IMPORTANCE OF VOCABULARY AND THE TECHNIQUES USED BY TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary is crucial to English language teaching because without adequate vocabulary students cannot comprehend or understand others or put across their own ideas.While it is possible to convey something without grammar, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.It would not be wrong to say that lexis forms the heart of the language.Teaching vocabulary enables students to develop their own personal vocabulary and learning strategies.The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of vocabulary and analyzing many techniques employed by the language teacher to teach his students.
Key Words*: Vocabulary, understand, ideas, language, teaching and techniques.*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which covey a particular meaning, the way individual words do. Vocabulary addresses single lexical items—words with specific meaning(s)—but it also includes lexical phrases or chunks.

Vocabulary constitutes one of most crucial skills which is important for teaching and learning a foreign language. It forms the basis for the development of all the other skills: reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, writing, spelling and pronunciation. Vocabulary is the chief instrument for the students in their attempt to use English effectively. When confronted with a native English speaker, when watching a movie without subtitle or when listening to a favorite English song, when reading a text or when writing a letter to a friend, students will always need to operate with words.

The importance of learning vocabulary

Every good mechanic has a toolbox full of tools. Some tools are used more than others, but every one has a specific purpose. In much the same way, writers have a "toolbox." This "toolbox" is constantly growing and is filled with items like grammar, punctuation, and capitalization rules; figurative language; rhyme; rhythm; and…vocabulary. Just as really good mechanics can pull out the right tools to make a good engine even more powerful, good writers can pull out the right tools at the right time to make good writing even more powerful. One tool that can "power up" your writing is a strong vocabulary.

Talking about the importance of vocabulary, the linguist David Wilkins argued that: "without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." Indeed, people need to use words in order to express themselves in any language. Most learners, too, acknowledge the importance of vocabulary acquisition. In my experience as a teacher, I noticed the fact that students usually find it difficult to speak English fluently. They usually consider speaking and writing activities exhausting because they keep on using the same expressions and words and very soon their conversation is abruptly interrupted due to missing words. And the main reason for such communication problems is the lack of vocabulary. Other students are confronted with the problem of forgetting the words immediately after the teacher has elicited their meaning or after they have looked them in the dictionary, and this also a cause of the lack of vocabulary. The more words students learn, the easier they memorize them.

The teacher has an essential role in helping students to improve their vocabulary. Unfortunately, vocabulary teaching has not been enough responsive to such problems, and teachers have not recognized the tremendous importance of helping their students to develop an extensive vocabulary. If we look back in the past, we discover that for a long time, English used teaching approaches such as Direct Method and Audiolingualism which emphasized the primary importance of teaching grammatical structures. Since the accent was on grammar, few words were introduced in such courses and most often, they were limited and related to the grammar structures taught.

By the beginning of 1970s, there was a major change in teaching English. The focus turned from the Direct Method and Audiolingualism to the Communicative Approach which emphasized the importance of teaching vocabulary. Students were exposed to diverse vocabulary and speaking activities. Many words began being introduced during such courses and students were encouraged to express themselves as much as possible.

Nowadays, there is more freedom in choosing the methods to be used during English classes. The English syllabus is organized around both vocabulary and grammar structures. Since there is a certain number of classes allotted for each item in the syllabus, teachers usually

have the necessary time to insist on teaching and practising vocabulary. Vocabulary is no longer treated as an add-on and teachers become more aware of the importance of vocabulary and attention is paid to the grammar of words, to collocations and to word frequency. Nevertheless, students still have difficulties in expressing themselves fluently and still consider speaking tasks exhausting.

Techniques employed in teaching vocabulary

There are many techniques pertaining to the teaching of vocabulary. However, there are a few things that have to be kept in mind by most English teachers if they want to present a new vocabulary or lexical items to their students. It means that the English teachers want students to remember new vocabulary .Then, it needs to be learnt, practiced, and revised to prevent students from forgetting.Techniques employed by teachers depend on some factors, such as the content, time availability, and its value for the learners (Takač, 2008). This makes teachers have some reasons in employing certain techniques in presenting vocabulary.In presenting one planned vocabulary item, the teacher usually combined more than one technique, instead of employing one single technique. Teachers, furthermore, are suggested to employ planned vocabulary presentation as various as possible (Pinter, 2006).

Here are some techniques of teaching vocabulary as stated by Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (1992).

a. Using Objects

Using this technique includes the use of realia, visual aids, and demonstration. They can function to help learners in remembering vocabulary better, because our memory for objects and pictures is very reliable and visual techniques can act as cues for remembering words (Takač, 2008). In addition, Gairns & Redman(1986) state that real objects technique is appropriately employed for beginners or young learners and when presenting concrete vocabulary.

Objects can be used to show meanings when the vocabulary consist of concrete nouns. Introducing a new word by showing the real object often helps learners to memorize the word through visualization. Objects in the classroom or things brought to the classroom can be used.

b. Drawing

Objects can either be drawn on the blackboard or drawn on flash cards.The latter can be used again and again in different contexts if they are made with cards and covered in plastic. They can help young learners easilyunderstand and realize the main points that they have learned in the classroom.

c. Using Illustrations and Pictures

Pictures connect students' prior knowledge to a new story, and in the process, help them learn new words. There are plenty of vocabularies that can be introduced by using illustrations or pictures. They are excellent means of making the meaning of unknown words clear. They should be used as often aspossible. The list of pictures includes: posters, flashcards, wall charts, magazine pictures,board drawings, stick figures and photographs. Pictures for vocabulary teaching come from many sources. Apart fromthose drawn by the teacher or students, they are sets of colourful pictures intended for schools. Picturescut out of newspapers and magazines are very useful as well. Nowadays many readers, vocabulary books and coursebooks contain a vast number of attractive pictures that present the meaning of basic words. The teacher can use learning materials provided by the school. They can also make their own visual aids or used pictures from magazines. Visual support helps learners understand the meaning and helps to make the word more memorable.

d. Contrast

Some words are easily explained to learnersby contrasting it with itsopposite, for instance, the word" good" contrasted with the word "bad". But some words are not. It is almost impossible to contrast the words whose opposite is the gradable one. When the word "white"iscontrasted with the word "black", there is an "in between" word" grey". Furthermore, verb "contrast" means to show a difference, like photos that reveal how much weight someone lost by contrasting the "before" and "after" shots

Manymore studies have also shown that vocabulary is best acquired if it is similar to whatis already learnt (e.g. Rudska et al., 1982, 1985), it is not surprising that learningsynonyms is a way to expand our vocabulary.Learning about synonyms is important also because this is how dictionaries areorganised. Putting bilingual dictionaries aside, mono-lingual dictionariesessentially use words to explain words, and in this process, synonyms are often used(Ilson, 1991).

e. Enumeration

An enumeration is a collection of items that is a complete, ordered listing of all of the items in that collection. It can be used to present meaning.. In other words, this technique helps when any word is difficult to explain visually. We can say"clothes" and explain this by enumerating or listing various items. Teacher may list a number of clothes e.g.adress,a skirt,trousers etc ,and then the meaning of the word "clothes" will became clear.The same is true of 'vegetable'or"furniture", 'for example(Harmer 1991).

f. Mime, Expressions and Gestures

Klippel (1994) implies that "mime or gesture is useful if it emphasizes the importance of gestures and facial expression on communication. At the essence it can not only be used to indicate the meaning of a word found in reading passage, but also in speaking activity as it stresses mostly on communication.Many words can be introduced through mime, expressions, and gestures. For example, adjectives: "sad" ," happy"; mime and taking a hat off your head toteach hat and so on.

Several studies have emphasised the role of gestures in second language (L2) acquisition (Gullberg, 2008). Teachers tend to gesture a lot (Sime, 2001; Hauge, 1999), especially when addressing young learners and/or beginners. It is commonly acknowledged that "teachinggestures"capture attention and make the lesson more dynamic. Using analyses of video recordings of English lessons to French students, Tellier (2007) determined three main roles for teaching gestures: management of the class (to start/end an activity, to question students, request silence, etc.), evaluation (to show a mistake, to correct, to congratulate, etc.) and explanation to give indications on syntax, underline specific prosody, explain new vocabulary, etc.). Teaching gestures appear in various shapes: hand gestures, facial expressions, pantomime, body movements, etc. They can either mime or symbolise something and they help learners to infer the meaning of a spoken word or expression, providing that they are unambiguous and easy to understand. This teaching strategy is thus relevant for comprehension (Tellier, 2007). However, its utility may depend on the kind of gesture used by the teacher. It has been highlighted that foreign emblems, for instance, may lead to misunderstandings when it is not known by the learners (Hauge, 1999; Sime, 2001).
In addition to supporting comprehension, teaching gestures may also be relevant for learners'memorisation process. Indeed, many second language teachers who use gestures as a teachingstrategy declare that they help learners in the process of memorising the second language lexicon.Many of them have noticed that learners can retrieve a word easily when the teacher produces the gesture associated with the lexical item during the lesson. Others have seen learners(especially young ones) spontaneously reproducing the gesture when saying the word. The effect ofgestures on memorisation is thus something witnessed by many but hardly explored on a systematic and empirical basis(Tellier, 2008).

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g. Guessing from Context

Guessing from context as a way of dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary in unedited selectionshas been suggested widely by L1 and L2 reading specialists (Dubin, 1993). Nation and Coady (1988) claim that there are two types ofcontexts. The first type is the context within the text, which includes morphological,semantic and syntactic information in a specific text, while the second one is the general context, ornon-textual context, which is the background knowledge the reader has about the subjects beingread. Williams (1985) agrees with Nation and Coady in considering the specific context as ''theother words and sentences that surround that word….. it follows that other words in the context of the unfamiliar word often 'throw light on' its meaning. These other words can be found in thesentence containing the unknown word or other sentences beyond the sentence of the unknownitem. Similarly, McCarthy (1988) sees context as within the text itself i.e. the morphological,syntactic, and discourse information, which can be classified and described in terms of generalfeatures. Learning from context not only includes learning from extensive reading, but alsolearning from taking part in a conversation, and learning from listening to stories, films, televisionor the radio (Nation, 2001). In order to activate guessing in a written or spoken text, there should befour elements available: the reader, the text, unknown words, and clues in the text including someknowledge about guessing. The absence of one of these elements may affect the learner's ability toguess. Furthermore, this technique encourages learners to take risks and guess the meanings of words they do not know as much as possible. This will help them build up their self-confidence so that they can work out the meanings of words when they are on their own. There are many clues learners can use to establish meanings for themselves, such as illustrations, similarity of spelling or sound in the mother tongue, and general knowledge(Walters, 2004).

I. Eliciting

This technique is more motivating and memorable by simply giving pupils a list of words to learn.

j. Translation

Even though translation does not create a need or motivation of the learners to think about word meaning (Cameron, 2001), in some situations translation could be effective for teachers, such as when dealing with incidental vocabulary (Thornbury, 2002), checking students' comprehension, and pointing out similarities or differences between first and

second language, when these are likely to cause errors (Takač, 2008). There are always some words that need to be translated and thistechnique can save a lot of time.

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