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Vocabulary learning can be fun

Abstract. Vocabulary acquisition is crucial to second language acquisition. However, learning vocabulary is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process. This paper first discusses problems learners have learning vocabulary and offers some guidelines. It introduces language learning strategies that make vocabulary learning interesting and easy for learners. It also familiarizes teachers with useful techniques and activities for presentation and fun games for practice and production. Ideas and viewpoints put forward by distinguished scholars such as Baker, Ausuble, Uberman, Thompson, Carter, Moras, Schmitt, Richards, Celce-Murcia, Chastain are utilized to substantiate the arguments

Key words: vocabulary, attitude, input, output, barriers, mnemonics, denotation, connotation, collocation, consolidation

Introduction

Learning a foreign or second language at intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency involves the acquisition of thousands of words. Language learners look for effective ways to increase opportunities for retaining new words in long-term memory, but forgetting is a common problem. Language learners often complain that they forget new words soon after learning them.

The importance of vocabulary learning also poses some challenges for teachers. They like to know in what ways instructional programs might foster the acquisition of so many words. It is noteworthy that in foreign language learning, formal instruction is the primary source of input and consequently can be the source of much misunderstanding and wasted effort. Therefore, special attention must be given to presenting, practicing, and producing new vocabulary items.

The purpose of this study is to present practical vocabulary learning strategies that can help learners and influential teaching techniques and activities, which are of help to the teachers.

Research questions

1. What are some barriers to learning vocabulary?
2. How can we overcome them?

Some of the Students' Vocabulary Learning Problems

Vocabulary learning problems may be barriers to successful language learning. Therefore, solving these problems may be of great help to both students and teachers. If we want to provide guidelines and solve vocabulary acquisition problems, it is necessary to discover those problems and perceive their nature.

Misconceptions

Misconceptions — wrong assumption or understanding — are among the problems that have serious learning consequences in the long run. Learners often have misconceptions concerning the process and strategies for learning the elements of language such as the lexicon. For example, Iranian learners are often confused when English speakers refer to two or three types of cooking vessels using the word *pot* while Iranians have different names for them. Farjami (2001) proposed Misconception Analysis for dealing with language learning problems. It involves discovering and understanding misunderstandings and uncovering false

assumptions. One seemingly trivial misunderstanding may have serious learning consequences in the long run; therefore, teachers should use Misconception Analysis at different points in their teaching process.

There are different ways of discovering students' misunderstandings. The teachers' observations can provide a rich source of information about students' misunderstandings. Tests can also give some ideas about misunderstandings and illusions. Students' problems may be of two types: those that arise from lack of knowledge or ability, and those that arise from misunderstanding. Of course, the teacher should differentiate between these two types of problems. In the former case, the teacher should provide affirmative instruction, that is, describe the item in terms of what it is, while in the latter case s/he should uncover false assumptions and describe the item in terms of what it is not or negative instruction. (Farjami, 2001)

Rote Learning

Forgetting is another important problem. Most of the students complain that they forget words soon after learning them. Why does forgetting take place? In order to answer this question, it is beneficial to present Meaningful Learning Theory. David Ausubel (1968, in Brown 2000) differentiated between meaningful and rote learning. Rote learning involves the mental storage of items having little or no association with existing cognitive structure; it is the process of acquiring material as discrete and relatively isolated entities. Meaningful learning, on the other hand, may be described as a process of relating the new material to relevant entities in cognitive structure.

The importance of the distinction between rote and meaningful learning becomes obvious when we think of efficiency of the two kinds of learning in terms of retention, or long term memory. It is believed that materials learned by rote are forgotten easily, while meaningfully learned materials are more efficiently retained. In the case of meaningful

learning, forgetting takes place in a much more intentional and purposeful manner, that is, according to Brown (2000) forgetting is systematic. It is the elimination of unnecessary materials and a clearing of the way for more material to enter the cognitive field.

Therefore, we should clarify our statement and say that one of the students' problems may be rote learning of the vocabulary, not forgetting. Learners should have a meaningful learning set whereby they can relate the new learning task to what they already know. The following sections deal with meaningful learning and meaningful teaching of new vocabulary items.

Dictionary Use

FL learners seldom have access to native speakers of the target language; therefore, a dictionary has the status of a little god to these learners. FLLs often do not know which dictionaries they should use, monolingual, bilingual, or bilingualised dictionaries. Another important point is that information that should be checked in a dictionary. When encountering a new word, some learners only check the first meaning that can be found for a word. Checking only the first sense may be of little use to learners and it sometimes misleads them. This paper presents some guidelines regarding dictionary use that may solve some learner problems in this area.

Lack of Sufficient Input

Another problem that impedes efficient vocabulary learning is lack of exposure to the foreign language. The major sources of input for foreign language learners are the teacher and the textbooks. These sources of input are not sufficient to guarantee successful language learning or at least vocabulary acquisition. We have not been taught the majority of words that we know. It is believed that beyond a certain level of proficiency in a second language, vocabulary learning is more likely to be mainly implicit through reading or listening (Carter, 2002). Implicit or incidental vocabulary learning occurs when the mind is focused elsewhere,

such as on understanding a text or using language for communication purposes. Multiple

exposure is important for incidental learning, but a common problem facing language

learners is lack of such exposure. A good way to combat this problem is to expose students to

extensive reading, in which reading is done consistently over a period of time. According to

Celce-Marcia (2001) extensive reading is the practice of reading a large amount of text for

extended periods of time. For beginning students, graded readers will probably give the best

access to a large amount of input. For intermediate students, it is appropriate to read

numerous authentic texts. These texts should focus on the same topic so that the texts will

provide repeated exposure to specific words. Advanced students should be encouraged to

read a wide variety of authentic texts. Exposure to a wide variety of authentic texts is

important because meeting a word in different contexts expands what is known about it and

consolidates it in memory. Celce-Marcia (2001)

Lack of Output

Output also serves an important role in second language acquisition. Krashen (1997, in

Brown 2000) maintained that in the language classroom output is too scarce to make any

important impact on language development. On the other hand, Swain and Lapkin (1995, in

Brown 2000) offered convincing evidence that their **output hypothesis** was at least at least as

significant as input in explaining learner success. If learners do not use new words in

speaking or writing, lack of production may result in forgetting. Learners should seek

opportunities to use words, which they have already been learned inside or outside of the

classroom.

Memory

Often the difference between a successful and unsuccessful language learner has to do with

memory. Memory plays an important role in learning a new language. Thus, the sort of

remembering has a place too. We store ideas in our mind on a short-term or long-term basis; our aim in language learning is to move things into our long-term memory, ready to use.

Sadly, forgetting is part of the process of sorting and trying to retrieve items from our memory. Plenty is forgotten immediately after it has been filed, but we can replace the items in our memory. Learners forget things because some factors affect their memory and because they have not learned helpful ways of remembering. Below is a list of factors that affect our memory (based on Lewis 1999).

A. Attitudes

Students often say, "I can't learn the vocabulary lists. I've always had a bad memory." Having negative attitude towards our memory ability can make a new language more difficult to remember. Our attitude towards the language, speakers, and a particular lesson also affect our memory. As Brown (2000) put it,

> Attitudes … develop early in childhood and are the results of parents' and peers' attitudes, of contact with people who are different in any number of ways …. These attitudes form a part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture in which one is living (p, 180).

Brown believes that positive attitudes toward self, the native language group, and the target language group enhance proficiency and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation.

B. Time

The time spent trying to remember is an obvious factor in whether or not things stick. If the time is spent in ways that really do help memory, then the results are pleasing. Long hours of study may not be of help to learners. Spacing out the learning is an important factor. Some people can concentrate for longer than others, some days are hotter than others, some information is harder to remember, and so on.

C. Depth of processing

Psychologists believe that processing new lexical information more elaborately will lead to a better retention than if it had been processed less elaborately. Yet the concepts of deep processing or elaboration need to be formalized and made operational. In an attempt to translate and formalize these concepts, Hulstijn and Laufer (2001) developed the Involvement Load Hypothesis for L2 vocabulary learning. Involvement load hypothesis is based on the notion that retention of unfamiliar words is, generally, conditional upon the degree of involvement in processing these words. They proposed a motivational cognitive construct of involvement, consisting of three basic components, need, search, and evaluation.

They suggested two degrees of prominence for need: moderate and strong. They supposed that need is moderate when it is imposed by an external agent, when the teacher asks students to use a word in a sentence. Need is strong when it is intrinsically motivated, that is, self-imposed by the learners, for instance, when learners decide to look up a word in an L1- L2 dictionary when writing a composition.

Search is the attempt to find the meaning of an unknown L2 word or the attempt to find the L2 translation of an L1 word by consulting a dictionary or another authority like a teacher. This leads to evaluation, the comparison of a given word with other words, a specific meaning of a word with its other meanings, or comparing the word with other words in order to assess whether a word fits its context. Likewise, two degrees of prominence were suggested for evaluation, moderate and strong. Moderate evaluation refers to recognizing differences between words, or differences between several senses of a word in a given context. Strong evaluation entails a decision as to how additional words will combine the new word in an original sentence or text.

The combination of factors with their degrees of prominence constitutes involvement load. Hulstijn and laufer (2001) proposed an involvement index. The absence of a factor is

marked as 0, a moderate presence of a factor as 1, and a strong presence as 2. As an examples, learners are asked to write original sentences with some new words translated or explained by the teacher. The task induces a moderate need (imposed by the teacher), no search (the words are glossed) and strong evaluation because the new words are evaluated against suitable collocations in learner-generated context. The involvement index of this task is 3.

An experiment done by these researchers fully supports the Involvement Load Hypothesis. The results showed that words processed with higher involvement load are retained better than words processed with lower involvement load.

Teachers could design tasks inducing high involvement load for words that are important for learners, or words which create special learning difficulties, such as false cognates, idioms, and other problematic words. Tasks with a lower involvement load, on the other hand, may be sufficient for easy words.

Techniques for remembering

Since learners need to acquire thousands of words to become competent speakers of the target language, it is a good idea to develop a plan for learning new words everyday. Some learners are very interested in learning vocabulary in the foreign language but they do not know how, as they are not aware of available vocabulary learning strategies that can be of great help to them. Lack of knowledge regarding effective ways of learning vocabulary may result in rote learning and forgetting. The way learners store the items learned can also contribute to their success in retrieving them when needed. Most learners simply list the items learnt in chronological order, indicating meaning with translation. This system is far from helpful, as items are de-contextualised, encouraging students to over-generalise in using them. It does not allow for additions and refinements, nor does it indicate pronunciation.

Vocabulary learning strategies should include strategies for using as well as simply knowing a word. Each strategy a learner uses will determine to a large extent how well a new word is learned. Gu (2003) argued that the choice, use, and effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies depend on the tasks, the learner, and the learning context. Numerous studies have been conducted comparing the retention effects of different vocabulary strategies. With the large amount of recent research on vocabulary acquisition, a person-task-context-strategy perspective Gu (2003) can be employed to present various strategies and their usefulness.

Task-dependent vocabulary learning strategies

Guessing

Studies have provided evidence showing that learners can learn vocabulary incidentally through repeated exposure. However, EFL/ESL studies suggest that learners are often unable to guess the meaning of an unknown word from a text. L2 learners in general, due to their inadequate grasp of target language skills, are less effective guessers and less effective incidental learners of English vocabulary. Moreover, beginning L2 learners who do not have the basic language skills in the target language to make sense of the new words and their contexts have much more trouble learning vocabulary incidentally.

However, this strategy seems to be more effective for intermediate to advanced L2 learners who already have at least a basic grasp of the language skills such as reading and listening. Even for these learners, the usefulness of incidental learning does not exclude the use of intentional learning strategies.

Dictionary use

Amongst the first things a foreign language student purchases is a dictionary, and most learners carry their dictionary around. Many teachers and learners want to know whether dictionaries are helpful and how dictionaries can best be used. Another important question

that has received the most attention is which approach is better, using a dictionary or simply guessing from context?

Knight (1994, in Gu 2003) discovered that while incidental vocabulary learning through contextual guessing did take place, those who used a dictionary as well as guessed through context not only learned more words immediately after reading but also remembered more after two weeks.

Reviewing research about the choice between bilingual and monolingual dictionaries reveals that a combination of good features of both types of dictionaries is the best choice. There has been considerable interest in the last twenty years in so called "new bilingualised compromise dictionaries". These hybrid dictionaries provide translation in addition to the good features of monolingual dictionaries such as full semantic, grammatical, and stylistic information, examples, and usage notes that are not available in traditional bilingual dictionaries.

Recent developments in computers have triggered a new line of interest in electronic dictionaries (E-dictionaries). Online vocabulary glosses offer the learner a quick access to the information a student needs, which in turn might encourage more dictionary use. Like traditional dictionaries, electronic dictionaries that contain little more than L1 equivalents are not quite helpful.

Note- taking

Setting up vocabulary note cards can be an aid in independent learning. According to Baker (2003), preparing personal pocket word cards is a useful way of consolidating new words. The teacher can help students write their own cards. The teacher asks students to cut out small cards from bits of scrap paper or card from used packaging. Then, students choose the words they want to learn, from about five to ten words. On one side of the card, the word is

written in English and on the other side of the card are the definition of the word, a sentence using the word, the grammar of the word, its pronunciation, and any synonyms.

Learners can organize colored cards according to categories they find useful. Color coding according to the place where the words are found can also help memory, for example, blue for the textbook, green for computer-lab programs.

Analyzing vocabulary

If learners pay careful attention to the word' pronunciation, orthography, grammatical category, meaning and semantic relations to other words, they are more likely to retain the word than if they pay attention to only one or two of the above word properties (Hulstijn and Laufer, 2001) For example, consider the word *breathe/breath* as analyzed by Susan Barduhn (2002):

single word: breath (noun)   - breathe (verb)

collocations: to breathe heavily

                         breathe deeply

                         to breathe unevenly

                         bad breath

                         fresh breath

phrase: out of breath

fixed expressions: It took my breath away.

                         She is like a breath of fresh air.

Make associations

One popular method that language learners use involves making associations. This triggers the associative networks of the memory in various ways. Celce-Marcia (2001) states "words appear to be organized into semantically related sets in the mind, and thus the associations attached to a word will affect the way that it is stored" (p. 288). Readers will recall that it was

a hot afternoon when they read a particular poem and from there they remember some of the words they encountered for the first time in that poem. It seems that even seemingly irrelevant details can be useful.

Mnemonics:

Mnemonics work by developing retrieval plan during encoding so that a word can be recalled through verbal and visual clues. Learners need to test different kinds of mnemonic techniques to see which ones work best for them. The following classification is based on Thompson (2002).

a.   The keyword method (linguistic mnemonics)

The key-word method of learning new words involves two stages: in the first stage, the learner selects a native-language word or phrase, preferably a concrete one (the key word) that is acoustically similar to the FL word. This stage is referred to as the acoustic link. For example, native Persian speakers could learn that the English word *slum* sounds like the Persian word [اسلام] (the key word). This stage is referred to as the acoustic link. In the second stage, the learner creates a mental image that associates the key word referent with the native language translation of the FL word. This second stage is referred to as the imagery link. Students imagine [مناطق فقیر نشین] and [اسلام] doing something together, for example [اسلام در مناطق فقیر نشین گسترش یافت]. This interactive image will help students to remember that the English word *slum* which sounds like the Persian word [اسلام] means [مناطق فقیر نشین]

b.   Pictures and visualization (Visual Mnemonics)

Learners can pair pictures with the words they need to learn. Flashcards with pictures or symbols them are a good way of memorizing words. As soon as a one sees a particular picture. they remember the word that goes with it. Sometimes instead of using real pictures, learners visualize the word they need to remember.

Grouping

Learners can group the words they need to remember by color, size, function, likes/dislikes, good/bad, or any other features that makes sense to them. Psychologically if the material to be memorized is organized in some fashion, learners can learn the material better.

Elaborating

Learners can relate the new words to others. For example, if they want to remember the foreign language word *cat*, they can think of *dog* or they can think of the superordinate term *animal*.

The narrative chain

Linking words in a list together to make a sentence or a story creates a firmer connection between the new words and those already stored in memory. Using the words and associating them with each other can do this.

Semantic mapping

Arranging words into a diagram can also be helpful. Write a key word at the top and relate words as branches linked to the key word and to each other. This technique can also be practiced in a group.

Word formation

It is said that knowledge of form can assist in vocabulary development. For example, knowledge of stems helps students predict or guess what a word means, explain why a word is spelt the way it is, and remember the word by knowing how its current meaning evolved from its metaphorical origins. (Kelly, 1991).

Lexical chunks

Lexis, that is, different kinds of multi-word chunks, is basic to communication. Chunks include collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions and idioms, which according to Lewis (1997) occupy a crucial role in facilitating language production and are the key to fluency.

Therefore it is beneficial for language learners to gain exposure to lexical chunks in order to begin the process of internalization. According to Schmitt (2000), the mind stores and processes lexical chunk as individual wholes. By storing a number of frequently-needed chunks as whole units, there is less demand on cognitive capacity because the lexical chunks are ready to use and require little or no additional processing.

Review and spaced practice

Unlike computers, human beings tend to forget over time. Therefore, learners should review regularly previously learned material. Also learners should have short and frequent study periods. Spaced practice leads to better long –term recall.

Real-life practice

Learners must have participation in real life communicative situations during language training. They should seek out as many opportunities for real-life practice as they can. Learners should try to use the material that they have learned in real life situations.

Person-dependent vocabulary learning strategies

Methods of evaluating the task requirements and deploying a cognitive strategy are often dependent more on the learner than on the tasks. The good learners are found to be more aware of what they can learn about new words, pay more attention to collocation and spelling, and are more conscious of contextual learning. By contrast, poor learners don't use the dictionary and almost always ignore unknown words. They are passive in learning and take words as discrete items, unrelated to previously learned words (Ahmed 1989). Weak pupils tend to focus on the problem word and ignore the context; their knowledge of the world is more restricted; they have difficulty integrating knowledge from different sources; and they have difficulty generalizing from words they have already learned to slightly different new words. (Schouten-Van Parreren, 1989)

Good learners seem to be those who initiate their own learning, selectively attend to words of their own choice, try to remember these words by using influential strategies, and seek opportunities to use them.

Learning context

Different learning contexts may relate to learners, tasks, and vocabulary learning strategies. Personal styles of learning, for example, have been shown to be very much related to cultural differences (Nelson, 1995. The educational and cultural traditions, the availability of input and output opportunities, and the classroom environment may have a role in vocabulary learning.

Formal Instruction

In foreign language learning, formal instruction is the primary source of input and consequently can be the source of much misunderstanding and wasted effort. Teachers should be careful not to impose additional problems on the students. The goals of vocabulary teaching must be more than simply covering a certain number of words on a word list. Teachers must use teaching techniques that can help realise this global concept of what it means to know a lexical item. And they must also go beyond that, giving learner opportunities to use the items learnt and also helping them to use effective written storage systems.

Many teachers suppose that inferences learners make about word meaning when they come across unknown words in a text is an important process in learning new vocabulary. However, care should be taken not to push students to rely too much on context to learn the meanings of new words. Although context is important in providing frequent exposure and a framework for consolidating and reinforcing vocabulary knowledge, its usefulness in generating new knowledge and learning words based on a single exposure is open to

question. Teachers should devote part of the class time to identifying, defining, and explaining the new words to the students, that is, explicit vocabulary learning (Nassaji **)

In explicit vocabulary learning students engage in activities that focus attention on vocabulary. Teachers have an important role in explicit vocabulary learning. They should discover students' problems and decide on effective ways of teaching vocabulary in order to pave the way for learning to take place. Effective methods help students learn vocabulary items in a foreign language and use them in communicating in that language. In order to lessen students' misunderstandings concerning lexicon, teachers can analyze the new words and provide students with the following information:

What does knowing a word involve?

A key question asked by teachers and researchers is, "what does it mean to learn a word?" "Does it mean knowing only the translation equivalent of the word?" In an attempt to answer this question Carter (2002) stated that "knowing a word involves knowing: its spoken and written contexts of use; its patterns with words of related meaning as well as with its collocational partners; its syntactic, pragmatic and discourse patterns." Ur (1996) suggested that the teacher should provide the following information for students:

1. Form: Suppose we want to teach from one of the books where a vocabulary lesson consists of a list of words, or there is a list of vocabulary as a pre-reading activity. The teacher can pronounce words one by one and the students look at them. There is no harm in having the students say each word after the teacher says it. Hearing the word, seeing it, and saying it may be aids to learning. But they are only a part of learning process, and the teacher should deal with this stage quickly (Allen, 1983). The teacher should also show the spelling of the new words by writing the words clearly on the board and having students practice them.

2. Grammar: It is important to provide learners with information about the grammar of a word. For example, when teaching a verb, we must also give its past and past participial form if it is irregular. Similarly, when teaching a noun, we should provide students with information about whether a word is countable or uncountable, its plural form, if it is irregular, information regarding different forms of a word, the preposition that collocates with the word, etc. For example,: the verb "Give"

Present   Past   PP

Give   Gave   Given

Give something to somebody: He gave the book <u>to</u> Mary.

Give somebody something: He gave Mary the book.

3. Collocation: Students should also know the collocations that occur with the new word with high frequency. Lewis (1997), who maintains, "instead of words, we consciously try to think of collocations, and to present these in expressions" best reflects the importance of collocations. He popularized an approach to EFL/ESL teaching which is called the Lexical Approach, which derived from the belief that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, or some other units of planning and teaching, but lexis, that is, words and word combinations (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Instruction in this approach focuses on relatively fixed expressions that occur frequently in spoken language, such as, *I'm sorry*, and *that will never happen to me*. The idea is that fluency is based on the acquisition of a large store of fixed and semi-fixed, prefabricated items. (Lewis, 1997) It is thus beneficial for language learners to gain exposure to lexical chunks in order to begin the process of internalization.

Collocational associations can also act as memory aids. It has been proved that vocabulary is best-learned in context and words that are naturally associated in a text are more easily learned than those having no such associations. According to Celce-Marcia

(2001), collocations assist the learner in committing new words to memory and aid in defining the semantic area of a word. For example, *rancid* co-occurs with *butter, lard, oil, salad dressing*; all of them have in common the semantic feature *oily* as part of their base. Teachers can present characteristics of restricted collocational clusters in contexts in which they naturally occur. They should also point out the semantic links among them.

Concerning syntax, collocations fall into two categories, grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. Grammatical collocations are those in which a noun, verb, or adjective frequently co-occurs with a grammatical item, usually a preposition. For example, *account for*, *pay attention to*, and *by accident*. Lexical collocations do not contain grammatical words, but consist of combinations of full lexical items, i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, for example, *spend money*, *rancid butter*, *deeply absorbed*.

Idioms also commonly occur in English, especially in informal conversational situations and should not be ignored in vocabulary studies. Teachers can introduce idioms in authentic texts, such as daily newspaper cartoons, dialogues from modern drama, comic strips, and so on.

Lexical phrases are another kind of multiword unit. Some are completely fixed expressions such as *by the way, how do you do?* Others are relatively fixed phrases that have a basic frame with slots for various fillers. For example, *the-----er X, the --------er Y; the higher the mountain the higher the climb. The longer you wait, the sleepier you get.* Lexical phrases differ from idioms and other ordinary collocations in that each is associated with a particular discourse function, such as greeting, expressing time, relationships among ideas, or condition. Lexical phrases are very beneficial for teaching conversation and other types of discourse.

4. Aspects of Meaning (1): denotation, connotation, and appropriateness

The denotation of a word is primarily what it refers to in the real world, for example, *dog* denotes a kind of animal. The associations, or positive or negative feelings a word evokes, which may or may not be indicated in a dictionary, are its connotations. The word *dog*, for example, as understood by most British people, has positive connotations of friendship and loyalty. A more subtle aspect of meaning that often needs to be taught is whether a particular item is the appropriate one to use in a certain context or not. Thus it is useful for a learner to know that a certain word is very common, or relatively rare, or taboo in polite conversation, tends to be used in writing but not in speech, is more suitable for formal than informal discourse, or belongs to a certain dialect.

5. Word formation: Vocabulary items, whether one word or multi-word, can often be broken down into their component bits. Exactly how these bits are put together is another piece of useful information. We can teach the common prefixes and suffixes; this will help learners guess the meanings of words like submarine, careless, unusual, and, etc. Some teachers claim to have great success by teaching students some of the more common Greek and Latin roots to be found in English. When these are combined with knowledge of the most common prefixes and suffixes it may be possible to work out the meaning of a large number of derived words.

There are several aspects of Lexis that need to be taken into account when teaching vocabulary. The list below is based on the work of Gairns and Redman (1986, in Moras 2001):

✓ **Boundaries between conceptual meanings**: knowing not only what Lexis refers to, but also where the boundaries are that separate it from words of related meaning (e.g. cup, mug, and bowl).

✓ **Polysemy:** distinguishing between the various meaning of a single word form with several and closely related meanings (head: of a person, of a pin, of an organisation).

✓ **Homonymy***:* distinguishing between the various meaning of a single word form which has several meanings which are NOT closely related (e.g. a file: used to put papers in or a tool).

✓ **Homophony***:* understanding words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings (e.g. flour, flower).

✓ **Style, register, dialect***:* Being able to distinguish between different levels of formality, the effect of different contexts and topics, as well as differences in geographical variation.

✓ **Translation***:* awareness of certain differences and similarities between the native and the foreign language (e.g. false cognates).

Stages of Teaching Vocabulary

According to Baker (2003) teaching vocabulary has different stages. First the teacher conveys the pronunciation and meaning of the new vocabulary item (Presentation). Second, the teacher checks that the student has understood properly (Practice). Third, the teacher consolidates and try to get the students to relate the word to their personal experience, and use it in context (Production).

Presentation techniques

At the presentation stage of the lesson, the teachers should do their best to introduce the new vocabulary items through effective presentation techniques. The choice between these techniques among others depends on the vocabulary items, level of the students, and the number of the students. Gairns and Redman (1986, in Uberman 1998) suggested the following types of vocabulary presentation techniques.

1. Visual techniques: visual aids help learners remember vocabulary items better by triggering visual memory, which is helpful with vocabulary retention. Doff (1990)

suggested some ways of showing the meaning of new words by using visual aids. One way of showing the meaning of new words is by simply pointing at them and saying, "Look, this is a *watch"*. Anything that is already in the classroom or can be brought into the classroom like furniture, clothing, food, etc can be presented in this way. Sometimes, we can show the meaning of a word by showing a picture or drawing a picture on the board. We can show the meaning of action words or some adjectives by miming and using actions and facial expressions. Those words that can be taught in this way include most action verbs (walk, stand, open) or some adjectives (happy, angry, sad).

2. Verbal explanation: this pertains to the use of examples, situations, synonyms, antonyms, definitions, and so on. If the teacher wants to use examples, it is important that new vocabulary items be presented in contexts rich enough to provide clues to meaning and that students be given multiple exposure to items they should learn. It is not necessary to give a complicated explanation; the meaning can be shown by simple sentences. A good example should contain enough information to show the meaning of the word to someone who doesn't know it clearly. We use this method to show the meaning of abstract words. For example: the teacher wants to present "Lazy":

> "Some people work hard. Other people don't work hard. They are lazy. For example they get up late, and then they do nothing all day".

The teacher can present several sentences in which the English word is used and then decide what the word means. The teacher works with the whole class to be sure that the correct meaning is inferred.

Teachers can also combine the keyword method with the context method. For example, the teacher asks students to read sentences, which contain the new word and

guess the meaning. After determining the meaning of the new word, the teacher proceeds to explain about two stages of the key word method.

One study (Rodriguez and Sadoski 2000) demonstrated the superiority of the context/keyword method. The immediate performance of students using the combined context/keyword method was significantly better than that of the students using the key word method. After a week, the combined context/keyword method was significantly better than all the other methods.

Another way for a teacher to demonstrate the meaning of a target word is to relate it to other words that the students already know. The two most common types of word relation are synonymy and antonymy. The teacher must be careful to use words as synonyms and antonyms that are easier than the original word. For example:

Children **like** their parents.

Children **love** their parents.

Some people are **poor.** They have **little** money.

Some people are **rich.**   They have **much** money.

Use of Dictionaries: Using a dictionary is another technique for learning meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions. According to Moras (2001) the most important aspect of vocabulary teaching for advanced learners is to foster learner independence so that learners will be able to deal with new vocabulary items and expand their vocabulary beyond the end of the course. Students should start using EFL dictionaries as early as possible, from Intermediate upwards. With adequate training, dictionaries are invaluable tools for learners, giving students independence from the teacher. As well as understanding meaning, students are able to check pronunciation, the grammar of the word (e.g. verb patterns, verb forms, plurality, comparatives, etc.), different spelling (American versus British), style and register, as well as examples that illustrate usage.

Word association activities

Celce-Marcia (2001) also suggested Word association activities as ways of presenting new words. The teaching of word lists through word association techniques has proven to be a successful way to learn a large number of words in a short period and retain them over time. Words are associated in various ways, and these associations reflect underlying relationships in the mind, that is, the meaning of a word depends in part on its relationship to similar words, and words in a word family are related to each other through having a common base.

Semantic mapping is an association activity that can create associative networks for words. It is an activity that helps bring into consciousness relationships among words in a text. The teacher chooses a text based on the words to be learned and students are asked to draw a diagram of the relationships between particular words found in the text. Consider a text describing a scene with a red house, a blue sky, and a yard with green grass. The teacher writes the appropriate related words in the circles connected to the heading *colour*.

Practice and production

A central task for teachers at this stage is to do everything they can to help learners turn input into intake; to help learners get the most out of any language they meet. Having shown the meaning of a word, the teacher should provide students with enough practice on that word. Students need lots of practice with new vocabulary in order to remember and use the new words. Recently, many teachers use games in the classrooms and they are recommended by methodologists. The use of games during the lessons motivate students to work more on the vocabulary items on their own, so the games are good stimulus for extra work. Games should be an integral part of a lesson since they provide the possibility of extensive practice.

Uberman (1998) showed that those students who practiced vocabulary activity with games felt more motivated and interested in what they were doing. The time they spend working on the words was usually long; therefore, this may suggest that more time devoted to

activities leads to better results. Fun and relaxed atmosphere accompanying the activities facilitates students learning.

Wealand (1999) suggested the following games:

1. **Back to the board:** Divide the class into two teams (A and B). Choose a student from each team while the other students have their backs to the board, facing their teammate. Teacher writes a word or phrase on the board and the students chosen from both teams try to describe it to their teammates at the same time. The first to correctly reproduce what is on the board gets a point. Insist on passable pronunciation. Erase the word and put another one up. Rotate the students periodically so that everyone gets a chance.

2. **Board Run**: Put students in teams of two, three, or four, depending on class size, and line them up facing the board. Give the first student in each line a board pen. Teacher describes a word or phrase. The first student who runs to the board and writes the word legibly scores a point. The word or phrase must be written correctly.

3. **Chain Story:** Teacher writes a list of vocabulary items on the board, and uses the first item in a sentence to start off a story. Students continue the story around the class using vocabulary from the board, in (or out of) sequence.

4. **The Best Sentence:** Divide the students into two teams. Write a word to be revised on the board. Each team has a secretary who writes a sentence constructed by the team using the word on the board. The best sentence scores a point.

5. **Team Vocabulary Race:** Divide the students into groups of three, four or five depending on class size. Appoint a group secretary. Establish a vocabulary category and a number of words, e.g. '20 words connected to sport'. Shout 'go'.

When a team claims to have finished, check their list for spelling and suitability of words without stopping the other groups.

6. **What's this called in English?** Cut out pictures, stick them on card and on the other side write the word (and phonetic translation if you like). Students mingle and hold up cards asking, "What's this called in English?" Students can't sit down again unless they can name all the items on the cards.

7. **Where Are You Going?** Using pictures of everyday objects to improvise a dialogue.

    A: Where are you going?

    B: To the _____

    A: Why?

    B: To get _____

E.g. if you flash a picture of aspirin, the dialogue should be:-

    A: Where are you going?

    B: To the chemist's

    A: Why?

    A: To get some aspirin.

Flash a magazine and hope for…..

    A: Where are you going?

    B: To the newsagent's

    A: Why?

    B: To get a magazine.

Same, opposite or different dictation: This is an activity for advanced or, at least, upper intermediate students suggested by Ana Paola Reginatto (2002). Dictate pairs of words to the students (e.g. hold/embrace, high/tall) and ask them to classify the pairs as Same, Opposite or

Different. Once you have finished dictating the pairs of words, the students should compare their choices with their partner and explain their reasons, especially the pairs classified as different (why are they different?) or same (are they always synonyms? Are there slight differences in meaning and connotation? Are there differences in collocation)? If you wanted, students could use dictionaries to check ideas. After the students have discussed the words, elicit the pairs to the board and deal with spelling, pronunciation and meaning.

Guess the word: Clare Laverly (2002) suggests the following activity for sudying abstract nouns. Choose five words relating to recent conversational themes. Write sets of clues to help students guess the words. Play with whole class or teams. Use one word per lesson over five lessons or use all words in one session as a longer game.

> Example clues:
>
> I am a noun but I am very important.
>
> I begin with the letter 'f'.
>
> People in prison have lost it and want it back.
>
> People demand it when it is taken away by dictators.
>
> It is related to speech.
>
> (Puzzle word = Freedom)

Teaching clothing vocabulary, as suggested by Ece Sevil (2002), is a good vocabulary activity that can be used for younger learners. To teach the names of articles of clothing, students cut a page of a newspaper in the shape of a hat, gloves, trousers, etc. Then, using a washing line and clothes pegs, students hang their projects on a clothes line. Students repeat the names of the clothes after the teacher. After teaching the vocabulary of clothing, the teacher asks them to close their eyes while he or she hides some of the clothes. A few seconds later the teacher asks them to open their eyes and name the missing clothes and find them. This activity is both very useful and enjoyable for students.

Consolidation

The teacher should consolidate and try to get the students to relate the word to their personal experience. There are some activities, which can be done at this stage.

1. **Matching Games**: As suggested by Baker (2003) at lower levels students can play different matching games with cards; for example, they can match words and pictures, or match the word in their first language and the word in English, or match words to their definition.

2. **Vocabulary box**: According to Gillie Cunningham (2002) the students can also prepare a class vocabulary box.

A small box, such as a shoebox, is a very useful tool in the classroom - it can become a vocabulary box. The teacher also needs some small blank cards or pieces of paper. At the end of each vocabulary lesson - for example 'Houses and Homes' - either the teacher or the students should write words from the lesson on different cards. So, the teacher may end up with ten words on ten cards - bedroom, kitchen, roof, window…- and these cards are then placed in the vocabulary box.

If you have time, and better classes, the teacher, or the students, may write a definition of the word on the reverse of each card. This vocabulary box can then be used at any time to review the vocabulary studied over the weeks. The teacher could simply pick words from the box at random, give the definition and ask for the word.

This can be done as a simple team game. The teacher may try something more active. For example, when s/he has had this vocabulary box for a month or two months and there are quite a lot of cards in there, the teacher might say to the students 'OK, collectively I want all these cards divided into nouns, adjectives and verbs … Go! You have three minutes'. Or, you might say 'OK I want all these cards divided into lexical sets … Go!'. Or, you might say 'Each corner of the room is a different

lexical set - that one's furniture, that one's medicine, that one is food and that one is sport. Put the cards in the right corner, you have one minute to do this…Go!'. Then they're all running around trying to get their words in the right corner.

This could also be done in teams, giving each team a handful of words to sort. This box just becomes so flexible in how the teacher can use it. It could be at the end of the lesson. For example 'the teacher can't leave the classroom until s/he has defined two words that are in the box'. Vocabulary boxes are fantastic and they take so little time but provide so many activities.

Vocabulary Expansion

When students come across a new word, they are likely to be interested in learning other related words, and this presents a natural opportunity for vocabulary development. There are different techniques for introducing sets of related words as suggested by Ur (1996):

1. Write a single word in the center of the board, and ask students to brainstorm all the words they can think of that are connected with it. This activity is mainly for revising words the class already knows, but new ones may be introduced, by the teacher or by the students.

   For example:

   Teacher: Hotel

   Student A: Bed

   Student B: Room

   Student C: Service

   Student D: Food

   Student E: Restaurant

   Student F: Chinese

2. The teacher can talk about the new words, introducing them, and writing them on the board.

3. The teacher can try to elicit the new words from the students and then write them on the board.

4. A useful way of expanding vocabulary of higher level students is that the teacher can break up the word into its prefix, suffix, and stem then ask the students to think about other words which are made by those prefixes and suffixes.

5. Another useful method of expanding the vocabulary of higher level students has the teacher ask students to think about and find other words, which collocate with the new word by using a dictionary, a list of collocations, etc.

Acquiring and retaining vocabulary in a foreign language is a continuing challenge, but by using methods based on the research presented here, it does not have to be like being thrown in a briar patch. Students can have fun with their learning activities and make progress.

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