DEVELOPING STUDENTS' VOCABULARY EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY

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(Disampaikan dalam Pelatihan Guru SMP Bidang Studi Bahasa Inggris se Kabupaten Sleman, tanggal 14 November 2007 di FBS UNY)

1.Vocabulary development

Vocabulary development is about learning words, but it is about much more than just that. Vocabulary development is also about learning more about those words and about learning formulaic phrases or chunks, finding words inside them, and learning even more about those words. Even the idea what counts as a 'word' starts to become confused when linguists try to produce watertight definitions. However, we will start from words in the recognition that infants, children and adults talk about 'words' and think in terms of a word as a discrete unit. Children will ask what a particular word means, or how to say a word in the foreign language, and in learning to read, the word is a key unit in building up skills and knowledge.

Learning words is not something that is done and finish at a time. Learning words is a cyclical process of meeting new words and initial learning, followed by meeting those words again and again, each time extending knowledge of what the words mean and how they are used in the foreign language. Each time students meet familiar words again, they too have changed and will bring new first language and conceptual knowledge to the vocabulary. The root system of word knowledge continues to grow and become thicker and more tightly inner-linked, so that the flowers of word use are more and more strongly supported.

2. What it means to know a word

Knowing about a word involves knowing about its form (how it sounds, how it is spelt, the grammatical changes that can be made to it), its meaning (its conceptual content and how it relates to other concepts and words) and its use (its patterns of occurrence with other words, and in particular types of language use). These different aspects of word knowledge can be summarized in the following table.

Type of knowledge	What is involved	Example
Receptive Knowledge: aural/ decoding	To understand it when it is spoken / written	
Memory	To recall it when needed	
Conceptual knowledge	To use it with a correct meaning	Not confusing *protractor* with *compasses*
Knowledge of the spoken form: phonological knowledge	To hear the word and to pronounce it acceptably, on its own, and in phrases, and sentences	To hear and produce the endings of verb forms, such as the /n/ sound at the end of *undertak<u>en</u>*
Grammatical knowledge	To use it in a grammatically accurate way: to know grammatical connection with other words	*She sang very well*, not *She sang very good*; To know that *is* and *be* are parts of the same verb
Collocational knowledge	To know which other words can be used with it	*A beautiful view*, not *a good looking view*
Orthographic knowledge	To spell it correctly	*Protractor*, not *protracter*
Pragmatic knowledge, knowledge of style and register	To use it in the right situation	*Would you like a drink?* Is more appropriate in a formal or semi-formal situation than *What can I get you?*
Connotational knowledge	To know its positive and negative associations with related words	To know that *slim* has positive connotation, when used about a person, whereas *skinny* is negative
Metalinguistic knowledge	To know explicitly about the word, e.g. its grammatical properties	To know that *protractor* is a *noun*; to know that *pro* is a *prefix*

3. Teaching vocabulary

There are numerous options for focusing on vocabulary as a part of a language proficiency course. There may be a specific lesson devoted to vocabulary development, or the focus on vocabulary may be integrated with the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Alternatively, vocabulary may be just dealt with as it occurs, but it dealt with in a principled way.

Kinds of words

All words are not created equal. Some occur much more frequently than others and are thus are more useful for learners. This knowledge is a very important prerequisite for planning a vocabulary program, and for making day to day decisions about how to treat particular words. In general there are four kinds of words: 1) high frequency words, 2) academic words, 3) technical words, and 4) low frequency words.

a. High frequency words

High frequency words consist of around 2000 word families and include most of the 176 function words (words that are not nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs), as well as content words, such as help, different, day, and often. These 2000 high frequency words can account for 80% to 95% of the running words in a text depending on what kind of text is being counted. It is possible to say and write most of what we need to say and write in our daily life mainly using only these words, although native speakers do not limit themselves in this way. About 50% of these words came to English from French, Latin, or Greek.

b. Academic Words

The academic words of a language are those words that are common in academic texts from a wide variety of disciplines and which are not in the most frequent 2000 words of English. The best list of these words is the academic word list which consists of 570 word families. Although the words in this list occur in no-academic texts like newspapers and novels, most of them occur much more frequently in academic texts. The academic word list covers around 8.5% to 10% of the running words in academic texts and includes words like abstract, affect, margin, policy, and technology. The words in this list are an essential learning goal for learners who intend to do academic study in the medium of

English and who already know the most frequent 2000 words. About 91% of these words come from French, Latin, and Greek.

c. Technical words

Each subject area has its own special technical vocabulary. Some of this technical vocabulary consists of high frequency words and words from the academic word list which are very common and have a narrowed meaning in a special subject area, like cost and price in economics, and agree and subject in grammar. There are technical dictionaries for many subject areas like medicine, geography, and applied linguistics. Most technical vocabularies seem to be less than 1000 words but some may be quite large, in subject like botany and anatomy. Most technical vocabularies contain many words from French, Latin or Greek.

d. Low frequency words

The fourth group of words consists of all those that are not in the previous groups. Some of the low frequency words are technical words for some people. One person's technical vocabulary may be another person's low frequency vocabulary.

The high frequency words are a small enough group to be a reasonable goal for a two or three year course. They are so frequent and provide such high coverage for such a small group of words that they should be given direct attention by both teacher and learners and should appear in all four strand of a course. Any time spent on these words both in class and outside class will be time well spent. There is a little sense in giving attention to other words if the high frequency words are not known.

The academic words are like high frequency words for learners with academic purposes and should get the same kind of attention after the high frequency words are known. Because such a large proportion of these words come from French, Latin, and Greek, useful word parts should be learned and used to help remember the words and their meanings.

The technical words of a subject are best learned while the subject matter of a specialist area is being learned. Technical words studied detached from an area of

knowledge will probably make little sense to the learners. Thus, technical words are most properly the concern of the subject matter teacher. However, the English teacher can help learners with strategies for learning such words (especially the use of word parts), and can help learners see how common words can stretch their meaning s to incorporate technical meanings.

The low frequency words make up a large, unpredictable group of words which provide very poor coverage for so many words. Each word does not occur frequently and a meeting with very low frequency word is unlikely to be followed soon by meeting with the another same word. For these reason, teachers should not spend class time teaching these words. Learners need to learn low frequency words but teachers should focus on strategies which can be used to cope with and learn these words. These strategies are guessing from context, using word cards, using word parts, and dictionary use. Teachers should use meeting with low frequency words as opportunities to develop and practice these strategies.

The following are the techniques of teaching vocabulary:

1). Getting an elaborate explanation of the meaning of a word and its uses

2) Learning words from word cards

3) Listening to a quick translation of a word

4) Guessing the meaning of a word from context while reading

5) Doing a matching collocation activity

6) Looking up a word in a dictionary

7) Finding the noun, verb, adjective, and adverbial forms for the same word

8) Reporting to the class on a word found in reading

9) Doing a speaking activity which involves some partly known words

10) Listening to a story where the teacher writes up unfamiliar words from the story on the board

Taken from:

1. Managing Vocabulary learning, written by Paul Nation
2. Vocabulary in Use