

STAGES OF FORMATION OF LEXICAL COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Abstract. Lexical competence, defined as the ability to understand, store, and appropriately use vocabulary in communication, represents a fundamental component of language proficiency. This article examines the stages of its formation in the process of second language learning, drawing on psycholinguistic, methodological, and pedagogical perspectives. The study identifies four key stages: recognition and comprehension, active acquisition, contextual application, and autonomous usage. Each stage involves the gradual development of lexical knowledge, strategic skills, and communicative readiness. The findings emphasize that lexical competence is not a static set of vocabulary items but a dynamic system that evolves through interaction between cognitive processes, communicative practice, and sociocultural context.

Keywords: lexical competence, language learning, vocabulary acquisition, communicative competence, psycholinguistics, contextual application, autonomous usage

ЭТАПЫ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ЛЕКСИЧЕСКОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация. Лексическая компетенция, определяемая как способность понимать, хранить и правильно использовать лексику в общении, представляет собой фундаментальный компонент владения языком. В данной статье рассматриваются этапы её формирования в процессе изучения второго языка с опорой на психолингвистические, методические и педагогические подходы. В исследовании выделяются четыре ключевых этапа: распознавание и понимание, активное усвоение, контекстное применение и

автономное использование. Каждый этап включает постепенное развитие лексических знаний, стратегических навыков и коммуникативной готовности. Результаты исследования подчёркивают, что лексическая компетенция — это не статичный набор словарных единиц, а динамическая система, развивающаяся посредством взаимодействия когнитивных процессов, коммуникативной практики и социокультурного контекста.

Ключевые слова: лексическая компетенция, изучение языка, усвоение лексики, коммуникативная компетенция, психолингвистика, контекстное применение, автономное использование

Introduction. Vocabulary is one of the most critical dimensions of language learning, as it serves as the foundation for communication in both spoken and written forms. Without sufficient lexical competence, learners cannot fully develop grammatical accuracy, pragmatic fluency, or discourse skills. Scholars such as Nation (2001) and Schmitt (2010) highlight that lexical competence encompasses not only knowing word meanings but also their forms, collocations, stylistic features, and pragmatic uses. Understanding how learners acquire lexical competence requires analyzing the stages of its formation, from initial recognition of words to autonomous use in communicative contexts.

Main part. At the initial stage, learners develop receptive vocabulary through recognition of word forms, pronunciation, and basic meanings. This stage relies heavily on memory strategies, repetition, and exposure to input. Learners begin to differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar words, focusing on comprehension rather than active use. At the earliest stage of language learning, the development of **receptive vocabulary** is fundamental. Learners are first exposed to new lexical units in their spoken and written forms, and their primary task is to **recognize and comprehend** these items. Recognition at this point does not yet imply mastery of usage; rather, it refers to the learner's ability to identify the form of the word (orthography and phonology) and associate it with a basic meaning or concept.

From a **pedagogical perspective**, the initial stage emphasizes **input-based learning**, where exposure is prioritized over production. Authentic materials, listening activities, flashcards, and visual aids are often used to introduce vocabulary in context. Memory strategies such as **rote repetition, association techniques, and keyword mnemonics** play a central role. Learners frequently engage in tasks like word-matching, labeling pictures, or listening for specific words, which strengthen their recognition abilities.

At this stage, learners also begin to **differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar lexical items**. This selective attention allows them to gradually expand their receptive vocabulary bank, even if many words remain passive for an extended period. Importantly, learners focus more on **comprehension than active use**; they can often understand a word when reading or listening but may not yet recall or use it in speaking or writing. This gap between receptive and productive vocabulary is a natural phenomenon in language acquisition and reflects the gradual transition toward active competence.

Another characteristic of this stage is the **importance of context**. Words are more easily remembered when introduced in meaningful contexts rather than as isolated items. For instance, a learner encountering the word *ball* in a story or during a sports discussion is more likely to retain its meaning compared to rote memorization. **Multimodal input**—such as hearing the word, seeing it written, and associating it with an image—further strengthens memory pathways.

Active Acquisition Stage. In this stage, learners attempt to transfer words from passive to active vocabulary. Activities such as vocabulary drills, translation, and controlled speaking or writing exercises play a significant role. The focus is on accuracy of form and meaning, with learners gradually internalizing basic collocations and word combinations.

Contextual Application Stage. At this stage of lexical competence development, learners move beyond the recognition and mechanical reproduction of words to their practical use in meaningful communicative situations.

Vocabulary is no longer treated as isolated units but as tools for interaction and expression within particular contexts. The emphasis lies in applying learned words to authentic or simulated discourse, which helps learners understand that meaning is shaped not only by the dictionary definition but also by context, cultural norms, and communicative goals.

One of the main characteristics of this stage is the **active integration of vocabulary into speech and writing**. Learners begin to participate in role-plays, classroom debates, guided dialogues, and collaborative projects, where they are required to select appropriate lexical items for a given communicative purpose. These activities encourage the use of words in real-time interaction, which promotes both fluency and accuracy. The focus shifts from purely receptive knowledge to **productive competence**, as learners are challenged to retrieve and apply vocabulary actively.

Autonomous Usage Stage. The final stage is characterized by the ability to flexibly and independently use vocabulary for expressing complex ideas, engaging in abstract discussions, and adapting to intercultural communication. Learners demonstrate mastery of semantic networks, idiomatic expressions, and lexical creativity. At this stage, lexical competence becomes integrated with other components of communicative competence.

Discussion. The progression of lexical competence reflects the interaction of cognitive, communicative, and cultural dimensions. The early stages rely more on explicit instruction and memorization, while later stages are fostered by meaningful interaction and authentic exposure. Teachers must adopt differentiated strategies, ranging from explicit vocabulary teaching to task-based learning and corpus-based input. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools such as vocabulary apps, parallel corpora, and lexical databases enhances the efficiency of each stage.

Conclusion. Lexical competence develops gradually through stages of recognition, acquisition, contextual application, and autonomous use. Each stage contributes to building a comprehensive vocabulary system that enables learners to

function effectively in diverse communicative contexts. A deep understanding of these stages allows educators to design more targeted methodologies, ensuring that learners progress from passive knowledge to active, creative, and pragmatic command of the lexicon.

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