

Concept-checking questions in teaching English grammar

Hoàng Thị Hương*

*ThS. Trường Đại học Tài nguyên và Môi trường Hà Nội

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Abstract: Language instructors use concept-checking questions to assess their students' comprehension of a particular idea or subject. The goal of using is to ensure that every student thoroughly understands the main concepts, vocabulary, and grammar rules being taught. This paper reviews basic fundamental theoretical issues on concept-checking questions **and** draws conclusions about how to use them successfully to teach English as a Foreign Language.

Keywords: Concept-checking questions, teaching English, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Each time the instructor provides new information or needs to make sure the learners understand what he/she is saying, questions such as “Is this ok?” or “Do you understand?” are unlikely to receive a truthful answer from all the learners. Concept-checking questions (CCQs) are especially helpful as a review after the lecture and following guided practice. Teachers will avoid situations where students remain silent or cannot respond to explanations by using closed-ended questions.

2. Content

2.1. What are CCQs?

“Concept checking is a technique used by the teacher during the lesson that involves the language learner in the process of discovering and understanding language.” (Liashenko, 2018).

According to Workman (2008), the CCQs are designed to check the learners' understanding of grammatical concepts, vocabulary, and functional expressions that have been taught. They are employed instead of asking questions like “Do you understand?” because they are more effective and useful. When teachers ask students “Do you understand?”, most students answer “yes” because they may think they have understood correctly but in fact they have not and they may also be embarrassed to admit it to their peers. Therefore, concept-checking questions are efficient to be used by teachers in the classroom. Additionally, they help students understand the structures or meanings in a more efficient and student-centered manner (Workman, 2008; Florkowska, 2018). CCQs are now considered an essential component of Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA)

instruction globally (Florkowska, 2018). Since the CELTA course emphasizes the communicative approach to teaching, incorporating and integrating students in the process itself is the preferred method of determining whether or not they have understood the new concepts. CCQs are used to demonstrate the meaning of the target language taught during a lesson, as well as verbal checks on students' understanding of new vocabulary, grammar points, and communicative functions.

2.2. Types of CCQs

Long & Sato (1983) and Ingham (2014) proposed two main types of CCQs: display questions and referential questions.

According to Ingham (2014), display questions are ones to which the instructor already knows the answer; they are only intended as a means of verifying the essential idea. The response is obviously right or wrong. Display questions can be:

- *Closed questions* (Does she still work there?)
- *Open questions* (How many people are there in the room?)
- *Trick questions* (You made a mistake when you were punished?)
- *Sentence finishers* (A skyscraper is a...)

Referential questions allow students to react more freely and openly and are genuine queries with greater room for interpretation.

Example: What did you do at the weekend?

2.3. How to Develop Effective CCQs

According to Workman (2008, p.7) states, there are several rules for the design and use of CCQs

- Break down the concept of the item into a series of statements of meaning.
- Make sure the statements of meaning are

expressed in simple language.

- Turn the statements into questions.
- The questions should be concise and simple.
- The language you use must be simpler than the language you are checking.

vThe questions should not normally use the language you are checking.

- Sort the questions into a logical order.
- Write down the correct answers you expect the learners to give.

- The answers should be short and simple.
- If they answer incorrectly state the correct answer and provide clarification.

• Liashenko (2018) proposed some basic tips for good concept questions are:

- Use basic and simple language when asking and answering questions.
- Question types such as yes/no, either/or, and 'wh' are particularly effective
- Avoid using new target grammar or uncommon vocabulary in questions
- Include basic concepts like 'time' and 'tense' in questions

- Ask as many questions as possible to cover all areas of the language and reach as many learners as possible

2.4. Implementing CCQs in the Classroom

CCQs are mostly utilized in the PPP (Presentation, Practice and Production) lesson planning framework.

- *Introduce the Concept:* The teacher presents the grammar point clearly using examples.

- *Use CCQs to Check Understanding:* After explaining, the teacher asks CCQs to gauge comprehension.

- *Practice with Exercises:* The teacher has students apply the concept in various exercises, interspersing CCQs to reinforce learning.

- *Review and Feedback:* The teacher discusses students' answers and provides feedback, addressing any misunderstandings.

- *Reinforce Through Repetition:* The teacher uses CCQs throughout the lesson and in subsequent lessons to reinforce understanding.

For example, suppose that the target language is giving a request using "Could." (Could you close the door, please?). The example dialogue will contain clear examples. After students are exposed to the language, the function can be elicited: "Is this an advice or request?"

Then, elicit form: "Yes, he is giving a request. How do you know?" "What words tell us that this is advice?"

2.5. Implementing CCQs in teaching Grammar

For grammar, concept-checking questions rely on a full context, an explanation or previous knowledge and a concept.

In communicative approach ESL lesson plans, concept questions are a popular elicitation method that is very helpful for teaching grammar and vocabulary. Instead of introducing the subject to ESL students with lengthy, complex explanations that can just confuse them, utilize concept questions to get information from them and assess their knowledge. Additionally, they are a more efficient and student-centered means of conveying content. For example, if wh-questions are the target language, the elicitation's objective should be to help students understand the structure (grammatical form) and function (asking) of the target language, rather than to have them generate a wh-question. Here, it is assumed that students have never learned the form or function before (when students have some past exposure, they have a bit more to rely on). When the teacher presents the language in context, concept questions should be included. The ESL instructor wants pupils to be able to recognize the structure, thus the text or recording should offer clear instances of the form.

For instance, if the teacher wants to check if learners truly understand the usage of the present simple (habits and routines), some Yes/No can be used:

Ex: I go to work at 7.30 every morning.

Concept questions:

1) Is this something I do every day?

2) Is this a routine/habit?

50/50 chance questions are also common. For example, when present continuous (dairy future) is the target language,

Ex: I'm meeting him at 5.00 on Monday.

a concept-checking question can be "Are we talking about the present or the future?"

If teacher would like to ask for more information, some open questions or information questions should be used. For example, if the concept is past perfect is used to talk about two actions in the past and to make clear the sequence of events. After giving the sample (*When we came to the cinema, the film had begun.*),

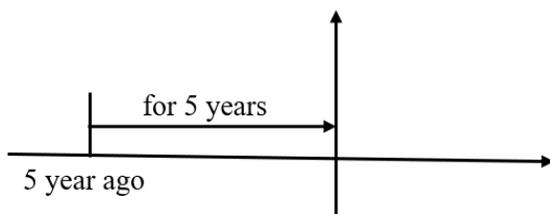
the teacher can use some CCQs:

1) How many actions are there in the past?

Which action happened first?

Concept questions are one tool for understanding assessment; however, depending on the target language employed, they are frequently used in conjunction with other techniques, most frequently visual ones. For example, when the target language is Present Perfect Simple (used to talk about the duration of an action that started in the past and continues up to and includes the present), timelines and concept questions can be used to establish tense.

Example: She has worked here for 5 years.



Concept questions:

When did the action start?

Do the action continue up to and include the present?

The teacher should not use the language of the item in the CCQs. For example, if the target language is “used to” (*He used to live in London*), the teacher cannot ask students “*Did he use to live in London?*” because the question contains the item that is checked for understanding (*used to*).

3. Conclusion

According to Florkowska (2018), the concept check questions have positive effects on the learning process because they enable teachers to figure out how much has been comprehended by the learners through meaningful conversation between the teacher and students. Though many teachers find CCQs difficult to create or neglect to use, concept questions are incredibly valuable. Teachers frequently find satisfaction in the way students complete practice tasks, indicating that they “seem to understand.” However, CCQs are one of the best methods for gaining fresh perspectives and confirming comprehension.

Concept questions can be posed at any point throughout a class, but they are especially helpful following the introduction and explanation of an item. They are helpful as a last check and review at the end of a class and after guided practice, especially

if the students don’t seem to have fully mastered the language.

Timelines and other devices are aids to explanation but are not substitutes for concept questions.

Through the use of CCQs, the instructor first evaluates the students’ knowledge, which involves them in the process of learning and understanding the new language. CCQs offer an ongoing, informal means of evaluating students’ progress in an ESL classroom. Based on information obtained through informal evaluations, teachers may adjust curriculum, games, or other activities to further improve a student’s knowledge of the concepts.

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