



Vocabulary Teaching in ESL Classroom

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Abstract- Vocabulary teaching for ESL learners demands from the teachers' part creativity, planning, and a deep understanding of how learners acquire new words. Vocabulary plays an essential role in facilitating their productive language performance. This article discusses the need for accelerating their word power to communicate successfully within and outside their world. Teachers need to adopt new techniques to expand their learners' vocabulary by taking into account several aspects of lexis while teaching vocabulary. There is a definite need for teaching strategies to help the second language learners to develop their vocabulary through listening, speaking, reading and writing. Innovative use of techniques in classrooms and exposure to English language, words and phrases will enable learners to gain vocabulary acquisition for communication in real life situations. This paper provides a few techniques that can be incorporated in the teaching of vocabulary in ESL classroom. The teachers can further explore new tips and techniques according to the level and interest of the learners to teach vocabulary as their learners need.

Keywords - Vocabulary teaching, ESL classroom, innovative techniques, further explore.

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is the core component of language proficiency. Success in this competitive world often depends on the candidates' effective use of words in context. According to Wilkins (1972: 111) without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. It has been observed that ESL (English as Second Language) learners specifically those coming from non-English medium schools do not have the required word power. Many college and university students in spite of learning English for about 13-15 years, are still unable to recognize, understand and use words in real life situations. This could be due to several factors such as inadequate vocabulary teaching in the Secondary and Higher Secondary classrooms, poor reading skills, and lack of exposure to English, lack of a homogenous English speaking community.

ESL students often feel a great sense of frustration when asked to define a word or a sentence on their own in English, since they know a little of grammar but do not have sufficient vocabulary. This difficulty hinders their speaking, listening, reading comprehension and writing. Therefore, vocabulary has to be properly taught in order that learners are trained to speak and write naturally and effectively. Some authors, pioneered by Lewis (1993), argue that vocabulary should be placed at the centre of language teaching, because language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar. Lewis insists that lexical approach is not simply a shift of emphasis from grammar to vocabulary teaching, as language consists of a lot of traditional vocabulary, but often of multiword prefabricated chunks (Lewis, 1997). These chunks including



collocations, fixed and semi- fixed expressions and idioms occupy a crucial role in facilitating language production, being the key to fluency.

Teaching of Vocabulary

Traditionally, the teaching of vocabulary above elementary levels was mostly incidental, limited to presenting new items as they appeared in reading or sometimes listening texts. This indirect teaching of vocabulary assumes that vocabulary expansion will happen through the practice of other language skills, which has been proved not enough to ensure vocabulary expansion.

Visnja (2003) laid emphasis on self-initiated independent learning with strategies, in which formal practices, functional practices and memorizing could be included. He said that the teacher should create activities and tasks to help students to build their vocabulary and develop strategies to learn the vocabulary on their own.

Gairns and Redman(1986) propose to look several aspects of lexis that need to be taken into account while teaching vocabulary. They provide a list of them. Second Language learners have to know:

Boundaries between conceptual meanings:

They have to know not only what lexis refers to, but also where the boundaries are that separate it from words of related meaning (e.g. cup, mug, and bowl).

Polysemy:

Learners have to distinguish between the various meanings of a single word form with several and closely related meanings (head: of a person, of a pin, of an organization).

Homonymy:

They should distinguish between the various meanings of a single word form which has several meanings which are not closely related (e.g. a file: used to put papers in or a tool).

Homophony:

Learners ought to understand words that have the same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings (e.g. flour, flower).

Synonymy:

They should make distinction between the different shades of meaning that synonymous words have (e.g. extends, increase, expand).

Affective meaning:

Learners should distinguish between the attitudinal and emotional factors (denotation and connotation), which depend on the speaker's attitude or the situation. A socio-cultural association of lexical items is another important factor.

Style, register, dialect: They have to be able to distinguish between different levels of formality, the effect of different contexts and topics.



Translation:

Learners should be aware of certain differences and similarities, between native and foreign language (e.g. false cognates).

Chunks of language:

They have to learn multi-word verbs, idioms, strong and weak collocations, lexical phrases.

Grammar of Vocabulary:

SL learners should learn the rules that enable students to build up different forms of the word or even different words from that word (e.g. sleep, slept, sleeping; able, unable; disability).

Pronunciation:

Learners have to recognize and reproduce items in speech.

However, the goals of vocabulary teaching must be more than simply covering a certain number of words on a word list. We must use teaching techniques that can help realize this global concept of what it means to know a lexical item. And we must also go beyond that, giving learners opportunities to use the items learnt for effective oral and written communication.

Frisby's comment is worth mentioning here. Frisby (1957) commented that "while the teacher is not, himself, concerned with the actual selection of vocabulary for text book purposes since practically all the books we use are based on limited vocabularies, it is important that the teacher should know the principles, which underlie vocabulary selection". It means a language teacher should be innovative and proficient in the application of methodologies pertaining to teaching vocabulary items in a classroom situation. Following are a few techniques which can be adopted for teaching vocabulary items in an ESL classroom.

Group Work:

Working in groups helps fostering learning independence, specially in vocabulary learning. Learners can exchange knowledge, asking others to explain unknown items. Group work will be a motivating factor, as students talk about places they have been to on holiday, to remember details together, exchanging impressions and even memorable experiences.

Using Dictionary in the classroom: Using dictionaries in the classroom may be the main way to deal with discovering meanings and its usage. With adequate training, dictionaries are an invaluable tool for learners, giving them independence from teacher as well as understanding meaning. Students will be asked to check pronunciation, the grammar of the word (e.g. verb patterns, verb forms, plurality, comparatives, etc.), different spelling (American versus British), style, and register, as well as examples that illustrate usage.

Dramatization: This method can be practiced at ease. It can win the favour of the students as they like dramatizations and they can easily learn through them. Many situations can be dramatized or demonstrated.



Word Games: The learners can be given a root word and asked to form chains of words relating to that word.(e.g. play: sports, games, playground, children, running, jumping, laughing, arguing, shouting, clapping and so on). Students can be provided with a number of prefixes, suffixes and in-fixes necessarily.

Listening carefully: Students can be motivated to listen to English news on Radio and TV and announcements in the airport and railway station. The teacher can play recorded speech, conversation, stories and authentic materials in the classroom as careful listening to the words may be a good option in teaching vocabulary items in a heterogenous classroom. "Let the students hear the word in isolation and in a sentence. If the sounds of the word have been mastered, the students will hear it correctly with two or three repetitions" (Robert Lado, 1964: 121).

Keeping Vocabulary Notebook: The teacher can encourage learners to keep a vocabulary Note book because a great deal of vocabulary growth ultimately depends on this method. The most important aspect of vocabulary teaching for ESL learners is to foster learner independence so that learners will be able to deal with new lexis and expand their vocabulary.

II. CONCLUSION

There is a definite need for teaching vocabulary to help Second Language learners to enhance word power to speak, comprehend and write in English. An efficient language teacher can use selected vocabulary activities or can use integrated activities. All this depends upon the ability and level of understanding and interest of the learners. There is no fixed method to enhance vocabulary in a day or two. A student's vocabulary can be enriched gradually, not overnight. Reciprocally learners also should always show keen interest and enthusiasm in finding, learning and understanding new words. Learning vocabulary has become essential, as it helps the students to communicate successfully with people within and outside their real life situations. Studies indicate that possessing a sound vocabulary facilitates the ESL learners in all spheres of life.

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