a detailed framework for teaching this competence to learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Understanding and correctly using quantity expressions is essential for communicative competence, as it enables learners to describe situations accurately, quantify objects and abstract concepts and engage in both everyday and academic discourse.

This unit draws on essential theoretical and pedagogical contributions related to the expression of quantity, including *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al., 1985); *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002); and *Semantics* (Lyons, 1977). Pedagogical perspectives are informed by works such as *The Grammar Book* (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999), *How to Teach Grammar* (Thornbury, 1999), and recent research in second language acquisition focusing on quantifiers and quantification (McCarthy and Carter, 1994; Nation, 2001). Additionally, the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) provides useful descriptors for the appropriate use of quantifiers across proficiency levels, embedding this competence within a communicative framework.

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2. The Concept of Quantity in Language

Quantity, in linguistic terms, refers to the specification or indication of how much or how many of something there is. It involves both countable and uncountable entities and can denote exact numbers, approximations, proportions or degrees. The cognitive and communicative function of expressing quantity is vital because it shapes how interlocutors understand and respond to information.

From a semantic perspective, quantity expressions contribute to the informational content of utterances, establishing boundaries or scope in reference to nouns and noun phrases. This is closely linked with the notions of countability and mass nouns, which affect how quantities are grammatically encoded and semantically interpreted.

Furthermore, quantity expressions interact with modality, aspect and negation, impacting meaning and pragmatic interpretation. For instance, the quantifier *few* conveys a small number with a negative or limiting implication, while *some* can suggest an indefinite amount but with positive overtones.

Understanding the concept of quantity is therefore not only about learning words but also grasping the subtle differences in meaning, usage and function, which are often shaped by context, register and cultural conventions.

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3. Linguistic Expressions of Quantity

English offers a rich array of linguistic forms to express quantity, ranging from single-word quantifiers to complex quantificational phrases. These can be broadly categorized into quantifiers, namely determiners and pronouns; numerals; and expressions of degree or proportion.

Quantifiers are perhaps the most frequent tools for expressing quantity. They modify nouns and noun phrases and indicate how much or how many referents are involved. Examples include *all*, *some*, *many*, *few*, *several*, *each*, *every*, and *no*. Each quantifier carries semantic nuances and syntactic constraints that influence meaning.

Numerals, on the other hand, provide precise counts, either cardinal (e.g. *one, two, three*) or ordinal (e.g. *first, second, third*), and function as determiners or pronouns in certain cases. They are essential for exact quantification and are foundational in early language acquisition and classroom instruction.

Expressions of degree or proportion such as *a lot of*, *a little*, *plenty of*, *most*, *half of*, and *a majority of* add gradation and relational meaning to quantity, often combined with mass or count nouns.

Additionally, quantification can be implicit or explicit, and can interact with other linguistic phenomena such as negation (e.g. *no*, *none*), indefiniteness (e.g. *any*) and distributive expressions (e.g. *each*, *every*). Mastery of these forms is crucial for nuanced and accurate communication.

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4. Quantifiers: Types and Functions

Quantifiers can be divided into several categories based on their syntactic behaviour and semantic function. The main types include:

- Universal quantifiers, such as *all*, *every* and *each*, which denote totality or entirety of a set. For example, *All students passed the exam* implies every single student without exception.

- Existential quantifiers, such as *some*, *any* and *several*, which indicate the existence of an unspecified quantity greater than zero. *Some* often has affirmative connotations, while *any* is common in negative and interrogative contexts.
- Numerical quantifiers, including cardinal and ordinal numbers, which specify exact quantities or order.
- Partitive quantifiers, such as *most*, *half* or *a quarter*, expressing a portion of a whole.
- Negative quantifiers, such as *no* and *none*, indicating the absence of quantity.
- Distributive quantifiers, like *each* and *every*, emphasizing individuals within a group.

Each type carries specific syntactic constraints, for example, *every* requires singular countable nouns, while *all* can be used with both count and mass nouns. Semantic subtleties, such as whether a quantifier implies inclusiveness or exclusiveness, definiteness or indefiniteness, also shape usage.

Quantifiers are integral to expressing comparisons, making generalizations and providing precise or vague information, all vital for effective communication in English.

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5. The Syntax and Semantics of Quantity Expressions
The syntactic positioning of quantifiers typically precedes the noun phrase they modify, functioning as determiners or pronouns. However, certain quantifiers appear in different constructions, such as post-nominally (e.g. *the students all left*) or in prepositional phrases (e.g. *a group of students*).

The semantic interpretation of quantifiers involves scope and reference, which can be complex in sentences with multiple quantifiers, negation or modality. For instance, the sentence *Every student did not pass* can be ambiguous: does it mean no student passed or not all students passed? Such scope ambiguity is an important consideration in both language comprehension and production.

Quantifiers also interact with verb agreement and tense, influencing sentence structure. For example, *each* and *every* require singular verb forms, whereas *all* and *some* take plural verbs with countable nouns.

Understanding these syntactic and semantic rules aids learners in producing grammatically correct and semantically precise sentences, reducing common errors such as incorrect verb agreement or inappropriate quantifier-noun combinations.

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6. Pragmatic and Contextual Use of Quantity
Beyond grammar and meaning, the use of quantity expressions is deeply influenced by pragmatic and contextual factors. Speakers choose quantifiers based not only on objective quantity but also on factors such as emphasis, politeness, vagueness and implicature.

For example, using *a few* instead of *some* might subtly convey a smaller quantity or a more negative evaluation. Similarly, the choice between *many* and *lots of* can reflect register differences, with the latter being more informal.

Context also governs the precision of quantity expressions. In scientific or academic writing, exact quantification is expected, whereas everyday conversation tolerates vagueness and approximate quantifiers. Cultural conventions influence how quantity is expressed and perceived, affecting pragmatic appropriateness.

Teachers must help learners develop pragmatic awareness to choose quantifiers that fit the communicative situation, genre and audience. This includes understanding how quantity expressions function in requests, offers, refusals and other speech acts.

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7. Teaching the Expression of Quantity in the EFL Classroom

Teaching quantity involves helping learners acquire both the linguistic forms and their appropriate use in context. A communicative and task-based approach is effective, combining explicit grammar instruction with meaningful practice.

Initial lessons should focus on differentiating countable and uncountable nouns, followed by introducing basic quantifiers with clear examples. Visual aids, realia and contextualized dialogues support comprehension. Practice activities can include categorization, gap-fills and matching exercises.

More advanced stages involve contrastive exercises exploring subtle differences between quantifiers (e.g. *few* vs *a few*), using quantifiers in complex sentences and addressing common learner errors such as overgeneralization or confusion between *some* and *any*.

Role plays, information gap activities and writing tasks encourage learners to use quantity expressions fluently and appropriately. Teachers should provide corrective feedback, focusing on both form and meaning, and promote metalinguistic awareness through reflection on usage.

Incorporating authentic materials, such as news articles, menus or scientific texts, exposes learners to real-world quantity expressions. Digital tools and corpora can be valuable for exploring frequency and collocations of quantifiers.

Assessment of quantity expression competence can include written exercises, oral tasks and error analysis, integrated into broader language use evaluations.

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8. Conclusion

The expression of quantity is a multifaceted linguistic competence essential for accurate and effective communication in English. It encompasses a wide range of quantifiers and structures, each with specific semantic, syntactic and pragmatic properties. Mastery of quantity expressions enables learners to describe, compare and quantify entities in diverse contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, teaching quantity requires a balanced approach that integrates explicit grammar instruction, communicative practice and pragmatic

awareness. Understanding learner challenges and providing contextualized and meaningful activities facilitates acquisition and functional use.

This theme aligns with the curricular mandates established by the Organic Law 3/2020, known as LOMLOE, and the Order ECD/1172/2022, comprising the Aragonese Curriculum for Secondary Education, which emphasize comprehensive development of communicative competence, including precision and appropriateness in language use. These frameworks support the goal of forming learners capable of participating effectively in academic, social and professional domains.

In conclusion, the expression of quantity is not merely a grammatical point but a critical component of language proficiency that teachers must address thoughtfully and systematically.