



SOME TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract

Vocabulary is widely acknowledged as one of the fundamental pillars in language acquisition. Even with a limited grasp of grammar, individuals can effectively communicate if they possess a basic vocabulary. Its significance in language learning stems from its role in bolstering all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, vocabulary serves as a springboard to proficient language usage and expedites the attainment of fluency. This article explores various strategies that educators can employ to impart vocabulary effectively, aiding them in selecting suitable and impactful methods within their teaching repertoire.

Keywords: vocabulary, techniques in teaching vocabulary, English learners

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is universally recognized as the cornerstone of language acquisition and teaching. It serves as the bedrock upon which we build the ability to express our thoughts, share information, and comprehend others. As Wilkins (1972) aptly noted, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (p. 111). Indeed, while grammar is essential, it is vocabulary that enables us to convey a wealth of information.

In language learning, vocabulary assumes paramount importance as it underpins all other language skills. A robust vocabulary facilitates listening, speaking, reading, and

writing with greater ease and precision. Furthermore, it serves as a launching pad for attaining proficiency in a language, accelerating the journey towards fluency (Schmitt, 2010; Nation, 2005).

2. Techniques in teaching vocabulary

2.1. What is vocabulary?

Vocabulary, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, encompasses "all the words known and used by a person," or according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "a list or collection of words or of words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined." Researchers such as Nation (2001), Thornbury (2002), Ur (2012), and

Schmitt (2010) emphasize that vocabulary extends beyond individual words like "family," "mother," and "father" to encompass phrases like "fire station" and "post office," phrasal verbs such as "look after" and "put on," idioms like "call it a day" and "raining cats and dogs," and collocations like "have a shower" and "make a mistake." Consequently, they define vocabulary as comprising all linguistic elements of a language, including single words, phrases, idioms, collocations, and more (Nation, 2001; Thornbury, 2002; Ur, 2012; Schmitt, 2010).

2.2 Types of vocabulary

Researchers (e.g., Doff, 1988; Gunapova, 2015) categorize vocabulary into two main types: active vocabulary and passive vocabulary.

Active vocabulary encompasses words that learners regularly employ in their writing, speaking, and thinking processes.

On the other hand, passive vocabulary consists of words that learners can understand when encountered in reading or listening contexts, but they struggle to use confidently in their own writing, speaking, or thinking.

It's common for foreign language learners to have a larger passive vocabulary than active vocabulary. However, effective language learners actively work to convert passive vocabulary into active vocabulary through consistent practice and application. The time required for this conversion varies depending on individual learning strategies and efforts.

2.3 Aspects of vocabulary

According to Nation (2001) and Ur (2012), mastering a word involves understanding three key aspects: Form, Meaning, and Use.

Form encompasses several elements:

- Spelling: How the word is written or spelled.

- Pronunciation: How the word is spoken or pronounced.
- Word formation/Word parts: The constituent parts of the word, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

Meaning refers to the representation of the word in real-life contexts or its translation into the learners' native language. Words may have single or multiple meanings depending on context, and several words can convey similar meanings.

Use involves understanding:

- Grammatical functions: The role of the word in sentences, including its position and syntactic function.
- Collocations: The words with which the word is commonly combined.
- Constraints of use: The conditions or contexts in which the word is appropriate or acceptable.

By mastering these aspects—Form, Meaning, and Use—learners can effectively acquire and utilize vocabulary in various linguistic contexts.

2.4 Some techniques in teaching vocabulary

Numerous vocabulary teaching techniques have been proposed by researchers such as Doff (1988), Nation (2001) and Ur (2012). Below are some of these techniques:

2.4.1 Teaching form

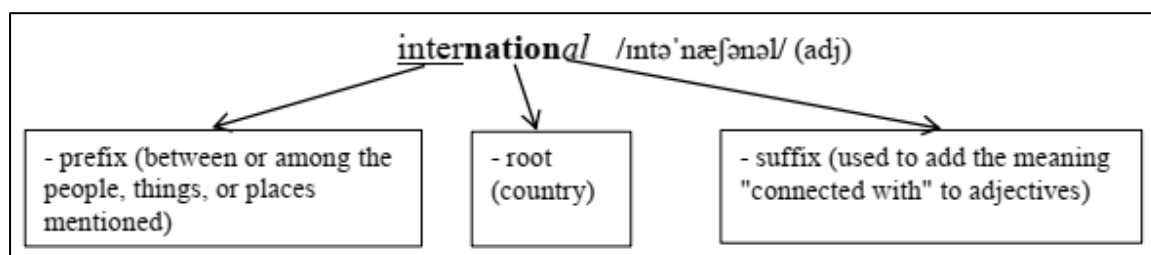
As mentioned above, the form of a word includes spelling, pronunciation, and word formation/word parts. Teachers can teach the form of a word in the following ways:

Spelling: Teachers can write the word on the board, hold up a flashcard, or show the word on the screen to let learners know how the word is spelled or written.

Pronunciation: Teachers can let learners listen to pre-prepared recordings of the word's pronunciation (usually integrated into the

presentation slide) or pronounce it themselves so that learners know how the word is pronounced. Teachers should also provide the phonetic transcription of the word so that learners can understand its phonetic representation.

Word formation/ Word parts: Teachers explain to learners what parts the word is composed of. For example, when teaching the word "international," teachers should explain that it consists of three parts: the root "nation," the prefix "inter-," and the suffix "-al."



2.4.2 Showing meaning

There are different ways to show the meaning of a word. Here are some common methods adapted from Doff (1988) and Ur (2012).

➤ Showing meaning visually

This technique is widely used and is particularly suitable for beginners or young learners. It includes several methods, such as showing real objects, using pictures, miming and using actions and facial expressions.

Showing a real object: Teachers can demonstrate the meaning of words by showing learners real objects. These can be anything available in the classroom, such as school supplies, clothes, or body parts. Teachers can also bring in objects like different types of food and drinks, keys, toys, etc.

Showing a picture: This can be done in two main ways:

- Drawing a picture on the board: If teachers have artistic talent, this can be a very engaging way to teach vocabulary.
- Showing a pre-prepared picture: The picture can be a drawing or photo taken with a camera or phone, or suitable images found on the internet.

Miming and using actions and facial expressions: This method is suitable for teaching action verbs

(e.g., eat, sit, stand, walk, sleep, sneeze) or adjectives describing feelings and emotions (e.g., happy, sad, excited, sleepy, afraid).

➤ Showing meaning by explaining

The technique of showing the meaning of vocabulary by explaining can be done in the following ways:

Giving definitions: Showing meanings by giving definitions is often suitable for learners who already have a certain amount of vocabulary. Teachers can get definitions from reputable dictionaries such as Cambridge, Oxford, Merriam-Webster, Collins, Longman, and Macmillan. They may keep the original definitions if the learners are advanced enough to understand or simplify them by replacing difficult words with simpler, equivalent terms.

Giving synonyms/ antonyms: To expand learners' vocabulary, teachers should not only teach words from the selected vocabulary list but also include their synonyms and antonyms (if any). For example, when teaching the word "happy," teachers can include its synonyms such as "cheerful," "glad," "delighted," and "in a good mood," as well as its antonyms like "unhappy," "sad," "depressed," and "in a bad mood." Including synonyms and antonyms provides learners with the opportunity to learn more words.

Giving examples: Another effective way to show meaning is by giving examples, using the

vocabulary in context. For example, to teach the word "boring," teachers can give an example: "She finds her job boring. She does the same things every day, and she feels bored." This method helps learners, especially beginners, to understand words more accurately. This technique is very useful in teaching abstract words like "happy," "beautiful," and "interesting."

Translating: No matter what techniques teachers use to teach vocabulary, the ultimate goal is to help learners understand what the words mean in their mother tongue. If learners still do not understand the meaning of a word after using different techniques, teachers should translate the word to ensure learners grasp its exact meaning. Methods like showing real objects, pictures, and using facial expressions are suitable for beginner learners and specific words. However, for difficult and abstract words, translating is often the easiest and most effective way to convey their meanings.

➤ Combining different techniques

In addition to using each technique individually, teachers can also combine different techniques simultaneously. For example, when teaching the word "cry," a teacher might say to the learners: "Look! He's crying" (drawing a crying face on the board). "Now look at me. I'm crying" (using facial expressions). "I often cry when I'm very sad. Can you say it? Cry." (waiting for students to repeat). "Good. What does it mean?" (confirming whether the meaning given by the students is correct).

In the example above, the teacher combines several techniques to teach the meaning of the word "cry," such as showing a picture, giving examples, using facial expressions, and checking understanding.

2.4.3 Teaching Use

As mentioned earlier, the use of a word refers to its grammatical functions, collocations, and so on. For example, when teaching the word

"homework," teachers should note that "homework" is an uncountable noun and is often used in collocations such as "do someone's homework," "give someone a lot of homework," and "have a lot of homework to do."

2.5 Revision and consolidation of vocabulary

The revision and consolidation of vocabulary are necessary for learners to store vocabulary in their long-term memory. Ur (1996) suggests various activities that teachers can use to help learners review and consolidate learned vocabulary, including dictation, word and meaning matching, collocation matching, gap-filling, odd one out, sentence completion, and translation. These activities aim to provide learners with opportunities to practice and solidify vocabulary in a variety of ways, stimulating them to retrieve learned vocabulary from memory and use it in other language skills.

3. Conclusion

The article has reviewed various aspects of vocabulary and techniques for teaching vocabulary to English learners. During their teaching process, teachers can use specific techniques or combine different ones depending on learners' levels, ages, and the types of vocabulary being taught. However, teachers should prepare their lessons carefully and thoroughly to provide learners with accurate, up-to-date knowledge while also stimulating their interest and motivation to learn.

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