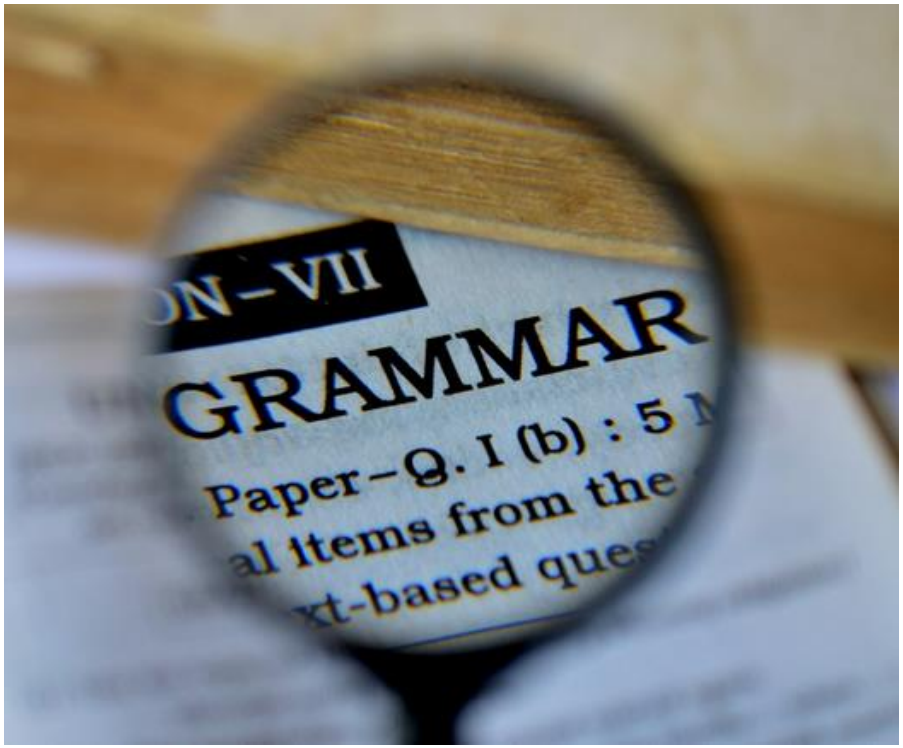
An evolution of learner grammar: Insights from the English Grammar Profile

Dr Anne O'Keeffe & Geraldine Mark

5th ELT Malta conference 2016

Saturday 8th October



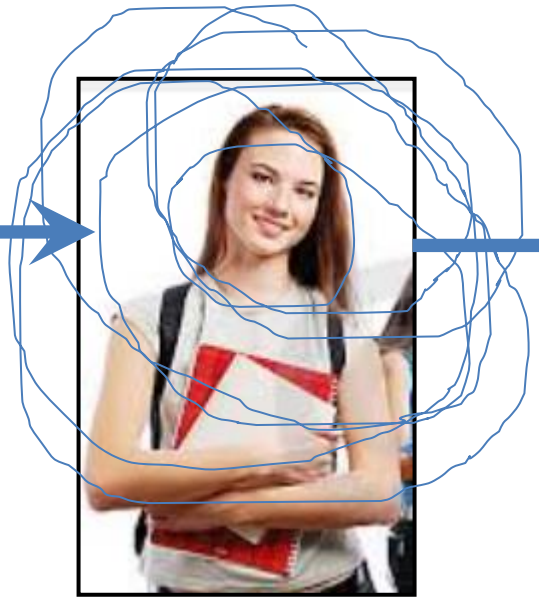
What grammar do learners really know at each level of the CEFR?

EnglishProfile
The CEFR for English

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

grammar *in*

explicit knowledge

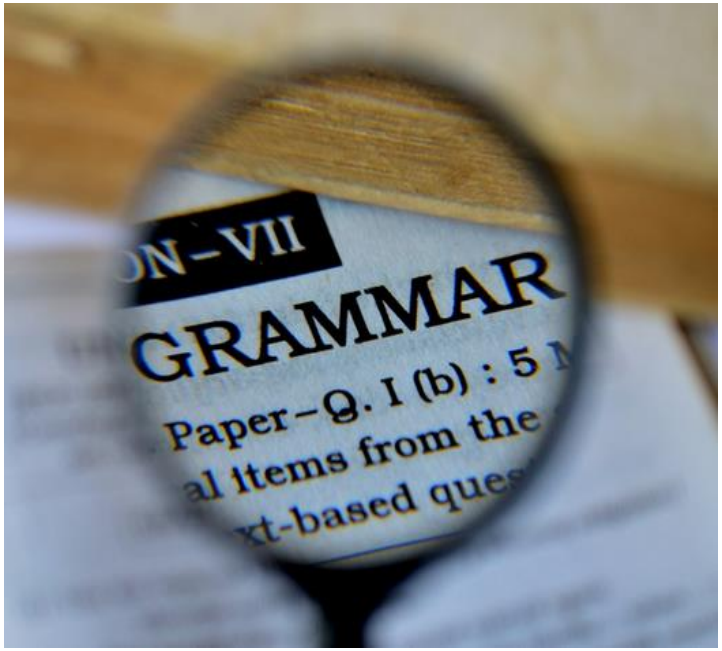


grammar *out*

implicit knowledge

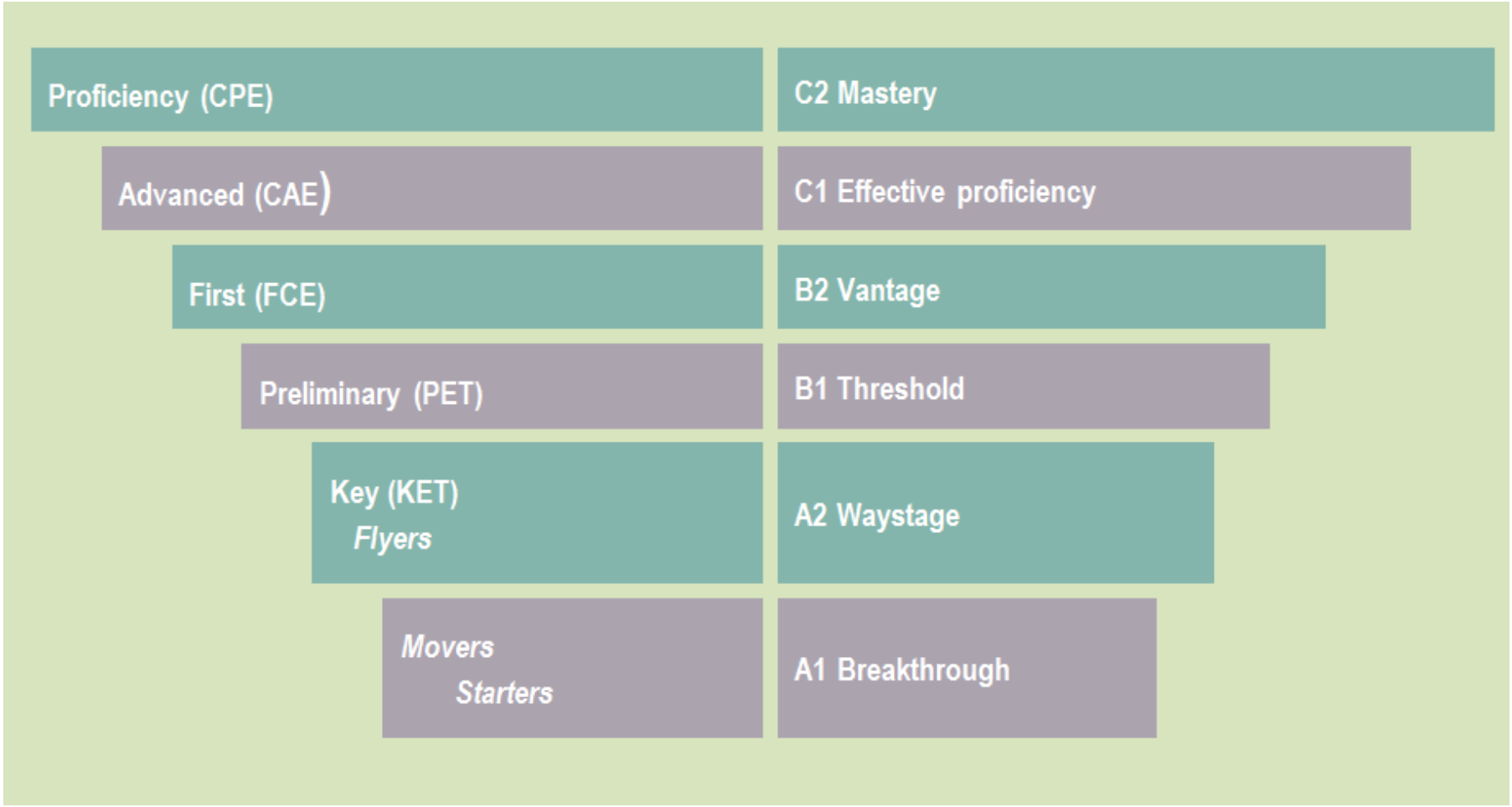
What is the English Grammar Profile?

The grammar that we *think* learners know and can use.



The grammar that learners *actually* know and can use.

CEFR and Cambridge Examinations



Cambridge Learner Corpus

over 55 million words

over 200,000 exam scripts

aligned to CEFR

Cambridge exam scripts

32 million words are error-coded

215 countries

143 first languages

20 years of data

Using the English Grammar Profile

Using the English Grammar Profile

http://www.englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile/egp-online

Sometimes learners use certain grammar patterns more than native speakers

Future perfect continuous

*This summer I **will have been working** for three years for my company …* (B2 Catalan)

Cambridge Learner Corpus 0.3 per million words

Cambridge International Corpus 0.2 per million words

More frequent in learner English

Some past perfect grammar patterns

Had I + past participle
No sooner had …
Never before had …
Hardly had …

Comparison of frequency

	BNC written
Had I + past participle	10.5 per million
No sooner had …	0.8 per million
Never before had …	0.3 per million
Hardly had …	0.0 per million

Comparison of frequency

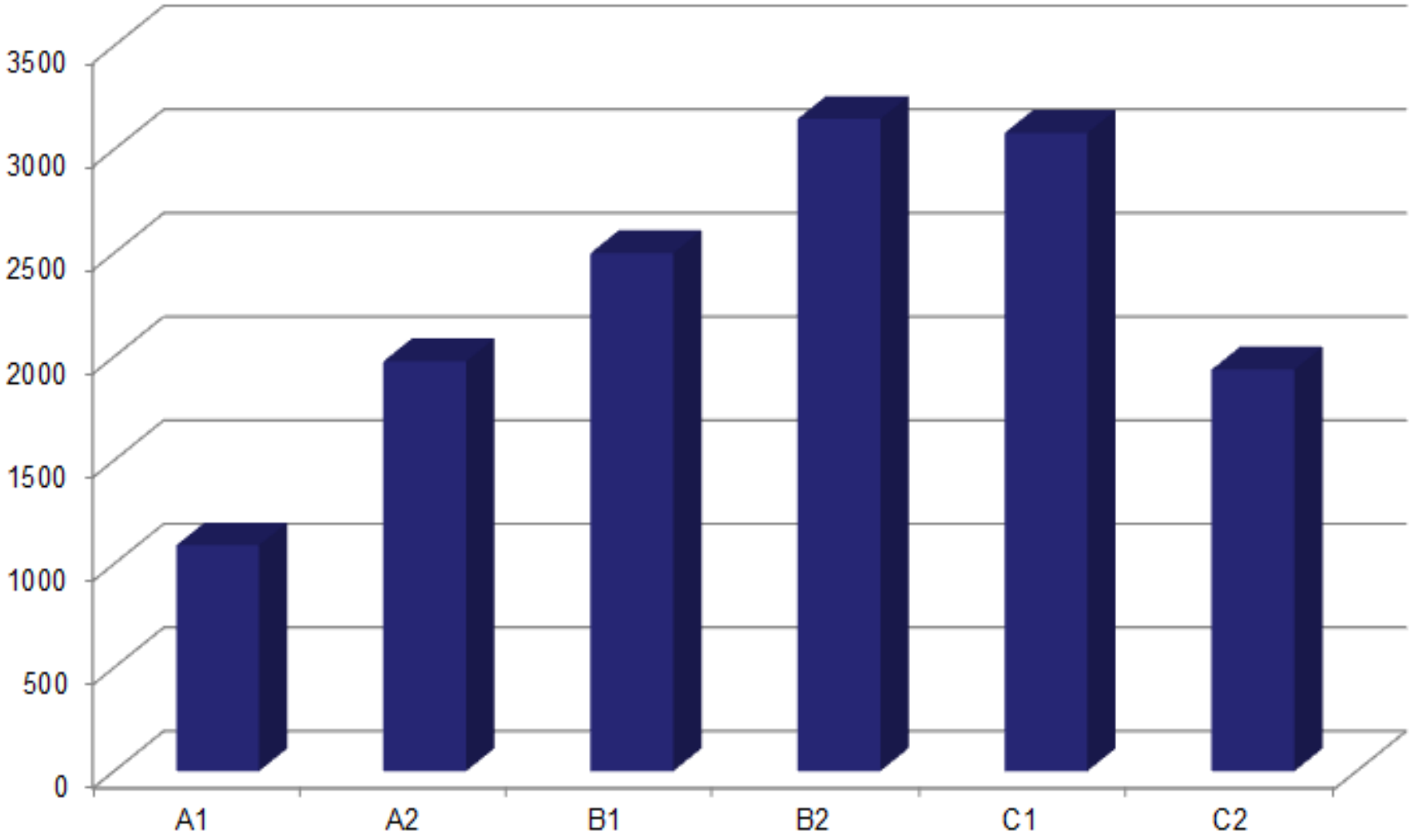
	BNC written	Cambridge Learner Corpus
Had I + past participle	10.5 per million	1.1 per million
No sooner had …	0.8 per million	5.6 per million
Never before had …	0.3 per million	1.2 per million
Hardly had …	0.0 per million	1.1 per million

Often, though grammar has been taught as a set, it is not learnt in a uniform way

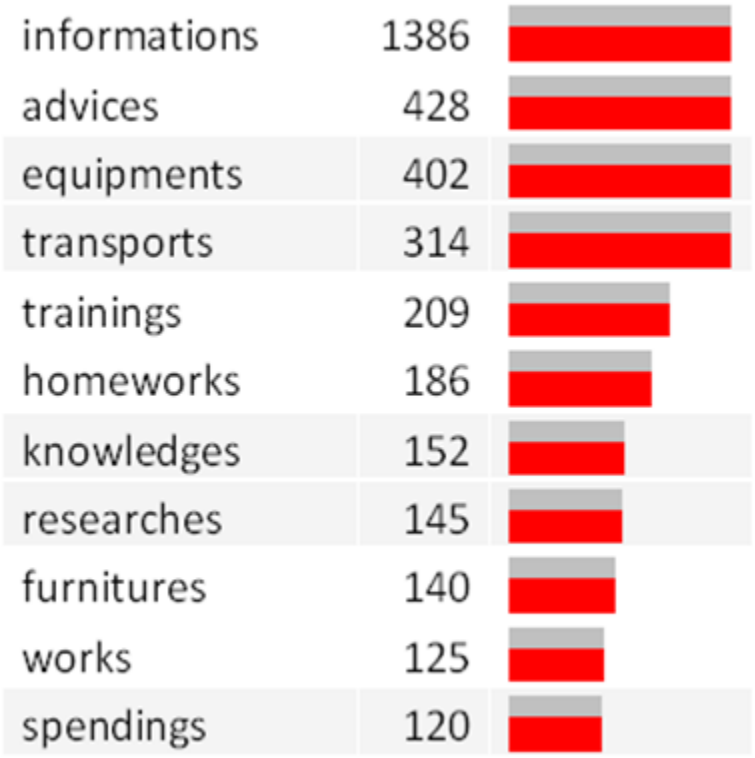
Noun countability:
Summary of popular coursebooks across publishers

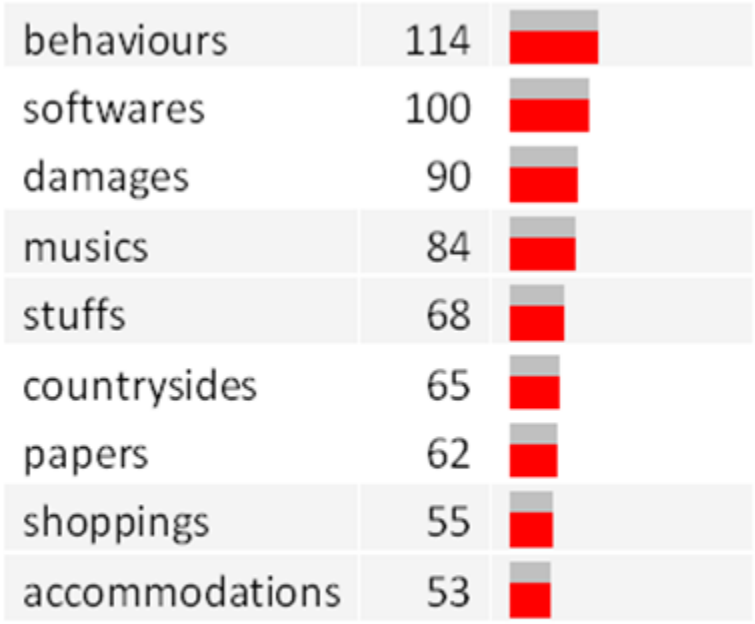
	Inside Out	*Cutting Edge*	*face2face*	*English in Mind*	*English File*
A1	countable and uncountable nouns with quantity *many a lot of, not many, much*	*a, some and any* + countable nouns	*a, some, a lot, any*	Countable and uncountable nouns	countable / uncountable nouns with *a, an, some, any, much* and *many*
A2		countable/uncount nouns with food + *some/any*	*How much/many* with countable/uncountable nouns; *some, any, a* with countable/uncountable nouns	countable/ uncountable nouns with *a, an, some,, much* and *many*	review of countable and uncountable; countability + quantifiers *many a lot of, not many, much*
B1	identifying countable and uncountable nouns	*Some, any,* quantifiers	B1 quantifiers (*a few, a little*) + nouns B1 + B2 quantifiers (*some, any, much, many, a bit of , enough, too much, loads of*) + countable, uncountable and plural nouns	*too much/many, not enough*	Quantifiers, *a few a little*
B2	uncountable nouns with *a few, a little, some*	quantifiers	*each, every, both, neither* + (*of*) + noun		Countability and plural nouns
C1		quantifiers, *some, any*	*little/a little, a few, quite a few*		
C2					

Errors with uncountable nouns



Most frequent uncountable noun errors





Expectations: A2

Waystage: CEFR

A2	Pronouns
2.1	demonstrative (3.1.1, 4.8.1.1, 4.8.1.2) **this, that, these, those**
2.2	personal (3.1.1, 4.8.1.1, 4.8.1.2)
2.2.1	subject forms **I, you, he, she, it, we, they**
2.2.2	non-subject forms **me, you, him, her, it, us, them**
2.3	possessive (4.7.5.1, 4.8.1.1, 4.8.1.2) **mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs**

KET Handbook

Pronouns

Personal (subject, object, possessive)
Impersonal: it, there
Demonstrative: this, that, these, those
Quantitative: one, something, everybody, etc.
Indefinite: some, any, something, one, etc.
Relative: who, which, that

Van Ek, J A and Trim, J L M (1991a) (1991b) *Waystage 1990*, Cambridge: Council of Europe/Cambridge University Press.
Cambridge ESOL (2009) *Key English Test Handbook for Teachers*.

Mine/mine A2 examples

I've just watched a football match between our teams and, of course, mine won …

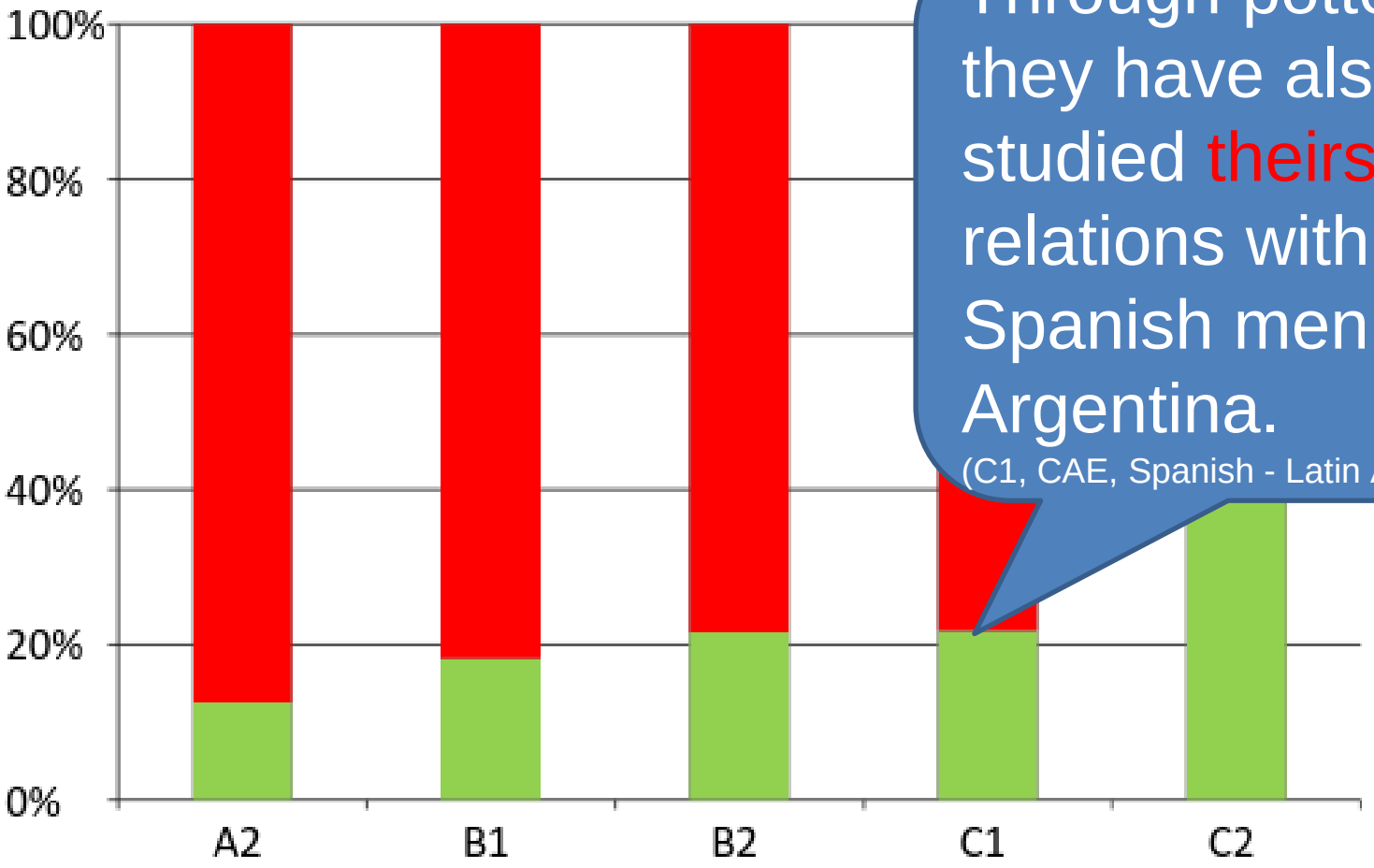
Mine is red.

I bought a new jacket too, because mine was very old.

I enjoyed mine very much.

A friend of mine bought a very nice sweater for me.

theirs



Through pottery, they have also studied theirs relations with the first Spanish men in Argentina.

(C1, CAE, Spanish - Latin American)

Sometimes learners know grammar before we even teach it

What level can students use this structure?

If they had not been there, I would have been very lonely.

(B1 THRESHOLD; 2001; Vietnamese)

How many types of conditional clauses did we find?

Conditional clauses – 27 in EGP!

A2	4
B1	10
B2	1
C1	4
C2	8

Conditional clauses – 27 in EGP!

A2	4
B1	10
B2	1
C1	4
C2	8

If you find it, call me (A2)

Is it possible to pay by card? If so, which ones do you take? (B1)

If you're really eager to learn age doesn't really matter as long as you're willing to learn. (B2)

Should there be a lack of mutual understanding a break-up is unavoidable. (C1)

Were it not for my university, I would give up this class immediately (C2)

Advanced learners show dexterity in language use

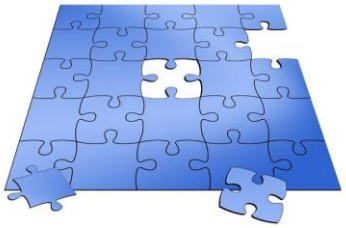
Adverbs (69 in EGP)

*Take care. See you **soon**.*
***Sometimes** I go to the beach.* (A1)

*If I were you I'd **certainly** choose not to go with your parents.* (B1)

***Apparently** someone made a mistake writing the details I gave over the phone.* (C1)

*He was quite nice to me, **surprisingly** and he told him that he would do his best but that the music was not too loud.* (C2)



adverb + adjective combinations

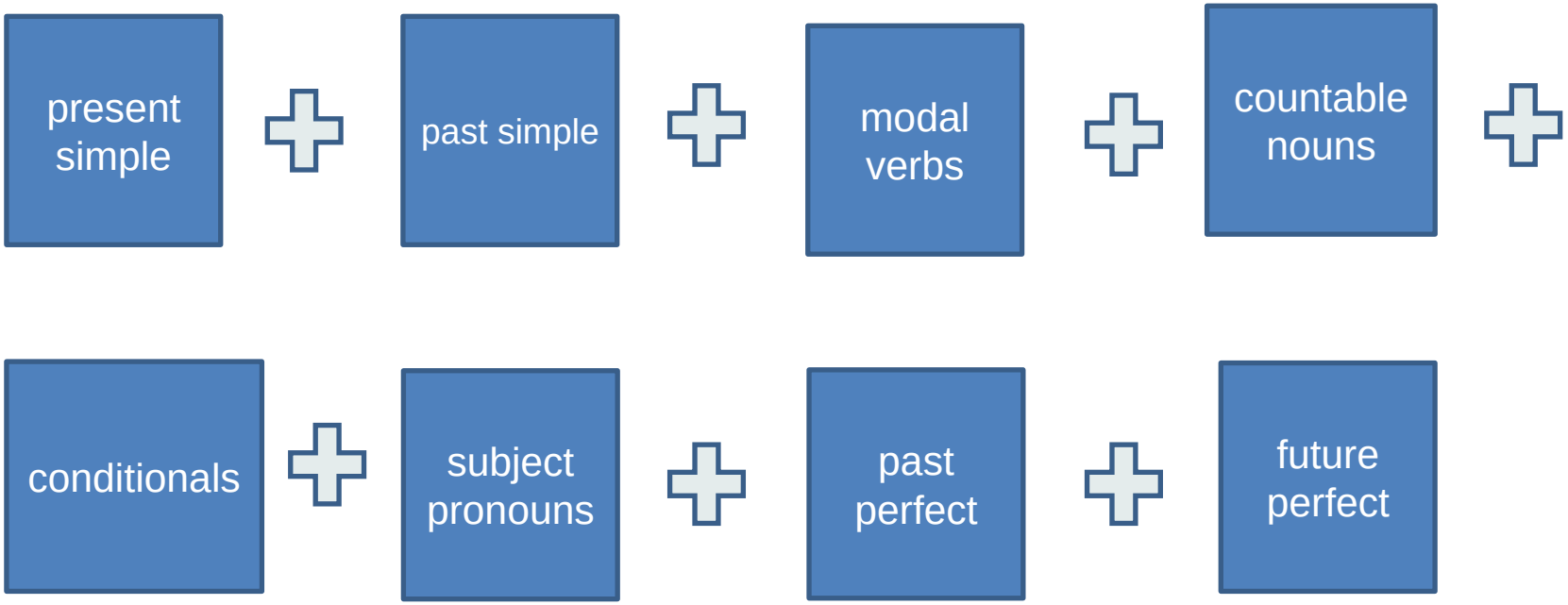
My home is ***very nice****.*
This is a ***very nice*** *neighbourhood.* (A1)

I'm ***really happy*** ***to*** *see you.*
It is ***really nice*** ***that*** *you come to visit me.* (A2)

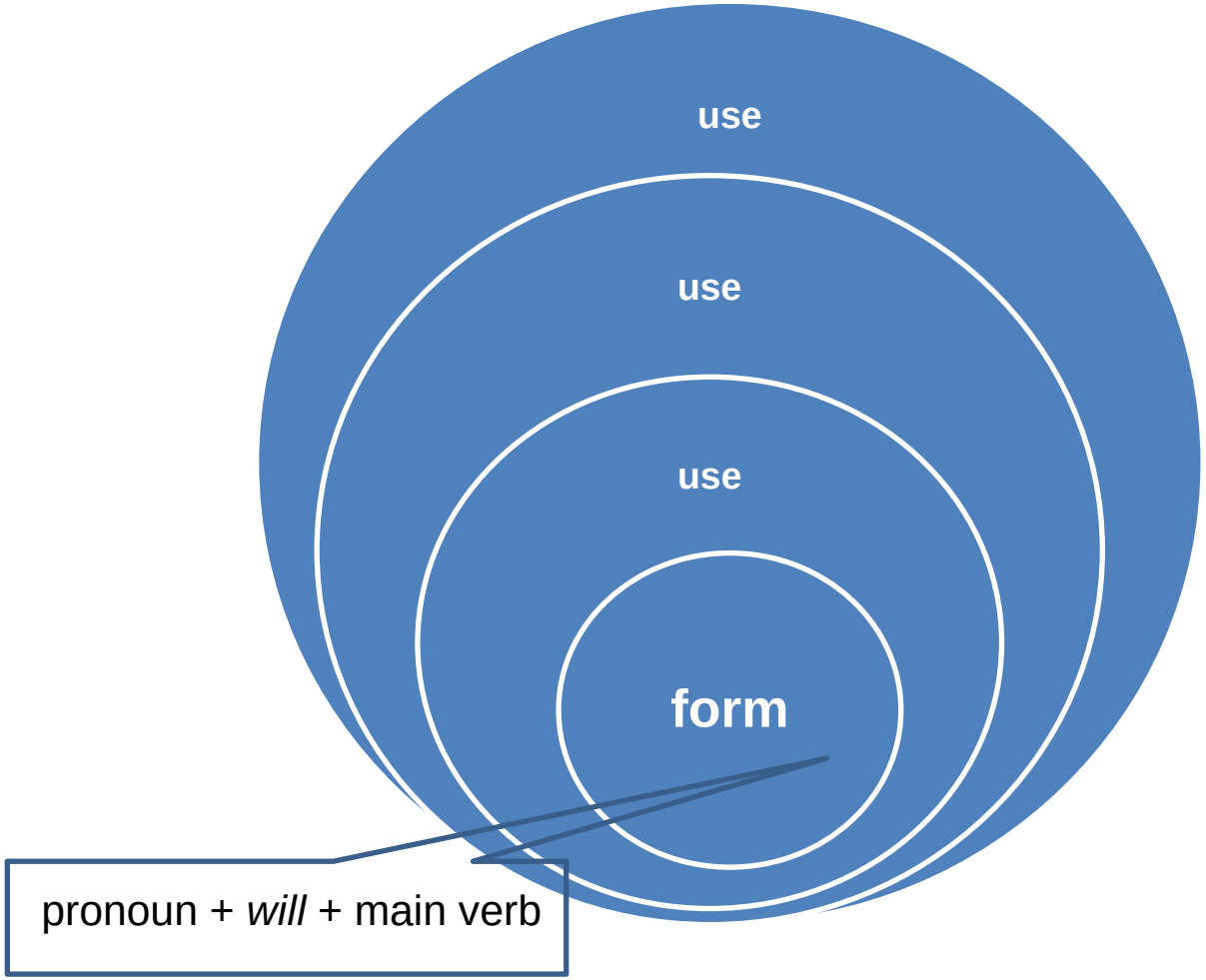
It is ***painfully obvious*** ***that it*** *will rescue our city from pollution and fumes that cars are producing.* (C1)

[Talking about stolen goods]
It is ***highly unlikely*** ***that*** *the goods can vanish from your warehouse without being noticed*. (C1)

Grammatical development doesn't look like this …



An evolution



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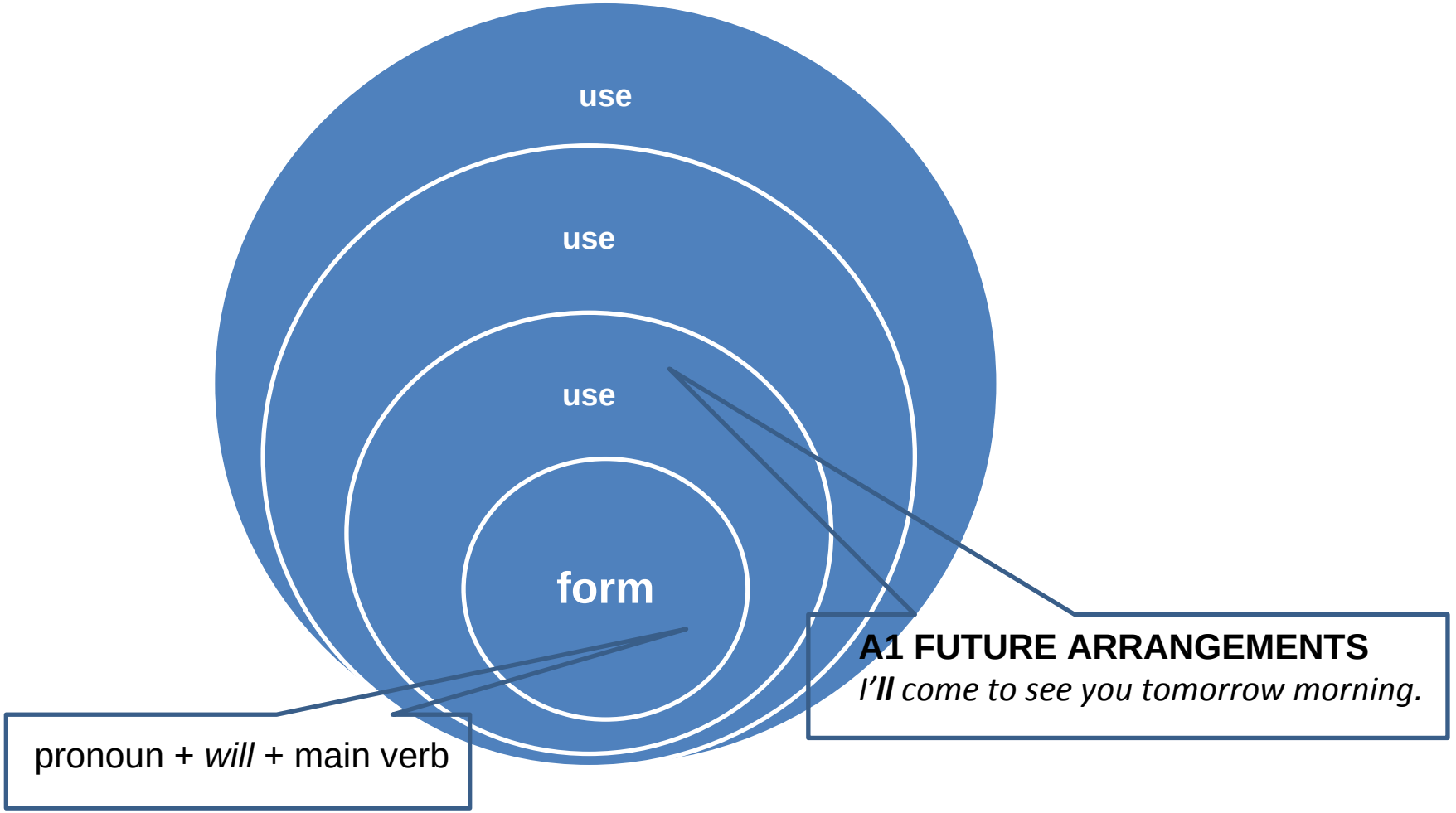

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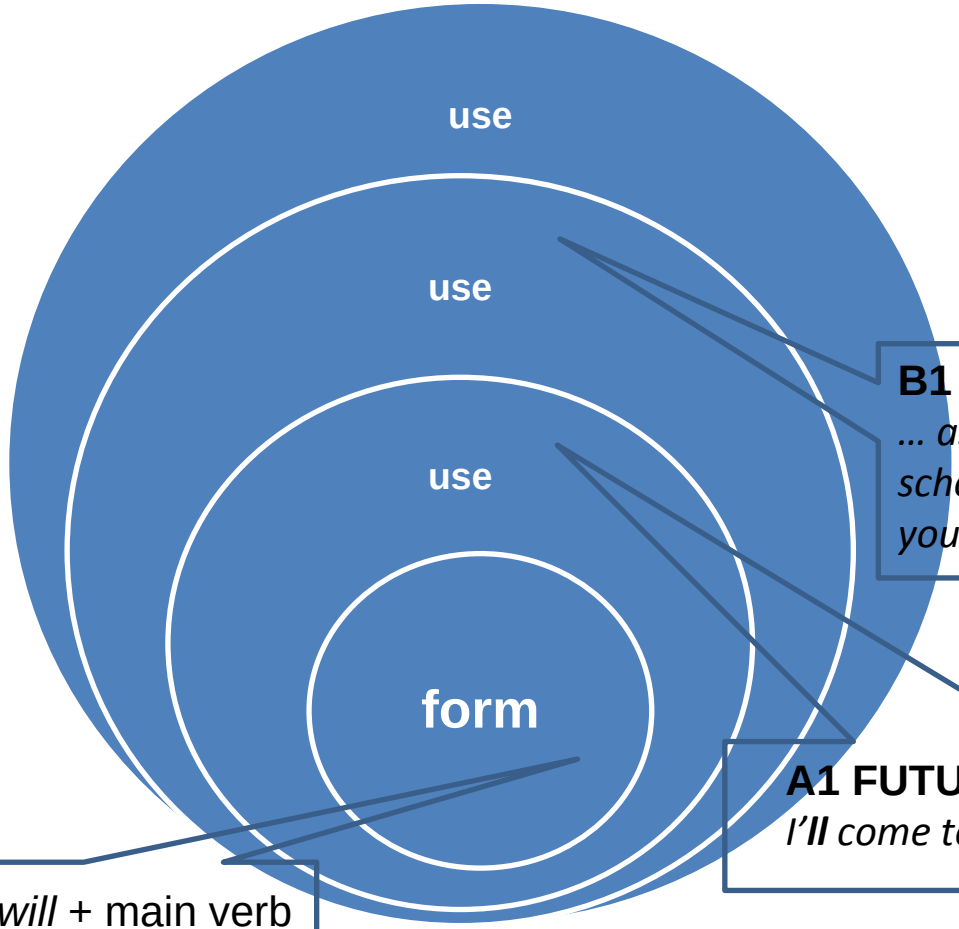
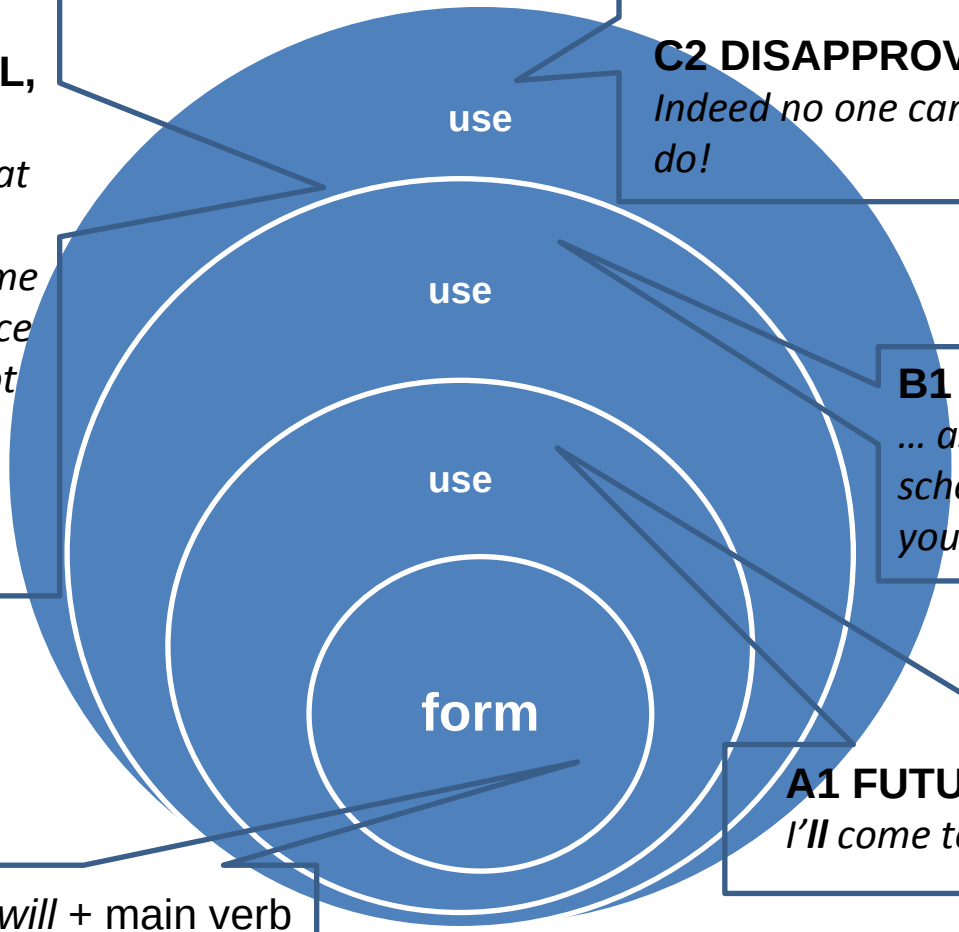


B1 PREDICTIONS
*… as soon as you finish your school, **it'll** be harder to meet your old friends.*

A1 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS
*I'**ll** come to see you tomorrow morning.*

pronoun + *will* + main verb

An evolution



C1 HABITUAL, TYPICAL
*… a dish that **will** usually contain some kind of sauce made of hot pepper, tomatoes, garlic …*

C2 DISAPPROVAL
*Indeed no one can imagine what children **will** do!*

B1 PREDICTIONS
*… as soon as you finish your school, **it'll** be harder to meet your old friends.*

A1 FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS
*I'**ll** come to see you tomorrow morning.*

pronoun + *will* + main verb

Some key insights

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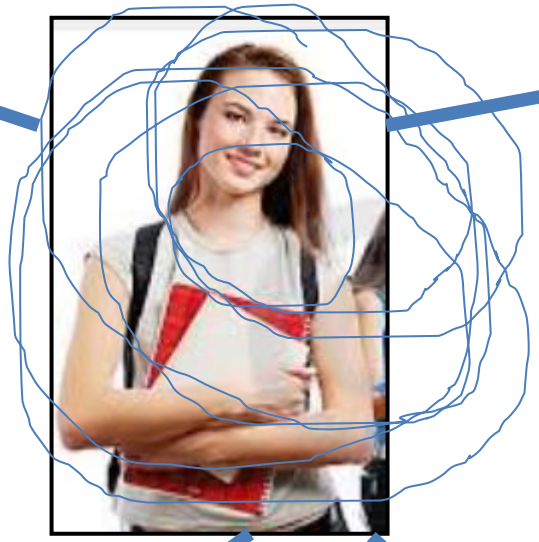

Sometimes learners use certain grammar patterns more than native speakers

Often, though grammar has been taught as a set, it is not learnt in a uniform way

Advanced learners show dexterity in language use

The result

A database resource of 1,222 grammar descriptors across the six levels of the CEFR

http://www.englishprofile.org/english-grammar-profile/egp-online