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METHODS FOR ESTABLISHING LEXICAL MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS IN PREPARING STUDENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Tursunov Alisher Rozikjonovich
Faculty of Innovative Pedagogy
Senior lecturer, Department of Philology
University of Innovation Technologies, Uzbekistan
E-mail: alisher6737@gmail.com
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3323-0500
Phone: +998 93 721 31 30

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Abstract:
This article explores the principles and procedures for establishing a lexical minimum to prepare students for professional communication in English. It explores the theoretical foundations of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the concept of a lexical minimum, and the main principles and criteria for selecting lexical units for professionally oriented language instruction. Particular attention is given to frequency, semantic relevance, combinability, stylistic neutrality, word-formation potential, and thematic relevance as key factors in vocabulary selection. The article also discusses the distinction between active, passive, and potential vocabulary and highlights the importance of authentic communication, empirical data, and corpus-based approaches in determining learners' lexical needs. Furthermore, it considers the role of structured text corpora in identifying professionally relevant lexical units, collocations, and lexical chunks. The study emphasises that combining corpus-based frequency analysis with thematic and professional relevance can contribute to the development of a more systematic and needs-oriented lexical minimum for students. Such an approach can support the development of students' professional communicative competence and improve their ability to use English effectively in occupational contexts

Keywords: lexical minimum, professional communication, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), lexical selection, selection principles, corpus linguistics, structured text, collocations, lexical chunks, communicative competence.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the emergence of the term *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) is associated with the work of T.Hutchinson and A.Waters. The authors identify three major factors that contributed to the emergence of language teaching for specific purposes. First, the expansion of international commercial and industrial relations led to the emergence of a distinct category of learners whose primary objective was to learn English for specific purposes. Consequently, there arose a need to develop highly efficient courses with clearly defined objectives that could be completed within a limited period of time. Second, within linguistics itself, research attention shifted from the study of the structural properties of language systems towards the investigation of language use in authentic communication. Significant differences between written and spoken language were also identified, particularly in relation to linguistic norms and the influence of context. This led to the recognition that the language used in different professional fields may also differ considerably. The proposed solution was to identify the linguistic characteristics of professional communication situations and design specialised courses that take these characteristics into account. Third, developments in educational psychology highlighted the need to focus on learners and their individual interests. This, in turn, increased the demand for vocationally oriented learning materials that reflect learners' interests and professional domains.

THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS

When discussing the selection of materials for English for Specific Purposes courses, it is necessary to consider such concepts as the lexical minimum, selection principles, and selection criteria. A lexical minimum may be defined as "a set of linguistic phenomena (or, in a broader sense, paralinguistic phenomena, systematic knowledge of the language being studied, or background knowledge) that have been specially selected and are obligatory for acquisition, each being intended for use in the communication situations envisaged by the syllabus, and that are sufficient to fulfil the

objectives of a course in a particular area of speech activity. These phenomena may require either both presentation and practice or presentation only". This definition reflects the principal characteristics of a lexical minimum:

- the necessity of practising the material included in the minimum;
- consideration of the specific characteristics of minimum requirements for teaching productive and receptive speech activities;
- exclusion of intermediate skills, abilities, or information that are not envisaged by the learning objectives;
- emphasis on the fact that a minimum is the result of deliberate selection rather than an arbitrary collection of material;
- its obligatory status for all students in an educational institution, based on the communicative importance of the selected material.

These characteristics imply that the selection of a lexical minimum must be rigorous and that the minimum should be characterised not by an excessive number of items, but rather by the careful limitation of its contents to essential vocabulary. It should be emphasised, however, that such a requirement does not restrict learners' desire to acquire additional language knowledge.

Therefore, in addition to the lexical minimum, students should have opportunities for independent development, primarily through expanding their vocabulary. They should also be provided with unrestricted access to supplementary learning materials-in this study, a structured corpus of texts-as well as additional exercises.

Methodological literature frequently uses two terms interchangeably: the *principle of selection* and the *criterion of selection*. In addressing the theoretical and practical aspects of lexical minimum selection, it is considered necessary and sufficient to distinguish three concepts. The term *principle* is regarded as the most conceptually significant. It refers to the initial requirements governing the selection of linguistic units, which should reflect the specific characteristics of a particular type of speech activity and the expected quality of learners' speech production. These principles constitute the highest level of selection regulations that must be implemented in every lexical minimum. The set of selection principles establishes requirements for the qualitative characteristics of the selected units and for the overall qualitative composition of the minimum. These requirements are directly related to the initial principles of selection. The third concept concerns the methods and procedures used to implement the selection principles. In methodological literature, these are often referred to more narrowly as *selection criteria*.

A number of methodological variables must be considered when selecting lexical minima. These primarily include questions concerning the adequacy of the quantity of selected material, which may be regarded as a general didactic requirement, as well as the definition of the initial rules, principles, and criteria governing selection. A reliable and validated procedure that corresponds to the current state of scientific knowledge is also required for their implementation. Furthermore, methodology generally distinguishes between active, passive, and potential vocabulary, which can be correlated with the productive and receptive types of speech activity.

The methodologically grounded distinction between active and passive language material can be traced to the works of G.Palmer and M.West. The distinction between obligatory and free sectors of speech is also discussed in M.West's work. In his research, L.V.Shcherba proposed a distinction between active and passive vocabulary and between active and passive grammar.

G. Palmer divided the vocabulary to be learned into two broad groups: "carefully selected material, which he termed the microcosm, and material acquired spontaneously". The first group was studied systematically at elementary and intermediate levels, whereas the second was accumulated more spontaneously at higher levels. It is noteworthy that the term *microcosm* means a small-scale representation of something larger, or a miniature reflection of a larger entity that retains its essential characteristics. For example, the expression *a microcosm of society* refers to a small-scale representation of society. This suggests that Palmer had already anticipated objectives that are central to contemporary corpus linguistics, particularly representativeness: the adequate representation, adaptation, or integration of large bodies of texts or other segments of speech activity within a considerably smaller structured corpus.

According to Palmer's conception, the first group of vocabulary, the microcosm, was studied systematically at the initial stages of learning, whereas the second group was accumulated more spontaneously at higher levels. Considering the term *word* insufficiently precise, Palmer preferred the term *lexical unit* and recommended the following principles for selecting lexical units.

1. **Frequency.** The inclusion of a lexical unit should be determined by its frequency of occurrence, with different meanings of the same lexical unit being counted separately.
2. **Word combination.** This principle concerns the ability of a lexical unit to combine with other lexical units. It should be taken into account both during the selection process and when determining the sequence in which the selected vocabulary is to be taught.
3. **Concreteness.** According to this principle, learners should first become familiar with words referring to concrete or readily identifiable meanings.
4. **Proportion.** The selection of teaching vocabulary should maintain an appropriate balance between different parts of speech and ensure a balanced approach to learning different aspects of the language.
5. **General evidence.** Palmer believed that the first four basic principles could, where necessary, be overridden to include words belonging to the same semantic group in the microcosm.

The initial linguistic principles of lexical selection in language teaching methodology were developed by L.V.Shcherba and I.V.Rakhmanov. These principles were applied in compiling vocabulary lists containing approximately

4,500 of the most frequently used words, taking seven principles into account: combinability, stylistic neutrality, semantic value, word-formation value, polysemy, range of use, and frequency. Researchers frequently return to the principles of active vocabulary selection, refining them through specialised studies in accordance with instructional objectives. The following principles have been proposed:

1. **The semantic principle.** The selected words should express the most important concepts related to the topics that learners encounter in the process of studying a foreign language, both in spoken and written communication.
2. **The combinability principle.** Words that occur in a wider range of combinations should be preferred to those with more limited combinability.
3. **The principle of stylistic neutrality.** Priority should be given to words that are not restricted to a single stylistic register and can be used across neutral, literary, colloquial, and written-literary styles.
4. **The frequency principle.** The lexical minimum should include the most frequently used words, particularly those common in literary and colloquial language.
5. **The principle of excluding synonyms.** When a group of synonyms is available, only one word-preferably the most widespread and stylistically neutral item-should be included in the lexical minimum.
6. **The word-formation value principle.** The selection should prioritise words that are most productive and widely used in word formation.
7. **The principle of excluding international words identical in the native and foreign languages.** Words that are identical in form and meaning in both languages may be excluded from the minimum, where appropriate.

The principles of active lexical minimum selection proposed by researchers have subsequently been refined. In particular, the semantic principle has been interpreted as the principle of relevance to a specified topic, which is associated with the integrative principle. According to the researchers, the last four principles, together with combinability, stylistic neutrality, and word-formation value, can be incorporated into a broader principle of linguistic functionality. These principles are subsequently linked to instructional objectives because many communication situations involve a combination of several practical domains of language use. Scientific discourse, for example, is closely related to specialised professional discourse. This relationship should be taken into account when selecting the terminological component of scientific texts.

In discussing the selection of vocabulary for speaking and writing, B.A.Lapidus identifies the thematic principle as a primary consideration. Since the present discussion concerns the teaching of lexical means of communication, the term *thematic* should be interpreted broadly rather than restricted to everyday topics such as "Food" or "Urban Transport." Lapidus proposes supplementing thematic organisation with a list of communicative acts that reflects speech categories identified in pragmatics and captures different aspects of speech acts. These categories include expressions that indicate the degree of precision in naming something, phrases used for logical argumentation, and expressions that introduce changes in the topic or direction of a conversation.

The progressive nature of this interpretation should be emphasized. It entails the inclusion of essential communicative components, such as expressions that specify the degree of precision in referring to something, phrases used to construct logical arguments, and expressions that signal a change in the topic or direction of a conversation. Without such elements, the lexical repertoire remains incomplete and fails to represent the lexical resources required for effective communication. Foreign language teaching specialists also emphasise the need to consider the pragmatic value and functional integrity of selected units, even when these units are not semantically complete in isolation. Accordingly, these elements of communicative vocabulary should be regarded as important components of learners' lexical repertoires.

We also agree with the second consideration, which may serve as a specific criterion for defining the boundaries of instructional content: the elements of instructional content should be suitable for pedagogical assessment. A structured corpus can also facilitate the transformation of relevant materials, including texts on professional topics, into components of instructional content that can be systematically taught and assessed.

The initiative of the British Council to develop a general English vocabulary list covering all proficiency levels from A1 to C2 is particularly noteworthy. According to the results of this project, the size of the lexical minimum was quantified for each of the specified levels. For example, the B2 level in the European framework for language proficiency was associated with a vocabulary of approximately 4,000 individual words and, when word-formation patterns were taken into account, a total of approximately 8,200 lexical forms. Second, the selected lexical items were presented in an alphabetically organised list of words classified by part of speech and made freely available to the public.

The project authors acknowledge that their work stops short of developing vocabulary specifically for English for Specific Purposes. Nevertheless, it provides a useful starting point and reference standard for teachers seeking to further develop the linguistic component of professionally oriented foreign language competence. It should also be noted that, according to various European sources, the quantitative parameters of general vocabulary minima are relatively consistent, generally reaching approximately 5,000–6,000 words. Beyond this range, efforts to expand vocabulary should increasingly focus on professionally oriented lexical items.

At the same time, the established initial rules, principles, and criteria of selection represent a contemporary approach to lexical minimum development from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The authors employed a combined approach to lexical selection, which they described in terms of the *top-down* and *bottom-up* approaches.

The first initial rule concerns frequency. It was implemented using numerous frequency lists containing between 2,000 and 20,000 words, derived from corpus materials representing British and American varieties of English. The lists were harmonised, and the most frequently occurring lexical units were selected.

The second assumption underlying the initial selection procedure involved obtaining vocabulary lists from national education systems. The authors considered the views of teachers and specialists from Germany, China, and other countries, who contributed their understanding of the lexical minimum through their respective national lists. Subsequently, a combination of selection principles was applied.

These principles can also be described in terms of incorporating specialists' subjective judgements regarding the relevance of individual lexical units. Such judgements draw on specialists' experience, professional intuition, and perceptions of which lexical items are important. Today, frequency analysis is carried out using empirical databases and can be implemented effectively through the use of linguistic corpora.

Within an interdisciplinary approach, there remains considerable untapped potential for cooperation between specialised subject departments and foreign language departments in identifying *disponible* vocabulary, or *vocabulaire disponible*-vocabulary that is readily available for use. French researchers R.Michéa and G.Gougenheim defined *disponible* vocabulary as lexical items that immediately come to the minds of native speakers, even if those items are not particularly frequent. This vocabulary was identified through surveys of native speakers. In some linguistic traditions, the term *reserve vocabulary* is also used.

In collaboration with subject-specialist teachers, a similar survey could be used to identify professional vocabulary. Such a survey would determine which lexical items specialists would immediately draw upon when producing speech in professional situations

CONCLUSION

In our research, we applied the thematic principle when selecting texts for the structured corpus. The previously discussed principle of linguistic functionality is also reflected in the selection of professionally relevant lexical units, collocations, and lexical chunks incorporated into the corpus.

The frequency principle is implemented not simply by considering the absolute frequency of individual words, but through a specially developed corpus-based procedure for identifying keywords within a thematic corpus. These keywords reflect the central ideas of the texts included in the corpus. As a result of this selection process, a set of relevant concepts for prospective specialists in regional studies and the socio-political fields can be identified and refined. This constitutes an important component of the process of establishing a lexical minimum.

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