



HAL
open science

Generating Grammar Exercises

Laura Perez-Beltrachini, Claire Gardent, German Kruszewski

► **To cite this version:**

Laura Perez-Beltrachini, Claire Gardent, German Kruszewski. Generating Grammar Exercises. The 7th Workshop on Innovative Use of NLP for Building Educational Applications, NAACL-HLT Worskhop 2012, Jun 2012, Montreal, Canada. pp.147-157. hal-00768610

HAL Id: hal-00768610

<https://hal.science/hal-00768610v1>

Submitted on 22 Dec 2012

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Generating Grammar Exercises

Laura Perez-Beltrachini

Université de Lorraine
LORIA, UMR 7503
Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy
F-54500, France

laura.perez@loria.fr

Claire Gardent

CNRS, LORIA, UMR 7503
Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy
F-54500, France

claire.gardent@loria.fr

German Kruszewski

Inria, LORIA, UMR 7503
Villers-lès-Nancy
F-54600, France

german.kruszewski@inria.fr

Abstract

Grammar exercises for language learning fall into two distinct classes: those that are based on “real life sentences” extracted from existing documents or from the web; and those that seek to facilitate language acquisition by presenting the learner with exercises whose syntax is as simple as possible and whose vocabulary is restricted to that contained in the textbook being used. In this paper, we introduce a framework (called *GramEx*) which permits generating the second type of grammar exercises. Using generation techniques, we show that a grammar can be used to semi-automatically generate grammar exercises which target a specific learning goal; are made of short, simple sentences; and whose vocabulary is restricted to that used in a given textbook.

1 Introduction

Textbooks for language learning generally include grammar exercises. *Tex’s French Grammar*¹ for instance, includes at the end of each lecture, a set of grammar exercises which target a specific pedagogical goal such as *learning the plural form of nouns*

¹*Tex’s French Grammar* <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tex/> is an online pedagogical reference grammar that combines explanations with surreal dialogues and cartoon images. *Tex’s French Grammar* is arranged like many other traditional reference grammars with the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, etc.) used to categorize specific grammar items (gender of nouns, irregular verbs). Individual grammar items are carefully explained in English, then exemplified in a dialogue, and finally tested in self-correcting, fill-in-the-blank exercises.

or *learning the placement of adjectives*. Figure 1 shows the exercises provided by this book at the end of the lecture on the plural formation of nouns. As exemplified in this figure, these exercises markedly differ from more advanced learning activities which seek to familiarise the learner with “real world sentences”. To support *in situ* learning, this latter type of activity presents the learner with sentences drawn from the Web or from existing documents thereby exposing her to a potentially complex syntax and to a diverse vocabulary. In contrast, textbook grammar exercises usually aim to facilitate the acquisition of a specific grammar point by presenting the learner with exercises made up of short sentences involving a restricted vocabulary.

As shall be discussed in the next section, most existing work on the generation of grammar exercises has concentrated on the automatic creation of the first type of exercises i.e., exercises whose source sentences are extracted from an existing corpus. In this paper, we present a framework (called *GramEx*) which addresses the generation of the second type of grammar exercises used for language learning i.e., grammar exercises whose syntax and lexicon are strongly controlled. Our approach uses generation techniques to produce these exercises from an existing grammar describing both the syntax and the semantics of natural language sentences. Given a pedagogical goal for which exercises must be produced, the *GramEx* framework permits producing *Fill in the blank* (FIB, the learner must fill a blank with an appropriate form or phrase) and *Shuffle* (given a set of lemmas or forms, the learner must use these to produce a phrase) exercises that target that specific goal.

- Give the plural form of the noun indicated in parentheses.
Pay attention to both the article and the noun.
1. Bette aime _____. (le bijou)
 2. Fiona aime _____. (le cheval)
 3. Joe-Bob aime _____ américaines. (la bière)
 4. Tex n'aime pas _____. (le choix)
 5. Joe-Bob n'aime pas _____ difficiles. (le cours)
 6. Tammy n'aime pas _____. (l'hôpital)
 7. Eduard aime _____. (le tableau)
 8. Bette aime _____ de Tex. (l'oeil)
 9. Tex aime _____ français. (le poète)
 10. Corey aime _____ fraîches. (la boisson)
 11. Tammy aime _____ américains. (le campus)
 12. Corey n'aime pas _____. (l'examen)

Figure 1: Grammar exercises from the *Tex's French Grammar* textbook

The exercises thus generated use a simple syntax and vocabulary similar to that used in the *Tex's French Grammar* textbook.

We evaluate the approach on several dimensions using quantitative and qualitative metrics as well as a small scale user-based evaluation. And we show that the *GramEx* framework permits producing exercises for a given pedagogical goal that are linguistically and pedagogically varied.

The paper is structured as follows. We start by discussing related work (Section 2). In Section 3, we present the framework we developed to generate grammar exercises. Section 4 describes the experimental setup we used to generate exercise items. Section 5 reports on an evaluation of the exercise items produced and on the results obtained. Section 6 concludes.

2 Related Work

A prominent strand of research in Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL) addresses the automation of exercise specifications relying on Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques (Mitkov et al., 2006; Heilman and Eskenazi, 2007; Karamanis et al., 2006; Chao-Lin et al., 2005; Coniam, 1997; Sumita et al., 2005; Simon Smith, 2010; Lin et al., 2007; Lee and Seneff, 2007). Mostly, this work targets the automatic generation of so-called objective test items i.e., test items such as multiple choice questions, fill in the blank and cloze exercise items, whose answer is strongly constrained and can therefore be predicted and checked with high accuracy. These approaches use large corpora and machine learning techniques to automatically generate the stems (exercise sentences), the keys (correct an-

swers) and the distractors (incorrect answers) that are required by such test items.

Among these approaches, some proposals target grammar exercises. Thus, (Chen et al., 2006) describes a system called FAST which supports the semi-automatic generation of Multiple-Choice and Error Detection exercises while (Aldabe et al., 2006) presents the ArikITurri automatic question generator for constructing Fill-in-the-Blank, Word Formation, Multiple Choice and Error Detection exercises. These approaches are similar to the approach we propose. First, a bank of sentences is built which are automatically annotated with syntactic and morpho-syntactic information. Second, sentences are retrieved from this bank based on their annotation and on the linguistic phenomena the exercise is meant to illustrate. Third, the exercise question is constructed from the retrieved sentences. There are important differences however.

First, in these approaches, the source sentences used for building the test items are selected from corpora. As a result, they can be very complex and most of the generated test items are targeted for intermediate or advanced learners. In addition, some of the linguistic phenomena included in the language schools curricula may be absent or insufficiently present in the source corpus (Aldabe et al., 2006). In contrast, our generation based approach permits controlling both the syntax and the lexicon of the generated exercises.

Second, while, in these approaches, the syntactic and morpho-syntactic annotations associated with the bank sentences are obtained using part-of-speech tagging and chunking, in our approach, these are obtained by a grammar-based generation process.

As we shall see below, the information thus associated with sentences is richer than that obtained by chunking. In particular, it contains detailed linguistic information about the syntactic constructs (e.g., cleft subject) contained in the bank sentences. This permits a larger coverage of the linguistic phenomena that can be handled. For instance, we can retrieve sentences which contain a relativised cleft object (e.g., *This is the man whom Mary likes who sleeps*) by simply stipulating that the retrieved sentences must be associated with the information *Cleft Object*.

To sum up, our approach differs from most existing work in that it targets the production of syntactically and lexically controlled grammar exercises rather than producing grammar exercises based on sentences extracted from an existing corpus.

3 Generating Exercises

Given a pedagogical goal (e.g., learning adjective morphology), *GramEx* produces a set of exercise items for practicing that goal. The item can be either a FIB or a shuffle item; and *GramEx* produces both the exercise question and the expected solution.

To generate exercise items, *GramEx* proceeds in three main steps as follows. First, a generation bank is constructed using surface realisation techniques. This generation bank stores sentences that have been generated together with the detailed linguistic information associated by the generation algorithm with each of these sentences. Next, sentences that permit exercising the given pedagogical goal are retrieved from the generation bank using a constraint language that permits defining pedagogical goals in terms of the linguistic properties associated by the generator with the generated sentences. Finally, exercises are constructed from the retrieved sentences using each retrieved sentence to define FIB and Shuffle exercises; and the sentence itself as the solution to the exercise.

We now discuss each of these steps in more detail.

3.1 Constructing a Generation bank

The generation bank is a database associating sentences with a representation of their semantic content and a detailed description of their syntactic and morphosyntactic properties. In other words, a gen-

Sentence realisation: "Tammy a une voix douce"
Lemma-features pairs: {"lemma": "Tammy", "lemma-features": {anim:+,num:sg,det: +,wh:-,cat:n, func:suj,xp: +, gen:f}, "trace": {propername}}}, {"lemma": "avoir", "lemma-features": {aux-refl:-,inv:-,cat:v,pers:3,pron:-, num:sg,mode:ind, aspect:indet,tense:pres,stemchange:-, flexion:irreg}, "trace": {CanonicalObject,CanonicalSubject,n0Vn1}}, {"lemma": "un", "lemma-features": {wh:-,num:sg,mass:-,cat:d, gen:f,def:+}, "trace": {determiner}}}, {"lemma": "voix", "lemma-features": {bar:0,wh:-,cat:n,num:sg, mass:-,gen:f,flexion:irreg, "trace": {noun}}, {"lemma": "doux", "lemma-features": {num:sg,gen:f,flexion:irreg,cat:adj}, "trace": {Epith,EpithPost}}}

Figure 2: Morphosyntactic information associated by *GraDe* with the sentence *Tammy a un voix douce*

eration bank is a set of (S_i, L_i, σ_i) tuples where S_i is a sentence, L_i is a set of linguistic properties true of that sentence and σ_i is its semantic representation.

To produce these tuples, we use the *GraDe* grammar traversal algorithm described in (Gardent and Kruszewski, 2012). Given a grammar and a set of user-defined constraints, this algorithm generates sentences licensed by this grammar. The user-defined constraints are either parameters designed to constrain the search space and guarantee termination (e.g., upper-bound on the number and type of recursive rules used or upper-bound on the depth of the tree build by *GraDe*); or linguistic parameters which permit constraining the output (e.g., by specifying a core semantics the output must verbalise or by requiring the main verb to be of a certain type). Here we use *GraDe* both to generate from manually specified semantic input; and from a grammar (in this case an existing grammar is used and no manual input need to be specified). As explained in (Gardent and Kruszewski, 2012), when generating from a semantic representation, the output sentences are constrained to verbalise that semantics but the input semantics may be underspecified thereby allowing for morpho-syntactic, syntactic and temporal variants to be produced from a single semantics. For instance, given the input semantics

Ll:named(J bette.n) A:le_d(C RH SH) B:bijou.n(C) G:aimer_v(E J C), GraDe will output among others the following variants:

Bette aime le bijou (*Bette likes the jewel*),
 Bette aime les bijoux (*Bette likes the jewels*),
 C'est Bette qui aime le bijou (*It is Bette who likes the jewel*),
 C'est Bette qui aime les bijoux (*It is Bette who likes the jewels*),
 Bette aimait le bijou (*Bette liked the jewel*),
 Bette aimait les bijoux (*Bette liked the jewels*), ...

When generating from the grammar, the output is even less constrained since all derivations compatible with the user-defined constraints will be produced irrespective of semantic content. For instance, when setting *GraDe* with constraints restricting the grammar traversal to only derive basic clauses containing an intransitive verb, the output sentences include among others the following sentences:

Elle chante (*She sings*), La tatou chante-t'elle? (*Does the armadillo sing?*),
 La tatou chante (*The armadillo sings*), Chacun chante -t'il (*Does everyone sing?*),
 Chacun chante (*Everyone sings*), Quand chante la tatou? (*When does the armadillo sing?*), ...

Figure 2 shows the linguistic properties associated with the sentence *Tammy a une voix douce* (Tammy has a soft voice) by *GraDe*. To generate exercises, *GramEx* makes use of the morpho-syntactic information associated with each lemma i.e., the feature-value pairs occurring as values of the lemma-features fields; and of their linguistic properties i.e., the items occurring as values of the trace fields.

3.2 Retrieving Appropriate Sentences

To enable the retrieval of sentences that are appropriate for a given pedagogical goal, we define a query language on the linguistic properties assigned by *GraDe* to sentences. We then express each pedagogical goal as a query in that language; and we use these queries to retrieve from the generation bank appropriate source sentences. For instance, to retrieve a sentence for building a FIB exercise where the blank is a relative pronoun, we query the generation bank with the constraint *RelativePronoun*. This will return all sentences in the generation bank whose trace field contains the *RelativePronoun*

item i.e., all sentences containing a relative pronoun. We then use this sentence to build both the exercise question and its solution.

3.2.1 GramEx Query Language

We now define the query language used to retrieve sentences that are appropriate to build an exercise for a given pedagogical goal. Let B be a generation bank and let (S_i, L_i, σ_i) be the tuples stored in B . Then, a *GramEx* query q permits retrieving from B the set of sentences $S_i \in (S_i, L_i, \sigma_i)$ such that L_i satisfies q . In other words, *GramEx* queries permit retrieving from the generation bank all sentences whose linguistic properties satisfy those queries.

The syntax of the *GramEx* query language is as follows:

```

BoolExpr → BoolTerm
BoolTerm → BoolFactor | BoolTerm ∨ BoolFactor
BoolFactor → BoolUnary | BoolFactor ∧ BoolUnary
BoolUnary → BoolPrimary | ¬ BoolPrimary
BoolPrimary → PrimitiveCond | ( BoolExpr ) | [ BoolExpr ]
PrimitiveCond → traceItem | feature = value
  
```

In words: the *GramEx* query language permits defining queries that are arbitrary boolean constraints on the linguistic properties associated by *GraDe* with each generated sentence. In addition, complex constraints can be named and reused (macros); and expressions can be required to hold on a single lexical item ([BoolExpr] indicates that BoolExpr should be satisfied by the linguistic properties of a single lexical item).

The signature of the language is the set of grammatical (*traceItem*) and morpho-syntactic properties (*feature = value*) associated by *GraDe* with each generated sentence where *traceItem* is any item occurring in the value of a `trace` field and *feature = value* any feature/value pair occurring in the value of a `lemma-features` field (cf. Figure 2). The Table below (Table 1) shows some of the constraints that can be used to express pedagogical goals in the *GramEx* query language.

3.2.2 Query Examples

The *GramEx* query language allows for very specific constraints to be expressed thereby providing fine-grained control over the type of sentences and therefore over the types of exercises that can be produced. The following example queries illustrate this.

Grammatical Properties (traceItem)	
Argument Realisation	Cleft, CleftSubj, CleftOBJ, ..., InvertedSubj, Questioned, QuSubj, ..., Relativised, RelSubj ..., Pronominalised, ProSubj, ...
Voice	Active, Passive, Reflexive
Aux	tse, modal, causal
Adjective	Predicative, Pre/Post nominal
Adverb	Sentential, Verbal
Morpho-Syntactic Properties (feature=value)	
Tense	present, future, past
Number	mass, count, plural, singular
Inflexion	reg, irreg

Table 1: Some grammatical and morpho-syntactic properties that can be used to specify pedagogical goals.

- (1) a. EpithAnte
Tex pense que Tammy est une jolie tatou (Tex thinks that Tammy is a pretty armadillo)
- b. [Epith \wedge flexion: irreg]
Tex et Tammy ont une voix douce (Tex and Tammy have a soft voice)
- c. POBJinf \wedge CLAUSE
 POBJinf \equiv (DE-OBJinf \vee A-OBJinf)
 CLAUSE \equiv Vfin \wedge \neg Mod \wedge \neg CCoord \wedge \neg Sub
Tammy refuse de chanter (Tammy refuses to sing)

Query (1a) shows a query for retrieving sentences containing prenominal adjectives which uses the grammatical (*traceItem*) property EpithAnte associated with preposed adjectives.

In contrast, Query (1b) uses both grammatical and morpho-syntactic properties to retrieve sentences containing a postnominal adjective with irregular inflexion. The square brackets in the query force the conjunctive constraint to be satisfied by a single lexical unit. That is, the query will be satisfied by sentences containing a lexical item that is both a postnominal adjective and has irregular inflexion. This excludes sentences including e.g., a postnominal adjective and a verb with irregular inflexion.

Finally, Query (1c) shows a more complex case where the pedagogical goal is defined in terms of predefined macros themselves defined as *GramEx* query expressions. The pedagogical goal is defined as a query which retrieves basic clauses (CLAUSE) containing a prepositional infinitival object (POBJinf). A sentence containing a prepositional

infinitival object is in turn defined (second line) as a prepositional object introduced either by the *de* or the *à* preposition. And a basic clause (3rd line) is defined as a sentence containing a finite verb and excluding modifiers, clausal or verb phrase coordination (CCORD) and subordinated clauses²

3.3 Building Exercise Items

In the previous section, we saw the mechanism used for selecting an appropriate sentence for a given pedagogical goal. *GramEx* uses such selected sentences as source or stem sentences to build exercise items. The exercise *question* is automatically generated from the selected sentence based on its associated linguistic properties. Currently, *GramEx* includes two main types of exercises namely, Fill in the blank and Shuffle exercises.

FIB questions. FIB questions are built by removing a word from the target sentence and replacing it with either: a blank (FIBBLNK), a lemma (FIBLEM) or a set of features used to help the learner guess the solution (FIBHINT). For instance, in an exercise on pronouns, *GramEx* will use the gender, number and person features associated with the pronoun by the generation process and display them to specify which pronominal form the learner is expected to provide. The syntactic representation (cf. Figure 2) associated by *GrDe* with the sentence is used to search for the appropriate key word to be removed. For instance, if the pedagogical goal is *Learn Subject Pronouns* and the sentence retrieved from the generation bank is that given in (2a), *GramEx* will produce the FIBHINT question in (2b) by searching for a lemma with category *cl* (clitic) and feature *func=subj* and using its gender value to provide the learner with a hint constraining the set of possible solutions.

- (2) a. Elle adore les petits tatous
(She loves small armadillos)
 b. ... adore les petits tatous (gender=fem)

Shuffle questions. Similarly to FIB questions, shuffle exercise items are produced by inspecting and using the target derivational information. More specifically, lemmas are retrieved from the list of

²The expressions CCoord and Sub are themselves defined rather than primitive expressions.

lemma-feature pairs. Function words are (optionally) deleted. And the remaining lemmas are “shuffled” (MSHUF). For instance, given the source sentence (2a), the MSHUF question (2b) can be produced.

- (3) a. Tammy adore la petite tatou
a. tatou / adorer / petit / Tammy

Note that in this case, there are several possible solutions depending on which tense and number is used by the learner. For such cases, we can either use hints as shown above to reduce the set of possible solutions to one; or compare the learner’s answer to the set of output produced by *GraDe* for the semantics the sentence was produced from.

4 Experimental Setup

We carried out an experiment designed to assess the exercises produced by *GramEx*. In what follows, we describe the parameters of this experiment namely, the grammar and lexicons used; the input and the user-defined parameters constraining sentence generation; and the pedagogical goals being tested.

4.1 Grammar and Lexicon

The grammar used is a Feature-Based Lexicalised Tree Adjoining Grammar for French augmented with a unification-based compositional semantics. This grammar contains around 1300 elementary trees and covers auxiliaries, copula, raising and small clause constructions, relative clauses, infinitives, gerunds, passives, adjuncts, wh-clefts, PRO constructions, imperatives and 15 distinct subcategorisation frames.

The syntactic and morpho-syntactic lexicons used for generating were derived from various existing lexicons, converted to fit the format expected by *GraDe* and tailored to cover basic vocabulary as defined by the lexicon used in *Tex’s French Grammar*. The syntactic lexicon contains 690 lemmas and the morphological lexicon 5294 forms.

4.2 Pedagogical Goals

We evaluate the approach on 16 pedagogical goals taken from the *Tex’s French Grammar* book. For each of these goals, we define the corresponding linguistic characterization in the form of a *GramEx* query. We then evaluate the exercises produced by

the system for each of these queries. The pedagogical goals tested are the following (we indicate in brackets the types of learning activity produced for each teaching goal by the system):

- Adjectives: Adjective Order (MSHUF), Adjective Agreement (FIBLEM), Prenominal adjectives (FIBLEM), Present and Past Participial used as adjectives (FIBLEM), Regular and Irregular Inflexion (FIBLEM), Predicative adjectives (MSHUF)
- Prepositions: Prepositional Infinitival Object (FIBBLNK), Modifier and Complement Prepositional Phrases (FIBBLNK)
- Noun: Gender (FIBLEM), Plural form (FIBLEM), Subject Pronoun (FIBHINT).
- Verbs: Pronominals (FIBLEM), -ir Verbs in the present tense (FIBLEM), Simple past (FIBLEM), Simple future (FIBLEM), Subjunctive Mode (FIBLEM).

4.3 *GraDe*’s Input and User-Defined Parameters

***GraDe*’s configuration** As mentioned in Section 3, we run *GraDe* using two main configurations. In the first configuration, *GraDe* search is constrained by an input core semantics which guides the grammar traversal and forces the output sentence to verbalise this core semantics. In this configuration, *GraDe* will only produce the temporal variations supported by the lexicon (the generated sentences may be in any simple tense i.e., present, future, simple past and imperfect) and the syntactic variations supported by the grammar for the same MRSS (e.g., active/passive voice alternation and cleft arguments).

Greater productivity (i.e., a larger output/input ratio) can be achieved by providing *GraDe* with less constrained input. Thus, in the second configuration, we run *GraDe* not on core semantics but on the full grammar. To constrain the search, we specify a root constraint which requires that the main verb of all output sentences is an intransitive verb. We also set the constraints on recursive rules so as to exclude the inclusion of modifiers. In sum, we ask *GraDe* to produce all clauses (i) licensed by the grammar and the lexicon; (ii) whose verb is intransitive; and (iii)

which do not include modifiers. Since the number of sentences that can be produced under this configuration is very large, we restrict the experiment by using a lexicon containing a single intransitive verb (*chanter/To sing*), a single common noun and a single proper name. In this way, syntactically structurally equivalent but lexically distinct variants are excluded.

Input Semantics We use two different sets of input semantics for the semantically guided configuration: one designed to test the pedagogical coverage of the system (Given a set of pedagogical goals, can *GramEx* generate exercises that appropriately target those goals?); and the other to illustrate linguistic coverage (How much syntactic variety can the system provide for a given pedagogical goal?).

The first set (D1) of semantic representations contains 9 items representing the meaning of example sentences taken from the *Tex's French Grammar* textbook. For instance, for the first item in Figure 1, we use the semantic representation *L1:named(J bette.n) A:le_d(C RH SH) B:bijou.n(C) G:aimer.v(E J C)*. With this first set of input semantics, we test whether *GramEx* correctly produces the exercises proposed in the *Tex's French Grammar* book. Each of the 9 input semantics corresponds to a distinct pedagogical goal.

The second set (D2) of semantic representations contains 22 semantics, each of them illustrating distinct syntactic configurations namely, intransitive, transitive and ditransitive verbs; raising and control; prepositional complements and modifiers; sentential and prepositional subject and object complements; pronominal verbs; predicative, attributive and participial adjectives. With this set of semantics, we introduce linguistically distinct material thereby increasing the variability of the exercises i.e., making it possible to have several distinct syntactic configurations for the same pedagogical goal.

5 Evaluation, Results and Discussion

Using the experimental setup described in the previous section, we evaluate *GramEx* on the following points:

- **Correctness:** Are the exercises produced by the generator grammatical, meaningful and appropriate for the pedagogical goal they are associated with?

appropriate for the pedagogical goal they are associated with?

- **Variability:** Are the exercises produced linguistically varied and extensive? That is, do the exercises for a given pedagogical goal instantiate a large number of distinct syntactic patterns?
- **Productivity:** How much does *GramEx* support the production, from a restricted number of semantic input, of a large number of exercises?

Correctness To assess correctness, we randomly selected 10 (pedagogical goal, exercise) pairs for each pedagogical goal in Section 4.2 and asked two evaluators to say for each pair whether the exercise text and solutions were grammatical, meaningful (i.e., semantically correct) and whether the exercise was adequate for the pedagogical goal. The results are shown in Table 3 and show that the system although not perfect is reliable. Most sources of grammatical errors are cases where a missing word in the lexicon fails to be inflected by the generator. Cases where the exercise is not judged meaningful are generally cases where a given syntactic construction seems odd for a given semantics content. For instance, the sentence *C'est Bette qui aime les bijoux* (It is Bette who likes jewels) is fine but *C'est Bette qui aime des bijoux* although not ungrammatical sounds odd. Finally, cases judged inappropriate are generally due to an incorrect feature being assigned to a lemma. For instance, *avoir* (To have) is marked as an -ir verb in the lexicon which is incorrect.

Grammatical	Meaningful	Appropriate
91%	96%	92%

Table 3: Exercise Correctness tested on 10 randomly selected (pedagogical goal, exercise pairs)

We also asked a language teacher to examine 70 exercises (randomly selected in equal number across the different pedagogical goals) and give her judgment on the following three questions:

- **A.** Do you think that the source sentence selected for the exercise is appropriate to practice the topic of the exercise? Score from 0 to 3 according to the degree (0 inappropriate - 3 perfectly appropriate)

Nb. Ex.	1	2	4	5	6	12	17	18	20	21	23	26	31	37	138
Nb. Sem	1	4	6	1	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Table 2: Exercise Productivity: Number of exercises produced per input semantics

- B. The grammar topic at hand together with the complexity of the source sentence make the item appropriate for which language level? A1,A2,B1,B2,C1³
- C. Utility of the exercise item: ambiguous (not enough context information to solve it) / correct

For Question 1, the teacher graded 35 exercises as 3, 20 as 2 and 14 as 1 pointing to similar problems as was independently noted by the annotators above. For question B, she marked 29 exercises as A1/A2, 24 as A2, 14 as A2/B1 and 3 as A1 suggesting that the exercises produced are non trivial. Finally, she found that 5 out of the 70 exercises lacked context and were ambiguously phrased.

Variability For any given pedagogical goal, there usually are many syntactic patterns supporting learning. For instance, learning the gender of common nouns can be practiced in almost any syntactic configuration containing a common noun. We assess the variability of the exercises produced for a given pedagogical goal by computing the number of distinct morpho-syntactic configurations produced from a given input semantics for a given pedagogical goal. We count as distinct all exercise questions that are derived from the same semantics but differ either in syntax (e.g., passive/active distinction) or in morphosyntax (determiner, number, etc.). Both types of differences need to be learned and therefore producing exercises which, for a given pedagogical goal, expose the learner to different syntactic and morpho-syntactic patterns (all involving the construct to be learned) is effective in supporting learning. However we did not take into account tense differences as the impact of tense on the number of exercises produced is shown by the experiment where we generate by traversing the grammar rather than from a

³A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 are reference levels established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_European_Framework_of_Reference_for_Languages) for grading an individual’s language proficiency.

semantics. Table 4 shows for each (input semantics, teaching goal) pair the number of distinct patterns observed. The number ranges from 1 to 21 distinct patterns with very few pairs (3) producing a single pattern, many (33) producing two patterns and a fair number producing either 14 or 21 patterns.

Nb. PG	1	2	3	4	5	6
Nb. sent	213	25	8	14	10	6

Table 6: Pedagogical Productivity: Number of Teaching Goals the source sentence produced from a given semantics can be used for

Productivity When used to generate from semantic representations (cf. Section 4.3), *GramEx* only partially automates the production of grammar exercises. Semantic representations must be manually input to the system for the exercises to be generated. Therefore the issue arises of how much *GramEx* helps automating exercise creation. Table 5 shows the breakdown of the exercises produced per teaching goal and activity type. In total, *GramEx* produced 429 exercises out of 28 core semantics yielding an output/input ratio of 15 (429/28). Further, Table 2 and 6 show the distribution of the ratio between (i) the number of exercises produced and the number of input semantics and (ii) the number of teaching goals the source sentences produced from input semantics *i* can be used for. Table 6 (pedagogical productivity) shows that, in this first experiment, a given input semantics can provide material for exercises targeting up to 6 different pedagogical goals while Table 2 (exercise productivity) shows that most of the input semantics produce between 2 and 12 exercises⁴.

When generating by grammar traversal, under the constraints described in Section 4, from one input

⁴If the input semantics contains a noun predicate whose gender is underspecified, the exercise productivity could be doubled. This is the case for 4 of the input semantics in the dataset D2; i.e. an input semantics containing the predicates *tatou.n(C)* *petit.a(C)* will produce variations such as: *la petite tatou* (the small armadillo (f)) and *le petit tatou* (the small armadillo (m)).

Nb. SP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	14	21
(S,G)	3	33	16	7	2	4	6	1	4	1	2	6

Table 4: Variability: Distribution of the number of distinct sentential patterns that can be produced for a given pedagogical goal from a given input semantics

Pedagogical Goal	FIBLEM	FIBBLNK	MSHUF	FIBHINT
Preposition	—	28	—	—
Prepositions with infinitives	—	8	—	—
Subject pronouns- <i>il</i>	—	—	—	3
Noun number	11	—	—	—
Noun gender	—	49	—	—
Adjective order	—	—	30	—
Adjective morphology	30	—	—	—
Adjectives that precede the noun	24	—	—	—
Attributive Adjectives	—	—	28	—
Irregular adjectives	4	—	—	—
Participles as adjectives	4	—	—	—
Simple past	78	—	—	—
Simple future	90	—	—	—
- <i>ir</i> verbs in present	18	—	—	—
Subjunctive mode	12	—	—	—
Pronominal verbs	12	—	—	—
Total	236	78	30	3

Table 5: Number and Types of Exercises Produced from the 28 input semantics

90 exercises are generated targeting 4 different pedagogical goals (i.e. 4 distinct linguistic phenomena).

6 Conclusion

We presented a framework (called *GramEx*) for generating grammar exercises which are similar to those often used in textbooks for second language learning. These exercises target a specific learning goal; and, they involve short sentences that make it easier for the learner to concentrate on the grammatical point to be learned.

One distinguishing feature of the approach is the rich linguistic information associated by the generator with the source sentences used to construct grammar exercises. Although space restriction prevented us from showing it here, this information includes, in addition to the morphosyntactic information and the grammatical properties illustrated in Figure 2 and Table 1 respectively, a semantic representation, a derivation tree showing how the parse tree of each sentence was obtained and optionally, an underspecified semantics capturing the core predicate/argument and modifier/modifiee relationships

expressed by each sentence. We are currently exploring how this information could be used to extend the approach to transformation exercises (e.g., passive/active) where the relation between exercise question and exercise solution is more complex than in FIB exercises.

Another interesting question which needs further investigation is how to deal with exercise items that have multiple solutions such as example (3) above. Here we plan to use the fact that underspecified semantics in *GraDe* permits associating many variants with a given semantics.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the language teacher, Tex’s French Grammar developers, and the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments. The research presented in this paper was partially supported by the European Fund for Regional Development within the framework of the INTERREG IV A Allegro Project⁵.

⁵<http://www.allegro-project.eu/> and <http://talc.loria.fr/-ALLEGRO-Nancy-.html>

References

- Itziar Aldabe, Maddalen Lopez de Lacalle, Montse Maritxalar, Edurne Martinez, and Larraitz Uria. 2006. Arikiturri: an automatic question generator based on corpora and nlp techniques. In *Proceedings of the 8th international conference on Intelligent Tutoring Systems, ITS'06*, pages 584–594, Berlin, Heidelberg. Springer-Verlag.
- Liu Chao-Lin, Wang Chun-Hung, Gao Zhao-Ming, and Huang Shang-Ming. 2005. Applications of lexical information for algorithmically composing multiple-choice cloze items. In *Proceedings of the second workshop on Building Educational Applications Using NLP, EdAppsNLP 05*, pages 1–8, Stroudsburg, PA, USA. Association for Computational Linguistics.
- Chia-Yin Chen, Hsien-Chin Liou, and Jason S. Chang. 2006. Fast: an automatic generation system for grammar tests. In *Proceedings of the COLING/ACL on Interactive presentation sessions, COLING-ACL '06*, pages 1–4, Stroudsburg, PA, USA. Association for Computational Linguistics.
- David Coniam. 1997. A preliminary inquiry into using corpus word frequency data in the automatic generation of english language cloze tests. *CALICO Journal*, 14:15–33.
- Claire Gardent and German Kruszewski. 2012. Generation for grammar engineering. In *11th International Conference on Natural Language Generation (ENLG)*.
- Michael Heilman and Maxine Eskenazi. 2007. Application of automatic thesaurus extraction for computer generation of vocabulary questions. In *Proceedings of Speech and Language Technology in Education (SLaTE2007)*, pages 65–68.
- Nikiforos Karamanis, Le An Ha, and Ruslan Mitkov. 2006. Generating multiple-choice test items from medical text: A pilot study. In *Proceedings of the Fourth International Natural Language Generation Conference*, pages 111–113, Sydney, Australia.
- John Lee and Stephanie Seneff. 2007. Automatic generation of cloze items for prepositions. *Proceedings of Interspeech*, pages 2173–2176.
- Yi-Chien Lin, Li-Chun Sung, and Meng Chang Chen. 2007. An Automatic Multiple-Choice Question Generation Scheme for English Adjective Understandings. In *Workshop on Modeling, Management and Generation of Problems/Questions in eLearning, the 15th International Conference on Computers in Education (ICCE 2007)*, pages pages 137–142.
- Ruslan Mitkov, Le An Ha, and Nikiforos Karamanis. 2006. A computer-aided environment for generating multiple-choice test items. *Natural Language Engineering*, 12(2):177–194.
- Adam Kilgarriff Simon Smith, P.V.S Avinesh. 2010. Gap-fill Tests for Language Learners: Corpus-Driven Item Generation. In *Proceedings of ICON-2010: 8th International Conference on Natural Language Processing*.
- Eiichiro Sumita, Fumiaki Sugaya, and Seiichi Yamamoto. 2005. Measuring non-native speakers' proficiency of english by using a test with automatically-generated fill-in-the-blank questions. In *Proceedings of the second workshop on Building Educational Applications Using NLP, EdAppsNLP 05*, pages 61–68, Stroudsburg, PA, USA. Association for Computational Linguistics.