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THEORETICAL BASES OF THE COGNITIVE APPROACH IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ITS ROLE IN ORAL SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

Abstract

This article examines the theoretical bases of the cognitive approach in foreign language teaching and its role in the development of oral speech. The study focuses on the key concepts of cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics that explain how speaking skills are formed and improved. Particular attention is given to such cognitive mechanisms as memory, attention, information processing, schema activation, chunking, and automatization. In addition, the article analyzes the influence of affective factors, especially anxiety and stress, on speech production. The review of prior research demonstrates that oral speech is not only a linguistic skill but also a complex cognitive activity requiring the coordination of multiple mental processes. Based on the analysis of theoretical sources, it is argued that the cognitive approach provides an effective framework for improving oral speech through the reduction of cognitive load, the strengthening of working memory, and the development of fluency through structured and meaningful practice. The article also outlines the pedagogical implications of this approach for foreign language teaching and highlights its significance for developing learners' communicative competence.

Keywords:

cognitive approach; oral speech development; foreign language teaching; working memory; cognitive load; schema theory; automatization; speaking anxiety; psycholinguistics; communicative competence.

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Introduction

In the context of globalization, foreign language proficiency, particularly oral communication, has become an essential component of modern education. English, as a global lingua franca, is used in academic, professional, and intercultural communication, which makes the development of speaking skills one of the major priorities in foreign language teaching [Crystal, 2003]. However, despite years of language learning, many students, even at advanced levels, continue to experience considerable difficulties in speaking fluently and spontaneously. This problem cannot be explained solely by insufficient linguistic knowledge, since many learners possess adequate vocabulary and grammar but are unable to use them effectively in real-time communication.

One of the major reasons for this discrepancy lies in the cognitive complexity of speech production. Traditional teaching methods often emphasize grammatical accuracy, memorization, and reading comprehension, while the cognitive mechanisms involved in speaking are frequently overlooked. As a result, students may know the language formally but remain unprepared to cope with the mental demands of oral communication. Speaking requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to conceptualize ideas, retrieve lexical units, organize them into grammatical structures, monitor correctness, and do all of this under time pressure.

The cognitive approach offers an alternative perspective by focusing on the mental processes involved in language acquisition and use. It views language learning as an active process of information processing, in which learners construct knowledge through attention, memory, perception, and conceptualization [Levelt, 1959]. From this perspective, successful speech production depends on the functioning and coordination of underlying cognitive mechanisms. Therefore, the cognitive approach provides a productive theoretical basis for understanding the development of oral speech and for improving teaching methodology.

The aim of this article is to analyze the theoretical bases of the cognitive approach in foreign language teaching and to examine its role in the development of oral speech.

The objectives of the article are:

1. to examine the cognitive nature of oral speech production;
2. to analyze the main cognitive theories relevant to foreign language learning;
3. to identify the role of memory, attention, schema activation, and cognitive load in speaking;
4. to discuss the influence of affective factors on oral speech;
5. to determine the pedagogical implications of the cognitive approach for speaking instruction.

Materials and research methods

This study is theoretical in nature and is based on the analysis and synthesis of scholarly literature in the fields of cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, and foreign language pedagogy. Rather than collecting empirical data, the article aims to systematize existing theoretical views on the role of cognitive mechanisms in oral speech development and to interpret them within the context of foreign language teaching.

The methodological basis of the study includes:

- theoretical analysis of scientific literature;
- comparative analysis of cognitive and psycholinguistic concepts;
- synthesis of pedagogical and psychological theories related to speaking development;
- interpretation of prior research findings relevant to the cognitive approach.

The sources used in the article include classical and contemporary works by scholars such as Crystal, Levelt, Piaget, Vygotsky, Sweller, Skehan, and Baddeley, whose studies contribute significantly to understanding the relationship between language learning and cognitive functioning.

Literature review

The cognitive approach to foreign language teaching is based on the assumption that language acquisition is inseparable from mental activity. Unlike approaches that view language learning as imitation or habit formation, cognitive theories regard learners as active processors of information who construct linguistic knowledge through interaction between perception, memory, and reasoning [Skehan, 1998]. This perspective has become especially important in explaining why learners often fail to transfer their passive linguistic knowledge into active oral production.

A central contribution to the understanding of speech production is the psycholinguistic model proposed by Levelt. According to this model, speaking is a multi-stage process that includes conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring [Levelt, 1959]. This model

demonstrates that oral production is cognitively demanding because the speaker must coordinate several processes simultaneously. It also explains why learners may hesitate or make errors even when they possess the necessary vocabulary and grammatical knowledge.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development further supports the cognitive approach by emphasizing that language reflects the evolution of thought structures [Piaget, 1959]. From this standpoint, speech is not a mechanical reproduction of memorized patterns but an expression of cognitive operations such as categorization, abstraction, and reasoning. In contrast, Vygotsky underlines the social nature of cognition and argues that language development occurs through interaction and guided support [Vygotsky, 1978]. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development highlights the role of scaffolding in enabling learners to perform tasks beyond their independent level. Another important theoretical perspective is Cognitive Load Theory, which explains how the limited capacity of working memory affects learning and performance [Sweller, 2011]. In the context of speaking, this theory is highly relevant because oral production places multiple simultaneous demands on the learner: idea generation, lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, and monitoring. When these demands exceed working memory capacity, fluency deteriorates. Skehan's work on the cognitive approach to language learning also emphasizes that speech production depends on information processing and attentional resources [Skehan, 1998]. He argues that task performance in a second language reflects the learner's ability to balance fluency, accuracy, and complexity under real-time processing constraints. This idea is directly relevant to advanced learners, who often struggle not because they lack knowledge, but because they cannot process it quickly enough during spontaneous speech.

From an affective and interactional perspective, Krashen emphasizes the Affective Filter Hypothesis, arguing that emotional variables such as anxiety, stress, and low motivation can block language input from being effectively processed, which directly limits speaking performance and fluency [Krashen, 1982]. Similarly, Horwitz, and Cope introduce the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, defining it as a distinct psychological construct that negatively affects learners' confidence, participation, and oral communication ability [Horwitz, and Cope, 1986]. In terms of output and production, Swain highlights the Output Hypothesis, stating that learners develop their linguistic competence more effectively when they are pushed to produce spoken language, as this process forces deeper cognitive processing and identification of knowledge gaps [Swain, 1985]. Ellis further explains second language acquisition as an interaction between implicit and explicit knowledge systems, where successful speaking depends on the ability to retrieve and proceduralize linguistic knowledge under real-time constraints [Ellis, 2008]. DeKeyser supports this view by arguing that fluency develops through skill acquisition and automatization, meaning that repeated practice transforms declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge, reducing cognitive effort during speech production [DeKeyser, 2007]. In addition, Kormos stresses that speaking in a second language is a highly demanding cognitive task because it requires simultaneous planning, formulation, and articulation, often exceeding learners' processing capacity and resulting in disfluency [Kormos, 2006].

Schmidt through the Noticing Hypothesis, argues that conscious attention to linguistic forms is essential for acquisition, as learners cannot internalize language structures without noticing them in input [Schmidt, 1990].

Gardner highlights the role of motivation and anxiety in language learning, stating that learners with higher integrative motivation and lower anxiety levels are more likely to achieve higher communicative competence and oral fluency [Gardner, 1985].

Finally, Baddeley and Hitch's model of working memory offers a useful explanation of how temporary storage and mental manipulation support oral speech production [Baddeley, Hitch, 1974]. Working memory enables learners to hold ideas, words, and structures in mind while planning and producing speech. Its limitations can therefore directly affect fluency, coherence, and accuracy.

Methods for Developing Cognitive Oral Speech Skills

The development of cognitive oral speech skills requires instructional methods that are grounded in the principles of information processing, working memory limitations, and automatization of linguistic knowledge. Since speaking is a time-constrained cognitive activity, effective pedagogical strategies should aim to optimize mental resources, facilitate retrieval of language, and support the gradual transition from controlled to automatic processing.

One of the most effective approaches is **retrieval-based speaking practice**, which strengthens long-term memory and enhances the accessibility of linguistic knowledge during real-time communication. According to Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, learning becomes durable when learners actively retrieve information rather than passively review it. In oral speech instruction, this can be implemented through delayed questioning, oral summarization, and spontaneous recall tasks, which require learners to reconstruct language under cognitive pressure. This process strengthens memory traces and improves fluency in spontaneous speech [Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, 2014].

Another important method is **spaced speaking practice**, which involves repeated exposure to language items over time rather than in a single session. Cepeda demonstrate that distributed practice significantly improves long-term retention. In speaking instruction, revisiting vocabulary, grammatical structures, and communicative patterns across multiple lessons reduces forgetting and supports automatization. This allows learners to retrieve language more efficiently during oral production [Cepeda, 2006].

Closely related is **interleaved speaking practice**, where different types of speaking tasks are mixed within a learning sequence. Rohrer argues that interleaving improves discrimination between concepts and enhances flexible application of knowledge. In oral communication, combining narration, description, argumentation, and discussion tasks helps learners adapt language to different communicative contexts and prevents mechanical memorization of isolated patterns [Rohrer, 2012].

A further effective strategy is **task-based language teaching (TBLT)**, which emphasizes meaningful communication as the core of instruction. Ellis explains that tasks promote natural language use by engaging learners in problem-solving and goal-oriented interaction. This reduces excessive focus on form and encourages procedural use of language, which is essential for fluency development in real-time speech [Ellis, 2003].

Another key method is **interaction-based learning**, which supports language development through communicative exchange. Long argues that interaction facilitates acquisition through negotiation of meaning, clarification requests, and modified input. These processes simplify input and make language more cognitively manageable, thereby supporting comprehension and production in speaking activities [Long, 1996].

Cognitive apprenticeship, proposed by Collins, Brown, and Newman provides a useful instructional model for speaking development. It involves modeling expert performance, providing guided practice, and gradually transferring responsibility to learners. In oral speech instruction, this can include teacher modeling of fluent speech, think-aloud strategies, and progressive learner independence in communication tasks [Collins, Brown, and Newman, 1989].

The use of **dual coding strategies** further enhances oral speech development by combining verbal and visual information. Paivio suggests that information encoded both visually and verbally is more easily remembered and retrieved. In speaking lessons, visual supports such as images, diagrams, and video materials can stimulate idea generation and reduce lexical retrieval difficulty during speech production [Paivio 1991].

In addition, **metacognitive strategy instruction** plays a crucial role in improving speaking performance. Flavell (1979) emphasizes that learners who are aware of their cognitive processes are better able to plan, monitor, and evaluate their performance. Teaching students to self-monitor grammar, adjust fluency, and evaluate communicative effectiveness strengthens self-regulation during oral speech [Flavell, 1979].

Finally, **automatization through repeated meaningful output** is essential for developing fluency. DeKeyser explains that procedural knowledge develops through repeated practice in meaningful contexts. Structured speaking drills, role-plays, and repeated communicative tasks enable learners to reduce conscious effort in language production, thereby increasing fluency and reducing cognitive load [DeKeyser, 2007].

In summary, cognitive development of oral speech is supported by a combination of retrieval practice, spaced and interleaved repetition, task-based communication, scaffolding, interaction, cognitive apprenticeship, dual coding, metacognitive training, and automatization. These methods collectively facilitate the transformation of linguistic knowledge into fluent, efficient, and spontaneous oral speech.

Discussion and results

Cognitive nature of oral speech production

From a cognitive perspective, speech production is a highly complex and structured process. According to Levelt's psycholinguistic model, oral speech involves several stages: conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring [Levelt, 1989]. Each stage represents a distinct cognitive operation through which thought is transformed into spoken language. At the conceptualization stage, the speaker generates ideas and organizes them into a coherent preverbal message. During formulation, this message is converted into lexical and grammatical structures. The articulatory stage involves the physical production of speech, while self-monitoring makes it possible to detect and correct errors during speaking.

This model demonstrates that speaking is not an automatic act but a cognitively demanding activity. Learners must process several kinds of information at the same time, which makes oral speech particularly vulnerable to processing difficulties. Thus, speaking problems often arise not because of poor language knowledge, but because of limitations in cognitive capacity or insufficient automatization.

Cognitive and developmental foundations

The cognitive approach is grounded in broader theories of learning and development. Piaget argues that language development reflects the growth of cognitive structures, meaning that speech is closely tied to the learner's intellectual development [Piaget, 1959]. This suggests that advanced speaking ability depends on the capacity for abstraction, reasoning, and conceptual organization.

At the same time, Vygotsky emphasizes that speech development is socially mediated. His concept of scaffolding explains how learners can gradually internalize linguistic and cognitive strategies through guided participation [Vygotsky, 1978]. This is especially relevant in speaking instruction, where teachers play an important role in supporting learners through prompts, modeling, and structured communicative tasks.

Taken together, these theories show that oral speech development is both a cognitive and social process. Learners do not simply accumulate vocabulary and grammar; they develop the mental and interactive capacities required to use language meaningfully.

Information processing in language learning

The information processing model provides further insight into how language is acquired and used in speaking. From this perspective, learning involves three broad stages: input, processing, and output [Skehan, 1998]. During input, learners perceive and attend to linguistic material. During processing, they encode and organize this information in memory. During output, they retrieve and use it for communication.

This model is especially important for speaking because oral production depends on the successful transfer of processed knowledge into real-time language use. If attention is weak, input may not be adequately noticed. If processing is shallow, information may not be retained. If retrieval is inefficient, speech may become slow, fragmented, or inaccurate. Therefore, the development of oral speech requires not only exposure to language but also effective cognitive engagement with it.

Role of memory and attention

Memory is one of the central mechanisms underlying oral speech development. Working memory is responsible for temporarily holding and manipulating information during speech production, whereas long-term memory stores vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and discourse knowledge [Baddeley, Hitch, 1974]. During speaking, learners rely on working memory to keep track of what they want to say, retrieve relevant lexical items, and organize them into meaningful structures. Because working memory has limited capacity, learners may experience difficulty when too many operations compete for attention at once. This can lead to pauses, hesitation, and simplified language. Fluency improves when linguistic material becomes more readily accessible through repeated practice and proceduralization.

Attention is equally important. It enables learners to focus on relevant information and suppress distractions. In speaking tasks, attentional control allows the speaker to maintain topic coherence, monitor language use, and respond appropriately to communicative demands. Without sufficient attentional resources, even knowledgeable learners may struggle to speak effectively.

Cognitive load theory and speaking

Cognitive Load Theory explains how the limitations of working memory influence speaking performance [Sweller, 2011]. Foreign language speaking imposes a high cognitive load because learners must generate content, retrieve words, construct grammatical structures, and monitor output simultaneously. When task demands exceed cognitive capacity, performance declines, resulting in disfluency, errors, and communication breakdown.

This has important pedagogical implications. If instruction is poorly structured or tasks are excessively demanding, learners may become overloaded and unable to demonstrate their actual speaking ability. Therefore, effective teaching should reduce unnecessary cognitive burden and provide support that gradually leads learners toward greater independence and fluency.

Schema theory and knowledge organization

Another important concept within the cognitive approach is schema theory. Schemata are mental structures that organize knowledge and help individuals interpret and produce language based on prior experience. In speaking, schema activation allows learners to access background knowledge, generate ideas more easily, and organize discourse coherently.

When learners speak about familiar topics, relevant schemata facilitate idea generation and lexical retrieval. This reduces cognitive effort and makes speech more fluent. Conversely, when learners lack relevant background knowledge or cannot activate it, speaking becomes more difficult. Thus, schema-based teaching can enhance oral communication by helping learners connect new language with existing knowledge structures.

Connectionist approach and automatization

Connectionist theories explain language learning as the strengthening of associations between linguistic elements through repeated exposure and use. From this point of view, fluency develops when frequently used lexical and grammatical patterns become automatized. Automatization reduces the burden on working memory because learners no longer need to process every element consciously. This view supports the importance of repeated, meaningful communication in speaking instruction. The more often learners use particular structures in communicative situations, the more easily they can retrieve and apply them in future speech. Therefore, fluency should be understood not simply as speed, but as the outcome of gradually strengthened cognitive and linguistic connections.

Affective factors and cognitive processing

Although the cognitive approach focuses primarily on mental processes, affective factors also play a major role in oral speech development. Anxiety, stress, and fear of making mistakes can interfere with attention and memory, thereby increasing cognitive load [Sweller, 2011]. When learners are anxious, part of their mental energy is directed toward emotional regulation rather than language processing. As a result, even well-prepared students may fail to perform effectively in speaking situations. Their speech may become less fluent, less accurate, and less confident. This shows that oral communication is influenced by the interaction between cognition and emotion.

Therefore, effective speaking instruction should address affective barriers alongside cognitive development.

Chunking and fluency development

Chunking is a cognitive strategy that enables learners to process language in larger meaningful units rather than as isolated words. Formulaic expressions, collocations, and sentence frames can be stored and retrieved as single units, which reduces the demands placed on working memory [Baddeley, Hitch, 1974]. This contributes to faster and more fluent speech production.

For example, expressions such as “on the other hand,” “as far as I know,” or “it depends on” function as ready-made chunks that allow learners to maintain speech flow. Teaching learners to recognize and use chunks can therefore support fluency and naturalness in oral communication.

Implications for language teaching

The theoretical analysis presented in this article has several implications for foreign language teaching. First, speaking instruction should take into account the cognitive demands of oral production and be designed in a way that reduces unnecessary load. Second, teachers should provide scaffolding that supports learners’ speaking performance until greater independence is achieved. Third, activities should activate prior knowledge and encourage schema-based organization of ideas. Fourth, repeated and meaningful speaking practice should be used to promote automatization. Finally, the emotional climate of the classroom should be supportive in order to reduce anxiety and facilitate communication. These implications suggest that the cognitive approach is not only theoretically valuable but also practically relevant for improving the methodology of teaching speaking.

Conclusion

The cognitive approach provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding oral speech development in foreign language learning. Speaking is not merely the application of vocabulary and grammar rules; it is a complex cognitive activity that requires the coordination of multiple mental processes, including attention, working memory, information processing, schema activation, and monitoring. The analysis of prior research shows that the development of oral speech depends on several interconnected factors. Effective speaking performance requires the reduction of cognitive load, the strengthening of memory systems, the automatisation of language patterns, and the activation of relevant background knowledge. At the same time, affective variables such as anxiety can significantly interfere with cognitive functioning and must therefore be addressed in teaching practice. Overall, the cognitive approach offers a strong theoretical basis for understanding why learners experience difficulties in speaking and how these difficulties can be reduced through appropriate pedagogical support. Integrating cognitive principles into foreign language teaching can significantly enhance learners’ communicative competence and promote the development of fluent, confident, and meaningful oral speech.

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ШЕТЕЛ ТІЛІН ОҚЫТУДАҒЫ КОГНИТИВТІ ТӘСІЛДІҢ ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ НЕГІЗДЕРІ ЖӘНЕ ОНЫҢ АУЫЗША СӨЙЛЕУДІ ДАМЫТУДАҒЫ РӨЛІ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада шетел тілін оқытудағы когнитивті тәсілдің теориялық негіздері және оның ауызша сөйлеуді дамытудағы рөлі қарастырылады. Зерттеу сөйлеу дағдыларының қалай қалыптасатынын және дамитынын түсіндіретін когнитивті психология мен психолингвистиканың негізгі ұғымдарына бағытталған. Ерекше назар жады, назар, ақпаратты өңдеу, схема белсендіру, chunking (ақпаратты топтастыру) және автоматтандыру сияқты когнитивті механизмдерге аударылады. Сонымен қатар, мақалада сөйлеу үдерісіне әсер ететін аффективті факторлардың, әсіресе мазасыздық пен стресс деңгейінің ықпалы талданады. Бұрынғы зерттеулерді талдау ауызша сөйлеудің тек тілдік дағды ғана емес, сонымен қатар бірнеше психикалық үдерістердің үйлесімді жұмысын талап ететін күрделі когнитивті әрекет екенін көрсетеді. Теориялық дереккөздерді талдау негізінде когнитивті тәсіл когнитивті жүктемені азайту, жұмыс жадыны нығайту және құрылымдалған әрі мағыналы тәжірибе арқылы сөйлеу еркіндігін дамытуда тиімді екені дәлелденеді. Сондай-ақ, мақалада бұл тәсілдің шетел тілін оқытудағы педагогикалық маңызы қарастырылып, білім алушылардың коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін дамытудағы рөлі айқындалады.

Тірек сөздер: когнитивті тәсіл; ауызша сөйлеу; шетел тілін оқыту; жұмыс жады; когнитивті жүктеме; схема теориясы; ақпаратты өңдеу; автоматтандыру; сөйлеу мазасыздығы; коммуникативтік құзыреттілік.

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ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ КОГНИТИВНОГО ПОДХОДА В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ И ЕГО РОЛЬ В РАЗВИТИИ УСТНОЙ РЕЧИ

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические основы когнитивного подхода в обучении иностранному языку и его роль в развитии устной речи. Исследование сосредоточено на ключевых понятиях когнитивной психологии и психолингвистики, которые объясняют, как формируются и совершенствуются навыки говорения. Особое внимание уделяется таким когнитивным механизмам, как память, внимание, обработка информации, активация схем, чанкинг (группирование информации) и автоматизация. Кроме того, в статье анализируется влияние аффективных факторов, в частности тревожности и стресса, на процесс речепроизводства. Обзор предыдущих исследований показывает, что устная речь представляет собой не только языковой навык, но и сложную когнитивную деятельность, требующую координации множества психических процессов. На основе анализа теоретических источников делается вывод о том, что когнитивный подход является эффективной основой для развития устной речи за счет снижения когнитивной нагрузки, укрепления рабочей памяти и формирования беглости речи через структурированную и осмысленную практику. В статье также рассматриваются педагогические аспекты применения данного подхода и подчеркивается его значение для развития коммуникативной компетенции обучающихся.

Ключевые слова: когнитивный подход; устная речь; обучение иностранному языку; рабочая память; когнитивная нагрузка; теория схем; обработка информации; автоматизация; речевая тревожность; коммуникативная компетенция

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