

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

## Russian Textbook Experience in Developing High School Students' English Word-Formation Competence

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### Abstract

The problem of word-formation competence has become relevant since there is a special task in the Russian State Exam. Students should be ready to build new words according to the rules. The aim of the study is to define the term “word-formation competence” and describe its peculiarities. The paper analyzes the difficulties that may occur while completing this task and possible ways out. The analysis results in recommendations for getting rid of some minor mistakes. The given strategies of developing word-formation are supposed to eliminate the most common mistakes and develop different aspects of communicative competence that contributes to intercultural competence development. The focus of explicit attention is on making these exercises more communicative because students should be able to build words in their speech too. The authors analyze studies devoted to this topic and some Russian textbooks that prepare students for exams. Different types of exercises and strategies for developing word-formation are presented in the article. The given system of tasks is structured and enhances students' word-formation competence. The article will be useful for ESL teachers who prepare students for different kinds of exam.

*Keywords:* Word Formation; word formation competence, English.

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### Introduction

The modern system of foreign language education is characterized by the implementation of a competency-based approach to teaching. Competency-based approach means that students should develop their

competencies (readiness and ability to perform a given task) while learning. Neil O`Sullivan and Alan Burce defines a competent person as a person who possesses a combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours required for effective performance of the task or activity. There are three levels of a competence: 1. a particular behavior in something; 2. a particular context; 3. a particular quality (N. O`Sullivan & A. Burce, 2014 p.22). According to the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard (FSES) of General Secondary Education, "the results of mastering the basic course of a foreign language should reflect the development of foreign language communicative competence necessary for successful socialization and self-realization as an instrument of intercultural communication in the modern multicultural world" (FSES of Secondary School, 2012).

Current education system follows the modern global tendencies where a student should be ready to take part in intercultural education. Intercultural education is the result of global processes in our world. It has become impossible to teach language without its cultural component. A foreign language is a tool to find out more about the culture of this language. The authors agree with E. Tareva`s idea that while acquiring foreign language skills and knowledge students realize peculiarities of their own culture (E. Tareva, 2014). Communicative competence combines cultural and language aspects in its structure. Students must demonstrate all these aspects at English exam. Teaching a foreign language at secondary school aims at achieving such a goal as the further development of foreign language communicative competence. There are several components of the foreign language communicative competence:

- language competence (language proficiency);
- speech competence (the ability to use the language in real communication);
- socio-cultural competence (knowledge of the peculiarities and the intricacies of the language culture);
- compensatory competence (the ability to find a way out of a situation with a lack of language resources);
- cognitive and training competence (the ability to learn independently) (Tayurskaya, 2015 p. 84-85).

Every competence mentioned above is of interest to research more. If a student has a high level of communicative competence, it will be easier for him/her to be a part of intercultural world. That is why we should take into account all the mentioned competences. In this article, the authors focus on the problem of the development of students' language competence, in particular, word formation competence, which is part of this competence (Dudkovskaya, 2014; Zimnyaya, 2009). It can influence perception skills while learning a foreign language. For example, knowledge of word formation rules stimulates students' reading skills development (Zhanli Yang, 2014). Speaking about word formation competence it is worth pointing

out that this is a relatively new term for methodological science. However, nowadays, there are already several studies devoted to this problem (Korzun, Savkina 2017). This problem has become relevant because there is a special exam task aimed at this competence.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

Despite the existing research papers, the word-formation competence needs further research to clarify some features of its development. The following questions remain unresolved:

- What is the essence of secondary school students' word-formation competence?
- What difficulties do Russian students have in the process of mastering English word-formation? What are possible ways to overcome them?
- What tasks and exercises contribute to the development of word-formation competence? What should be added to the current exercise system?

The ultimate goal of the study is to provide answers to these questions. To achieve this goal the paper will summarize the key ideas of developing word-formation competence, analyse Russian textbooks that prepare students for English exams, find out the reasons for making mistakes in word-formation tasks.

### **Literature review**

Before turning to word-formation competence, we need to describe different processes of making words. There are several ways of making words in English, but the paper will focus on some of them that are necessary to pass the final exam at school successfully. These methods are affixation (or derivation), composition and conversion (FSSES of Secondary School, 2012). The most popular way is considered to be derivation and it is believed to be the hardest one. Later the authors are going to analyse the reasons for it and provide possible solutions. G.B. Antrushina, O.V. Afanaseva, N.N. Morozova define affixation as the process of «coining a new word by adding an affix to some root morpheme» (Antrushina, Afanaseva, Morozova, 2004 p 79). While forming a word this way students should keep in mind a lot of rules and consider semantics. Conversion is an affixless way of word-formation and it causes fewer problems than derivation. Conversion is a type of wordbuilding when we make a new word by changing the part of speech. Students should be familiar with composition as well. It is the process of putting several roots together to build a new word. The only difficulty here is spelling. English vocabulary comes in different forms. The paper agrees with Sun Wentao's idea that in order to make people master English vocabulary better and make people use it flexibly we have to study word-formation of the words and make people have a better understanding of word meaning (Sun Wentao, 2016).

After focusing our attention on the linguistic side of word-formation, we can get back to word-formation competence. Taking into account the existing interpretations of this term, the authors understand students' word-formation competence as the ability and readiness: to use word formation skills in the target language; to operate with word formation methods that are typical for this language; to create new words from derivatives in the process of mastering oral and written foreign language speech.

The process of developing students' word-formation competence is associated with certain difficulties, which are caused by the existence of several ways of word-formation. The main ways of word-building are affixation, conversion, word composition, reverse word formation, reduction, alternation of stress, and alternation of sounds. The Russian State Exam checks students' level of English word formation competence. There is a task in the section «Grammar and Vocabulary» devoted to word building. This task assesses the following aspects: ability to recognize common derivation forms, knowledge of word building methods and skills to use them, knowledge of spelling while building a new word. The tasks consist of the text with gaps where a student should form the word in the brackets to complete the gap.

## Methodology

The authors have analysed the demo variants of the Russian State Exam to identify the most frequently used lexical units in word-building examination tasks (132 lexical units have been found). The analysis of the demo variants and tasks in the textbooks (which prepare for the Russian State Exam) shows that word building exercises are devoted only to affixation. The results of the analysis of the Russian State Exam demo variants allow us to group all the selected lexical units into several groups according to the way of word formation:

**Group I.** The building of a noun from the lexical unit given in the task (most often with the help of affixes -ment, -ance/-ence, -tion/-sion, -ness, -ity/-ty, -ship, -ist, -ing, -er/-or, -ian). For example, achieve → achievement; collect → collection.

**Group II.** The building of an adjective from the lexical unit given in the task (most often with the help of affixes un-, im-/in-, -ous, -ian/-an, -ful, -able/-ible, -ive, -less, -ent, -al, -ing, -ed, -ic). For example: impress → impressive; use → useless, useful.

**Group III.** The building of an adverb from the lexical unit given in the task (with the help of the affix -ly). For example: constant → constantly; serious → seriously.

**Group IV.** The building of a verb from the lexical unit given in the task (with the help of the affixes dis-, mis- и -ize/-ise). For example: appear → disappear; special → specialize.

M. V. Verbitskaya, K. S. Makhmuryan, and V. N. Simkin claim that graduates make a lot of mistakes in

the word-formation task because of confusing the meaning of affixes, building the original words incorrectly, and making spelling mistakes [1, p. 17]. Probably, the reason why students encounter these difficulties is the insufficient number of tasks for developing the English word-formation competence of students in modern Russian textbooks.

To confirm this idea, the paper analyses the textbook for grades 10-11 "Spotlight" by O.V. Afanasyeva, D. Duli, I.V. Mikheeva, B. Obi, and Evans V. for general secondary schools. The result of the analysis shows that out of 132 selected lexical units, only 25 occur in word-formation tasks in the selected textbooks, which is only 19% of the total amount of selected lexical units. It means that the tasks aimed at developing word-formation competence in the textbook "Spotlight" for grades 10-11 are insufficient for the proper development of the required competence of students of secondary (full) general education schools. This fact may be the reason why students have difficulties at the Russian State Exam in completing tasks devoted to word-formation. Therefore, there is a need to organize methodological assistance for students when they complete word-formation tasks in the examination format. The authors of the article offer some general recommendations, which can make the process of doing this task easier. We should take into account T.N. Bokova and L.A. Mivannova's thought that "the perception of a foreign word is promoted by searching for its significant features, approving them, inspecting them ..." (T.N. Bokova, L.A. Mivannova, 2020 p. 50). Word formation in this case is the good basis for searching for this kind of features.

## **Results**

To solve one of the questions mentioned in the purposes the article the authors have come up with a special set of strategies that can prevent students from making typical mistakes. Students have to pay attention to the word they build and follow the recommendations. These recommendations can be presented in the form of an algorithm of students' actions:

1. Read the task carefully; understand what is required in the tasks.
2. Read the entire text in order to grasp the general meaning of the text.
3. Start reading the text sentence by sentence, paying attention to what part of speech is missing.
4. After you have realized what part of speech is missing, remember all the affixes that can be used for word building in this situation
5. After you have built the word, read the sentence again and analyse whether this word fits the meaning. It may be necessary to add a negative prefix, or if it is a noun, check what number is needed.
6. Pay special attention to the spelling; remember in which cases you need to double the consonant, and in

which cases you do not.

7. After you have inserted all the words, read the entire text with these words and make sure that they fit logically.

8. Carefully transfer your answers to the special form.

The authors offer to use the following strategy of forming students' English word formation competence. It consists of three stages. The first stage is aimed at the introduction of the form and meaning of the affixes of different parts of speech that should be learnt at school. For better memorization at this stage, it will be helpful to offer drills using multiple-choice exercises, for example, to match the proposed suffixes with the part of speech with which they can be used. Here is an example of such a task.

*Sort out the following suffixes according to the part of speech they derive (Table 1).*

-or, -ize, -ent, -ful, -an, -ly (2), -ment, -al, -ent, -ance, -er, -ty, -ous, -less, -ing, -teen, -ist, -ible, -ness, -sion, -ise, -ship, -able, -ive, -tion

Table 1. An example of the task of the 1<sup>st</sup> step

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Adverbs

It is possible to use language examples as well – specially composed sentences that use lexical units formed from the selected derived words. These examples will help students to learn in the context how to determine which part of speech a particular lexical unit belongs to, and with the help of which affix it was formed. Here is an example of a task.

*Define what parts of speech the underlined words are. Which suffixes were used?*

1. The calculation that you have made contains a few mistakes.
2. Changes like this will affect the global economy.
3. Public awareness of the issue will make politicians take it seriously.
4. Our house is comparatively small.
5. Not everyone understands that urbanization destroys our nature.

At the second stage, students can use their knowledge of the form and meaning of word-formation units in practice. It means that they get familiar with the usage of these units. To implement this aim, it is necessary to use language exercises. Firstly, the training of the studied affixes that are divided into groups should be organized. Such a division should be based on the similarity of the meanings of affixes. For successful

drilling of the material, the process of using prefixes and suffixes should take place separately from each other, as well as the training of each part of speech. Further, the level of language exercises should become more complicated. In our opinion, at this stage, it is also worth including exam format exercises, which, will not only contribute to the productive development of students' word-formation competence but will also help them prepare for the final exam. The types of exercises can be completely different, most importantly, they should be built on the principle of gradation of difficulty levels, that is, with each further exercise, the task will become more complicated. Here are examples of tasks of different levels of difficulty.

*Level I - the building of new words from these lexical units within the given affixes. These are separate tasks for each part of speech for similar affixes. Here is an example of a task for the -or/-er suffixes.*

Make nouns with the help of the suffixes -or or -er.

1. He is a good \_\_\_\_\_. (to operate)
2. What famous \_\_\_\_\_ do you know? (to discover)
3. Alexander G. Bell was the first \_\_\_\_\_ who patented the telephone. (to invent)
4. Have you ever wanted to become a \_\_\_\_\_ (to create)
5. I believe that working as a \_\_\_\_\_ is rather difficult. (to build)

*Level II - the building of new words from these lexical units within all the studied affixes. The derived words are given mixed up in this task.*

Transform the words from the brackets and complete the gaps.

1. Watch out! This \_\_\_\_\_ is still unstable. (to construct)
2. Sometimes the most desirable dreams can \_\_\_\_\_ you. (to lead)
3. Do you know the \_\_\_\_\_ composition of our atmosphere? (chemistry)
4. A kind old man showed me the right \_\_\_\_\_ (to direct)
5. \_\_\_\_\_, nobody was injured in that accident. (thankful)

*Level III – multiple-choice tasks where a student has to choose an answer from the proposed single-root words within a given context. Thus, these tasks resemble the format of the Russian State Exam, but so far, students do not build new words in accordance with the context, but train to choose the appropriate part of speech in terms of meaning and grammar. Here is an example of a task:*

Read the text and fill in the gaps with the appropriate words.

Alexander Graham Bell was a (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (science/scientific/scientist) born in Edinburgh. His famous (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (achievable/ achieve/achievement) is that he invented the telephone and patented it in 1876. The following year, Thomas Edison who was an (3) \_\_\_\_\_

(America/American/Americanish) inventor, produced the first working telephone. Soon telephones started to become more and more available for all people. Nowadays, telephones are (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (wide/widely/widen) used and we just cannot imagine our life without them.

*Level IV - tasks where students have to build a new word with a help of a prefix or an affix from a given lexical unit within the context.* It is the same task as in the Russian State Exam. Here is an example of a task.

Read the text and fill in the gaps with the appropriate words derived from the given ones.

My friend's hobby

My friend was fond of collecting stamps when he was a child. It was his main hobby that helped him to find out a lot about (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (to differ) countries and customs.

He liked bringing his albums to school and showed his (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (to collect) to the classmates. There were always lots of (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (colour) stamps that caught everybody's eyes. He (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (constant) exchanged them with other people who were interested in this hobby too.

Time passed and his interests changed as well as people stopped using stamps so often. Nevertheless, he sometimes looks through his albums of stamps that have brought him so much (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (happy) in the past.

At the final, third stage, there is a direct application of the acquired knowledge and formed skills. At this stage, students have to do a series of speech exercises. Appropriate exercises should cover all types of speech acts such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking (both monologue and dialogue). Here is an example of a task aimed at developing dialogical speech and improving the students' word-formation competence.

Make up a dialogue according to the following situation. In your speech, use derived words from the following ones:

true      tropic      special      Europe      annual      vary

Your friend phones you and says that she wants to go somewhere during the next holidays. She has not travelled much and now she is trying to decide what country she should choose. She asks for your help. Tell her about countries you have been to and advise one that is really worth visiting. Explain why you think so.

As a result of step-by-step training under the guidance of a teacher, students overcome all the above difficulties gradually. We agree with E.V. Shtanko that "preparation for the Russian State Exam in English is not the only goal. It is also the way to improve foreign language competence and can be considered as

productive communicative activity” (Shtanko, 2014 p. 413).

## Discussions

After analyzing the current situation of word-formation competence, the authors have realized that there are few tasks that have the aim to train word-formation in the real speech. Most of the tasks are non-productive in terms of being drilling tasks rather than stimulating students to speak. The main goal of foreign language education is to prepare for intercultural communication. To achieve this goal, we should find the proper way to make linguistic tasks more speech oriented. That is why this theme requires further research.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that the system of word-formation must be coherent in order to develop word-formation competence properly. The given strategies for word formation competence development in this article can form the basis of a training set of exercises aimed at reducing difficulties and mistakes in doing word formation examination tasks.

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