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**Research/Technical Note**

# Foreign Language Grammar Acquisition in the Context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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**Abstract:** One of the main concerns of current foreign language methodology is the effective grammar acquisition and the actual need for it. On other hand, the constant progress of mobile technology and the attractiveness of social media provide great opportunities for ubiquitous learning, which can complement the regular class work and motivate learners to practice and master the grammar contents in a foreign language. This study investigates the impact of the communicative approach on the learning traditions of Eastern countries, and concludes on the key role of technology in facilitating the development of grammar competence. The study interviewed more than 100 university students from 22 countries from Eastern Europe and Asia. Data show clear preference for the explicit learning and support the proposal for a mobile Application dedicated to the explication of grammar rules and to the interactive practice of different grammar contents in community through social media.

**Keywords:** Explicit Learning, Grammar Acquisition, mLearning, Communicative Approach

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## 1. Introduction

When in the late 60s of 20th century British linguists Candlin and Widdowson first believed that foreign language learning should involve also communicative competence, a new era in education began. Communicative theories have been evolving for many years and have influenced the field of Foreign Language Learning and Teaching (FLLT). They seem to have made a great progress in language teaching by giving students a clearer projection of how language is used through sophisticated and engaging practice activities [1]. Arguably the Communicative approach, also known as communicative language teaching (CLT), has improved the quality of the educational process. Nevertheless, it seems that the number of authors that question the efficiency of the communicative approach has been getting bigger. The major concerns involve the effective ways to learn in a specific cultural environment and the need to master grammatical content. [2] talk about the difficulties to apply CLT to the educational system of Egypt that has passive-student traditions, teacher-dominated subjects and negative-to-group-work attitudes. [3] and [4] point out that the examination system in Asian countries is exam-centered. The focus is put

on the command of FL grammar which educators should take into consideration for the successful implementation of the communicative approach. [5] and [6] argue that the current model of western FLLT methodology should be revised in order to fit an educational system based on the deep rooted Confucian culture, where learners must passively listen to the teacher. [7] find that FL teachers frequently had no choice but to turn to the use of L1 in their teaching in order to maximize their effective use of the limited EFL classroom time and to help the better understanding of the formal content and rules of the target language. [8] notes that, given their nature, Asian cultures in general prevent genuine communication from happening in class, because students prefer a single large classroom conversation instead of doing group work. [9] resumes that there are barriers in the implementation of the CLT in many Asian countries, and that the approach should be modified to suit better the local context.

It seems to be a common understanding that communicative theories which are the foundation of most approaches to modern language training treat grammar acquisition as a peripheral and implicit process. At the same

time, there are many educational systems around the world where people are used to learning language in a different way – through the examination and the explicit analysis of the formal aspects of language. We are facing a paradox: first, language teaching based on the communicative theories is proclaimed to be student centered and in accordance with learners' needs; at the same time, it is usually presented as the most advanced "recipe" for success in the area of FLLT. It is not logical to put emphasis on students' individual needs but insist on applying only one of several possible approaches to the learning process. What, then, happens to the students and their right to choose?

Even a cursory exchange of experience among language instructors from different parts of the world is sufficient to reveal a tendency: students that achieve good communicative competence often do not have a good command of the formal content and grammar rules of a FL. So, is it necessary to work more on developing better grammar competence? Can technology be an important tool for reaching this goal? Is there a need to rediscover the grammar translation method or to get back to the generativists ideas? Can we teach effectively a FL while ignoring the use and reference to the mother tongue? What are the risks of imposing a communication-oriented methodology in cultures where silence is an essential component to understand communication, and deep observation and analysis of structures are key factors for personal development? These questions urge us to seek answers in the available literature.

## 2. The Concept of Grammar and Its Natural Acquisition

Grammar is a deep and polyvalent concept. In his extensive analysis of the terminology [10] distinguishes grammar as a symbiosis of *object* and *theory*. Grammar as *object* represents a historical view of the faculty of the language as used by the members of a certain community. It is a complex phenomenon and a strange mixture of biogenetic, social and psychological aspects that still has not been completely decoded. Nevertheless, linguists are convinced that this reality is ripe for a systematic study. That is why grammar as *theory* is an attempt to make explicit the rules which define the functionality of a certain grammar *object*. The variety of textbooks and grammar summaries that exist are the result of this attempt.

There has been a strong debate for years about whether a regular language class could be a place where the natural acquisition of a foreign language might take place [11]. Some researchers have explored the dichotomy of learning and acquiring in depth. An example is [12], who believes that both processes are independent and take place at the same time. While the acquisition is unconscious, learning is centered on conscious study of rules. This is the point of the learning process where the grammar instruction begins, according to him.

This position was heavily criticized and nowadays

linguists tend to accept that acquisition and learning are closely related and happen simultaneously in the educational environment. During the learning process the students and the teacher are involved in a metalinguistic interaction where the analysis and practice of formal content, among many other activities, represent a relevant factor for the successful mastering of the target language [11].

Undoubtedly, the ideas of Krashen increased the interest towards the acquisition process and the communicative practice in class [13]. It seems that his ideas are one of the reasons why the followers of the communicative approach have declared explicit grammar instruction unnecessary. At the same time, there are enough arguments in favor of the grammar acquisition through the communicative approach [10]. But the question is not whether we should vote in favor or against the grammar, because it is always present in a foreign language class, either as *object* or as *theory*. The discussion is about the appropriate quantity and the type of procedures of conscious instruction that should be included in the learning process to support effectively the metalinguistic thought. [14] distinguish between explicit and implicit education and argue that the two are related and happen simultaneously in class. The implicit or unconscious instruction generates explicit knowledge, also called intentional, where the rules are defined in a conscious way. They conclude that the explicit learning is of great importance for the acquisition of cognitive skills, which every language is all about.

### 2.1. The Communicative Approach and the Asian Model of Learning

According to the communicative theories, the acquisition of the formal content in a FL class is interpreted as an implicit and inductive process. That is why the educational resources usually present a minimum of grammar-related information, especially at the beginner level, which is supposed to be worked out by the students while they interact in a given context. The grammar summary presented in those resources is what is considered sufficient for the learners to achieve certain skills described in the Language Framework established by the western world. It is questionable whether the volume of the information and the way it is presented work equally well for all cultures around the world and whether they meet the learners' unique expectations and needs. The teachers' role in the communicative methodology is to emphasize the communicative aspect of language, while the students attempt to get as close as possible to the natural acquisition of a language like that of the mother tongue. Often a priority is given to teachers that are native speakers or that are fluent in the target language, which is considered a key factor in a learning process based on communication that is appropriate for the context and uses natural language. At the same time, teachers who fit this profile naturally tend to rely on their linguistic awareness when teaching grammar at the expense of being more explicit when explaining the rules and how they compare to structures in the mother tongue of the students. The linguistic awareness of FL teachers that are

native speakers normally does not match the one of their students, because every language is a projection of how people from a specific culture look at the world, and there are no two cultures that are completely identical. That is why it is not unusual for students who are used to learning grammar structures and rules gradually to feel confused and frustrated when the communicative methodology is applied. It would be interesting then to see if different cultures are equally passionate about introducing the communicative approach in their educational curriculum.

[15] Describes the analysis of the methodology of English instruction in South Korea. Curiously, the results of the education in this country have changed drastically. According to his author, the FL curriculum from 1950 to 1990 was focused on translation and grammar rules. In the 90s the statistics showed that the linguistic competence in English of the Korean students was the worst among the countries from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That report was followed by the immediate reaction of the government, and the national curriculum was channeled towards the communicative theories. Teachers were trained to concentrate on meaning and fluency in communication. Textbooks could be argued to have become rich in tasks such as *exchange information, solve a problem, give advice, ask for favors*, etc. [16]

At the same time, it has been argued that Korean students do not feel comfortable in this new educational situation, and are unable to identify and fix their grammar mistakes without guided instruction. It can be argued that is why, the majority of them have difficulty expressing themselves, and it is the lack of grammar competence that accounts for that. The South Korean government “has recognized the importance of grammar as requirement for achieving a decent communicative competence” [15].

[52] indicates that students face the difficulty of learning grammar forms through an approach that seems generic. The main contacts that those students have with the target language are reduced to their classmates, whose use of that language is usually abundant in mistakes. The insufficient exposure to the target language restricts the learner’s ability for self-correction. That is why “teaching grammar protects students from fossilization” [15].

This situation is not only typical for South Korea; it can be argued that there is a paradigmatic tendency in the eastern world in general that consists in the appreciation of grammar as a key factor to learn a foreign language. Several examples from different Asian countries seem to prove this. For example, the students from Bangladesh are usually not able to understand the contents of a FL class because grammar explication is missing [17]. Also, the insufficiency of “quantitative and qualitative input” prevents students from the natural correction of grammar mistakes.

After exploring the learning perceptions of Chinese students and non-Chinese students, [19] confirmed that Chinese students do not show similar patterns of learning as western students arguably because they had learned in different educational and social environment.

On other hand, in Japan, where nowadays the task-based approach is living its glorious days, there is an ongoing debate about its drawbacks. Some assert that students are exposed to certain circumstances which make them disregard functional forms like articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, etc. These might not be critical for expressing the basic meaning, but are important when trying to create a clear and forceful meaning [20].

Given the examples above, we may conclude on that many eastern countries give priority to the formal content in a foreign language class. In order to foster the effective grammar acquisition first Japan, then Korea and other countries introduced the method of team-teaching and the model of simultaneous *presentation, practice, production* [20]. Team-teaching in the context of FLLT involves two instructors who co-teach a class: one is a native speaker, and the other - a local expert. The latter is the one that analyzes and systematizes the formal structure, and even translates when necessary. The local expert plays the role of a bridge between local mentality and culture of contemplation and philosophical thought, and the western canon of methodology. Izumi also criticizes the segregation between grammar and communication and claims that in order to get definitive and positive results in students' competence, it is necessary to combine both aspects as if they were two sides of the same coin.

The concept of team is defined by [21] as any possible combination of participants that is organized to promote authentic communication in the classroom. The authors confirm the existence of a tension between local and native foreign language teachers. Local *experts*, as they called them, accuse native speakers of being ineffective in adapting the curriculum to the personal needs of the students, while native speakers complain about the excessive use of the local language in the classroom, which makes it hard for learners to develop the skill to think in the target language. Realizing that these two points of view may evolve into a problem with a negative impact on the curriculum and on students' motivation, the authors suggest looking at team-teaching as “team-learning”. They expect that to be a unique collaboration process where teachers and students are effectively learning from one another by exchanging professional experience and cultural values. In spite of the current debate, the team-taught model has been adopted by many Asian countries and represents a particular feature of the education in that part of the world. The need for this addition to the teaching process seems sensible when western communicative theories clash with communities that are used to following structure and social hierarchy.

The literature reviewed in this chapter leads the author of this work to the conclusion that eastern cultures, because of their traditions and way of thinking, are used to a more structured learning process and their educational system is clearly “teacher-centered” [22]. In the context of FLLT, that means a major concentration on formal content, a priority given to the explicit way to learn grammar and a major dependence on the teaching approach.

## 2.2. Grammar and Communicative Theories in Non-Asian Contexts

The drawbacks of the communicative theories in the context of FLLT have been researched also by non-Asian authors. [23] stated that grammar practice contributes to the creative usage of language. [24] showed that students who had spent 5300 hours in a French immersion program did not get any better than those taking fewer than 500 hours in regular classes. The participants in the immersion program achieved a high level of fluency in communication but their control over the form stayed unaffected. That is why linguists like [25] came to defend the idea that the need of teaching grammar in an explicit way “is the solution of low accuracy in the communication between foreign language learners”. He even added that a creative approach to teaching grammar could boost student participation.

Furthermore, practice and grammatical analysis help to avoid the *fossilization* which [26] defines as “a broken, non-grammatical, pidgin form of the language”. Instruction based on meaning, that does not emphasize grammar could lead to fossilization because “some complex structures cannot be acquired during natural conversation” [26]. [27] also note that students immersed in communicative classes, where meaning and fluency prevail over form have problems with the linguistic adequacy and complexity of the language.

[28] notes that high school students taking part in a language immersion program made many mistakes when speaking and writing, although they had developed the other 2 skills (reading & listening comprehension) to a level close to that of a native speaker. [29] assert that continuous structural instruction may focus student’s attention on the form and may help them realize the difference between grammatically correct speech and their current skills.

Explicit and deductive teaching and learning was extensively used in the structuralistic approaches and by the generativists. Since the introduction of the communicative approach they have been progressively abandoned and even reached the point of being considered wrong. Nonetheless, *drill* exercises, which are structuralistic by nature, are considered the most common procedure to practice the formal content of any foreign language today [10].

In conclusion, it can be argued that we are witness of the rising number of supporters of the importance of knowing the grammar of a foreign language. They are questioning the effectiveness of the communicative theories in achieving grammatical competence. It seems sensible to expect that the new geo-political situation in the world and the economic interests towards some of the Eastern countries will influence the opening of new lines of research, the results of which might change some of the established linguistic concepts and further develop others. Due to geo-political reasons after the Second World War, a significant number of Eastern countries and the possible benefit of linguistic research of their correspondent cultures have been neglected by the western civilization during the golden years of discoveries in the linguistic field. The FLLT traditions and needs of those

countries have not been studied in detail. Those countries belong to an extensive geographical area which contains a number of cultures that might be relevant for linguistic research in the future.

## 3. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Mobile Learning (*mLearning*)

Technological advances and the popularity of Internet have created *e-learning*, which is the use of electronic means and ICT in education. The boom of mobile technologies has caused the inevitable move towards *mLearning*. *MLearning* is defined by [30] as the intersection of mobile computing and education, or the implementation of small, portable and wireless mobile devices in education. Mobile education is a combined process of learning and instruction as a result of the use of mobile devices, which facilitates the flexible access to educational resources without space and time limitations ([31]; [32]). It offers several advantages:

- allows access to educational resources according to individual needs, and at the same time provides instant feedback [32]
- provides new learning opportunities that go beyond the traditional activities which are based on the teacher-student relationship in class [31]
- motivates learners to be more active in the learning process by putting them in real, contextualized situations ([33]; [31])
- facilitates learning and productivity by exploring real contexts [30]
- makes possible the instant exchange of knowledge between experts and between the members of learning communities [34]

At the same time, *mLearning* is a very dynamic phenomenon. Users around the world constantly generate and develop it, which is why it is difficult to predict its evolution [35]. Education and FL teaching in particular face a big challenge because of the constant progress of the ICT and social media. Mobile technology makes it possible to have instant access to real-life usage of the target language. At the same time, [32] warns that mobile education might be problematic because in the electronic world everything could be considered context, which can be rather “noisy” and confusing. It is then entirely the teacher’s responsibility to show students an effective way to learn while they are immersed in an ocean of information.

The interest in mobile technology today is centered on the mobility of the learner and the possibility of unlimited access to information – two key aspects of mobile learning. Even though *mLearning* has been defined, several authors find worrying the lack of specific *mLearning* criteria that identify all new content on the market. [36] First announced the search of a new approach beyond the established instruction methodology. [37] also noted the lack of common understanding of *mLearning* and conducted a study which

aim was to establish an index of rules for future projects. A list of 100 of the most famous proposals for digital teaching was analyzed. The study helped the authors to create a scale to assess the relevance of the context and the level of pedagogical complexity of every educational project that uses technology. The scale consists of 4 levels, called “dimensions”, the lowest of which is the *independent context* and the highest – the *social context*. The independent level is the one where the learner practices in an environment that is not directly connected to the learning process (i.e. doing *drill* type exercises while traveling on public transport). The social context, on other hand, refers to “the human relations that include situations, emotions, friends or actual and past experiences” [37]. Interestingly enough, that study identified a small percentage of mobile applications that fit the social context. The majority of them offered access to information and several online services independent from the learner’s context and needs.

On other hand, [38] divided digital applications into two categories – *low tech* and *high tech*. The popular *Microsoft Office*, for example, has to be considered low tech according to the author. Despite the fact that high tech applications like *Chat*, *Forum* for debate, *Social media*, etc. have changed the way to approach and complete activities, the major part of the tools introduced in modern methodology by the teachers remains low tech. [39] noted that the use of low tech technology from a pedagogical perspective has to be associated generally with the teacher centered methodology, while the high tech one usually promotes the constructive practices where the learner feels immersed in a collaborative context. Whatever one may have a particular way to define what is actually *low tech*, arguably the more sophisticated technologies for electronic education would force teachers to come up with new ways to communicate with students and to modify the existing methodologies, which has also been noted by [40].

#### Social media and education

Research work dating from 30 years ago supports the importance of creating learner communities and introduced the term *sense of community* as a mutual dependence between members, connectivity, confidence, interaction, expectations and shared goals [41]. In the era of technologies and social media various psychologists ([42]; [43]) confirm that such communities may facilitate the achievement of the educational goals. The most recent research [44] shows that *Facebook* can have a positive effect on the relationship between students, and between teachers and students. Mazer and his team discovered that those students who have access to websites that reveal personal information about their teachers tend to be more motivated and their training is more effective.

[45] highlights that students are completely engulfed by the technology of 21st century. That is why it is sensible to assume that they will easily make use of the opportunity to collaborate and develop a mutual dependence. He also holds that an emphasis should be put on the importance of social media and the fact that it represents an integral part of the

electronic routine of the students. Consequently, those educators who choose to guide their students on an educational route which crosses paths with a concrete Social media will gain a valuable social and educational experience.

[46] and [47] assert that the integration of ICT in foreign language class to aid in the interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds helped them build successful, real contacts.

Social media allow for synchronous and asynchronous interaction. They also offer access to an incredible volume of authentic information. In the field of FLLT social media are a key factor in facilitating the comprehension because they demonstrate the actual use of the language in real context. The language input gathered when observing natural speech also has the advantage of being attractive and personalized in social media, hence the better pragmatic development of the learner. It makes it easier to draw conclusions in an inductive way (i.e. starting from data in order to formulate the rules). According to [47], without the recreational activities facilitated by social media FL learners may never realize that different cultures treat speech-acts in different ways. That is why group discussions such as those in *Facebook*, for example, can help learners understand the way in which culture and language are connected. Social media have become a tool for achieving optimum foreign language proficiency and a better understanding between cultures.

[48] argue that “language is the most pervasive and powerful cultural artifact that human possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves”. One has to have various skills to gain FL competence. People have the ability to imitate the intentional behavior of our social partners, and social media represent a perfect platform where this ability can be applied through observation and participation in discussion forums. [45] talks about the new generation that was born in the years of the technological boom. He calls them *digital natives* because they master this new “language” from a very young age. There are also *digital immigrants*, the generations born before the technological progress. If we understand the linguistic analogy, it becomes clear that the latter will never manage to lose their “accent” when using the ICT. Since different experiences shape unique brain structures, one should expect that knowledge is structured and information is treated in a different way in the brain of the technological generations in comparison to previous ones. That is why education currently is facing a very serious problem: “digital immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language” [45]. In addition, new generations prefer “graphics over texts”, “hyperlinks over regular text”, games over “serious” work, they also work better when connected through the net, and like to carry out parallel activities and multitasks.

In the digital world the most popular products seem to be those closest to the concept of games and entertainment, the most colorful and flexible ones, also the most effective that

allow for fastest connection with other users. Their characteristics could be used perfectly to typify the language spoken by new generations.

Portable devices like laptops, digital personal assistants, smartphones and wireless connection they all facilitate mobility and contribute to the learning process inside and outside the classroom. They offer teachers and students great flexibility and new opportunities for interaction [49]. [50] set forth the hypothesis that mobile technology will deeply impact education. The team presented the following visions for future changes in education based on current tendencies:

- Will concentrate completely on students' needs
- Will engage students in making meaningful connections with resources and people.
- The ability to share different observations and reflections in real time will empower users to become explorers of their own environment
- The ability to capture, save and easily share moments from everyday life will help learners to memorize and to reflect on the meaning of the language in collaboration.

It has been said many times that life today seems unimaginable without mobile technology and is completely conditioned by Internet. ICT have shaped various aspects of human life including education. Obviously, the digital world (guided by humans) tries to adapt to the immense ocean of individual interests and priorities. The life-style and the digital expectations of the modern person center on several key factors which the Lifeboat foundation (<http://lifeboat.com>) defines as the core of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Web: ubiquitous connectivity, open identity (the ability to port the user account and search history between different platforms) and intelligent applications (natural language processing, machine learning, machine reasoning, autonomous agents).

As seen in the previous chapters, the insufficient acquisition and practice of grammar content and the lack of solid grammatical competence in a FL has caused one of the main debates about the communicative approach. Due to the specific cultural characteristics and the unique educational systems in the Eastern countries, one could argue that the deeper business and social contacts with this part of the world might confirm the conclusions made in this paper regarding grammar competence, and even might reveal more imperfections of the communicative methodology. This presents a new, promising field for future research.

Technology and the opportunities for online social interaction may be a solution for the effective practice and acquisition of grammar competence in a foreign language.

Based upon the analysis presented in this article it can be argued that if there was an Application for mobile devices dedicated at the same time to the explicit clarification of grammar rules, to the interactive analysis of structures and to the practice of different grammar contents in community through social media, it could be a valuable addition to foreign language learning and teaching.

## 4. The Study and Its Goals

In order to support the hypothesis that has been presented in chapter 3.1., a survey has been conducted among 131 university students in the American University in Bulgaria ([www.aubg.edu](http://www.aubg.edu)). Although it was undertaken in the context of a single academic institution, the study included students from 24 countries, 22 of which are in Asia and Eastern Europe, and that adds to its value. Due to the physical location of the research, the data was collected and processed quickly. The survey consists of 10 closed-ended questions that were meant to gather relevant input regarding several aspects of grammar learning mentioned previously in this paper: the way that eastern cultures look at grammar learning, the ubiquitous use of mobile devices and the need of specific mobile application dedicated to effective grammar acquisition through interactive and creative activities. Also, the survey explores some additional topics such as the number of foreign languages that the interviewee speaks, whether users are familiar with the resources offered by Google platform, etc. These will be discussed in detail in the second part of this paper, which presents a model of mobile Application for interactive learning of grammar and a case study based on it. For unknown reasons, some of the interviewees left some of the questions blank, hence the slight variation in numbers across the questionnaire.

Results of the study

Several aspects of the survey stand out. In the first place, clear priority is given by the interviewees to the explicit learning of grammar structures (*see Annex, Figure 1*). Given the fact that almost all of the participants in the survey were from Eastern Europe and Asia, these results support the idea that eastern cultures feel more comfortable with the explicit and deductive way of learning grammar. At the same time, most of the interviewees declare that they speak 3 or 4 foreign languages already, which represents an interesting argument against those who believe that only the communicative methodology and its implicit and inductive way to explain grammar can effectively teach foreign languages (*see Annex, Figure 2*).

What way do you prefer to learn grammar?

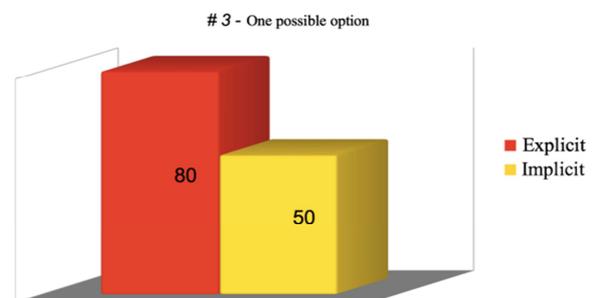


Figure 1. Preferred way of learning grammar.

### How many languages do you speak?

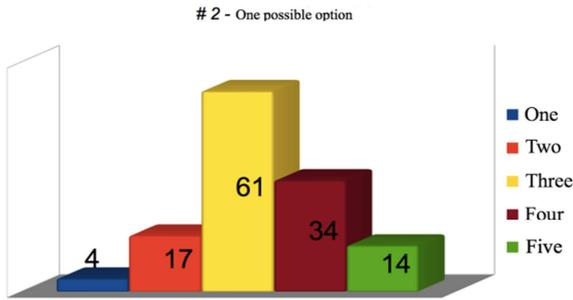


Figure 2. Number of FLs spoken by the interviewees.

Today a person owns usually at least one mobile device. Usually it is a sophisticated piece of technology such as smartphone or tablet. This tendency is also confirmed by the results shown in Figure 3. In addition, iOS and Android operating systems (Figure 4) are the most popular ones among the interviewees.

### What kind of mobile device do you have?

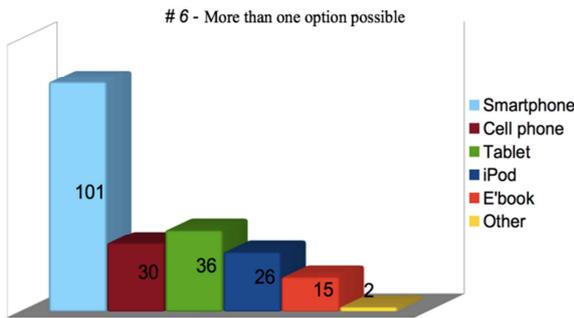


Figure 3. Most popular mobile devices.

### What is the OS of your mobile device?

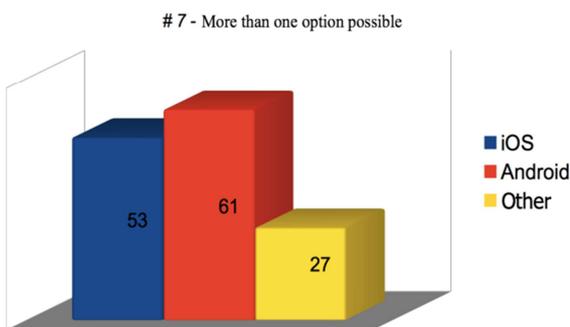


Figure 4. Most popular Operating System.

Surfing the social media and online press are the most frequent activities after phone calls and chats (Figure 5). 88,4% of the students say they have never used or have rarely used mobile Apps to practice and learn grammar (Figure 6).

Finally, as seen in Figure 7, 57,3% of the interviewees would be interested in the didactic mobile application which characteristics have been defined at the end of chapter 3.1. It is also worth noting here that 76,8% of the resting students are concerned about the cost of the product. This leads to the assumption that if the price is reasonable, those people might be considered potential users.

### Have you ever used Apps for practicing and learning grammar?

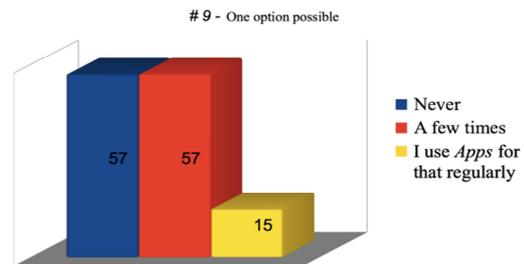


Figure 5. The use of mobile devices.

### What do you use it for?

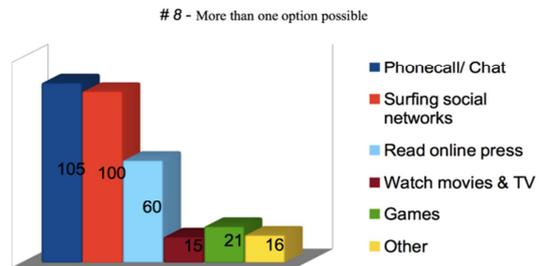


Figure 6. Previous experience with similar Apps.

### Would you download and use an App that fits this profile?

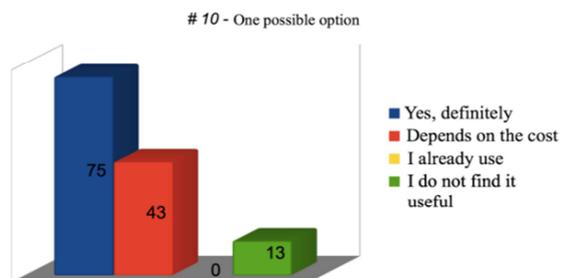


Figure 7. Interest in the new proposal for learning grammar.

## 5. Conclusion

Technology by itself, even the one that is sophisticated and of high quality is not enough to create economic and social value [51]. The human factor is crucial in shaping and adjusting the digital functionality to the individual user's priorities and needs. Another important thing to consider is that the FLLT process usually takes place in areas where that language is not spoken and training is limited to a very small number of classes. Children start from zero when learning their mother tongue, but they have the benefit of being in constant contact with it. Even then it takes a couple of years to acquire adequate language skills. Adults, though, do not have that much free time and their minds have the tendency to inquire, to pay attention and to analyze new information by comparing it to already familiar structures and systems. This is normally considered a drawback but can easily be transformed in an advantage, if methodology adapts to the individual forms of learning. A few hours a week are not enough to understand and practice grammar rules. That is why many students are unable to master grammar forms and continue to make basic mistakes even at the advanced level. Achieving an adequate communication competence in a FL depends on the good grammatical competence for many cultures.

ICT and the popular social media offer a great opportunity for easy access to written and spoken texts in the target language. They provide enough language material for the learners to use and analyze the real usage of grammatical structures. Students can also practice what they have learned, which will help them acquire new skills in real contexts. Wireless mobile technology makes possible the web browsing without space and time restrictions for the users. The ubiquitous digital interaction opens up a new dimension of opportunities for those language instructors who seek ways to make the best out of the motivation and the efforts of the learners.

The revised literature and the data gathered in this study show that there is a significant number of FL learners, especially coming from Eastern Europe and Asia, who stand for the explicit way of learning grammar. That is why, in the era of social media and ubiquitous connectivity, the need for digital tools that motivate adult learners to practice and to achieve a decent grammar competence outside of the classroom becomes more and more sensible. In order to support this conclusion, a model of Application for mobile devices called *GramCreate* has been developed. As its name suggests, its functionality is based on the online interaction, on the analysis of grammar structures in real context and on the creation of original *drill* type exercises that users can store and share thorough social media. The continuation of this paper discusses in details the main functionality of *Gram Create* and the results of a case study based on it.

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