VOCABULARY IN EFL TEACHING SITUATION

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Abstract

The vocabulary of English Language like any other language consists of several hundred thousand words. How can teachers and learners approach this vast, endless store of language and make use of it? How is the vocabulary composed? What sort of elements does it contain? Can we use its structuring principles in language teaching? How can the vocabulary of English Language be acquired, stored and made retrievable when required? **Significance:** Vocabulary learning should not be limited to single words or expressions taken from lists and texts. If our aim is to help the students communicate in the real world, then vocabulary in EFL teaching should be promoted?"

 Key Words :   L1= First Language, Mother Language, L2= Second Language, EFL= English as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

As a foreign language, English holds an eminent place in most Arab countries owing to the traditional relationship maintained with the English-speaking world, Arabs need to learn English to communicate with native speakers of English as well as with inter language users of English abroad or within the Arab world. The teaching of English, in the Arab world, is constantly emphasized because of its universality and the sophisticated and advanced culture of the English-speaking world. Many Arab countries send an increasing number of students and academics to the USA and Britain for undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The students normally benefit a great deal through integrating themselves with the people, the culture and the modern technology.

In this study I will try to highlight on the theory of teaching vocabulary especially in part one . I am going to concentrate on its development through history, formation of words, and their relation with L1 and L2 vocabulary. Part two, will be defining the different aspects of criteria: selection, quantity of words to be taught, and their grouping as well as the methodology used in teaching them. Part three will examine the teaching procedures and the difficulties in learning vocabulary.

Part One:
Learning Vocabulary

If you can involve your students in this small English using community, you have made one of your most important contributions to their learning.

Learning vocabulary is a lengthy and complex process which requires adequate mastery of form, meaning and usage. Through process, the pupils should be able to: spell and pronounce the words correctly when they use them either in writing or speaking, understand the meaning of the words without difficulty upon hearing or reading them, know the correct collocation of vocabulary as well as its connotations or associations, use vocabulary in appropriate grammatical sentences or utterances, knowing under what circumstances a certain word occurs, the relationships between interlocutors, and the mode of the discourse - spoken or written, etc.

These requirements for knowing vocabulary are essential in foreign language learning because any ineffective vocabulary teaching and learning may lead to undesirable results such as:

a) Inability to retrieve learnt vocabulary while communicating in the language;

b) Inappropriate use of the vocabulary items in different situations as in the underlined words in the following sentences:

- My car was badly injured in the accident, (damaged)
- We shall discuss about the problem, (talk)

The choice of words is as important as knowing their meanings, since what is correct in one situation may not be correct in another.

a) ignorance of varieties of language; that is, using vocabulary at the wrong level of formality either of situation or the relationship between the speakers of the language.

b) using bookish English (i.e. formal language found in textbooks) in normal conversational situations, e.g. The hind tyre of my car is worn out: so I must purchase a new one (hind/rear. purchase/buy or get

c) using vocabulary in a meaningless or in an unidiomatic way. For example: Her name is familiar with me (to) incorrect use of grammatical form, stress, pronunciation and spelling.

Types of vocabulary

In teaching English vocabulary, the FL teacher has to distinguish five categories/classes of vocabulary, namely: ESP (English for Special Purposes); active/productive; passive/receptive; action/structure; and content vocabulary. Although this classification is arbitrary, it is useful for pedagogical purposes; many overlapping relationships exist between these types. Below is a brief discussion of these five classes/categories of vocabulary.

a. ESP Vocabulary:

English for Special Purposes (ESP) is related to special interests whether professional or technical. Its vocabulary helps the learners to enlarge their use of the content words. It is best learned connection with the job or profession itself. However, in the classroom situation, pupils have to learn the forms and to understand the concepts behind the words away from a real situation.

b. Active and Passive Vocabulary

Productive (or active) vocabulary is utilized in everyday speech. It is learned for performance in any communication act. Hence, active words should be taught through focusing on pronunciation, correct form, appropriate collocation and meaning that pupils can easily remember them.

On the other hand, passive vocabulary is not essential for production in speaking or writing. It is meant for recognition and understanding. This vocabulary is needed for comprehension. The pupils are not asked to utilize it in everyday speech but recognize when occurring in context. It may be added that words which a passive in a certain situation or level can be considered active in another context. This feature is not made clear in some English textbooks since all types of vocabulary are treated equally. To overcome this drawback, the teacher has to concentrate on the most useful items for the pupils. He should then handle the remaining items as receptive vocabulary to help improve pupils' recognition and comprehension.

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c. Content Words

Content words are closely related to one's experience. They are also open-ended in the sense that new nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are often coined to name new things or processes.

d. Structure or Function words

Structure or function words are considered as part of the grammatical system of the language since their main functions are grammatical.

Unlike content words, structure words are limited in number. There are about two hundred of them in English, and they belong to a closed class to which no new words can be added. Their meaning is mainly derived from the functions they serve. In other words, they are inseparable from content words in communication. For example, a string of content words like 'repairman find air conditioner broken' has no grammatical relationship between its elements; but with some structure words we can bring it to grammaticality in this form: 'The repairman found the air conditioner broken', and thus the whole message is conveyed. If we examine the structure word 'do' in the sentence 'Do you always walk on the beach at sunset?' we find that its main function is grammatical because it serves as a marker of the question form and as a marker of tense.

Function words are also used in the following contexts/ functions:

- to join fragments of structures together into larger units as with "prepositions".
- to join pairs of sentences or phrases as in "coordinating conjunctions": but, yet, and, or, nor, and for.
- to connect a subordinate idea to the main sentence as with "subordinating conjunctions": if, although, because, whenever, since, until, etc.

as a sequence signal as with the article 'the', which can be used as an anaphoric reference, i.e. a reference to something which has been previously mentioned. For example: An old man was standing at the door. The old man left before one.

Function words have high frequency in the language. That is, words like 'the', 'a', 'in', 'that' or the auxiliaries and conjunctions occur very frequently in any piece of writing or speech in order to establish the grammatical structure of sentences. However, they are unstressed in spoken language, which makes them difficult for a foreign language learner to identify.

Vocabulary Teaching Through History

It is true that the more vocabulary one has in addition of other factors, the more he or she has the ability to communicate with others. However, one could find out that this important feature had been ignored in teaching languages. Such neglect may due to many reasons as what some linguists believe that learning L2 does not depend on learning its vocabulary, but to master its phonology and grammatical structure as well (McCarthy M & Carter R, Vocabulary and Language Teaching, 1988). This could be right, but the point is as (Wallace, 1982) argued that having good knowledge system does not enable learners to communicate, whereas having needed vocabulary could do that.

For example one justification was that learning vocabulary could be achieved by exposing learners to real life situation to grasp the amount-needed lexis. This certainly turns for L1 and not for L2 especially in a country where the target language is not is not widely spoken. A further reason concerns with learners, needs. In other words, what sort of vocabularies suits them most, and which does not. So, designing vocabulary textbook was readily task, which had almost been avoided. But, in the last few decades it was recognized that a language wouldn't be effectively taught or mastered

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without learning its vocabulary. So, as a result many efforts has been made to find some approaches of teaching lexis in order to facilitate their teaching as well as their acquisition for learners.

Formation of words and their relations with L1, L2 vocabulary.
Word Forming

In any language, vocabulary consists of groups of words, which in turn are formed in different ways. Therefore, language teachers should take care of such formation to facilitate their task of teaching vocabulary to their students; if not the task will be somehow difficult. In order to know how words of any language can be acquired, it might be a good idea to how are they built or formed. This can be achieved by the study of morphology, which deals with the study of grammatical structure of words. Generally speaking, letters originally composes words and they are in turn making up the vocabulary of any language. In most languages if not all words consists of one or two meaningful parts and even more. Each one of them is called morpheme. For instance if we have a look at the word reinforcement, we can notice that such a word can be segmented into three elements re, enforce, ment. Every part of them is called a morpheme. And what can be noticed about them is that when re and ment stand alone, they are meaningless, whereas enforcement dose have a clear meaning. Grammarians call the former two bound morphemes and the later free morpheme, because it can stand as a meaningful word. (Andrew, 1999) These morphemes that precede a root as in reinforcement are called prefixes and those which follow are called suffixes. The general term covers both of them is affixes. Sometimes, combining more than one free morpheme could form a word. For instance, the word wastepaper basket consists of three morphemes, which at the same time are capable of being three free standing words in other contexts (McCarthy M, Vocabulary, 1990). Another type of word could be those phrasal verbs which can simply be formed by combining a preposition and a verb as in the word look up or sometimes, a verb and more than one preposition as in go a long with, pass away. The phrasal verbs should be introduced to learn as a chunk and not as separate units; otherwise they would lose their meaning. A further more different kind of words is cluster words, which are composed of number of words to illustrate a specific meaning as in the clusters as far as I know, nice to meet you. Such cluster also should be taught as whole parts so that they can be easily stuck into learners' minds.

Part B:
Selection

One of the problems of vocabulary teaching is how to select what words to teach. A general principle in the past has been to teach more concrete words at lower levels and generally become more abstract. Words like "table","chair" has figured for the beginners. The type of vocabulary to teach was on the basis of how frequently they are used by the speakers of the language. The words, which are more used, are the ones to be first taught.

How to examine a textbook

To select any lexis textbook one has to focus on some factors by which such selection can be judged as an appropriate for learners, ability to any target language. Thus, each language teacher as well as textbook designer should be completely consisting of them to their task well. And the factors are the selection criteria, the quantity of vocabulary, organizing principles and the methodology.

Selection Criteria

To teach any target language, five criteria should be subjected, such as "core vocabulary, frequency, range, learn-ability, and learners, needs". It seems that teachers are forced to follow these criteria strictly in order to obtain a successful teaching process.

a. The core vocabulary

It might be found that the importance of words differs from one to another in many ways when examining the vocabulary of a language. One of these variations concerns with their position in the language they are related to. That is, some words "are more or central to the language than others"(McCarthy M, Vocabulary, 1990). These words are more used by the speakers rather than others. Thus, in the early stages every learner must be taught these words to be exploited in different spoken and written states. For instance if we take the words fat, obese, overweight, plump…etc., we can find out that they almost have the same meaning, but the word fat is frequently used and could be used to describe many different nouns while the others cannot. The word fat for example could describe a man, a bear, a dairy, but the word overweight is used only to describe a man only. Thus, words like these can be regarded as vocabularies, and language teachers have to concentrate on them when selecting lexis to teach. Nevertheless, some other words should not be ignored or neglected as being less central to the language.

b. The frequency

Frequency can be defined as "the degree of probability of encountering the word in speech or in print"(Taylor, L, 1990). When teaching vocabulary, this aspect is very fundamental, therefore frequent words are easy to understand and recall as well for all learners even the weak ones. This is why it is thought, "the most frequent words in the language must be presented in the early stages of language teaching" (McCarthy M, Vocabulary, 1990). Furthermore, it is believed that without such high frequent of words "it is impossible to use English (as an example)in any normal ways"(Coady, J & Huckin, T, 1997). On the other hand, some linguists maintain that "The high frequency of an item is no longer guarantee of usefulness"(Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986).

c. The Range

Any certain word, which is widely occurring and can be used in various contexts of language, could mean the range of a word. So, some words have a range whereas others do not have. The English word diagnose might be seen as having a narrow range because it seems to be restricted only for medicine. But words like when while, there, the…etc. have a wide range, for they could occur in almost all language fields. For that reason, it is believed that "the useful words for learners are those words which "a" are frequent and "b" have a fairly wide range, etc."(McCarthy M, Vocabulary, 1990)Therefore, teachers are always asked to select such kinds of words for their students so that the later could make use of them in their communication.

d. The Learn-ability

Learn-ability could be defined as the possibility of learning vocabulary. It might be thought that words of both wide frequency and range could be learnt easily; however there are other factors which could contribute in this matter such as spelling and pronunciation difficulties, cognates and false friends, culture variety and syntactic properties.

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Spelling and pronunciation difficulties

Spelling and pronunciation are related to each other, so learners of English as an example may encounter some difficulty in their learning process of vocabularies. So many English words for instance are spelt in a way and pronounced in another different way, such as psychology which could be regarded as difficult for some learners like the Arab learners whom in their mother tongue, both spelling and pronunciation are nearly in a complete corresponds. Besides there is "the systematic sound confusion such as /i/and /i: / which occur in bit, beat...etc." (Wallace, 1982).

A further form of difficulty can usually be found in words with double letters such as characterization. Another thing may confuse learners is "words which have very difficult form, but are pronounced identically e.g. break, brake, etc." (Wallace, 1982).

Cognates and false friends

Words, which have different spelling and meaning, are called cognates in different languages. This phenomenon usually can be found when two languages are derived from one origin as the case for some Europe an languages such as English, French, Spanish etc. So speakers of these languages can benefit from these cognates in learning the other languages. For instance, "the Spanish method is clearly related to the English method…etc." (Wallace, 1982). However, this fall in a trick if they thought that such relation always works. For example, the English and the French word amateur doesn't mean the same thing in both languages. So, these kinds of words tend to make their acquisition very difficult.

Culture variety

When learners are provided with words these do not relate to their culture, they might be difficult to be learned as a result of not experiencing them in their real life and the surrounding enlivenment. For instance, words like snow, skyscrapers, underground etc. can be easily forgotten by learners who live in desert as being unimaginable or impossible to relate them to their areas. However, this does not mean that learners should not be taught whatever is not relevant to their culture.

Syntactic properties

As in the other languages some words in English could be very close in their meaning which leads to some kind of difficulty in learning them. An example of this group is (want& wish, each& every). Therefore, students learning any language with such words often face problem dealing with them.

5- Learners' needs

Learners need to have a language course that meets their main needs. Their need as language learners, that is to equip them with an acceptable competence of the language and their need as language users. "Although learners have individual senses of need which perhaps do not coincide with those of the other group or class".(McCarthy M, Vocabulary, 1990).However, when selecting a material to teach, is extremely crucial to pay attention. In other words, teachers have to make sure that such selection meets their learners' needs; otherwise, their teaching process will not be effective and useful for learners. The reason is that because "students' particularly more sophisticated adults, and teenagers' need to feel that the material from which they are learning has relevance to the real world and at the same time relates positively to aspects of their make-up such as age, level of education,

social attitudes, intellectual ability, and level of emotional maturity".(Worth, 1984). For example, if a certain group of learners are studying English for chemistry, there will be no need to teach them anything relates to astronomy, except if there is some correlation between the two subjects, because they would probably recognize that what is being taught to them is not relevant to their field which will cause negative results. So, teachers have to be precisely aware of this point in order to avoid any conflict that might arise if such important aspect is ignored.

Quantity of Vocabulary

The quantity of vocabulary means how many new words or items a teacher should present to his or her students in each new lesson. It is largely believed that taking a right decision in this matter is not easy as a result of a number of factors such as the purpose of teaching English where it is for general English, or for specific purposes. For instance, some subjects like literature may require so many vocabularies, whereas, another one like Mathmatics may not. A further factor relates to the variety of the L2 learners. For example, it could seem illogical to introduce the same amount of vocabulary items to both learners whose mother tongue derives from the same origin of the target language and those whom their L1 is completely different. This is why it was said that "it is impossible to be dogmatic about the number of new lexical items that should be presented in sixty-minutes lesson",(Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986).However, eight to twelve items are suggested for each respectively during a single lesson for elementary learners, and advanced ones. But, it could be argued that there is no guarantee that all students can acquire such number of items at the same time. Because if a teacher sets his or her goal just to introduce that number without considering other factors which contribute in learning process such as class duration, teachers qualification etc. In contrast, some linguists think that "if we cling to the view that words to be acquired in certain quantities at certain rates, vocabulary teaching process will not progress" (McCarthy M & Carter R, Vocabulary and Language Teaching, 1988).Obviously, the number of words to be taught can be effected by many factors. First, how items are similar to the students' mother tongue. In other words, if they are so, it might be easy to introduce as many as possible without over burdening the students. On the other hand, when such items completely vary, the amount might depend on their ease and difficulty. Another factor concerns with learners' memory. That is, if they have long-term memory, they could be provided with so many items and vice-versa when they have short one. A further factor that plays a significant role is as (Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986) think that it can be found in many educational systems around the world that a syllabus should be covered. So, in this case, a teacher has no choice or freedom to take his or her own decision.

Their grouping or Organizing Principals

The definition of grouping is the way by which words can be classified according to their relation. For instance, words like shall, should, can, could, might etc, could be classified as a group for they belong to cautious words. So, grouping is seen as a helpful mean for teachers in teaching new vocabularies to "illustrate the organized nature of vocabulary and at the same time enable him to internalize the items in a coherent way"(Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986), especially if teachers know well how to be utilized. For example, when an ESP teacher is giving a lesson about fruits to medicine students, it would be useful to present a group of fruits which help in recovering from certain disease, instead of introducing so many kinds of fruits simultaneously which may confuse learners.

Generally speaking, in any language teaching vocabulary could be subjected to some principles by which these lexis can be organized and grouped to facilitate their teaching as well as learning. Some of these principles are sense relation, collection, idioms, and others.

aSense relation

Nearly most words in almost all languages are related to each other's in some ways. Such relation makes understanding them easier for learners and also for teaching them. They might be connected in terms of synonymy, antonym, hyponymy, polysemy, and some other relations. The first three will be indicated here.

Synonymy

All words, which have different forms of spelling, are synonymous words, but almost with the same meaning, and various use. For instance, boy& lad, girl& lass, fat &Overweight, etc.

Hyponymy

All words, which can be grouped under one super ordinate term, are words of hyponymy.For example: Johan, Mary, Ahmad, and Camel, dog, cow, etc. Every word from the two groups can go under a super ordinate term, like human being, or animal. For that reason, these words are related to each other's as being hyponyms.

Antonym

These are words and their opposites such as new& old, easy& difficult. This type can be found in various forms like converse old& young, complementary true& false, and gradable antonym as fat & thin, etc.

Collocations

Collocated words can be defined as those words which frequently tend to occur with each other as if there is some kind of "a marriage contract between them",(McCarthy M, Vocabulary, 1990). "The most common type of collocation are (a) subject noun +verb, (b) object noun,(c) adjective+ noun, and (d) adverb+ past participle",(Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986).

c. Idioms

"An idiom is a sequence of words which operates as a single semantic unit",(Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986).It seems to be difficult to understand the meaning of idioms, if not possible for L2 learners. Therefore, an idiom like kick a pocket, at the first time it is not easy to guess it means to die and the same thing can be applied on its alike. Thus, paying attention should be taken into consideration when dealing with such kinds of relation among words, and present them as a whole units with certain meaning. More than that, teachers of second languages can utilize from such types of relation in their presentation of new lexis because they can work as a helpful mean of understanding.

Part Three:
Methodology

Methodology is considered to be one of the most fundamental aspects in teaching any subject and that is because it is the way by which teachers convey information to be taught to their learners. Though, when teaching vocabulary text books, the methodology to be looked at, is whether such books aim to build up the learners' knowledge with useful items which can be used productively. That

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is "these language items which the learner can use appropriately in speech and writing".(Cairns, R. & Redman, S, 1986) And another important thing is that, such books should contain various activities for practicing vocabulary as well as being facilitate comprehend them for learners. Furthermore is to provide effective visual aids in each lesson to illustrate the meaning.

Teaching Procedures

Teaching vocabulary does not stop with learning the meaning of a word. It continues until students learn how to use the word correctly in appropriate communicative acts or situations. There are some procedures the teacher should take into consideration when presenting the new lexical items. Here are some of the principles that are to be borne in mind:

a) The teacher must identify the amount of vocabulary -active or passive- the students can learn. This is important because many new words might confuse students. However, the quantity of vocabulary or its type is usually decided for the teacher by the textbook he is using,

b) Words should be presented in such a way that they make an impression on the students' minds. That is, presentation should be vivid and motivating so as to make students feel that they need the new words.

c) New vocabulary should be presented in appropriate situations or with the words they normally collocate with as well as with structural environmental signals, i.e. noun and verb signals or with associated prepositions or markers.

d) Students should have a specific understanding of what the new word refers to. That is, its denotation and connotation meanings have to be clear.

e) There must be enough practice in the receptive use of the target words for the students to learn them. Repetition is also an effective technique especially for young learners. The teacher should check whether the pupils can recognize the new forms and identify their meanings.

f) The teacher should encourage students to record new vocabulary items in their note-books for future use. The teacher may provide the class with the equivalent meaning in the mother tongue for each foreign word.

In addition, there are several ways to introduce new vocabulary items. The following are the most appropriate techniques applicable to any vocabulary in a reading lesson;

Recognition Stage

At this stage the teacher presents the phonic form, the graphic form, the lexical meaning and the grammatical position of each new word. He also demonstrates how to associate each new item with certain other words, ideas, functions and subject areas. In these situations the teacher;
First pronounces the word two or three times with the students listening. They may repeat the word after him if the need arises. A difficult word, however, should constantly be repeated.
Creates   a situation, or uses an appropriate context or communicative language function to show how the new word is normally used. He may also ask questions related to the function of the target word or simply make a statement including the item under study.

Clarifies the meaning of the unknown item through definition, demonstration, visual aids, synonyms and antonyms, or even translation, or dictionary work shows the visual form of the new word and its collocation. This can be done on the chalkboard or on flash cards so that students can recognize its spelling and visual configuration. If there is any spelling problem related to the target

word, the teacher will draw the pupils' attention to it. The pupils may then write it down in their vocabulary books.

Receptive Stage

During this stage, the teacher provides the learners with exercises that stress reception rather than production which may further illustrate the meaning. Furthermore, he presents language functions or exercises of different kinds of contexts in which the new item can be used so as to show the class its connotative meanings. Students should be aware of other meanings of the word they are trying to master, especially if it is an active vocabulary item. At this stage, it is also necessary to check their understanding of the meaning. To do this the teacher may ask the students questions and their answers will determine whether or not they have understood the meaning of the relevant word.

Productive Stage

At this stage, the teacher will concentrate on how to use the newly learned word productively. For this purpose he has to provide the class with exercises that help students develop the ability to use the target word correctly in sentences. Students are requested to use it in situations or contexts. As an alternative technique the teacher may ask them questions, the answers to which require the use of the target word. If inexperienced teachers have some difficulty in dealing with such exercises, they should consult the Teacher's Book for the course they are using or else a general guide to teaching techniques. In teaching new vocabulary the teacher needs to create interest so that the pupils can follow the presentation attentively and enthusiastically. External motivation is very important. Here are some suggestions for making the teaching interesting.

Difficulties in Learning Vocabulary

The teaching of English vocabulary to monolingual Arab learners presents additional difficulty to the teacher because Arabic and English are not cognate languages. Both have different syntactic systems and word formations; so the teacher will not have the advantage of cognates which might facilitate his task of teaching new lexical items. He/she has to pay special attention to the form and sound of new items which may be different from those of Arabic language.

To overcome the problems associated with teaching English vocabulary to Arab pupils, a teacher's book is often published to provide detailed guidelines of how to teach individual words. This book includes all the new items and structures.

There are, however, two major issues that influence the effectiveness of teaching English vocabulary to Arab pupils. One relates to the competence of the English language teacher, while he is associated with the communication-oriented approach which is commonly used in Arab countries.

The teacher is confronted with the problem of catering for the number of vocabulary items included in the English syllabus; competent teacher can provide a useful explanation followed by adequate practice. Unfortunately, this is not the case with many teachers. Empirical evidence indicates that teachers encounter difficulty in using the new vocabulary in appropriate contexts. This often happens when the teacher is new, inexperienced, inadequately trained or lacks fluency in spoken English. Apart from incorrect rhythm and intonation, mistakes can be observed with teachers using weak forms, idioms and structures. Pupils will not be able to communicate in English satisfactorily unless efforts are made to overcome these problems.

Communication-oriented teaching has also added a further load to the teacher's task. Thus, he is required to give his pupils, along with the language functions and notions, adequate English vocabulary to enable them to communicate effectively in the language. In addition, the teacher is required to contextualize all teaching points through the use of audio-visual aids, stories, etc.

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