THE ROLE OF VOCABULARY TEACHING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES: ASSESSING VOCABULARY

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Abstract: *The article describes issues based on the role of vocabulary teaching in foreign languages. Vocabulary is the foundation of language learning and communication. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to understand or express ideas effectively. Teaching vocabulary, therefore, plays a central role in mastering foreign languages, as it directly influences listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.*

Keywords: *vocabulary, foreign language, teaching methods, communication, acquisition.*

Words are the basic building blocks of a language; we use them to create sentences, larger paragraphs, and whole texts. As native speakers, we rapidly acquire vocabulary in childhood, and this development continues as we encounter new experiences and concepts, but for the second language learner the process is demanding, sometimes requiring a more conscious effort. Language researchers and teachers recognize that vocabulary knowledge is integral to overall second language ability and are now focusing on ways to teach vocabulary and also assess the knowledge of vocabulary. To begin this discussion, let's look at what vocabulary is. First of all, we can identify words as tokens and types. Tokens are all the words in the paragraph, which in this case totals 53- Types, 'on the other hand, do not count words that are repeated, only words that are of different forms. So in the above paragraph, the word "lies" occurs three times but is counted only once. Both "doctor" and "doctors" appear, but they get counted as two types, even though they are in the same word family. Most vocabulary tests would not test two derivatives of the same family; otherwise one is most likely testing grammatical knowledge. Another set of categories that we need to consider when we talk about knowledge of words is the difference between function words and content words. Function words - prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and other "little" words—are seen as belonging more to the grammar of the language than vocabulary. In isolation, function words mostly show the association among content words in sentences. Content words are nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Generally then, it's content words that we focus on in vocabulary tests. Some vocabulary tests might focus on larger lexical items such as phrasal verbs ("put up with," "run into"), compound nouns ("personal computer," "fish tank"), or idioms ("a pretty penny," "against the clock," "actions speak louder than words"), which have meaning only as a whole unit. In vocabulary testing, these larger lexical items have received less

attention than single words, partly because traditional vocabulary tests have been discrete-type tests that lend themselves more easily to single-word test items. Single words are also easier to identify (from word lists and texts) as well as to score. In contrast, because larger lexical phrases can vary in grammatical form and have particular functions in spoken and written discourse, they are more open-ended, which makes them more difficult to identify and evaluate.

So what does it mean to "know" a vocabulary item? One way to answer this question is to try to clarify everything a learner has to do to acquire a vocabulary item. Richards (1976, p. 83) outlined a series of assumptions about vocabulary ability that developed out of linguistic theory:

1. The native speaker of a language continues to expand his or her vocabulary in adulthood, whereas there is comparatively little development of syntax in adult life.

2. Knowing a word means knowing the degree of probability of encountering that word in speech or print. For many words we also "know" the sort of words most likely to be found associated with the word.

3. Knowing a word implies knowing the limitations imposed on the use of the word according to variations of function and situation.

Nation (1990) took Richards's (1976) approach further by specifying the scope of the learner's task to include the distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge. We may be able to recognize a word when we see or hear it. But are we able to use it in our speech or writing? The production of a word requires a different (and perhaps more complex) set of abilities from those needed for reception of a word, so both modes of performance need to be taken into account in assessment. To better understand the construct of vocabulary ability, let's go back to our discussion of communicative language testing. Following Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, Bachman (1990) and later Bachman and Palmer (1996) included not only language knowledge (grammatical and sociolinguistic competence) but also strategic competence, a set of "metacognitive strategies that provide language users with the ability to, or capacity to create or interpret discourse" (p. 67) as part of their model of communicative competence. Thus Bachman and Palmer's definition of language ability included both knowledge of language and the ability to put language to use in context. Other researchers (Chapelle, 1994) accounted for both the explicit knowledge of vocabulary and the ability (more implicitly) to put vocabulary knowledge to use in a given context. Three components make up Chapelle's definition of vocabulary ability:

1. the context of vocabulary use
2. vocabulary knowledge and fundamental processes
3. metacognitive strategies for vocabulary use
✓ Explore how vocabulary knowledge supports communicative competence.

A qualitative approach was used, analyzing academic literature and classroom practices. Data was gathered from teacher observations, student feedback, and case studies on language learning outcomes. Various teaching strategies, including contextual learning, repetition, and digital tools, were compared. In the same way that context plays an important role in receptive vocabulary tasks, productive tasks, which involve recall and use, are also better performed within a context or situation. A common vocabulary test type is sentence completion, where the target vocabulary item is deleted from a sentence and the test-taker must understand the context in which the word occurs in order to produce the missing word. This methodology involves recall in that the test-taker must provide a lexical item from memory. In the last item above, the information provided in the sentence context helps the test-taker to understand that the water in the river has spread beyond its banks, which then means "flood."

Going beyond a single sentence, longer passages provide opportunities to assess other aspects of vocabulary knowledge. Thus in addition to word meaning, the form and use of a lexical item can be assessed. The selective deletion cloze or gap-fill test is one type of test that draws on these aspects of word knowledge. For example:

Selective deletion cloze.

The Montessori method of education, used worldwide today, was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori. She was the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree, but found it difficult to practice_____ because Italians at that time were not ready to accept_____ doctors. So she turned to education, working with children who had been_____ away in mental_____ because they were considered_____ _ to learn. Through_____ thoughtful observations, and through her experience with these_____ , she developed a _ _ _ _ _ _ of educating them that was so_____ that they were able to pass reading and writing_____ designed fo r_____ children.

Here is the original text:

The Montessori method of education, used worldwide today, was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori. She was the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree, but found it difficult to practice medicine because Italians at that time were not ready to accept female doctors. So she turned to education, working with children who had been locked away in mental institutions because they were considered unable to learn. Through her thoughtful observations, and through her experience with these children, she developed a method of educating them that was so successful that they were able to pass reading and writing examinations designed for normal children.

In this selective-deletion cloze or gap-fill test, the test-taker must be able to identify not only the meaning but also the form of the lexical item that is needed to fill in the blank.

Results

Findings show that learners exposed to systematic vocabulary instruction achieved greater fluency and comprehension. Context-based teaching improved retention, while technology-enhanced methods increased motivation. Repetition combined with active use proved most effective in long-term memory.

Conclusions

Vocabulary teaching is vital in foreign language education. Effective instruction requires diverse methods that engage learners actively. By focusing on vocabulary development, teachers can significantly enhance learners' communicative abilities. Assessing vocabulary needs to be carefully understood in classroom contexts, especially within communicative methodology. In both teaching and assessment, focus on form has an important role to play in helping students "zoom in" on the bits and pieces of the language they are learning. Of course, these zoom lenses should not be overly uti lized at the expense of appropriate, authentic wide-angle views of language as a tool for communicating meaning in the real world.

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