



## Contextual and associative conditionality of lexical retention in the speech activity of adults

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### Abstract

The article explores the contextual and associative factors that influence the retention of words in adult speech. Lexical retention refers to the ability to retain words in memory and reproduce them in speech later. The article emphasizes the importance of speech context, personal vocabulary, associative links, frequency of word use, and accumulated linguistic experience. It has been shown that a word is more likely to be preserved and actualized if it is used in a stable communication context, is associated with the speaker's personal or professional experiences, and has strong semantic connections with other words. It has also been noted that context and associations play a role in this process: context guides the choice of words, while associative connections help retrieve them from memory. The study of lexical retention has been found to be important for psycholinguistics, developmental linguistics, and the analysis of adult speech. The relevance of this study stems from the importance of understanding the speech patterns of mature individuals, whose vocabulary is already well-established. However, the processes of maintaining and updating their vocabulary continue to be influenced by context, associative links, and prior experience with language. In psycholinguistic research, vocabulary is seen not only as a collection of words but also as an integral part of an individual's lexicon, linked to memory, thought, and communication.

**Keywords:** lexical retention, speech activity, mature persons, individual vocabulary, context, associative connections, word reproduction, speech experience, psycholinguistics, age linguistics

### Relevance of the study

The relevance of this study stems from the importance of understanding the speech patterns of mature individuals, whose vocabulary is already well-established. However, the processes of maintaining and updating their vocabulary continue to be influenced by context, associative links, and prior experience with language. In psycholinguistic research, vocabulary is seen not only as a collection of words but also as an integral part of an individual's lexicon, linked to memory, thought, and communication.

A crucial aspect of this research is the examination of lexical retrieval, which refers to the ability to retrieve and reproduce words in speech. For older individuals, this process depends not only on the size of their vocabulary but also on the frequency of word usage, semantic significance, and connections to personal experiences and professional background. Context plays a significant role in this regard, as it assists in clarifying the meaning of words, selecting the appropriate lexical item, and integrating it into a sentence.

The associative factor is equally significant. Words in an individual's vocabulary are related in terms of

meaning, subject matter, emotional connotation, and personal experience. These connections facilitate faster vocabulary recall and maintain coherence in speech [7, p. 922].

Therefore, the topic of research is relevant because it enables us to view lexical retention as a multifaceted process that is influenced by context, the associative structure of the dictionary, and the accumulated speaking experience of adults. Investigating this issue is crucial for psycholinguistics, developmental linguistics, and research on speech production.

### **The purpose of the study**

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of contextual and associative factors in the retention and reproduction of lexical items in adult speech.

### **Materials and research methods**

The research materials consisted of scientific provisions from psycholinguistics, developmental linguistics, and the theory of speech activity that focused on individual vocabulary, word retention in memory, contextual usage of vocabulary, and associative links between words.

This paper employs methods such as theoretical analysis of academic literature, descriptive analysis, generalization, contextual analysis, and elements of the psycholinguistic approach to studying speech activity.

### **The results of the study**

Lexical retention refers to the ability of a person to remember and recall words and their meanings. This process is closely related to memory and the individual vocabulary of each person. In scientific literature, it is studied in relation to memory, the size and organization of a person's vocabulary, and the processes of comprehension and production of speech.

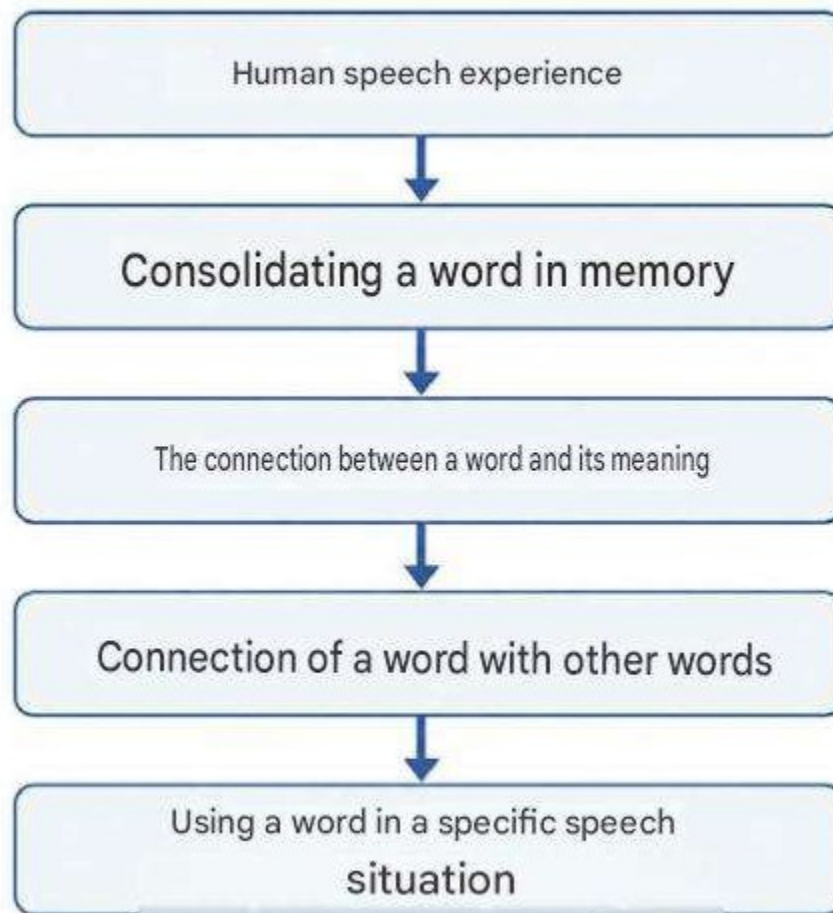
A word in a person's memory is not isolated; it is related to meaning, grammar, contexts of use, frequency of occurrence, and other related words. Psycholinguists emphasize the importance of an individual dictionary, which is organized as a network of connections between words and their meanings, rather than as a simple list. A person's speech experience, profession, daily interaction, and stable topics for conversation [8, p. 110] influence the preservation of vocabulary.

For mature people, the study of lexical retention is especially important. This point has accumulated speech experience, but the actualization of a desired word may depend on attention, memory, communication conditions, and the complexity of the task.

Studies of age dynamics in cognitive abilities show that different abilities peak at different ages. Some begin to decline earlier, while others remain stable or reach a high level in adulthood. It is important to consider these factors when analyzing speech, as lexical processes cannot be solely explained by age.

Research shows that age-related changes in cognitive functions manifest themselves in different ways. This suggests that vocabulary preservation is a complex process that is influenced not only by biological age but also by speech practice, frequency of use of words, semantic connections, and communication conditions. The work of Hardy and his colleagues also notes that healthy aging may be associated with difficulties in vocabulary processing, while syntactic organization may be preserved better [9].

To visualize the process of lexical retention, we can identify its main components as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The composition of lexical retention (developed by the author)

**Table 1.** Types of context and their role in lexical retention

Type of context	Which includes	How does it help to reproduce a word
Semantic context	The topic, the general meaning of the phrase, the meanings of neighboring words	Helps you choose a word by meaning
Grammatical context	Sentence structure, word form, word connection	It helps to identify the necessary part of speech and the form of the word.
Situational context	Communication environment, addressee, purpose of speech	Helps you choose the appropriate word.
Personal context	Experience, profession, familiar topics of communication	Strengthens the preservation of frequently used vocabulary

A source: author's development For mature people, context can serve as a supportive tool. If a word is related to a familiar topic or situation, it is easier to recall. Therefore, professional, everyday, and emotionally significant vocabulary is generally more stable than words that are rarely used and not associated with regular speech practice.

Studies on speech processing show that semantic context influences the understanding and recall of spoken information. Sun and colleagues' work notes that older adults may rely more heavily on semantic context

when processing speech, though the success of this approach depends on the task conditions and the quality of the spoken signal [10].

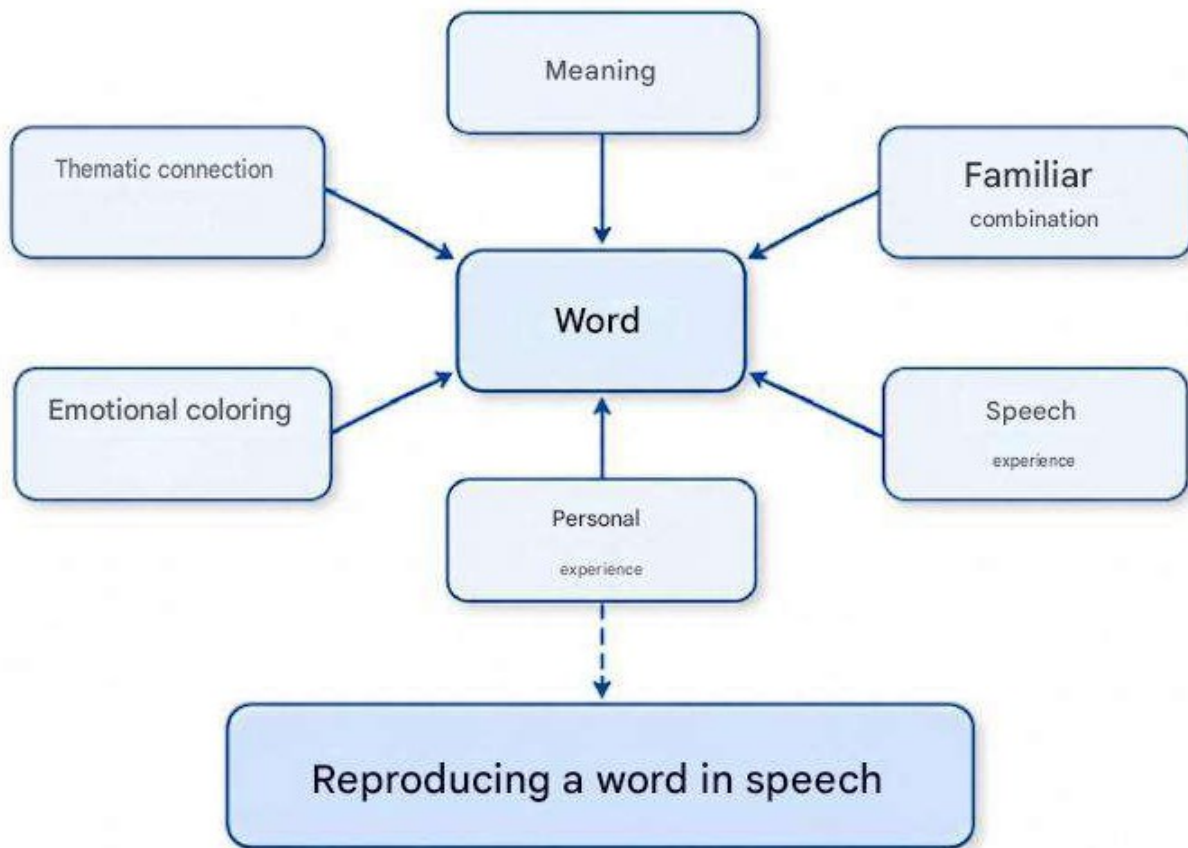
The associative conditioning of lexical retrieval is related to the fact that words are not stored and recalled in isolation, but through connections to other words and concepts. In spoken language, people do not access isolated words, but rather a network of semantic, thematic, and habitual associations. Therefore, when retrieving vocabulary, it is essential not only to understand the meaning of a word, but also the connections it has with other words, images, events, and topics.

In psycholinguistics, the experiment with free associations is used to study the connections between words [5, p. 101]. The subjects are offered a word, and they are asked to pronounce the first word that comes to their mind. These reactions are then used to create associative dictionaries [2, p. 55].

The direct associative dictionary lists the most common reactions for each word, while the reverse dictionary shows which words cause the same reactions. This allows us to understand not only the meanings of individual words, but also the connections between them in the minds of native speakers.

Associations can be different in nature. Some of them are related to the meaning of the word, for example, "a doctor in a hospital" or "a school teacher." Others are based on thematic similarities, for example, the phrase "heavy rain" is often used together. These associations are important for vocabulary memorization, as they help us to memorize words easier and faster [6, p. 23].

Figure 2 shows the associative connections for a word in a person's lexicon.



**Figure 2.** Associative connections of a word in an individual lexicon (developed by the author)

In mature individuals, the associative conditioning of lexical retrieval is closely linked to accumulated experience. Words that are frequently used in professional settings, family conversations, everyday interactions, and personal topics tend to have stronger associations in memory, making them easier to recall and produce in speech. In contrast, words that are less frequently employed and not associated with consistent communication contexts may become passive in the vocabulary and take longer to retrieve.

Both contextual and associative factors play a role in this process. The context serves as a guide for the word retrieval process, while associative links assist in selecting a specific lexical item from the individual’s mental dictionary. When a person finds themselves in a particular speaking situation, the topic at hand activates first, followed by the relevant words associated with that topic, ultimately leading to the selection of the most suitable word to express the intended thought.

For example, when discussing medicine, words related to treatment, doctors, diagnosis, hospitals, and examinations are activated. If someone has professional or personal experience in this area, these words are easier to recall. In this case, context and associations work together. Context limits the range of possible words that can be used, and associative connections help to quickly retrieve them from memory [3, p. 152].

**Table 2.** The combined action of context and associations

<b>Component</b>	<b>Main function</b>	<b>The result for speech activity</b>
Context	Defines the topic, situation, and purpose of the speech	Narrows down the range of possible words
Associative links	Activate related words and meanings	They help you find the right vocabulary faster.
Speech experience	Fixes frequent and significant words	Increases the stability of the dictionary
Repeated use	Maintains the active state of the word	Facilitates subsequent playback

A source: author’s development This interaction demonstrates that lexical retention is not solely dependent on rote memorization of words. Rather, a word is better retained in memory and more successfully reproduced when it is embedded in a meaningful context, connected to other words, and regularly used in conversation. This is particularly significant for adults, as their accumulated life and speaking experience enhance the role of familiar topics, stable associations, and habitual methods of expressing thoughts.

Therefore, contextual and associative elements form a unified framework for supporting lexical retention. The context assists in determining which word is appropriate in a specific situation, while associative connections assist in searching for and retrieving the word in the individual’s lexicon. Consequently, analyzing these elements allows for a more accurate description of the speech patterns of adults.

It is advisable to consider lexical retention not only as the preservation of words in memory, but also as a person’s ability to retrieve the necessary lexical units in a timely manner and use them in a specific context. In the speech of adults, it is important to take into account that a word may be stored in an individual’s vocabulary, but its ability to be reproduced depends on the specific requirements of the communication task. A person may understand the meaning of a word and recognize it when reading or hearing it, but they may have difficulty producing it or incorporating it into their own speech quickly.

The study of lexical retention should consider several indicators: the accuracy of word recall, the speed of retrieval, the nature of potential substitutions, and the relevance of usage in a given context. If a person can quickly and accurately name a word, it indicates that it is actively stored in their vocabulary. If they use a description, synonym, or related term in place of the exact word, it means that the meaning is preserved, but accessing the desired lexical form directly may be challenging. Therefore, when analyzing speech, it is essential to assess not only errors but also the methods of compensation [1, p. 24].

It is important to note the frequency of use of a word. Words that are frequently used in professional, everyday, or social settings tend to remain highly stable in one's vocabulary. In contrast, words that are rarely used in speech may become passive vocabulary, although they do not disappear from memory completely. Rather, they become less accessible during independent speech production. Thus, lexical retention depends not only on age but also on the frequency of usage, the diversity of communication, and the extent to which a person engages in various communicative situations.

An important aspect of analysis is the comparison between isolated and contextual reproduction of words. In an isolated task, a person has more difficulty retrieving the necessary lexical unit, as there are no contextual clues to help them. However, in context, the word is easier to remember, as the topic, grammar, and communication situation help narrow down the possible options. This leads us to the conclusion that context plays a supportive role in helping to maintain an active vocabulary.

Associative connections also contribute to the retention of words. The stronger the connection between a word and other words, themes, images, or personal experiences, the more likely it is that the word will be successfully recalled. In adulthood, these connections are often based on stable aspects of life, such as a person's profession, family, daily interactions, and social experiences. As a result, words that are associated with significant situations in a person's life are better preserved and updated more quickly in their speech.

## Conclusions

The study found that adults' vocabulary memorization is influenced not only by the size of their vocabulary, but also by the conditions in which they use it. Context plays a crucial role in helping people find the right word for a particular communication situation. Associative connections also help to ensure the search for words in a person's vocabulary. Words associated with frequent use, personal experience, and emotional significance are more likely to be retained. In addition, familiar communication topics contribute to the constant memorization of vocabulary. Thus, contextual and associative factors work together to promote vocabulary memorization and contribute to maintaining an active vocabulary throughout adulthood.

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