

THE ROLE OF DICTIONARIES IN TEACHING VOCABULARY AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract : The purpose of this study is to teach vocabulary to learners in the tertiary level and enable them to understand the role of dictionaries in developing their language skills. Students from rural schools are unable to cope up to the standard and meet the expectations of Professional education. Mere memorizing has been their practice since childhood. Dictionaries can build the vocabulary skills of a person. It is a valuable tool in developing their language and use of words. This paper discusses on how to learn and remember vocabulary through dictionary on a task based approach. This study emphasizes on the exposure given through dictionaries and their impact on the minds of the learners in learning words with pronunciation and retention of words with proper usage.

KEY WORDS: Vocabulary building, retention, pronunciation, phonetics, memorizing techniques, task based approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Without grammar very little can be conveyed
Without words nothing can be conveyed”

“Words, so innocent and powerless as they are, standing in a dictionary; how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to choose and combine them”

-Nathaniel Hawthorne

Since KG to XII standard, English teachers have been teaching English language thorough literature. Some students (city students who studied CBSE or Matriculation Schools) have got benefited with the teaching techniques adopted by an English teacher. The remaining students who have studied in rural / regional schools were unaware of the importance of English and its development, out of them very few developed communication skills out of their own interest and efforts and some due to inferiority complex and diffidence did not learn and left uncared.

One of the major problems of the students is they are unable to express their thoughts and ideas explicitly due to lack of vocabulary or appropriate words and its usage. These students can be identified and exposed to Reading and Listening. Subsequently, they can be instructed to sue the dictionary for finding the meaning of unfamiliar words. To express anything words are very important and grammar comes next.

A word is basically an association of (1) Linguistic sound and (2) Meaning. Either we hear someone pronounce a sound that we associate with a meaning in our head or we have a meaning we wish to express and do so by creating linguistic sounds with our mouth. An important fundamental characteristic of language is that when we speak, we only exchange linguistic sounds. We do not exchange meanings: meaning is all in our heads. Fewer than 1,000 of the Earth’s 6,800 languages and dialects-English among them have writing systems. In these languages, a third component of information is associated in a word: (3) Spelling – spelling does not always easily correlate with the sound of word. Look at the way we spell pair, pare and pear all of which are pronounced the same. One of the other hand, lead has two different pronunciations” /led/ and /lead/. Dictionaries help us both with spelling and pronunciation of such words. We even need to know the grammatical categories of words, the part of speech.

For example:

“LEAD” could be either one of two different words. One is noun (the soft heavy metal); the other is a very (the activity of showing someone the say). But we often need more grammatical information. We need to know the category of the verb. Some English verbs (the ‘weak’ verbs) are regular and use the suffix –ed to form the past tense; stretch: stretch-ed. Other verbs (the ‘strong’ verbs) are irregular: sing: sang. It is important for non-native speakers of English to know which category a word belongs to, in order to use it correctly.

II. HOW TO USE A DICTIONARY?

Most of the students know to use a dictionary to look up for a word's meaning. After knowing the meaning of the word they just simply close the dictionary without concentrating on pronunciation. Spelling, word formation etc, due to which they are unable to use the words in appropriate place or situation and also commit grammatical errors as they don't know the relation ship of words.

Students from regional background use bilingual dictionary and they too just look into the meaning for the word in the regional language. They don't concentrate on different shades of meanings. Usage of bilingual dictionary hinders their capacity of leaning its related words.

Therefore, the teacher can take the responsibility in guiding the students to purchase a standard dictionary preferably monolingual dictionary with all the entries, which would help them not only to know the meaning but also its usage.

Dictionaries are a valuable tool for the students in their leaning process. A dictionary gives the following information about a word.

- How to spell the word and its special plural form?
- Whether the word is capitalized or abbreviated?
- How the break the word into syllables?
- The part of speech of a word
- Different meanings that the word has, as well as synonyms (same meaning) and antonyms (opposite meaning)
- A sentence or expression with the word used correctly
- The meanings of important prefixes and suffixes
- The special uses of the word
- The history of the word
- Other words derived from the main word

III. DICTIONARY SKILLS:

Dictionary skills are the building blocks for using all reference materials. However, many students are not confident of using dictionaries. Building Dictionary Skills familiarizes students with the information provided in the dictionary as well as it helps them to quickly locate the words and in finding its meanings. Practicing dictionary skills would help students in using dictionaries effectively to verify spellings, look up new words, and learn new meanings. Dictionary skills are strengthened by specific activities on parts of speech, syllabic divisions, pronunciations, prefixes and suffixes, and multiple definitions.

IV. DICTIONARY SKILLS ACTIVITIES AND VOCABULARY BUILDING:

Once the students learn the dictionary skills they can be trained in it by giving them some activities to develop their vocabulary. Each student can be instructed to maintain a separate book which can be termed as personal dictionary of vocabulary builder etc. Then they can be instructed to write the alphabets for A to Z at the top of pages, allowing two pages per letter. Each day write 2 or 3 mystery words on a block board and ask the student to guess the meaning of the word if not they can be allowed to refer dictionary for its exact meaning.

After that, write a sentence on aboard using those mystery words.

For example: the women climbed to the top of the turret.

Ask the students to frame few sentences of their own in different context. See to it that students keep a notebook of words and definitions throughout the year.

List 3 synonyms and antonyms for the word.

Then place a word on the chalkboard and students must define the word and use it as much as possible in their conversations and written work. Quiz competitions can be conducted in class by forming groups and marks can be awarded.

To bring some seriousness in learning a word periodical test can be conducted and the marks can be taken into consideration while awarding them internal marks.

Train the students to find selected words and record the word with the page number.

As they go on entering words into their personal dictionary they may get self-motivated and self-inspired for having known numerous words with meaning and its usage.

V. VOCABULARY TEACHING:

V.I. Complexity of word meaning:

Learning of L2 vocabulary is not just learning a word once and for all but learning the range of meanings that go with it. The problems associated with going from L1 to L2 are not just transfer of the actual words but also the relation ships and over tones they carry in L1.

A traditional teaching technique was the memorizing of word lists. A recent variation is the psychology – inspired “*mnemnotechnics*” techniques in which students acquire L2 words by associating with incongruous images and sounds in L1.

The French “herison” (hedgehog) is remembered through an image of the English sound alike “hairyson” (Gruneberg 1987). However many words one learns in this way it is doubtful if they will form part of one’s active vocabulary.

V.II. Meaning components:

One way of analyzing vocabulary is to break the meaning of the word into smaller components. Thus the meaning of “girl” is made up of “female”, human and “non adult”. The meaning of “apple” is made up of “fruit”, “edible” and so on. Much of the dispute about gender discrimination in English comes down to whether the meaning of “man” necessarily has the component “male” as well as “human” and an “adult” and whether “girl” is made up of “young” as well as “female”.

Breaking meaning up into components has been used in the first language acquisition to study the development of words such as “before” and “big” in English children. At one stage they know one component of the meaning but not the other. They know “big” and “small” share a meaning component to do with size but think they both mean “big”; or they know that “before” and “after” are to do with “time” but do not know which one means “prior” (Clark, 1971). L2 beginners in English indeed found it much easier to understand “Mary talks before Susan shouts” than “Caroline sings after sally dances” (Cook, 1977). Students look at a series of word study displaying the different component of meaning of words.

For example:

A chart gives words that share the meaning “look at/over” such as “check”, “examine” inspect. “scan” and “scrutinize”. It shows which of them have the component of meaning “detect errors” which determine that rules are observed. Students can be encouraged to build up the idea of the vocabulary consisting of such components while reading text.

V.III. Prototype theory of vocabulary:

Many aspects of meaning cannot be split up into components but are appreciated as wholes. An influential approach of this type is Eleanor Rosch’s “prototype” theory. An English person is asked to give an example of a typical bird is more likely to say “sparrow” than “penguin” or “ostrich”; sparrows are closer to the prototype for “birds” than “penguin or ostriches”.

Prototype theory claims that children first learn words that “basic” because they reflect aspects of the world, prototypes that stand automatically from the rest of what they see. “Sparrows” is a basic level term compared to the superordinate level term like “bird” or a subordinate term like “house sparrow”. The basic level of the vocabulary is easier to use and learn.

For example:

Superordinate terms	Furniture	bird	fruit
Basic level terms	Table Chair	Sparrow	Apple Strawberry
Subordinate terms	Coffee Table arm chair	Field Sparrow	Golden Wild Delicious strawberry

V.VI.Putting words in structures:

An aspect of vocabulary that has become important in recent years is the position of the word in the structure of the sentence.

For example:

The verb “fruit” can only occur with a grammatically subject such as “Martin” in “Martin fainted” never with an object “Martin fainted John”.

Verb “meet” on the other hand has to an object. “He met John” not “He met”. Some verbs are followed by subordinate clauses- “I hoped Mary would go” rather than grammatical objects “I hoped Mary” (would go). A speaker of English knows not just what a word means and how it is pronounced by also how it fits into the sentence.

VI. LEARNING AND REMEMBERING VOCABULARY:

Learning vocabulary is not a problem but remembering them is a biggest problem. According to Harry Bahrick (1984) remembering depends on how well they process it. Repeating a string of sounds is low-level processing and badly remembered. Fitting the words in the grammatical structure of the sentence is deeper and leads to better memory. Using the meanings of words together with in the whole meaning of the sentence is the deepest level of processing and ensures the best memory. Bahrick suggests that a word is remembered best if it is practiced every 30 days rather than using it often. How the word is practiced is important rather than how often it is used. Frequency and usage matters here than being familiar with words and its meaning. Frequency means how often something is repeated by the student. He also suggest that the teachers should make the first occurrence of the word memorable than practicing it several times.

VI.I Focus on pronunciation:

It’s important for students to understand the way pronunciation shown in the dictionary. Practice them phonetics symbols in a playful way. This type of exercise can help the student in correcting their pronunciation.

The teacher can ask the class to work in terms by giving each team three different words that they probably don't know. Ask each team to choose a word and write the word in three phonetic spellings, two of which are incorrect on the black board. When they are ready, ask each team to say and write the word as if they all could be correct. Make them to deduce or guess the correct pronunciation without using the dictionary. Finally allow them to check the dictionary for proper pronunciation without using the dictionary. Finally allow them to check the dictionary for proper pronunciation simultaneously the teacher also can pronounce the word for verification.

Similar activity can be given to them to find three stress patterns for a word. Ask students to find a word of three or more syllables. When they are ready, call a student and make him/her to write the word on the board, in normal spelling, and they say each of the three pronunciations aloud. The teams try to guess which stress pattern is most probable, and later they can check with their dictionaries.

VII. COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING AND DEVELOPING VOCABULARY

The amount of vocabulary that children need to acquire each year is staggering in scope, estimated to be about 3,000 words a year. Therefore, a comprehensive approach consisting of the following components needs to be in place.

- Use "instructional" read-aloud events.
- Provide direct instruction in the meanings of clusters of words and individual words.
- Systematically teach students the meaning of prefixes, suffixes, and root words.
- Link spelling instruction the reading and vocabulary instruction.
- Teach effective, efficient, realistic use of dictionaries, thesauruses, and other reference works.
- Teach and encourage the application of a word-learning strategy.
- Encourage wide reading
- Create a keen awareness and a deep interest in language and words.

VIII. CONCLUSION:

Language and the way we use words convey intelligence and authority. A person who is a mathematical genius or an expert or a software developer may be highly respected for technical skills, but if the words that come out of mouth consist of a poor vocabulary, it will, unfortunately, communicate a lack of intelligence.

VOCABULARY WEBSITES

<http://www.englishclub.com/vocabulary/index.htm>

<http://www.englishclub.com/esl-quizzes/index.htm>

TEFL Games.com

<http://www.leftgames.com/interactive.html>

<http://a4esl.org/>

VOCABTEST.COM

<http://www.vocabtest.com/>

<http://esl.fis.edu/vocab/index.htm>

<http://www.eslpartyland.com>

<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/research/awl/>

<http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/asl.htm>

<http://www.uvic.ca/gluton/awl/>

<http://www.manythings.org/>

ON-LINE DICTIONARIES AND THESAURES

www.wordcentral.com

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

<http://www.m-w.com/>

Thesaurus.com

<http://thesaurus.reference.com/>

<http://pewebdic2.cw.idm.fr/>