

**THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EXERCISES IN  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEXICAL COMPETENCE OF LEARNERS**

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**Annotation:** This article explores the theoretical-methodological foundations of exercises designed to develop lexical competence in language learners. It begins by defining lexical competence as the ability to understand and use words appropriately in context. The article highlights key theoretical frameworks, including cognitive linguistics, sociocultural theory, and connectionism, which inform vocabulary learning processes. It emphasizes the importance of social interaction, context-based learning, and repeated exposure to vocabulary in strengthening lexical knowledge. The article also outlines various methodological approaches, such as task-based learning, contextualization, and spaced repetition, which help learners acquire vocabulary through meaningful, real-life tasks and regular review. Furthermore, it provides practical examples of exercises that can enhance both receptive and productive vocabulary skills, including matching exercises, role plays, sentence construction, and vocabulary games. Overall, the article presents a comprehensive approach to vocabulary instruction, combining theoretical insights with practical techniques to support the development of lexical competence in learners.

### **Introduction**

The development of lexical competence in language learners is a central aspect of language acquisition. Lexical competence involves not only understanding and recalling words but also knowing how to use them appropriately in different contexts. Developing lexical competence is crucial for learners to function effectively in communication, whether in speech or writing. To foster lexical competence, language instructors need to design exercises that are rooted in sound theoretical and methodological foundations. These exercises should aim to improve both receptive (understanding) and productive (usage) vocabulary skills, drawing on principles from cognitive linguistics, sociocultural theory, and task-based learning, among others. This

article explores the theoretical and methodological frameworks for designing exercises aimed at developing the lexical competence of learners.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Lexical Competence Development**

Lexical competence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and appropriately use words and their meanings. Several theoretical perspectives provide a solid foundation for developing exercises that promote this aspect of language competence.

#### **1. Cognitive Linguistics and Mental Representation of Vocabulary**

Cognitive linguistics emphasizes that the human mind organizes knowledge through conceptual structures that connect words with meanings. Words are not isolated entities but are connected to networks of concepts, and understanding these connections is key to acquiring vocabulary. This view suggests that vocabulary learning involves building mental representations of words that include their meanings, associations, and uses in various contexts. Exercises grounded in cognitive linguistics should encourage learners to connect new words to known concepts, fostering deeper understanding and retention. For example, activities that involve categorizing words or creating semantic maps help learners understand the relationships between words, their meanings, and usage.

#### **2. Sociocultural Theory and Social Interaction**

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, language learning is inherently social and occurs through interactions with more knowledgeable individuals (e.g., teachers, peers). Lexical competence, from this perspective, develops through communicative activities that engage learners in authentic language use. The social context of learning is emphasized, with vocabulary acquisition occurring most effectively when learners are actively involved in dialogue and negotiation of meaning. Exercises based on this theory often include collaborative tasks like pair or group discussions, role plays, and debates, where learners have opportunities to use new vocabulary in meaningful, contextualized interactions.

#### **3. Connectionism and Repetition in Vocabulary Learning**

Connectionism posits that language learning occurs through the formation of connections between words and their meanings in the brain. This theory suggests that frequent exposure to vocabulary, especially in varied contexts, strengthens the neural connections responsible for recalling words. Repeated exposure to words—through exercises that encourage practice and review—ensures that words are encoded more deeply in memory. Connectionist theory supports the use of spaced repetition techniques, where learners revisit vocabulary at increasing intervals to promote long-term retention.

#### **Methodological Approaches to Lexical Competence Development**

To design effective exercises, educators must consider methodologies that support

active vocabulary learning. These methods can be tailored to specific learner needs, contexts, and the goals of instruction.

### 1. Task-Based Learning (TBL)

Task-based learning (TBL) is an approach in which learners engage in real-world tasks that require the use of language to solve problems, create projects, or complete activities. The primary benefit of TBL is that it places vocabulary acquisition within meaningful communicative contexts. By completing tasks, learners acquire and use words more naturally, as they are pushed to express themselves in ways that require not only comprehension but production. For example, learners could engage in tasks like planning a trip, writing a letter, or presenting a report, all of which necessitate the active use of a variety of vocabulary items. Such exercises provide learners with opportunities to internalize vocabulary through authentic and goal-directed interaction.

### 2. Contextualization of Vocabulary

The process of learning vocabulary is most effective when words are presented in context. Receptive exercises, such as reading texts or listening to dialogues, expose learners to vocabulary in natural settings, enabling them to grasp not only the meaning of individual words but also their use in different contexts. Contextualization can be further supported by exercises that involve learners in identifying and discussing words used in specific situations. For instance, in a role-playing exercise, learners might have to use a set of new words to act out a particular scenario, such as a job interview or a medical consultation, where the vocabulary is relevant to the situation. The key here is that vocabulary learning should not be isolated but should reflect its use in real-life communication.

### 3. Spaced Repetition and Review Exercises

Spaced repetition is a well-established technique for improving retention. It involves reviewing words at increasing intervals to ensure that vocabulary is retained in long-term memory. Exercises that integrate spaced repetition techniques, such as flashcards, quizzes, or interactive apps, can be particularly effective in reinforcing vocabulary learning. These exercises allow learners to assess their knowledge regularly and to identify areas where they may need more practice. For example, apps like Anki and Quizlet use spaced repetition algorithms to help learners review vocabulary at optimal intervals.

### 4. Explicit Instruction on Word Formation and Collocations

While communicative activities are important, explicit instruction also plays a role in lexical competence development. Teaching word formation (derivation, compounding, inflection) and common collocations (words that frequently co-occur) helps learners understand how vocabulary is structured and used. Exercises could include activities where learners match words with their derivatives, form new words by adding prefixes or suffixes, or use collocations in sentences. This knowledge

enables learners to use words flexibly and accurately, making them more proficient in speaking and writing.

### Types of Exercises for Developing Lexical Competence

To facilitate the development of lexical competence, teachers must design exercises that align with the theoretical frameworks mentioned above. These exercises should aim to enhance both receptive and productive vocabulary skills.

#### 1. Receptive Vocabulary Exercises

- **Matching Exercises:** Learners match words with their definitions or corresponding images, reinforcing word meaning and context.

- **Fill-in-the-Blanks:** In this exercise, learners complete sentences or paragraphs with the correct word from a given list. This helps reinforce the meaning and usage of vocabulary in context.

- **Reading and Listening Comprehension:** Learners read texts or listen to audio materials that include target vocabulary. They then answer questions based on the text, testing their understanding of the words in context.

#### 2. Productive Vocabulary Exercises

- **Role Plays:** Learners engage in role-playing activities where they must use new vocabulary to carry out specific tasks (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant, discussing a current event).

- **Sentence Construction:** Learners are given a set of vocabulary words and asked to create sentences or short paragraphs that incorporate those words. This encourages active use of vocabulary and promotes creativity.

- **Storytelling or Descriptive Writing:** Learners use a set of new vocabulary words to tell a story or describe a process. This type of exercise promotes fluency and helps learners use vocabulary in more complex ways.

#### 3. Interactive Games

- **Vocabulary Bingo:** A game where learners match words on their bingo cards with corresponding definitions or pictures. This is a fun way to reinforce word recognition.

- **Flashcard Games:** Learners use flashcards to test themselves on vocabulary meaning, pronunciation, or usage. Games like “memory” or “matching pairs” can make the review process engaging and enjoyable.

### **Conclusion**

The development of lexical competence is essential for effective language acquisition. Theoretical approaches such as cognitive linguistics, sociocultural theory, and connectionism offer valuable insights into how vocabulary is learned and processed. Methodological approaches, including task-based learning, contextualization, and spaced repetition, provide practical frameworks for designing effective exercises that promote both receptive and productive vocabulary skills. By

integrating these theories and methods into classroom practice, educators can design exercises that not only enhance lexical competence but also ensure that learners can use vocabulary flexibly and appropriately in real-world communication. The combination of theory and practice provides a comprehensive approach to vocabulary instruction that can significantly improve learners' language proficiency.

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