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LEARNING GERMAN VOCABULARY AT A1 LEVEL REPETITION AND ACTIVE USE IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. This paper examines how vocabulary can be introduced and reinforced at A1 level in German as a foreign language. It draws on a focused analysis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the Goethe-Institut's A1 word list, and selected experimental studies of vocabulary learning. The analysis distinguishes recognition of a word from independent use. On this basis, the paper proposes a short teaching sequence in which learners encounter words in a concrete situation, retrieve them repeatedly, and then use them in their own utterances. The sequence is a teaching proposal; its effectiveness was not tested empirically in this paper. The central aim is to help learners use words to complete simple communicative tasks rather than merely recall translations.

Keywords. German as a foreign language, A1 level, vocabulary learning, retrieval practice, language teaching

Introduction. In beginner classes, learners may recognize individual German words yet still struggle to use them in conversation. This difficulty is particularly apparent when words have been learned outside meaningful sentences. At A1 level, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes a basic vocabulary related to concrete situations (Council of Europe, 2020). The teaching question is therefore not only which words to introduce, but also how an initial encounter can develop into usable vocabulary. This paper aims to derive a practical approach to vocabulary teaching from selected sources. It focuses on repeated encounters with a word, active retrieval, and use in short sentences.



Materials and approach. This is a literature-based analysis. It does not report a survey, classroom observation, or original learner test. The Council of Europe framework and the Goethe-Institut's A1 word list are used to define the learning goal. Three experimental studies of repetition, retrieval, and receptive and productive tasks inform the proposed teaching activities (Webb, 2005, 2007; Karpicke & Roediger, 2008). These studies did not involve Uzbek learners of German. Their findings therefore offer guidance for lesson design, but do not establish the effectiveness of the proposed sequence in this specific setting.

Vocabulary knowledge and repetition. Knowing a word involves more than stating its translation. To use a German noun, learners may also need its article, pronunciation, and common combinations. The Goethe-Institut's A1 list includes topics, words, and example sentences. It serves as a guide to the examination level and is not presented as complete teaching material for practising vocabulary (Goethe-Institut, 2012). A word list must therefore be developed into contextualized activities if it is to support learning.

Webb (2007) used a controlled study to examine how different numbers of encounters with new words affected several aspects of vocabulary knowledge. The participants were Japanese learners of English. The findings support the view that one encounter is unlikely to produce comprehensive knowledge of a word. They do not, however, justify prescribing one fixed number of repetitions for every German class. Word difficulty, prior knowledge, and learning conditions may vary.

A further distinction concerns rereading and recalling a word without looking at it. In experiments using foreign-language vocabulary, Karpicke and Roediger (2008) found that repeated retrieval improved later recall. Looking at a prompt, producing a German word from memory, and then checking the answer may therefore complement rereading. At A1 level, retrieval activities should be brief and followed by clear feedback so that learners can correct errors.

A classroom example for A1 learners. Consider a lesson on travelling to



university. The teacher selects a small set of everyday expressions, such as “der Bus” (bus), “die Haltestelle” (bus stop), “fahren” (to travel), and “warten” (to wait). The words first appear with an image and two short sentences: “Ich fahre mit dem Bus” and “Ich warte an der Haltestelle.” Learners match the expressions to the image, repeat the sentences aloud, and recognize the words in a short question. The article in “der Bus” is learned together with the noun instead of being introduced only as an isolated grammar rule.

Next, learners cover the German side of their notes and try to recall the words from an image or brief description of a situation. A second activity asks them to produce a sentence of their own, for example, “Ich fahre heute mit dem Bus.” Working in pairs, they then ask a simple question: “Wie fährst du zur Universität?” The teacher provides a sentence frame when needed. This support makes the task manageable for beginners while moving them from recognition toward use.

The chosen words can be retrieved again at the end of the lesson and in a later class. This schedule is a practical suggestion, not a claim that the cited studies establish an optimal interval. Two short tasks could assess different abilities: first identifying a word in a brief text, and then forming an appropriate sentence without a model. The second task offers evidence that the expression is available for independent use in that situation. Assessment should also note errors in form, such as a missing article or an unsuitable preposition.

Discussion and conclusion. Webb (2005) compared receptive and productive vocabulary learning tasks. Which task performed better in his experiments depended in part on whether the same amount of time was allowed for both tasks or the time actually needed to complete them was taken into account. The study does not support a simple rule that sentence production is always superior to reading. In an A1 lesson, it is reasonable to combine the two: an understandable context supports the first encounter, while later retrieval and speaking tasks practise and check whether a word is available for use.



The proposed sequence links three steps: contextual introduction, independent retrieval, and use in a small communicative task. It reflects the A1 goal of communicating about concrete everyday situations with a limited repertoire. Whether it works better than other approaches at the National University of Uzbekistan remains an open question. A subsequent study could compare two groups with similar initial proficiency and the same target words, followed by a delayed assessment of independent use.

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