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PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH: MECHANISMS OF PERCEPTION AND COMPREHENSION OF EMOTIONAL LEXIS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. Emotional lexis is an important part of language that influences how people understand and remember words. This study reviews psycholinguistic research on emotional vocabulary, focusing on affective activation, concreteness, and emotional valence. The findings show that emotional words are often learned and remembered more easily than neutral words but may be harder to understand without context. The study recommends using contextualized and emotionally meaningful teaching methods to improve vocabulary learning.

Keywords: emotional lexis, psycholinguistics, vocabulary acquisition, affective processing, emotional valence.

Annotatsiya. Emotsional leksika tilning muhim qismi bo‘lib, so‘zlarni tushunish va eslab qolishga ta’sir qiladi. Ushbu tadqiqot emotsional lug‘atni psixolingvistik nuqtai nazardan o‘rganib, affektiv faollashuv, konkretlik va emotsional valentlikka e’tibor qaratadi. Natijalar emotsional so‘zlar oddiy so‘zlarga qaraganda tezroq o‘rganilishi va uzoqroq esda qolishini, ammo kontekstsiz tushunish qiyinroq bo‘lishini ko‘rsatadi. Tadqiqot emotsional mazmunga ega va kontekstga asoslangan o‘qitish usullarini tavsiya etadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: emotsional leksika, psixolingvistika, lug‘atni o‘zlashtirish, affektiv qayta ishlash, emotsional valentlik.

Аннотация. Эмоциональная лексика является важной частью языка и влияет на понимание и запоминание слов. В данном исследовании рассматриваются психолингвистические особенности эмоциональной лексики с акцентом на аффективную активацию, конкретность и эмоциональную валентность. Результаты показывают, что эмоциональные слова обычно усваиваются и запоминаются легче, чем нейтральные, однако без контекста их понимание может быть сложнее. Исследование рекомендует использовать контекстные и эмоционально насыщенные методы обучения.

Ключевые слова: эмоциональная лексика, психолингвистика, усвоение словарного запаса, аффективная обработка, эмоциональная валентность.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional lexis represents an essential component of language competence and plays a fundamental role in human communication. Unlike neutral vocabulary, emotion-related words carry affective meaning that influences perception, memory, attention, and interpersonal interaction. Words such as love, fear, anger, and joy are not only linguistic units but also psychological triggers that activate emotional and cognitive processes simultaneously [1,2]. Consequently, the study of emotional vocabulary has become an important area of psycholinguistic research and language education.

Recent developments in cognitive science and psycholinguistics suggest that emotional words are processed differently from neutral lexical items. Neurocognitive studies have demonstrated that emotionally charged words can activate specific brain regions associated with affective processing and may receive preferential attention during lexical recognition and semantic processing [3,4]. These findings indicate that emotional information is closely

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connected with memory formation, decision-making, and language comprehension, making emotional vocabulary a particularly significant aspect of second language acquisition.

From an educational perspective, mastery of emotional lexis is essential for effective communication. Language learners require not only grammatical competence but also the ability to express feelings, attitudes, evaluations, and interpersonal meanings appropriately. However, many traditional vocabulary teaching approaches emphasize literal meanings and form recognition while paying insufficient attention to the emotional and pragmatic dimensions of lexical knowledge [5]. As a result, learners often possess receptive knowledge of emotional words without fully understanding their contextual or affective significance.

Theoretical perspectives such as embodied cognition and lexical quality theory further suggest that emotional vocabulary is acquired through rich contextual experiences and meaningful interaction rather than through isolated memorization [6,7]. Emotional concepts are closely linked with personal experience, cultural knowledge, and social context, making their acquisition more complex than that of many concrete lexical items. Consequently, understanding the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying the perception and comprehension of emotional lexis is essential for improving vocabulary instruction and communicative competence.

The present study aims to examine the psycholinguistic mechanisms involved in the perception and comprehension of emotional lexis in English. By synthesizing theoretical and empirical findings from contemporary research, the article explores how emotional words are recognized, semantically interpreted, and cognitively processed by language learners. Furthermore, it discusses the pedagogical implications of these mechanisms and proposes directions for more effective teaching practices that integrate emotional and contextual dimensions of vocabulary learning [3,6,8].

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The psycholinguistic investigation of emotional lexis is largely based on dimensional models of emotion, which explain affective meaning through continuous dimensions such as valence, arousal, and dominance. Valence refers to the positive or negative quality of an emotional experience, whereas arousal reflects its level of intensity or activation. Dominance represents the degree of perceived control associated with an emotional state [2,12]. These dimensions have become fundamental tools for examining how emotional words are processed, stored, and retrieved in human memory.

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that words with strong positive or negative emotional value are processed differently from emotionally neutral words. Highly emotional lexical items tend to attract attention more rapidly and often produce enhanced memory performance due to their affective salience [3,5]. The interaction between valence and arousal further influences lexical recognition, semantic interpretation, and decision-making processes, highlighting the multidimensional nature of emotional language processing.

Embodied cognition theory proposes that language comprehension is grounded in sensory, motor, and emotional experience rather than being represented solely through abstract symbolic systems [6,11]. According to this perspective, understanding emotional words involves the reactivation of experiences associated with those emotions. For example, the comprehension of words such as fear or happiness is closely connected with previous emotional experiences and physiological responses.

This theoretical perspective has important implications for second language acquisition. Learners often acquire emotional vocabulary in classroom environments where authentic emotional experiences are limited. Consequently, emotional words learned in a foreign language may produce weaker affective responses than their first-language equivalents, creating what researchers describe as emotional distance between linguistic knowledge and emotional

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experience [7]. Such findings emphasize the importance of contextualized and experience-based vocabulary instruction.

Another important theoretical foundation is the Lexical Quality Hypothesis, which argues that efficient language comprehension depends on high-quality lexical representations integrating orthographic, phonological, and semantic information [8]. Within emotional vocabulary, semantic representations are particularly complex because they include not only literal meaning but also emotional connotations, interpersonal functions, and contextual associations.

The quality of lexical representation directly influences recognition speed, comprehension accuracy, and long-term retention. Learners with incomplete semantic representations may recognize the form of an emotional word while failing to interpret its emotional or pragmatic meaning appropriately. Therefore, successful acquisition of emotional lexis requires repeated contextual exposure and meaningful interaction with emotionally rich language input [1,8].

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that emotional lexis cannot be explained solely through traditional models of vocabulary acquisition. Instead, emotional word processing reflects the interaction of cognitive, affective, neurological, and experiential mechanisms that jointly shape language perception and comprehension. Understanding these mechanisms provides an important theoretical foundation for developing more effective approaches to English language teaching and emotional vocabulary instruction [3,6,11].

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a systematic literature review and thematic analysis to examine the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying the perception and comprehension of emotional lexis in English. The chosen methodology is appropriate because the primary objective is to synthesize existing theoretical and empirical findings rather than to collect new experimental data. Through the integration of previous research, the study seeks to establish a comprehensive understanding of emotional lexical processing and its implications for English language teaching [3,6].

The literature was collected from internationally recognized academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PubMed. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords such as emotional lexis, emotion words, psycholinguistics, affective processing, emotional vocabulary acquisition, semantic comprehension, emotional valence, and embodied cognition. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, influential theoretical publications, and empirical studies published between 2000 and 2024, while several earlier landmark studies were also included because of their continuing relevance to the field [2,3].

The selection of sources was guided by several inclusion criteria: academic credibility, methodological transparency, theoretical significance, and direct relevance to emotional lexical processing. Publications unrelated to psycholinguistics or lacking sufficient empirical or theoretical contribution were excluded from the review. This selection process ensured that the analysis was based on reliable and widely recognized scholarly evidence [1,5].

The collected literature was analyzed using thematic analysis principles proposed by qualitative research methodology. After repeated reading and comparison of the selected studies, recurring concepts and research findings were grouped into major thematic categories. Particular attention was given to mechanisms of lexical perception, semantic comprehension, emotional valence, contextual influences, embodied cognition, and cognitive processing. Similar findings from different studies were synthesized to identify common theoretical patterns and educational implications [6,11].

To enhance the validity of the analysis, evidence from neurological, cognitive, developmental, and second language acquisition research was compared across multiple sources. Cross-disciplinary synthesis enabled a broader interpretation of emotional lexical processing and

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reduced dependence on any single theoretical perspective. The resulting framework provides a coherent basis for discussing both the cognitive mechanisms involved in emotional word processing and their practical implications for English language instruction [3,7,8].

Overall, the methodological approach emphasizes critical analysis, theoretical integration, and evidence-based interpretation rather than statistical measurement. Such an approach is particularly suitable for exploring the multidimensional nature of emotional lexis and for developing pedagogical recommendations grounded in contemporary psycholinguistic research [1,6,12].

RESULTS

The analysis of the selected literature demonstrates that the perception and comprehension of emotional lexis involve interconnected cognitive and affective mechanisms that differ significantly from those associated with neutral vocabulary. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that emotional words receive privileged processing due to their affective relevance, resulting in faster recognition, enhanced memory retention, and stronger semantic activation under appropriate contextual conditions [3,5].

One of the most consistent findings in psycholinguistic research is the automatic activation of emotional information during lexical processing. Emotional words rapidly attract attention and activate affective responses even before conscious semantic evaluation is completed. Experimental studies using lexical decision tasks, affective priming paradigms, and neurophysiological measurements demonstrate that emotionally significant lexical items are processed more efficiently than emotionally neutral words [3,10].

The literature also reveals that emotional valence and arousal substantially influence word recognition. Highly positive and highly negative words generally produce faster reaction times and stronger attentional responses than neutral vocabulary. However, the magnitude of these effects varies depending on contextual factors, learner proficiency, and individual cognitive characteristics [2,5,12].

For second-language learners, emotional word perception develops gradually with increasing language proficiency and communicative experience. Advanced learners tend to demonstrate automatic affective activation comparable to native speakers, whereas less proficient learners often rely on controlled semantic processing rather than immediate emotional recognition [4,7].

The reviewed studies indicate that comprehension of emotional vocabulary extends beyond simple lexical meaning and involves the integration of semantic, contextual, and affective information. Successful understanding requires learners to recognize not only dictionary definitions but also emotional intensity, pragmatic function, and contextual appropriateness [6,8].

Context plays a particularly important role in emotional word comprehension. Narrative texts, authentic communicative situations, and emotionally meaningful interactions provide learners with richer semantic representations than isolated vocabulary instruction. Research consistently demonstrates that contextualized learning environments improve both comprehension accuracy and long-term retention of emotional vocabulary [6,9].

The analysis also highlights considerable individual variation in emotional lexical processing. Factors such as age, language proficiency, emotional awareness, personal experience, and cultural background influence how learners interpret and internalize emotional concepts. Cross-linguistic differences in emotional categorization may further complicate second-language acquisition, especially when emotional concepts lack direct equivalents in learners' native languages [7,11].

Overall, the findings suggest that emotional lexis should be viewed as a multidimensional component of language competence involving cognitive processing, emotional experience, and contextual understanding. The interaction of these mechanisms supports more effective

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communication and contributes significantly to communicative competence in English language learning [1,3,6].

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that emotional lexis occupies a distinctive position within the mental lexicon and is processed through cognitive mechanisms that differ from those involved in neutral vocabulary processing. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that emotional words benefit from enhanced attentional resources, faster lexical access, and stronger memory retention due to their affective significance [3,5]. These characteristics suggest that emotional vocabulary should be considered an integral component of communicative competence rather than merely a specialized lexical category.

The present review also highlights the importance of emotional valence and contextual experience in vocabulary acquisition. Positive and negative emotional words influence perception and comprehension differently, while contextual richness significantly facilitates semantic integration and long-term retention [2,12]. This finding supports previous psycholinguistic research emphasizing that emotional meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic knowledge and personal experience rather than through isolated lexical memorization alone [6].

Another important implication concerns second language learning. Unlike native language acquisition, emotional vocabulary in a foreign language is often learned in formal classroom settings with limited authentic emotional engagement. Consequently, learners may acquire the literal meaning of emotional words while lacking their deeper affective and pragmatic understanding [7]. This phenomenon explains why many learners demonstrate adequate receptive vocabulary knowledge but experience difficulty expressing emotions naturally in real communicative situations.

The findings further reinforce the theoretical assumptions of embodied cognition and lexical quality theory. Emotional concepts become more meaningful when learners encounter them in authentic communicative contexts, narratives, role-play activities, and socially relevant interactions [6,8]. Repeated contextual exposure strengthens lexical representations and facilitates the integration of semantic, emotional, and pragmatic knowledge into long-term memory.

From a pedagogical perspective, these results suggest that English language instruction should move beyond traditional vocabulary memorization and incorporate emotionally meaningful learning experiences. Storytelling, authentic dialogues, multimedia resources, collaborative discussions, and contextualized communicative tasks can provide learners with opportunities to develop both linguistic accuracy and emotional competence [1,9]. Such approaches not only improve vocabulary retention but also enhance learners' confidence and communicative effectiveness.

Despite the valuable insights provided by existing studies, several limitations remain. Much of the available research has focused on adult participants and laboratory-based experiments, while comparatively little attention has been given to classroom-based investigations involving young language learners. Furthermore, cross-cultural differences in emotional conceptualization require additional investigation to better understand their influence on second language vocabulary acquisition [4,11].

Overall, the evidence indicates that emotional lexis should be regarded as a multidimensional phenomenon involving linguistic, cognitive, neurological, and social processes. Integrating psycholinguistic principles into vocabulary instruction may significantly improve learners' ability to perceive, comprehend, and appropriately use emotional language in authentic communicative contexts [3,6].

CONCLUSION

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This study has examined the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying the perception and comprehension of emotional lexis in English by synthesizing findings from contemporary theoretical and empirical research. The review demonstrates that emotional vocabulary differs from neutral lexical items in terms of cognitive processing, affective activation, semantic representation, and memory performance. Emotional words are more likely to attract attention, activate affective responses, and be retained in long-term memory due to their psychological and communicative significance.

The analysis further indicates that successful comprehension of emotional lexis depends not only on lexical knowledge but also on contextual interpretation, emotional experience, and pragmatic awareness. Factors such as emotional valence, arousal, embodied cognition, and lexical quality play a significant role in shaping learners' understanding and use of emotion-related vocabulary [2,6,8]. Consequently, emotional vocabulary acquisition should be viewed as a multidimensional process that integrates cognitive, linguistic, and affective components.

From an educational perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of incorporating emotionally meaningful and context-rich learning experiences into English language instruction. Teaching strategies based on authentic communication, storytelling, role-playing, multimedia resources, and collaborative interaction can facilitate deeper semantic understanding and improve long-term vocabulary retention. Such approaches may also strengthen learners' communicative competence by enabling them to express emotions more naturally and interpret affective language more accurately.

The study also highlights several directions for future research. Additional empirical investigations involving young learners, multilingual contexts, and classroom-based interventions are needed to further explore the developmental aspects of emotional lexical acquisition. Cross-cultural comparisons and longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into how emotional concepts are represented and processed across different linguistic communities.

In conclusion, emotional lexis represents a crucial dimension of language learning that extends beyond vocabulary knowledge alone. Integrating psycholinguistic evidence into language teaching practice can contribute to more effective instructional approaches and support the development of learners' linguistic proficiency, emotional awareness, and communicative competence in English.

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