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## HOW TO TEACH VOCABULARY EFFECTIVELY

*The present paper discusses some methods of teaching vocabulary. Vocabulary is an indispensable part of any language. It serves as a means of conveying information when communicating. Wrong use of the vocabulary may result in misunderstanding. The use of contemporary methods alongside with the traditional ones can create a student-oriented classroom. Good knowledge of vocabulary plays a great role in developing professional skills and motivates students to participate in classroom discussions. The teacher manages to organize an effective classroom, when he or she considers the individual needs of students in a given group.*

**Key words:** *vocabulary instruction, test on vocabulary, dictionary definitions, teamwork, newly acquired vocabulary, complete description of words, analytical ability, language proficiency*

Along with constant changes taking place in our world, there has been a change in teaching methods and techniques in every subject. Effective vocabulary instruction is an important challenge for many teachers of English. The need for teaching English effectively is an incentive for teachers to rethink and develop new teaching methods. Teachers nowadays have to apply different strategies and new approaches to meet students' needs and to organize effective classroom. It should be noted, that these new strategies and approaches are sometimes coupled with old methods to reach the desired effect. Considering new approaches teachers also need to preserve old methods, by applying them differently, in a new light.

Vocabulary is an indispensable part of language through which we convey our thoughts, ideas, feelings, experiences: it serves as a means of conveying information. An individual's vocabulary is the word stock belonging to that particular person, showing his or her knowledge, literacy, etc. One accumulates vocabulary not only through learning definitions or studying in class but also through reading, songs, communicating, etc. Mastering the bulk of the vocabulary, one's speech becomes correct and fluent. Moreover, good knowledge of vocabulary (here go synonyms, antonyms, high-flown words, idioms, expressions) helps to construct good narratives.

For mastering the language one needs to have good stock of vocabulary. When learning English, students always need to learn vocabulary in a systematic way. According to Carter, books devoted to practical approaches to vocabulary teaching do not duly recognize the issues in vocabulary learning and are based on untested assumptions /Carter, 1998: 98/. It can be inferred that the vocabulary learning process or the teaching process of vocabulary should be organized according to practical rather than theoretical considerations.

While emphasizing the importance of vocabulary instruction and evaluating the newest methods and changes in this sphere, it should also be noted, that for some period, there has been certain neglect for the importance of teaching vocabulary: more attention was paid to grammar. However, this tendency has met much criticism /Meara, 1980; 1984; Wilkins, 1972; 1974, Lewis, 2000 and others/. According to some researchers teaching vocabulary is more important than teaching grammar. As Lewis mentions, “when there is no grammar very little can be conveyed, but when there is no vocabulary nothing is conveyed” /Lewis, 2000: 111/. At the same time other researches have been trying to emphasize that learning vocabulary is as important as learning grammar /Wilkins, 1972; 1974; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Nunan, 1998/. We also agree with this statement, considering that though good knowledge of grammar is important, lack of lexical knowledge can hinder communication, because “communication breaks down when people do not use the right words” /Allen, 1983: 5/. Without vocabulary it is difficult to communicate, wrong use of vocabulary may bring to misunderstanding and failure in communication. On the contrary, one single word is often capable of expressing complete thoughts or meaningful ideas. It is, thus, important to enrich the vocabulary and make its level as advanced as possible.

As was mentioned above, teaching English entails teaching vocabulary. Alongside with different strategies, the most traditional and effective method of teaching vocabulary remains the method of dictionary definitions. This method suggests that either the teacher gives the students the definitions or the students themselves have to look the new words up in a dictionary. Although this method is sometimes considered to be tiresome and time-taking and many new trends try to minimize its efficiency stating that it is not actual any longer, it should be noted, that this method is persistently serving as an efficient means in several aspects. Firstly, dictionary definitions (either given by the teacher or looked up by the learner) give the student a clear understanding of not only the concept that the given word denotes, but also a complete description of that word. Such descriptions may usually include pronunciation, part of speech, word combinations composed of that word, examples, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, expressions, derivatives, sometimes the origin of the word, etc. These factors give us enough ground to believe that the efficacy of this traditional method is more than invaluable. Even considering the fact that students may forget these words, we should bear in mind that the general description is usually saved in the memory. Secondly, as our teaching practice shows, the seemingly boring detailed descriptions/definitions of words in dictionaries usually endow students with analytical ability, which is so important in comprehending and translating unknown texts. Due to this analytical ability, students often “guess” the meanings of new words in context without having a dictionary at hand. And finally, learners, who have been writing definitions, as well as synonyms, antonyms, derivatives, word combinations, examples, idioms in their vocabularies

(copybooks) during their early studies, develop language proficiency and acquire skills for the correct use of dictionaries. From this perspective, teachers have an important task to fulfill: to make students get used to working with vocabularies and dictionaries.

It should be noted, that nowadays many students classically have difficulty in looking up new words in dictionaries, especially when one word has a number of definitions, each having different, sometimes antonymous meanings. This difficulty often results in misunderstanding, causing errors in translation. For example, students frequently look up words in a dictionary, without taking into consideration the given context they are going to translate. A more global problem is when the context is considered, however, the equivalent is not chosen correctly in translation by the student. This is due to poor knowledge of grammar: when the student is unable to differentiate which part of speech the word to be looked up in the dictionary belongs to. When the target word in the given sentence appears as a verb but the student chooses the adjectival or noun meaning in translation. Hence, we should emphasize the importance of having good knowledge of grammar (that very often help those who do not look up a word in the dictionary). In order to avoid such inappropriate situations, teachers should try to facilitate the vocabulary learning process by selecting words arising out of the specific needs of the given group of students. For example, teachers can choose a specific word-stock for each lesson and for each unit/theme and give to their students enlisted in a paper (in a handout) or by writing them on the blackboard, with a simultaneous discussion of each word. The discussion may be accompanied by certain activities: the teacher asks the students to fulfil the following tasks:

- make combinations with the given word,
- give the derivative,
- use in sentences of your own,
- give synonyms/antonyms,
- give a definition, etc.

The abovementioned tasks are effective, as they help students to study new words from different aspects and to fix them in their memories. Besides, with the help of these assignments the teacher motivates all the students in the group to get involved in the learning process.

To fix the vocabulary in the student's mind the teacher chooses a special group of words and asks the students to compose a small text. This is an effective method for revising the active vocabulary. This task can be assigned either to the whole group to be done individually by each student or a teamwork can be organized (by dividing students into groups and asking them to compose texts within their team). For example, students of the Department of Diplomacy (International Relations) can be given the following group of words (or word combinations) to compose a news report: *escalation of the conflict, puppet*

*government, to make concessions, shuttle diplomacy, to restart talks, to head a delegation, high-level talks, to break a deadlock, truce, a four-day visit, a thaw in relations, withdrawal of troops, international affairs, etc.*

Our practice shows, that fulfilling this kind of task students have an opportunity to revise the vocabulary and, at the same time, to improve their professional knowledge. Being given such a set of words, students subconsciously recall either historical events or events from the current international situation and compose texts of similar content. Moreover, the frequency of such assignments motivates students to be informed from the news media, television, radio and the internet, in order to be able to keep pace with other students in the group and to participate in debates regularly held by the teacher.

Another effective strategy that can be used in teaching vocabulary and keeping it active in the students' memory is to ask them to listen to news programs in the mother tongue (news on television, radio, the Internet) and try to translate them on the spot. Our observations show that students meet this challenge quite successfully as they realize the active use of their newly-acquired vocabulary.

It goes without saying that one of the most traditional methods of revising and fixing the vocabulary is test on vocabulary. Generally, test on vocabulary can take different forms. It can be organized either on a translation principle (the teacher gives the Armenian equivalents and students write the English variant) or through exercises (multiple choice, gap filling, word formation, etc.). This kind of vocabulary testing usually takes the form of a written task. However, the newly-acquired vocabulary can also be tested and revised orally, by regularly asking words from the active vocabulary.

A quite interactive method of refreshing the newly-acquired vocabulary is to write a sentence on the blackboard that the teacher composes of the words from the active vocabulary. After writing the sentence on the blackboard, the teacher asks the students to paraphrase the underlined parts using synonyms or definitions. It should be noted, that paraphrasing is not only an excellent means of revising the vocabulary, but it also improves the analytical skills of students. The teacher chooses a text containing the active vocabulary, underlines special parts in it, asking students to express the same in other words.

In order to make students more interested in the vocabulary learning process and to involve more and more students, teachers may organize an activity (game). This is a method used in classroom that can motivate students: the teacher divides the classroom into groups (two or three, depending on the number of students) and calls one student from each row to the blackboard. The blackboard is divided respectively into columns. The teacher writes a word on the top of the blackboard and asks students from each row to write a word with the last letter of it, exclusively from the newly-acquired vocabulary. Then each row continues in

succession and the one that suggests words not from the active vocabulary loses the game. The usage of this method in classroom serves as a way of “refreshing” and should not last more than 5 or 10 minutes.

We may come to the conclusion, that vocabulary teaching or vocabulary testing usually differs not only from teacher to teacher, but also from class to class. That is, teachers should not be led by one and the same method in all classrooms, as they meet different challenges working with different groups of students. This is because the needs, abilities and knowledge of students differ and this fact should be taken into consideration by the teacher. This entails that by applying even the most effective or time-tested method, the teacher is not absolutely sure to guarantee perfect results in the classroom. It is, thus, necessary to check the knowledge of students and to decide the vocabulary level of that special group and to choose what special needs they have. When the teacher takes into account the individual needs of students, classroom management (by the teacher) and acquisition of knowledge (on the part of the student) reach their maximum. The learning process becomes smooth and useful, students become more motivated. This kind of approach can create a student-oriented classroom, which is an essential precondition both in the teaching and learning processes.

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**Ս. ՍԱՐՈՅԱՆ – Լսարանում բառապաշարի մատուցման որոշ մեթոդների շուրջ.** – Սույն հոդվածում քննության են առնվում բառապաշարի ուսուցման նպատակով լսարանում կիրառվող մեթոդներն ու դրանց արդյունավետությունը: Լինելով լեզվի կարևորագույն մասերից մեկը՝ բառապաշարը հանդես է գալիս որպես հաղորդակցման ապահովմանն ուղղված անհրաժեշտ նախապայման: Ուսանողակենտրոն լսարան ապահովելու և ուսանողներին խթանելու նպատակով անհրաժեշտ է կիրառել ինչպես նորագույն, այնպես էլ ավանդական մոտեցումներ, որոնք համադրելով՝ դասախոսը կարող է բարձրացնել դասավանդման արդյունավետությունը և բավարարել ուսանողների պահանջները:

**Բանալի բառեր.** բառապաշարի ուսուցում, բառապաշարի ստուգում /թեստավորում/, բառարանային սահմանումներ, խմբային աշխատանք, նոր ձեռք բերված բառապաշար, վերլուծելու կարողություն, լեզվական հմտություն

**С. САРОЯН – О методах эффективного обучения лексике.** – В данной статье рассматривается вопрос преподавания лексики, в частности, методы ее обучения. Отмечается важность приобретения богатого словарного запаса как в процессе изучения языка, так и для успешной коммуникации. Для эффективного обучения лексике следует учитывать особые потребности каждой группы и каждого студента. Подобный индивидуальный подход способствует созданию необходимых условий, в которых при применении как современных, так и традиционных методов повышается эффективность обучения.

**Ключевые слова:** обучение лексике, лексический тест, словарные дефиниции, новый лексикон, групповая работа, индивидуальный подход, аналитические способности, языковая компетенция