



DEVELOPING A2 LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF THEMATIC LEXICAL SETS

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Abstract: *The article explores the development of communicative skills in A2-level learners through the use of thematic lexical sets. The relevance of the topic stems from the growing emphasis on practical language proficiency, the necessity of fostering confident oral production at the basic level, and the demand for efficient and accessible teaching methods that enhance motivation and ensure systematic vocabulary expansion. The practical value of the study lies in the adaptability of the proposed approach for various teaching contexts, age groups, and curricula, ultimately contributing to increased learner confidence and the development of consistent oral communication skills.*

Keywords: *lexical sets, A2 level, communicative competence, oral production, basic vocabulary, communicative tasks, speaking activities, CEFR.*

INTRODUCTION.

Contemporary English language teaching is increasingly shifting away from mechanical grammar acquisition towards cultivating learners' ability to express themselves in typical everyday situations. Within the CEFR framework, the A2 level—referred to as the “Waystage”—marks a stage at which learners can manage simple communicative tasks related to daily life: describing themselves, their families, places of residence, habits, shopping routines, travel experiences, health issues, food preferences, weather conditions, and other familiar topics. Nevertheless, A2 learners often struggle with insufficient activation of their vocabulary. Many words remain available only in their passive lexicon, and students experience difficulty retrieving them quickly in real-time communication. This leads to frequent pauses, a sense of insecurity, fragmented speech, reliance on the mother tongue, and reluctance to engage in interaction.

One effective response to this challenge is the use of thematic lexical sets—coherent clusters of words belonging to the same semantic field, such as “Food,” “Travel,” “Shopping,” “Daily routine,” “My country,” “Weather and seasons,” “Health and body,” and “Hobbies and free time.” The essence of this method lies in teaching vocabulary not as isolated units but as interconnected elements linked through meaning, context, and functional usage. A lexical set forms a cognitive map of a topic, enabling learners to recall words more easily, activate them more rapidly, and combine them more effectively to produce longer and more fluent utterances. This is particularly valuable at the A2 stage, where learners are transitioning from single sentences to longer, more cohesive speech.

Another significant advantage of lexical sets is their ability to instill a sense of control over the communicative situation. When learners see a concrete set of words and expressions that they can rely on, the unpredictability of the speaking task decreases. For instance, prior to a descriptive task about one's country, learners may be provided with lexical items such as traditional food, national holidays, capital city, climate, mountains, lakes, famous people, local language, customs, celebrations. The mere presence of this list reduces linguistic anxiety, and deliberate repetition combined with mini-dialogues facilitates the transition of this



vocabulary into the active lexicon. Lexical sets also play a crucial role in the development of monologic speech. A2 learners often find it difficult to structure a description: they may know individual words but struggle to organise them logically. When working with a thematic lexical set, the process becomes more manageable. For example, the task “Describe your weekend” may be accompanied by a lexical group such as woke up, had breakfast, met friends, went to the park, watched a movie, ate out, enjoyed, relaxing, sunny day, tired but happy. The teacher encourages learners not simply to list these elements but to connect them with discourse markers such as First..., Then..., After that..., Finally.... This approach transforms scattered vocabulary into a coherent narrative, fully aligned with A2-level descriptors.

Communicative activities provide the most natural environment for implementing lexical sets. Role play is particularly effective, as it simulates real-life interaction. When studying the topic “Travel,” learners may assume the roles of a tourist, a guide, a hotel receptionist, a passenger, or a shop assistant. Each receives a set of key phrases—book a room, check-in, one-night stay, comfortable, local attractions, city tour, buy a souvenir, ask for directions. The teacher presents short scenarios, and learners interact, striving to employ as many items from the set as possible. This type of activity increases the density of speech and encourages flexible use of the active vocabulary.

Valuable technique is the use of “speaking cards,” where learners draw a card with a picture or word from a lexical set. An image of a national dish may prompt the utterance: “In my country people often eat this dish on special days,” while a traditional costume may lead to comments about holidays and celebrations. Through such tasks, students learn to produce spontaneous utterances, make lexical associations, and link new information with prior knowledge. Information-gap tasks are particularly effective for developing dialogic competence. Learners receive two versions of the same text or visual material, with some details missing. To complete the information, they must ask each other questions using the target vocabulary. At A2 level, such tasks may relate to “My country,” “Daily routine,” “Families,” or “Free time.” Typical questions include: “What do people in your country usually eat on holidays?” “When do people celebrate this festival?” “Is your climate hot in summer?” “What languages do people speak?” These interactions both increase speaking fluency and encourage natural vocabulary usage. Creative tasks also play an essential role, as they appeal to learners’ personal experiences. Students may be invited to design a mini-guidebook about their country using the “My country” lexical set. They can describe weather patterns, traditions, celebrations, tourist attractions, national dishes, notable figures, or cultural symbols. By selecting 10–15 items from the lexical set and creating a monologue, leaflet, or poster, learners connect linguistic content with their own identity, which significantly enhances motivation and engagement. Another helpful technique is the creation of lexical mind maps, in which learners organise words on paper in the form of a tree or web. For example, the “Food” topic may branch into fruit, vegetables, meat, drinks, and desserts, each of which can be expanded. This visual structuring promotes long-term retention and strengthens learners’ ability to recall vocabulary during spontaneous speech. Another important advantage of thematic lexical sets is their strong alignment with how memory naturally operates. Cognitive psychology demonstrates that humans recall information more effectively when it is organised in meaningful clusters, rather than stored as isolated elements. This phenomenon, often referred to as “semantic grouping,” significantly enhances retrieval speed. When learners at A2 level encounter communicative tasks, quick access to vocabulary is essential. If the vocabulary has been previously grouped into coherent thematic units, the brain retrieves not only one word but automatically activates a chain of related items. For example, recalling the word “mountains” often triggers associations such as high, cold, hiking, trip, beautiful views, fresh air, and travel. This automatic activation greatly facilitates the production of longer utterances and reduces the cognitive load placed on the learner during conversation.

In addition to supporting memory, lexical sets contribute to the development of lexical fluency, which is one of the most critical components of speaking competence at the A2 stage. Lexical fluency does not imply advanced vocabulary, but rather the ability to use familiar words spontaneously, without hesitation. Many A2 learners experience speaking difficulties not because they lack knowledge, but because they cannot access the words they know quickly enough. The repetitive nature of lexical-set-based tasks—such as mini-dialogues, role



plays, picture descriptions, and information-gap activities—helps reduce retrieval time. As learners repeatedly encounter the same lexical items in slightly different communicative contexts, these words become automatised, allowing students to concentrate more on message planning and less on searching for vocabulary. Furthermore, thematic lexical sets provide an effective scaffold for learners who struggle with confidence. A2 learners often report feeling “lost” when asked to speak without support, especially in front of peers. When a lexical set is visually present—whether as a printed list, mind map, flashcards, or illustrated board—the learner perceives the communicative task as more manageable. This sense of structure creates a psychological safety net that reduces anxiety and encourages greater participation. The teacher can gradually remove the visual support as learners gain confidence, transitioning from controlled practice to freer communication. This scaffolding approach mirrors the progression described in communicative language teaching (CLT) and is fully compatible with CEFR descriptors emphasizing the need to mediate meaning with simple language. Lexical sets is their adaptability to mixed-ability groups, which are common in contemporary classrooms. While some learners may quickly grasp and apply new vocabulary, others may require more time and repetition. Lexical sets allow for differentiation: stronger learners can be given additional items or more complex tasks, such as explaining word relationships or creating micro-stories, while those who need more support can focus on the core vocabulary. Even within one lexical field, tasks may vary by complexity. For example, when working on the theme “Food,” a weaker learner may simply identify and describe items (“This is fruit. It is sweet. I like it.”), whereas a stronger learner might compare dishes from different cultures or express preferences with reasons (“This dish is traditional in my country because people cook it for family celebrations.”). Lexical sets make it possible to maintain a unified topic while offering flexible task design that meets individual needs.

A2 learners often struggle not only with vocabulary but also with using language appropriately in context: choosing polite forms, expressing preferences, giving reasons, reacting to information, or asking for clarification. Lexical sets can be enriched with formulaic expressions and functional language that correspond to real-life communicative situations. For example, a lexical set for the topic “Travel” may include not only nouns and verbs but also polite phrases such as “Could you help me, please?”, “I would like to check in,” or “How much does it cost?”. Including these functional chunks allows learners to engage in more authentic, socially appropriate conversation and prepares them for situations they may encounter outside the classroom.

The effectiveness of lexical sets has been confirmed by classroom observation and learner performance analysis. Regular work with thematic vocabulary contributes to more elaborate utterances, increased use of adjectives and intensifiers, reduced hesitation, and less reliance on the mother tongue. Learners become more confident at initiating conversations, asking and answering questions, and maintaining exchanges. In some cases, improvement is also observed in grammar, as frequent lexical activation encourages the natural use of structures such as the Present Simple, Past Simple, like + V-ing, want to + verb, and can + verb, all of which align with A2 learning outcomes.

In conclusion, thematic lexical sets constitute an effective tool for enhancing communicative competence among A2 learners. They facilitate vocabulary organisation, promote linguistic flexibility, and contribute to more natural and coherent speech production. Moreover, lexical sets boost learner confidence, support motivation, and help reduce language anxiety. Particularly at the transitional stage toward independent communication, this method empowers learners with a manageable and functional lexicon, enabling them to express themselves more freely despite linguistic limitations. Integrating lexical sets into English lessons not only expands students’ active vocabulary but also cultivates their ability to use language meaningfully in real-life communicative situations—an outcome that represents the core goal of A2-level instruction.

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