

The Concept of Lexical Competence and its Content

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Abstract. This article discusses the concept of lexical competence, its linguistic and psycholinguistic foundations, the stages of formation of lexical competence in students, and the mechanisms of effective use of lexical units in the learning process. Lexical competence is considered a key component of the language learning process, and its composition includes such elements as vocabulary, semantic fields, phraseological units, polysemy, connotative meaning, and lexical selection appropriate to speech situations. The article analyzes modern linguodidactic approaches - communicative method, competency-based approach, interactive teaching methods, and innovative ways to develop lexical competence based on digital technologies. The author substantiates the role of lexical competence in the formation of a student's speech culture, psycholinguistic factors and pedagogical conditions that affect the effectiveness of its acquisition. The results of the study indicate the need for a comprehensive approach to the development of lexical competence, including the importance of didactic resources, modern methods, and a multimodal environment.

Keywords. Lexical competence, vocabulary, linguodidactics, psycholinguistics, semantic field, polysemy, phraseology, communicative approach, competency approach, speech culture, learning process, interactive methods, lexical unit, semantic system, mental lexicon.

Lexical competence is one of the central categories of the language learning process, which forms the ability of a person to express his thoughts clearly, fluently, meaningfully and in accordance with the context of communication through language tools. In modern linguistics, lexical competence is

not only memorizing words or increasing vocabulary, but also includes a wide range of processes such as a deep understanding of the meaning of words, understanding their speech functions, being able to use them in accordance with the context, distinguishing semantic fields, perceiving the content of phraseological units and terms, and actively using them in speech. Therefore, lexical competence is considered the foundation of a person's general communicative literacy.

Lexical competence is a complex psycholinguistic system in its essence. This system is based on the learner's lexical knowledge, lexical skills, level of understanding of semantic relations, vocabulary, structure of the mental lexicon, memory mechanisms, word selection strategies, and speech experience. In the process of language learning, ideas about new words are formed in the learner's thinking, which are placed in semantic fields, combined with previous knowledge, and gradually become an active speech base. From this point of view, lexical competence is a key component of language learning, which is closely related to other components such as grammatical competence, phonetic competence, and pragmatic competence. The vocabulary of a language learner is manifested in two forms: active vocabulary and passive vocabulary. Active vocabulary consists of words that the student actively uses in oral and written speech, while passive vocabulary covers words that the student understands, but rarely uses in speech. The level of development of lexical competence is largely determined by the breadth and effective use of the active vocabulary. Because the ability of a person to express his thoughts in the process of communication is directly related to the skill of choosing words. The more words a student knows and can use their meaning with accuracy appropriate to the context, the more effective the speech process will be.

Competence is a set of internal capabilities of a person, psychologically formed and not yet fully manifested potential structures. This structure includes knowledge, imagination, internal algorithms for performing activities, values, a system of individual relationships and mental constructs of a person based on experience. All this turns into new psychological mechanisms that later manifest themselves as competence in practical activities.

Competence is also interpreted as an ability to perform a specific task or perform a specific type of activity effectively, based on the knowledge, skills and experience acquired by a person. For example, a translator's excellent knowledge of the language, vocabulary, level of understanding of the grammatical system and the ability to adequately reproduce speech in the process of work determine his language competence.

Language competence is developed through the formation of lexical, grammatical and phonetic skills; however, it is not the main one, but a component of speech competence. Knowledge of the language system is a necessary tool for communicative activity, which serves to strengthen the speech competence of a student or specialist.

Speech competence is not limited to knowledge of the language; it includes the ability to communicate effectively in all types of speech activity - speaking, listening, reading and writing. In this case, a person not only knows the language system, but also can adapt and use it in life situations, choose goal-oriented communicative strategies and create speech in accordance with the social environment.

Competence, in contrast to competence, is interpreted as a real characteristic of a person, a quality that manifests itself in practice. Competence is a person's ability to make correct, quick and effective decisions in a particular situation, relying on knowledge, experience and skills; that is, it expresses the level of intellectual and personal development of a person in social and professional activities.

Competence is based on pre-formed competence:

competence is a set of internal capabilities and knowledge,

competence is the manifestation of this capability in real life.

Thus, competence determines the extent to which a person can apply the knowledge and skills formed in the previous educational process, during life experience and in professional practice. A person with these qualities independently solves complex tasks, takes a responsible approach, can evaluate and manage his activities.

The content of lexical competence includes not only knowing the main meaning of a word, but also being able to understand its polysemy. In most cases, a student memorizes only one meaning of a word, but real-life speech situations require understanding other connotative or figurative meanings of the word. For example, the word "light" can mean a physical phenomenon, but in a literary text it is used as a symbol of hope, goodness, spiritual purity. Therefore, lexical competence requires broad thinking, the ability to perceive artistic means in the language, and the correct interpretation of the text.

Another important element of lexical competence is understanding the semantic relationships between words. The mechanisms of synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, hyperonym-hyponymy, metaphor and metonymy enrich a person's lexical thinking. For example, through synonyms, a student can more clearly express a thought using words with subtle differences; antonyms help to form a thought based on logical contrast; homonyms serve to prevent false meaning confusion in speech. All this is an integral part of the content of lexical competence.

In the modern educational process, the formation of lexical competence is carried out in stages. Initially, the student gets acquainted with the form, pronunciation and main meaning of new words. This process is called the "receptive stage".

At the next stage, the student consolidates the words by repeating, constructing sentences, and performing exercises. Finally, at the third stage, the student begins to use words in active speech situations. This stage is the highest manifestation of lexical competence and determines the communicative readiness of the individual [2].

The formation of lexical competence is also associated with psycholinguistic processes. Human memory initially stores new words in short-term memory, and then, as a result of repetition, they are transferred to long-term memory. Through associative connections, words are placed in meaning groups in the mental lexicon. For example, the word “tree” forms associations with words such as “leaf”, “branch”, “fruit”, “forest”. In this way, logical networks are formed in the mental lexicon according to the meaning of words. This process helps the student to quickly remember new words and use them in speech.

The role of lexical competence in the educational process is incomparable. In native language education, it serves to fully understand the content of the text, increase literary literacy, and express thoughts fluently. In teaching foreign languages, lexical competence plays a key role, since 70-80 percent of the ability to communicate in a foreign language is determined by the lexical base. Even if a student knows grammar well, if he does not have a lexical base, the effectiveness of communication will be low. Therefore, the development of lexical competence is a priority in teaching a foreign language.

In the process of language acquisition, students of primary school age become familiar with important linguistic laws such as the structure of words, their form changes, as well as how words are connected in word combinations, sentences and texts. This process, in turn, serves to create a natural language environment for the formation of grammatical skills. The main condition for the acquisition of grammatical skills in a student is the formation of functional speech experience that ensures the use of language units in accordance with the situation. Grammatical skills, in fact, represent the student's conscious selection of the necessary morphological and syntactic forms in speech and their correct use. This skill is a complex mental activity that helps to carefully construct language units at any stage of speech - from words to complex texts. However, the effective formation of grammatical skills cannot occur without a lexical base. Because the word is the central unit that carries the main communicative load of speech, and it is the word that forms the substantive foundation of any grammatical design.

Unlike grammatical skills, lexical skills are formed more based on semantic understanding, logical thinking and the activity of understanding meaning. Correctly understanding the meaning of a word, being able to associate it with other units, leads to an increase in the student's language sensitivity and ability to perceive content.

The process of forming lexical skills takes place in stages:

The first stage is creating a tentative basis for speech activity. At this stage, students hear, understand new words, and an initial acquaintance with their meaning occurs.

The second stage is organizing a lesson. During this period, words are actively used, applied to the practical speech process through a system of exercises.

The third stage is the consistent implementation of the program. At this stage, lexical units are strengthened, the student acquires the ability to freely use words.

Language skills are also divided into two main types:

Reproductive skills - active reproduction of words in the process of speaking and writing, that is, the student's speech-making activity;

Receptive skills - the process of perceiving the meaning of words during listening and reading comprehension.

Semiotic and symbolic functions are of particular importance in language acquisition. Words are not only a means of naming things, but also a symbolic unit that reflects their meaning. Therefore, when working with words, the first stage of abstraction occurs: the child communicates not with the thing itself, but through its sign in the language medium. This process strengthens the student's ability to generalize.

After the concept of a language sign is formed, it begins to be actively used in speech activity.

Using signs and symbolic means, students:

- transfer real reality to the internal mental plane;
- facilitates the creation and processing of meaning;
- begins to independently analyze the meanings of words and enrich their speech using them.

Thus, lexical and grammatical skills are formed in primary school students in harmony with each other. Their interdependence forms the student's ability to create meaningful, logical and grammatically correct speech. As lexical wealth increases, the correct selection of grammatical constructions becomes easier; as grammatical skills are strengthened, the ability to use words correctly increases.

In modern education, interactive methods, communicative approaches and digital technologies are widely used in the development of lexical competence. Methods such as "Brainstorming", "Insert", "Cluster", "Conceptual Map", "Associogram" develop students' independent thinking, the ability to identify logical connections between words. Through role-playing games, dialogues, and modeling real-life situations, students learn to use words naturally. Technologies, however, allow for faster and more effective development of lexical competence using electronic dictionaries, multimedia resources, and language learning applications [5].

Problems also arise in the process of developing lexical competence. For example, there are problems such as students quickly forgetting new words, confusing synonyms, using phraseologisms incorrectly, choosing words that do not fit the context, and not being able to pronounce words in a foreign language correctly. To overcome these difficulties, methods such as context-based teaching, the use of visual materials, associative methods, a repetition system, vocabulary cards on topics, and multimedia lessons are used.

As mentioned above, an algorithmic map has been developed to systematically organize the process of developing lexical competence in students. This map includes four stages that are implemented sequentially, which ensure the student's gradual speech development.

Stage 1 - Formation of reproductive activity and development of analytical skills. At this stage, students perform exercises based on ready-made samples under the guidance of a teacher, learn to use existing language units. The content of the learning process in the classroom is more focused on repetitive and reinforcing activities. Students gain initial experience in reproducing given words and phrases in speech, using them correctly, and analyzing the meaning of lexical units.

Stage 2 — Development of productive and creative actions. This stage serves as a basis for the student's transition to independent thinking and free speech. The student performs activities such as independently using previously learned lexical units, creating new sentences, and selecting words in accordance with a given situation. Their creative potential expands and the skill of using vocabulary purposefully is formed.

Stage 3 — Organization of partial research activities. At this stage, students begin to work independently with language materials, carry out activities such as transferring acquired knowledge to new situations, identifying connections between information, and engaging in independent research. The content of the educational process shifts from reproductive to research in nature. The student studies lexical units in more depth, independently analyzes their function in speech.

Stage 4 — Creativity and independent assimilation of new knowledge. This stage constitutes the highest level of the educational process. Students create new ideas, draw independent conclusions and enrich their speech experience. The process of mastering new words and phrases takes on a natural and creative character. The educational process is focused on the individual development of the student.

The number of students in the class is considered one of the important criteria when choosing teaching methods by the teacher. If the class is small, the teacher will have the opportunity to work with each student individually or in pairs, using active teaching methods. This helps to intensively conduct the learning process and increase the speech activity of students.

If the class is large, it becomes difficult for the teacher to devote separate time to each student. In such conditions, interactive methods, group work, pair assignments, role-playing games, discussion-based teaching are effective. Interactive educational technologies allow you to manage large groups, learn together, and involve students in the lesson.

The development of lexical competence also directly affects the formation of speech culture. Well-developed lexical competence allows a person to express his thoughts concisely, sonorously, meaningfully and artistically. The speech of such a person is clear, fluent, memorable. He adheres to the norms of the literary language, has stylistic accuracy, and is able to choose appropriate lexical options in various communication situations. Therefore, lexical competence is not only a language skill, but also an important indicator of speech culture [6].

In conclusion, lexical competence occupies a central place in the overall linguistic development of a person. It forms the basis of language learning, provides verbal literacy, develops thinking, forms communicative skills, and plays an important role in the social activities of a person. The development of lexical competence requires systematic training, taking into account psycholinguistic mechanisms, the use of modern methods and technologies, regular repetition and practice. A student with developed lexical competence can express his/her thoughts in a meaningful, fluent, and effective manner in any communication situation.

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