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## DEVELOPING LEXICAL COMPETENCE TEACHING ESP VOCABULARY

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**Abstract.** This article considers the problems of teaching English vocabulary for specific purposes. The author reveals theoretical questions and suggests some practical activities

**Key words:** *ESP vocabulary, specific terminology, subject, integrated.*

Vocabulary is obviously a very important element within a language as the overwhelming majority of meaning is carried lexically. The most relevant issue of teaching vocabulary is to make a research for the proper tools in this process and applying them in the classroom with the purpose of giving them to the students, namely, to provide them with a large and rich vocabulary to be successful not only in educational terms, but also in life as overall.

English is learnt and taught in many different contexts and in many different class arrangements. Such differences will have a considerable effect on how and what it is we teach.

Learning a language cannot be reduced, of course, to only learning vocabulary, but it is also true that «no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way.

Learning vocabulary is a rather more complex process than it might at first sight appear. It does not mean acquiring the same amount of knowledge for every word in a language. After all, we must take into account that even native speakers of a language can understand many more words than they actually use.

There are different things that can go wrong in learning vocabulary. Probably the most basic type of problem is the inability to retrieve vocabulary that has been

taught. In this situation either communication breaks down altogether or else the student has to convey the message in a different way by drawing on his strategic competence. The use of vocabulary inappropriate to a given situation is another fault. Thus, for instance, «right / left» are usually acceptable ways of indicating direction, although not on a ship, where «starboard / port» are more appropriate.

Another common error is the use of vocabulary at the wrong level of formality, e.g. «Be seated, ladies and gentlemen» vs. «Sit»; or possessing the wrong kind of vocabulary for one's needs, e.g. academic instead of conversational English. It is clear then that learning vocabulary is something more than just memorizing lists of words.

When making decisions about content, one of the first questions the language teacher will have to address is what vocabulary to teach. For many of them this will be determined by the choice of the course book, the syllabus designers, or other factors. Even so, the teacher should be concerned about the different criteria used when designing their syllabuses and materials, the ones followed in making decisions about vocabulary content in language courses, and what the objectives of these particular decisions are. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to evaluate syllabus and materials, to understand why particular vocabulary is to be taught as well as to explain to learners why they must learn particular words. Nowadays, different criteria can be employed to select the particular words to be taught, but before dealing with this it is important to point out that every teaching situation is different and so essential items in one context may be quite useless in another (for example, in ESP). The relative importance we attach to the various criteria will therefore depend on our own teaching situation.

The criteria which may be used to select vocabulary are as follows: it seems self-evident that it is sensible to teach the most frequent words in any language before the more unusual ones are taught as they are likely to be the most useful ones for learners of that language. But frequency is a more complex matter



than it looks, and it is unlikely that any syllabus or course book would want to stick to frequency lists alone.

If we want to organize our vocabulary teaching on a subject basis it may be a good idea to work out what the most frequent words are in that subject area either intuitively, with the aid of teachers of other subject matters (ESP), through the study of a limited set of related texts or with the help of a dictionary, for example, topic dictionaries.

A word may be quite frequent, but a majority or even all of its occurrences might be in just one or two texts. In this case, although its frequency might look significant, its range might be quite small. The most useful words for the learner then are those which are frequent and occur across a wide variety of texts.

Another area of classroom language has to do with the items which often appear in language activity instructions. Although constant exposure alone usually guarantees that these items will eventually be assimilated, it is possible to speed up the process by designing classroom activities containing many of these items and so avoid confusion or misunderstanding. It is possible for students to feel they need or to be interested in different words to those suggested by the teacher or course book, something to be taken into account for the sake of motivation. In fact, their needs or interests perhaps do not even coincide with those of the group or class. Our challenge here as teachers is to combine the collective and the individual.

It is also worth stating that, if the learner perceives the vital personal relevance of an item, he may acquire it whether the teacher pays great attention to it or not. On the contrary, the learner may consciously or subconsciously reject some of the items being taught.

Students enrolled at the University can take an English course, which is either general or ESP courses. From my teaching experience I can say that students face difficulties while learning new English words. It is difficult to learn words especially ESP words because they are low frequency words and are not encountered very often. Learning concrete words is easier than learning abstract words. Learners can

more easily remember words like: peach, house, and horse if they appear on a list than words such as transmission and device.

In order to develop an ability to learn new vocabulary, for both general English and legal vocabulary in learning ESP (English for Specific Purposes), the students should become aware of the importance of language learning strategies and be trained to use them appropriately. The teachers put a lot of effort toward helping them to learn vocabulary related to their field of study.

It is widely believed that reading is the major source of vocabulary growth in L1. Students with strong reading skills who read a variety of texts may realize substantial gains in their vocabulary without direct instruction. These students may also realize some incidental vocabulary gains through independent reading, however.

I believe that ESP teachers should teach words. A suitable approach for teaching ESP words is the lexical approach. The lexical approach follows the principle that lexis is the most important part of any language and should be treated that way.

Most of the students taking ESP identify it with specific terminology related to their field of study. So, ESP relates to the learners, the language required and the learning context, and thus establishes the primacy of need. Need is defined by the reasons for which the student is learning English.

It is my opinion that language teachers who teach ESP courses should be familiar with the core vocabulary of the field of study and design curriculum that integrate both content area and English language. The teachers' responsibility is to follow different procedures suggested by researchers in this field and try to make the learning of words as easy as possible for the students.

All in all, teachers should strive to help learners become independent learners and show them there are many vocabulary learning strategies that can be used to learn ESP words.

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