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THE CONTENT OF DEVELOPING GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE IN PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

ЗМІСТ ФОРМУВАННЯ ГРАМАТИЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of developing prospective English teachers' grammatical competence on the basis of context-based approach. The authors assert the following advantages of using texts over separate sentences in studying grammar: being a linguistic embodiment of discourse, texts provide students with both linguistic and extralinguistic information; demonstrate grammatical phenomena in a real-world communicative context, which enables students to develop their communicative skills, cognitive activity and creativity; arouse students' interest and encourage them to naturally use target grammatical structures in their speech. The focus is on the content of developing grammatical competence, which is revealed in its subject and procedural aspects. The emphasis is put on training and consolidating the skills of using purely grammatical material which is introduced into the communicative process through an algorithm of cognitive actions: perception (through reading and prediction) and formation of students' own «counter» text-discourse via specially selected texts of various functional styles and genres and tasks developed for them. The suggested activities are aimed at training and consolidating grammatical skills by integrating them into the communicative process: from controlled (identification and commenting, transformation, translation) to semi-controlled exercises and free speech production (expansion, creative writing, discussions, improvisation). These activities contribute not only to the grammatical material absorption and retention but also to the development of students' cognitive and communicative skills. The conducted research resulted in the practical grammar coursebook «Learning Grammar in Context. Part 1. Sequence of Tenses. Modal Verbs. Oblique Moods» for the Bachelor students, pursuing a degree in foreign language education as prospective English teachers.

Key words: *grammatical competence, context-based approach, an algorithm of cognitive actions, text, «counter» text-discourse.*

Introduction. Grammatical competence is an indispensable component of communicative competence of professional users of English. This fully concerns English language teachers as effective communicators in a

foreign language in different communication situations, classroom discourse in particular. Effective communication in terms of accuracy and fluency requires certain grammatical skills. According to the requirements to the foreign language education at pedagogical universities, prospective English language teachers are to have a profound understanding of grammatical rules and structures to provide clear and accurate explanations to their students. The lack of well-developed grammatical skills, therefore, becomes an obstacle to the development of prospective English language teachers' professional-communicative competence. Thus, within the prospective EFL teacher education, the issue of developing their grammatical competence is one of the most vital. In this regard, the content of developing grammatical competence becomes a key component as it defines what knowledge and skills should be formed and how they should be formed effectively to provide the prospective EFL teachers' foreign language proficiency.

Literature review. Despite numerous scholarly attempts to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language grammar acquisition and to find the most productive ways of developing prospective foreign language teachers' grammatical competence, the issue remains a topic of debate in foreign language teaching methodology.

Grammatical competence is generally viewed as «a person's ability to correctly grammatically formulate his oral and written statements and to understand the grammatical structure of the speech of others, which is based on the complex and dynamic interaction of relevant skills, knowledge, and grammatical awareness» [1, p. 234]. There are various traditional and innovative approaches to teaching grammar and forming grammatical competence.

The communicative approach has been continuously put forward as an innovative way of teaching EFL, particularly grammar, opposing the traditional one. Using a communicative approach to teaching grammar proves to actively motivate students, engage them in the learning process, and allows learners to quickly acquire new grammatical structures, unlike traditional methods which commonly focus on analyzing grammatical rules and grammatical parsing (Francis, 2020 [9]). However, a number of studies demonstrate that there is no significant difference between communicative language teaching and traditional approaches in enhancing grammar skills, proving that both methods can be effective (Evangeline & Alvarez, 2017 [7]; Rama & Luque-Agullo, 2012 [17]).

Recently emphasis has been put on interactive methods of developing grammatical competences such as inductive, deductive, and interactive strategies (Mahdi & Ismail, 2022 [12]), project method (Prystai, 2022 [15]), interactive-dialogic based model (Hanafia, 2022 [11]), classroom interaction model (group discussions, role-plays) (Chai, 2024 [6]), etc. which are considered to be more

effective in stimulating and maintaining students' interest in comparison with the teacher-centered approach. Overall, interactive methods aim at students' active participation in the learning process, at simultaneously developing their grammatical and communicative competence. The consciousness-raising approach has a similar goal – to form grammatical competence in students by making them actively aware of the target language specific features. This approach is based on the theory of instructed second language acquisition that emphasizes the importance of learners' «noticing» language features, comparing them to their existing knowledge, and integrating them into their interlanguage system. It involves problem-solving tasks that force students to construct an explicit rule to describe the grammatical feature rather than just practicing grammar exercises (Fatemipour & Hemmati, 2015 [8]).

The benefits of these two approaches in teaching grammar are beyond doubt. However, the issue of learning language materials used within these approaches is still under discussion. In this connection, the linguistic content of developing grammatical competence comes to the fore. The teaching method that concentrates on the use of authentic materials is context-based instruction. Context-based approach implies teaching grammar «in logical contexts through authentic discourse-length input» [13]. J. Frodesen claims that without contextual practice, learners become «grammarians» who can analyze language but fail to use it effectively in real-life situations [10]. The results of various experimental studies clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of teaching English grammar in context [5; 13; 14; 16]. Overall, the context-based approach focuses on the content of learning language materials (authentic real-life stories, dialogues, texts of different genres, songs, etc.) that are characterized as communicatively meaningful.

Taking V. Chernysh and S. Nikolaeva's view [4], we assume that the content of developing prospective EFL teachers' grammatical competence demands constant updating to modern educational needs that can be fulfilled through a context-based approach.

Thus, **the aim of the study** is to devise the subject and procedural content of developing grammatical competence in prospective EFL teachers utilizing the context-based approach.

The research is conducted within the Cognitive and Communication Studies Laboratory at the Department of Germanic Philology and Teaching Methods of Foreign Languages at the State Institution «South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky».

Methods. The following methods were used for the research: analysis and synthesis – to form a holistic view of the problem under study, discourse analysis – to select the subject content, and modeling – to work out the procedural content of the developing prospective EFL teachers' grammatical competence.

Results and discussion. For prospective foreign language teachers, grammatical competence does not only comprise mastering rules but also develops the ability to apply this knowledge effectively in teaching and communication. According to D. Rusnak, prospective foreign language teachers' grammatical competence maturity requires the integration of its components: understanding of the target language grammatical system, reproductive and receptive grammatical skills, the ability to use grammatical structures in one's own speech, and to analyze the speech of others (particularly students) in terms of its adherence to the norms of the target foreign language [3, p. 22]. Expanding on this, we consider it necessary to add the abilities to analyze one's own speech in terms of grammatical accuracy, to formulate grammatical rules clearly, and to explain the use of grammatical structures in a way that is comprehensible to learners. These abilities are essential for EFL teachers to guide their students effectively and provide well-structured, accessible explanations, anticipate and address common learner errors, and adapt grammar instruction to different proficiency levels.

In this regard, teaching grammar in context is especially relevant for prospective EFL teachers. Instead of relying solely on isolated grammar drills, it is crucial to integrate grammar instruction into meaningful discourse. The advantages of the text over separate sentences in studying grammar are as follows: text as multi-functional phenomenon provides students with both linguistic and extralinguistic information, promotes their cognitive activity and their creativity; authentic text being an example of natural everyday speech demonstrates grammatical phenomena in real communicative context giving students an opportunity to develop their communicative skills; most grammatical phenomena appear in the form of a refrain, which helps remember them better [18, p. 4]; working with texts allows for the integration of various language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) alongside grammar learning, making the study of grammar more holistic. However, to provide the successful and effective use of texts for developing grammatical competence, it is necessary to consider criteria for text selection, the sequence of tasks based on these texts, and their application in the educational process.

First, it is important to select texts of different functional styles. We are deeply convinced that belles-lettres prose texts should be involved in the process of developing prospective EFL teachers' grammatical competence. Their narrative structure and the diverse range of grammatical constructions offer valuable opportunities for analyzing grammar in context. Additionally, they can promote discussions that help profound understanding of grammatical structures and their practical applications in communication. However, we argue for short stories as a specific choice for developing

students' grammatical competence. Due to their length and focused themes, short stories allow students to engage deeply with language without being overwhelmed. The concise nature of these texts encourages careful analysis of grammatical structures while still offering a coherent and complete narrative. Apart from this, lyric texts, such as modern songs and poems, forming a significant layer of national culture, the system of native speakers' worldviews and aesthetic value, offer a unique opportunity to study the use of grammar in a way that engages students both emotionally and cognitively. Likewise, publicist texts, with their focus on relevant social issues, not only capture students' interest but also encourage the active use of grammatical structures in discussions, allowing them to articulate their thoughts, express opinions, and develop critical thinking skills.

In addition, the selection of texts should be guided by the following criteria: the potential for enhancing grammatical awareness (the use of the target grammatical structure); cultural and sociolinguistic relevance; the accessibility and comprehensibility. For belles-letters texts these are also the degree of aesthetic impact on the reader, and the intrigue and appeal of the plot.

For effective learning, it is essential not only to determine what needs to be studied (the subject content) but also to provide appropriate tasks that ensure high-quality knowledge acquisition and its practical application (the procedural content). Thus, the content of developing the grammatical competence of prospective EFL teachers stipulated for the selection of a pool of texts considering the established criteria, and further working out corresponding tasks. We will exemplify the elaborated study aids with the topic «Oblique Moods» that is studied within the course «Practical Grammar (the English Language)» (the Bachelor's program, 2nd year).

First, students are to work with two belles-lettres texts: «Death by Scrabble» by Charlie Fish and «The Valentine Generation» by John Wain. These texts serve as excellent examples of the Oblique mood structures used in context. For each text, we developed a set of tasks that engage students in identifying target grammatical structures in context, analyzing them, and further applying in communication.

Considering the principle of the contextualization of grammar, at first, students are required to identify and analyze samples of Oblique mood structures directly in the text. It enables them to learn grammatical structures through authentic linguistic input rather than mechanical rule memorization. This agrees with L. Orlovskaya's research which argues that in the process of developing prospective EFL teachers' grammatical competence, it is essential to encourage them to actively use procedural knowledge, rather than simply providing declarative knowledge [2, p. 54]. Additionally, students are asked to translate the analyzed text extracts as it helps them to compare English and Ukrainian target grammatical structures. Furthermore, by

engaging in such tasks, prospective EFL teachers develop the ability to explain grammatical rules effectively.

The following tasks emphasize a focus on form through meaningful activities. Students are required to transform, paraphrase, and justify grammatical choices within the context of the narrative. By experimenting with different formulations – such as converting indicative structures into subjunctive ones or modifying conditionals – they develop grammatical flexibility, learning to adapt structures to different communicative situations.

The focus is also on active use of Oblique mood structures within communicative contexts, such as spoken dialogues, creative rewritings, and various essays on the text material. By practicing grammar within the events of the story, students naturally apply the target structures while simultaneously working on fluency and accuracy. The variety of activities ensures that they use the target grammatical structures not only at the sentence level but also in extended discourse.

Students are also encouraged to interpret the text, reflect on its deeper meanings, and engage in hypothetical reasoning by reimagining events, predicting alternative outcomes, or discussing the philosophical implications of the story. Discussion-based and reflective writing activities further enhance cognitive and affective engagement, making grammar instruction more meaningful and memorable.

What follows are some examples of activities that are suggested for students (on the example of «Death by Scrabble» by Charlie Fish):

- *While reading the story pay attention to the ample use of Oblique Moods in the text. Use colours to mark samples of Oblique Moods in the story. Do you easily recognize samples of Oblique Moods while reading the text? Can you explain peculiarities of their use in the context without consulting Grammar Rules? Translate the passages into Ukrainian.*

- *Look carefully throughout the passages from the text. Transform these sentences into ones with the same idea but using other words. Use Subjunctive II and Conditional Mood. Try to make more than one sentence in each case. Mind the story content. Reread the text if necessary. Follow the model given below.*

- *Look at the story and find the following sentences in the text. Transform the sentences into ones with object clauses after the verb TO WISH using the appropriate form of Subjunctive Mood. Follow the given models: I start chewing on my U. It's a bad habit, I know. – I wish I didn't have such a habit. I'm sorry I didn't know that. – I wish I had known that.*

- *To justify the use of Oblique Moods, complete the following sentences with the appropriate principal clauses in your own words according to the story content. Reread the text if necessary: (1) But for cheating, the man ... (2) If the man had not been overwhelmed with his feelings, he ...*

– *What could be if the man in the story were more restrained, more thoughtful and understanding? Read the text below to know it. Complete the text with the verbs in brackets. The verbs may be in negative form. Mind the use of Oblique Moods.*

– *Work in pairs and improvise a small dialogue after paragraph 16 which will intensify the tension between the man and his wife before they return to the scrabble board. The first line has been given to you. Pay attention to the use of Oblique Moods.*

– *If you were the wife, how would you react to the events that unfold in the story? Think of what you would think, what you would say and what you would do in the corresponding situations in the story.*

– *Imagine that all events described the main character saw in a dream. Suddenly he woke up sitting in an armchair in front of the table with the scrabble board on it – the episode «... We're playing Scrabble ...». Write a brief account on the possible events. Use Oblique Moods.*

– *The story «Death by Scrabble» by Charlie Fish is rather controversial. The moral of the story may be that people should be careful with their wishes. Express your opinion on the point in the opinion essay «Our wishes can be dangerous». The first paragraph has been given to you. Expand it into an essay. [18].*

After completing tasks based on the aforementioned texts, students are given additional exercises that we categorized as review tasks. These exercises were designed to encourage students to use the Oblique mood structures in different contexts, reinforcing their understanding and application. In particular, we included lyrical texts – poems and songs – into the tasks. It allowed students to apply the target grammatical structures in a more dynamic, real-world context, enhancing their ability to comprehend and use them in various communicative situations. Lyrical texts are particularly effective for practicing specific grammatical structures because their very nature requires it to be spoken, repeated, analyzed, and pondered. With each repetition and reflection, the structure becomes more deeply ingrained. As a result, such texts serve as an excellent resource for structured grammar practice and a suitable basis for review, promoted further integration of grammatical structures into students' language proficiency. For example, students are required to identify and underline subjunctive and conditional constructions within the texts; to analyze their meaning and function, discussing how they contribute to the emotional and stylistic impact of the text; to rewrite selected lines, transforming indicative structures into subjunctive or hypothetical equivalents; to predict alternative endings, imagining how the meaning of the poem or song might change if different moods were used, etc. What follows are some examples of suggested activities:

– *Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have wings? To be able to soar above the clouds and feel the wind rushing through your feathers? It's*

a dream that many of us have had at some point in our lives. Step 1. Read the poem «Wings» by Pie Corbett and comment on the forms of Subjunctive Mood and Conditional Mood in it. Step 2. Transfer this poem into a prosaic version. Mind the use of the Oblique Moods. Compare the two texts. What does the narrative variant lack as compared to the poem? Comment on the difference between the poem and its prose variant in terms of its lexico-grammatical structure and punctuation. Step 3. What would you do if you had wings? Make a list of 10 coherent sentences according to the model.

Model: If I had wings, I would fly high above the mountains and over the oceans. I would feel the sun on my face and the cool breeze in my hair. I would explore every corner of the world and see things that most people can only imagine. I would visit the Amazon rainforest and see all the exotic animals that live there. I would fly over the Great Barrier Reef and marvel at its beauty. I would soar over the Sahara Desert and feel the sand whipping past me. But having wings wouldn't just be about exploring the world. It would also give me a sense of freedom that I've never experienced before. I would no longer be bound by the limitations of gravity or the constraints of society. I could go wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted.

– Read a cute love poem by Courtney Kuchta and use it as an inspiration for writing an opinion essay «What would you wish if you could wish just one wish?».

– Work in small groups. Use the links given below and listen to the song lyrics. The lyrics of these songs include multiple examples of Subjunctive II used in object clauses after the verb TO WISH. Write down these examples. Define and comment on the form of Subjunctive Mood and Conditional Mood in these sentences. Group A is to listen to the song «I Wish You Would» by Taylor Swift. Group B is to listen to the song «I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free» by Nina Simone. Within the groups answer the following questions: Why do the singers use Subjunctive II in their songs? What do they want to express in their songs? In your opinion, what might the singer (singer-songwriter) feel writing/singing the song? What does the singer want to share with others? What could encourage this lady to sing the song? How the singer's (singer-songwriter's) personality is displayed in the song? What do you feel while listening to the song? Be ready to present your conclusions to other students. [18].

Apart from the mentioned activities, a variety of other tasks aimed at reinforcing the use of Oblique Moods in different contexts are offered. These tasks were elaborated to deepen students' understanding and application of the target grammatical structures while providing opportunities for both controlled and free practice. Among them are analytical and transformational tasks (e.g. substitution and paraphrasing), sentence-completion-expansion activities, as well as creative, opinion-based, dialogue-based, and role-

playing tasks. For example, in mini-dialogues, students expand sentences into conversations, that allows them to contextualize grammar in real-life scenarios. Role-playing immerses them in hypothetical situations where they are supposed to use Oblique Moods naturally, enhancing both their grammatical accuracy and conversational fluency. Tasks involving expansion challenge students to develop coherent stories using target grammatical structures in situational contexts, further strengthening their ability to think critically while applying grammatical knowledge.

To promote self-awareness, students may be engaged in self-reflection through guided questions (e.g., *Which structures do you feel most confident to use? Which aspects of Oblique Moods still seem challenging? How can you apply these structures in real-life conversations?*), which helps them to reflect on their progress and identify areas where they feel confident or needed further practice.

Thus, the task sequence moves from recognition and controlled (identifying and commenting structures, translation, transformations) to semi-controlled exercises and free production (expansion, creative writing, discussions, improvisation). Overall, the suggested tasks are structured to guide students through different stages of working with grammatical material, ensuring a gradual shift from passive recognition to active use. It agrees with the principles of teaching grammar in context, as students are encouraged to use target grammatical forms in meaningful discourse.

The research findings are implemented in the practical grammar coursebook «Learning Grammar in Context. Part 1. Sequence of Tenses. Modal Verbs. Oblique Moods» for the Bachelor's program, 2nd year [18].

Conclusions. We argue that a context-based approach is a reliable tool for creating an effective framework of diverse and well-structured tasks aimed at developing prospective EFL teachers' grammatical competence. The selection of texts of various functional styles, particularly belles-lettres prose, lyrical, and publicist texts, promotes not only students' grammar acquisition but also their cognitive, interpretative, and communicative skills. We underscore consecutive development of grammar awareness – from recognizing and analyzing grammatical structures in context to actively applying them in controlled and free production tasks. Thus, the focus is on training and reinforcing skills in using purely grammatical material and its integration into the communication process through an algorithm of cognitive actions: perception (through reading and prediction) and creation of one's own «counter» text-discourse based on specially selected texts of various functional styles and genres, along with tasks developed for them. Integration of varied exercises, including analytical, transformational, sentence-completion-expansion activities, as well as creative, opinion-based, dialogue-based, and role-playing tasks, provides not only grammatical

accuracy but also the ability to explain, justify, and adapt grammatical rules to different teaching contexts.

The content of developing prospective EFL teachers' grammatical competence is based on our own classroom experiences. However, we acknowledge that no single approach is universally applicable; successful implementation depends on adaptation to the specific needs of students and teaching goals. The suggested framework is open to modifications, making it a valuable resource for educators interested in foreign language teacher training.

The further research perspective is to experimentally test the effectiveness of the devised content utilizing «Learning grammar in context» coursebook in practical grammar classes.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті розглядається проблема формування граматичної компетентності майбутніх учителів англійської мови на базі контекстного підходу. Зазначено переваги використання тексту перед окремими реченнями у вивченні граматики: текст як лінійне втілення дискурсу забезпечує здобувачів як мовною, так і екстралінгвістичною інформацією; демонструє граматичні явища в реальному комунікативному контексті, що дає можливість здобувачам розвивати свої комунікативні здібності, сприяє їхній пізнавальній активності та творчості; викликає зацікавленість здобувачів і спонукає їх використовувати у своєму мовленні граматичні структури. Увагу сфокусовано на змісті формування граматичної компетентності в предметному та процесуальному аспекті. Акцентовано на тренуванні та закріпленні навичок вживання суто граматичного матеріалу й введення його у процес комунікації через алгоритм когнітивних дій: сприйняття (через читання та прогнозування) й утворення власного «зустрічного» тексту-дискурсу на базі спеціально відібраних текстів різних функціональних стилів та жанрів та розроблених до них вправ. Завдання, які пропонуються для опрацювання, передбачають тренування та закріплення граматичних навичок шляхом їх інтеграції в комунікативний процес через використання контрольованих вправ (ідентифікація та коментування, трансформація, переклад), частково контрольованих вправ та вільного продукування мовлення (розширення, обговорення, творчі письмові роботи, рольові ігри). Така організація роботи сприяє не лише засвоєнню граматичного матеріалу, а й розвитку когнітивних та комунікативних навичок майбутніх учителів англійської мови. В результаті проведених розвідок було розроблено навчальний посібник з практичної граматики «*Learning grammar in context (Sequence of Tenses. Modal Verbs. Oblique Moods.)*» для здобувачів першого (бакалаврського) рівня вищої освіти за спеціальністю 014.02 Середня освіта (Мова і зарубіжна література (англійська)).

Ключові слова: граматична компетентність, контекстний підхід, алгоритм когнітивних дій, текст, «зустрічний» текст-дискурс.