LEXICAL COMPONENT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN INTENSIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: This article explores the lexical component of communicative competence within the context of intensive language teaching. Lexical competence refers to the learner's ability to acquire, understand, and appropriately use vocabulary in various communicative situations. The study focuses on effective methods of vocabulary acquisition in intensive language programs, emphasizing semantic clustering, contextual usage, and task-based application of lexical items. It also examines the integration of lexical skills with other components of language competence, such as phonological, grammatical, and pragmatic abilities. The findings highlight the crucial role of communicative approaches in enhancing lexical proficiency in accelerated learning environments.

Keywords: lexical competence, communicative competence, intensive language teaching, vocabulary acquisition, semantic network, language skills, language pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

   In the modern paradigm of second language acquisition, communicative competence has emerged as a central goal of language instruction. First introduced by Dell Hymes and later developed by scholars such as Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence encompasses various interrelated components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and lexical competence. Among these, the lexical component holds a foundational position, as vocabulary serves as the essential building blocks of language use in all communicative contexts. In recent years, the intensive language teaching model has gained significant traction due to its accelerated approach to learning and its emphasis on functional communication. This model prioritizes real-time language use, often in immersive and high-frequency learning environments, making the role of vocabulary knowledge even more crucial. Without a well-developed lexical base, learners face considerable limitations in both comprehension and production, regardless of their grammatical or phonological proficiency. While considerable attention has been given to grammar instruction and fluency development, vocabulary teaching remains, in many cases, underrepresented in curriculum design and teacher training. Yet, it is precisely the lexical component that bridges the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical language use. A learner may possess a strong grasp of syntactic structures, but without sufficient lexical knowledge, meaningful interaction becomes difficult to sustain. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the lexical component in building communicative competence, particularly within the framework of intensive language programs. The paper investigates effective strategies for vocabulary instruction, the integration of lexical items into communicative tasks, and the importance of contextual learning. Additionally, it discusses how lexical development supports other areas of communicative competence, ultimately contributing to learners' overall language fluency and confidence.

By examining theoretical perspectives and practical classroom applications, this research aims to provide insights into how intensive language instruction can be optimized through the targeted development of learners' lexical competence. The findings may serve as a resource for language educators, curriculum developers, and researchers striving to enhance vocabulary acquisition in time-constrained yet outcome-oriented learning environments.

MAIN BODY

Lexical competence as a core element of communicative competence

Lexical competence refers to the ability of a language user to recognize, recall, and appropriately use words and fixed expressions in various communicative contexts. As Canale and Swain (1980) emphasize, lexical knowledge is not merely the passive storage of words but involves the dynamic capability to choose contextually appropriate vocabulary to convey intended meanings. In communicative language teaching (CLT), vocabulary is no longer taught in isolation or merely through rote memorization. Instead, lexical items are embedded within interactive tasks, dialogues, and real-life communication scenarios. Learners are encouraged to understand not only the denotative meaning of words but also their connotative, collocational, and pragmatic features. This holistic understanding allows them to use words fluently, naturally, and accurately.

Vocabulary development in intensive language teaching contexts

Intensive language programs are characterized by increased exposure to the target language within a compressed timeframe. Such programs often demand rapid lexical acquisition to enable learners to function communicatively as early as possible. Therefore, vocabulary instruction in these contexts must be both strategic and context-driven.

Several methods have proven effective in enhancing lexical competence within intensive settings:

Thematic clustering: Teaching vocabulary around specific topics or themes (e.g., travel, health, education) helps learners build associative links and retain information more effectively.

Lexical chunks and collocations: Teaching fixed expressions, collocations, and idiomatic phrases enables learners to produce language more fluently.

Task-based learning (TBL): Activities that simulate real-life communication (e.g., role plays, problem-solving tasks) promote active vocabulary use and reinforce retention.

Multimodal input: Visuals, audio, and kinesthetic tools enrich the learning experience and facilitate deeper lexical processing.

Additionally, repetition and recycling of vocabulary through spaced practice and varied contexts are critical to long-term retention. Teachers in intensive programs must therefore prioritize active engagement with words across multiple communicative modalities.

Integrating lexical competence into broader communicative goals

The development of lexical competence does not occur in isolation. It is deeply interconnected with grammatical, phonological, and sociocultural competence. For instance, the correct usage of a word may depend on its syntactic placement, pronunciation, or cultural appropriateness. In this regard, vocabulary instruction must be integrated into broader communicative tasks that reflect authentic language use. For example, when preparing students for a debate, vocabulary related to argumentation, agreement/disagreement, and persuasive language should be explicitly taught and practiced. Similarly, writing assignments can be used to focus on topic-specific vocabulary expansion. Moreover, learner autonomy in vocabulary learning—such as the use of learner-developed word banks, flashcards, or digital vocabulary tools—can significantly enhance both motivation and retention

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the lexical component represents a vital pillar of communicative competence, particularly in the context of intensive language teaching. A rich and functional vocabulary allows learners not only to understand but also to produce meaningful language in a wide range of communicative situations. As this paper has shown, lexical competence is not confined to memorization of isolated words; rather, it involves an intricate understanding of meaning, context, usage patterns, and pragmatic appropriateness. In intensive language programs, where time is limited and learning objectives are accelerated, vocabulary instruction must be intentional, integrated, and learner-centered. Strategies such as thematic clustering, lexical chunking, contextualized practice, and task-based learning have proven effective in supporting rapid and sustained vocabulary growth. Furthermore, vocabulary acquisition should not be treated as a separate skill but as an essential and dynamic element interwoven into listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Language educators are encouraged to employ a communicative and functional approach to vocabulary instruction, ensuring that learners gain not only lexical knowledge but also the confidence and flexibility to use it in real-life contexts. Ultimately, the successful development of lexical competence greatly enhances learners' overall communicative performance, leading to greater fluency, accuracy, and autonomy in language use. Continued research and innovation in this area will further refine instructional practices and contribute to more effective and engaging language teaching methodologies.

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