

Teaching Vocabulary

Instructor: Nguyen Ngoc Vu, Ph.D.

What is vocabulary?

- A new item of vocabulary may be more than a single word, e.g. *post office* and *mother in law*, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea, so a useful convention is to cover all such cases by talking about vocabulary items ‘rather than ‘words’.

The importance of vocabulary

"Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." (Wilkins 1972:111)

"When students travel, they don't carry grammar books, they carry dictionaries." (Krashen in Lewis 1993: iii)

"The more one considers the matter, the more reasonable it seems to suppose that lexis is where we need to start from, the syntax needs to be put to the service of words and not the other way round." (Widdowsen in Lewis 1993:115)

What needs to be taught?

- **Form:**
pronunciation; spelling; inflections; derivations
- **Meaning:**
basic and literal meanings; derived and figurative meanings; semantic relation (synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, co-ordinates, superordinates); connotation
- **Usage:**
subcategorization; collocation; sociolinguistic and stylistic restrictions; slangs and idioms

How many words are needed for effective communication in L2?

Level	Number of Words	Text Coverage%
High-frequency words	2,000	87
Academic vocabulary	800	8
Technical vocabulary	2,000	3
Total to be learned	4,800	98
Low-frequency words	123,200	2
Total	128,000	100

from Nation and Newton, 1997, p.239

Thinking About Vocabulary Instruction: Three Tiers

- Tier One Words- Consists of basic words and rarely require instructional attention in school and highly frequent in life: clock, baby, ball, happy, walk, run, etc.
- **Tier Two Words - High frequency use for mature language users and found across a variety of knowledge domains: coincidence, absurd, industrious, fortunate, etc.**
- Tier Three Words - Low frequency use and limited to specific knowledge domains: isotope, lathe, peninsula, refinery, etc. Best learned when teaching specific content lessons such as geography, science, etc.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). Bringing words to life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction. NY: Guilford Press.

Can You Find a Tier II Word?



The Little Red Hen had eaten the last slice of her tasty loaf of bread. She'd sipped a cup of chickweed tea and taken her nap. Now she was hungry again. So she scratched through her cupboard and spied a can of tomato sauce.

Why don't I make a lovely little pizza? she said to herself.

Can You Find a Tier III Word?

OUR NEIGHBORS

A solar system has a star, or sun, at its center, with planets orbiting around it. Our solar system has nine planets spinning around the Sun. Seven of these have one or more moons orbiting them. You can see most of the planets shining in the night sky. Large pieces of rock called asteroids and frozen balls of ice called comets also orbit the Sun.



Pluto

Neptune

Uranus

Jupiter

Saturn

Mars

Earth

Venus

Mercury

asteroids

asteroids that come near the Earth

a comet

Gas and Dust

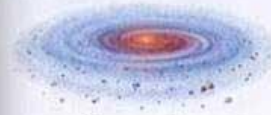
Our solar system was born when the Sun formed from a cloud of gas.



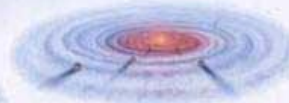
The Sun formed deep inside the dusty cloud.



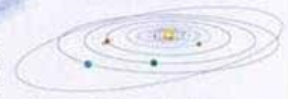
A disk of gas and dust swirled around the infant Sun.



Bits of dust stuck together to form large pieces of rock.



The rocks bumped and stuck together to form huge rocky masses.



Over millions of years, these masses combined to form planets.

Active vs. Passive vocabulary

- Active vocabulary: Words Ss need to understand and use -> spend a lot of time giving examples & asking questions
- Passive vocabulary: Words Ss will not need to use -> present quickly

Presenting Vocabulary

Some techniques for teaching new words

- Say the word clearly and write it on the board.
- Get the class to repeat the word in chorus.
- Translate the word into the students' own language.
- Ask students to translate the word.
- Draw a picture to show what the word means.
- Give an English example to show how the word is used.
- Ask questions using the new word.

Which are the most useful techniques?

What are their merits and defects for you?

Can you think of any other techniques you could use?

More techniques for teaching new words

- Provide creative examples.
- Elicit meaning from the students before telling them.
- Use related words such as synonyms, antonyms etc. to show the meaning.
- Think about how to check students' understanding.
- Relate the new word(s) to real life context(s).
- Predict possible misunderstanding or confusion.

Showing meaning visually

Using real objects

- How do you show the meaning of **Ceiling laptop shoulder**
- What kinds of words can be presented in this way?

Showing a picture

- How do you show the meaning of **eagle snorkeling arrow**
- Showing a picture
 - Draw a picture on the board
 - Show a picture prepared before a lesson

Summary

- For suitable vocabulary, it is a very effective method: it is direct, it is interesting, and it makes an impression on the class.
- Of course, not all words can be presented in this way. Vocabulary should only be presented visually if it can be done quickly, easily and clearly.

Using mime

- How do you show the meaning of **smile knit sad**?

What other words could be taught **using mime**?

Giving examples

How do you present these words?

Remote happiness urban

- Examples are useful for abstract words
- A good example clearly shows the meaning of the word to someone who does not know it already.
- The meaning can be shown by simple sentences.

Group practice: Add 1 or 2 sentences to make the meaning of these words clearer

- **Market:** You can buy food at the market
- **Clothes:** In the morning we put on our clothes
- **Noisy:** Students are often noisy
- **Look for:** I'm looking for my pen
- **Visit:** Last weekend I visited my uncle.
- **Happiness:** He was full of happiness
- **Impossible:** Your plan is quite impossible

What other techniques can you use to make the meaning of each word clearer?

Other techniques to show the meaning of lexical items

- **Concise definition**
- **Detail description**
- **Context**
- **Semantic relations: synonyms, antonyms**
- **Translation**
- **Associated ideas**
- **Collocation**

A combination of techniques can be used to show the meaning of a word

Group practice

- Answer these exam questions. Practice teaching if possible.

Using a new word

- Ts should reinforce the new words by asking **short and simple** questions around the class.
- Purposes:
 - Make sure Ss really understand the word
 - Give Ss more examples of how the word is used
 - Give Ss chance to practice other words and structures

Group practice

**You have just presented the words.
Think of 2 or 3 questions you could ask
the class, using these words**

**To cook lion holiday
magazine windy**

Vocabulary reviewing/testing techniques

- Multiple choice
- Matching
- Odd one out
- Writing sentences
- Gap-filling
- Translation
- Sentence completion