
10

Vocabulary

Overview

This chapter includes the following key issues:

- What is the nature of vocabulary knowledge?
 - Dimensions of knowing a word.
- What are the main targets for vocabulary learning?
 - Core vocabulary.
 - Academic vocabulary.
 - Technical vocabulary.
- How can vocabulary be learned effectively?
 - The gradual nature of vocabulary acquisition.
 - Direct or indirect vocabulary learning.
 - The role of memory.
 - The role of learning strategies.
- What are the principles for vocabulary instruction?
 - Planning vocabulary teaching.
 - Integrating vocabulary teaching into the lesson.
- How can vocabulary be assessed?

10.1 Introduction

Words and grammar are often thought of as the building blocks of language proficiency. A learner with a large vocabulary is well equipped to develop skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. And since vocabulary (or *lexis* as it is referred to in applied linguistics) plays a role in all of the four skills, every English lesson is, at least in part, a vocabulary lesson. The learning of vocabulary often appears to be a daunting task for learners, since all languages contain large numbers of words. Many English dictionaries, for example, list over 100,000 words. However, learners often have restricted needs for vocabulary learning. Vocabulary development in a second language involves developing a core vocabulary which is common to many different domains, genres and text types, as well as building up more specialized vocabulary related to the learner's own interests and needs, whether these are academic, occupational or social. Learning vocabulary is an incremental process that involves frequent encounters with words and their uses over time. The task learners and teachers face is to answer the following questions: How many words do students need to know, and how can words best be taught and, more importantly, remembered? And to what extent is the learning of vocabulary the teacher or the learner's responsibility? This chapter explores these and other issues in the domain of vocabulary learning and teaching.

Goals for vocabulary teaching

Vocabulary does not normally constitute the focus of an entire language course. It is a component of every course, but the emphasis it receives will vary according to which skills the course addresses, the level of the course and the learner's background. Learners with romance-language backgrounds will find that they already 'know' many words in English, since English contains thousands of words of French or Latin origin. However, students with Chinese or Russian as a first language have no such advantage. And since every language contains more words than anyone could master in a lifetime, the goals of vocabulary instruction are not to 'teach' vocabulary, but rather to provide opportunities for learners to improve their knowledge and use of vocabulary related to their specific needs. This means that the teacher's role is to identify learners' vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary needs; to select materials that can be used as a vocabulary-learning resource; to design activities within a course that focus on vocabulary development and retention of words that have been encountered; and to help learners develop strategies for managing their own vocabulary learning. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to understand the nature of vocabulary and vocabulary learning and to consider the different instructional options that can be used to facilitate second language vocabulary development.

10.2 The nature of vocabulary knowledge

There are many aspects to knowing a word, as is illustrated in Nation's description of dimensions of word knowledge (Nation, 2001):

Form	
Spoken	R What does the word sound like? P How is the word pronounced?
Written	R What does the word sound like? P How is the word written and spelled?
Word parts	R What parts are recognizable in this word? P What word parts are needed to express this meaning?
Meaning	
Form and meaning	R What meaning does this word form signal? P What word form can be used to express this meaning?
Concepts and referents	R What is included in the concept? P What items can the concept refer to?
Associations	R What other words does this make us think of? P What other words could we use, instead of this one?
Use	
Grammatical functions	R In what patterns does the word occur? P In what patterns must we use this word?
Collocations	R What words or types of words occur with this one? P What types of words must we use with this one?
Constraints on use	R Where, when and how often would we expect to meet this word? P Where, when and how often can we use this word?

R = receptive knowledge
P = productive knowledge

We generally think of words as single lexical items, although words often occur in multi-word groups, which are discussed below. And research using corpus analysis has revealed a great deal about the kinds of word groupings that occur in natural language use and how words are used in both spoken and written English. O’Keeffe et al. comment (2007: 60):

And what corpora reveal is that much of our linguistic output consists of repeated multi-word units, rather than single words. Language is available for use in ready-made chunks to a far greater extent than could ever be accommodated by a theory of language which rested upon the primacy of syntax.

O’Keeffe et al. (ibid.: 65–7) give examples of the most frequent two- to five-word chunks in a five-million word corpus, which include:

Two-word chunks: *I mean, sort of, and then, do you, if you, don't know.*

Three-word chunks: *I don't know, do you think, you know what, but I mean.*

Four-word chunks: *At the end of, I don't know if, or something like that.*

Five-word chunks: *You know what I mean, all the rest of it, and all that sort of.*



Do you include multi-word units like these in your teaching? What resources are useful for introducing learners to these kinds of expressions?

Dimensions of knowing a word

Word relations

The meaning of a word depends not only on its core meaning but also on its relationship to other words. For example, *start* is linked to *finish* (an antonym), to *begin* and *commence* (synonyms) and to other words having the same core or root: *restart, starter, starting*. Some words exist in a hierarchical relationship to other words. *Seat*, for example, refers to a category of words that includes *chair, bench, stool* and so on. Learning words, therefore, involves learning a network of relations among words, and these are important in teaching and learning vocabulary. It is easier to learn words if they are presented in connected groups, rather than as a list of unrelated items.

Multiple meanings

Many words have multiple meanings, and the more meanings a word has, the more likely a learner is to encounter the word. A learner may first learn *hold*, in the sense of gripping something in the hand, and later encounter it in many other uses, such as *hold on, hold up, hold an idea, hold a position* or *hold a meeting*. The first meaning of *hold* above can be regarded as its 'core' meaning and often would be the meaning taught first, although it might be possible to learn a fixed expression, such as *hold on* – said, for example, on the telephone – without knowing the core meaning. Other less central meanings generally would be acquired later. Vocabulary learning is not simply about learning new words, but also about learning new uses of previously encountered words.

Register

Register refers to the kind of vocabulary that normally occurs in a particular kind of discourse (e.g. teacher talk, children's talk, men's talk), in a particular subject area (legal talk, business talk, medical talk) or in a particular social situation (public talk, private talk), in a particular mode of discourse (spoken language vs. written language) or even in a particular location (e.g. the capital compared to a regional area). Some words have very general usage (e.g. *laugh*), compared to others that are found in particular registers (e.g. *chuckle, giggle, guffaw*); some are used in more formal than informal contexts

(e.g. *boss, kid* vs. *employer, child*); and some may be more typical of everyday, as opposed to literary, usage (e.g. *face* vs. *visage*). A doctor talking to an adult patient might speak of *acute abdominal pain*, but to a child, the same condition might be referred to as a *tummy ache*. I was once on a panel interviewing applicants for a university teaching position. One applicant on entering the room greeted the panel with 'Hi everyone'. Her choice of *hi* as opposed to the more formal *good afternoon* nearly cost her the position she was applying for.

Collocations

The term *collocations* refers to restrictions on how words can be used together, such as which prepositions are used with particular verbs or which verbs and nouns are used together. Knowledge of collocations is vital for effective language use, and a sentence that is grammatically correct will look or sound 'awkward' if collocational preferences are not used. For example, we can say *blond hair*, but not *blond car*; *lean meat*, but not *slim meat*; *perform a play*, but not *perform a meeting*. We say *bitterly disappointed*, rather than *sourly disappointed*. Many common verbs collocate with particular nouns. We *do our hair*, *make our bed*, *do the dishes* and *make a noise*. Things *turn* or *go grey, brown* or *white*. But people *go mad*, rather than *turn mad*. Similarly we *catch a cold*, we *take a photo*, we *have a meeting*, we *take a phone call*, we *make progress*, we *lose track* of something and so on. Vocabulary development, therefore, involves expanding knowledge of the collocational patterns that known words can enter into. The most common verbs in English collocate with particular nouns, and the permitted combinations that occur are unpredictable, creating an important aspect of vocabulary learning. O'Keeffe et al. (2007: 53) comment:

One may conclude that collocations, along with semantically transparent and opaque idiomatic chunks, form the main component of the multi-word lexicon and that the multi-word lexicon is at the heart of advanced-level lexical knowledge, given that the challenge, at this level, is as much to do with grappling with observing recurrent collocations and chunks (which will most often consist of words already known individually), as it is with simply pushing for a (never-ending) linear increase in the vocabulary size based on single words never seen before.

Multi-word expressions

Much use of language involves the use of words in multi-word expressions. These are items made up of two or more words, and whose meaning can often not be understood from knowing the meanings of the individual words in the expression, making them particularly problematic for second language learners. For example, knowing *hold* does not help in understanding *hold up*, and knowing the meaning of *face* does not necessarily mean the learner will understand the following idiomatic expressions: *let's face it*, *on the face of it*, *keep a straight face*, *face up to* or *fall flat on one's face*. Multi-word expressions in English include idioms, such as those above; phrasal verbs, such as *turn off* the light, *take out* the garbage; phrasal prepositional verbs, such as *put up with*, *look forward to*; as well as fixed expressions made of as many as five words, such as *as far as I know* or *in a manner of speaking*.

A marked feature of conversational discourse is also the use of a subset of the multi-word units – conversational routines – which often have specific functions in conversation, and which give conversational discourse the quality of naturalness (Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992). These perform a variety of functions in spoken English, and the teaching of these and other multi-word units is a feature of some recent English courses, such as the *Touchstone* series (McCarthy et al., 2005). Hence, when a learner uses English, in order for his or her usage to sound natural, utterances need to be expressed in the way they are conventionally said in English, and this is something that it is often not possible to predict. For example, why do we say, when we meet someone for the first time, ‘Nice to meet you’ and not ‘To meet you is nice’? Both have the same meaning, but the former is said and not the latter. Our linguistic, or grammatical, competence provides the basis for creating many different ways of saying things; however, only a small subset of possible utterances is ever actually said. Nation (2001: 343) recommends the use of activities, such as the one below, to help learners memorize multi-word units, particularly with low-level learners:

- 1 Write each chunk on a small card, with its translation on the other side so that there has to be active retrieval of its form or meaning.
- 2 Repeat the chunk aloud, while memorizing it.
- 3 Space the repetitions so that there is an increasingly greater interval between learning sessions.
- 4 Use mnemonic tricks like the keyword technique, putting the chunk into a sentence, visualizing examples of the meaning of the chunk, and analyzing its parts. This increases the quality of the mental processing and helps learning.
- 5 Don't learn chunks with similar words or meanings together. They will interfere with each other.
- 6 Keep changing the order of the word cards to avoid serial learning.



Can you think of other ways of helping learners remember multi-word units?

Grammatical properties of words

Although grammar and vocabulary are often presented separately, the boundary between them is not rigid. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to separate the two. To use vocabulary effectively, learners need to be able to learn the main grammatical categories of words, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and to know what grammatical patterns words fit into, such as which verbs can be used with the present continuous and which normally cannot, which nouns are countable and which are uncountable, which verbs are transitive and which are intransitive, which adjectives can be used predicatively and which cannot and what the normal order of adjectives is when more than one occurs. For

example, many different kinds of adjectives can occur before a noun in English, including those describing opinion, dimension, age, shape, colour, origin or material. Normally, no more than three adjectives occur before a noun, and when they do so, the order of adjectives follows a regular sequence (although we noted in Chapter 9 that use of more than two adjectives before the noun is more common in written than in spoken English):

- A beautiful old French house (opinion–age–origin).
- A huge round red cushion (dimension–shape–colour).
- A hideous brown plastic ornament (opinion–colour–material).
- A tiny old Italian ring (dimension–age–origin).

Learners also have to learn the many different prefixes and affixes that can change the grammatical function of words, turning *happy* into derived forms such as *unhappy*, *happiness*, *happily* and so on. Knowing the meanings of the most frequent affixes and what their grammatical functions are can help learners learn the meanings of many words they encounter in texts, and using knowledge of prefixes and suffixes to recognize new words is an important way in which learners expand their vocabulary knowledge. (See Appendices 1 and 3 for two different lesson plans for teaching affixes and word families.)

Cross-linguistic differences

The way languages categorize meanings often appears arbitrary, and there are often considerable differences between languages. English, for example, distinguishes between *peas* and *beans*, a distinction that appears obvious to speakers of English, but not necessarily to Koreans, who make no such distinction. *Family* in English refers to what people in some languages mean by *immediate family*, and for whom *family* is closer to *relations* in English. Words that appear similar in two languages, but which have different meanings are sometimes referred to as *false friends*, such as *demand* in English and French. In English *demand* refers to a forceful request, whereas *demandeur* in French simply means to request. A teacher comments on an amusing confusion of two such false friends:

Words with different meanings in the L2

While quite pregnant with my first child in Mexico, I was waiting for a city bus to go by, and a student of mine stopped and greeted me. We chatted for a few minutes, and he asked me in Spanish, 'How long have you been waiting?' I looked at my watch and said, 'Not long.' He looked at me again and asked, again, the same question. It finally dawned on me that he was asking me how long I was pregnant – how far along was I in my pregnancy, and not how long I had been waiting for the bus. The verb in Spanish could be used for two actions [and means *wait* or *expect*]. One could be waiting for a bus or a person, but also the word could be used for expecting a baby. We started

laughing, because he and I realized our misunderstanding with a simple word. I finally said I was eight months pregnant. This is an example of how confusion can be part of a simple conversation and how we solved this miscommunication in two different languages.

Martha Lengeling, teacher and teacher educator, Guanajuato, Mexico

Nation (2001: 56) suggests that the grammatical learning burden of words depends on similarities or differences between English and the learner's first language:

If a second language word takes the same grammatical patterns as its rough equivalent in the first language, then the learning burden will be light. If words of related meaning, like *hate* and *like*, take similar patterns, then the learning burden of one of them will be lighter because the previous learning of the other will act as a guide.

10.3 Targets for vocabulary learning

How many words does a learner need? And how many words do native speakers know? The latter issue is difficult to measure since one could hardly devise a test of the 100,000 or so words in a dictionary to see how many words native speakers 'know'. Usually, estimates of the size of people's vocabulary are based on how many words they recognize from a sample of the words in a dictionary, with an estimate of their knowledge of the total number of words in the dictionary done from there. Studies suggest that English native-speaking university graduate students have a vocabulary size of about 20,000 'word families' – a head word and all its related words, such as *democracy*, *democratic*, *democratize*, etc. (Schmitt, 2000). However, most second language learners will know or need far fewer words, unless they plan to do advanced academic work in English.

? The following are 25 words that commence entries for words beginning with the letter 'C' in a dictionary. How many of these words do you know? How many of them do you think learners need to know?

cab, cabal, cabaret, cabbage, cabbie, caber, cabin, cabinet, cable, caboose, cache, cachet, cack-handed, cackle, cacophony, cactus, cad, cadaver, caddie, cadence, cadet, cadge, cadre, caesarean, café

Identifying the number of words learners need to learn was a major focus of early research in applied linguistics, an area of research that focused on vocabulary control, or procedures for limiting the number of words to be taught. This was a principle that was used in the 1930s to develop a basic vocabulary syllabus for teaching English as a foreign language and for the preparation of graded readers. The aim as stated by Jeffery (in West, 1953: v) was:

To find the minimum number of words that could operate together in constructions capable of entering into the greatest varieties of contexts has, therefore, been the chief aim of those trying to simplify English for the learner.

Using available information on word frequencies in written texts, as well as other practical criteria such as usefulness in the classroom and coverage of common topics and concepts, the result was a list of some 2,000 words, which was published in 1953 as the *General Service List of English Words* (GSL – West, 1953), and which had a huge impact on the design of teaching materials and coursebooks. The GSL also included the frequency of the different meanings of words.

In discussing knowledge of words, an important distinction is usually made between a person's active, or productive, vocabulary and their passive, or receptive, vocabulary, since our passive vocabulary is generally much larger than our active vocabulary. In spoken English, for example, native speakers may use a relatively small number of words in daily conversation – as few as 1,500 different words – though they recognize far more words than they use. For passive vocabulary knowledge, researchers suggest that knowing a minimum vocabulary of 3,000 word families (which equals some 5,000 words) is required to enable a person to understand a high percentage of words on an average page of a text, and that 5,000 word families (some 8,000 words) is required to be able to read for pleasure (Laufer, 1998). Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996) found that twice as many words as that were needed to read first-year university materials. It is also important to distinguish between knowledge of content words (those that carry the main meaning of sentences, such as nouns, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives and question words, e.g. *why, when, what*), demonstratives (*this, that, these, those*) and function words (those that express grammatical relationships, such as articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, pronouns, conjunctions and relative pronouns). There is a small, finite list of function words in English, but a very large set of content words. When people expand their vocabulary knowledge, they add to their knowledge of content words.

Core vocabulary

O'Keeffe et al. (2007: 37–47) suggest that based on their research on the frequency of items in spoken English, a basic or core spoken English vocabulary for second language learners contains several different categories of words:

- *Modal items*: These describe degrees of certainty or necessity and include modal verbs, such as *can, must, should, may*, etc.; lexical modals, such as *look, seem, sound*; and adverbs, such as *probably, definitely* and *apparently*.
- *Delexical verbs*: These are words with little lexical content but high frequency, such as *do, make, take, get*, and their collocations with nouns, prepositional phrases and particles.
- *Stance words*: These communicate the speaker's attitude towards something and include words such as *just, whatever, actually, really, basically, clearly, honestly* and *unfortunately*.

- *Discourse markers*: These are words that are used to organize talk and monitor its progress, such as *you know, I mean, right, well, good and anyway*.
- *Basic nouns*: These are nouns referring to common activities, events, situations, places and people, such as *person, problem, trouble, birthday*; days of the week; family members; and colours.
- *General deictics*: These are words that relate the speaker to the world in terms of time and space, such as *here, there, now, then and ago*.
- *Basic adjectives*: These are words that communicate everyday positive and negative evaluations of situations, people, events and things, such as *lovely, nice, horrible, brilliant, terrible and great*.
- *Basic adverbs*: These are adverbs of high frequency referring to time, frequency and habituality, such as *today, tomorrow, always, usually, suddenly and quickly*.
- *Basic verbs for actions and events*: These are verbs describing everyday activities, such as *give, leave, feel, put and say*.

Some of these types of words are not found in vocabulary lists for ESL/ELT learners because such lists have often been based on frequency counts of written language, rather than spoken English, which, as mentioned in Chapter 9, highlights the importance of corpus research in language teaching.

Beyond the core vocabulary, O'Keeffe et al. (2007: 48–9) suggest the following targets for vocabulary learning:

A receptive vocabulary of some 5,000 to 6,000 words would appear to be a good threshold at which to consider learners at the top of the intermediate level and ready to take on an advanced programme. Such a programme would ideally have the following aims:

- To increase the receptive vocabulary size to enable comprehension targets above 90% (e.g. up to 95%) for typical texts to be reached.
- To expose the learner to a range of vocabulary at frequency levels beyond the first 5,000–6,000 word band, but which is not so rare or obscure as to be of little practical use.
- To inculcate the kinds of knowledge required for using words at this level, given their often highly specific lexical meanings and connotations.
- To train awareness, skills and strategies that will help the learner become an independent vocabulary learner, and one who can continue the task for as long as he or she desires.

However, once learners reach the intermediate level, they often fail to make sufficient gains in their vocabulary knowledge. A study of college students' vocabulary development in China found that during their first two years of university study, an English major's vocabulary increased by 1,500 words on average each year; but in the later two years, their vocabulary increased only by 250 words on average each year (Fan, 2007).

Academic vocabulary

In addition to core vocabulary, there is another set of words common to academic disciplines, sometimes referred to as the basis for an *academic vocabulary* (see below).

Coxhead's Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000; 2010) refers to 570 word families that have high frequency in a wide range of academic texts and which are important words for students to know if they are pursuing academic studies. The words do not occur in the 2,000 most frequent words in general English and are grouped into ten sub-lists that reflect word frequency and range. The most frequent words on the list are:

analyse, approach, area, assess, assume, authority, available, benefit, concept, consist, context, constitute, contract, data, define, derive, distribute, economy, environment, establish, estimate, evident, factor, finance, formula, function, income, indicate, individual, interpret, involve, issue, labour, legal, legislate, major, method, occur, percent, period, principle, proceed, process, policy, require, research, respond, role, section, sector, significant, similar, source, specific, structure, theory, vary

A website that enables a teacher to determine the number of academic vocabulary items in a text is the *Compleat Lexical Tutor* (www.lex tutor.ca/vp/bnc/). By pasting a text there, the percentage of academic vocabulary it contains is calculated.

Technical vocabulary

Learners may also need to acquire a *technical vocabulary*; that is, the words that are most frequent in a particular subject area, such as computer science, law or medicine. A medical text, for example, may contain technical words such as *microbe*, *gene*, *organism* or *cell*.



Think of a class you teach. Which of these categories of words are important to your learners?

10.4 Learning vocabulary

The gradual nature of vocabulary acquisition

As we have seen above, there are many different dimensions involved in 'knowing' a word, and not all aspects of the meaning and usage of a word are acquired at once (Nation and Gu, 2007). Vocabulary acquisition is a gradual process as different aspects of vocabulary knowledge are learned. For example, a sequence of order of acquisition for words might (hypothetically) look like this:

Knowing:

- 1 how to spell the word.
- 2 how to pronounce the word.
- 3 the core meaning of the word.
- 4 the word receptively.
- 5 related words (antonyms, synonyms).
- 6 the grammatical function of the word.
- 7 the word productively.
- 8 other meanings of the word.
- 9 the affixes the word is used with.
- 10 the collocations the word occurs with.

However, learners differ in terms of how they build up their lexical knowledge and which aspects of vocabulary they acquire first, depending on their exposure to words and their first language. Schmitt (2000: 120) summarizes vocabulary learning in this way:

[Vocabulary acquisition] is incremental in a variety of ways. First, lexical knowledge is made up of different kinds of word knowledge and not all can be learned simultaneously. Second, each word-knowledge type may develop along a cline, which means that not only is word learning incremental, in general, but learning of the individual word knowledge is, as well. Third, each word-knowledge type may be receptively or productively known, regardless of the degree of mastery of the others. Taken together, this means that word learning is a complicated, but gradual, process.

Direct or indirect vocabulary learning

Vocabulary instruction is not generally the focus of a specific course, but is usually integrated into the teaching of other skills, such as a component of a reading or writing course, where it may either be taught directly or indirectly. However, general English coursebooks now often feature vocabulary input and practice as a syllabus strand. Direct vocabulary instruction (also referred to as explicit learning) refers to activities that seek to teach students particular words, or word groups, and to help them remember words they have already encountered. Incidental vocabulary learning is learning that takes place without specific vocabulary instruction. It is learning that is a by-product of engaging in other activities, such as reading or listening, and depends upon the frequency with which learners encounter words. Any form of reading is a good source of incidental vocabulary learning, since it involves learning words from context, and graded readers are a useful way of providing spaced repetition of core vocabulary (see below). Researchers have sought to determine the amount of vocabulary learners can acquire through learning from context. Grabe (2009: 272), reporting research by Nation (2001), comments:

If a student reads 100 wpm for 45 minutes per day for 222 days in the year, that student would read just under one million words in a year. If students learn one word in ten through context, they will learn somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 new words, through extensive reading, in a year.

Extensive reading allows students to read for pleasure, where the reading is its own reward, and will be covered more fully in Chapter 14.



Extensive reading can clearly be of benefit to learners. How much extensive reading do your learners engage in? How do you encourage them to read more?

A teacher educator and researcher comments on the value of incidental vocabulary learning, through context:



Incidental vocabulary learning

In my EFL teaching experience in China, I found there wasn't a single student who didn't attach great importance to vocabulary learning (or, to put it more accurately, vocabulary memorization). However, the majority of students were apt to spend most of their time memorizing only the word lists from their textbooks, not caring much about the contexts in which these words were used. This, I found, was not very fruitful, and the words so remembered slipped the mind of the students easily, being isolated from their contexts. In exceptional cases, I observed that those who had not only larger vocabulary (both passive and active) but also [were] able to know how to use this vocabulary in the proper contexts were oftentimes among the top students. I talked to them and found that about 30% of their vocabulary was not from direct teaching, but from incidental reading (e.g. simplified readers and novels) and listening (e.g. to pop songs and news). Incidental vocabulary learning is helpful, probably because students who use this method are normally those highly motivated ones who often learn self-imposedly through different channels.

Ao Ran, teacher and teacher educator, Yunnan, China; Singapore

Advocates of direct instruction argue that it provides better support for learning because it involves a greater depth or level of mental processing. Stated simply, 'the more one engages with a word (deep processing), the more likely the word will be remembered for later use' (Schmitt, 2000: 121). Vocabulary techniques that require a surface-level of processing of word meanings (such as writing down a word many times on a page) are less likely to result in learning than techniques that require relatively deep processing. An example of a technique that promotes deep processing is the keyword method (Hulstijn, 1997). This technique divides the learning of a vocabulary item into two stages. The first stage requires the learner to associate a new word with a keyword in the mother tongue that sounds like some part of the English word; the second stage requires the learner to form

a mental image of the keyword, interacting with the mother-tongue translation. Thus, the keyword method can be described as a chain of two links connecting a new word to its first-language translation, through the mediation of a keyword; the new word is linked to the keyword by a similarity in sound (acoustic link), and the keyword is linked to the mother-tongue translation by a mental image (imagery link). For example, if an English-speaking learner was studying Indonesian and wanted to remember the Indonesian word for *sport (olahraga)*, the learner could first make a connection with *rugby*, which sounds a little like *raga* – part of the Indonesian word. The learner could then make a mental image of a rugby player kicking a ball. Recalling this image would prompt the word *olahraga*.



What techniques have you used to help you remember new vocabulary in a language you have studied?

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, students who read extensively in English generally expand their vocabulary knowledge without explicit instruction, demonstrating that the extent of meaningful exposure to vocabulary is a valuable source of learning (Elley, 1991). Both direct instruction and incidental learning are, therefore, important sources of second language vocabulary development, and both processes support and complement each other. The teacher below describes his process for exposing students, in an incidental way, to additional vocabulary during the lesson:



Going beyond the book

When teaching vocabulary, I try to find extra words related to the topic that students find relevant and interesting. For example, when the book introduces price expressions, such as *that's cheap*, *that's expensive*, *it's not bad*, etc., I also introduce related expressions that could be used in conversation, such as *that's a rip off*, *that's a bargain*, *that's (not) worth it*, *that's way too much*. Since students are often familiar with the common expressions found in the book, the new expressions expand their vocabulary repertoire and also provide the basis for further practice. Asking students to come up with examples of things that they think are a bargain or a rip off adds interest and motivation to the lesson.

José Lema, teacher and teacher educator, Quito, Ecuador

The role of memory

A recurring issue in vocabulary learning is the difficulty in remembering words that have been encountered. Learning a new word is not instantaneous. A word may be encountered in a text, understood and then forgotten the next time it is encountered, and several encounters will be needed before it can be considered 'learned'. Memory is normally conceived as involving two different processes – short-term memory (holding memory for a short period, while it is being processed) and long-term memory (retaining information

for future use). Short-term memory is fast, while long-term memory takes a relatively long time. The goal of vocabulary learning is to establish new words in long-term memory. This involves, on the one hand, meeting the word repeatedly over an extended period of time and, on the other, connecting new words to known words through different forms of links and associations, such as word families or words with similar or dissimilar meanings. Baddeley (1997: 112) comments:

The act of successfully recalling an item increases the chance that the item will be remembered. It appears that the retrieval route to that item is in some way strengthened by being successfully used.

Schmitt (2000) points out that productive vocabulary is more likely to be remembered than receptive vocabulary. Several conditions, considered below, have been proposed which increase the quality of learning and remembering (Nation, 2001; Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001).

Noticing

This refers to conscious focus on vocabulary as a learning goal and paying attention to aspects of words that might facilitate understanding and learning, such as similarities and differences between words, how the word is pronounced and the grammatical function of the word. Nation (2001: 64) suggests that noticing involves decontextualizing, a process that occurs ‘when learners give attention to a language item as a part of the language, rather than as part of the message’. Nation suggests that noticing occurs in a variety of ways:

- While listening or reading, the learner notices that a word is new, or thinks, ‘I have seen that word before’, or thinks, ‘That word is used differently from the ways I have seen it used before’.
- The teacher highlights a word while writing it on the board.
- The learners negotiate the meaning of a word with each other or with the teacher.
- The teacher explains a word for the learners by giving a definition, a synonym or a first-language translation.



Can you think of ways in which new words can become more noticeable to learners, for example, in a reading text?

Spaced repetition

This refers to meeting a word at a later time and emphasizes that a single encounter of a word is unlikely to lead to learning and that spaced, meaningful repetition over a period of time is needed. Research on learning suggests that repetition that is spaced over time is more effective than massed repetition over a short time period (e.g. a lesson) (Nation 2001).

A simple technique that provides for spaced repetition is for learners to write words on cards and to review them regularly over time, gradually removing the learned words and adding new ones. Flashcards can be very useful for memorizing vocabulary, especially if they are based on the principle of ‘spaced learning’ (a type of spaced repetition, also known as the ‘Leitner system’); this holds that vocabulary memorization is most efficient if the length of time between practising new vocabulary is gradually increased, but only for those items that were successfully recalled. For example, let us say a learner is trying to memorize two new words or expressions. On day one, the learner takes each card but only remembers Card 1 correctly. Card 2, the learner looks at again later in the day until he or she gets it right. The following day, both cards are checked again. Card 1 is memorized correctly and, therefore, will now be practised again two days after that, but Card 2 will be practised again the next day, and so on. The purpose is to minimize the number of times each card is checked: Words that are easy are memorized and checked at increasing intervals; difficult words more often. Computer software and mobile apps (SuperMemo is one example) are particularly useful for this, as they take the work out of remembering which card was memorized correctly and which one wasn’t, etc. They help learners to practise vocabulary only as often as necessary, while leaving more time for difficult words. Vocabulary recycling can also be turned into a game, as suggested by this teacher educator:

Vocabulary games for recycling

One popular idea for recycling vocabulary is the use of a vocabulary box/bag/jar. A teacher I observed recently used this effectively for vocabulary revision. One student was given a large jar and several slips of card and was assigned the job of ‘secretary’ for that lesson. Every time a new word came up which the students wanted to remember, they asked the secretary to write the word down and put it in the jar. This empowered the learners, giving them responsibility for choosing the words they wanted to recall. The teacher helped by pointing out if a word was not in frequent use or not particularly useful for their active vocabulary, but the students had the final decision about what went into the jar.

The vocabulary can then be recycled at an appropriate stage in the course – perhaps at the end of the week, or even as a warmer or filler activity. Students who arrive early can be encouraged to use the vocabulary jar to see how many words they can remember. Competitions and team games are often a fun and effective way of reviewing lexis and are usually popular with all ages of learners. Some activities I have found successful for revising vocabulary are: a ‘hot-seat’ game, where one student has to try and guess which word is being defined by his/her teammates or, alternatively, one student defines the word for the team; miming games, where one student mimes the word to the rest of the team; and ‘pictionary’ – one student draws the word for the team to guess. Learners could also group the words from the jar into groups or write gap-fill tests for their classmates. Another task would be to try and invent a story, incorporating some of the

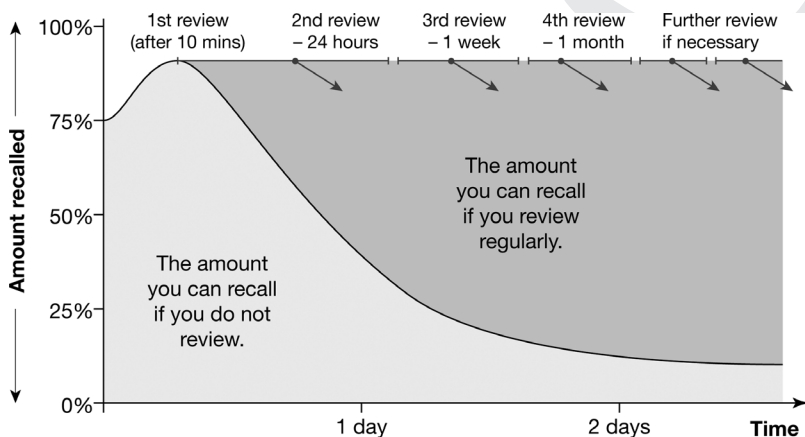
words. This would show whether they are able to use the vocabulary appropriately. All these tasks also help the teacher informally assess learning.

Many students are not disciplined enough to keep a well-organized and effective vocabulary journal. However, by doing it as a class activity initially, they may be motivated to keep better records and learn to recycle vocabulary for themselves.

Tina Appleton, teacher and teacher educator, Bath, UK

Zimmerman (2009: 10) suggests that repetition of words can be achieved by recycling important words, by including words from earlier lessons in homework and classroom practice, by compiling a list of key words from past units and placing them on a visible location in the classroom, and using activities in which students are encouraged to use newly learned words as often as possible – such as in a ‘words-of-the-week’ activity.

The diagram below shows the effect of reviewing on the recall of information.



Generative use

This refers to the use of a word actively and productively in speech or writing, as opposed to a passive encounter with the word; that is, it involves active practice in word use. Nation (2001: 68) suggests ‘Generative processing occurs when previously met words are subsequently met or used in ways that differ from the previous meeting with the word’.



Can you suggest activities that encourage generative processing of new words that were encountered in a reading or listening text?

Learner involvement

Tasks with higher levels of learner involvement, e.g. because they are motivating, memorable or challenging, are more likely to lead to vocabulary retention. A list of words

the teacher has prepared for learners to review is less likely to be remembered than a list of words students bring to class, based on words that are linked to experiences the students had out of class or words that the students had selected themselves from their coursebook and organized in ways the learners themselves have determined. The New Zealand educator Sylvia Ashton Warner wrote about this in her famous book *Teacher* (Ashton Warner, 1963). The book described how she developed powerful reading materials for young Maori children in rural schools in New Zealand, drawing on words they brought to school from their lives outside of the school.



What kinds of links or associations could be made to help learners remember these words: *repulsive*, *spicy*, *restore* and *reprimand*?

The role of learning strategies

Elsewhere, we described learning strategies as specific actions and behaviours that learners use to improve their skill in learning or using a second language (see Chapter 2). Learning strategies would appear to be particularly relevant to vocabulary learning, since words are items that are easy to recognize and focus on, so, in theory, they should be amenable to the use of specific techniques and procedures to facilitate learning. Schmitt (2000) distinguishes two kinds of vocabulary-learning strategies: strategies for discovering the meaning of words and strategies for remembering words that have been encountered.

Strategies for discovering the meaning of words

A number of strategies can be used to help understand the meanings of new words (Nation, 2001):

- *Analyzing word parts*: Using knowledge of affixes to identify or clarify meaning.
- *Using context*: Using information provided by the topic or by the preceding or subsequent words or sentences.
- *Comparisons with the mother tongue*: Where possible, comparison with similar first-language words.
- *Using resources*: Consulting dictionaries, glossaries or other sources. Electronic dictionaries, both monolingual and bilingual, provide convenient and quick access to word meanings.

Strategies for remembering words that have been encountered

The following are strategies that can help students remember words:

- *Recording*: Noting the word in a notebook, or in any other way, to allow later review, together with information about the word, such as examples of usage and a translation of the word.

- *Organizing*: Organizing words into groups, such as by word families or as part of a spidergram or semantic map.
- *Practising and producing*: Trying out the word several times in a sentence, either spoken or written, or finding other ways of using words.

Nation (2002) suggests a number of ways in which teachers can help learners revisit words they have previously encountered:

- 1 Spend time on a word by dealing with two or three aspects of the word, such as its spelling, its pronunciation, its parts, related derived forms, its meaning, its collocations, its grammar or restrictions on its use.
- 2 Get learners to do graded reading and listening to stories at the appropriate level.
- 3 Get learners to do speaking and writing activities, based on written input that contains the words.
- 4 Get learners to do prepared activities that involve testing and teaching vocabulary, such as 'Same or different?', 'Find the difference' and 'Word and picture matching'.
- 5 Set aside a time each week for word by word revision of the vocabulary that occurred previously. List the words on the board, and do the following activities:
 - a Go round the class, getting each learner to say one of the words.
 - b Break the words into parts, and label the meanings of the parts.
 - c Suggest collocations for the words.
 - d Recall the sentence where the word occurred, and suggest another context.
 - e Look at derived forms of the words.

See Appendix 2 for one teacher's lesson plan for how to revisit words that have been taught.



What strategies do you recommend to your students to help them remember words they encounter?

10.5 Principles for vocabulary instruction

A number of general principles have been identified for teaching vocabulary (Nation, 2001; Grabe, 2009; Gu and Johnson, 1996). These divide roughly into the areas of planning vocabulary teaching and integrating vocabulary teaching into the lesson.

Planning vocabulary teaching

Planning effective vocabulary teaching involves determining learners' vocabulary level, setting vocabulary-learning targets, reviewing the vocabulary content of coursebooks and including a vocabulary strand in skills lessons.

Determine learners' vocabulary level

Knowing the students' current vocabulary level can help the teacher select reading and other materials that are at an appropriate level of difficulty. A number of simple vocabulary tests have been developed that enable a teacher to estimate whether a learner's vocabulary is at the 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 word level or higher (Beglar, 2000). These tests generally make use either of a multiple-choice test or gap-filling format. For example, the following test items (from Nation, 1999) assess students' knowledge of words from the 5,000 to 10,000-word range:

- 1 The baby is wet. Her dia____ needs changing.
- 2 Second-year university students in the US are called soph_____.
- 3 The deac____ helped with the care of the poor of the parish.
- 4 The hurricane whi____ along the coast.
- 5 Some coal was still smol____ among the ashes.
- 6 She was sitting on a balcony and bas____ in the sun.
- 7 Computers have made typewriters old-fashioned and obs_____.
- 8 Watch out for his wil____ tricks.
- 9 If your lips are sore, try sal____, not medicine.
- 10 The new vic____ was appointed by the bishop.
- 11 The actors exchanged ban____ with the reporters.
- 12 A thro____ controls the flow of gas into an engine.
- 13 Anyone found loo____ bombed houses and shops will be severely punished.
- 14 The wounded man squi____ on the floor in agony.
- 15 The dog crin____ when it saw the snake.
- 16 The approaching storm stam____ the cattle into running widely.
- 17 The problem is beginning to assume mam____ proportions.
- 18 The rescue attempt could not proceed quickly. It was imp____ by bad weather.

The website www.lex tutor.ca lets students do this themselves. As mentioned earlier, 10,000 word families, roughly, are needed to read first-year university texts. It's important to remember, however, that since the gap-filling format tests productive recall of vocabulary, students may score higher on a multiple-choice test, which tests receptive familiarity.

Set vocabulary-learning targets

As discussed earlier, it is useful to determine realistic vocabulary-learning targets for students, perhaps by lesson, by unit or by week. However, the targets set should not overload students' capacities. For example, five to ten new words per lesson would be a realistic target, but the learning targets set will depend on the intensity and level of the course. It is better to teach a limited set of words and teach them in depth, with multiple encounters, rather than introduce a large number of words that may never be seen again.



How many new words do you think your learners should try to learn each week?

Review the vocabulary content of coursebooks

Commercial textbooks vary in terms of their vocabulary content and how the words they contain were selected. Hedge (2000: 133) contains a checklist for reviewing the vocabulary content of coursebooks, which includes: questions that address the adequacy of the selection of vocabulary items in the book; the aspects of vocabulary usage that are taught; the ways in which vocabulary is presented and practised; the ways in which vocabulary retention is addressed; and the support given in the teacher's book for vocabulary teaching.

See Appendix 4 for two sample vocabulary lessons in a current textbook.

Include a vocabulary strand in skill lessons

Any lesson can contain a vocabulary strand. Useful words should be identified that occur in listening, reading and other skill lessons and can be used as the focus for a class or homework activity. For example, Zimmerman (2009: 70) suggests that listening to a news report can be used to focus on countable and uncountable nouns by having students listen to a news report and first list as many nouns as they can. To do this they can focus on clues such as pronunciation and article usage. Later in pairs or groups they can compare lists, clarify meanings and classify the nouns as countable or uncountable.

Integrating vocabulary teaching into the lesson

Teach high-frequency and high-utility words

When students ask for assistance with words they encounter in a coursebook or reading passage, it is important to assess whether the words are of high frequency and value and which of them will be important words for student to know, as opposed to words that may only have incidental value and that are not worth spending too much class time on.

The mere fact that a student asks about a word does not necessarily mean it is worth a lot of class time. It is useful to become familiar with word lists that contain vocabulary targets for the first 3,000 words. Students should be encouraged to consider if words they encounter are worth memorizing and to ask about the frequency of new words they are exposed to.

Deal with vocabulary systematically

Nation (2001: 93–4) argues that teachers should deal with vocabulary in a systematic and principled way. In considering the vocabulary learners will encounter in a reading text, for example, he looks at a number of different ways of dealing with words, with the option chosen depending on the word in question and its importance in the text, or potential usefulness for the learners:

- Pre-teach.
- Replace the unknown word in the text before giving the text to the learners.
- Put the unknown word in a glossary.
- Put the unknown word in an exercise after the text.
- Quickly give the meaning.
- Do nothing about the word.
- Help the learners use context to guess, use a dictionary or break the word into parts.
- Spend time looking at the range of meanings and collocations of the word.



Which of the strategies above do you usually use?

Teach words in meaningful groups

One of the key problems in helping learners improve their vocabulary is finding effective ways for them to help remember words they have encountered. Gairns and Redman (1986) point out that our mental lexicon is highly organized and efficient, and that items that are related semantically are stored together. This is why it is much easier to recall a list of words that are grouped or organized in a meaningful way, as compared with trying to recall a set of words that are simply organized alphabetically. This could be by grouping them according to topic or in semantic groupings, such as opposites or synonyms.

Use graded readers

Graded readers (see Chapter 14) are prepared to controlled vocabulary levels and enable learners to consolidate known vocabulary, as well as expand their vocabulary knowledge

and develop their fluency in reading (Allan, 2008). If readers are chosen that are appropriate to the learners' vocabulary level, learners can typically understand 95% of the words in a reader and learn the remaining words through guessing from context or with the help of a dictionary. Nation (2001: 163) gives the following figures for a commercial graded-reading series:

Level	New words	Cumulative words
1	400	400
2	300	700
3	300	1000
4	400	1400
5	400	1800
6	700	2500

Graded readers are often assigned for reading out of class as an extensive reading activity.

Use the learners' mother tongue as a resource

If students in the class have the same mother tongue, it is the most obvious point of reference in studying vocabulary. Bilingual word lists, glosses in texts of mother-tongue equivalents of words and flashcards with an English word on one side and the translation equivalent on the other are all simple techniques many students find helpful in learning new vocabulary.



There is a debate about the role of the L1 in the language classroom, and this includes the area of vocabulary, with some teachers arguing that only English–English dictionaries should be used and others suggesting that translation dictionaries can play a role. What is your stance?

Teach students to guess words from context

Teaching students to guess the meaning of words from the context in which they occur has long been advocated as a useful strategy, although not all contexts allow the meaning of words to be inferred. The words in the context of the unknown word also need to be known if a student is to be able to guess a word from context. There are various ways in which context can help identify the meaning of words, however:

- **Contrast:** The word means the opposite of another word or expression in the text. Example: 'A frugal boss will never give a generous bonus at the end of the year.' [*frugal: generous*]
- **Cause:** The word is the cause of something described in the text. Example: 'Anorexia is a disease attributed to many deaths in young girls because they want to lose too much weight.' [*anorexia: lose too much weight = death*]
- **Consequence:** The word is used to describe the result of something. Example: 'Lung cancer can result from too much smoking.' [*smoking: cancer*]
- **Explanation:** The meaning of the word is explained, a definition is given or an example is given. Example: 'Kimchee, a Korean fermented cabbage, is a very delicious food.' [*Kimchee: fermented cabbage*]
- **Hyponyms:** A reader may be able to see the relationship between a familiar and unfamiliar word by looking at the general word class, such as *boat*, *ship*, *tanker*, where *tanker* is used as a hyponym of *ship*, the broader category. Example: 'We must prevent oil spills from supertankers. An example took place in 1970 near Spain, when an oil spill from a wrecked tanker exploded into fire. These types of ships are difficult to control in busy waters.' [*supertanker: tanker: ship*]
- **Definition:** Definitions of words may sometimes be found in the text. Example: 'Neuralgia, a sharp, violent pain along a nerve pathway, can be treated with aspirin.' [*neuralgia: nerve pain*]
- **Punctuation:** Readers can use the punctuation in the sentence to figure out the meaning of the word they do not know. For example, readers can use such clues as italics (showing how a word is defined), quotation marks (showing the word has special meaning), dashes (showing apposition, definitions) and/or brackets (enclosing a definition). Example: 'Taekwondo – a Korean martial art – is very good for self-defence.' [*meaning between two dashes*]
- **Inference:** Contexts give examples from which a reader can infer the meaning of a term. Example: 'The misogynist manager disliked all the women in his office, so they all resigned.' [*misogynist: woman hater*]

Nation and Coady (1988: 104–5) suggest the following five-step procedure learners can use to guess the meaning of unknown words:

- 1 Determine the part of speech of the unknown word.
- 2 Look at the immediate context and simplify, if necessary.
- 3 Look at the wider context. This entails examining the clause with the unknown word and its relationship to the surrounding clauses and sentences.
- 4 Guess the meaning of the unknown word.
- 5 Check that the guess is correct.

A teacher comments on the strategy of guessing words from context:

●● Teaching students to guess words from context

The more I teach vocabulary in the classroom, whether it be direct or incidental, the more I value the strategy of guessing word meanings from context. Even though a simple search in a dictionary is quick and easy for a student to find the correct definition of an unknown word, I often find my students forgetting the target word days or even minutes later, without deep or critical thinking of the word. If the focus of a lesson is to teach vocabulary, then having the students take time to analyze a word is much more beneficial for a deeper understanding, by having them use their critical-thinking skills. The overall goal when I teach vocabulary in the classroom is not only to have students learn new vocabulary words but to also teach them ways of learning on their own, without always relying on a dictionary. This strategy may be time-consuming and difficult at first, but repeated practice and critical thinking can help make this L2 skill of guessing meaning from context as natural as the way most people guess the meaning of words in their L1.

Brandon Narasaki, teacher, Tokyo, Japan

Encourage active learning

Students can become actively involved in their own vocabulary learning. For example:

- Students bring words and lexical items they have encountered out of class into class for discussion.
- Students keep a vocabulary journal in which they enter words they want to remember. The words can be organized by theme or category and examples included of the words in context, as well as other useful information.
- Students build up lists of words in different categories and their equivalents in the mother tongue and review these regularly.

A teacher comments on how he tries to encourage autonomous learning:

●● Helping learners remember words

One of the most difficult aspects of vocabulary learning for my students is remembering words that have been encountered or presented previously. Learning new words and remembering them requires effort, both on the part of the teacher as well as the learner. I review lessons my students have studied in the textbook and develop word sets with simple activities to go with them. I try to find other sources of input that use some of the words they have encountered (e.g. songs and games, or extracts from

movies or sitcoms). I also make use of graded readers where new words are recycled. I want my learners to become autonomous learners, to develop their own ways of understanding and remembering vocabulary, to share new words they have learned with other learners in group discussion and to compare different ways of remembering words. Hence, I believe both direct and indirect vocabulary teaching are needed to support vocabulary learning, to maintain knowledge of words and how they are used, to promote autonomous learning – in order to help students discover their own vocabulary-learning techniques.

Anuwat Kaewma, teacher and teacher educator, Sakon Nakhon province, Thailand

? The teacher above argues for using both 'direct and indirect vocabulary teaching'. What is your view on this? What would make for a good balance between the two?

Moras (2007) recommends as effective teaching and learning strategies the use of guided discovery and, like Nation and Coady earlier, contextual guesswork, as well as mastering effective dictionary use. Guided discovery involves asking questions or offering examples that guide students to guess meanings correctly. In this way, learners get involved in a process of semantic processing that helps learning and retention.

? Some teachers are not in favour of students using a dictionary during tests. What is your view on this? Would there be cases when it would be best not to let students use dictionaries, either during tests or even during regular classroom hours?

Teach word-analysis strategies

Teaching students the skill of analyzing words can be part of regular instruction. Aebbersold and Field (1997: 144) suggest the following procedures for analyzing parts of words:

- 1** Ask the students to look at a certain word and divide it into its parts. Tell them to look for familiar prefixes (word parts that precede the base and add semantic meaning), bases and suffixes (word parts that follow the base and add syntactic as well as semantic meaning).
- 2** Ask them what the base is and what it means. If they are uncertain about whether a part is a base or not, ask them to think of other words they know that have the same part.
- 3** If there is a prefix, ask them what it means.

- 4 If there is a suffix, ask what its grammar function is.
- 5 Have students check the meaning they have come up with to see if it fits the context of the sentence(s) they are reading. Can they think of a synonym for the meaning?

Use the resources of technology

Computers and the internet provide for an approach known as data-driven learning (DDL), in which a corpus of texts with concordancing software can be used to explore how words are used. As described by Allan (2008: 23):

The learner inputs the target word or words into the software and all examples from the corpus are returned, usually in a keyword in context (KWIC) format, with the target word in the middle of the line. These lines can be sorted in a variety of ways that may help to reveal patterns in meaning and usage... Learners then interact with the concordance and find answers to their questions about the target words by looking for patterns in [them], categorizing them and deriving their own hypothesis, rather than relying on a teacher's intuition or research.

An example of a useful corpus is the Bank of English, which forms part of the Collins Corpus – a 650 million-word corpus used in the preparation of the COBUILD dictionaries. If a learner wanted to find out how the word *agree* is used in English, he or she could look at examples in the corpus, such as those below. From the examples, the learner can see you can *agree on something*, *agree with somebody* and *agree to something* (www.mycobuild.com/about-collins-corpus.aspx):

...in Chile, which was supposed to **agree** on environmental protection...

...for the Chargecard Service. We **agree** to provide you with BT charge...

...terms. Mr King and his advisors **agree** that there is a need to top up...

...boorishness of rock. I couldn't **agree** more, but I still wish they'd...

...reader. Despite the problem, I **agree** it is still the best means of...

...the first affected unless managers **agree** to take talks at the conciliation...

...time that Vietnam is prepared to **agree** to the principle of forcible...

...of political opinion in Turkey **agree** that a new constitution is...

...think is much more likely to **agree** with you on church...

You can try the above for yourself. Go to the British National Corpus (BNC) corpus website at www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk, and see if you can find out the difference between *scared* and *afraid*.

10.6 Assessing vocabulary

Vocabulary tests may be developed in a number of ways. Vocabulary placement or proficiency tests usually include a range of words representing different levels of difficulty so that the test will distinguish between learners with basic-, intermediate- or advanced-level vocabulary knowledge. Commercial proficiency tests are often designed this way. Achievement tests are based on a sampling of the words from materials the students have studied. An example of a diagnostic test is Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test, which measures the learner's knowledge of words at the 2,000, 3,000, 5,000 and 10,000 word levels. These sorts of diagnostic tests may also be used for placement purposes. A vocabulary test for placement purposes in a language course should include a sample of words from different levels of the course to determine the students' level.

Here a teacher comments on the appropriateness of guessing during a vocabulary test:

Assessing vocabulary during the course

Oftentimes in assessing vocabulary knowledge, students feel the need to guess if they do not know an answer when given any kind of 'test' in a classroom (believing that the higher their score, the better). However, it is often the case that when students guess a word, and if they guess correctly, their vocabulary assessment becomes inaccurate. A word they guess the answer to may show, in the results, that the student knows the word, but to the student, they did not know and simply guessed. Even though assessing a student's vocabulary knowledge in the classroom may seem a simple enough task, I believe it is very important to explain to the students that their grade is not affected by the results of their assessment. The 'test' is simply a measurement of their current vocabulary knowledge, and the more honestly they answer the questions, the better it is for the students' learning. So, for this kind of assessment, I always explain and reiterate to my students to *not* guess if they are not sure of an answer.

Brandon Narasaki, teacher, Tokyo, Japan

Nation (2001) suggests that vocabulary tests should contain about 30 items. A number of different item types can be used in vocabulary tests, depending on the kind of vocabulary knowledge being tested (e.g. receptive or productive knowledge). Testing procedures reflect two perspectives on vocabulary assessment. One approach is to test sets of words to measure students' lexical knowledge, perhaps referenced to a word-frequency list, in order to measure gaps in a learner's lexical knowledge. The other is to assess vocabulary in the context of a language-use task (Read, 2000). Each approach requires the use of different testing procedures. A test of the first kind might be one in which the learner is given words and selects the correct meaning from choices given. The other could involve testing understanding of the meaning of a word as it appears in a text. The following are examples of test items commonly used in vocabulary tests:

- *Multiple choice:* These are common in vocabulary tests, though are difficult to construct and only allow a small number of items to be tested.
- *Matching:* Words are matched with synonyms or definitions or with an L1 equivalent.
- *Sentence completion:* A sentence is given with a target word replaced by a blank.
- *Sentence writing:* Students are given a word and asked to use it in a sentence.
- *Gap-fill (or cloze) test:* The learner supplies a word to fill in a missing word in a text.
- *Self-rating:* The learner rates how well he or she knows a word.

While we have addressed the testing of vocabulary in isolation, vocabulary testing is frequently combined with the testing of other skills, such as grammar.

10.7 Conclusion

Vocabulary knowledge is a core component of all language skills; good language learners have large vocabularies and look for ways to expand their vocabulary knowledge. They use a variety of different strategies to help themselves understand words they encounter in spoken and written texts, as well as to help themselves remember them. While reading is a major source of vocabulary learning for students, all lessons contain vocabulary and need to be reviewed for their potential in learning vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction should aim to help expand and consolidate students' vocabularies, to help students develop strategies to manage their own vocabulary learning and to familiarize students with ways of approaching new words they encounter in reading and other contexts. Targets for vocabulary learning will depend on the learners' needs and the purposes for which they use English. The goal of vocabulary instruction is not simply to teach knowledge of words, but to help learners to become independent learners. Both direct and indirect approaches to vocabulary learning are helpful; however, direct support for vocabulary development is essential if learners are to acquire the words they need to become effective users of English.

Discussion questions

- 1 Examine a coursebook and look at exercises designed specifically to develop vocabulary. What aspects of vocabulary use do they teach?
- 2 Look again at the exercises you identified in question 1. What kinds of exercises are used to teach and practise vocabulary?
- 3 Choose a text that would be suitable for a particular group of learners you are familiar with but that contains a number of words they might not know. Which of the new words do you think are useful for receptive knowledge and which for productive knowledge?
- 4 Examine the first page of a local English language newspaper. How many examples of collocations and multi-word units does it contain?

- 5 If possible, interview two or three learners and find out how they try to remember words they encounter.
- 6 Examine a few pages from a textbook used in an academic course, such as engineering or agriculture. Check the vocabulary in the texts using the Compleat Lexical Tutor. How much academic vocabulary does it contain? How many words in the text would you classify as technical vocabulary?
- 7 With a partner, see if you can describe a vocabulary game for practising the names of fruit and vegetables.
- 8 Review the various ways that context can help identify the meaning of a word.
- 9 Using five low-frequency words from an authentic reading text, assume a learner role and apply Nation and Coady's (1988) five-step strategy for guessing the meaning of unknown words. How well does the strategy work? Were any of the specific suggestions for guessing meaning helpful?
- 10 Examine a coursebook, and use the checklist suggested by Hedge to review the treatment of vocabulary in the book. Did you find the treatment adequate?
- 11 Choose a reading text from a general English coursebook at a particular level, or choose an authentic reading text suitable for this level. Select five words you would focus on to allow the students to process the text in a meaningful way. What principles of instruction for teaching vocabulary did you apply to select these words?
- 12 Choose five words that appear in this chapter. How could you test someone's knowledge of these words?

Appendix 1:

Teaching affixes and word families

Review the lesson plan below, prepared by Ao Ran, a teacher and teacher educator in Yunnan, China, and in Singapore. What principles of vocabulary teaching does it reflect?

Complete the sample exercise (Handout 3) for practising word families. Did you experience difficulty with any of the items in the test? What strategies did you use to provide an answer? What other formats could be used to test knowledge of these words?

1 Goals

- To learn some common English affixes: *un-*, *in-*, *be-*, *-ly*, *-ive*, *-ible*, *-less*, *-ful*, *-ness*, *-er*.
- To learn some word families containing the above affixes: *sense*, *friend*, *use*, *do*, etc.
- To raise students' awareness of word families as a way to expand their vocabulary.

2 Resources

A. Handout 1: List of some commonly-used English affixes, with explanations: *un-*, *non-*, *in-*, *be-*, *mis-*, *re-*; *-ly*, *-ive*, *-ible*, *-less*, *-ful*, *-er*, *-ness*, etc.

B. Handout 2: List of word families of the words *sense*, *friend*, *use* and *do* prepared in the following way:

— SENSE

Verb: sense

Adjective: **sensible** – **senseless** – **sensitive** – **insensitive**

Adverb: **sensibly** – **sensitively** – **insensitively**

Nouns: sense – **nonsense** – **sensibility** – **sensitivity** – **insensitivity**

— FRIEND

Noun: friend – **friendliness** – **friendship**

Adjective: **friendly** – **unfriendly** – **friendless**

Verb: **befriend**

— USE

Verb: use – **misuse** – **reuse**

Noun: use – **usage** – **user** – **disuse** – **misuse** – **usefulness** – **uselessness**

Adjective: **usable** – **unusable** – **reusable** – **useful** – **useless** – **used** – **disused** – **unused**

Adverb: **usefully** – **uselessly**

— DO

Verb: do – **outdo** – **overdo** – **redo** – **undo**

Noun: do – **doing**

Adjective: doable – done – **overdone** – **undone**

(Word families based on *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 3rd edition, CD-ROM; Cambridge University Press, 1995)

- C. Handout 3: Hard copies of blank-filling exercises for practising word families, which are prepared in the following way:

do (v. and n.), **outdo**, **overdo**, **redo**, **undo**, **doing**, **doable**, **done**, **overdone**, **undone**, **dos**

- a) The roast lamb was dry and _____.
- b) He always tries to _____ everybody else in the class.
- c) It's a global problem – what can individuals _____ about it?
- d) Damn, my shoelaces have come _____ again.
- e) After a heart attack, you have to be careful not to _____ things.
- f) This project may be difficult, but I still think it's _____.
- g) There are no special privileges for the managers – we believe in fair _____ all round in this company.
- h) These new measurements mean that I'll have to _____ the calculations.
- i) Can someone help me to _____ my seat belt?
- j) Running a marathon takes a lot of _____.
- k) The washing-up's _____, but I've left the drying for you.

(Example sentences from *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 3rd edition, CD-ROM; Cambridge University Press, 1995)

- D. Handout 4: Hard copies of more blank-filling exercises to be used for homework.
- E. *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 3rd edition (CALD3) CD-ROM (1st and 2nd editions will also do) for the teacher to prepare word families (through the 'word-building' function), and example sentences for use during class and as homework.

3 Timing 50 minutes

4 Grouping No grouping needed.

5 Activities

- Question and answer (Q and A)
- In-class written exercises

6 Sequencing

- Opening
 1. Q and A: Teacher asks four or five questions as a lead-in activity, for example:
 - *What is the word that means 'not happy'?*
 - *What is the word that means 'not kind'?*
 - *What is the word that means 'not selfish'?*
 - *Is the word 'sad' a noun or an adjective? How can we turn it into a noun? An adverb? A verb?*

(It does not matter whether students have the right or wrong answers to these questions because the purpose is to steer them towards the theme of the lesson. In fact, it may produce a more beneficial effect if students do not know the correct answers to some or all questions.)

2. Teacher provides the answers to the questions and naturally transitions into the lesson.
3. Teacher describes the goals of the lesson.
4. Teacher states the activities students will do.
- Main activity
 5. Teacher gives students Handouts 1 and 2, and explains the affixes and the word families.
 6. Students are given a few minutes to digest and memorize the word families on Handout 2.
 7. Teacher then gives students Handout 3 for them to complete the blank-filling exercises.
 8. Teacher checks the answers after students finish the exercises.
- Closure
 9. Teacher reviews and summarizes what has been learned.
 10. Homework. Teacher gives students homework, which consists of the following:
 - a) Building word families, following the format in Handout 2 for the words *able*, *break*, *know*, *possible*, *learn*, *live*, *speak* and *believe*.
 - b) Handout 4.
 11. Teacher dismisses the class.

Appendix 2:

Word race

Look at the activity for reviewing vocabulary, prepared by Brandon Narasaki, a teacher in Tokyo, Japan. Compare it to the suggestions in the chapter for revisiting words. Would this activity be suitable for students you teach?

Activity objective: An activity to help students review a set of words taught in a class. Since this is purely a review activity, the word set should have already been taught before proceeding.

Required materials:

- 1 A PowerPoint or other presentation software document including the learning objective(s), rules and questions for the activity.
- 2 Projector, screen or any other way of displaying the presentation, so that all students can easily see.
- 3 One desk per group of students.
- 4 A review sheet for each group that includes at least a list of the target vocabulary used for the activity. This review sheet may include exercises students completed to learn the different aspects of the target vocabulary (e.g. word definitions, synonyms, parts of speech – example sentences with the way each word can be used, etc.).

Activity process:

- 1 Students will be placed into groups of no more than four (two to three is ideal to ensure each student has enough time to actively participate).

- 2 Once the groups have been decided, set up one desk for each group in a place where they are able to clearly see the presentation.
- 3 Explain the directions and reason for activity:

Directions:

- 1 Each group will elect one person to start by sitting in the group chair. Only one person per group is allowed to sit at a time, but after every three questions, a new member will sit (the frequency of changing the person who sits can be decided by the instructor).
- 2 The instructor will show slides of the preselected categories (e.g. definition, synonyms and word use), and the first person sitting down to raise their hand is allowed to guess the correct answer.

EXAMPLE: A slide shows the definition 'feeling or showing pleasure or contentment'. The first person to guess the word *happy* wins. Each word that is used as an answer must be from the target vocabulary set.

- 3 Even though the student sitting down is NOT allowed to use any notes, his or her group members standing up behind the chair are allowed to. The person sitting down may not look at her group-members' notes, but group members are allowed to verbally give the answer.
- 4 Once the person sitting down raises her hand to answer, his or her group members are not allowed to help any more.
- 5 If a student guesses incorrectly, another group may guess. Each student is only allowed to guess one time, so students should think about their answer before raising their hand.

NOTE: If pronunciation is a focus of the target vocabulary, students should be warned that pronunciation also counts (so improper pronunciation of a word may make an answer incorrect, even if the correct word is given).

- 6 For every correct answer, that group is awarded a point.
- 7 At the end of the activity, the group with the most points wins. To help motivate students to study for this activity or participate more actively, some sort of prize is useful (e.g. extra credit, less homework, snack, etc.).

The main categories I use for this activity include:

- Word definition (The definition of a word will be shown. Choose the vocabulary word that is being defined.)
- Synonyms (A word will be shown, and students must decide which of the target words from the unit has a similar meaning.)
- Word use (A sentence will be shown with a blank, and groups must decide which target word fits.)
- Word parts (A target word will be shown, along with several multiple-choice affix answers. Students must choose the correct affix that goes with the word. OR, a target vocabulary word will be shown, with its part of speech. Then, students must say the target word in a different form, based on what the question asks for, such as a verb.)

Appendix 3:

'Slap the affix'

Look at the activity below, prepared by Brandon Narasaki, a teacher in Tokyo, Japan, and compare it with the activity for teaching affixes in Appendix 1. With what type of students might each activity be most effective? What reasons might you have for choosing one activity over the other?

Activity objective: An activity to help review word families and the uses of English affixes (for this example, the focus will be on suffixes) and to help students become aware of the relationship of words in a *word family*.

Materials needed:

- 1 A preselected set of vocabulary items that students have studied and for which they have learned the different suffixes used to change a word's part of speech (e.g. noun → verb).
- 2 Before conducting the game, the instructor should create a set of words and suffixes to use in the game. I usually try to have about twenty questions each time I do this activity, to give the students enough practice to become comfortable with the rules and process of the activity (e.g. 'Change *happy* (adj.) into a noun' → *happiness*).
- 3 One set of index cards for each group (if more than one group is formed). Each set of index cards should have several different types of affixes.
- 4 I also always use a blank index card, with no suffix written, since oftentimes a word can be used as a verb, noun or adjective, without changing its form.

Activity process:

- 1 Depending on the size of the class, break the students up into groups of two to four. (I prefer at least three in each group, but any larger than four may demotivate some students from wanting to participate.)
- 2 Have each group of students stand around a separate table or large desk.
- 3 Give each group a deck of index cards, and have them spread the cards out on the table/desk.
- 4 Make sure the students read each index card to see the different suffixes on each one.
- 5 Explain the rules of the activity:
 - a The teacher will show the students one of the target words being learned (either write on the board [the word] say, or use a software presentation such as PowerPoint).
 - b The teacher asks the entire class what part of speech the word is (e.g. write *happy* on the board, and students should know this word is an adjective).
 - c Once the students know the original part of speech, tell them to 'slap the affix' that changes the word into a chosen part of speech (e.g. *happy* (adj.) → noun = *happiness*). The instructor should already have predetermined words to help avoid any unwanted surprises.

- d** Inform the students that they only have one chance to choose a card, so once they 'slap' a card, they must leave their hand down. Depending on the level of the students and the difficulty of the word, the instructor may need to wait until each student in each group has chosen a card to 'slap'.
- e** This activity is called 'Slap the affix' because the students have to race to slap the affix they believe to be correct, as quickly as possible (adapted from the common card game slapjack, a variant on snap). If two students slap the same correct affix, the fastest one wins.
- f** This may need to be demonstrated with an example, at least one time, so that students understand how to play.
- g** One person from each group should keep track of the score to see who has the most points at the end.
- h** At the end of the game, the person from each group with the most points wins.

Optional variations:

- I find it more entertaining and motivating to give the winners a prize. This could be in the form of extra credit, a snack, a gift card, less homework or anything the instructor feels would be appropriate.
- Another fun option is to save the last several questions of the game as 'betting rounds', where students can bet the points they accumulated in the game to increase their points. It is simpler mathematically if the betting is kept simple. For example, if a student bets two of his other points, he or she will get two extra points for winning the round or lose two points if he or she does not win in his or her group for that round. It is also useful for the students to know how many rounds are left near the end so they can strategize how to bet for each round.

Appendix 4:

Recognizing problems; A good night's sleep

Look at the two pages below from the textbook *Passages*, 2nd edition (Richards and Sandy, 2008). What kind of vocabulary knowledge is taught in each activity? Are these examples of direct or indirect vocabulary instruction?

5 Recognizing problems

vocabulary

A These verbs are often used to talk about problems. Use the verbs to replace the boldfaced words and phrases in the sentences below.

aggravate	a problem
avoid	
cause	
deal with	
identify	
ignore	
run into	
solve	



1. My friend **never does anything about** his problems.
My friend always ignores his problems.
2. Maria can look at a broken bicycle and **find** the problem right away.
3. My sister is never afraid to **try to take care of** a difficult problem.
4. Gil Dong always **makes** his problems **worse**.
5. Ruby always follows the recipe closely to **prevent** problems when she cooks.
6. Ming always **unexpectedly encounters** problems when he tries to fix things.
7. Carla is great at **completely fixing** any kind of problem at work.
8. Al is the kind of student who always **makes** problems for teachers.

B **Pair work** Do you know anyone similar to the people in the sentences above? Tell your partner.

"My cousin always ignores her problems. Her car is always making strange noises, but she never does anything about it."

6 Dealing with problems

listening

A Listen to Ray (R), Felipe (F), and Jennifer (J) talk about a problem that they each had. What did each person finally do about the problem? Write the correct letter.

___ ignore it ___ deal with it ___ aggravate it

B Listen again. Briefly describe each person's problem.

Ray: _____

Felipe: _____

Jennifer: _____

LESSON B • Tossing and turning

1 A good night's sleep

starting point

A Read the statements about sleep habits. Check (✓) the statements that are true for you.

- ☐ I sometimes lie awake at night, even if I'm really tired.
- ☐ I'm lucky I can get by on six hours of sleep, considering that most people need eight.
- ☐ I'm a light sleeper, so any little noise wakes me up unless I'm really tired.
- ☐ I can manage on five hours of sleep, as long as I take a nap during the day.
- ☐ Unless I get a good night's sleep, I can easily fall asleep at school, at work, or even while driving.
- ☐ I always set two alarm clocks just in case one of them doesn't go off.
- ☐ I only wake up early if I have somewhere to be in the morning.
- ☐ I never have any trouble sleeping.
- ☐ I'm exhausted every morning, even if I slept great all night.



B Pair work Compare your answers. Which statements did you check?

"I definitely lie awake at night, even if I'm really tired. I can't help it. I replay everything that happened during the day."

"You're not the only one. I do the same thing, especially when I'm feeling stressed."

2 Expressions related to sleep

vocabulary

A Put these expressions about sleep in the columns. Then compare answers.

be fast asleep	be wide awake	feel drowsy	nod off	take a power nap
be sound asleep	drift off	have a sleepless night	sleep like a log	toss and turn

Having trouble sleeping	Falling asleep	Sleeping a short time	Sleeping deeply
			be fast asleep

B Pair work Use the expressions to ask and answer questions.

"Do you ever take a power nap during the day?"

"Not really. Whenever I try to take a nap, I end up sleeping until the next morning. But let me ask you something. What do you do when you feel drowsy after lunch?"

Further reading

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