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Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

I.S.P. Nation, Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand)

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

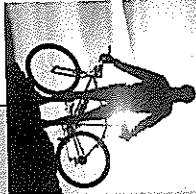
Goals

- ✓ **provide** your own definition of the term vocabulary.
- ✓ **distinguish** the different types of vocabulary (high frequency, academic, technical, low frequency) and describe how a teacher should deal with them.
- ✓ **describe** the strands of a well-balanced course and the conditions they require to be effective for vocabulary learning.
- ✓ **help** learners apply a range of effective vocabulary learning techniques and strategies across the four learning strands in a language course (meaning-focused input, deliberate learning, meaning-focused output, and fluency development).

1. What is vocabulary?

Before we do anything else, we need to decide what should be considered as vocabulary in a language course.

Reflection



If you were counting words that your learners needed to learn, what would you consider?

- **What are words?**
Do you consider the names of people—Elizabeth, Philip, Charles, Anne—to be vocabulary? What do learners need to learn about them?
Should the names of products like Pepsi, Vim, Big Mac, and Toyota be counted as part of a learner's vocabulary?
- **Are the words in italics the same words or different words?**
Should *neutral* as in *neutral gear* be counted as the same word as *neutral* as in a *neutral country*?
- **Should *government* be counted as the same word as *govern*?**
Should *hard work* be counted as a part of *hard* or *work* or as a separate piece of vocabulary?

Multivord units

Words are clearly vocabulary, but what about groups of words like *absolutely fantastic*, *at once*, *in a minute*, *portable TV*, *the United States of America*? If learners want to use language fluently and want to sound like native-speakers, they need to be able to put words together quickly in typical combinations (Pawley and Syder, 1983). Research on very large collections of language use like the British National Corpus show that although there are many possible ways of putting words together, language users have preferred ways of doing this (Kennedy, 1992). That is, we typically say *There's no answer* rather than *There isn't an answer*, *heavy rain* rather than *storer rain*, and *take medicine* rather than *have medicine* or *drink medicine*.

There are many ways of learning these typical combinations including deliberately learning them as units, deliberately searching for them in texts, learning the patterns they are based on, and picking them up incidentally through large quantities of language input. For people beginning to learn a language, Palmer (1925) noted that "the most fundamental guiding principle [for] those who are anxious to be proficient in foreign conversation ... is this: *Memorize perfectly the largest number of common and useful word-groups!*"

As a way of quickly developing **fluency** and of picking up native-like expressions, groups of words should be learned as units. This learning is made easier in most cases if the meanings of the single words that make up the multivord units are also understood. It is thus useful to see vocabulary as also including multivord units. A useful starting point for learning such units is Crabbe and Nation's survival vocabulary (Crabbe and Nation, 1991).

Word families

Do we count different forms of the same word as different words? Researchers need to count words to answer questions like: How many words do you need to know in order to read this book? How long is this book? How fast do people speak? How many words does a five-year-old native speaker know? How many words can you learn in week? What is a suitable vocabulary learning goal for a first-year English course?

One way of counting words is to count running words or tokens. That is, each word is counted one after the other and even if the same word form occurs again it is counted again. So the previous sentence to this one contains 23 tokens and several of these tokens are the same words — *is*, *the*, *counted*, *word*, *again* — occurring more than once.

Another way to count words is to count different forms or types. So a page of tokens will consist of a smaller number of types. But this means that words like *goal* and *goals* will be counted as different types. When learners know some of the basic word building patterns of English, particularly plural, past tense, present tense, stem+ing, stem+ed, possessive, it is more realistic to count *walk*, *walks*, *walked*, *walking* as one **word family**. There are occasional exceptions to this, like *being* and *beings*, *hard* and *hardly* where the meanings differ more than that involved in the affixes, but usually counting the word family better represents the receptive learning burden of the words.

Example

Word families from the first 1000 most frequently used words of English

Agent	Agree	
agencies	agreed	disagree
agency	agrees	disagreeable
agents	agreeing	disagree
	agreement	disagreeing
Ago	agreements	disagreement
	disagreements	disagrees

Core meanings

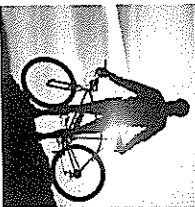
So far we have looked at multiword units and word families. The last issue we will consider in deciding what is counted as vocabulary is meaning. If we look at an entry for a word in a dictionary, we will find several different senses of the word listed. For example, the entry for *neutral* in the COBUILD dictionary lists the following senses:

Example

Neutral

1. a country that does not officially support either side in a war
2. a position not supporting either side in an argument
3. not showing emotions or preference
4. a neutral voice does not show emotions
5. not causing change because is equal on both sides
6. a position between the gears of a car
7. neutral wire—not earth or positive
8. neutral color
9. neutral atomic particles neither positive nor negative
10. neither acid nor alkali

Reflection



What is similar in the ten senses of *neutral* outlined above? Do you consider them to be different words or just different, closely related uses of the same word?

If we look closely at these senses we can see that they all share a common **core meaning**—something like “not taking a particular side or position.” When teaching and learning vocabulary, it is important to draw attention to this core meaning because this reduces the number of items the learner has to cope with, provides access to a wide range of uses, and often contrasts with the first language of the learners. This contrast can be seen as one of the educational values of foreign language learning in that it shows learners that different languages organize the world in different ways.

When we look at the important vocabulary teaching principles, these ideas of multiword units, word families and core meanings will be touched on again. We have seen that there are arguments for teaching related uses, related forms, and multiword units made from known items as part of a larger

word family. This is particularly useful for **receptive** learning. For **productive** use, distinctions may need to be made.

2. Background to the teaching of vocabulary

Vocabulary teaching and learning must fit into the broader framework of a language course. One way to make sure that there is a balanced range of learning opportunities is to see a language course as consisting of four strands. They are as follows:

1. learning from meaning-focused **input**—learning through listening and reading
2. deliberate language-focused learning—learning from being taught sounds, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse
3. learning from meaning-focused output—learning by having to produce language in speaking and writing
4. developing **fluency**—becoming quick and confident at listening, speaking, reading and writing

Distinguishing the strands means that there is a balance of deliberate learning and incidental learning, of learning from input and output, of learning through oral and written skills, and of learning and fluency development.

These four strands apply for all aspects of a language course, and possibly most kinds of learning, but here we will only look at vocabulary.

Learning from meaning-focused input

The “learning from meaning-focused input” strand involves learning from listening and reading. For vocabulary learning to occur in this strand, learners need to know 98 percent of the running words already. That means that, at most, there should be only one unknown word in every fifty running words (Hu and Nation, 2000). This one unknown word in fifty is something that can be learned through guessing from context and which does not stop comprehension of the text.

The learning from input strand needs to be present even in the early stages of language learning, and so it is essential that learners have access to simple written and spoken texts. Graded readers are the most important source of these.

Deliberate learning

The deliberate learning strand is sometimes called form-focused instruction, language-focused learning, or language study. It involves paying deliberate attention to language features such as sounds, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, or discourse that are presented out of context. The most obvious deliberate learning technique is learning new vocabulary by memorizing their first language translations.

Like the other strands, no more than 25 percent of the course time should be given to this particular strand. It is an essential strand of a course but it should not overwhelm the other strands.

Learning from meaning-focused output

The “learning from meaning-focused output” strand involves learning through speaking and writing where the learners’ main attention is on communicating messages. It may seem a little strange to see the **productive** skills as sources of vocabulary learning, but using vocabulary productively can strengthen learning and can push learners to focus on aspects of vocabulary knowledge that they did not need to attend to when listening and reading (Swain, 1985). For example, when having to say that someone took their medicine, the speaker has to choose the right verb—do people *eat*, *drink*, or *take medicine*? When listening and reading, no such decision has to be made.

Corson (1997) argues that **academic vocabulary** needs to be learned both receptively and productively because being able to produce it is one way of showing that you are part of a particular **discourse community**.

Fluency development

Vocabulary must not only be known, it must be readily available for use. The fluency development strand of a course aims at helping learners make the best use of what they already know. It is important to see fluency as being related to each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing with fluency needing to be developed independently in each of these skills. Fluency development activities should involve only known language items (there should be no unknown vocabulary or grammatical features), should be message-focused, should involve substantial quantities of input and output, and should involve some pressure to perform faster than usual.

Action

Classify these teaching techniques into the four learning strands in a language course given below. Add five more techniques from this chapter and from your experience.

Four learning strands

Meaning-focused input; Deliberate learning; Meaning-focused output; Fluency development

Teaching techniques

1. Intensive reading
2. Learning word parts
3. Speed reading
4. Listening to stories
5. Listening to morning talks
6. Reading easy graded readers
7. Extensive reading
8. Prepared writing
9. Strategy training
10. Communication activities with written input

3. Principles for teaching vocabulary

Learners see vocabulary as being a very important part of language learning and one of the difficulties in planning the vocabulary component of a course is making sure that it does not overwhelm other essential parts of the course. The best way to avoid this is for the teacher and course designer to have a set of guiding principles that can be applied in a variety of teaching and learning situations. These can then be applied in courses where there are parts of the course deliberately set aside for vocabulary development, or in courses where vocabulary is dealt with as it occurs in skill-focused or content-focused lessons.

1. Focus on the most useful vocabulary first.

Some words can be used in a wide variety of circumstances. Others have much more limited use. For example, the word *help* can be used to ask for help, to describe how people work with others, to describe how knowledge, tools, and materials can make people’s work easier and so on. The word *advertise* has much more limited usefulness. It is still a useful word to know, but there are many more useful words to learn before this one. Teaching useful vocabulary before less useful vocabulary gives learners the best return for their learning effort.

The most useful vocabulary that every English language learner needs whether they use the language for listening, speaking, reading, or writing, or whether they use the language in formal and informal situations, is the most

Action

How much vocabulary do you know?

The words at the beginning of the list below are high frequency and the words at the end of the list are very low frequency. Put a check next to each word for which you know the meaning. This short test will help you to get a feeling for how many words you know. Multiply the number of words you know in this list by 500 to find your vocabulary size.

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. bird | 18. monologue | 35. plainchant |
| 2. fell | 19. tamper | 36. astrochemisty |
| 3. improve | 20. acanthus | 37. nondurables |
| 4. barn | 21. blowout | 38. carboxyl |
| 5. fatigue | 22. crupper | 39. eyestalk |
| 6. kettle | 23. gloaming | 40. curragh |
| 7. combat | 24. minesinger | 41. gunlock |
| 8. resent | 25. perpetuity | 42. dipole |
| 9. redeem | 26. rifle | 43. rigorism |
| 10. hurrah | 27. behindhand | 44. localist |
| 11. conversion | 28. embolism | 45. benchmark |
| 12. fixture | 29. angst | 46. sitrabout |
| 13. accede | 30. blowhard | 47. hypothallus |
| 14. avocation | 31. devolute | 48. doombook |
| 15. calyx | 32. envoi | 49. paradiplomatic |
| 16. conclave | 33. golliwog | 50. poroplastic |
| 17. hierarchy | 34. neonate | |

It is estimated that the average native speaker with a university education knows at least 20,000 word families. To cope well in English, a second language learner would need around 5,000 words and preferably 10,000 words. It is most efficient to learn these words from the most useful to the least useful. In this way, at each stage of learning, learners get the best return for their learning effort.

frequent 1000 word families of English. This vocabulary is so useful that it covers around 75 percent of the running words in academic texts and newspapers, over 80 percent of the running words in novels, and about 85 percent of the running words in conversation. It contains most of the 176 function word families (words like *a, the, of, because, could*), and words like *keep, kind, know, lack, and land*. It is possible to say and write a lot using only the first 1000 words of English. The next most useful list is the second 1000 words of English. There are numerous lists of these words.

After this, the most useful vocabulary depends on the goals of the learners. If learners want to do academic study in senior high school or university, then the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000) is the most useful vocabulary to learn (<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/jals/div/l/awl/>). This is a list of 570 word families that occur frequently in a wide range of academic texts. Here is part of an academic text with the words from the Academic Word List marked in bold type. Note that there are about three Academic Word List words in almost every line.

Example

The second idea used to justify a rule based approach to policy, is the idea of **time consistency** which implies that **discretionary policy** has systematic inflation bias. I **attach less significance** to this second idea than many of my **colleagues** in the profession do. The reason is that in the time **consistency theories**, the **benefits of policy** rules largely arise from how they influence inflation expectations.

As well as Academic Word List words, each subject has its own special technical vocabulary, which needs to be learned while studying that subject. Beyond that, the rest of the vocabulary is **low frequency words**. At the most conservative estimate, English contains 120,000 low frequency words and this largely excludes proper nouns. Learners need to learn low frequency words but, except for special needs, they are best learned after the **high frequency words** are known. Native speakers of English do not know all of the words in the English language.

2. Focus on the vocabulary in the most appropriate way.

The first principle looked at what words to teach and learn. This principle looks at how they should be taught and learned. Here we will look at the four most important vocabulary learning strategies of using word parts, guessing from context, using word cards, and using dictionaries. We will see that teachers need to clearly distinguish the way they treat high frequency words from the way they treat low frequency words.

English is a language that has been strongly affected by other languages. The core of the English language is the Germanic words from Anglo-Saxon and Norse which make up most of the function words and well over half of the first 1000 words of English. These are words like *the, a, because, home, cat, instead, from*. Beyond the first 1000 words, most of the words, around 60 percent, came into English from French (through conquest), Latin (through religion) or Greek (through scholarship). These French, Latin and Greek words are typically made up of prefixes, stems and suffixes: *associaltion, definition, collaborate, contain, uninformative*. This means that using word part knowledge is a very useful way of learning low frequency words. The most common word parts (prefixes and suffixes) occur in a very large number of different words.

Because high frequency words cover a large proportion of the running words of a text, they provide a helpful context to allow learners to guess the meaning of the low frequency words. This means that if learners develop skill in reading and, along with that, skill in guessing from context, they will have an effective strategy for coping with the many low frequency words that they meet in their reading.

Using word parts to help remember words, and using guessing from context are two very important strategies for dealing with low frequency words. There are two more very important strategies—using word cards for deliberate learning, and looking up words in dictionaries.

Using word cards involves making small cards and writing the English word on one side and the first language translation on the other. These cards are kept in packs of about fifty and are looked at when the learner has a free moment, while travelling on the subway, waiting for a bus, or during TV commercials. It may seem surprising to recommend using first language translation and deliberate, decontextualized learning. The use of the first language helps because it provides the meaning in a simple, clear, and comprehensible way. Learning from word cards is a very unfashionable technique (among teachers wedded to a communicative approach) but research (Nation, 2001) has shown it to be very effective. In every vocabulary learning experiment where deliberate and incidental learning is compared, deliberate learning always achieves faster and stronger vocabulary learning results. This should not be interpreted as saying that deliberate learning should replace incidental learning, but it does show that deliberate learning should be part of a well-balanced course. Deliberate learning and meaning-focused learning complement each other.

Action

Write thirty words in another language on word cards. Study them. Work to learn them all.

1. Keep a record of how much time and how many repetitions were needed to learn the words. How many repetitions were needed to learn half of the words, three-quarters, all of them?
2. What words were difficult to remember? Why?
3. Describe a trick you used to help remember a particular word. Was it effective?
4. Briefly list three research questions that would be worth exploring with this type of technique.

Learning how to use a dictionary well is another important strategy in which many learners require training and practice.

So far we have looked at ways of helping learners with low frequency words. High frequency words are so important that anything the reader can do to help in learning them is a well-justified use of classroom time. This includes

- directly teaching high frequency words
- getting learners to read and listen to graded readers containing these words
- getting learners to study the words and do exercises based on them
- getting learners to speak and write using the words

From the teacher's point of view, the low frequency words do not deserve teaching time in the same way. In class, time can be spent working on the strategies that help learners deal with low frequency words, but teaching time should not be spent on the words themselves. Low frequency words do not deserve classroom time because of their low frequency. This means that when learners ask about particular low frequency words, the teacher should either deal with the word very quickly or use the opportunity to focus on a strategy.

3. Give attention to the high frequency words across the four strands of a course.

High frequency vocabulary needs to occur in all four strands of a course. It should get deliberate attention through teaching and study and should be met and used in communicating messages in listening, speaking, reading and writing. High frequency vocabulary should also be fluently accessible for receptive and productive use.

4. Encourage learners to reflect on and take responsibility for learning.

So far we have looked at principles that relate to choosing what vocabulary to teach and the conditions needed for learning it. There is an important principle that lies behind choosing and learning and that is that learners need to realize that they must be responsible for their own learning. Taking this responsibility requires (1) knowledge of what to learn and the range of options for learning vocabulary, (2) skill in choosing the best options, and (3) the ability to monitor and evaluate progress with those options.

Learners often find it difficult to take on this responsibility, partly because of the way they have learned in the past. The following quotations are from interviews with language learners about their vocabulary learning while they followed an English proficiency course.

"I think course is 85 percent learning by myself. Teacher not always teach about English in here. This is different from Hong Kong. I suggest teacher can use three hours concentrated teach vocabulary—just use simple English to explain some word meanings."

A factor affecting what vocabulary learners study is the assessment that is used in a course.

"I think it is not good way. We are studying for test. Before the test we study hard, very hard. After the test we forget everything."

In order to take responsibility for their own vocabulary learning, learners need to choose words that will be useful for them. Here, an effective language learner describes what words he chooses to study.

"Mostly I just choose the words that I already know but I have to improve them or make them clear to me. Or I choose the one that are difficult to—me—about how to use them in different situations."

"I learn words from talking to people, from TV and from radio. If that word is interesting I write on a small book. I always have a pen and notebook. Later I can put them in this list (vocabulary notebook)."

Contrast this with learners who are not taking control of their own learning. "I don't have no time to finding the words. Just I open my book and then I just pick up the words."

"I choose very big academic word, but academic word is not useful. Of course I should know that word, but I think I don't use after this course."

(Moir and Nation, 2002)

Unless learners take control, the course will not be as effective for them. Teachers can help them do this in the following ways:

1. Inform the learners of the different types of vocabulary.
2. Train the learners in the various ways of learning so that they are very familiar with the range of learning options available for them.
3. Provide genuine opportunities for choosing what to learn and how to learn.
4. Provide encouragement and opportunity for learners to reflect on their learning and to evaluate it.

These ways include a mixture of informing, training, and encouraging reflection; or in other words, knowledge, skill, and awareness.

Vocabulary learning is a large and continuing task. Although teachers can provide useful input and support to help learners deal with this, it is ultimately the learners who have to learn and carry on learning.

The four principles we have looked at in this chapter can be applied in a variety of ways and in a variety of types of courses. What is most important is that a principled approach is taken to vocabulary development so that learners get the best return for their learning effort.

4. Classroom techniques and tasks

The techniques in this section are grouped under the four strands described in the background section of this chapter.

Meaning-focused input activities These involve the learners focusing on understanding messages where there is a low density of new vocabulary.

- Teachers can read to learners from graded readers, briefly noting difficult words on the board and giving quick translations or definitions. The reading can be done as a serial with the story unfolding week by week.

1. Choose an interesting story for an ESL/EFL class you are familiar with. You might choose a story from a simplified reader.
2. Prepare to read this story aloud to the class. For the first one or two paragraphs, lightly mark in pencil in each sentence where you will pause and repeat.
3. For the first page, circle the words that students might not understand.



- Doing regular silent extensive reading of graded readers is a vital means of vocabulary development, as well as providing numerous other benefits.
- Learning through meaning-focused input can come from presenting talks to each other, from reading other learners' writing, and from interacting with the teacher. Vocabulary learning through input is increased if a little bit of deliberate attention is given to the vocabulary by noting unfamiliar words, by reflecting on the new vocabulary, by the teacher quickly explaining new words while the learners listen to the story, and by learners quickly previewing a reading to choose a few words to focus on when reading.

Deliberate learning activities These involve direct study or direct teaching.

- Having the meanings of words explained and examples of use provided
- Learning prefixes and suffixes, and cutting up words to see their parts
- Studying vocabulary on bilingual word cards
- Learning and using mnemonic techniques like the **keyword technique** to help remember vocabulary
- Practicing spelling rules
- Doing **cloze** exercises where the missing words in a text are recently met items
- Building word families by adding prefixes and suffixes to a stem
- Learning to use the vocabulary learning strategies of word cards, guessing from context, using word parts, and dictionary use. (For some learners these strategies require deliberate attention to bring them into use.)

Meaning-focused output activities These involve producing spoken or written messages.

An effective way of turning input into output is to base speaking and writing activities on written input. If this input contains a few words that are outside the learners' knowledge, but which are relevant to the topic, then there is a high probability that these words could be used and negotiated in spoken interaction, or picked up for use in the written output of the task. Combining written input with speaking and then writing increases such vocabulary learning opportunities. Although there are several important studies focusing on vocabulary learning from output, more research needs to be done to see how the written input is best designed and how different kinds of tasks affect use and learning.

The following activity focuses on the word *registration*, which occurred in a reading text about a nurse (see Nation and Hamilton-Jenkins, 2000). The learners read the text and then do productive work on some of the vocabulary by doing such tasks.

Example

Group these jobs into those that you think require registration (like nursing) and those that do not.

teacher	doctor	shop assistant
lawyer	plumber	bus driver
cleaner	engineer	computer programmer

Fluency activities These involve receiving or producing easy messages with pressure to go faster.

- A very basic listening fluency activity involves the learners pointing to or writing numbers as the teacher quickly says them in an unpredictable order.
- At a slightly more advanced level learners can listen to stories from graded readers which are well within their vocabulary knowledge. That is, where they have 100 percent coverage of the running words.
- Speaking fluency activities involve speaking on very familiar topics with some pressure to speak faster as in a 4/3/2 activity where the learners speak to one listener for four minutes on a topic, then give exactly the same talk to a different listener but in three minutes, and then to a different listener in two minutes.

Reflection



- Analyse the 4/3/2 technique mentioned above to show which of the following fluency conditions it puts into practice. Part of it (*in italics*) has been done for you.
1. Easy language (*The learners choose what to talk about and what to say.*)
 2. Message-focused communication
 3. Pressure to perform quickly
 4. Large quantity of language use

- Very elementary reading fluency activities can involve learners responding orally to flashcards of words and phrases.
- Once learners have a vocabulary of around seven or eight hundred words, they can do speed reading training using very easy graded readers or a speed reading course with a controlled vocabulary.
- Speed writing involves writing under time pressure about topics that are very familiar or that have just been read and talked about.
- Reading lots of very easy graded readers for pleasure can develop reading fluency.

5. Vocabulary in the classroom

The purpose of this section is to show you some of the ways the principles and techniques are used in the classroom. It is organized using the principles described in this chapter.

Focus on the most useful vocabulary first For elementary and intermediate learners, teachers should use material that is at a suitable level.

Before using a text with learners, it is useful to see how much of the vocabulary in the text is likely to be new for them. One way of doing this is to see the frequency level of the vocabulary in the text—how much is in the first 1000, the second 1000, the Academic Word List, and how many are not in those lists. This can be done by checking the words in the text against frequency lists. There are computer programs that can do this for you.

Go to one of these addresses on the Internet and type in a word or paste in a short text to see the different kinds of words in your text.

Frequency Level Checkers

<http://language.tlu.ac.jp/fl/c/>

http://www.er.udgam.ca/nobel/121270/texttools/web_vp.html

Focus on the vocabulary in the most appropriate way Teachers should give attention to high frequency words and should focus on the strategies for dealing with low frequency words. Notice how the teacher in Extract 1 deals with useful and not so useful vocabulary in the following examples.

Action

Extract 1

A low frequency word

S: What does *regurgitate* mean?

T: It means "repeat ideas from the book."

A high frequency word

S: What does *punish* mean?

T: That's a useful word, although I hope it is not needed in this class. See if you can guess its meaning from these sentences.

He was punished for eating in class.

She was punished for coming home late.

What is the punishment that you hate the most?
Tell me some things that you get punished for.

In the first example, the word is dealt with quickly and the lesson moves on. The teacher could have added, "The *re-* at the beginning means *again* so that is where the *repeat* part of the meaning comes from." By doing this the teacher directs attention to the widely used prefix rather than the much less useful word. In the second example, the teacher spends time on the word and gets the learners to think about it. The teacher will also come back to it again in later lessons.

In Extract 2, the same word is being taught in two different ways. Once again, the principle of treating high frequency and low frequency words differently lies behind the teaching. The word *composition* has been met in this context—*It involves using parts of a musical composition in a new work.*

Extract 2

S: Sir, what does *composition* mean?

T1: A piece of music, like a song.

(The explanation given by Teacher 1 suits the meaning of the word in its context. Teacher 2 gives more helpful explanation using word parts.)

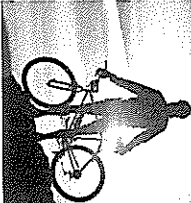
S: Sir, what does *composition* mean?

T2: Well, what does *com-* mean? With, together. So, a *composition* is something that is put together in a planned way. For example, a piece of writing, a picture, a piece of music, a committee, or a chemical mixture.

Teacher 2 connects the meaning of the parts to the meaning of the whole word. It also goes for the **core meaning** of the word. It works well if the learners have already learned the thirty or so most useful prefixes:

non-, un-, anti-, ante-, arch-, bi-, circum-, counter-, en-, ex-, fore-, hyper-, inter-, mid-, mis-, neo-, post-, pro-, semi-, sub-, ab-, ad-, com-, de-, dis-, ex- ("out"), in- ("in"), ob-, per-, pro- ("in front of"), trans-

Reflection



Open a dictionary and look at some of the words beginning with *com-* (and its variants *co-, col-, con-, cor-*). How much does the meaning of the prefix help with understanding the meaning of the words that contain them?

In the following extract with a low frequency word, notice how the teacher switches the learners' attention from the word to the guessing strategy. Here is the piece of text containing the unknown word.

At age 15 he entered the University of Leipzig as a law student and by the age of 20 received a doctorate from the University of Altdorf. Subsequently, Leibniz followed a career in law and international politics.

Extract 3

- S: What does subsequently mean?
- T: What part of speech do you think it is?
- S: Adverb?
- T: Why?
- S: It's got -ly on the end.
- T: Good. If we took away subsequently, what other word could we put there to join the two sentences?
- S: Then? Next?
- T: Great. That's the meaning of subsequently. The sequ part means "to follow."

Balance attention across the four strands

Learning from input Graded readers may be the major means of learning from input. Graded readers are books written within a controlled vocabulary. Some graded readers are considerably reduced simplifications of well-known texts like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Lord Jim*, *Free Willy*, *The Secret Garden*, and *The Boys from Brazil*. Others are original stories written especially

for language learners within a controlled vocabulary. There are hundreds of such books available in numerous series such as Oxford Bookworms, Cambridge English Readers, Penguin Readers, Heinemann Guided Readers, and Longman Classics. These are an extremely valuable resource for teaching and learning English, and teachers should be very familiar with them.

Here is part of a graded reader. Notice how it contains mainly high frequency words and yet it still is an interesting story.

Example

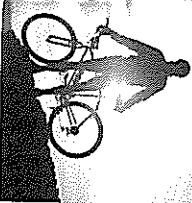
Soon we were on our way to Castle Dracula. The mountains were all around us and the moon was behind black clouds. I could see nothing, but I could still hear the wolves. The horses went faster and faster, and the driver laughed wildly. Suddenly the carriage stopped. I opened the door and got out. At once the carriage drove away and I was alone in front of the dark, silent castle. I stood there, looking up at it, and slowly, the big wooden door opened. A tall man stood in front of me. His hair was white and he was dressed in black from head to foot.

"Come in, Mr Harker," he said. "I am Count Dracula." He held out his hand and I took it. It was as cold as ice!

I went into the castle and the Count carefully locked the door behind me. (Dracula from the Oxford Bookworms Series of Graded Readers Level 2)

The few low frequency words like *castle*, *wolves*, and *carriage*, which are needed for the story, are repeated many times in the story.

Reflection



- Here are criticisms which are made of graded readers. For each criticism think of a possible argument against that criticism. The first one has been done for you.
1. Simplified texts have difficult grammar: "Only poorly simplified texts have easy words and difficult grammar."
 2. Simplified texts are not like the original.
 3. Simplified texts take away the richness of the language.
 4. Simplified texts deny learners access to vocabulary.
 5. Simplified texts do not give learners the chance to develop guessing and dictionary use skills.

maybe it is only bus driver license ... maybe registration is just like a list where you can find some name like doctor.

Fluency development Here is part of the four-minute delivery of a 4/3/2 activity and the corresponding part from the two-minute talk. Notice the changes that accompany the increase in fluency. You should notice less hesitations and repetitions, and more complex and accurate language use.

Extract 4

Four-minute delivery

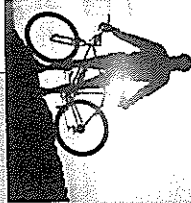
S: Today I will tell you about my experience with er Burmese ethnic group in Thailand. I work in the village as a school teacher for four years. It is very interesting. They have their own leader. They have their own language. They have their own law, erm So it's like a independent state in Thailand which is illegal. I teach in ah in that school before it become the normal school like this, it's a patrol police school before and we have about three hundred students in that school. It is primary school. When the children first come to school, they cannot speak Thai at all. They speak their own language and the student in form one the teacher has to speak Mon.

Two-minute delivery

S: Today I will tell you about my experience in Thailand. You know I teach um Burmese ethnic group on the western part of Thailand before I came here. In the village where I teach there are about six thousand people. They have their own leader. They have their own law. They have their own language like an independent state. um Their occupation they they plant ah corn, cotton and sugar cane. I have about three hundred students in the school and the children when they come to school they don't speak Thai. They speak their own language. So every teacher ha has to know the Mon language, especially the teacher who teach in grade one.

Because meaning-focused activities do not give special overt attention to vocabulary, the teacher needs to observe them carefully from a vocabulary perspective. In this way, vocabulary can get attention across all four strands of a course.

The thoughtful application of principles in the classroom will ensure that learners can gain the most from the vocabulary component of the language course.



Reflection

Learning from output Speaking activities with a vocabulary focus need to be monitored carefully to make sure the target vocabulary is getting attention. Often, only small changes to the design of the activity are needed to keep the focus on vocabulary.

The following discussion occurred when learners were doing the task in the example given on page 143. In the text, *registration* as a nurse was described. The learners performed a speaking task which got them to consider what kinds of jobs would require someone to be officially registered. Find two examples from the discussion below which shows how the discussion contributes to the learning of the word.

S12: Bus driver? I don't think so

S10: Bus driver because it is ...

S9: If you don't have a license how can you drive a bus, the police will catch me.

(The others agree)

S11: I see, so we need registration.

S12: ... so bus driver also need reg ... registration because of competence so at first I think teacher, doctor, and lawyer is a very specific occupation so um it um at first they have to go to the university and po/vreach so they need require registration so ah in my opinion er/ bus driver ... if we want to be bus driver only we have ah license and then we can ah get as a driver so I don't forget registration so I'mistaked ah Japanese guess.

S10: Maybe it is not registration, maybe it is not registration, I think

(Continued on page 149)

6. Conclusion

The teacher's role is to focus on the most useful vocabulary, to provide strategy training for the low frequency vocabulary, to ensure that vocabulary learning has a chance to occur in all parts of a course, and to help learners take control of their own vocabulary learning.

It is necessary to have a broad view of what can be considered vocabulary so that multword units are included. It is also necessary to see that there are shared meanings underlying the range of senses of a word as well as its various family members.

Vocabulary learning cannot be left to itself. It needs to be strengthened by careful planning and well-directed teaching.

Further readings



Nation, I. S. P. 1990. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

This is an easily read, practical text.

Nation, I. S. P. 2001. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book is a current comprehensive survey of research, theory, and practice in the teaching and learning of vocabulary.

Schmitt, N. 2000. *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Very readable, this book is an up-to-date review of vocabulary teaching.

Schmitt, N. and M. McCarthy (eds.) 1997. *Vocabulary: Description, acquisition and pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An excellent collection of review articles, this book covers a wide range of aspects of vocabulary.

Helpful Web sites



Learning Vocabulary in Another Language
(<http://ulk.cambridge.org/elt/nation>)

This Web site contains a range of supplementary material for the book including a very large classified list of references about vocabulary.

The Academic Word List (<http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/div1/awl>)

Kyoto Sangyo University Extensive Reading
(<http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/er>)

Second Language Vocabulary Resources
(<http://www1.harenet.ne.jp/%7Ewaring/vocab/index.html>)

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- Swain, M.** 1985. Communicative Competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S.M. Gass and C.G. Madden (eds.) *Input in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.