

DEVELOPING THE LEXICO-GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCIES OF FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

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Abstract: This article examines theoretical foundations of developing the lexico-grammatical competencies of future English language teachers. On the basis of the existing scholarship, the article substantiates the introduction of the concept of “competence” into scientific discourse and the interrelationship between lexical and grammatical competencies. It analyses the system of training English language teachers in the Republic of Uzbekistan, together with its curricula and blocks of disciplines, and identifies the existing problems in the formation of lexico-grammatical competence. The article also presents a comparative analysis of methods that are commonly used in English language teaching.

Keywords: lexico-grammatical competence, communicative competence, lexical approach, language teaching methodology, CEFR, collocations, corpus linguistics, task-based language teaching, cognitive approach

In contemporary linguodidactics, the concept of “competence” occupies a central position. The introduction of this concept into scientific discourse is associated with the name of the American linguist N.Chomsky, who in 1965 distinguished between the notions of “linguistic competence” and “linguistic performance.” According to Chomsky’s theory, linguistic competence is the speaker’s internal, intuitive knowledge of the language system, which provides the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences and to understand them.

In the 1970s, D.Hymes criticised Chomsky’s theory and put forward the concept of “communicative competence.” In Hymes’s view, grammatical correctness alone is not sufficient for successful communication; it is also necessary to use linguistic means appropriately to the social situation. Communicative competence thus came to be interpreted as a complex construct uniting grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic components.

M.Canale and M.Swain (1980) proposed a four-component model of communicative competence: grammatical competence (the rules of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology and orthography), sociolinguistic competence (the choice of linguistic means appropriate to the social context), discourse competence

(the production of coherent text) and strategic competence (strategies for overcoming problems in communication).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001, 2018) divides communicative language competence into three main components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Linguistic competence in turn includes lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological and orthographic competencies. Although the CEFR defines lexical and grammatical competencies separately, in actual speech activity they are closely intertwined.

Lexical competence is the knowledge of vocabulary and the ability to use it. It involves two main aspects: lexical elements (idioms, phraseological units, fixed expressions, individual lexical items) and grammatical elements (articles, quantifiers, demonstrative pronouns, personal pronouns, interrogatives, conjunctions, particles). As P.Nation (2001) emphasises, knowing a word means knowing its form (pronunciation, spelling, word formation), its meaning (denotative meaning, connotation, associations) and its use (grammatical functions, collocations, restrictions).

Grammatical competence is the knowledge of grammatical resources and the ability to use them. It encompasses morphology (word formation and inflection) and syntax (the structure of phrases and sentences). The CEFR defines grammatical competence as the ability to produce and understand meaningful word and sentence structures from linguistic units.

In modern linguodidactics, the interrelationship between lexis and grammar is increasingly being recognised. In the traditional approach, grammar and vocabulary were taught as separate areas. However, the "Lexical Approach" theory advanced by M. Lewis (1993) fundamentally changed this view. As Lewis stresses, "language is not grammaticalised lexis, but rather lexicalised grammar." This means that grammatical structures appear bound to particular lexical items and, conversely, that lexical items are used in particular grammatical forms.

Data from corpus linguistics likewise confirm the integration of lexis and grammar. The research of J. Sinclair (1991) showed that the majority of linguistic units are selected on the basis of the idiom principle: that is, speakers do not freely combine individual words but rather draw on ready-made lexico-grammatical units (chunks, collocations, patterns). For example, the combination "make a decision" is used rather than "do a decision," and "strong tea" rather than "powerful tea."

The Place of Lexico-Grammatical Competence in the System of Training Future English Language Teachers

The training of future English language teachers is a complex, multifaceted process aimed at the formation of various components of professional competence. Within the framework of the modern educational paradigm, the professional

competence of a teacher manifests itself as a synthesis of language knowledge, pedagogical skill, psychological readiness and methodological knowledge.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the training of English language teachers is carried out at the bachelor's level (educational programme "Foreign Language and Literature," 60111800) and at the master's level (specialty "Foreign Language and Literature") of higher education. In accordance with the State Educational Standards and curricula, the training of English language teachers at the bachelor's level includes the following main blocks of disciplines:

- a practical course of English (Practical English, Integrated Skills);
- theoretical linguistic disciplines (phonetics, lexicology, theoretical grammar, stylistics);
- language teaching methodology;
- literary studies disciplines;
- the theory and practice of translation;

Lexico-grammatical competence is formed directly within the disciplines of "Practical English Course," "Practical Grammar," "Lexicology" and "Theoretical Grammar." However, other disciplines also contribute to the consolidation and development of lexico-grammatical competence. For example, in the literary disciplines, students develop their lexico-grammatical skills through working with authentic literary texts; in the translation disciplines, the skill of recognising interlingual similarities and differences between lexico-grammatical units is formed.

In the curricula of higher education institutions, the discipline "Practical Grammar" is usually taught during semesters 1-4 and covers the following topics: sentence structure and types of sentences, the system of verb tenses, modal verbs, the passive voice, conditional sentences, object clauses, attributive (relative) clauses, non-finite verb forms (the infinitive, the gerund, the participle), tense agreement and non-agreement, the use of articles, pronouns, the degrees of comparison of adjectives and adverbs, prepositions, and others.

The discipline "Lexicology" is taught in semesters 5-6 and addresses such issues as the structure of the word, the means of word formation, the semantic structure of the word, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, phraseology, lexical strata and stylistic stratification.

An analysis of the existing teaching process shows that lexical and grammatical material are often taught in isolation from each other. Practical grammar lessons concentrate on grammatical structures, while lexical activities focus on expanding vocabulary. Such an approach does not adequately take into account the interrelationship between lexis and grammar; as a result, students may produce speech that is grammatically correct yet lexically unnatural.

Analysis of Approaches to Developing Lexico-Grammatical Competence

Throughout the history of foreign language teaching methodology, various approaches to teaching lexical and grammatical material have been employed. Each approach answered the demands of its time and possessed certain advantages. In modern methodology, the positive features of these approaches are being synthesised and more refined methodologies are being developed on their basis.

The Grammar-Translation Method is one of the oldest methods of foreign language teaching. It is based on the explicit teaching of grammatical rules, on translation from the native language into the foreign language and vice versa, and on work with written texts. The advantage of this method is that it allows for the systematic study of grammatical structures and provides the opportunity for a deep understanding of the language's structure. Its disadvantage, however, is the absence of formation of oral speech skills and the lack of communicative orientation.

The Direct Method involves teaching directly in the foreign language, without recourse to the native language. Grammar is acquired inductively, through examples. Vocabulary is explained by means of real objects, pictures and actions. The strong side of this method is the development of oral speech and the creation of a language environment. Its weak side is the difficulty of explaining complex grammatical concepts.

The Audiolingual Method is grounded in behaviourist theory and forms language skills through repetition and reinforcement (drilling). Grammatical structures are automated through pattern-drill exercises, while vocabulary is learned in the context of dialogues and texts. Its advantage lies in the automation of language skills. Its disadvantages are the limited scope it allows for creative speech activity and the diminished communicative significance of what is learned.

The Communicative Approach (Communicative Language Teaching - CLT) has, since the 1970s, occupied a leading position in foreign language teaching methodology. The principal aim of this approach is the formation of communicative competence. Grammar and vocabulary are regarded as means of communication and are studied within the framework of communicative tasks.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a developed form of the communicative approach. In TBLT, the educational process is directed not so much at learning about the language as at carrying out tasks through the language. Grammatical and lexical material are mastered naturally in the course of accomplishing the task. The theoretical foundations and practical aspects of TBLT have been thoroughly elaborated in the works of D. Nunan, J. Willis and R. Ellis.

The Lexical Approach was developed by M. Lewis in the 1990s. According to this approach, language consists primarily of ready-made lexical units (chunks): collocations ("make a decision"), formulaic expressions ("I'd like to...") and idioms

("break the ice"). The Lexical Approach does not separate grammar from vocabulary, but rather proposes the integrated study of lexico-grammatical units.

The Cognitive Approach understands language learning as a cognitive process. It focuses on the conceptualisation of linguistic structures, on the formation of schemas, and on cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy. Cognitive grammar (R. Langacker, G. Lakoff) emphasises the necessity of studying the meaning and the form of linguistic units together.

Context-Based Teaching is the study of lexico-grammatical material within the framework of a specific context, situation or topic. Context helps to make the meaning of lexico-grammatical units precise and to assist in their memorisation and application. Context-based teaching is widely used in the methodologies of Content-Based Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

In conclusion, comparative analysis of the approaches above shows that, in modern methodology, it is appropriate to draw upon and combine the positive aspects of each:

- from the grammar-translation method: the systematic analysis of grammatical structures and the contrastive approach;
- from the communicative approach: orientation toward communication, authentic materials and communicative tasks;
- from task-based language teaching: learning through practical tasks and the unity of process and outcome;
- from the lexical approach: the integrated study of lexico-grammatical units, with attention to collocations and chunks;
- from the cognitive approach: the conceptualisation of linguistic units and the unity of meaning and form;
- from context-based teaching: learning in a meaningful context and the real use of language.

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