



THE LINGUISTIC AND LINGUODIDACTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPT OF THE LEXICAL MINIMUM

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the theoretical underpinnings of the lexical minimum, examining its linguodidactic relevance, the evolution of the concept, and its contribution to contemporary language teaching. Drawing on a comparative approach, it reviews the scholarly perspectives of leading foreign linguists and synthesizes the principal methodological principles underlying the development of lexical minimums. In addition, the article proposes an authorial approach that may serve as a methodological framework for developing proficiency level-based (A1–C2) lexical minimums for the Uzbek language.*

Keywords: *lexical minimum, language didactics, communicative competence, lexical competence, proficiency level classification, corpus linguistics, CEFR, Uzbek language.*

In contemporary language didactics, the lexical minimum is regarded as a key instrument for developing learners' communicative competence. Within this framework, emphasis is placed not on the memorization of isolated lexical items but on their effective use in authentic communicative contexts. Consequently, the selection of a lexical minimum is currently guided by such criteria as communicative necessity, functional relevance, semantic scope, stylistic neutrality, and frequency of occurrence.

The concept has been approached from different perspectives in the scholarly literature. While some researchers interpret the lexical minimum as a body of



vocabulary that learners are expected to acquire as an essential component of the learning process, others regard it as the foundational lexical basis of language competence. For instance, I. V. Rakhmanov defines the lexical minimum as a set of lexical units that learners need to employ actively in speech when acquiring a foreign language [1: 8–22]. E. I. Passov, approaching the concept from a communicative perspective, emphasizes that the selection of lexical units should be determined by their relevance to practical communication [2: 17–39]. These perspectives suggest that a lexical minimum should be defined not only in quantitative terms but also on the basis of qualitative criteria.

The concept of the lexical minimum is frequently associated with related terms such as **basic vocabulary**, **core vocabulary**, and **high-frequency vocabulary**. Although these concepts are closely related, they are not synonymous. *Basic vocabulary* refers to the most common and universally used layer of a language, whereas the *lexical minimum* denotes a set of lexical items specifically selected to meet particular educational objectives. *Core vocabulary*, in turn, comprises the central lexical units of a language that are widely employed across diverse communicative situations. Thus, while the lexical minimum shares certain characteristics with these concepts, it is distinguished by its pedagogical orientation and by the methodological criteria used in selecting lexical items.

Recent advances in corpus linguistics and computer technologies have significantly influenced the methodology for identifying lexical minimums. Whereas lexical items were previously selected primarily on the basis of experts' pedagogical experience and professional judgment, contemporary approaches increasingly rely on national and learner corpora, frequency dictionaries, and statistical analyses to ensure greater objectivity and empirical validity. Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, and Randi Reppen argue that corpus data provide a reliable empirical basis for examining the actual use of linguistic units in authentic discourse [3: 1–18]. This development has facilitated a shift from intuition-based vocabulary selection to scientifically grounded, data-driven principles for compiling lexical minimums.



The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, has also introduced a new perspective on the concept of the lexical minimum. Although the CEFR does not prescribe fixed word lists, it specifies the lexical competence expected at each proficiency level [4: 132–136; 139–142]. Consequently, proficiency level-based lexical minimums in many languages are now developed with reference to CEFR descriptors, corpus-based evidence, and analyses of learner language, resulting in more systematic and pedagogically relevant lexical inventories.

In light of the scholarly perspectives discussed above, the lexical minimum should not be viewed merely as a list of words to be acquired. Rather, it should be understood as a linguodidactic model that integrates the objectives of language instruction, learners' communicative needs, the functional relevance of lexical units, and the target level of language competence. From this perspective, the present study defines the **lexical minimum** as a systematically selected set of lexical units that enables effective communication at a particular proficiency level and is organized according to scientifically established criteria for progressive acquisition. This conceptualization provides the methodological foundation for developing proficiency level-based (A1–C2) lexical minimums for the Uzbek language.

The scientific development of a lexical minimum necessarily requires an examination of its internal structure and typology. In contemporary language didactics, the lexical minimum is no longer regarded as a single, fixed list of vocabulary items; instead, it is viewed as a multi-layered system organized in accordance with learners' communicative needs, stages of language acquisition, and the characteristics of different language skills. Consequently, identifying the structural components, functional categories, and classification criteria of lexical minimums has become one of the central issues in modern language teaching methodology.

Norbert Schmitt likewise emphasizes the multidimensional nature of lexical knowledge. In his view, knowing a word cannot be reduced to remembering its form



or meaning alone. Lexical competence also encompasses a word's grammatical properties, semantic relationships, stylistic value, collocational behavior, and frequency of use [5: 477]. For this reason, Schmitt argues that vocabulary instruction should focus not on teaching isolated lexical items but on developing learners' ability to use them effectively in authentic communicative contexts. This perspective is fully consistent with the communicative approach advocated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The theory of the lexical minimum emerged as a distinct field of research alongside the development of foreign language teaching methodology. Although the lexical minimum is now widely recognized as an essential component of language instruction, its theoretical foundations began to take shape in the early twentieth century in response to the growing need for practical and time-efficient foreign language education. During this period, scholars shifted their attention from teaching the entire vocabulary of a language to identifying the lexical items most essential for effective communication. This conceptual shift laid the theoretical groundwork for what later became known as the theory of the lexical minimum [6: 56].

The earliest scientific foundations of lexical minimum theory are closely associated with the work of the British linguist and language teaching methodologist Harold E. Palmer. Palmer argued that lexical material in foreign language instruction should not be selected arbitrarily but on the basis of clearly defined scientific criteria. According to him, *"language teaching should begin with lexical units that occur most frequently in practical communication and adequately meet learners' everyday communicative needs"* [6: 180–185]. This principle subsequently laid the foundation for selecting lexical items according to their frequency of occurrence, functional value, and communicative significance.

The next major milestone in the development of lexical minimum theory is associated with Michael West. In his landmark publication *A General Service List of English Words* (1953), West compiled a scientifically grounded list of the most frequently used words in English. For several decades, this list served as one of the



principal resources for the compilation of pedagogical dictionaries, language textbooks, and lexical minimums [7: 78–85].

West's central contribution was the argument that language instruction should begin with the highest-frequency vocabulary, as these lexical items constitute the core of everyday communication. This approach marked a decisive shift from intuition-based vocabulary selection to statistically informed lexical selection. Whereas Palmer established the theoretical necessity of selecting lexical items according to scientific principles, West translated this concept into practical application by developing an empirically based lexical inventory. As a result, lexical minimum theory entered a new stage of methodological development.

By the second half of the twentieth century, lexical minimum theory had undergone significant refinement. During this period, researchers shifted their attention from the question of which lexical items should be selected to the equally important issues of how they should be taught and how they are acquired by learners. Consequently, advances in communicative language teaching, psycholinguistics, and cognitive linguistics were gradually incorporated into lexical minimum theory. This stage provided the methodological foundation for the contemporary frameworks developed by Michael McCarthy, I. S. P. Nation, and Norbert Schmitt [8: 357].

Among these scholars, I. S. P. Nation has made an outstanding contribution to the modern development of lexical minimum theory. His research systematically established the scientific criteria for selecting lexical items in language instruction. Nation distinguishes between **high-frequency vocabulary**, **academic vocabulary**, **technical vocabulary**, and **low-frequency vocabulary**, while clearly defining the pedagogical role of each category in language learning. According to Nation, *"the most important task in language teaching is not to teach all words, but to select those that best meet learners' communicative needs"* [5: 120]. This principle has become one of the fundamental methodological foundations for the development of contemporary proficiency level-based lexical minimums.



Another important contribution made by Nation is his argument that knowing a word extends far beyond simply remembering its dictionary meaning. According to his framework, lexical knowledge involves the integrated mastery of a word's form, meaning, and use. Consequently, a modern lexical minimum should take into account not only the number of lexical items acquired but also the depth to which they have been learned. This multidimensional view of vocabulary knowledge subsequently became one of the theoretical foundations of lexical competence.

Norbert Schmitt further expanded lexical minimum theory by incorporating insights from psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics. He conceptualizes lexical knowledge as a multidimensional system comprising phonological form, written representation, grammatical properties, collocational patterns, semantic relationships, and pragmatic use. In Schmitt's view, learners can be considered to have fully acquired a lexical item only when they are able to use it appropriately across a range of communicative contexts. Accordingly, he emphasizes that the development of lexical minimums should be based on authentic language use and real communicative situations rather than on isolated vocabulary lists [9: 156–167].

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, lexical minimum theory has entered a new stage of development under the influence of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and advances in corpus linguistics. By organizing language proficiency into the A1–C2 levels, the CEFR provides descriptors of the lexical repertoire expected at each stage of language learning. As a result, the establishment of lexical minimums has come to depend not merely on the size of learners' vocabulary but, more importantly, on their ability to perform specific communicative tasks appropriate to each proficiency level.

The rapid development of corpus linguistics has further strengthened the scientific foundations of lexical minimum design. The availability of large electronic corpora has enabled researchers to analyze millions of authentic texts in order to identify the most frequently used lexical items, together with their stylistic characteristics and functional distribution. Consequently, the compilation of lexical



minimums has evolved from an intuition-driven practice into a systematic process grounded in statistical evidence and empirical data. This shift has significantly enhanced the reliability and validity of contemporary proficiency level-based lexical minimums.

In summary, the historical development of lexical minimum theory can be viewed as a sequence of interrelated and mutually reinforcing stages. The scientific principles of lexical selection initially established by Harold E. Palmer and Michael West were subsequently enriched by the communicative and cognitive perspectives advanced in the works of Michael McCarthy, I. S. P. Nation, and Norbert Schmitt. More recently, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and corpus linguistics have further transformed the theory by providing a robust methodological foundation for its practical implementation. These theoretical developments constitute an appropriate methodological basis for designing proficiency level-based (A1–C2) lexical minimums for the Uzbek language.

The lexical minimum is now recognized as one of the core concepts of language didactics, serving as an essential methodological tool for the scientific organization of language teaching, the systematic sequencing of instructional content, and the development of learners' communicative competence. While the early stages of lexical minimum theory primarily focused on determining the number of words learners should acquire, contemporary language didactics offers a much broader interpretation of its functional significance. Today, the lexical minimum is viewed as a pedagogical model that integrates learners' communicative needs, instructional objectives, communicative contexts, and proficiency levels into a coherent framework. Consequently, it not only determines the scope of instructional vocabulary but also plays a crucial role in ensuring the coherence, progression, and overall effectiveness of language teaching [8: 357].

From a language didactics perspective, one of the primary functions of the lexical minimum is to optimize the content of language instruction. Since the vocabulary of any language comprises hundreds of thousands of lexical units,



incorporating all of them into the teaching process is neither practical nor pedagogically feasible. Consequently, there is a need to identify and systematically select the lexical items that are most essential for meeting learners' communicative needs. I. S. P. Nation argues that the selection of lexical items should be based primarily on their frequency of use, communicative value, and relevance to learners' needs [5: 477]. This approach makes it possible to view the lexical minimum not as a simple word list but as an integral component of language teaching strategy.

Another essential function of the lexical minimum is its role in the development of communicative competence. Contemporary language teaching methodology evaluates language proficiency not only in terms of grammatical knowledge but also in terms of learners' ability to express themselves effectively in diverse communicative situations. From this perspective, the lexical minimum provides the lexical foundation necessary for developing the four core language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Michael McCarthy regards vocabulary knowledge as the central component of communicative competence, arguing that successful language acquisition fundamentally depends on possessing an adequate lexical repertoire [8: 357]. Therefore, the value of a lexical minimum lies not in the number of words it contains but in its capacity to support effective communication.

Another important aspect of the present study is that the lexical minimum is conceptualized not as a static inventory of lexical items but as a dynamic system. As languages continuously evolve through the emergence of new lexical units, the obsolescence of others, and changes in patterns of usage, lexical minimums likewise require periodic revision and updating. Accordingly, the model proposed in this study is viewed as an open and adaptable framework that can be continuously refined in response to corpus-based evidence and changing communicative needs.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the term *proficiency level-based lexical minimum* in the present study refers to a systematically organized set of lexical units selected for the A1–C2 proficiency levels according to scientifically established



linguodidactic principles. These units are chosen on the basis of their frequency of occurrence, communicative value, semantic scope, stylistic neutrality, and cultural relevance, with the aim of meeting learners' communicative needs at each stage of language proficiency. This definition serves as the principal methodological framework for the selection, classification, and digital modeling of lexical units in the subsequent chapters of this research.

The analysis of the theoretical literature demonstrates that the development of proficiency level-based lexical minimums for the Uzbek language should not rely on the direct adoption of foreign models. Instead, international experience should be critically adapted to the lexical, cultural, and communicative characteristics of the Uzbek language. On this basis, the present study proposes an authorial interpretation of the lexical minimum and establishes the principal methodological criteria for its development. This theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for the selection, description, and digital modeling of proficiency level-based lexical minimums for the Uzbek language in the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

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