ROLE OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE FOR DEVELOPING READING SKILLS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Uzbek State World Languages University
Teacher: **Rasulova Sokhiba Azizjon qizi**
Uzbekistan, Tashkent

Annotation: *Linguistic competence, a concept introduced by Noam Chomsky, refers to an individual's innate ability to understand and produce language. In the context of university students, linguistic competence is a critical factor in developing proficient reading skills. This article explores the relationship between linguistic competence and reading proficiency in higher education, highlighting how language skills influence comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and the ability to analyze and interpret texts. It also examines the role of teachers in enhancing linguistic competence through targeted strategies that improve reading skills, considering the impact of both explicit language instruction and implicit language exposure. The article further discusses various pedagogical approaches that utilize linguistic competence to support reading development in university students.*

Key words: *Linguistic Competence, Reading Skills, University Students, Comprehension, Vocabulary Acquisition, Pedagogical Approaches.*

Reading is an essential academic skill that requires a combination of cognitive and linguistic abilities. University students, particularly those in fields that demand a high level of reading proficiency, rely heavily on their linguistic competence to navigate complex texts and develop critical reading skills. Linguistic competence, in simple terms, is the subconscious knowledge of language structure, including grammar, syntax, morphology, and phonology. It enables students to decode and comprehend written texts effectively.

At the university level, students are required to read not only for basic comprehension but also for deeper understanding, analysis, and synthesis of information. In this context, their linguistic competence plays a central role in their reading success. This article aims to explore how linguistic competence contributes to the development of reading skills, specifically for university students, and discusses strategies that educators can employ to enhance these skills.

Linguistic competence encompasses several key elements that are crucial for reading comprehension, including phonological awareness, syntax, vocabulary knowledge, and grammar (Chomsky, 1965). The role of these components in reading is multifaceted, and a lack of proficiency in any of these areas can significantly hinder reading development.

Phonological awareness, the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken language, is essential for decoding written words (Snow, 2010). While this is particularly relevant in the early stages of literacy development, its impact extends into higher education, especially when dealing with complex academic vocabulary. Students with strong phonological awareness are better equipped to decode unfamiliar words, which is crucial for understanding challenging texts.

Syntax refers to the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences. University students often encounter texts with complex sentence structures, and linguistic competence in syntax enables them to break down and understand these structures. Understanding how sentences are constructed helps students to comprehend the meaning of texts more efficiently and identify relationships between ideas (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This skill is particularly important in academic reading, where dense, academic language is often used.

Vocabulary knowledge is another critical aspect of linguistic competence that directly affects reading comprehension. A rich vocabulary allows students to better understand the content of texts and engage with more specialized language in academic disciplines (Snow, 2010). Moreover, strong

vocabulary knowledge helps students make inferences and understand the nuances of the text, which are important for higher-order comprehension.

Grammar, which includes rules for word order, tense, and sentence structure, is an essential component of linguistic competence. A solid understanding of grammar allows students to parse sentences accurately and understand the underlying meaning. When reading academic texts, students often encounter nuanced grammatical structures that require attention to detail, and linguistic competence in grammar enables them to extract meaning effectively (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

The development of reading comprehension skills in university students is closely tied to their level of linguistic competence. A study by Paris and Hamilton (2009) suggests that students with stronger linguistic competence are more likely to engage with texts critically and understand complex academic materials. Linguistic competence enables students to recognize key ideas, understand the relationships between them, and synthesize information across different texts. This is particularly important in disciplines that require extensive reading, such as law, history, and literature.

Furthermore, linguistic competence helps students improve their reading speed and efficiency. With a solid understanding of language structures and vocabulary, students can process texts more quickly and focus on higher-order cognitive tasks, such as analyzing arguments, evaluating evidence, and drawing conclusions (Carrell, 1989).

While linguistic competence is partly innate, it can be developed and enhanced through targeted pedagogical strategies. Educators can play a pivotal role in supporting students' reading development by fostering their linguistic competence through explicit instruction and reading practices.

Direct instruction in vocabulary is crucial for university students, particularly in academic settings where specialized terminology is common. Teachers can use techniques such as word maps, context clues, and word lists to

enhance students' vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, encouraging students to read widely and across disciplines helps them build a more extensive vocabulary (Snow, 2010).

Teaching students the structures of academic texts and emphasizing the syntax and grammar used in scholarly writing can improve their ability to parse complex sentences. Techniques such as sentence diagramming or the analysis of academic texts can help students understand how sentences are constructed and how meaning is conveyed through syntax (Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

Encouraging active reading strategies, such as annotation, note-taking, and summarization, can also help improve students' reading comprehension. These strategies not only promote engagement with the text but also reinforce linguistic competence by encouraging students to break down and analyze sentence structures, vocabulary, and overall meaning.

Regular exposure to a variety of texts, including academic journals, novels, and newspapers, helps students naturally expand their vocabulary and strengthen their grammatical intuition. Extensive reading allows students to encounter language in context, which is an effective way to reinforce their linguistic competence (Carrell, 1989).

Despite the effectiveness of these pedagogical strategies, several challenges exist in enhancing linguistic competence for reading. One key issue is the variability in students' linguistic backgrounds. Students who are non-native speakers of the language of instruction may struggle with vocabulary, syntax, and reading comprehension, which can impede their academic progress (Snow, 2010). Moreover, students from diverse linguistic backgrounds may have different levels of exposure to academic language, which can affect their ability to engage with complex texts.

Another challenge is the overemphasis on passive reading in some educational contexts. Without active engagement, students may fail to develop the deeper linguistic skills needed for advanced reading comprehension.

Therefore, it is essential for educators to use interactive and student-centered approaches that encourage linguistic development.

Linguistic competence plays a critical role in developing the reading skills of university students. Strong phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, and syntactical ability all contribute to effective reading comprehension, which is essential for academic success. While linguistic competence is foundational, it can be enhanced through targeted teaching strategies such as explicit vocabulary and grammar instruction, interactive reading strategies, and extensive reading practices. By recognizing the importance of linguistic competence and implementing strategies that support its development, educators can significantly improve their students' reading skills, preparing them for the challenges of higher education and beyond.

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