

**THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND HOW TO
BE TAUGHT**

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Abstract: Learning vocabulary is crucial in acquiring a foreign language, as understanding the meanings of new words is heavily emphasized in both literature and classrooms. Effective vocabulary teaching is central to language education and critically important for learners. Recent studies suggest that teaching vocabulary poses challenges because many educators lack confidence in best practices and struggle to know where to begin in prioritizing word acquisition (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008).

This article summarizes significant research on the importance of vocabulary and explores various techniques employed by English teachers in their instruction. Additionally, it presents personal perspectives on these issues.

Key words: Receptive, productive, vocabulary, contrast, gesture.

Аннотация: Изучение словарного запаса имеет решающее значение для овладения иностранным языком, поскольку пониманию значений новых слов уделяется большое внимание как в литературе, так и в классе. Эффективное преподавание словарного запаса занимает центральное место в языковом образовании и имеет решающее значение для учащихся. Недавние исследования показывают, что преподавание словарного запаса создает проблемы, поскольку многие преподаватели не уверены в передовых методах и не могут понять, с чего начать приоритизацию усвоения слов (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008).

В этой статье подводятся итоги важных исследований о важности словарного запаса и исследуются различные методы, используемые учителями английского языка в своем обучении. Кроме того, в нем представлены личные взгляды на эти вопросы.

Ключевые слова: Рецептивный, продуктивный, словарный запас, контраст, жест.

Introduction

Vocabulary, as one of the knowledge areas in language, plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language (Cameron, 2001). Harmon, Wood, & Keser, (2009) as well as Linse (2005) state that learners' vocabulary development is an important aspect of their language development. Although it has been neglected for a long time, researchers have increasingly been turning their attention to vocabulary e.g. Carter and McCarthy (1988), Nation (1990), Arnaud and Bejoint (1992), Huckin, Haynes and Coady (1995), Coady and Huckin (1997), Schmitt (1997, 2000) Read (1997).

Literature Review

The importance of learning vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication. Underscoring the

importance of vocabulary acquisition, Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” p. 55) Nation (2001) further describes the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and language use as complementary: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, conversely, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. The importance of vocabulary is demonstrated daily in and out the school. In classroom, the achieving students possess the most sufficient vocabulary. Researchers such as Laufer and Nation (1999), Maximo (2000), Read (2000), Gu (2003), Marion (2008) and Nation (2011) and others have realised that the acquisition of vocabulary is essential for successful second language use and plays an important role in the formation of complete spoken and written texts. In English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) learning vocabulary items plays a vital role in all language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2011). Rivers and Nunan (1991), furthermore, argue that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, we will be unable to use the structures and functions we may have learned for comprehensible communication.

Teaching vocabulary

Recent studies suggest that teaching vocabulary can be challenging because many educators lack confidence in best practices and struggle to establish effective instructional methods for word learning (Berne & Blachowicz, 2008). Mastering vocabulary is essential in language acquisition since languages are fundamentally built upon words (Thornbury, 2002). Communication between individuals hinges on vocabulary, underscoring its pivotal role in language learning. Teachers and students alike acknowledge that vocabulary acquisition is crucial in language education (Walters, 2004). Teaching vocabulary remains a focal point in the discourse on teaching English as a foreign language. During the teaching and learning process, educators often encounter various challenges. They must determine the most effective techniques to ensure satisfactory outcomes for students. Preparation is key; teachers need to equip themselves with diverse and contemporary strategies that engage and motivate students in the classroom. Teachers must also recognize that teaching vocabulary differs significantly from a student's native language and varies between teaching young learners and adults. Understanding the characteristics of their learners is crucial. Additionally, educators must select appropriate techniques and materials tailored to meet the goals of language education.

The Description of Vocabulary

1. The Definition of Vocabulary

Vocabulary can be defined as " words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)" (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009, p. 385). Hornby (1995) defines vocabulary as "the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings". While Ur (1998) states: "Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than just a single word: for example, post office, and mother-in-law, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. A useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary "items" rather than "words." In addition, Burns (1972) defines vocabulary as " the stock of words which is used by a person, class or profession. According to Zimmerman cited in Coady and Huckin (1998) 'vocabulary is central to language and of critical importance to the typical language learning. Furthermore, Diamond and Gutlohn (2006) in www.readingrockets.org/article state that vocabulary is the knowledge of

words and word meanings."From the definitions above, it can be concluded that vocabulary is the total number of words that are needed to communicate ideas and express the speakers' meaning. That is the reason why it is important to learn vocabulary.

a. Receptive Vocabulary

Receptive vocabulary is words that learners recognize and understand when they are used in context, but which they cannot produce. It is vocabulary that learners recognize when they see or meet in reading text but do not use it in speaking and writing (Stuart Webb, 2009).

b. Productive Vocabulary

Productive vocabulary is the words that the learners understand and can pronounce correctly and use constructively in speaking and writing. It involves what is needed for receptive vocabulary plus the ability to speak or write at the appropriate time. Therefore, productive vocabulary can be addressed as an active process, because the learners can produce the words to express their thoughts to others (Stuart Webb, 2005).

The techniques in teaching vocabulary

When it comes to teaching vocabulary, there are various techniques that English teachers should keep in mind when introducing new words or phrases to their students. It's essential for teachers to ensure that students not only learn but also retain new vocabulary through practice and regular review. The selection of techniques depends on factors such as the content being taught, available class time, and the relevance of the vocabulary to the learners' needs (Takač, 2008). These factors influence why teachers choose specific methods for presenting vocabulary. Typically, when introducing a new vocabulary item, teachers combine multiple techniques rather than relying solely on one approach. It's recommended that teachers vary their planned vocabulary presentations as much as possible (Pinter, 2006). Here are some techniques for teaching vocabulary, as outlined by Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (1992):

Drawing

Objects can either be drawn on the blackboard or drawn on flash cards. The latter can be used again and again in different contexts if they are made with cards and covered in plastic. They can help young learners easily understand and realize the main points that they have learned in the classroom.

Using Illustrations and Pictures

Pictures connect students' prior knowledge to a new story, and in the process, help them learn new words. There are plenty of vocabularies that can be introduced by using illustrations or pictures. They are excellent means of making the meaning of unknown words clear. They should be used as often as possible. The list of pictures includes: posters, flashcards, wall charts, magazine pictures, board drawings, stick figures and photographs. Pictures for vocabulary teaching come from many sources. Apart from those drawn by the teacher or students, they are sets of colourful pictures intended for schools. Pictures cut out of newspapers and magazines are very useful as well. Nowadays many readers, vocabulary books and coursebooks contain a vast number of attractive pictures that present the meaning of basic words. The teacher can use learning materials provided by the school. They can also make their own visual aids or use pictures from magazines. Visual support helps learners understand the meaning and helps to make the word more memorable.

Contrast

Some words are easily explained to learners by contrasting it with its opposite, for instance, the word "good" contrasted with the word "bad". But some words are not. It is almost impossible to contrast the words whose opposite is the gradable one. When the word "white" is contrasted with the word "black", there is an "in between" word "grey". Furthermore, verb "contrast" means to show a difference, like photos that reveal how much weight someone lost by contrasting the "before" and "after" shots. Many more studies have also shown that vocabulary is best acquired if it is similar to what is already learnt (e.g. Rudska et al., 1982, 1985), it is not surprising that learning synonyms is a way to expand our vocabulary. Learning about synonyms is important also because this is how dictionaries are organised.

Guessing from Context

Guessing from context as a way of dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary in unedited selections has been suggested widely by L1 and L2 reading specialists (Dubin, 1993). Nation and Coady (1988) claim that there are two types of contexts. The first type is the context within the text, which includes morphological, semantic and syntactic information in a specific text, while the second one is the general context, or non-textual context, which is the background knowledge the reader has about the subjects being read. Williams (1985) agrees with Nation and Coady in considering the specific context as "the other words and sentences that surround that word.... it follows that other words in the context of the unfamiliar word often 'throw light on' its meaning. These other words can be found in the sentence containing the unknown word or other sentences beyond the sentence of the unknown item. Similarly, McCarthy (1988) sees context as within the text itself i.e. the morphological, syntactic, and discourse information, which can be classified and described in terms of general features. Learning from context not only includes learning from extensive reading, but also learning from taking part in a conversation, and learning from listening to stories, films, television or the radio (Nation, 2001). In order to activate guessing in a written or spoken text, there should be four elements available: the reader, the text, unknown words, and clues in the text including some knowledge about guessing. The absence of one of these elements may affect the learner's ability to guess. Furthermore, this technique encourages learners to take risks and guess the meanings of words they do not know as much as possible. This will help them build up their self-confidence so that they can work out the meanings of words when they are on their own. There are many clues learners can use to establish meanings for themselves, such as illustrations, similarity of spelling or sound in the mother tongue, and general knowledge (Walters, 2004)

Conclusion

This work emphasizes the crucial role of vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning, a topic that gained significant attention from researchers starting in the 1980s after years of relative neglect. Lexical knowledge is essential for developing communicative competence and mastering a second or foreign language; inadequate vocabulary hinders learning progress. The article reviews current trends in teaching vocabulary, exploring the diverse techniques employed by ESL/EFL teachers. Before introducing vocabulary meaning or form, teachers must consider factors such as the type of vocabulary, students' proficiency levels, their individual characteristics, and the effectiveness of techniques for learning outcomes. Age, educational level, and English proficiency of students can significantly influence their learning process, prompting teachers to tailor their approaches accordingly. Furthermore, educators should equip students with effective vocabulary learning strategies, ensuring they encounter words repeatedly and in varied contexts to enhance retention and comprehension.

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