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METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING VOCABULARY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE - A STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

The word is so important that one frequently use it by a kind of synecdoche for language itself. Though vocabulary is part of language, its importance overshadows the other components of the language. Words indeed have a mystical quality about them, or else, the world wouldn't have believed in magical incantation, wherein the words uttered by a magician acquired magical powers to cure some body or to cost a spell on somebody. Viewed in the right perspective as a concomitant feature of the language abilities, vocabulary is unquestionably a major consideration. Words are indeed omnipotent. It serves to carry our thoughts, or rather to put our ideas across. In the great struggle of a child or the equally powerful struggle of a L₂ learner, the grasp for right words occupies a most important position. It is the right word at the right context that matters. Vocabulary, certainly,

is the first step towards learning any language. The list of words that one has to learn in acquiring a mastery over L₂ is probably very important.

KEYWORDS: Teaching Vocabulary, Vocabulary Development, L₂ Vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION :

We require a core vocabulary to start the process of acquiring the new language. Words are what the child learns at first. For at a pinch, we can set up a rudiment of communication with a foreigner, with a set of words. The along that the uneducated among us handy about is an instance of such a phenomena. "Long time, no see" and "have money, will travel" are two well known examples of such slang. Such a language sees to get the meaning across. But, certainly it is not the elegant use of the language, though the meaning is clear.

Vocabulary can be broadly divided into **content words** and **structure words**. Content words are those that we talk about and the structure words are those that we talk with. That is, content words are those that have definite lexical meaning and the structural words express only grammatical and spacio-temporal relations among the content words. They have no specific referents outside the linguistic context. For example, we can think of some referent to the word 'boy', even in isolation. But that is impossible for a structure word such as 'in'. Nevertheless, it is later which provides the skeleton for, and thereby give a form to a sentence. Content words provide the flesh to the bony skeleton of a sentence frame formed with the structure words.

In teaching vocabulary the main thrust will be on structural words as they are very important. One has to learn about all the structural words, because they are required for even the most rudimentary kinds of communication. They form what is called the 'closed set'- learning the use of such a vocabulary is very important, and in any case such a list will be relatively



small.

To start with, Teaching of vocabulary is grammar oriented. The teacher reaches new language with a clever blend of structural and content words, with the structural words getting priority. But to teach structure words, we have to teach content words also. So it is the blending of the two in right proportions that is more important. To teach adjectives, prepositions, verbs, and adverbs we certainly require content words. So in any vocabulary teaching the thrust will be mainly on grammar, while the teacher keeps a very eye on content words also.

To touch upon all the aspects of vocabulary Teaching will be beyond the scope of this dissertation. The objective of this dissertation is just to evaluate some of the known methods of vocabulary teaching and the evaluation of the same. Some of the difficulties the teacher has to face while teaching vocabulary and remedial measures are also dealt in this dissertation. Owing to various constraints, the scope of this dissertation is limited to teaching English vocabulary to students whose mother tongue is Tamil. In this dissertation examples are taken from English language. L₁ means mother tongue and L₂ means the target language or the second language.

In teaching vocabulary the teacher will have to face some problems, and the major ones are outlined in this chapter. Many words, especially in English, belong to more than one part of speech. This becomes a source of trouble for learners of English. The other main problem is the lack of inflections in English. In languages like, **Tamil** which is a highly inflected language, inflections take over what in English is achieved by word order. The words '**hope**' '**love**' and '**sleep**' can both be nouns and verbs. Words like '**chief**' '**square**' and vegetable can be nouns or adjectives. '**Clean**' '**dead**' and wide can be either adjectives or adverbs, while the word '**since**' can be anything from adverb, preposition or conjunction.

These '**multiple membership**' of words can be an ever-lasting sources of trouble to foreign learners of English Any number of such '**multiple membership**' words can be found out from other languages also. But "owing to their more extensive use of inflections, examples are much rarer in other languages (Zandvoort, R.W., 1995). But nevertheless, this phenomenon poses a real problem for learners of English, especially to those of the students whose mother tongue happens to be on highly inflected one.

A further problem for learners of English is what is known as '**conversion**'. As in the words of Zandvoort, "The appurtenance of words to more than one part of speech, which is mainly owing to the paucity of inflections, should be distinguished from another feature that is even more typically English, viz., the deliberate transfer of a word from one part of speech to another, technically known as conversion."

'Don't Sir me, it is hardly English' 'he never gave, anything to the poor'¹ and 'the train allowed down' are examples of such a conversion.

Sir 1- noun > verb

The poor 1- adjective > noun

Allowed 1- adjective > verb

In the sentence '**I want a shave**' the verb '**shave**' is converted to a noun. Such a tendency of the English words leaves the learners of English in a state of confusion. Jespersen in his **Essentials of English Grammar** calls such words **grammatical homophones**. Compound words in English are yet another source of trouble. It is quite easy to understand them. But to produce them is yet another matter. Following compound words are acceptable: **head ache**, **tooth ache**, and **belly ache**. These words are formed with the head word 'ache' prefixed with appropriate words. But we cannot have words like arm ache, elbow ache or leg ache. Here analogy fails us completely. The foreign learners of English will run into deep trouble, if left alone without proper guide. As in the words of J.A. Bright, "The learner will not meet unacceptable forms in his reading; he will only invent them if he is unwisely pushed into premature productive use" (1978, 32).

Another glaring problem is the disparity between English spelling and pronunciation. It is probable that in the beginning the writings were phonetical. But slight individual differences in pronunciation slowly crept in and spelling varied with the individuals. As in the words of H.R. Bhatia, "The spoken forms of words changed from time to time, but the extinct forms of speech continued to be written long after they had ceased to be heard"

(1998, 2). Whatever be the explanation offered to these discrepancies, it makes the lot of the beginner very hard. The Indian student is always at a great disadvantage. His vernaculars are phonetic. He spells what he pronounces. Such a state of affairs is not very conducive to the learners of this language.

English, as we know, is a frequent borrower of words from other languages. Englishmen, in their quest for new markets, opened up new frontiers for other Englishmen to establish contact with strange people and countries. This led to an invasion of foreign words into English such words pose a real problem for the new comers to this language.

In writing many words in English, Englishmen used his resources to the fullest. He was, of course handicapped because English had only five vowels to reproduce all such words. As Bhatia reports "lastly the English alphabet is far from being perfect as a means of rendering sound, it possesses just five vowels and many of the discrepancies between pronunciation and spelling may be attributed to these imperfections (1998, 6).

Indian students of English are at a great disadvantage here in learning English, as their native language is almost always phonetic. And the apparent lack of any system or code in English spelling and the corresponding sound makes the lot of the beginner very hard indeed. The student who misspells **coming** as **comming** is an example of the student falling into the trap of wrong analogies.

An Indian student is apt to make mistakes while learning English words, because he is used to inflections in his language. English words do not change their spelling to indicate whether it is a subject or an object or even an indirect object. Many of the mistakes an Indian student commits in learning the vocabulary of English, is because of the influence of his native language. The strongly entrenched L₁ habits hinder the progress of L₂ learner. In **Tamil, IE, ALL, IN, ADTHU, KANn** are the inflections which change the form of the word to indicate whether the noun is used in nominative accusative or dative cases. Such a change in nouns is what the student expects in other languages. When they find that in English word order replaces most of the inflections, they are baffled. The wrong uses of English by Indians can be traced to this problem.

English borrowings from Latin and French brought in the peculiarities of Latin and French spelling, not only in writing words borrowed from languages, but also in writing original English words. This constitutes yet another problem to be surmounted by the learner. These are some of the problems the teachers will have to bear in their mind before they attempt to teach vocabulary words are to be taught in contexts to minimize possible errors. Close watch will have to be kept on the students, while they learn spelling particularly the difficult ones.

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