



VOCABULARY CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

Language is usually thought of as a means of communication. Feelings, moods, ideas, information, experiences of various types all these may be communicated by means of language. Thus language is a peculiar, unique phenomenon which man uses to communicate with each other. To communicate ideas with one another signs and symbols are used. A sign is a token or a device that carries a special meaning or has a specific meaning attached to it. A symbol is a conventional sign, and languages are arbitrary symbols. Thus, they have no intrinsic natural or inevitable meaning embodied in them.

Keywords:Communication, information, symbols, language, phenomenon, ideas

Received :12/02/2015

Revised on: 24/02/2015

Accepted on: 28/02/2015

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When a child is born in a community it hears the language spoken by that community. A child in the modern society may have to learn one or more languages other than his mother tongue. There is a great difference between mother tongue acquisition and the learning of a second language or a foreign language. In the former case, the child learns the language by its interaction with the speech community. It may not require the help of a teacher. Without any control and selection the child is exposed to its mother tongue which it learns spontaneously. But in learning a second or foreign language this situation is not available. Here a teacher has to teach the target language within a stipulated period of time. Thus it is imperative that an intelligible choice should be made about the language items to be taught. Teaching materials will have to be prepared, making use of a selected

number of structures and lexical items. This selection of vocabulary is called vocabulary control. There are sufficient reasons to resort to vocabulary control. First, experience and experiments have shown that all the vocabulary items are not necessary for the effective use of a language. Even a native speaker is not conversant with all the vocabulary items and structures of his language. Second, research has proved that a few thousand English words are enough for ordinary communication. The studies conducted by Michael West made him conclude that, "practically any technical matter can be written within 2500 or even 1000 words": It implies that a clever selection of language items is necessary in the teaching of English as a second language. The third reason for vocabulary control is that it has been realized that most of the learners of a foreign language can learn only a few thousand words. In the light of the

aforesaid facts it becomes clear that selection of course content entails a judicious selection of those words which are considered most important, suitable and necessary. As a result of this attempts were made in the second and third decades of the present century to prepare lists of minimum vocabulary items to be taught to the learners of English. The criteria for the selection of these words may be classified into two - external factors and internal factors.

1. External Factors

First, we will have to decide the type of language material. From the total language material, selection must be made about the type of dialect, register, style and medium to be taught. In making this selection we will have to keep in mind the following external factors.

Objectives — objectives are the most important external factor in the selection of the type of language to be taught. The selection should be such that it must help the learners to fulfill the tasks described in the objectives. The language items selected to carry out the objectives of FLT for special purpose and FLT (Foreign Language Teaching) for general purpose are different. A foreign language learner will find the standard variety of the language the most useful. So the standard variety of English should be used to realize the general objective of learning a foreign language.

Level - The level of the learners is another important external factor. If the language material is for a high level, this objective assumes greater importance. At the lowest level the objectives are less important because a learner will have to master a certain number of language elements known as the "common core".

Time - The number of periods or hours that are set apart for language instruction is the third external factor for the selection. The type of the school attended and the language background of the learner are the other external factors which decide the selection process.

The type of the language to be taught is selected on the basis of the above external factors. The next step is to decide the number of the vocabulary items. The vocabulary items should be a minimum in number but they should be of maximum use.

Internal factors used objectively are the usual criteria for vocabulary selection in modern times.

2. Internal Factors

The lexicon of a language contains many items. Many of them occur very infrequently. So the possibilities for selection at the lexical level are extensive. The following internal factors are used to make the selection of vocabulary items.

a) Frequency — one of the best known criteria is how frequently words occur in a sample of texts which represents the language use. Words which occur more frequently in the sample are preferred to less frequent words.

b) Range or distribution — By range is meant the way in which words are distributed over the various parts of which the sample consists. A word which is used in a number of registers is preferred over a word which is used only in one register.

c) Semantic Range — Words of greater semantic range are given preference. They can be used in different situations. For example the word "table" means a piece of furniture and also the multiplication table.

d) Productivity — By the use of prefixes and suffixes new words can be formed. For example from the word "kind" new words can be formed such as "unkind" "kindly" "kindness" etc. Such words are said to have greater productivity and are preferred over words of less productivity.

e) Traceability — By traceability is meant to teach the words in class room situations. Words which can be taught in the normal class room situations are given priority over other words.

There are different ways of classifying vocabulary items. According to one classification they are divided into active vocabulary and passive vocabulary. The active vocabulary is one which a learner is able to use correctly in his speech and writing. Thus it is the productive vocabulary. The passive vocabulary is the recognition vocabulary which one is able to recognize when used in speech and writing from the context.

There is another classification according to which the vocabulary can be considered as Mends, acquaintance and strangers. Friends are those vocabulary items the meaning and usage of which the learner knows very well. They are the active vocabulary. Acquaintances are those vocabulary

items the meaning of which the learner knows from the context in which they appear. They are the passive vocabulary. Strangers are those vocabulary items the meaning and usage of which the learner does not know.

Another manner of classifying words is to divide them as structural words and content words. Content words are those which carry the message or meaning. Structural words are those words which establish links between words and make the meaning clear.

Structural Words

Palmer in his book, 'A Grammar of English Words' says that English contains about 20,000 words in current use. Of these, about 1000 present considerable difficulty to the foreign students of English, the rest present little or no difficulty. These words are known as structural words. The preposition, the negative particles, the conjunctions, the pronouns, the auxiliary verbs, the determiners the interrogative adverbs and the adverbs come under this group of words.

Miller in his book 'Language and Communication' calls them "forms". They are indispensable for one's use of English. Structural words are words which help to give meaning by establishing links, even though they have no definite meaning of their own. About 200 of them are very frequent and important in speech and writing. They are also known as closed system words. Affixes are not used with them to create new words.

Procedure for the teaching of structural words

There are different methods to teach the structural words, depending on the number of years the learners have already spent in learning the language, the nature of the structural words, the background of the learner and so on. The procedure outlined here is suitable to beginners who have already studied the use of definite article and the interrogative adverb "where". The structural words to be taught are the prepositions "between" "over" and "under".

First, the teacher takes three objects — a bag, a pen and a pencil box. He places them on the table. Then he puts a piece of chalk between the bag and the pen. After this he tells the students "Look here.

Where is the piece of chalk?" The student replies "It is between the bag and the pen". Then he puts the pen between the piece of chalk and bag and asks the class, "where is the pen?" The student replies, "The pen is between the chalk and the bag": He changes the relative positions of the three items and the question is repeated. The student answers and when the teacher is satisfied he moves to the next stage.

He writes the word "place" on the board and says. Look at the blackboard. Where is the letter 'l' in "place"? (It is between p and a) where is the letter 'a' (It is between 'l' and 'c')

In this manner the students are taught the usage of the structural word 'between'. Next the teacher teaches other structural words "over" and "under".

The teacher places a book under the table and says that the book is under the table. Then he places a pencil under the table and asks the students, "where is the pencil?" (The pencil is under the table).

Then he places a duster under the table and asks the class, "where is the duster?" (It is under the table). Thus the use of under is taught.

Then he puts a pen on the table and says the pen is on the table. The teacher can show a picture of a river, a bridge and a boat under the bridge. He asks the students.

Where is the bridge?

(The bridge is over the river)

Where is the boat?

(The boat is under the bridge or on the river)

After having taught this the students are given the following table and are asked to write as many sentences as possible using the table as homework:

The pen is between The bag and the box

The pencils are under The table

The bag is over The book The duster is

Teaching of content Words

A good vocabulary is essential for communication. This fact has to be taken care of in any language teaching programme. The important features of a word that require practice in learning are pronunciation, spelling, meaning and usage.

Language is basically speech and in the case of a second language most of the learners do not get a chance to listen to the native speakers. This makes the teaching of pronunciation very important. For

the majority of the learners the classroom is the only source to provide them with language experience. The teacher is the model for them. The teacher pronounces the words and the students follow him. The use of teaching aids like radio, tape recorders TV etc. are of great use to teach pronunciation. In advanced stages language laboratories are also used.

Teaching of spelling is another aspect of the teaching of vocabulary. English words are not read on the basis of their spelling. Certain letters are aspirated and sometimes the same letter is pronounced differently in different words. So the teaching of spelling is a very difficult task for the language teacher.

The traditional method of teaching the spelling of English words is imitation and practice. The teacher says the spelling of each word and the students repeat it after the teacher. The learner says "g-i-r-a-f-f-e": "Giraffe" ten or fifteen times to learn it properly. Sometimes instead of drill learners say and write the words a number of times.

This rote learning is dull and boring so we need a better method.

Flash cards can be used to teach spelling. A letter may be written on a flash card. A number of them should be given to the students and they may be asked to arrange them into as many words as possible. A group activity can be introduced. The class may be divided into small groups. Each group may be provided with the same number of flash cards having the same letters. The group which makes the maximum number of words with the given cards may be declared successful. This exercise can be introduced in lower classes.

A few letters may be written on the board and the students may be asked to write as many words as possible using them. This can also be converted to group activity. This teaching can be used in advanced stage.

The use of a dictionary is also an important means to learn spelling. The habit of consulting a dictionary for spelling or meaning should be developed in the students.

Cross word puzzles and spelling games may be used to teach spelling in an interesting and effective manner.

Meaning and usage

This is the most important aspect of the teaching of vocabulary items. A good dictionary is a very useful aid to teach this aspect of words. Besides this there are other techniques used to teach the meaning and usage of words. The following are some of them.

A) In context -

It may be possible to make the students understand the meaning from the context in which the word occurs. They may be helped to deduce the meaning and usage from the text, if the words are in the text and the meaning of other words is known for example. 'He praised him for hard work.'

The meaning of abstract words like "brave" "patriotism" "honesty" etc may be taught by creating a context or situation. Suppose we want to teach the meaning of "brave". We may talk about the great Indian leaders who fought for the freedom of India. In this context we may say that, "They were not afraid because they were brave": "LalBahadurShastri was honest and full of patriotism for this country". While using this technique, teachers should take care to see that the students understand the meaning correctly. For example the meaning of "beauty" can be taught by saying that, "AishwaryaRai is a woman of great beauty":

B) Description or definition words can be described or defined to make their meaning clear to the learners e.g. hymn — "A hymn is a religious song":

C) Drawing — The teacher can draw the pictures of objects on the board so that the students understand the meaning of these objects. If a teacher is not good at drawing he can draw line pictures. The pictures will stimulate and motivate the students to co-relate the objects represented by them.

D) Objects — Objects may be used to teach the meaning of vocabulary items. Objects which are available in the classroom or which can be easily brought into the classroom can be used for this purpose. For example "table", "chalk"; "duster" spectacles" can be easily shown to the students.

E) Field Trips — Field trips may be arranged. During these educational trips students may be brought into contact with many things which they will have to learn in the classroom. Suppose there is a lesson on railway station or zoo. The teacher should

arrange a visit to these places and most of the vocabulary items can be taught when the students visit these places. Learning in this manner is easy and interesting because a direct bond is established between the object and its meaning.

F) Mime — Vocabulary items indicating actions can be illustrated by mimicry. For example words like 'eating; singing; 'dancing; 'jumping; running; may be made clear to the students by mimicry. Revision of them can be done by asking the students to mime while the teacher says these words.

G) Pictures and flash cards — Certain vocabulary items like names of animals, vehicles, cars, cities, mountains, rivers etc can be taught by using pictures and flash cards. The pictures or cuttings can be pasted on a piece of cardboard to make flash cards. The teacher shows these pictures to the class and pronounces the vocabulary items. Then the students are asked to pronounce these words. The words can also be written on the board and the students read these words and pronounce them. Wall charts may also be used to teach vocabulary items.

H) Word games — There are different types of word games. They can be very effectively used for revision or for practicing vocabulary items after they have been introduced to the class. Cross word puzzles are useful for group work or for home work. The following exercise can be used to revise the vocabulary items which the class has studied.

(1) Pair of related words (2) Relate colours with nouns

money	pencil	sky	green
street	bank	grass	blue
pen	road	milk	yellow
duster	bucket	gold	black
table	chalk	carbon	white
water	chair		

I) Synonyms and Antonyms — English scholars have studied Greek and Latin and English churchmen have introduced words from Hebrew, Greek and Latin through the Bible and prayer-books, sermons. Often words derived from two or more sources would be equivalent in meaning, and for a while, these equivalent words dwell side by side and would be used indiscriminately, and quite at random, for the same thing. Synonyms are useful in teaching

vocabulary items. e.g. "beautiful" - attractive, charming, lovely.

All things bright and beautiful

All creatures great and small

All things wise and wonderful

The Lord God made them all (Mrs C.F. Alexander 1818-1895)

The word pure also has many synonyms e.g. absolute, chaste, clean, clear, fair genuine. Antonyms also are useful in teaching vocabulary.

E.g. antonyms of beautiful are ugly, unlovely, grotesque, horrid, etc.

An "ugly" girl is not "pretty": If the students know the meaning of ugly then the meaning of pretty is dear to them.

Vocabulary can be practiced with the aid of "homonyms": A homonym is a word identical with another in spelling and pronunciation but differing from it in origin and meaning. For example.

Fare — passage money.

Fare — eatables, food and drink

Lime — fruit

Lime — Calcium oxide

table — a piece of furniture

table — list of figures or facts arranged one below another

K) Words can be studied as 'homophones' A homophone is a word identical with another in pronunciation, but which differs from it in spelling and meaning

E.g. — Write — draw symbols and signs which make words. rite — fixed form of prayer in church, temples etc.

right — correct, proper weight — heaviness wait — to stay.

red — color

read — past tense of 'read' (verb)

tear — break by pulling apart

tare — weight of cart or box without the goods in it.

L) Vocabulary can also be enriched by associating words with a particular hobby, a specialization or profession, a game or a social activity.

For example : Philately (stamp-collecting); stamps, envelopes, cancellation, postage,

Cricket — pitch, maiden-over, googly, bouncers, cover, runs agriculture- plough, seed, fallow, crop-rotation, fertilizer, urea

Jam-session — drums, jazz, cooing, swing, twist, dizzy, guitar, banjo

M) Words can be studied as fixed formulae like social forms and greetings or fixed collections and idioms.

Good morning; Good afternoon; yes, please; No, thank you; I'm afraid, not; happy new year.

Words and expressions can be classified as technical terminology belonging to special fields and often spoken of as scientific, technical or official jargon. Several common words for everyday language are often restricted and reserved in various branches of disciplines. On the other hand technical terms move out into the world of common speech and everyday application with wider use and less restrictions. This two-way traffic of words has resulted in perennial source of vocabulary expansion and enrichment. For example - land, labour, wealth, market, (in money) retrieve, store, stock (in computer science, economics) catharsis, purge, behavior (medicine) strategy, deploy, command (from combat use)

Words can be studied as made up of "affixes" — both, "prefixes" and "suffixes" corruption; anticorruption; corruptionless, Organize; reorganize; disorganize; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; unity; disunity;

The students are now given a variety of prose selections, word-lists and exercises for building up their vocabulary.

Passage

Science has told us so much about the moon that it is fairly easy to imagine what it would be like to go there. It is certainly not a friendly place. As there is no water or air, there can be no life of any kind. There is no variety of scenery either. For miles after miles there are only flat plains of dust with mountains around them. Above, the sun and stars shine in a black sky. If you step out of the mountain shadows, it will mean moving from severe cold, into great heat. These extreme temperatures continually break rocks away from the surface of the mountains. The moon is also a very silent world, for sound waves can only travel through air. But beyond the broken horizon, you see a friendly sight. Our earth shines more brightly than the stars. From this distance, it looks like an immense ball, coloured blue and green, and brown.

EXERCISES

Read the passage carefully, Re read it, if necessary.

Note down the difficult words.

Use either a prefix or suffix to the following words

Friendly, Certainly, sight, fairly.

Find one word from the passage above which means the same as the expression(s) given below:

to suppose (line 1-5)

utmost (lines 5-8)

the limit of vision (lines 8-10)

tremendously large (line 10-12) ti

EXERCISE

I got out of the house at ten in the morning and by the time I got to the main road I got soaking wet by an unexpected shower of rain. I got under a bus shelter for sometime and got quite tired waiting for either the rain to stop or a bus to take me to the station. At last I got fed up and got to the other side of the road quickly where we have got a small tea shop. I got myself a cup of tea from which I got much relief.

Rewrite replacing the ten occurrences of the word "get" with appropriate synonyms or synonymous phrases.

Thus a teacher has to make a proper selection of teaching material for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Since it is a global world it is essential to learn English because it is a window to the west and it opens clear vistas and horizons of knowledge.

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