



## RETRACING THE STRATEGIES AND LINES OF ATTACK IN UPSKILLING THE LEXICON

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### ABSTRACT

*Reweighing the weightiness of vocabulary, exploring the relevance of significant word-hoard picking methods, and the degree of helpfulness of varied strategies in boosting up the treasure trove of lexicon are discussed in this piece of writing.*

**Key Words:** *The Deficiency of Vocabulary-Incidental Learning-Explicit Instruction-Etymology-Mnemonics.*

#### 1.0. INTRODUCTION:

God's given gift to human beings is language. Language may be in the spoken form or written form. Words create different situations in the human world. Words, hold human beings high, or pull down us, or soothe our minds, or shatter confidences, or promote friendships or initiate fights. Words help human beings to build relationships with our children, spouses, relatives, friends or with strangers. It depends upon what type of words; we employ in written or oral contexts. Are ill-suited words employed, related to criticism or harshness in written or oral communication. Then the cost of improper words commands a price of the language user's health and wealth. So, the language users intentionally or deliberately have to revamp their stock of words, if the lexicon is harsh-sounding to the situations. Science says that the whole world is energy. Everything in the world is energy. Energy is vibration. All words have different vibrational levels, when they are uttered.

**DR. D. KANAKADURGA**

**D. VENKATESWARA RAO**

1Page



When the positive words are articulated, positive thoughts/vibrations touch the mind/heart of the hearer. Words activate different mental moods or ambiances. Choice of words, before placing in writing or in voicing, is very important.

Students are supposed to possess larger vocabulary to convey themselves more lucidly and aptly in a varied range of contexts. Vocabulary is of two types. They are receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. In receptive vocabulary/sight vocabulary, the learner identifies/recognizes the meanings of high frequency words, without taking much time and understanding the messages of written or oral. Strong receptive vocabulary improves listening and reading fluency in reading or listening comprehensions. Coming to the productive vocabulary, the learner has control over a stock of words that he/she uses to express himself/herself in writing and speaking. Generally, the language exponents believe that the learners' sight vocabulary is larger than his/her productive vocabulary.

### **1.1. Importance of Vocabulary in Educational Institutions:**

There is a strong correlation between the vocabulary range of the learners and the degree of understanding in reading comprehension. Cynthia and Drew Johnson say that "Student Word Knowledge is linked with academic accomplishment and helps in every subject".

When the students become passed-outs from colleges, after graduation or post-graduation courses, they become job-seekers. They need good written and oral communication skills, to get themselves selected for jobs. Michael F Graves feels that in this regard "Vocabulary Knowledge is the number one indicator of verbal and listening abilities, which are vital aspects of any job (2-3)."

### **1.2. The Deficiency of Vocabulary:**

Steven A. Stahl talks about the range of words that students in the high school can learn. He believes that in a study of fifth graders, it was estimated that students learn 1,000 to 5,000 new words a year (11).

All students do not hold the same quantity/volume of lexicon in the same grade. The range of vocabulary acquisition depends on social, economic and cultural backgrounds of the learners. Rich/professional back-drop community parents make the children have larger vocabularies. When the children come from working class or below poverty level, the students acquire smaller vocabularies, as these people fall under underprivileged/disadvantaged category. These students will not have more exposure to vocabulary/language situations.

#### **Table-1**

**DR. D. KANAKADURGA**

**D. VENKATESWARA RAO**

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### Actual Differences in Quantity of Words Heard (By Social Class)

In a typical hour, the average child would hear:

Below Poverty Level:	616 words
Working Class:	1,251 words
Professional:	2,153 words

### Actual Differences in Quality of Word

Professional:	32 affirmations, 5 prohibitions
Working Class:	12 affirmations, 7 prohibitions
Below Poverty Level	5 affirmations, 11 prohibitions

*Source: Vocabulary Instruction: John Polemikos.*

Limited vocabularies disallow students understanding the full message from listening/reading comprehensions. Educationists feel that students acquire the vocabulary ranges from 1,000 words to 5,000 words a year. If teachers motivate students, students can learn easily six to eight words per day which turns out to be 300 to 500 words per year.

### 1.3. Incidental Learning Vs. Explicit instruction:

These two different schools of thought have supporters, to back each school of thought.

#### 1.3.1. Incidental Learning:

Beck et al. (2002) hold that a strong correlation between the amount of reading a person does and the depth and breadth of their general vocabulary. In incidental learning the readers read for pleasure or for enjoyment and the readers are exposed to new words. Students try to infer meanings from the contextual backdrops of the words in the sentences. E. Curtis and Ann Marie Longo hold the opinion that “hearing a word multiple times helps students understand differences in meaning.” The definition of a word switches from one context to another. Here are some example sentences.

- Ravi *got* a headache.
- Ravi *got* poor.
- Ravi *got* sad news over phone.
- Ravi *got* into distress.

In the above sentences the common verb is ‘*got*’. However, the meaning is not same in every sentence mentioned above. Different shades of meanings are conveyed through different contextual references. Hunt and Beglar say the less importance of single exposure in



contextual learning. They highlight that “A word that is encountered once has about a 10 per cent chance of being learned from context (1).”

Students’ involvement or participation in active learning helps them a lot. Repeated drills in different contexts of the same word/words, gives the advantage of fixing meanings, or grasping the messages or/and to recall the words to employ the words in meaningful contexts. Stahl, Steven A. talks about four phases of gaining the word knowledge, as below

1. I never saw it before.
2. I have heard of it, but I don’t know what it means.
3. I recognize it in context – it has something to do with .....
4. I know it. (15)

This method links between the volume of vocabulary and the time-spent on incidental reading by the students.

### 1.3.2. Explicit instruction:

Here the teacher plays an important role. Here the instructor decides the following points to initiate explicit instruction in the class.

- The sort of words is to be explained/imparted.
- The number of words to be instructed/coached.

Andrew Biemiller says about explicit/direct instruction of vocabulary, in this fashion, “Direct approaches to teaching have been effective, especially with students who do not have as many opportunities to learn new words.”

Beck and Mckeown (1991) also assert that “Direct instruction is more effective than incidental learning and exposure to print for the acquisition of a particular vocabulary.” This method highlights the points of creating the meanings and debating on word meanings in the class rooms. This method does not give importance to committing to dictionary meanings by students, as this approach believes that more emphasis on application and use of words in a productive way than simply recalling the definitions of the words. Blachowicz and Lee emphasize the significance of explicit instruction. They voice out that “Explicit instruction that focusses on both definitional and contextualized information has been shown to be most effective in building readers’ vocabularies (45).”

It is felt by some language exponents that Incidental Learning Contributes to a major part of vocabulary in vocabulary acquisition. When both approaches i.e., Incidental Learning and



Explicit learning are blended together, certainly the fusion system gives the desired results in the classroom.

## 2.0. Initiation of Different Language Activities by the Teacher:

There is a necessity to start the ball rolling with varied language activities, in the classroom. The teacher's initiation of the following activities helps the students to improve learners' stocks of vocabularies.

### 2.1.a. Ideational boundaries between or among words:

In learning vocabulary, students are presented the list of words, which has notional differences in meanings. For example, table, saucer, spoon. Each idea of the word is different and cannot be clubbed together.

### 2.1.b. Polysemy:

Here a word has more than one meaning. This is different from Monosemy, which has only one meaning. Example for polysemy are, 'Head' → of an individual, or of a leader of an organization.

### 2.1.c. Homonymy:

Homonymous (pair of) words have same pronunciation and spelling, but each word in the pair has a different meaning. For instance, 'Bark' has two meanings. i.e., the sound of a dog and also the skin of a tree. In the same way the word 'Crane' shares the same relationship. It means a bird and also a machine used at construction sites.

### 2.1.d. Homophony:

Homophonous word-pairs have same pronunciation, however meaning and spelling are different for each word in a pair. In particular, 'flour - flower', 'hour - our' 'cell - sell' etc.

### 2.1.e. Synonymy:

It is also known as 'poecilonym'. The synonymous words have almost similar or equivalent meanings. Namely, 'begin', 'start', 'commence', 'initiate' etc.

### 2.1.f. Denotation and Connotation:

‘Denotation’ refers to literal, or basic or primary meaning of a word. ‘Connotation’ refers to different kinds of meanings or extension of meanings of a basic sense. Connotative word invokes emotional, or attitudinal, or cultural, or subjective meaning in a given context. For example, ‘a red rose’ is a flower in denotative sense. However, in connotative sense, the meaning is passion and love.

### 2.1.g. Style, Register and Dialect:

‘Style’ refers to Formal and Informal styles of language, basing on the social/educational/cultural setting, status of addressee etc. Formal language is to be employed for official purposes, such as writing a thesis, giving a presentation in the office etc.

‘Register’/’Jargon’ relates occupational vocabulary. For example, Journalist register, Computer jargon etc.

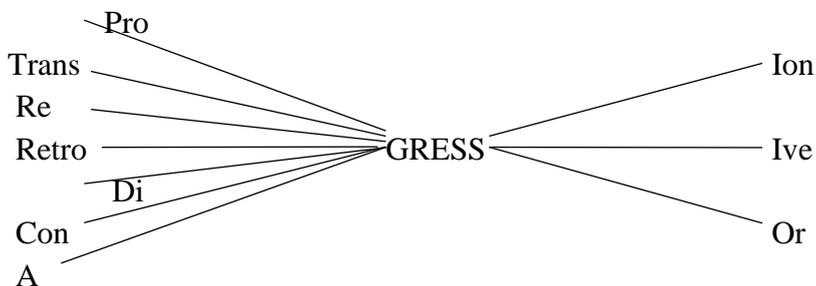
‘Dialect’ touches on a regional linguistic variation of a language. Dialect speaks of changes in grammatical, phonological and lexical aspects of a specific language. For example, Cockney dialect in England.

### 2.1.h. Root words/Prefixes and Suffixes;

Andrew Miller feels that “students will need to know about 2,000 to 3,000 root words, making teaching vocabulary reasonable.”

For Example,

**Figure – 2. Root Chain:**



‘Gress’ is the ‘root’/’base’. ‘Gress’ means ‘go’. Before the word-element ‘Gress’, some other elements such as ‘pro’ – ‘trans’ – etc., are found. These are known as prefixes. After ‘Gress’, the items like, ‘-ion’ ‘-ive’ etc., are found. These are labelled as suffixes. With the



help of prefixes and suffixes, students generate a number of words. By knowing the root meaning, learners could predict the whole word meaning in a given context.

### 2.1.i. Etymology/Word-Histories:

The study of word-origins makes the students remember the meanings of words easily. Some of the examples are discussed here. The word 'jumbo' has come from African language. In African language, the meaning of 'jumbo' is a large elephant. In English language (when it is borrowed), the meaning is extended to anything which is big/large called as 'jumbo'. For instance., Jumbo-Jet, Jumbo-Cabinet etc. The word 'Assassin' is originated from Arabic word 'Hashish'. Hashish means sleep-inducing herb in Arabic language. When the word has entered into English, it has acquired the meaning of 'murderer/killer for mercenary reasons.'

### 2.1.j. Mnemonics:

Mnemonics are the memory tools/memory aids for students, that promote the remembrance of meanings/ideas through relatable associations. Some examples are discussed here. The word 'Bedizen' means 'decorate' or 'beautify'. To remember it, a sentence such as, 'Kiran **B**edi is travelling in a decorated **Z**en car', is generated. To recall the meaning of 'circuitous' (which means 'round-shaped'), a sentence is produced, such as 'Circus tent is circuitous'.

### 3.0. CONCLUSION:

A few significant things are discussed here, to upskill the vocabulary repository of students. The basic knowledge which is relevant to vocabulary acquisition is put forward here, to ignite the hunger, to increase the stock of lexicon of the students.

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