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MODERN METHODOLOGICAL CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE GRAMMATICAL MINIMUM IN MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article investigates the problem of defining grammatical minimum in mother tongue education from corpus-based and competency-oriented perspectives. The study analyzes grammatical units used in general secondary education in terms of frequency, functionality, and contextual relevance, and substantiates methodological criteria for their selection. Using corpus analysis, comparative and statistical methods, the research demonstrates that grammatical minimum should be formed as a selective, functional, and pedagogically efficient system aligned with real communicative needs. The findings confirm that grammatical minimum should not be viewed as a closed set of rules, but as a system of functional units ensuring communicative competence. The results contribute to improving the practical effectiveness of grammar teaching.

Keywords: Grammatical minimum, corpus linguistics, communicative competence, competency-based approach, grammar teaching.

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Introduction

In modern mother tongue education, the teaching of grammar is interpreted in direct connection with the development of learners' communicative competence. Grammar is no longer regarded merely as a set of theoretical rules, but as an essential tool that ensures accurate and clear expression of thought. Therefore, the process of selecting grammatical material must be based on scientifically grounded criteria. In determining the grammatical minimum, learners' age-related, psychological, and communicative needs are taken into account. Analyses based on authentic speech samples make it possible to select grammatical units not according to theoretical completeness, but according to communicative requirements. As a result, grammar instruction is shaped as a system that is concise in content, methodologically justified, and practically effective. This, in turn, creates a foundation for the formation of the concept of the grammatical minimum and necessitates methodological reliance on it.

A grammatical minimum grounded in empirical data prioritizes those forms that occur most frequently in learners' speech practice and play a significant role in meaning expression, while complex and rarely used constructions are assigned secondary importance. This approach simplifies the process of teaching grammar and enhances speech fluency and communicative confidence. Therefore, corpus analysis serves as a reliable methodological basis for determining the grammatical minimum according to functional, frequency-based, and contextual criteria. In modern linguistics, this process is mainly substantiated through corpus-based analytical methods. Corpus-based analysis makes it possible to identify not only the formal structure of grammatical units, but also their functions in discourse, conditions of use, and semantic load. This enables the effectiveness of grammatical material in real communication to be established as the main criterion for its inclusion in the teaching process. Consequently, the grammatical minimum is formed as a concise, selected, and practically grounded system. Such an approach frees mother tongue grammar instruction from

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excessive theoretical orientation, directs it toward learners' communicative needs, and creates a basis for the consistent development of grammatical competence.

The development of natural language processing technologies has further enhanced this process, significantly expanding the possibilities for the automated identification of grammatical structures on the basis of large speech corpora. The British National Corpus (100 million words) (British National Corpus) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, more than 1 billion words) (Corpus of Contemporary American English) (a corpus of contemporary American English containing more than one billion words) serve as primary sources for the empirical analysis of the real usage of grammatical units. The achievement of 90–95 percent accuracy in identifying grammatical structures through machine learning algorithms makes it possible to define grammatical rules in a statistically grounded and objective manner [1].

In foreign studies, the effectiveness of this approach is also widely acknowledged. British scholars Reiner and Carter demonstrate, through a hybrid methodology based on both statistical and rule-based principles, that grammatical structures can be adapted to real speech processes, and they emphasize that corpus data constitute an important resource for optimizing grammatical rules [2, p.125]. Their approach enables the optimization of grammatical rules on the basis of corpus-derived data, which increases efficiency in forming a minimal grammatical set. The interdisciplinary application of corpus analysis also creates opportunities for a deeper understanding of grammar. For instance, a group of linguists led by the German scholar Malberg, in their studies based on nineteenth-century English novels, identified period-specific grammatical conventions and demonstrated the role of context in grammatical choice [3]. Lithuanian researcher Šinkūnienė, through the analysis of discourse markers, substantiated the functional diversity of grammatical forms and revealed their significance within the minimal grammatical set [4].

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According to corpus studies, the 20–30 grammatical constructions most frequently used in spoken communication account for nearly 80 percent of everyday speech. These constructions are reinforced in an automated manner through procedural memory, enabling learners to acquire grammatical rules more rapidly and stably in natural communication processes rather than through isolated memorization. For example, the Ukrainian linguist Gromko substantiates the priority of corpus analysis in identifying minimal functional units in speech and emphasizes the importance of empirical data in determining idiomatic and pragmatic units [5, p.21]. The German researcher Adolf points out that speech corpora make it possible to identify the grammatical constructions most frequently used in conversational interaction [6]. American scholars Blum and Last, relying on corpus linguistics, scientifically demonstrate that the use of authentic speech samples increases the effectiveness of the language acquisition process [7, p.71].

In addition, the application of automated analytical models developed by a group of linguists led by the Israeli researcher Solan makes it possible to organize the process of determining the grammatical minimum in a more objective and systematic manner [8]. The work Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English by British linguists D. Biber, S. Conrad, and R. Reppen, also systematically analyzes the real usage of grammatical forms in spoken and written discourse on the basis of large language corpora [9]. In this work, the real usage of grammatical forms in spoken and written discourse is systematically analyzed on the basis of large language corpora; the frequency, functional load, and contextual characteristics of grammatical units are presented as important empirical foundations for determining the grammatical minimum.

The following table summarizes in a concise and systematic form the main principles characteristic of corpus analysis in determining the grammatical minimum, their content, and their practical significance in the educational process:

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Criterion	Main Content	Methodological Significance
Real speech-based	Based on spoken and written corpora.	Grammatical units are selected from natural discourse.
Frequency	The degree of repetition is taken into account.	The most essential units are included in the minimum.
Contextual relevance	Analyzed in various communicative situations.	The form–meaning–situation alignment is ensured.
Functionality	Its function in discourse is identified.	Grammatical competence is formed.
Didactic suitability	Adapted to educational objectives.	The learning load is optimized.

These theoretical approaches have now found practical implementation in international educational programs. In particular, the Cambridge Primary English Curriculum and the U.S. Florida B.E.S.T. English Language Arts Standards clearly demonstrate the methodological foundations for determining the grammatical minimum [10]. The results of a comparative analysis of these programs show that several universal scientific and practical criteria are prioritized in the process of selecting a grammatical minimum.

First, grammatical units are selected with a focus on communicative needs, that is, on core forms most frequently required in real speech activity. In the Cambridge curriculum, the grammatical minimum for the primary level (Grades 1–6) is limited to functional parts of speech, high-frequency verb tenses, constructions expressing possessive and case relations, and central sentence structures [11].

The second important criterion is the principle of spiral development, according to which grammatical material is gradually expanded from simple to more complex stages.

In the Florida English Language Arts Standards, this principle is implemented through a systematic progression from morphological units to more complex syntactic and morpho-syntactic phenomena across Grades 5–9. In addition, the

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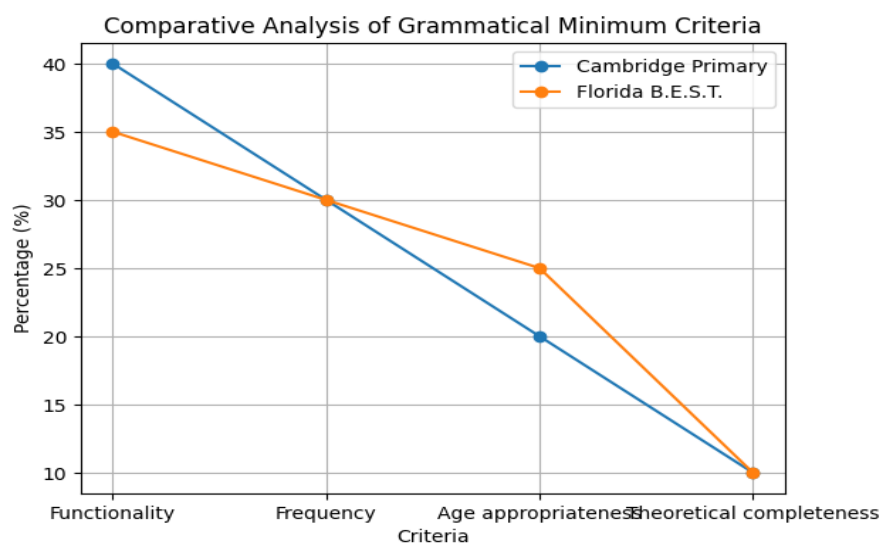
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criteria of frequency and functionality occupy a leading position in international curricula. The conducted comparative analysis shows that, in international educational programs, the criteria of functionality and frequency play a dominant role in determining the grammatical minimum.

Specifically, in the Cambridge Primary English Curriculum, 40 percent of grammatical units are selected on the basis of functional usage, whereas in the Florida standards this figure составляет 35 percent. In both programs, the frequency criterion holds an equal share (30%), and the frequent occurrence of grammatical units in speech is recognized as a key selection factor. Furthermore, the age-appropriateness criterion is evaluated relatively higher in the Florida program (25%), indicating greater attention to learners' psychological and cognitive developmental characteristics.

The limitation of the theoretical completeness criterion to 10 percent in both programs confirms that, in international educational approaches, the principle of minimal and practical instruction prevails over excessive theoretical formalization of grammar.

The following line chart compares, in percentage terms, the criteria for determining the grammatical minimum in the Cambridge and Florida curricula.



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International educational practice also practically confirms the priority of the principles of functionality, gradual progression, and communicative orientation in determining the grammatical minimum. For example, in the Singapore education system, the lower secondary mother tongue curriculum (Grades 5–9), introduced in 2021, interprets grammatical material not as a traditional rigid theoretical system, but as an integral component of “Language Knowledge,” which serves the development of language skills. Within this approach, grammar is taught not as a separate and independent component, but in an integrated and gradual manner in connection with the main types of language activities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In the Singapore curriculum, at the lower and middle stages (Grades 5–7), the grammatical minimum is limited to the most essential, high-frequency morphological and syntactic units in accordance with learners’ age and cognitive development. At the upper stage (Grades 8–9), these same units are functionally expanded and oriented toward the development of text production, analysis, and communicative adaptation skills. Importantly, grammatical units are not organized strictly according to a fixed “list of topics” by grade levels; instead, they are deepened in a spiral manner within the G1, G2, and G3 course frameworks, which correspond to communicative tasks and levels of language acquisition [12]. This clearly illustrates the principle of defining the grammatical minimum not as a set of topics, but on the basis of practical communicative necessity.

A distinctive modern model of determining the grammatical minimum can also be observed in the education system of Saudi Arabia. According to the report Education in Saudi Arabia prepared by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), grammar, including morphological material, is being reconsidered within the framework of a competency-oriented system of learning outcomes in the process of curriculum modernization in the country [13]. While in the traditional approach the scope of grammatical

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knowledge was determined mainly through textbooks, recent reforms prioritize the optimization of grammatical material, that is, the selection and teaching of units necessary for real communicative activity. As a result, grammar is no longer interpreted as an object of mechanical memorization, but as a means of understanding texts, expressing ideas accurately, and meeting communicative needs.

A similar approach can be observed in the Turkish education system. In the Turkish Language Curriculum (Türkçe Dersi Öğretim Programı), updated in 2019, grammar is not allocated as a separate section but is taught in close integration with listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities [14]. In this curriculum, morphological units are not regarded as an independent goal, but as tools that serve to enhance learners' text comprehension and to ensure grammatical accuracy in both written and spoken communication. Based on the spiral approach, basic and high-frequency forms are presented in minimal volume in lower grades, while in higher grades they are expanded functionally and communicatively.

In international methodological approaches, morphology is considered a core component of the grammatical minimum, and grammatical units are primarily selected according to real communicative functions, based on verb- and noun-centered models. This approach interprets the grammatical minimum not as a list of topics, but as a system of functional units that ensure communicative activity. The model based on the principle of spiral development guarantees the gradual formation of grammatical competence while maintaining harmony with learners' age-related and cognitive characteristics.

The practical implementation of these principles is clearly reflected in the diagram illustrating the morphological composition of the grammatical minimum defined for Grades 5–9. The dominant share of verb categories (35%) indicates that the grammatical minimum is formed primarily on the basis of core communicative functions. The significant proportion of nouns and case forms

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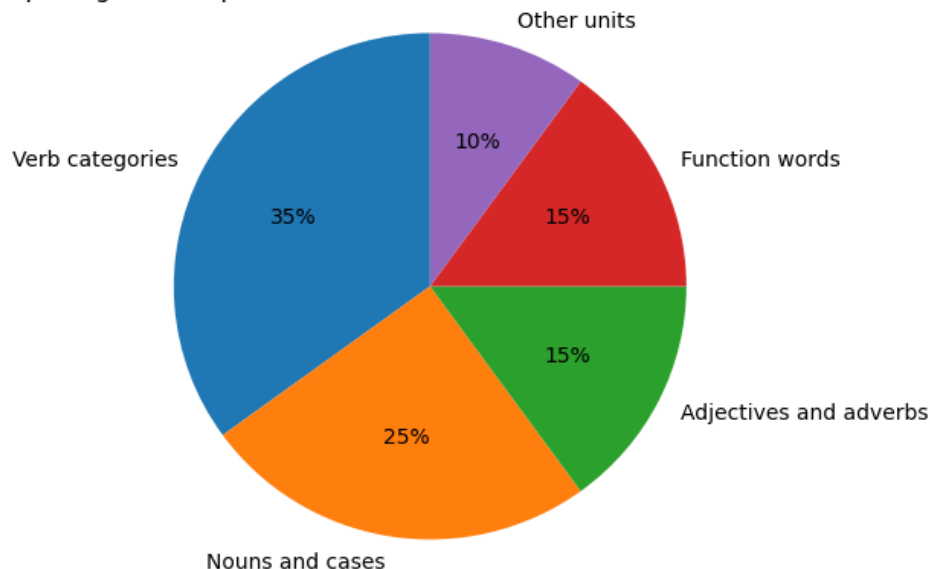


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(25%) confirms their central role in constructing sentence meaning. Furthermore, the equal representation of adjectives and adverbs, as well as function words (15% each), demonstrates the priority of an approach aimed at ensuring accuracy, coherence, and logical consistency in speech. The relatively small share of “other units” (10%) indicates that the principle of limiting the grammatical minimum to only communicatively necessary elements, without excessive theoretical expansion, remains dominant.

Morphological Composition of the Grammatical Minimum in Grades 5–9



Conclusion

Research and analysis show that the process of determining the grammatical minimum in mother tongue education should not be based on a set of theoretical rules, but rather on real speech practice and communicative needs. Corpus-based empirical analyses confirm that the frequency, functional load, and contextual relevance of grammatical units must serve as the main criteria for their selection. Moreover, forming the grammatical minimum on the basis of corpus data prevents excessive theoretical formalization in grammar instruction and brings it closer to learners’ real communicative needs. As a result, grammar teaching is

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oriented not toward memorization of rules, but toward the conscious and effective acquisition of functional units that support communicative activity. This, in turn, ensures the integrated development of grammatical competence in close interaction with communicative competence.

The experience of the education systems of Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Cambridge, and Florida confirms the growing tendency to interpret grammatical material not as a collection of topics, but as a tool that supports communicative activity. This approach creates a foundation for grammar instruction that is concise in content, methodologically grounded, and practically effective. Overall, determining the grammatical minimum on the basis of a corpus-based empirical approach serves as an important scientific and methodological foundation for optimizing the content of mother tongue education and increasing the practical effectiveness of grammar teaching.

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