

# Studying Grammar In The Process Of Mastering A Foreign Language

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the role of grammar in teaching foreign languages to students. An analysis of classical and modern methodological approaches reveals contradictions between the grammar-translation and communicative paradigms. Particular attention is paid to the idea of forming a 'language user' and the importance of integrating grammar into contextual and communicative activities. The views of Russian linguists and methodologists are considered. The necessity of combining conscious study of grammatical structures with practical application is substantiated.

**Keywords:** Grammar, communicative competence, foreign language teaching, internal grammar, linguistic personality, teaching methodology, systematicity of language.

**Introduction:** Is grammar a necessary component of learning a foreign language? This question has traditionally been of concern to students and remains a key issue in theoretical and methodological discussions. The importance of studying grammar for students learning a foreign language is a typical question that many students ponder. Grammar is the foundation of language, and without it, everything we know would be meaningless. Grammar provides the structure necessary to organise and express your messages and ideas. Without it, you will not be able to fully convey your thoughts without mastering the basic grammatical patterns and structures of the language. Many students ask this question simply because, in their experience, they have always encountered two main scenarios and nothing in between. They want to know what their future level of learning will be. On the one hand, there are language courses where almost exclusively grammar is taught, as if preparing students to become second language grammarians rather than users. On the other hand, there are 'communicative' courses where the only thing that is done is discussing a topic or reading an article and commenting on it.

In many cases, what is taught in one class has nothing to do with what happens in the next. Both options may seem suitable for very specific purposes, but neither is suitable for most language learners. Firstly, a good command of the grammar of a language does not in

itself mean that a person is able to communicate effectively, as we often see in students who have sometimes been exposed to an approach focused exclusively on grammar for years. Many could recite grammar rules by heart, but when asked to express basic information, they hesitate too long and review all the grammar rules in their head before saying anything, or simply lose their ability to speak. Secondly, simply speaking in class without doing anything else to learn from the conversation itself is also not enough. Of course, it can be useful, but only to a certain extent. This approach may be more useful for very advanced students who just need to refresh their knowledge of a second language, but for those who want to lay the foundations of a new language, it is certainly too vague, inconsistent, and lacking in any sequence. Therefore, when asked, 'Is grammar really important for someone learning a second language?', we always answer 'yes', but the real question here is not whether grammar is important, but how we should teach it to our students.

Sometimes, even advanced students are not very familiar with grammar and terminology, despite having a fairly good command of the second language. This is because teachers want, first and foremost, to 'create' users of the new language, to prepare people for real-life communication situations using the appropriate language and models. They are not at all interested in explaining the list of all grammatical constructions that

exist in a particular model. For example, think about your native language. Name all the verb tenses you can find in your native language, with their corresponding uses and structures. Unless you are a teacher, translator, or someone who needs to have a very good command of this metalanguage, you will most likely find it difficult to answer this question. And this does not mean that you do not have a perfect command of the language. After all, you can easily understand and express everything you want. Moreover, by having this ability, you demonstrate an excellent command of the internal grammar of the language. If you did not know the grammatical patterns, you would not be able to form a single sentence, but you can. This means that although you may not have a conscious ability to describe how your language works (i.e. its grammar), you can use it perfectly. You are a language user. You use the grammar of your native language perfectly, intuitively or unconsciously. Again, our main goal as second language teachers is to educate language users, not linguists! In Russian linguistics, the understanding of grammar as a system-forming component has deep roots. L. V. Shcherba emphasised that language is a “complex system of systems and that mastery of it is impossible without mastery of its structure”. This quote from his work emphasises that language is not just a set of separate elements, but a complex, multi-level system whose elements are interconnected. Accordingly, studying grammar is not simply a matter of learning rules, but a process of understanding the structural patterns of language.

The importance of the grammatical component was also emphasised by V. V. Vinogradov, who noted that the grammatical structure of language is “the organising basis of thought expression”. Thus, grammar is a cognitive mechanism that ensures the transmission of semantic relationships and allows the speaker to formulate statements accurately and effectively. However, modern methodology emphasises that knowledge of the rules alone does not guarantee successful language acquisition. I. L. Bim noted that “awareness of form does not mean the ability to use it in speech; the lack of automation renders grammatical structure ineffective”. Students can reproduce the rules, but have difficulty when trying to use these structures in live speech — precisely because theoretical knowledge has not been transformed into skill.

The problem is exacerbated by the existence of two polar approaches: the traditional grammar-translation approach and the communicative approach. The first involves a detailed study of the rules, but “leaves the student without a mechanism for transferring knowledge into real communication”. The second

minimises the role of explicit grammar teaching, which, according to E. I. Passov, leads to the formation of “fragmentary language proficiency without systematic support”.

At the same time, Russian methodologists emphasise the need to synthesise the two approaches. Passov pointed out that “communication is impossible without a system, but the system must also be included in communication in order to become alive”. In this respect, the “meaning to form” approach seems to be the most reasonable: first, the student learns the meaning of the structure in context, then realises its formal characteristics.

A similar point of view was expressed by L. V. Shcherba, who said that grammar in language is always secondary to speech, but it is grammar that “regulates and organises speech manifestations.” This means that grammar should not be studied in isolation, but in direct connection with speech activity.

The importance of presenting grammatical material in context was also emphasised by V. G. Kostomarov, who noted that only “natural speech situations ensure the formation of skills relevant to real communication.” Accordingly, grammatical phenomena should be included in real or simulated communicative tasks.

Practice shows that the optimal methodological sequence includes several stages. At the first stage, students are introduced to the topic and authentic material, focusing their attention on the general meaning of the statement. At the second stage, they identify specific grammatical means that ensure the transmission of meaning. The third stage involves conscious comprehension of the structure: its analysis, comparison, and formalisation. Finally, there is the automation stage, which includes both mechanical exercises and creative speech. As O. D. Mitrofanova emphasised, “a stable skill is formed through repeated use of the structure in various types of speech activity.”

Homework is also particularly important, as it allows students to consolidate their knowledge of the structure through independent study. As many researchers emphasise, lesson time should be used as effectively as possible, primarily for speaking practice, where grammar serves not as an object of study but as a tool for communication.

Thus, grammar is an essential component of foreign language acquisition, but its role is manifested not in the knowledge of rules, but in the student's ability to use grammatical structures in real communication. The goal of teaching is to develop language users who, like native speakers, have an intuitive grasp of the structure, but at the same time are able to express complex thoughts accurately and appropriately. This

result is achieved through the integration of grammar into communicative activities, through a combination of meaningful analysis and practical implementation.

The idea of a balance between knowledge and use, between theory and activity, reflects contemporary trends in domestic methodology and corresponds to the psychological mechanisms of skill formation. Grammar, incorporated into live speech, ceases to be an abstract system of rules and becomes an effective tool for the formation of a full-fledged linguistic personality.

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