RESEARCH ARTICLE

VOCABULARY BUILDING: DOING IT DIFFERENTLY

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ABSTRACT

"We think with words, therefore to improve thinking, teach vocabulary." (A. Draper and G. Moeller). Every new word that is learnt widens and strengthens one's vocabulary equipping one to be explicit in sharing views, grasping ideas, thinking logically, and thus connecting with the world around engagingly. Therefore, teachers can use a variety of simple invigorating, time-bound word-games and competitions that serve as an excellent way to teach new words since a rich vocabulary creates a favourable impression and also trains the learner to speak with accuracy, brevity and clarity which are the hallmarks of professional communication.

KEY WORDS: Vocabulary, time-bound word games, competitions

INTRODUCTION

"Few activities are as delightful as learning new vocabulary." Tim Gunn

Grammar is important but vocabulary has its own significance. As British linguist David A. Wilkins states: "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, David A. 1972). Improving one's vocabulary has a major influence on one's ability to enhance language proficiency. Paul Nation, a leading linguist researcher points out that "vocabulary is not an end in itself. A rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing easier to perform." (Nation, Paul 1994).

The advantage of having a good vocabulary needs to be impressed upon the learner. They have to understand that a good vocabulary is not restricted only to writers and speakers but can, in fact be useful to whoever wishes to improve their lives personally and professionally.

Teachers can improve students' vocabulary by using various communication strategies, for instance, in the Osmania University syllabus, for first year engineering students, the topics aimed at enhancing students' vocabulary include: Glossary at the end of each essay as well as Synonyms, Antonyms, Homonyms, Homophones and Homographs, Prefixes and Suffixes. In addition to these, Idioms, Words Often Confused and One - Word Substitutes are also taught.

Many a time, a teacher wonders how to make the process of learning interesting. How can acquiring new vocabulary be made enjoyable for students? Examinations and assignments may not always capture students' unique skills and could even lead to high stress and anxiety. However,

competitions that are enjoyable may provide opportunities for them to demonstrate their talents and skills and galvanize them to achieve excellence in academic achievement. Using engaging, interesting and fun based vocabulary games/ competitions motivates learners and consolidates learning. Therefore using such games /competitions to teach language, forms the main focus of this paper.

It also looks at how language teachers can go beyond the syllabus by adopting interesting, collaborative, activity based learning strategies viz. incorporating certain simple word games/ competitions taking care to choose those vocabulary items that are particularly attention-grabbing and also conducting the activity in a short span of time, perhaps just a minute or two. To this extent, simple word games and word plays involving pairs or groups can be conducted in a very brief time. These simple and engaging tasks, games and competitions can become a part of a teachers reportoire since they can be conducted in any classroom set up without sophisticated labs to sustain and develop learners communicative competence. These may include interesting vocabulary items which create interest in vocabulary learning such as Anagrams, Euphemisms, Portmanteau Words, Malapropisms, Spoonerisms, Palindromes etc. since, as Alberto Manguel observes, vocabulary is meant to "help and delight and instruct us."

In the classroom, the teacher can use various methods centered on vocabulary items. Opportunities should be provided for students to engage in literary competitions, group discussions, debates and role plays which broaden their horizons and consequently enhance their vocabulary in their class room and their language lab. As Decarrico (2001) states, words should not be learnt separately or by memorization without understanding. Rather, "learning new words is a cumulative process, with words enriched and established as they are met again". (Nation 2000)

Sally Gardner states that she collects words: "…they are sweets in the mouth of sound." (Gardner, Sally 2013) Teachers too can impart their love for learning new words and encourage learners to read extensively, learn at least one new word a day, by keeping a dictionary and a thesaurus handy, get the habit of journaling and engaging in conversations in their daily life. Besides this, the teacher can also frame various dynamic, time bound competitions e.g. word games /word play to improve and consolidate students' vocabulary. This will expose students to new vocabulary and also ensure better retention by revisiting words already learnt. There are numerous and complex vocabulary games available on the internet however, this facility may not always be available to the teacher. In this scenario the teacher can conduct simple and interesting competitions in the classroom in just a minute or two.

METHODOLOGY
WORD GAMES

Games are highly motivating since they not only develop higher order thinking skills but are also amusing, interesting and provide a welcome break from the normal routine of classroom work. They challenge the students to be curious, participate and interact with least effort in acquiring vocabulary. They also sustain learners interest in vocabulary building. As Nguyen ThiThanhHuyen and KhuatThi Thu Nga say, quoting Huang, "Learning through games could encourage the operation of certain psychological and intellectual factors which could facilitate communication heightened self-esteem, motivation and spontaneity, reinforcing learning, improving intonation and building confidence." (HuyenNguyen ThiThanh and NgaKhuatThi Thu 2003)

Some of the interesting vocabulary games/competitions that will appeal to students and can be conducted in a very short time include: Blowing Bubbles, "What's the Good Word?" Word Mapping and Word Pyramid to motivate learners to expand their vocabulary.

Blowing Bubbles

I. In this one minute game, students are asked to find words that convey the meaning of something that is circular and if they are in a cheerful mood and are willing to go along with it, they could even write the words in the form of circles or bubbles: e.g. a ring, sun, moon, face of a

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clock, iris (part of the eye), Halo, centre of the fan etc. The next levels could be :

II. List at least two synonyms for the word bubble: for example: *air ball, globule*

III. List an alternate use for the word bubble e.g. *something bubbles up or appears suddenly*

IV. Provide the meaning of the given idiom and use it in a sentence: to burst his bubble e.g. He said, *I hate to burst your bubble, but you will not be winning a prize.*

Colours Galore

After the game using shapes, one could focus on colours. First, students have to list as many colour idioms as possible in a minute. e.g. feeling blue, in the pink of health, green fingers, green horn, looking at the world through rose coloured glasses, roll out the red carpet, white elephant etc.

In the next level, students can be asked to guess as many idioms as possible for a *particular* colour e.g. white elephant, a white lie, in black and white; red tape, roll out the red carpet, etc. Visuals could also be used to convey meaning while teaching idioms e.g. a piece of cake, like two peas in a pod, once in a blue moon etc. This is ideal for pair work and the pair which finds the largest number of idioms using colours in just one minute will be the winner.

What's the Good Word?

Taking ideas from the vocabulary- based game show by Sabira Merchant on Doordarshan, in the 1970s, "What's the Good Word", the teacher can formulate her own version (s) of the game

i. One or more prompts can be given to enable the student to guess the word. For example:
Very large and huge ancient structures, situated in Egypt : Answer: *The Pyrammids*

ii. A phrase is provided and the student has to replace it with a single word that conveys the same meaning e.g. *a group of islands*: *archipelago*

iii. Two words are given and the student has to provide a word which has the same meaning as the given word e.g.

unmanageable, clumsy: cumbersome (synonym)

iv. One word is provided and the student has to be given two words which have the opposite meaning. e.g. *Cacophony: Euphony and Symphony* (antonyms)

Word Pyramid

i. Although there are many complex versions of the game, a very simple adaptation of this game can be used. All the words need to begin with the given letter. Initially, the word pyramid can be started with the letter A.The next row should have a word beginning with A but having only two letters,the third row should have a word with three letters and so on. The team which succeeds in completing the pyramid with a 10 letter word at the base, is the winner.

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A
AN
ANT
AUNT
ABOUT
ASSURE
AMNESTY
ACHIEVED
ADULATION
ACCELERATE
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ii. The next step could involve making words beginning with different letters e.g. the letter I, working in pairs to form a word pyramid in a limited time (about two minutes).

Word Mapping

A word map promotes vocabulary development through the use of a visual organizer. As the Essay titled *Word Map- Strategies for Student* quotes Echevarria, Vogt & Short (2014), "These charts provide more context and "clues" than typical word walls, because they include an illustration, definition, and sentence for each vocabulary word". An additional benefit is that, participating in this exercise nurtures the learners' intelligence andcontributes towards making them rational,

problem-solving, goal setting, and imaginative individuals.
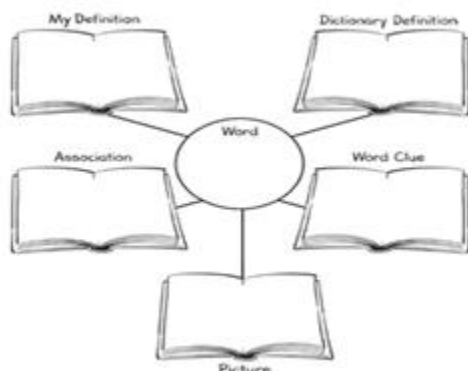
Courtesy:
http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/word_maps

One strategy involves writing the given word, drawing a picture of it, giving its definition and using it in a sentence. Another way to use Word Maps is to give the dictionary definition of the word followed by it's transcription, part of speech, synonym, antonym and give an example of its usage. Thus through word mapping students are given the opportunity to make personal connections, depict their ideas through their own pictures, write their own sentences and give definitions in their own words.

WORD PLAY

A play on words involves a clever or witty use of language so that the result is amusing or interesting. Word play includes techniques that involve letters, semantics and phonetic values of words as in Anagrams and Palindromes, Malapropism, Neologism and Spoonerisms. These can be used in conducting competitions as given below:

Anagrams

An Anagram is a form of word play that can be defined as "a word, phrase, or name formed by rearranging the letters of another, such as *spar,* formed from *rasp"* (Oxford Living Dictionaries).

i. Competitions using Anagramscan be conducted with pairs of students trying to rearrange the letters to form a new word or phrase in the shortest possible time. One way is to use Scrabble by giving simple instructions to enable students to rearrange the word, for e.g. use all the letters given, put the new word together as fast as you can.

ii. To make the competition interesting, ask the students to find Anagrams that are relevantto each other, for eg. *Debit card: Bad credit, The earthquakes : The queer shakes, Schoolmaster: The classroom They see: The Eyes*

iii. The teacher can give a sufficient number of examples of Anagrams to help students understand how they can be unraveled to find new words .For example: the following Anagrams could be given:*acres, races, aster, taser*

Answers:*cares; scare; rates; tears, stare*

A lawmen pun? (Hollywood Actor)

Poem cycle seen (HollywoodActress)

Answers: Paul Newman, Clemence Poesy

iv. Anagrams could also be taught by giving them in the form of Match the Following

S. No	Anagram		Unscrambled
1	*The Schoolmaster*	a	*Flutter by*
2	*The Morse Code*	b	*Elegant man*
3	*Vacation times*	c	*I'm not as active*
4	*Butterfly*	d	*The classroom*
5	*A gentleman*	e	*Here come dots*

Answers: 1d, 2e, 3c, 4a, 5b

Palindromes

"A word, phrase, or sequence that reads the same backwards as forwards, e.g. madam or nurses run" (Oxford Living Dictionaries). In other words it is a word or phrase that reads the same in either direction.

Examples of Palindromes are:

Words (e.g. *level, racecar, Malayalam)*

Phrases (e.g.***"Madam, I'm Adam")***

Numbers (6-10-2016) or other sequence of units that can be read the same way in either direction.

i. In order to use Palindromes in vocabulary competitions, the teacher could give an example of a palindrome, for instance: *radar,* and then ask students, in twos to think of other examples of words that are Palindromes. The team that comes up with

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the largest number of palindromes in one minute is the winner. Or, the teacher could ask the students to name the pairs of words where the first word (e.g: *Star*) is spelled backwards to get the second word (e.g: *Rats*) in the shortest possible time.

ii. The next level can be challenging and has the additional benefit of increasing general awareness. Learners can be given the following palindromes and asked to find out what they refer to and share it with the class the next day. *"Able was I ere I saw Elba", "A man, a plan, a canal, Panama!*(Ans. The first refers to Napoleon when he was banished to Elba and the second refers the Panama Canal.)

Malapropism

"The mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with an amusing effect (e.g. *'dance a flamingo'* instead of flamenco)" (Oxford Living Dictionaries).

i. To begin with, the students can be familiarized with a few of the original malapropisms of the character Mrs.
Malaprop in Richard Sheridan's play (*The Rivals* , -1775).
"...promise to forget this fellow - to illiterate him, I say, quite from your memory." [obliterate]
"O he will dissolve my mystery!" [resolve]
"He is the very pine-apple of politeness!" [pinnacle]
"...she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying." [comprehend]
"...she's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile." [alligator]
"I am sorry to say, Sir Anthony, that my affluence over my niece is very small." [influence]

ii. The teacher can give examples of common malapropisms for instance facilitate for *felicitate* and credible for *creditable.*

iii. The teacher can ask the students to provide the right word which was intended:

- let's get down to *brass roots* (Ans: grass roots)

- you've sent her barking up the *wrong dog* (Ans. wrong tree)

iv. Similarly malapropisms made by famous personalities can be given and students will have to guess the correct word(s)
Listen to the *blabbing brook*. Norm Crosby (Ans. *babbling)*

Neologism

It is a "new word or expression or a new meaning of a word" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). It refers to creating new words.

i. Neologisms can be used as examples when teaching the etymology and usage of words. Besides this, students can be asked to present a Neologism a day: they will be required to present the etymology as well as an example of how the word is used. After a week, the teacher can conduct a competition to check how much the students were able to recall. She can also give a few new words and the team which is able to guess their meanings as well, will be the winners. Two examples of neologisms are given below:

- *Cyberspace:* This word which was first coined by William Gibson in his sci-fi short story became better known a few years later, when his novel "Neuromancer" was published. Example: *This time Kate didn't hesitate pressing send and watched her mail vanish from the out-box into cyberspace. Fallen Woman.*

- *Freelance*: This term appeared when Walter Scott suggested it for the first time. In his novel Ivanhoe, "Free Lances" were hired as militants for a fee.

ii. The teacher can ask the students to coin a new word by adding a single letter to the given words. She may give the following examples as a guide line.
Eruditz: A philosophy professor who can't figure out how to work the copying machine. (John Kupiec, Fairfax, Va., 2007)

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Skilljoy: The would-be friend who's a bit better than you at everything. (Steve Fahey, Kensington, Md., 2008)

Spoonerisms

It is "a transposition of usually initial sounds of two or more words - as in tons of soil for sons of toil (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

i. Spoonerisms can also be used to teach the four basic language skills for example, in the spoonerism Go and shake a tower for Go *and take a shower.* Students can be asked to think of all possible words related to shower like *hot, cold, warm, cleanliness, shower of blessings* etc. to understand more than one discourse. This will enable the teaching-learning process to be fun-filled and exciting and to encourage English learners to improve their language skills.

ii. Since spoonerism is a verbal error in which a speaker accidentally transposes the initial sounds or letters of two or more words, often to humorous effect, the competition could be simple and just involve guessing what the person really wanted to say. For example:

• *Blushing crow* mistakenly used for --- ("crushing blow.")

• A toast to *our queer dean* instead of --------- ("our dear Queen.")

• *Fighting a liar* is meant for---------("lighting a fire")

Portmanteau

It is a word or morpheme whose form and meaning are derived from a blending of two or more distinct forms (as *smog* from *smoke* and *fog*) (Merriam Webster Dictionary) .

Portmanteaus can be interesting and have become a part of our dictionary. These words which contain messages and feelings keep getting added to the dictionary. An example of a portmanteau word is*Frabjous*means *great, wonderful, fabulous,* and is a blend of either fabulous and joyous, or fair and joyous.

It may be interesting to note that Lewis Carroll coined numerous portmanteau words two of which are mentioned below:

• *Chortle* meaning "to exclaim exultingly, with a noisy chuckle." (Oxford English Dictionary) was coined by Lewis Carroll as a blend of *chuckle* and*snort*."He chortled in his joy." (Carroll, Lewis 1946).

• *Mimsy* -Mimsy as a blend of *miserable* and *flimsy*. (Carroll, Lewis 1946)

i. The teacher could use as a resource other whimsical portmanteau words coined by Lewis Carrol in *Alice in Wonderland* and ask the students to identify the two words which have been combined to form the given word.This will serve not only to learn new portmanteau words but to consolidate what was learnt.

ii. The students can be asked to collect other examples of portmanteau words and present them in the next class in just a minute. Four or five groups can be asked to present their findings, each team taking only one minute to do so. After hearing all the examples, the entire class tries to list as many as they can and the team that lists the maximum will be the winners.

Euphemism

This is "the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant; also the expression so substituted. (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

Euphemism is used across languages, cultures and situations. People use it to be polite rather than offensive. For instance, one could say that a person is *economical with the truth* instead of saying he is lying or that he is *between jobs* instead of stating that he is unemployed.

i. Euphemism smoothens communication and leads to positive relationships. Since it plays an important role in daily communication, the teacher can give various examples of euphemisms. To consolidate the learning, students are asked to make a collection of their own; they can work in pairs and together think of how to write a euphemistic expression for certain terms such as:

a*. Fat =*

b*. Homeless =*

c. *Accidental deaths =*

Answers:
a. *overweight, big boned, chubby, plump, portly, etc*
b. *without a roof over one's head, destitute, dispossessed, displaced*
c. *collateral damage*

ii. This can be played in the reverse order as well for e.g. by giving some euphemisms that are used to soften an unpleasant truth,

a. *Letting someone go-------------*
b. *Put to sleep ---------------*
c. *On the streets -----------------------*

Answers:
a. *firing someone*
b. *euthanize*
c. *homeless*

CONCLUSION

A good range of vocabulary lends richness and clarity to one's speech. Therefore an interesting way to do so could be to use games. As Wright, Betteridge and Buckby observe, "…games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work" and "create various contexts in which students have to use the language to communicate, exchange information and express… their own opinions." (1984). Thus it can be seen from the few examples given above that "games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, as the Essay titled *Grammar Games - Motivation in Teaching English* says for the "useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence." In this context, a language teacher can use games and competitions as tools in building vocabulary and also reap the significant benefit of making the teaching–learning process interesting and enjoyable.

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