

CHAPTER 25 TEACHING VOCABULARY

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INTRODUCTION

In order to develop effective skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, students need to acquire sufficient vocabulary for effective communication. Vocabulary refers to the words we must understand to communicate effectively. Language teachers need to devote special time to enhance their students' acquisition of sufficient vocabulary. In this chapter, therefore, we are going to be discussing the concept of vocabulary, the importance of vocabulary, stages in vocabulary knowledge, dimension of teaching vocabulary, strategies for teaching vocabulary, word formation process in English, French, Yoruba and Arabic.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this chapter, we should be able to:

1. define vocabulary;
2. identify stages in vocabulary knowledge;
3. explain the dimensions of vocabulary teaching;
4. discuss the strategies for developing vocabulary skills; and
5. analyse the word formation processes in English, French, Yoruba or Arabic.

CONCEPT OF VOCABULARY

Vocabulary can be seen as the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning the way individual words do. When students increase their vocabulary size, their use of language skills implicitly increases as their knowledge of the word also becomes broader. For any language learner, especially the learners of a foreign language, vocabulary is the direct canal that links him to his conceptual system. His curiosity for the new language he is studying is aroused when he comes near a new word, the meaning of which he is eager to know.

Teachers need to help their students to develop both their receptive and productive vocabulary, although, only the receptive knowledge is required in listening and reading tasks. Productive vocabulary knowledge assists the learners to communicate through speaking and writing to convey ideas to others.

Stages in Vocabulary Knowledge

a. Vocabulary knowledge is critical to reading comprehension and it is important for teachers to help their students foster their development of a large 'word bank' and effective vocabulary learning strategies. The six stages of vocabulary knowledge are:

- i. Learning to listening to known words;
- ii. Learning to read known words;
- iii. Learning new meanings of known words;
- iv. Learning new words that represent known concepts;
- v. Clarifying and enriching meaning of known words; and
- vi. Moving words from receptive (listening and reading) to productive (speaking and writing) vocabulary.

Strategies for Developing Vocabulary Skills

Language teachers can employ both explicit (intentional planned instruction) and implicit (spontaneous instruction) strategies in teaching vocabulary. The following are some of the strategies.

- a. Careful selection of vocabulary words to be taught
- b. Pre-teaching vocabulary words (i.e. discussing the connotation and denotation meaning of unfamiliar words before reading the text)

Repeated exposure to words (providing multiple opportunities for learners to use a new word in its written and spoken form)

- d. Key word method (teaching unfamiliar words through 'word cue' from part of the definition or illustration that will create easy cognitive link to the word's meaning in the context)
- e. Word map (creating a graphic organiser for the unfamiliar words to indicate the word class, meaning and examples)
- d. Root analysis (practice in analysing words to determine their roots, prefixes and suffixes)
- e. Restructuring reading materials (replacing difficult words with easier synonyms, using footnotes and an accompanying vocabulary guide to explain unfamiliar or difficult words)
- f. Incidental learning (teaching learners how to get meaning of difficult words through the other words in the context – 'context clues')
- g. The use of dictionaries (to check pronunciation, the function of the word, spelling as well as sample sentences for illustration)
- h. Reinvest the vocabulary in another linguistic situation (use the words regularly and specifically in different contexts to favour acquisition).

Word Formation Processes

The following involves how new words are created and thus become part of the language.

- a. **Borrowed words** i.e. words from another language e.g. French word: coup d'état; Arabic word: safar/journey, but in English is safari. Falaat which means spacious in Arabic is a loan word in English as "FLAT". Miraat is also borrowed by English from Arabic as "Mirror". Words from English to French include "interview", "week-end", etc. and Yoruba words, such as *birèdì*, *tàbìlì* and *òfíísì* are borrowed from English.
- b. **Affixes**: an affix is a morpheme comprising a letter or group of letters added to the beginning or end of a word to change its meaning. There are three types of affix: prefix (e.g. unkind), (*àì-kù*, *ì-sẹ̀*, *alàì-sùn*, *àtì-jẹ̀*); in-fix (e.g. mother-in-law), (*omọ-kí-omo*=*omokómo*, *ilẹ̀-dẹ̀-ilẹ̀*=*ilédélé*, *ifẹ̀-kú-ifẹ̀*=*ifẹ̀kùfẹ̀*) and suffix (e.g. careless). In French we have *reprendre* (to take back), *buvable* (drinkable). There is no suffix in Yorùba.
- c. **Converting**: changing the function of a word without changing its form. e.g. The dress is beautiful (used as noun) I like the way you are dressed (used as verb). Also in Yorùba, *Wàhàlà* Adé ti pòjù (used as noun), Adé ñ *wàhàlà* mi (used as verb). But in French, there is no such direct conversion from a noun to verb, except it is marked by a verbal inflection. *La pensée* is a noun (thinking), "penser" is a verb (to think). The fact that a verb always precedes a noun in Arabic does not make conversion easy as it is in other languages, although there are nominal and verbal sentences having different constructions.
- d. **Combinations**: words formed by joining parts of two or more existing words (e.g. motor + hotel = motel); *franglais* (a combination of français et anglais), *autoroute* (a combination of auto and route; highway); *alcootest* (a combination of alcool and test: a test to detect an abusive consumer of alcohol) or by combining two words e.g. foot ball = football; *libre-échange*, *cure-dent* (chewing-stick); *ilẹ̀+iwé*=*ilèwé* (school), *omọ+isẹ̀*=*omọsẹ̀* (apprentice) In Arabic, "Kuratul qodam" is a combination of "Quratu" and "Alqodam"; meaning football. "hatifuyadawi," a combination of "Hatifu" and "Yadaw," meaning Handset.
- e. **Clipping**: of longer words (e.g. advertisement = ad; examination exam; telephone = phone). This is called truncation in French: *dico* = dictionnaire; *pub* = publicité (advertisement); *fac* = faculté; *clim* = climatiseur (Air Conditioner).
- f. **Acronyms**: word made up from the first letters of the words that made up the name of something (e.g. NASA-National Aeronautics Space Administration, WAI- War Against

Indiscipline). In French, we have SDF (Sans Domicile Fixe; people with no fix habitation); CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle). In Arabic, SOL'AM/SAS/AS, meaning "Sollallahu Ala Muhammad"/ "SollahuAlahi Salaam"/ "Alachi Salaam", meaning "Peace and blessing of Allah upon Muhammad"/ "Peace be upon him".

g. **Coinage:** this is when a new idea or process is produced, and we have to create a word for it, e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram, Tweet, etc.

DIMENSIONS OF VOCABULARY LEARNING AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Vocabulary cannot be understood on its own except in relation to other linguistic components such as phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics. It is when these criteria are developed for individual languages that their words can be fully understood. As such, all the linguistic dimensions mentioned above need to be thoroughly taught so that students could understand fully the concept and usage of vocabulary.

1. **Pronunciation:** ability to pronounce words correctly would aid intelligibility. Careful attention to pronunciation is therefore an essential part of vocabulary teaching. Teachers should also point out the danger in pseudo-familiar words (i.e. words that seem known to learners but not actually so, e.g. "venerable"/ "vulnerable"; (synophones -word similar in sound but different in meaning), e.g. Peau /po / - peu /pø / - peur /pœr / (in French), and *igbá* (calabash), *igbà* (time), *igbá* (garden egg), *igbà* (climbing rope) and *igba* (200) (in Yorùbá).

2. **Morphology (Word Formation):** There are four main processes of word building in English. They are affixation, compounding, conversion and coinage. Teachers should ensure that their learners are taught all these in the process of teaching vocabulary. Affixation is the process of adding prefixes and suffixes to the base item. In this way, an item can be modified in meaning and or change from one part of speech to another. To the base form 'God', for instance, we can add prefixes and suffixes in the following way: God +ly = Godly, Un + God +ly + ness = Ungodliness. In French, this type of affixation can be found in: Accès - (s) ible - accessible, in + acces + ible - inaccessible. In Yorùbá, we can add either prefix or infix to the base item in the following ways, respectively: àì+lówó=àìlówó; oní+gbàgbò=onígbàgbò; ilú+sí+ilú=ilúsilú.

Focus on word building helps learner both receptively and productively. With the receptive skills, an understanding of all three aspects of word building is essential if the learner is to make informed guesses about the meaning of unknown items. In terms of productive skills, knowledge of some basic principles of word building and specific examples will serve to widen a learner's range of expressions.

3. **Spelling:** This is a very important area of vocabulary that needs the teacher's full attention. The three basic English writing systems are (i.) **ideographic:** no unique correspondence between sound and symbols, e.g. when we pronounce 'i.e.' (id est) as 'that is' or viz (videlicet) as 'namely', we are using ideograms; (ii.) **syllabic:** there is direct correspondence between sound and symbol). The symbol in this case represents a syllable, e.g the word "ceremony" has four syllables (ce/re/mo/ny); (iii.) **alphabetic:** individual symbol or letter represents individual sounds, but this does not necessarily mean that one individual letter corresponds directly or regularly to one individual sound). Also, language teachers need to emphasise the consistency of using British English without mixing it with American English. This is a major source of spelling errors responsible for the replacement of "s" with "c" as in the case of 'practice' and 'device' used as verb; "s" and "z" as in several instances, including "analyze" for "analyse". Teachers need to sensitise learners to the nature of English spelling, its regularities and principles, and the information which all this can provide about morphology, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Also, the French language teacher should give more attention to spelling of the words, the graphic forms of which resemble those in English: address (in French: *adresse*); resemble (in French: *ressembler*). Yorùbá words, on the other hand, are spelt the way they are pronounced. Thus, the word *lòòótó* (truly) has four syllables *lò/ò/ó/tó*. Language teachers need to emphasise the consistency of using the standard form of the language i.e. *biótìlẹ̀jẹ̀pẹ̀* = *bi ó tilẹ̀ jẹ̀pẹ̀* (however), *nìgbà tí* = *nìgbà tì* (when).

Emphasis also has to be put on English words that resemble French words in spelling but have different meanings: To rest; (in French: *rester* = to stay); achievement, (in French: *achèvement* = completion).

4. Grammar (lexico-syntax): Grammar in vocabulary learning implies information about the syntactic operation of a word and the distinction made between "full" words and "form" words. Words like tree, sing, blue, etc are 'full' words e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, while the 'form' (or grammatical) words are pronouns, determiners, i.e words that accompany nouns and determine their contextual status, e.g. "it", "the", "of", "and", etc. which only have grammatical meaning. knowing the word class or part of speech of a word is essential for working out the meaning and the correct inflections.

5. Lexico-semantics: This is the study of meaning, changes in meaning and the principles that govern the relationship among words and their meanings. The study of sense relations enables us to bring out the full meanings of words and facilitates acquisition of vocabulary. These sense relations include:

- a. **Polysemy:** a single word form with several different but closely related meanings, e.g. "Branch" of a tree, family, discipline, organisation, etc.
- b. **Homonymy:** a single word with several different meanings, which are not closely related, e.g. 'file' (tool for cutting or smoothening hard substances) and 'file' (used for keeping papers). In French: *avocat* (avocado pear), *avocat* (a lawyer); *Voler* (to move on air {bird, plane}), *voler* (to steal). In Yorùbá: *bọ* (to drop, to slip from one's grasp), *bọ* (to feed), *bó* (to unclothe, to remove, to take off)
- c. **Hyponymy:** the notion of inclusion in the sense that "Rose" is included in "flower" and "lion" is included in "animal". Flower and animal are regarded as super-ordinates, while rose and lion are regarded as hyponyms. In French: *insect* (*abeille, mouche, fourmi*). In Yorùbá: *èsò* (*màngòrò, ọsàn, ibẹ̀pẹ̀, àgbálùmò*), *ewébẹ̀* (*ẹ̀fọ̀, ewéédú*).
- d. **Synonymy:** means sameness in meaning although there are no perfect synonyms, i.e. no two words have exactly the same meaning as there are some ways in which they can be seen to differ. Some sets of synonyms belong to different dialects of the language e.g. fall (USA) autumn (British). The implication of this for Nigerian ESL learners is to avoid mixing Nigerian, American and British Englishes, so as not manifest inconsistency in the use of English. In French: "élève" and "étudiant", and in Yorùbá: "gbangba" and "kedere" are roughly synonymous.
- e. **Antonymy:** is a term used for 'oppositeness' and this includes complimentary, converse, multiple taxonomy and gradable antonyms. Examples of antonym in French: *mort/vivant* (dead/alive) and in Yorùbá: *òkè/ilé* (heaven/earth). Examples of gradable antonym in French: *chaud/tiède/froid*; in English: hot/warm/cold; similarly, in Yorùbá: *gbóná/lọwọ́ọ́rọ́/tútù*. Examples of procedural antonym are: *bébé/enfant/adolescent/adulte* (baby/infant/adolescent/adult).
- f. **Metaphoric/idiomatic expressions:** e.g. in French: *des gorilles* (body guards), *un don Juan* (a seducer), *un Mozart* (an artistic genius), *une Pénélope* (a patient and faithful wife); and in Yorùbá: *àparò* (a dirty person), *èmi* (someone who does not sleep in a place for a long time), *pẹ̀pẹ̀yẹ̀* (someone who does not sleep). Idioms in English include "black sheep", "black book", "bench-warmer", etc.

Language teachers need to teach these sense relations as they are of paramount importance because they can provide a useful framework for the learner to understand the semantic boundaries, to see where meaning overlaps and learn the limits of the use of lexical items. Furthermore, sense relations help learners to make deductions about unknown items.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Language teachers have the onerous task of developing their students' vocabulary to enhance their language proficiency. Students too should be made aware of different strategies they can adopt to develop their vocabulary.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is "vocabulary"?
2. Identify stages in vocabulary knowledge.
3. Explain the dimensions of vocabulary teaching.
4. Discuss the strategies for developing vocabulary skills.
5. Analyse the word formation processes in your language of specialisation.

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