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Teaching Vocabulary through Sentences

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Abstract

Almost every teacher is certain about that vocabulary is an important facet of learning a second language. It may be more important than grammar, at least in so far as this concerns communication , and particularly in the early stages when learners seem to understand that amassing a basic vocabulary is very important to fluency in another language. As a rule, receptive vocabulary exceeds productive vocabulary and why listening with comprehension and speaking with comprehension are two very different things—the latter a more difficult cognitive process than the former. Furthermore, vocabulary acquisition is highly idiosyncratic and depends largely on the learner and her or his individual learning styles and cognitive abilities. No two people learn alike. In particular, as understanding and fluency increases, individual interests and even needs will change, which then requires teacher-assisted guidance and remediation vis-à-vis the compilation of a specified and nuanced vocabulary that is tailored to the learner’s more practical linguistic needs, whatever these might be.

Keywords: English teaching, Teaching technique, English structures, Teaching Vocabulary.

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Cümleler Yoluyla Kelime Öğretimi

Öz

Öğretmenler, ikinci bir dil öğrenmede kelimenin önemli bir yere sahip olduğu konusunda neredeyse hemfikirdirler. Kelime birikiminin, dilde akıcılık için önemli bir faktör olması sebebiyle, dilbilgisinden daha önemli yere sahip olduğu söylenebilir. Kural olarak, algısal kelime bilgisi oranı üretimsel kelime bilgisini geçmekte ve dinleme kavrama ve konuşma kavrama iki farklı unsur olup ve burada ikinci saydığımız unsur birincisinden daha zor bir bilişsel işlevselliğe sahiptir. Bundan başka, kelime edinimi yüksek derecede kendine özgü olup öğrenene, öğrenenin öğrenme tarzına ve bilişsel kabiliyetine büyük ölçüde bağlıdır. Hiç bir insan aynı değildir. Özellikle anlama ve akıcılık arttığında, bireysel ilgiler ve hatta ihtiyaçlar değişecek, daha sonra öğretmen destekli rehberliğe ihtiyaç duyulacak ve karşılıklı iletişimle ve her ne için olursa olsun öğrencinin dilbilimsel ihtiyaçlarına göre belirlenen detaylı kelime bilgileri daha iyi bir seviyeye gelebilecektir. Bu makalede, kelimelerin cümleler yoluyla nasıl öğretilebileceği konusu araştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce öğretme, Öğretim teknikleri, Cümle kuruluşları, Kelime öğrenme.

Introduction

In countries like Turkey, where the first and even second language is not English, the vast majority of EFL students struggle with the following problems: (i) how to enrich their vocabulary and (ii) how to refine their rhetorical skills. Both are essential to becoming proficient readers and writers in L2. For this to happen, it the implementation of a more effective system of learning and, in this case, of acquiring additional vocabulary is needed. Importantly, it should operate within the framework of practical, every-day aural-oral communication types and effective writing in L2. For this to be successful, a minimum of classroom instruction and greater emphasis on the value of real language environments and

creation/re-creation of the same, it has been shown in a certain number of studies how this facilitates the acquisition and proper use of new vocabulary.²

This essay asks EFL teachers to consider the advantages of incorporating a variety of interactive vocabulary activities into their normally-scheduled classes. In addition, a number of pedagogical strategies are listed and designed to help students understand the complexities of vocabulary acquisition and that learning new words is a complex task that requires a wide range of skills. And so, learning a new language requires an approaches that provides a variety of experiences and learning environs.

The aforementioned is important for teachers to acknowledge and for students to understand. Vocabulary acquisition plays an important role in all aspects of language learning. In English Conversation classes, however, separate vocabulary builders are not always used. Instead, vocabulary items are restricted to the passages or texts to be read and the discussion that follows. However, a single activity or text for any given word is not enough. Moreover, an approach that entails something more active and participatory is called for.³

² Studies in the field of vocabulary acquisition are extensive. See the following as a broad sweep of the best work thusfar: Allen, V. F. (1983), *Techniques in teaching vocabulary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Coady, J. (1997); J. Coady & T. Huckin (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition* (New York: Cambridge University Press); C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Folse, K. S. (2004), *Vocabulary myths* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press); Fry, B. E., Kress, J. E., & Fountoukidis, D. L. (1993). *The reading teacher's book of lists 3rd ed.* (West Nyack, New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education; Gairns, R., & Redman, S. (1986), *Working with words: A guide to teaching and learning vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Hunt, A., & Beglar, D. (April 2005), "A framework for developing EFL reading vocabulary." *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 17 (1), 23-59; Krashen, S. (1989), "We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading: Additional evidence for the input hypothesis," *The Modern Language Journal*, 73, 440-464; Laufer, B., & Sim, D. D. (1985), "Measuring and explaining the threshold needed for English for academic purposes texts," *Foreign Language Annals*, 18, 405-413; Lewis, M. (1997), *Implementing the lexical approach* (Hove: Language Teaching Publications); Loucky, J. P. (1998), "Suggestions for improving ESL/EFL vocabulary instruction," *Seinan Jogakuin Junior College Bulletin*, 45, 1-12; Morgan, J., & Rinvoluceri, M. (1986), *Vocabulary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Nation, I. S. P. (1990), *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* (Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Pub); Nation, I. S. P. (Ed.) (1994), *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary* (New Ways in TESOL Series: Innovative Classroom Techniques); Perkins, K., Brutton, S. R., & Pohlmann, J. T. (1989), "First and second language reading comprehension," *RELC Journal*, 10 (2), 1-9; Pigada, M., & Schmitt, N. (2006), "Vocabulary acquisition from extensive reading: A case study," *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 18 (1), 1-28; Taylor, L. (1990), *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* (New York: Prentice Hall); Taylor, A. M. (2006), "Text selection and frequency: Comments on Pigada and Schmitt," *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 18(2), 116-117; Walters, J. (October 2004), "Teaching the use of context to infer meaning: A longitudinal survey of L1 and L2 vocabulary research," *Language Teaching*, 37 (4), 243-252; Wang, L. (2007), "Word association: Second language vocabulary acquisition and instruction," *TESL Reporter* 40 (1), 49-66.

³ On the issue of participatory language learning, see, for example: Shen, Jia, Roxanne Hiltz, Kung-E Cheng, Yooncheong Cho, Michael Bieber (2001), "Collaborative Examinations for Asynchronous Learning Networks: Evaluation Results," *Proceedings of the 34th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (IEEE Press, Washington, D.C.); Wu, Dezhi, Michael Bieber, S. Roxanne Hiltz and Hyo-Joo Han (2004), "Constructivist

What is Vocabulary?

It is important to keep in mind that “words” and “vocabulary” are terms that have slightly different meanings.. We need to decide what “vocabulary” actually means and its role in the EFL classroom. Vocabulary is very important, to be sure, and requires a systematic approach in its own right. It is not simply an addendum to grammar or subset of reading comprehension. The job is not complete the first time a new vocabulary item meets the eye: practice makes perfect in the process of learning, storing, and recalling new vocabulary items, as well as their proper use. English-English dictionaries are essential to vocabulary acquisition, too, but students require a degree of assistance in the proper use dictionaries as a facet of self-directed study. The distinction between “productive” and “receptive” vocabulary must be kept in mind and adapted to the classroom. Vocabulary acquisition and the various exercises employed to this effect should not be restricted to single words, but also include collocations, longer words, and multi-words.

After students have been introduced to a new lexical entry, opportunities to become more familiar and practiced in vocabulary recognition and manipulation are crucial to the successful acquisition of the item in question. The following ideas are a few pedagogical strategies that have proven effective in the acquisition and mastery of new vocabulary. First, initiate discussion, using a variety of communicative activities, such as role-playing, and which require the use of the new vocabulary items in question. And second, make use of new vocabulary in written tasks.

There are many published works on exercises in vocabulary acquisition. Laufer has provided an excellent summary of some effective exercises to date and which include the following: (i) using pictures and matching them to words, (ii) matching parts of words such as their beginnings and endings, (iii) Matching words using collocations, synonyms, antonyms, and word sets, (iv) employing prefixes and suffixes in the construction of new words, (v) organizing new vocabulary into lists according to a variety of classification schemes, (vi) linking new vocabulary to a specific task which students are then expected to complete, (vii) using word games such as crossword puzzles, vocabulary grids, and word

diagrams, (viii) creating written and oral assignments which involve “filling in gaps in sentences,” and ix) a memory games that are both comprehensive and programmatic.⁴

As Scrivener points out, “vocabulary is a powerful carrier of meaning. A learner, recognizing the communicative power of vocabulary,” he goes on to explain, “might reasonably aim to acquire a working knowledge of a large number of words. The more words I have, the more precisely I can express the exact meanings I want to. But ... getting to be on familiar terms with vocabulary is quite difficult.”⁵ In other words, learning vocabulary in isolation, or simply as long lists of L2-L1 equivalencies, is not the answer.

Importance of Vocabulary

Moras is but one of many scholars to defend the teaching of vocabulary on a regular basis and as part of the syllabus.⁶ As Lewis has also shown, “language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar” and so vocabulary should be front and center.⁷ Drawing upon the work in the field of Gairns and Redman’s seminal book, *Working with words* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), Moras proffers the following as a comprehensive list of the various L2 considerations that must be taken into account when teaching vocabulary:

Boundaries between conceptual meaning [sic]: 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, bowl). *Polysemy:* distinguishing between the various meaning [sic] of a single word form with several but closely related meanings (head: of a person, of a pin, of an organisation). *Homonymy:* distinguishing between the various meaning [sic] of a single word form which has several meanings which are NOT closely related (e.g.

⁴ Cf. Laufer, B. (1997), “What’s in a word that makes it hard or easy: some intralexical factors that affect the learning of words,” in N. Schmitt & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *Vocabulary: description, acquisition and pedagogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 140- 155.

⁵ Scrivener, J. *Learning Teaching : Chapter 7 - Vocabulary* (pg. 73). Sunday, 21 October 2007. Accessed 1 Jan. 2014. <http://dictionaries911.blogspot.com/2007/10/learning-teaching-by-jim-scrivener.html>

⁶ Also see in this connection: Allen, V. (1983), *Techniques in teaching vocabulary* (Oxford University Press); Gairns, R. Redman, S.(1986), *Working with words* (Cambridge University Press); Hill, J. (1999), “Collocational competence,” *English Teaching Professional*, 11, 3-6; Lewis, M. (1997), *Implementing the lexical approach* (Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications); Oxford, R.(1990), *Language learning strategies* (Newbury House); Richards, J. (1985),*The context of language teaching* (Cambridge University Press); Scrivener, J. (1994), *Learning teaching* (Heinemann); Thornbury, S. (1998), “The lexical approach: a journey without maps,” *MET*, 7 (4), 7-13; Willis, J. (1996), *A framework for task-based learning* (Longman).

⁷ Lewis, M. (1993), *The lexical approach: The state of ELT and the way forward* (Hove, England: Language Teaching Publications), vi. Cf. Scott Thornbury, *A-Z of ELT*. Accessed 1 Jan. 2013. <http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/tag/michael-lewis/>

a file: used to put papers in or a tool). *Homophony* [*sic*]: understanding words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings (e.g. flour, flower). *Synonymy*: distinguishing between the different shades of meaning that synonymous words have (e.g. extend, increase, expand). *Affective meaning*: distinguishing between the attitudinal and emotional factors (denotation and connotation), which depend on the speaker's attitude or the situation. Socio-cultural associations of lexical items are [*sic*] another important factor. *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). *Chunks of language*: multi-word verbs, idioms, strong and weak collocations, lexical phrases. *Grammar of vocabulary*: learning the rules that enable students to build up different forms of the word or even different words from that word (e.g. sleep, slept, sleeping; able, unable; disability). *Pronunciation*: ability to recognise and reproduce items in speech.⁸

As mentioned, an important consideration for teachers planning vocabulary work is the distinction between *productive* and *receptive* vocabulary. In general, we understand many more words than we may use in everyday speech. Our *receptive* vocabulary is that set of words that we recognize and may or may not understand, but, for whatever reason, we tend not to use. For this reason, a new lexical item is most likely to “stick,” that is, to be remembered and mastered, if the learner feels a personal need to know and, especially, should there be a need to express some specific thing that serves a learner's particular needs at the time. And so, the need to add a new *productive* vocabulary item is often a very personal matter and varies from student to student.

Because vocabulary acquisition depends so much on one's personal motivation to learn a second language, it follows that teachers should facilitate as much as possible the acquisition of *productive* vocabulary items that are tailored to the personal needs of students. Task-based learning is closely related to this and where teachers provide students with authentic, meaningful contexts in which to achieve concrete results and the employment of the appropriate vocabulary and usage for the task at hand.

In the case of intermediate learners, helping them turn *receptive* into *productive*

⁸ Moras, S. (2001), , “Teaching Vocabulary to Advanced Students: A lexical Approach” (San Carlos,Brazil). July 2001. Accessed 1 Jan. 2014.
<http://www.lrc.ctu.edu.vn/pdoc/47/Teaching%20Vocabulary%20to%20advanced%20students-A%20lexical%20approach.pdf>

vocabulary, understanding the application of such conceptual categories as polysemy, synonymy, style, register, and collocations, is essential.

Using Sentences to Teach Vocabulary

This is a type of exercise in which student are meant to internalize the target structure, but in this case passively, by silent reading, mumbled cursory reading, reading aloud, and quiet contemplation. The idea is that the rewards will be enjoyed at a later stage in the learning process. What follows is a short lesson plan for the reader's consideration:

1. Organise the class in groups of three and explain that they are going to compete against each other in a word game that requires them to complete fourteen "headless sentences."
2. Give out the fourteen sentence "bodies."
3. Point out that there will be a seven-minute time limit.
4. The correct "heads" of these sentences should be written down on a separate sheet of paper, once for each group.
5. When the time is up, one student from each group will turn in the answers, or "heads," for their entire group, and then be assigned to a different group and score that group's answers.
6. Invite student scorers to share their scores with the class and adjudicate on any points of doubt.

Sample Headless Sentences (including answers)

1. _____ is a small receiver which is placed in or over the ear (for a radio or telephone) (An earphone)
2. _____ are eyeglasses with darkened lenses that shade the eyes from the sun. (Sunglasses)
3. _____ a small animal with fur and long ears that lives in a hole in the ground. (A rabbit)
4. _____ someone who [secretly tries](#) to [find information](#) about a [person](#), [country](#), etc.(A spy)

The Wisdom of Proverbs

Proverbs can be of special interest to student of a foreign language and culture. Proverbs often contain archaic elements of any given language, as well as preserving popular

attitudes that may have long histories. It is thought that “a body of proverbs reveals interesting stratifications of both language development and the historical experience of the people,” in the same way perhaps that archaeological layers elucidate the stages of a society’s development to the trained eye.”⁹

Proverbs can also serve as an excellent conversation piece, but for upper-level ESL and EFL students since there is a high level of abstract thinking and expression. What follows is another sample lesson plan:

1. Write a proverb on the board.
2. Explain its grammar and vocabulary.
3. Discuss its meaning and significance as an expression of popular wisdom and historical commentary.
4. Ask students to find proverbs expressing an opposite or similar thought in their native language.
5. Ask select students to recite their proverbs.
6. Lead students in a discussion of the cultural differences that can be seen in the English and non-English versions of the same parable.
7. Encourage students to express themselves using English only.

Combining Headless/Tailless Sentences and Proverbs

1. All roads lead to _____ . (..... Rome)
2. _____ a storm comes a calm. (After)
3. _____ news travels fast. (Bad)
4. Tell me who you go with and I'll tell you who _____. (.....you are)
5. All the gillnetters are not _____. (..... gold)

Conclusion

Include vocabulary activities into classes does indeed take extra time and effort, and number of the exercises can be increased all the more. All the same, designing such vocabulary exercises becomes easier the more one does it. In order to facilitate student understanding, providing better tools with which to acquire new vocabulary more effectively is paramount. Moreover, an approach that is both developmental, systemic, and a regular part

⁹ See in this connection, “V.Proverbs and Humor,” *The PhyEmoc Method* (n.p., n.d.), 16-17. Accessed 1 Jan. 214. http://www.languages.dk/methods/documents/PhyEmoc_English.pdf

of the EFL curriculum is called for. In countries like Turkey, where English is taught as a foreign language, the vast majority of students are aware of the importance of understanding English. Vocabulary is essential to all such efforts to reading, writing, listening, and speaking any foreign language. In order to become proficient in the English language, students must also develop their rhetorical skills. But this is not possible if vocabulary is not an important consideration. And making use of sentences has a great importance in vocabulary teaching and for their future development.

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