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Abstract

Vocabulary is of prime importance to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary, students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkin's (1972) assertion that without grammar very little can be conveyed also supports the importance of vocabulary in learning language generally and especially L2 or FL. Considering the importance of English language as a world language, teaching its vocabulary becomes very important. Traditionally, vocabulary instruction was neglected and at best equated with just teaching word meaning with students learning a list of words, synonyms, and antonyms in the belief that by so doing, vocabulary will be adequately taught, but this does not give learners understanding of the kind of lexical choices available to proficient users of the language and why one alternative is preferred to another. To the contrary, the correct practice should be that lexis, grammar and discourse should not be taught as separate strands in the language syllabus but rather taught under an integrative, holistic approach. The focus of this paper is to examine the rudiments of vocabulary teaching by considering the concept of vocabulary, dimensions of the lexeme and stages of English vocabulary instruction within the whole language approach which would enhance learner's ability to proficiently communicate in English language.

Keywords: vocabulary, dimensions of the lexeme, vocabulary instruction, receptive and productive vocabulary.

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Introduction

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. This means that vocabulary involves single lexical items (words with specific meanings) and also lexical phrases or chunks. Previous studies have revealed that vocabulary is often called different terms. The most popular two among these terms are lexical knowledge and vocabulary knowledge. Its French origin is 'vocabulaire', meaning 'word for name' (Emmanuel 2009). Qian (2002) and Salah (2008) view vocabulary as the knowledge of word meaning and the level of one's accessibility to this knowledge. It is pathetic, however, to note that this definition ignores other aspects of lexical knowledge such as spelling, pronunciation, and morpho-syntactic properties along two broad parameters of receptive and productive competence, as would be addressed in this paper.

Chall (1987), stahl (1990), Nation (2001), Salah (2008) and chall and stahl (2009) opine that vocabulary knowledge can help the learner to comprehend written texts, just in the same way reading can contribute to vocabulary growth. Some researchers noted that vocabulary is the crucial factor in reading comprehension (Graves, 2001 and salah, 2008). No text comprehension is possible, either in one's native language or in a foreign language, without understanding the text's vocabulary (Laufer 1997). Hirsh and nation (1992), Hu and Nation (2000), Laufer (1989, 1992, 1997) and salah (2008) maintain that when the percentage of unknown vocabulary in a given text increases the possibility of comprehending the text decreases.

Haung (1999) observes that when readers increase their vocabulary size, their use of language skills implicitly increases as their knowledge of the word also becomes broader. Salah (2008) advises readers to develop both their receptive and productive vocabulary, although, only the receptive knowledge is required in reading tasks. However, productive vocabulary knowledge assists the learners to produce language forms by speaking and writing to convey ideas to others (Nation, 2001).

Developments in Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary instruction has been around for a very long time. The history and development of vocabulary revolve round a series of dominating ideologies that have succeeded one another and sometimes come in full circle [Cather & McCarty 1998]. However, there has been progress and much refinement over the years. Views from descriptive linguistics, psycholinguistics and computational linguistics have contributed to a large extent to the teaching of vocabulary.

The years between 1940-60 can be described as vocabulary-controlled years because of the influential tendency of American linguistics to push vocabulary into the background and to relegate its importance to a secondary level in the teaching of secondary language. Such notable linguists as Fries [1945] attributed language learners' concern with vocabulary to their native memories of their first language learning experience and that they were not to first learn its vocabulary but to master its sound system and its grammatical structure. All the learners need at first is enough basic vocabulary to practice the syntactic structures. Fries' views were in line with those of such other American structural Linguists as Lado (1955) and Rivers (1968) with their emphasis on phonology and syntactic patterning.

Between 1960 and 1978, contrary views started coming from such linguists as Wilkins (1972), Twadell (1973), Connolly (1973), Donley (1974), Lord (1976), Brown (1974), Anthony (1975), Nelson (1974). Wilkins (1972) asserted that the structuralist views would be useful only if the (target) intended language would not be used for immediate communication. He submitted that without grammar very little can be conveyed but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. What Wilkin's work is significant for is his desire to bring into vocabulary teaching the insights of lexical semantics. He believed that through the incorporation of insights from semantics, vocabulary teaching can be advanced.

The period between 1976 and 1980 can be regarded as consolidation years. It is the period that saw a combined interest in further studies of the lexicon itself and a more detailed look at the various needs of learners. Richard (1976), in his contribution to this concern, advised that materials should be prepared beginning with a rich concept of vocabulary and goals must be related to techniques

In the last decades however, attention was devoted to approaches to vocabulary expansion, development of lexically oriented materials such as realia, pictures, mime presentation and activating the learner's background knowledge. Investigation of a strategic and generalizable vocabulary for general and for academic purposes was also stressed at this period.

Finally, the discussion on the development of vocabulary instruction cannot be completed without mentioning the impact of the computer which gained premium beginning from the last two decades of the last century. John (1986) demonstrated how modest microcomputers could produce vocabulary concordances which engage learners actively in problem- solving activities related to meaning and usage of items.

This is an impressive development but more knowledge is needed about classroom activities, especially given the recent interest in vocabulary instruction and interaction in the ESL classroom. This is part of the gap this present study intends to fill with the examination of findings and perspectives on the approaches and techniques for teaching of vocabulary among students learning English as a second language.

Dimensions of the Lexeme and Pedagogical Implications for English as a Second Language (ESL).

Vocabulary cannot be understood on its own except in relation to other linguistic components. Hence Bardes (1999) asserts that one way to try to define vocabulary is in terms of other linguistic components or constructs 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 examined so as to understand fully the concept of English language vocabulary. The five components of vocabulary(dimensions of lexemes) would now be examined individually with their pedagogical implications.

Pronunciation

Redman (1990) asserts that it is not uncommon for L₂ learners to find that their lexical knowledge is rendered almost useless by their inability to make themselves intelligible when they speak. Such painful experiences are not confined to production only, for it is equally true that unfamiliarity with correct pronunciation can result in the learner failing to understand words in connected speech that he understands clearly in written English. Careful attention to pronunciation is therefore an essential part of vocabulary teaching, if new Lexis is to be used effectively or understood without difficulty in spoken English. Gibson & Knowles (1975)

observe that second language learners often avoid words that they find difficult to pronounce, and those words which they find easier to pronounce are accurately perceived and readily retained.

Laufer (1985) points out the danger in pseudo-familiar words (i.e. words that seem known to learners but not actually so e.g. "venerable" "vulnerable", "continuous"/"continual", "moral"/"morale" "agreeable"/"agreed", "adopt"/"adapt", "affluence"/"influence", "topical"/"typical", "effect"/"affect", and "superficial"/"artificial". These confusing pairs of words have similar though not identical sounds and Laufer (1985) identifies them as synophones (word similar in sound but different in meaning). This is quite different from homophones which are those that are identical in sound but different in meaning, e.g. "war"/"wore", "blue"/"blew", "died"/"died", "cite"/"site"/"sight", etc. Even though there is confusion in pronunciation and spelling, learners should be taught not to tolerate confusion of meaning in context.

In the Nigerian educational system, some phonetic conflicts can be identified as the causes of student's difficulties in learning English vocabulary. One of such conflicts is often referred to as "mother tongue interference". A cursory examination of Hausa speakers of English in Nigeria could reveal that the average indigenous Hausa man has the problem of replacing English consonants /f/ with /p/ e.g four /f ɔ:(r)/ as /p ɔ:(r)/, plenty /plenti/ as /flenti/, phantom/fæntəm/ as /fætəm/. Also the typical Ibo man in Nigeria often experience the problem of replacing consonant /r/ with /l/, and substituting consonant /l/ for /r/ e.g carry /kæri/ as /kæ li/ and play/plei/ with /prei/. The Epira are also known to have the same linguistic difficulties as the Ibos with reference to words containing consonants /r/ and /l/. The Yoruba are not left out of this "mother tongue interference" as some Yoruba students have difficulty in differentiating words with consonant /S/ and /ʃ/ e.g should /ʃud/, for /Sud/, action /ækʃn/, for /akson/ and show /ʃou/ for /Sou/. Apart from mother tongue interference, it is observed that many English words pronounced by an average Nigerian are wrongly pronounced, e.g, father /fada/ instead of /fa:ðə(r)/ culture /kʌltʃə/ instead of /kʌltʃə(r)/, students /stju:dent/ instead of /stju:dint/ and so on. (Okel 2000).

Having discovered these structural defects in pronunciation and the issue of mother-tongue interference, there is therefore the need for ESL teachers to pay particular attention to these areas so as to adopt a meaningful and relevant teaching approach for this important dimension of vocabulary.

According to Redman (2000), the degree of attention paid to the pronunciation of lexical items will depend on the importance of the item in spoken English and the extent to which it poses problems for the learners. He however suggests that when new lexis is taught and written on the board, it is helpful to indicate the primary accent (assuming the item has more than one syllable) and follow the written form with a phonemic transcription, if the students had previously been taught phonemics.

Discussing the importance of phonemic transcription, Stuart (1999) asserts that one of the advantages of phonemic transcription is that it can act as a reminder to the students not to be misled by orthographic form. He also asserts that phonemic and stress markers provide valuable visual assistance. This is because not all language learners are blessed with a good ear for languages. Neither can they imitate or discriminate between English sounds orally from the model provided by their teacher or peer learners. For some students, it is easier to grasp patterns by seeing them represented graphically.

Morphology (Word Formation)

There are three main processes of word building or word formation in English. They are affixation, compounding and conversion. According to Redman (1990), affixation is the process of adding prefixes and suffixes to the base item. In this way, item can be modified in meaning and or change from one part of speech to another. To the base form 'man' for instance we can add prefixes and suffixes in the following ways.

- a) man + ly = manly.
- b) Un + man + ly + ness = Unmanliness
- c) God + ly = Godly
- d) Un + God + ly + ness = Ungodliness.

Sometimes, the process of affixation produces changes in stress and sound in an item. E.g. "democrat" /'deməkræt/, "democratic" /demə'tkrætik/, "democracy" /di'məkrəsi/. It may also cause spelling difficulties as in the examples 'b' and 'd' above (i.e. manly-manliness, Godly-Godliness). Suffixes may indicate parts of speech and have little semantic value as in the noun ending '-tion', e.g. discrimination or may have an intrinsic meaning e.g. "+ less" as in "hairless" and "childless" which signifies an adjective ending and also contains the idea of 'without'.

Typically, a morphologically complex (or polymorphic) word will contain a central morpheme, which contribute the basic meaning, and a collection of other morphemes serving to modify this meaning in various ways. For instance, from the word 'disagreements', we can dissect a base morpheme agree and three bound morphemes "dis-", "-ment", and "-s". We call 'agree' the root and the other (bound) morphemes, affixes. The morphemes "-ment", and "-s", which come to the right of the root, are suffixes, while "dis", which comes to the left, is a prefix. The word 'disagreement' is called the stem.

Pedagogically, Gains (1986) asserts that focus on word building is likely to pay dividends for the 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.

Compounding is the formation of words with two or more separate words which can stand independently in other circumstances. Redman (2000) asserts that there are three different types of compounding, adjective compounding e.g. hardworking, time-consuming, Anglo-French, etc, verb compounds, e.g. "baby-sit", 'sight-see', etc., and noun compounds, (i.e. base noun + noun), e.g. coffee jar, table tennis, house race etc.

Conversion, according to Brown (1974), is also known as zero affixation. It is the process by which an item may be used in different parts of speech, yet does not change its form, e.g. we've just had a lovely swim (N). I can't swim very well (V). This process is similar to suffixation in that syntactic and semantic changes may be involved, the difference being that no prefixes or suffixes are used. With certain examples of conversion, there may be phonological changes e.g. he works in export market. He will export a lot of goods.

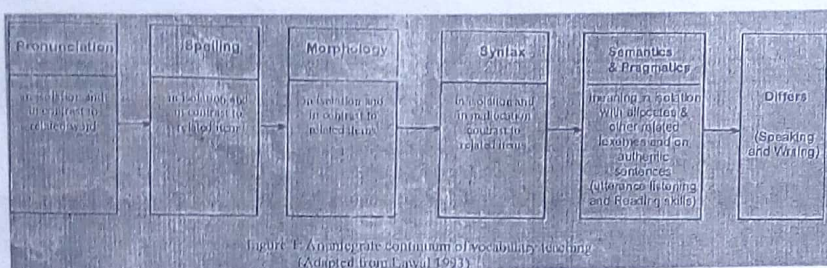
'hide'/'conceal', 'liberty'/'freedom', each implying approval or disapproval. The implication of such words is to influence attitudes. Thirdly, some words are collocationally restricted (e.g. "bite" & "teeth", "bark" & "dog", "blond" & "hair"), they occur only in conjunction with other words. This does not seem to be a matter of their meaning but of the company they keep.

Antonymy: Another sense relation in connection with lexico-semantic is antonym – a term used for 'oppositeness'. Types of opposites include complimentaries, converses, multiple taxonomy and gradable antonym.

Concluding Remarks

Considering the above dimension of lexeme and the pedagogic activities, teaching vocabulary using integrative approach as earlier suggested is highly pertinent. In order to teach vocabulary components in an integrative way, this paper suggests the following order of vocabulary instruction.

A proposed model of patterns of integration in vocabulary instruction



The order in Figure 1 indicates that vocabulary instruction should start with the teacher **pronouncing** the lexical item to be learnt to the students, the students are made to repeat the pronunciation first in isolation and later in contrast to similar words, until the accurate pronunciation is derived. After this, the teacher writes the word for students to learn the spelling again in isolation and in contrast. In the same way, this leads to the study of the structure of the word and how the word could be derived or generated. The teacher will then indicate the word class of the lexical item and its relationship with other lexical items in the sentence and finally, the meaning of the word can be derived from the relationship it has with other lexical items in the text or utterance. This process will help the learners to understand the meaning of words within the context of its usage and thereby reduce the learner's over-dependency on the dictionary. The teacher must show an awareness of the fact that learners naturally hear a particular piece of language before speaking or writing it. It is thus expected that the receptive skills of listening and reading must precede the productive ones of speaking and writing each time the teacher introduces to learners a new vocabulary items

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