

Structuring Vocabulary for Tenderfoots

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Abstract- Vocabulary is a common word used in different contexts and in different situations. Vocabulary is the group of words that a person or group of people knows how to use it. Thus, vocabulary is a list or number of words that one knows and uses it regularly in daily life. This paper critically evaluates the importance of vocabulary for learners, various building strategies and activities involved in its learning.

Index Terms- Structuring, tenderfoots, vocabulary, strategies, activities, building, learners. L1, L2

I. INTRODUCTION

“Every human occupation has its repertoire of stock phrases, within which every man twists and turns until his death. His vocabulary, which seems so lavish, reduces itself to a hundred routine formulas at most which he repeats over and over”.

August de Villiers de L’Isle Vocabulary is vital when it comes to communicate with others. Man is a social being and therefore cannot live in isolation. Therefore, to survive and sustain position in the society he needs to communicate with others. Thus, the knowledge of vocabulary is needed at every phase of life. Usually it is observed that L1 vocabulary of the learners is comparatively rich and refined as compared to the English [L2] vocabulary. This shows that learners acquire their L1 vocabulary more efficiently than L2. This imbalance between vocabulary of L1 and L2 is pretty great. This difference is due to the lack of exposure, disinterest in L2, lack of awareness and importance etc. The rectification of such misconception is an urgent need of the hour. It is very important to guide learners about the building up of vocabulary which plays a vital role not only in their personal life but also contributes in their social interactions in the society and in career advancements. We all know that English is the language of global communication. It functions not only as a powerful learning tool but also a medium or a window through which the learners can access to knowledge from around the world. With such a varied applications the vocabulary of this language is a requisite to learn since it acts as a medium to develop positive values and attitudes, establish and maintain meaningful relationship with the people around, increase cultural understanding and expand their knowledge beyond the boundaries. Thus it is important to understand the importance of building vocabulary, strategies and methods which helps the learners to enhance their mental dictionary.

II. IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY

“Vocabulary words are the building blocks of the internal learning structure. Vocabulary is also the tool for better define a problem, seek more accurate solutions, etc.”

Ruby K. Payne Language enriched vocabulary is essential not only for the personal growth but when extended into a large prospective, it is crucial for the international business, trade and professional communication. Few years ago the emphasis was only given to language learning and that too at a very substantial rate but now with changing phase and trends more and more prominence is given to the language supplemented vocabulary. Learners with rich vocabulary helps the learners or empower with the capabilities necessary for lifelong learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and innovation and for adapting to the rapid changes and demand of society. `Thus mastery of vocabulary is vital to learners as it opens up new possibilities for intellectual and social development, educational attainment, career advancement, personal fulfilment and cultural understanding.

III. CATEGORIES OF VOCABULARY

According to the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1989: 1629), the vocabulary of a language is the total number of words in it and someone’s vocabulary is the total number of words in a language that he or she knows. Thus vocabulary is an important element within a language and is a must for a language learner. There are mainly two types of vocabulary which is applicable for both the native speakers as well as learners.-

[A] *Active or productive vocabulary*

[B] *Passive or receptive vocabulary*

Words that we understand and use it in our day to day life is known as *active vocabulary*. In our own language, there are many words that we use regularly while speaking or writing. These words are a part of our active vocabulary.

On the other hand, there are words that we understand but do not or cannot implement it in practical life is known as *passive vocabulary*. There are many words that we understand when we hear on televisions etc. but do not use in our everyday speech. These words are a part of our passive vocabulary.

IV. TEACHING VOCABULARY

“To enjoy and learn from what you read you must understand the meanings of the words a writer uses. You do

yourself a grave disservice if you read around words you don't know, or worse, merely gives at what they mean without bothering to look them up.

For me, reading has always been not only a quest for pleasure and enlightenment but also a word-hunting expedition, a lexical safari”.

Charles Harrington Elster

The field of vocabulary teaching is in transition. In language learning the transition is shifted from the traditional methods of teaching i.e. The Grammar-Translation methods to the innovative method of Communicative approach. The aim of vocabulary teaching provides every learner of English with further opportunities for extending their knowledge and experience of the cultures of other people as well as the opportunities for personal and intellectual development, further studies, pleasure and work in vocabulary rich language. Building vocabulary enables every learner to prepare for the changing socio-economic demands resulting from advances in information technology (IT) – demands which include the interpretation, use and production of texts for study, work and pleasure in English. These days' teachers provide vocabulary rich environment to encourage learners to learn and use the language and to support in learning other subjects. Teachers make use of a broad range of activities and materials to enhance learners' motivation and to cultivate creativity as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In simple words, vocabulary is the knowledge of words and their meanings. As Steven Stahl (2005) puts it, “Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world.” Mastering vocabulary is not an easy assignment since every now and then fresh words are added in the vocabulary list and knowing 100% is almost next to impossible. Actually it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime. Instruction in vocabulary involves for more than looking up words in a dictionary and using those words in sentences. The two basic methods involved in the instruction of vocabulary involve direct and indirect exposure to words. Vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words and intentionally through explicit instruction in specific words and word learning strategies. There is another school of thought, according to which the two common ways in which meaning of new items is conveyed through traditional approach and techniques which are absolutely teacher-centered and the other is student-centered learning. In teacher centered approach, the teacher plays the lead role in framing the modules for learners whereas in the second case the students learn automatically when they are exposed themselves to the natural environment. To be more elaborate Michael Graves (2000), suggested four components of an effective vocabulary program:

- Wide or extensive independent reading to expand word knowledge.
- Instruction in specific words to enhance comprehension of texts containing these words.
- Instruction in independent word-learning strategies, and
- Word consciousness and word-play activities to motivate and enhance learning.

V. INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that there is no single research based method for teaching vocabulary. From its analysis, the panel recommended to use a variety of direct and indirect methods of instruction according to the suitability of time and context.

Some of the most commonly implemented methods used worldwide are as follows:

[A] Taking advantage of students' first language- One method of building vocabulary is to capitalize on students' first language knowledge if this language shares cognate with English for eg, the Vocabulary Improvement Project (VIP) (Carlo et al., 2004) taught students to draw on their cognate knowledge as a means of figuring out the meaning of new words in English. Through this method students' become comfortable with L2 as with L1 and would learn to relate the two languages and develop interest in strengthening L2.

[B] Intentional vocabulary teaching- According to the National Reading Panel (2000) explicit instruction of vocabulary is highly effective. To develop vocabulary intentionally, students should be explicitly taught both specific words and word-learning strategies. To deepen students' knowledge of word meanings, specific word instruction should be robust (Beck et al. 2000). Seeing vocabulary in rich contexts provided by authentic texts, rather than in isolated vocabulary drills, produces robust vocabulary learning (NRP, 2000). Such instruction goes beyond definitional knowledge. It gets students actively engaged in using and thinking about word meaning and in creating relationships among words. Vocabulary dictionary is a huge thing and therefore cannot be confined into certain boundaries therefore students learn independently determining the meanings of unfamiliar words that has not been explicitly introduced in class.

[C] Review and Reinforcement- This method emphasizes on review and practice. One way to review and reinforce vocabulary is through reading aloud. It has been shown that reading aloud speeds up the lexical acquisition for L2 learners.

[D] Fostering word consciousness- It is developing awareness and creating interest in the words. It can be developed at all times and at several ways i.e. through encouraging adept diction, the word play and through research on word origins or histories. According to Graves (2000); “If we can get students interested in playing with words and language, then we are at least halfway to the goal of creating the sort of word-conscious students who will make words a lifetime interest.”

[E] Multiple exposures in multiple contexts- One principle of effective vocabulary learning is to provide multiple exposures to word's meaning. This is a great improvement in vocabulary when students encounter vocabulary words often (NRP, 2000). According to Stahl (2005), “students probably have to see a word more than once to place it firmly in their long-term memories”. “This does not mean mere repetition or drill of the word, but seeing the word in different and multiple contexts”. In other words, it is important that vocabulary instruction provide students with opportunities to encounter words repeatedly and in more than one context.

[F] Restructuring of vocabulary tasks- When the existing vocabulary strategies do not work i.e. they fail to cater the needs of the learners then in that case the instructional tasks are restructured or reshaped. Restructuring the tasks can often lead to

increased vocabulary acquisition, especially for low achieving or at risk students (NRP, 2000). According to Kamil (2004), “once students know what is expected of them in a vocabulary tasks, they often learn rapidly”.

[G]Incidental vocabulary learning- The scientific research on vocabulary instruction reveals that most vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words. This can be done by engaging in rich oral-language experiences at home and at school, listening to books read aloud to them and reading widely on their own. Reading volume is very important in terms of long-term vocabulary development. (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998). Kamil and Hiebert (2005) reason that extensive reading gives students repeated or multiple exposures to words and is also one of the means by which students see vocabulary in rich contexts Cunningham (2005) recommends providing structured read-aloud and discussion sessions and extending independent reading experiences outside school hours to encourage vocabulary growth in students.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

These days enormous efforts is being put in to enhance every element of L2 but of all the elements, vocabulary is often the least systematized and the most neglected of all the aspects of learning. This absence is due to following the old conventional syllabuses, emphasizing more on the structure, notions, functions etc. and neglecting the vocabulary aspect of language. Apart from the other elements of language it is very important for the students to focus on the vocabulary aspect as well. Since this is a teaching-learning process so the teachers should know what to teach. For many of them this will be determined by the choice of the course book, the syllabus designers etc. In the absence of teachers this can be done through the so- called awareness activities.

VII. CONCLUSION

Vocabulary is obviously an essential element within a language and student should be more aware of its importance. There are certainly other elements such as grammar, stress, rhythm, intonation, tone of voice, pauses, hesitations or silences,

non-verbal phenomena etc. that has to be kept under consideration but at the same time the fact cannot be denied that no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way.

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