



Principles Of Developing Linguistic Competence In University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis examines the fundamental principles of developing linguistic competence in university students learning English as a foreign language. Linguistic competence is interpreted as an integrated system of phonological, lexical, grammatical, orthographic, semantic, and discourse knowledge that enables learners to understand and produce accurate language forms. The study focuses on the principles of systematicity, communicative orientation, contextualization, consciousness, continuity, differentiation, integration, and practical applicability. The findings show that the effective development of linguistic competence requires a balanced combination of language knowledge and communicative practice. Particular attention is paid to the organization of instructional materials, the sequence of linguistic content, the use of authentic contexts, and the role of formative assessment. The thesis concludes that linguistic competence develops successfully when language units are taught not as isolated elements but as interconnected means of expressing meaning in real communicative situations.

KEYWORDS: linguistic competence, university students, English language teaching, communicative approach, systematicity, contextualization, integration, language skills, formative assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic competence is one of the central components of foreign language proficiency. It includes knowledge of phonological patterns, vocabulary, grammatical structures, word formation, spelling conventions, semantic relations, and rules governing the construction of coherent utterances. In university education, linguistic competence serves as the foundation for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient knowledge of the language system, students may understand individual words or rules but experience difficulty in constructing meaningful and accurate communication.

The concept of linguistic competence was initially associated with a speaker's internal knowledge of grammatical rules. Chomsky distinguished competence from performance and emphasized the mental system that enables speakers to generate and understand an unlimited number of sentences [1]. Later, Hymes broadened this interpretation by connecting language knowledge with communicative appropriateness [2]. This shift influenced foreign language methodology and established the need to teach grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse in connection with real communicative purposes.

The aim of this thesis is to identify and explain the methodological principles that contribute to the effective development of linguistic competence in university students. The relevance of the



study is determined by the need to integrate theoretical language knowledge with students' ability to use English accurately, independently, and appropriately in academic and professional contexts.

The study employed theoretical analysis, comparison, generalization, and systematization of linguistic and methodological sources. The works devoted to linguistic competence, communicative competence, foreign language teaching, vocabulary acquisition, grammar instruction, and language assessment were examined. The principles identified in these sources were evaluated in relation to university-level English teaching.

The methodological analysis was based on the relationship between language form, meaning, and use. Phonological, lexical, grammatical, orthographic, semantic, and discourse components were considered as interconnected elements of one competence. The effectiveness of each principle was assessed according to its contribution to the students' ability to recognize linguistic units, understand their functions, use them in context, and transfer acquired knowledge to new communicative situations.

The analysis demonstrates that the principle of systematicity is essential for developing linguistic competence. Language material should be presented in a logically organized sequence, moving from relatively simple structures to more complex ones. Previously learned units must be connected with new material so that students can perceive the language as a coherent system. When grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation are taught without internal connections, learners often memorize separate facts but fail to apply them consistently.

The principle of communicative orientation ensures that linguistic knowledge is connected with meaningful language use. Grammar and vocabulary should not be limited to mechanical exercises. Students need opportunities to employ new structures in discussions, presentations, academic writing, problem-solving tasks, and professional simulations. In this way, language forms become instruments for expressing intentions rather than abstract objects of memorization.

Contextualization is another significant principle. The meaning and function of a linguistic unit become clearer when it is presented within a sentence, dialogue, text, or communicative situation. A lexical item learned only through translation may remain passive, whereas a word encountered in several meaningful contexts is more likely to become part of the learner's productive vocabulary. Nation emphasizes that knowing a word includes knowledge of its form, meaning, and use [3]. Therefore, contextual teaching strengthens semantic associations and improves long-term retention.

The principle of conscious learning requires students to understand how and why a language unit is used. Conscious attention to grammatical form, pronunciation, word formation, and semantic differences helps learners monitor their own speech and recognize errors. However, explanation alone is insufficient. Analytical understanding must be followed by repeated contextual practice so that explicit knowledge gradually becomes automatic.

Continuity and progression are necessary for maintaining the development of linguistic competence throughout the course. Language units should be regularly revisited in new contexts and at higher levels of complexity. Repetition should not merely reproduce identical exercises; it should expand the function and communicative scope of previously learned material. Such progression enables students to consolidate knowledge while developing flexibility in language use.

The principle of integration connects the components of linguistic competence with the four language skills. Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and discourse organization should be practiced through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, students may read an academic text, identify key terminology and grammatical patterns, discuss its main idea, and produce a short written response. This integrated procedure demonstrates how linguistic knowledge operates across different forms of communication.

The findings indicate that linguistic competence cannot be developed effectively through a single teaching method. University students differ in prior knowledge, learning pace, motivation, professional specialization, and cognitive style. Therefore, differentiation is required in the selection of texts, tasks, support materials, and assessment procedures. Students with limited grammatical knowledge may require structured guidance, while more advanced learners may benefit from independent analysis and creative production.

Authentic materials also strengthen the practical value of linguistic instruction. Academic texts, professional correspondence, interviews, lectures, reports, and digital resources expose students to natural language patterns. Nevertheless, authenticity should correspond to learners' proficiency. Excessively difficult materials may increase cognitive load and reduce motivation. The teacher's role is to adapt tasks while preserving the linguistic and communicative value of the source.

Formative assessment is particularly important because it provides continuous information about students' strengths and difficulties. Linguistic competence should be evaluated through both focused and integrated tasks. Tests may measure knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but oral presentations, written assignments, summaries, and dialogues reveal whether students can use linguistic resources effectively. Feedback should explain not only that an error has occurred but also why it occurred and how it can be corrected.

The identified principles also support learner autonomy. Students should be encouraged to use dictionaries, corpora, grammar references, pronunciation tools, and digital platforms critically. Self-correction, peer feedback, reflective journals, and vocabulary records help learners take responsibility for their progress. In this context, technology functions as a support mechanism rather than a substitute for systematic instruction and active language practice.

The development of linguistic competence in university students depends on the consistent application of systematic, communicative, contextual, conscious, continuous, integrated, differentiated, and practice-oriented instruction. These principles ensure that phonological, lexical, grammatical, orthographic, semantic, and discourse knowledge develops as a unified system. Effective teaching should connect form with meaning and use, provide gradual progression, employ authentic contexts, and combine focused language exercises with communicative tasks.

Linguistic competence becomes functional when students can select accurate language forms, interpret meanings, construct coherent utterances, and adapt their speech to academic and professional situations. Therefore, university English courses should organize language material in a way that transforms theoretical knowledge into stable communicative ability. The implementation of these principles contributes not only to linguistic accuracy but also to students' confidence, independence, and readiness for further academic and professional communication.

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