



The Concept of Grammatical Competence and Its Essence

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Abstract: This article highlights the role of grammatical competence in the development of language competencies among learners within the methodology of teaching foreign languages. It also analyzes students' ability to use language correctly, logically, and precisely—that is, their skill in understanding grammar rules and constructing expressions based on them. The aspects of developing grammatical competence are examined. The main methods of enhancing grammatical competence, as well as the difference between grammatical competence and grammatical knowledge, are explained.

Keywords: Grammatical competence, cognitive grammar, mental grammar, stages of teaching foreign language grammar, grammatical knowledge.

Introduction: In the methodology of teaching foreign languages, special attention is given to studying the development of learners' language competencies. Grammatical competence is understood as the knowledge of grammatical elements of a language and the ability to use them in speech. While defining the concept of "grammatical competence," various research findings, viewpoints, and approaches were reviewed. The term "grammatical competence" had evolved before it was integrated into the linguistic discourse. It encompasses the ability to comprehend and convey specific meanings through phrases and sentences constructed according to language rules. Students' grammatical competence refers to their ability to apply the language correctly, logically, and precisely—that is, their proficiency in understanding grammar rules and using them to form expressions. Grammatical competence plays a crucial role in learners' effective language acquisition. Its development enhances their overall language proficiency and ability to comprehend and express speech.

METHODS

The following aspects are essential in developing grammatical competence:

1. Knowledge of grammar rules: Students must have a clear understanding of the morphology (word formation) and syntax (sentence construction) of the language. These rules enable them to construct accurate and precise sentences.
2. Structure and meaning: Grammar rules help students properly grasp the structure and meaning of the language. They provide insight into how words and sentence components are interconnected.
3. Practical application of competence: It is vital for students to apply grammar rules in practice—i.e., to express themselves correctly in writing and speaking. This can be facilitated through grammar exercises, storytelling, lectures, and conversations.
4. Grammatical competence in a foreign language: When students are learning another language, grammatical competence determines the level of language acquisition. For example, for learners

of English, grammar rules are distinct and specific.

Improving grammatical competence strengthens students’ written and oral communication skills, allowing them to express their thoughts clearly and understandably while reducing speech errors. Moreover, grammatical competence is a core component of overall language competence and plays a crucial role in all language learning processes.

Research Results. Based on the analysis of scientific literature, the following conclusions can be drawn [7]:

Grammatical competence is a complex phenomenon that has gone through several stages of development.

Grammatical competence is a pressing issue in foreign language teaching theory and requires the development of new teaching methods.

This term is closely related to communicative and linguistic competence and is an integral part of them.

Grammatical competence requires detailed study to define it more precisely (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Researchers’ Approaches

No.	Researchers	Researchers’ Opinions
1.	D. Hymes	Identified grammatical competence as one of the four components of communicative competence.
2.	S. Savignon	Understood as the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactic, and phonological features of a language.
3.	L. Bimm	The ability to generate an infinite number of linguistically correct sentences.
4.	V.I. Chernitsky	The ability to appropriately use grammatical knowledge, skills, and abilities in a foreign language to effectively perform speech actions in communication.
5.	L. Karpova	A set of principles governing the integration of lexical elements into meaningful phrases and sentences through the use of grammatical tools.
6.	E. Azimova	The ability to use grammatical elements of a language during communication.
7.	Ye. Oleynikova	The use of grammatical tools necessary for speech communication.
8.	N. Kaftaylova	The ability to use grammatical tools of the language and a set of methods and principles for integrating lexical elements into meaningful expressions and sentences.

What is learners' grammatical competence?

Could it be a kind of program that enables students to construct grammatically correct sentences according to the “commands” of an instructor, like programmed

robots? Or is it the continuous functioning of a neural network in the brain, connected by bioelectrical links that emerge during interaction? Or perhaps it is a unique grammatical worldview in which a person,

immersed in real-life experience, reflects meaning as in a mirror?

The cognitive model of learners' grammatical competence is based on two opposing perspectives, which require comparison: the "cognitive" grammar of R. Langacker and the "mental" grammar of N. Chomsky. According to the American linguist N. Chomsky, mental grammar is an innate mechanism of the brain, while R. Langacker claims that cognitive grammar is the linguistic continuation of how reality is perceived [9].

As an academic subject, a foreign language, beyond its primary functions, also serves several additional purposes, including the development of personal qualities such as creativity and logic. It is important not to forget that the main goal of foreign language teaching is to develop communicative competence in the target language—something that cannot be achieved without grammatical competence. The role of grammar in a foreign language includes not only the use of grammatically correct expressions and sentences, but also mastery of the rules for word formation, sentence construction, and the ability to use the language independently. If we refer to grammar from a formal perspective, the term can be defined as a system of rules that enables the generation of orderly chains of linguistic elements [5].

Grammatical competence refers to the ability to use a language correctly and accurately. It is directly linked to students' knowledge of grammar rules and their ability to apply them in various contexts. The main ways to develop grammatical competence include:

1. Learning grammar rules.

Students must study the core principles of morphology and syntax. This includes understanding parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, etc.) and their functions within a sentence. Complex grammar rules, such as tenses (past and future), passive voice, comparisons, and others, should also be covered.

2. Performing practical exercises.

Completing various grammar tasks helps students consolidate their understanding of the rules. For example, exercises on verb tenses, correct use of parts of speech, and their syntactic connections. Fill-in-the-blank exercises help students apply grammar structures correctly.

3. Written practice.

Encouraging students to write letters, essays, and stories regularly helps improve their ability to construct words and sentences according to grammar rules. Reviewing and editing written texts for

grammatical errors allows students to recognize and correct their mistakes, especially with feedback from teachers or peers.

4. Reading and listening.

Reading English texts (books, articles, news) helps students understand how grammatical structures are used in context. Encountering complex sentences and constructions allows for a deeper grasp of grammar. Listening to English podcasts, films, or conversations also aids in understanding how grammar is applied in real speech.

5. Speaking practice.

Regular spoken communication in English helps students develop natural and intuitive use of grammar. It is important to focus on grammatical correctness when expressing ideas. Role-play or grammar-based games involving various structures reinforce practical understanding.

6. Using grammar tools.

Grammar-checking applications and tools, such as Grammarly or Ginger, help detect and correct grammar mistakes. Interactive apps like Duolingo, Babbel, or Memrise offer practical exercises to make grammar learning more engaging and effective. These tools allow students to easily explore various aspects of grammar.

7. Clarifying grammar concepts.

When English is being learned as a second language, special attention must be given to grammar. Every language has its own unique grammatical system, so it is recommended that students compare the grammar of the foreign language with that of their native language.

At the speech stage, learners further develop their grammatical language and speech skills. The construction of the speech component of grammatical competence is selected in a way that allows learners to comprehend and master grammatical material by considering their individual and cognitive learning styles. The corresponding tests may include the following tasks: Fill in the blanks in the sentences using the correct grammatical forms. Replace errors in the text with appropriate grammatical forms based on the meaning of the grammar phenomenon being tested. Insert the correct grammatical forms into phrases, proverbs, or poems. Restore missing grammatical elements in the text (with or without the number of blanks specified). Identify and correct grammatical errors in the text (with or without the number of errors indicated). Compose a story on a given topic using the grammar rules studied. Compose a story using the given grammatical words in any (or fixed) sequence. Using the suggested formulas, select the correct words and reconstruct the rule for applying the grammatical

phenomenon. Follow the specified instructions [5].

Grammatical competence includes knowledge of grammar rules, grammatical skills, and the ability to comprehend and express specific meanings. It is formed through expressions and sentences that conform to the rules of the language [3].

As seen above, none of the definitions fully reflect the essence of grammatical competence as a key component of linguistic competence; rather, they interpret its structure and content in various ways. To define grammatical competence precisely and comprehensively, it is necessary to determine what students must learn in terms of the grammatical aspect of speech in a foreign language, as well as to identify what constitutes the content of teaching grammar in speech.

According to A.N. Shamova, the content of teaching the grammatical aspect of foreign language speech involves three key components: linguistic, psychological, and methodological. Let us briefly review each of them:

The linguistic component includes a grammatical minimum—a defined set of grammatical phenomena (grammatical forms, structures, rules of word formation and sentence construction), intended for accurate speech design from morphological and syntactic perspectives. It also contains a list of differentiating features, which describe the sequential functioning of a grammatical phenomenon in oral and written communication.

The psychological component comprises productive and receptive grammatical skills, which—together with phonetic and lexical skills—form the foundation for the ability to carry out speech activities in a foreign language.

The methodological component ensures the development of students’ independent work skills and

their ability to interact with peers while working with grammatical material [10].

When studying grammar, it is necessary to consider the connection between the grammar and culture of the country where the target language is spoken. These elements shape the worldview of native speakers from a different linguistic and cultural background [2].

In defining grammatical competence, researchers emphasize learners' ability to correctly comprehend grammar and apply it in meaningful foreign language communication. It encompasses grammar knowledge, grammar skills, and strategies for working with them, all based on learners' speech activity and their language acquisition process [6].

R.P. Milrud presents grammatical competence as a model, defining its cognitive structure as the psycholinguistic mechanism of “thought-proposition” expressed through verbal abstraction, organization, and repeatable transformation within communicative and cognitive activity. In constructing this grammatical model, Milrud draws from cognitive psychology and linguistics, identifying the following components: grammatical concepts, grammatical examples, grammatical categories, grammatical prototypes, grammatical frames, grammatical scenarios, grammatical schemas, grammatical creativity [1].

At every stage of foreign language grammar instruction, a combination of approaches and methods is applied. There are many classifications of grammar teaching methods, including: grammar-translation, text-translation, direct method, audio-lingual method, audio-visual method, and others.

The effectiveness of foreign language grammar teaching is achieved by combining these methods and approaches in accordance with the recommended stages of instruction [8] (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Stages of Teaching Foreign Language Grammar

Stages	Approaches	Methods
Stage 1	Conceptual	Direct method Audio-lingual method Audiovisual method
Stage 2	Cognitive	Grammar-translation method Text-translation method
Stage 3	Cognitive-communicative	Natural method Conscious-practical method

Grammatical competence is understood by researchers as the level of knowledge of the basic language code, which includes the linguistically correct formation of grammatical rules, vocabulary, word

formation, and sentence structure. Grammatical competence includes both productive and receptive grammatical skills [12].

The methodology for the formation of grammatical

competence in a foreign language, taking into account didactic principles, utilized the following principles:

- 1) the principle of a communicative approach to the selection, organization, and presentation of materials;
- 2) the principle of considering the cognitive processes of material assimilation;
- 3) the principle of functionality of phenomena in speech, utterance, and the language system;
- 4) the principle of organizing grammatical material structurally and thematically by using a speech sample as a learning unit and connecting “grammatical” and “communicative” topics in the lesson;
- 5) the principle of situationality, which includes demonstrating grammatical phenomena in a communicative situation and their impact in conditional speech and speech situation exercises;
- 6) the principle of a differentiated approach to teaching grammar;
- 7) the principle of considering interlingual

interference [4].

Grammatical competence generally implies the knowledge of grammatical means and the ability to use them adequately in speech. It includes the following:

knowledge of grammar rules that help to transform lexical units into meaningful statements;

the ability to perceive and produce utterances developed in accordance with the rules of the foreign language;

skills in using grammatical phenomena in speech in accordance with the communicative task and situation [11].

Understanding the difference between grammatical competence and grammatical knowledge is very important in the process of teaching and learning a language. The main difference between these two concepts is that grammatical knowledge refers to the understanding and knowledge of grammatical rules and structures, while grammatical competence is the ability to apply this knowledge effectively and correctly in the language (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Differences between Grammatical Competence and Grammatical Knowledge

Differences	Grammatical Knowledge	Grammatical Competence
Definitions	A collection of information about the grammar of a language. It includes rules, structures, parts of speech, and syntax.	The ability to actively and effectively apply grammatical knowledge. It includes the practical aspect of language and implies using learned grammar in real-life communication contexts.
Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parts of speech: noun, verb, adjective, numeral, pronoun, etc. - Basic grammar rules: tenses, suffixes, verb forms, correct word order. - Sentence structures: simple and complex sentence constructions. - Theoretical grammatical concepts: e.g., “past tense of the verb,” “plural forms.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correct use of grammar: the learner knows how to correctly and effectively apply grammar rules in speaking and writing. - Error correction: the learner can identify and fix grammatical mistakes in their own speech. - Applying grammar in context: proper use of grammar in various communicative and writing situations. - Coherent speech: the learner expresses their thoughts clearly, understandably, and effectively using grammar.
Practical Application	This is theoretical knowledge – understanding grammar rules, structures, and patterns. It allows learners to understand	This is the ability to apply that knowledge effectively and correctly in real-life communication or writing. It reflects the learner’s ability to use grammar practically.

	how grammar works in the language.	
Examples	The learner studies the past tense of verbs and knows examples like “I read,” “he left.”	The learner uses the past tense correctly in real conversation or writing. For instance, when describing yesterday's activities, they say: “I read a book” or “He didn’t go to school.”

Grammatical knowledge and grammatical competence complement each other. Grammatical knowledge provides the theoretical foundations, but grammatical competence is necessary to ensure the practical use of grammar. When a learner understands the connection between learning grammar and using it in practice, their overall language competence becomes stronger. Grammatical knowledge is a collection of rules and structures, while grammatical competence is the ability to apply this knowledge accurately and effectively in real-life situations. Both are important in language learning, but grammatical competence plays the main role in using the language correctly and successfully.

Grammatical competence is essential for developing learners’ ability to use language correctly and effectively, and its formation and development go through several stages. Although the concepts of formation and development are closely related, there are some differences between them.

Formation of grammatical competence is the initial stage in which learners begin to acquire grammatical knowledge. At this stage, learners are introduced to grammar rules for the first time. During this process, learners gain theoretical knowledge of grammar and learn to apply it in simple practice.

As the initial stage, formation includes learners' understanding of grammar rules and structures. For example, constructing correct sentences, identifying parts of speech, and recognizing tenses. In acquiring theoretical foundations, the learner gains knowledge about verb tenses, parts of speech, and syntactic structures. At this stage, the learner begins to apply

grammar rules using simple and short texts. The main purpose of formation is to build a foundation of grammatical knowledge and introduce the learner to the language system. For example, a beginner student may form sentences like “I read” or “He walked,” thus forming basic grammatical knowledge.

Development of grammatical competence, on the other hand, is the process of deepening and expanding the grammatical knowledge already formed. At this stage, the learner further develops their grammar skills, understands more complex structures, and learns to apply them correctly and effectively in practice. During the development stage, the learner applies their knowledge more frequently and uses grammar rules more widely across various contexts.

As an advanced stage, development involves the learner using previously acquired grammatical knowledge in more complex texts, exercises, and language situations. Practical application is improved; learners start using grammar in real-life speech and written tasks. In learning complex structures, the learner practices forming compound and complex sentences, using various verb tenses and forms. The main purpose of development is to enhance the learner’s grammatical competence and prepare them to use grammar accurately and effectively in different contexts. At this stage, the learner is able to apply grammar rules correctly and proficiently in various complex sentences and communicative situations. For example, the learner might produce sentences like “If I had studied, I would have finished the book.”

There are differences between the formation and development of grammatical competence (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Differences Between the Formation and Development of Grammatical Competence

Aspects	Formation	Development
Stage	Initial (newly acquired)	Advanced (i.e., deepened and expanded)
Grammatical Knowledge	Basic grammar rules (parts of speech, simple sentences)	Application of complex grammar structures (compound and complex sentences, tenses)

Objective	To acquire grammatical knowledge and establish the foundations	To further improve and effectively apply grammatical knowledge
Practical Application	Simple texts and short sentences	Complex texts, extended speech, written tasks
Theoretical and Practical Approach	Acquiring theoretical knowledge	Applying language correctly and effectively in practice
Grammatical Structures	Simple structures, basic tenses, parts of speech	Complex structures, verb forms

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the formation of grammatical competence is the initial stage of mastering grammatical knowledge, during which the learner studies the basic rules and structures of the language. The development of grammatical competence, on the other hand, is the process of deepening and expanding this knowledge, as well as enhancing the ability to use it effectively in more complex contexts and situations. The formation and development of grammatical competence are two complementary stages aimed at helping learners successfully apply their grammatical knowledge in practice. Together, they form a solid foundation for the language learning process.

The development of grammatical competence is a continuous process that teaches learners to understand and correctly apply grammar rules. The practical use of writing, reading, listening, and speaking, along with the integration of technological tools and resources, facilitates and enhances the effectiveness of this process.

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