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PSYCHOLINGUISTIC FEATURES OF DEVELOPING ORAL SPEECH IN FRENCH

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The development of oral speech in French as a foreign language is not merely a linguistic task; it is also a psycholinguistic and pedagogical process that involves perception, memory, attention, internal speech, motivation, and self-regulation. This article examines the psycholinguistic foundations of oral speech development with particular attention to the relationship between listening and speaking, the distinction between receptive and productive speech activity, and the cognitive mechanisms that underlie oral production. Drawing on foreign-language teaching methodology and psycholinguistic research, the article discusses the principles of verbalization and correlation, the transition from knowledge to skill and from skill to communicative competence, and the role of inner speech in the formation of coherent external speech. Special emphasis is placed on the stages of speech production, including conceptual planning, linguistic encoding, and articulation, as well as on transfer and interference in Uzbek learners of French. The article argues that successful oral development requires not only knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, but also systematic classroom practice that supports confidence, automaticity, self-monitoring, and meaningful communication.

Introduction. Learning a foreign language is a cognitive, communicative, and social activity. It is cognitive because it involves perception, memory, attention, analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving; communicative because its ultimate goal is meaningful interaction; and social because speech always takes place in relation to an interlocutor, a context, and a purpose. For these reasons, the teaching of French cannot be reduced to the transmission of grammatical rules. It must also address the psychological and psycholinguistic mechanisms that make oral communication possible (Leontiev, 1999; Zimnyaya, 1991).

In foreign-language education, oral speech occupies a central position because it is the most immediate form of language use. Students are expected not only to understand spoken French, but also to formulate thoughts, choose appropriate lexical and grammatical resources, pronounce them intelligibly, and adjust their speech to a communicative situation. Contemporary language teaching frameworks similarly emphasize that learners develop proficiency through reception, production, and interaction in meaningful tasks rather than through isolated rule memorization alone (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020).

The present article translates and expands the author's original Uzbek discussion of the psycholinguistic features of developing oral speech in French. It examines the psychological principles that underlie foreign-language teaching, clarifies the role of receptive and productive speech activities, analyzes the cognitive mechanisms involved in speaking, and outlines pedagogical implications for French language classrooms. Particular attention is given to Uzbek learners of French, whose oral development is shaped by both transfer and interference from the first language.

Psychological and Psycholinguistic Foundations of Foreign-Language Speech

Because language learning is a form of mental activity, it necessarily has psychological foundations. Within the methodological tradition of foreign-language teaching in the post-Soviet space, scholars have often discussed two important psychological principles: verbalization and correlation (Jalolov, 1996; Zaripova, 1986). The principle of verbalization stresses that a foreign language is most fully acquired through speech activity, especially oral speech. In other words, learners do not master a language simply by storing rules; they must engage in verbal use of the language. From this perspective, oral speech is not only an educational objective but also a pathway to language acquisition itself.

The principle of correlation refers to the selection and organization of language material—vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation—in accordance with communicative needs and the formation of speech skills. This principle implies that language content should

be chosen for its usefulness in actual speaking and listening tasks. Topics of communication, therefore, become an important methodological criterion in lexical selection, while grammatical and phonetic material should support the learner's ability to understand and produce speech rather than remain abstract knowledge to be memorized (Hashimov & Yoqubov, 2003; Saydaliyev, 2004).

Methods. Psycholinguistics provides the bridge between language and psychology. It studies how speech is produced and perceived, how linguistic units are represented in the mind, and how thought is transformed into utterance. In this respect, foreign-language methodology is closely connected to psycholinguistics because effective teaching depends on understanding the mechanisms of speech perception and speech production (Leontiev, 1999; Jinkin, as cited in Zimnyaya, 1991). In practical terms, this means that the teacher must know not only what linguistic material to teach, but also how learners process, store, retrieve, and use that material during communication.

Receptive and Productive Speech Activity

Speech psychology traditionally distinguishes between receptive and productive forms of language activity. Receptive activity is concerned with the reception and interpretation of information and is realized mainly through listening comprehension and reading. Productive activity, by contrast, is concerned with the expression of meaning and is realized through speaking and writing (Artyomov, 1996; Belyayev, 1999). This distinction is pedagogically important because oral proficiency cannot be developed through productive practice alone. Learners must first receive comprehensible input, recognize patterns, and form auditory images of the language before they can produce speech with confidence.

In the oral domain, listening comprehension and speaking are inseparable. Listening provides the learner with phonological models, lexical patterns, discourse structures, and pragmatic cues. Speaking, in turn, transforms passive knowledge into active performance. For that reason, oral speech should be understood as a complex system that integrates listening comprehension with oral production. A student who has not developed adequate listening ability will often struggle to speak fluently because speaking depends in part on the ability to anticipate interlocutors, interpret responses, and monitor one's own output against remembered models of the target language (Council of Europe, 2020; Kormos, 2006).

This relationship between receptive and productive skills also explains why oral development should proceed from guided comprehension to controlled production and then to freer interaction. At early stages, learners rely heavily on imitation, repetition, and pattern recognition. Gradually, however, they must move toward more autonomous speech in which

utterances are selected and organized in response to communicative intent. Thus, oral development is best viewed as a progression from exposure and perception to formulation and spontaneous interaction.

Knowledge, Skills, and Communicative Competence

A central issue in the psychology of language teaching is the relationship among knowledge, skills, and habits or competences. Knowledge refers to what the learner knows about the language system: vocabulary, grammatical patterns, phonetic rules, and sociolinguistic conventions. Skills are the learner's ability to apply that knowledge in practice, while stable communicative competence emerges when those skills become increasingly automatic, flexible, and situation-appropriate (Zaripova, 1986; Jalolov, 1996).

This progression is especially important in oral speech development. If learners do not possess adequate lexical, grammatical, and phonetic knowledge, they cannot build correct utterances, choose precise words, or make themselves understood. At the same time, theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient. The teacher must create exercises that transform declarative knowledge into procedural ability. Repeated practice, variation across contexts, and communicative use gradually convert isolated abilities into oral competence. In this sense, speaking instruction is a process of moving from knowing rules, to using them consciously, to applying them fluently and appropriately in real interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2021).

The CEFR makes a similar distinction when it describes language users as social agents who mobilize linguistic resources to accomplish tasks. The goal is not perfect formal knowledge in isolation, but the ability to perform meaningful communicative actions in context (Council of Europe, 2001). Therefore, oral teaching in French should aim at the integrated development of linguistic accuracy, fluency, discourse organization, interactional ability, and self-monitoring.

Cognitive Mechanisms Underlying Speaking

Speaking is a complex mental activity supported by several cognitive mechanisms. Among the most important are memory, attention, anticipation, and executive control. Memory allows the learner to retain lexical items, retrieve grammatical structures, preserve the thematic thread of an utterance, and connect a current sentence with previous discourse. If memory is weak or overloaded, speech may become fragmented, logically disconnected, or grammatically incomplete. For this reason, the development of oral speech in French depends not only on language knowledge but also on working memory resources that help the speaker maintain and manipulate information during real-time production (Kormos, 2006; Levelt, 1989).

Attention is equally essential because it directs mental resources toward relevant aspects of speech. During oral production, the learner must attend simultaneously to content, grammar, vocabulary choice, pronunciation, the reaction of the listener, and the broader communicative goal. Attentional control influences whether a speaker can maintain coherence, notice errors, and adapt to conversational change. In classroom settings, poorly focused attention may lead learners to produce short, hesitant, or inaccurate speech even when they possess the necessary knowledge.

Anticipation or prediction is another important mechanism. Speakers often form hypotheses in advance about what they want to say, what vocabulary they will need, and how their interlocutor may respond. Likewise, listeners predict upcoming meanings and structures while processing speech. In second-language learning, this anticipatory function helps reduce processing load, making it easier to sustain interaction. When memory, attention, and anticipation work together, speech production becomes more efficient and more comprehensible. When one of these mechanisms is weak, communication becomes slower and more effortful.

Results. Inner Speech and External Speech

Psychology and psycholinguistics often distinguish between inner speech and external speech. Inner speech refers to silent verbal thought: the internal planning, conceptualization, and organization of what the speaker intends to express. External speech is the overt spoken realization of that thought. In foreign-language learning, the quality of external speech often depends on the quality of inner speech, because coherent and meaningful oral production usually begins with prior mental formulation (Zimnyaya, 1991; Leontiev, 1999).

This distinction has important methodological implications. If learners speak before they have formed a clear communicative intention, their speech is more likely to be illogical, fragmented, or overly dependent on literal translation from the first language. Many students learning French first formulate ideas in Uzbek, then attempt to translate those ideas into French, and only then articulate them. This extra layer of processing increases cognitive load and slows down oral production. As learners gain experience, however, they gradually move from translation-based production to more direct conceptualization in the target language.

For this reason, oral tasks should support the transition from inner speech to external speech. Planning activities, guided brainstorming, short silent preparation phases, and structured prompts can help learners organize content before speaking. At the same time, excessive reliance on preparation may reduce spontaneity. Effective pedagogy therefore

balances planned speech with opportunities for immediate interaction, helping students build both coherence and fluency.

Stages of Speech Production

Psycholinguistic research commonly describes speech production as a multi-stage process. The author's original text identifies three broad stages: planning what to say, transferring thought into linguistic form, and executing articulation. This general sequence corresponds closely to influential speech production models. Levelt (1989), for example, distinguishes conceptualization, formulation, and articulation, while later work in second-language speech production adapts these stages to the increased cognitive demands faced by L2 learners (Kormos, 2006).

At the planning stage, the speaker evaluates the speech situation, the interlocutor, and the communicative aim. The learner decides what information should be expressed and what type of utterance is appropriate. At the formulation stage, conceptual content is encoded as language: lexical items are selected, grammatical structures are assembled, phonological forms are activated, and word order is organized. At the articulation stage, the utterance is physically produced through speech organs, intonation, rhythm, and other phonetic features.

Zimnyaya (1991) also emphasizes the motivational dimension of speech activity. Before speaking, the learner must have a motive or need to express something. This is followed by intention formation and then by the linguistic realization of that intention. In actual classroom speech, these phases are often accompanied by pauses, hesitations, self-repair, and monitoring. Such features should not always be interpreted as failure. On the contrary, they may indicate that learners are actively managing the relationship between meaning and form.

Transfer and Interference in Uzbek Learners of French

One of the major psycholinguistic challenges in French oral development is the interaction between the first language and the target language. Similarities between languages may lead to positive transfer, while differences may create interference. For Uzbek learners of French, interference often appears in word order, grammatical gender, article use, adjective agreement, prepositions, and pronunciation patterns. Because Uzbek and French differ structurally in several of these areas, learners may transfer native-language habits into French speech, which can reduce accuracy and fluency.

Word order provides a clear example. Uzbek typically allows patterns that differ from the canonical French sentence structure, and this may affect the learner's ability to formulate utterances quickly in spoken French. Likewise, grammatical gender and agreement present a substantial challenge because they require forms that are absent or organized differently in

Uzbek. In oral production, these difficulties are intensified by time pressure: learners must make grammatical choices instantly while also attending to pronunciation and meaning.

French phonology introduces additional difficulties. Liaison, vowel quality, nasal vowels, stress patterns, and the relationship between written and spoken forms all increase the complexity of oral performance. As a result, the development of speaking skills in French may require more sustained guided practice than in languages whose structure is closer to the learner's linguistic background. This does not mean that achievement is unattainable; rather, it highlights the need for targeted phonetic, lexical, and grammatical support within communicative tasks (Kormos, 2006; Lightbown & Spada, 2021).

Discussion. Types of Oral Speech and Classroom Practice

The original draft distinguishes several forms of oral speech: consciously organized speech linked to communicative content and situation; imitative speech based on previously heard or read material; and memorized speech that may be only loosely connected to context. This classification remains pedagogically useful. Imitative and memorized speech can help learners build confidence, internalize patterns, and practice pronunciation at early stages. However, genuinely communicative speech requires more than repetition; it requires learners to connect linguistic means to intention, context, and audience.

Therefore, oral work in the French classroom should move gradually from repetition to meaningful production. Teachers may begin with listening and repetition, then proceed to substitution drills, guided dialogues, picture-based narration, information-gap tasks, and short monologues. Later stages should include role-play, problem-solving discussions, mini-presentations, interviews, and debates. Such tasks promote not only accuracy but also discourse organization, turn-taking, and interactional flexibility (Council of Europe, 2020; Saydaliyev, 2019).

Importantly, oral activities should be emotionally engaging. Classroom experience shows that material with emotional resonance is often remembered longer and motivates students to speak more willingly. When learners care about a topic, they are more likely to invest cognitive effort, retrieve vocabulary, and sustain communication. Motivation, therefore, should be treated not as an external add-on but as a central component of oral development.

Self-Monitoring, Motivation, and Learner Development

Many scholars have emphasized the importance of self-regulation in language learning. Jinkin, for example, is associated with the idea that successful language learning requires movement from teacher control to self-control. In oral speech this is particularly visible in self-monitoring: learners often pause, reformulate a sentence, test an alternative expression aloud,

or correct themselves during conversation. Such behavior is common among students specializing in French, especially when they produce monologic speech or attempt more complex utterances.

Self-monitoring should not be discouraged. Instead, teachers should help learners use it productively. If correction becomes obsessive, fluency suffers; if there is no monitoring at all, fossilized errors may persist. The pedagogical task is to develop balanced self-control: enough awareness to notice and repair serious problems, but enough confidence to continue speaking. This balance is closely tied to motivation. Learners are more willing to take risks and persist through difficulty when they perceive oral speech as meaningful, achievable, and relevant to their future goals.

The main motivational forces that drive students to speak French include the desire to communicate with speakers of the language, to access education and culture, to widen their worldview, and to achieve professional mobility. At the same time, social and moral expectations also shape motivation: society expects students to develop a certain level of competence, and students internalize these expectations in different ways. Effective teaching draws on both personal and social motives while creating a classroom climate in which speaking is safe, purposeful, and rewarding.

Conclusion. The development of oral speech in French is a multidimensional process in which linguistic knowledge, psycholinguistic mechanisms, and pedagogical conditions interact continuously. Speaking is not a simple output skill. It depends on listening, memory, attention, anticipation, inner speech, motivation, and self-monitoring. For this reason, the formation of oral proficiency requires more than explanation of rules; it requires carefully sequenced practice that transforms knowledge into skills and skills into communicative competence.

A psycholinguistic perspective clarifies why learners may struggle even when they know vocabulary and grammar. During oral production they must conceptualize meaning, encode it linguistically, articulate it accurately, and regulate their own performance in real time. For Uzbek learners of French, this process is further shaped by transfer and interference, especially in areas such as word order, gender, agreement, and pronunciation. These challenges make oral development demanding, but they also make methodological precision especially important.

In conclusion, successful teaching of oral French should combine rich listening input, structured speaking practice, emotionally engaging topics, opportunities for interaction, and pedagogical support for self-regulation. When these conditions are met, oral speech becomes not only a classroom exercise but also a genuine form of communication and intellectual development. Such an approach reflects both the psychological foundations of language

learning and the practical demands of foreign-language education in the contemporary classroom.

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