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## HOW TO TEACH VOCABULARY IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**Annotation:** Teaching vocabulary is not just conveying the meaning to the students and asking them to learn those words by heart. If teachers believe that the words are worth explaining and learning, then it is important that they should do this efficiently. Teachers should use different techniques and activities in teaching English vocabulary to motivate the learners, enrich their vocabulary and enable them to speak English properly.

**Key words:** teacher, dictionaries, learning and teaching, approach, foreign language, English lessons.

Nowadays methodologists and linguists suggest that teachers can decide and select the words to be taught on the basis of how frequently they are used by speakers of the language. That is, the most commonly used words should be taught first.

We can get information about which words will be most useful for learners of English by looking at frequency counts of vocabulary. Usually a vocabulary count is done by making a list of the words in a particular text or group of texts and counting how often and where they occur. Some of the more recent counts have used computers to list the words and count their frequency.

Besides that, teachers can decide which words are useful and should be taught to their learners on the basis of semantics. This means, that the word is more useful if it covers more things than if it only has one very specific meaning. Furthermore, Nation says that frequency and coverage are not enough to be used when teachers select and prepare a word list for learners of English. So he suggests other criteria, such as language needs, availability and familiarity, regularity and ease of learning or learning burden.

We looked at possible sources of vocabulary input, including vocabulary books, readers, dictionaries and corpora. A motivated and self-directed learner might be able to acquire a large vocabulary simply by using these resources. However, many learners sign up for language courses in the expectation that, at least some of the time, they will be presented with language, rather than having to go out and find it for themselves. By presentation, we mean those pre-planned lesson stages in which learners are taught pre-selected vocabulary items. Of course, incidental vocabulary teaching can occur at other times of the lesson, as when a text or a discussion throws up unfamiliar vocabulary. In this chapter, however, we will be mainly concerned with ways vocabulary can be formally presented in the classroom. But many of the issues are relevant to the informal teaching of vocabulary as well.

At the very least learners need to learn both the meaning and the form of a new word. We shall deal with each of these components in turn. But it's worth pointing out that both these aspects of a word should be presented in close conjunction in order to ensure a tight meaning-and-form fit. The greater the gap between the presentation of a word's form and its meaning, the less likely that the learner will make a mental connection between the two.

Let's say the teacher has decided to teach a related set of words - for example, items of clothing: shirt, trousers, jacket, socks, dress, jeans. The teacher has a number of options available. First, there is the question of how many words to present. This will depend on the following factors:

- the level of the learners (whether beginners, intermediate, or advanced);
- the learners' likely familiarity with the words (learners may have met the words before even though they are not part of their active vocabulary);
- the difficulty of the items - whether, for example, they express abstract meanings.

Consider how you would present each of the following six sets of words. What do you think would be the most appropriate means of presenting them? (E.g. visual aids, a situation, real objects, etc.)

An alternative to translation - and an obvious choice if presenting a set of concrete objects such as clothes items - is to somehow illustrate or demonstrate them. This can be done either by using real objects (called realia) or pictures or mime. The use of realia, pictures and demonstration was a defining technique of the Direct Method. The Direct Method, in rejecting the use of translation, developed as a reaction to such highly intellectual approaches to language learning as Grammar-Translation. Here, for example, is advice for teachers from a popular Direct Method course of the 1940s: How to teach the names of objects. The usual procedure is as follows.

The teacher first selects a number of objects, in batches of say from 10 to 20. The objects may be:

- \* those that are usually found in the place where the lesson is given, e.g. door, window, knife, match, book; or parts of the body or articles of clothing;
- \* those collected specially for the purposes of the lesson, e.g. a stick, a stone, a nail, a piece of wire, a piece of string etc;
- \* those represented by pictures, such as those printed on picture cards or wall charts, or by rough drawings on the blackboard.

The teacher shows or points to each object in turn and names it. He says the name clearly (but naturally) three or four times. When the pupils have had sufficient opportunity to hear the words and sentences they are called upon to say them. In the first instance they may repeat them after the teacher.

Visual aids take many forms: flashcards, wall charts, transparencies projected on to the board or wall using the overhead projector, and board drawings.<sup>1</sup>

Many teachers collect their own sets of flashcards from magazines, calendars, etc. Especially useful are pictures of items belonging to the following sets: food and drink, clothing, house interiors and furniture, landscapes/exteriors, forms of transport plus a wide selection of pictures of people, sub-divided into sets such as jobs, nationalities, sports, activities, and appearance (tall, strong, sad, healthy, old, etc).

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Of course, reliance on real objects, illustration, or demonstration, is limited. It is one thing to mime a chicken, but quite another to physically represent the meaning of a word like intuition or become or trustworthy. Also, words frequently come up incidentally, words for which the teacher won't have visual aids or realia at hand. An alternative way of conveying the meaning of a new word is simply to use words - other words. This is the principle behind dictionary definitions. Non-visual, verbal means of clarifying meaning include:

- providing an example situation;
- giving several example sentences;
- giving synonyms, antonyms, or super ordinate terms;
- giving a full definition.

All of the above procedures can be used in conjunction, and also in combination with visual means such as board drawings or mime. Although a verbal explanation may take a little longer than using translation, or visuals or mime, the advantages are that the learners are getting extra “free” listening practice, and, by being made to work a little harder to get to the meaning of a word, they may, be more cognitively engaged.

In this term paper we have looked the implications of findings for the teaching of vocabulary:

- \* Learners need tasks and strategies to help them organize their mental lexicon by building networks of associations - the more the better;
- \* Teachers need to accept that the learning of new words involves a period of “initial fuzziness”;
- \* Learners need to wean themselves off a reliance on direct translation from their mother tongue;
- \* Words need to be presented in their typical contexts so that learners can get a feel for their meaning, their register, their collocations and their syntactic environment;
- \* Teaching should direct attention to the sound of new words, particularly the way they are stressed.

In this work we have looked the ways the teacher can make the presentation of vocabulary maximally effective, both in terms of word form and word meaning. Some of the conclusions reached include the following:

- \* establishing the meaning of a new word first and when presenting its form is a standard approach;
- \* translation is an economical way of presenting meaning but may not be the most memorable;
- \* illustrating meaning is effective but is limited to certain kinds of words;
- \* explaining meaning verbally is time-consuming but can be effective if explanations are kept clear and simple;
- \* the spoken form can be highlighted through the giving of clear models, the use of phonemic script, and repetition;
- \* the written form should not be withheld too long;
- \* learners should be actively involved in the presentation.

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