

LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH COMPETENCES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract. In modern linguistics, speech competence is regarded as a complex, multi-level phenomenon that integrates linguistic knowledge with communicative and discourse abilities. The secondary school period represents a critical stage in speech competence development, as pupils actively master lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and discourse resources of language. This article examines the linguistic features of speech competence development in secondary school pupils from the perspective of applied and educational linguistics. Special attention is paid to the structural, functional, and pragmatic components of speech, age-related linguistic changes, and pedagogical mechanisms that support effective speech formation. The study argues that speech competence development should be viewed as a dynamic interaction between linguistic systems and communicative practice within educational discourse.

Keywords: speech competence, applied linguistics, discourse competence, secondary school pupils, communicative language development, educational linguistics

Within contemporary linguistics, increasing attention is devoted to the study of language as a functional and communicative system rather than a closed set of grammatical rules. This shift has led to a reconsideration of how speech competence is conceptualized and developed in educational contexts. In particular, secondary school pupils represent a linguistically significant group, as this stage is marked by intensive development of discourse abilities, pragmatic awareness, and stylistic variation. Speech competence plays a central role in pupils' academic success, social interaction, and cognitive development. From a linguistic perspective, it reflects the learner's ability to select and organize lexical, grammatical, and syntactic resources in accordance with communicative intentions and discourse norms. Despite its importance, speech competence development in secondary education is often reduced to formal language instruction, which limits pupils' ability to use language flexibly and meaningfully.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the linguistic features of speech competence development in secondary school pupils and to identify key factors that influence the formation of coherent, context-appropriate, and functionally effective speech. The study integrates concepts from applied linguistics, discourse analysis, and educational linguistics.

In linguistics, speech competence is closely related to the broader concept of communicative competence. The latter was introduced to overcome the limitations of purely structural approaches to language, which focused primarily on grammatical

correctness. Speech competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy and includes the ability to produce and interpret utterances within real communicative contexts.

From a linguistic standpoint, speech competence represents a multidimensional construct that integrates several interdependent components, each of which contributes to the successful production and interpretation of oral and written discourse. These components do not function in isolation; rather, they interact dynamically in real communicative situations, forming a unified system of language use.

Lexical competence constitutes the foundation of speech competence and refers to the speaker's command of vocabulary, including both receptive and productive lexical resources. It involves not only the quantitative aspect of vocabulary size but also qualitative dimensions such as semantic accuracy, contextual appropriateness, collocational knowledge, and stylistic variation. For secondary school pupils, lexical competence development is characterized by the transition from everyday vocabulary to more abstract, academic, and subject-specific lexemes. Linguistically, this stage requires mastering polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, and metaphorical meanings, which significantly enhance expressive potential and semantic precision in speech.

Grammatical competence encompasses knowledge of morphological forms and syntactic structures that enable the construction of grammatically correct utterances. From a linguistic perspective, grammatical competence is not limited to rule memorization but includes the ability to manipulate grammatical resources to achieve communicative goals. In secondary school pupils, grammatical development is marked by increased use of complex sentences, subordinate clauses, modality, and tense-aspect distinctions. Grammatical errors at this stage often reflect developmental experimentation with language rather than deficiency, indicating active internalization of linguistic patterns.

Discourse competence is responsible for the organization of language beyond the sentence level and plays a crucial role in the production of coherent and cohesive texts. Linguistically, discourse competence involves understanding and applying principles of thematic progression, logical sequencing, information structure, and cohesion through lexical and grammatical means. For secondary school pupils, the development of discourse competence enables the creation of extended oral and written texts such as narratives, explanations, arguments, and descriptions. Mastery of discourse competence reflects the ability to follow genre conventions and adapt speech to different communicative purposes.

Pragmatic competence enables speakers to use language appropriately in accordance with communicative intentions, situational context, and social norms. From a linguistic viewpoint, pragmatic competence involves the understanding of speech acts, implicatures, politeness strategies, and register variation. In the process of speech development, secondary school pupils gradually acquire the ability to express intentions, evaluate interlocutors' reactions, and select linguistically appropriate forms depending on the communicative situation. Pragmatic competence ensures that speech is not only grammatically correct but also socially and culturally acceptable.

In linguistic terms, the effective development of speech competence depends on the balanced interaction of lexical, grammatical, discourse, and pragmatic components.

The dominance or neglect of any single component may lead to communicative limitations, emphasizing the necessity of an integrative approach in language education.

These components interact dynamically in speech production and comprehension. Linguistic research emphasizes that competence is not static but develops through continuous exposure to language input and active participation in communicative situations.

Secondary school age is characterized by significant qualitative changes in language use. At this stage, pupils move from predominantly situational and concrete speech toward more abstract, generalized, and argument-based discourse.

Lexical expansion is one of the most noticeable linguistic processes during secondary school years. Pupils acquire academic vocabulary, abstract nouns, and evaluative lexemes, which enable them to participate in subject-specific discourse. However, lexical growth is often uneven, with passive vocabulary exceeding active usage. Linguistically, this creates a gap between comprehension and production. Lexical competence development requires not only vocabulary memorization but also semantic differentiation, collocational awareness, and stylistic appropriateness.

Grammatical development during secondary school is marked by increased use of complex sentence structures, subordinate clauses, and varied syntactic patterns. Pupils gradually learn to manipulate grammatical forms for pragmatic purposes, such as emphasis, modality, and persuasion.

From a linguistic perspective, errors at this stage often reflect developmental processes rather than insufficient knowledge. Such errors indicate experimentation with language structures, which is a natural component of competence formation.

Discourse competence becomes particularly relevant in secondary school education, where pupils are required to produce extended oral and written texts. Linguistically coherent discourse involves logical sequencing, thematic progression, and appropriate use of cohesive devices.

Difficulties in discourse production often arise from insufficient understanding of genre conventions and textual organization rather than from grammatical limitations. Therefore, linguistic instruction should focus on discourse models and genre-based analysis.

Pragmatic and Sociolinguistic Aspects of Speech Competence -Pragmatic competence enables pupils to adapt their speech to communicative situations, interlocutors, and cultural norms. From a linguistic point of view, pragmatics plays a crucial role in successful communication, as grammatically correct utterances may still be pragmatically inappropriate.

Secondary school pupils gradually develop:

- Awareness of speech acts (requests, arguments, explanations);
- Sensitivity to politeness strategies and register variation;
- Ability to express evaluation, stance, and attitude.

Sociolinguistic competence is also significant, as pupils encounter diverse communicative contexts both inside and outside the classroom. Linguistic variation,

including formal and informal styles, becomes an essential component of speech competence.

Educational Discourse as a Linguistic Environment -from the perspective of educational linguistics, the classroom represents a specific type of discourse environment with its own norms, roles, and communicative patterns. Teacher–pupil interaction, peer communication, and instructional texts all contribute to speech competence development.

Effective linguistic environments are characterized by:

- High frequency of meaningful speech production;
- Dialogic interaction rather than monologic instruction;
- Exposure to varied discourse types and genres.

The linguistic quality of classroom discourse directly influences pupils' speech development. Therefore, teachers' language use, feedback strategies, and task design are linguistically significant factors.

Linguistic Approaches to Developing Speech Competence

Applied linguistics offers several approaches that support speech competence development in secondary school pupils:

1. **Communicative language teaching**, emphasizing functional language use;
2. **Discourse-based instruction**, focusing on text organization and coherence;
3. **Genre-based pedagogy**, which familiarizes pupils with conventional discourse patterns;
4. **Task-based learning**, encouraging authentic language use.

These approaches share a common linguistic principle: language competence develops through use, not through isolated rule learning.

The linguistic analysis demonstrates that speech competence development in secondary school pupils is a multi-level process involving lexical, grammatical, discourse, and pragmatic components. Isolated linguistic training is insufficient for forming functional speech competence. Instead, pupils require systematic exposure to authentic discourse and opportunities for meaningful communication.

Furthermore, linguistic evidence suggests that speech competence development is closely linked to cognitive and social factors, reinforcing the interdisciplinary nature of applied linguistics.

From a linguistic perspective, speech competence development in secondary school pupils represents a complex interaction between language systems and communicative practice. Effective speech formation requires an integrative approach that combines structural language knowledge with discourse and pragmatic awareness.

Educational linguistics provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for understanding and improving speech competence development. The results of this study highlight the necessity of discourse-oriented instruction and linguistically informed pedagogy in secondary education.

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